

Spiritual Link



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A Perfect Devotee

*One who has purged himself of ego
Is like a wish-granting gem.
He slanders nobody, hurts nobody,
Thinks ill of nobody –
His mind is as clear as crystal.
He need not go to holy places
For he is the holiest place of all.
The world comes to him,
And the sight of him gives deliverance.
Does one whose mind is pure
Need beads or any outward adornments?
He sings forever in praise of the Lord
So that his mind is filled with happiness.
He has given his body, mind and wealth
To the Lord and has no desires left.
Such a one is more precious
Than the philosopher's stone, says Tuka.
How can his greatness be described?
Tukaram: The Ceaseless Song of Devotion*

A Symphony of Sound

There is only the One – that is all that there is. Is this a misleading statement? Each one of us appears to be different from the other – and within our world there are numerous other life forms and inanimate things. And further afield, suns and moons and planets, solar systems and galaxies – a seemingly endless variety! But, it all flows in a never-ending stream from the One. Therefore everything – including ourselves – is a part of the One.

The million-dollar question is: can we know the One from which all diversity flows? And then, is it possible to become one with the One? This is our objective in life: not only to know the One, but to actually transfer from individuality to oneness, by merging back into that originating source.

Words can neither describe nor explain the One, and our thinking is too limited to comprehend this creative force. The mind expresses itself through the medium of the brain and is bound by the brain's physical limitations. This does not affect our understanding and acceptance of the diversity in the physical creation. However, our understanding of the One is constrained by these limitations.

How then can we give form to these thoughts and concepts of the One? Well, we can try to do this by using an analogy with music. Many of us are not very musically inclined and know little about it. If we sit in front of a piano, randomly pressing the keys, we would just produce sounds – discordant, jarring sounds. However, if we have been trained to play the piano it would be very different. The sound coming from the piano would make sense – there would be harmony and melody. All the different notes would flow into one coherent composition.

When the piano is joined by a variety of other instruments, an orchestra is created that produces musical magic – a symphony of harmonious sound. Individual notes merge to become music. The musicians become one with their instruments, and under the guidance of the conductor the instruments and the music flowing from them become as one – a symphony.

In many ways we can apply this analogy to our own lives. Individually we have a mind with a jumble of thoughts. The mind uses the instruments of the brain and the body to express itself and to gather impressions of the world around us. Because we do not understand the subtleties of these impressions, what we see, hear or feel is simply a process of gathering information. An untrained piano player cannot read the music score; similarly, although the notes of life are playing all around us, we are unable to read them. We look at life and take it in, but it doesn't make sense to us because we are untrained life musicians.

We try and express ourselves in life as though we were trying to play the piano or the cello in an orchestra. Every day, every moment, we all do exactly that: we play the music of life as if we know what we are doing. But with what result? Many of us do enjoy some harmony, some pleasure and some satisfaction from life, but because of our human failings there's plenty on the negative side: strife, war, poverty, discontent, pain, anger, greed, attachment and lust – the list is endless. Everyone says there must be something better, but how does one find it? Perhaps we have moments when we manage to play a few harmonious notes, and then, we touch that *something*, but all too often we experience just a harsh discordance of sound.

This happens both on a personal scale with one instrument and on the grand scale of an orchestra. One may have heard an orchestra tuning their instruments before a performance and it is simply a jumble of sound. Imagine that scenario on the scale of a planet or a galaxy – it's scary!

To understand the music of life we have to train as individuals to become harmonious, which needs focus, attention and meditation. It may take years or even lifetimes to become proficient in this performance – there are so many variables and distractions that we can easily get lost or side-tracked. Because the mind is untrained, unfocused and scattered, it appears to be our enemy. But that is erroneous thinking – it is simply untrained. It can be compared to a person who, randomly pressing the keys of a piano, is just making a noise. However, if that person is trained to play the piano, in time he or she may become an accomplished musician. It is the same with our minds. The mind is one of the greatest instruments we have, but it has to be trained and focused – fine-tuned until the mind and soul play in harmony. As Maharaj Charan Singh says:

Unless there is love and devotion in the mind, the soul will never be able to go back to the Father. The mind is an enemy as long as it pulls you downward towards the senses. But the mind is your best friend when it is at the eye centre and is in touch with the Shabd and is being pulled towards the second stage, Trikuti. Without winning the friendship of the mind, the soul can never go back to the Father.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. I

Taking this analogy of harmonious music a bit further, we can say that each sentient being, every living thing, even every inanimate bit of rock, each drop of water and each breath of air in the entire creation, is part of one huge orchestra. This includes all realms – physical, mental, causal – everything!

There are so many elements making up this whole grand creation, each seeming to exist separately from all others. But there's a subtle musical theme running through that links them all, making them wonderfully interdependent. That theme is the Shabd, without which none could

even exist, let alone separately – the power that pulls all together into one glorious creation, a symphony incomparably greater and more magnificent than any that could ever be composed by man.

Through our meditation – under the guiding baton of the Master – we are striving to become aware of, and listen to, this underlying Sound that brings all the separate lesser sounds together to make a beautiful whole. The more we can focus on the Shabd, the more our minds will become attuned to harmony instead of discord, and the more we ourselves will be in harmony with the One.

An orchestra actually seems to be just one instrument playing a variety of notes. Every note is necessary – it plays its part in the music of life, the music of creation. It loses its individuality and merges into the sound of the one great rapturous melody reverberating throughout creation – majestically thunderous or infinitely gentle – all sounding together, as one note, One Being.



The scale and subtlety and nature of ultimate reality are beyond all concepts, thought, and words! Though immanent within every being, the reality of that One is beyond the scope of the mind, beyond symbols, beyond intellectual understanding.

Incomprehensible and indescribable, it is the eternal powerhouse of creation. It is realized through experiencing the transcendent Shabd and Nam within oneself.... As the unchanging source of pure energy, giving life to every form, its positive power pre-empts all subsequent realities by being pre-existent to all.

The Spiritual Guide, Vol. II

An Unholy Trinity

There is a parable attributed to the fourth-century Chinese philosopher Chuang Tzu, which has been given numerous interpretations. In this parable, he tells us that he dreamt he had become a butterfly. This distressed him terribly, and when his friends enquired as to why he was distressed, he replied: “While asleep, I dreamt I had become a butterfly.”

The friends laughed and said: “Nobody is ever so disturbed by dreams. When you awake the dream has disappeared. So why are you so disturbed?”

Chuang Tzu said: “If Chuang Tzu can become a butterfly in a dream, it is possible that now the butterfly has gone to sleep and is dreaming she is Chuang Tzu.”

How then do we know which is the dream and which is reality? Is the butterfly real or is Chuang Tzu real? This is the power of illusion – when we can't tell the difference between reality and the dream. Each is simply a process of the mind – a different combination of thoughts and images. Mind creates the illusion – that which does not exist, but appears so real that we don't realize we are deceived. The mind and the ego exist in our body by virtue of our soul. These three, mind, ego and soul are the necessary trinity for us to experience life in the physical universe.

A baby is born without the encumbrance of an ego but it quickly establishes likes and dislikes and it learns how to express its joy or distaste by either crying or laughing. This is when the first building blocks of its ego are laid. A baby comes into the world from the very source of life – the Shabd. As it grows it seems to lose its original innocence – its soul – that drop of pure Shabd which sustains it for as long as its karma keeps it in its body.

But of course, it isn't really lost at all. Something far more mysterious happens. The soul remains intact in a state of purity and wholeness; it is simply buried deeper and deeper inside as the baby's sense of self develops.

As we become aware of our apparent separateness from the world around us, our mind and our karmic connections become stronger and our soul is buried underneath layer upon layer of mental and karmic dross. The mind becomes ever stronger and dominant, and the ego flourishes.

We generally refer to the ego as that part of us that we perceive as our self – the thinking and feeling person that we identify with. We consider this self as being separate from others and from worldly objects. It is through this self that we experience and interact with the outside world. Ego is our sense of self-importance, self-esteem and self-image. It creates our personality, which determines the way we perceive and interact with the physical duality created by the mind – the dream that we find ourselves in.

Ego is created and driven by karma: our country, culture, family, moral values, our level of intelligence and education, our conscience. To a great extent we are born with these relationships, influences, and attitudes already in place, determined by our karma. And that karma also determines impressions taken in by the baby as it grows and its ego develops. The karmic environment is held in the mind. It moulds and shapes the growth of the ego according to the requirements of the baby's destiny – modelling the developing infant according to the needs of its future life – and then, it directs it along the path of its life. The mind and ego orchestrate our destiny.

Mind is something we are all familiar with because we live with it and constantly use it as we attempt to unravel and understand some of life's riddles. The author of *One Being One* explains this:

We want to solve the riddle of thinking with our thoughts. We want to know the nature of our mind with our mind. We want to understand

the nature of our self with our self. It's not rocket science to figure out that that kind of approach will lead us round in endless circles.

When the Masters tell us that the effects of an action are stored on the mind as an impression, we may not understand how – but we accept it. In the same book the author explains this saying:

All our thoughts and deeds are recorded – not in some heavenly tome, but in the soft, impressionable putty of our own minds. We are the ones who keep the detailed record, deep in our own unconscious minds. If we are unaware of this, it is because we are almost infinitely forgetful.

The reactions and impressions of our past experiences are stored in the mind. They are the sanskaras or imprints left on the 'putty' of the mind from previous lives. These impressions are carried forward from life to life. Our perception and understanding are based on the effects, tendencies, imprint and conditioning of our sanskaras, and it is the mind that carries the indentation of all of our past impressions.

Our predisposition to think, act or proceed in a particular way results from our past actions and reactions – and those pull us back and create our next life and our progressive karma. Maharaj Ji makes this clear when he says:

Individual karmas do not determine our future. It is the accumulated effect of those karmas that we have to go through.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. I

Our mind thrives on change and delights in the creation and its diversity, in which it searches for more and more worldly pleasures. Enter the senses. Our senses are in fact, the root of all our problems – they

create our desires which result in our karma. The Great Master said that our desires are the cause of our birth and rebirth in this world. This is explained in the following verse from the *Upanishads*:

*As is your desire, so is your will.
As is your will, so is your deed.
As is your deed,
So is your destiny.*

And yet, knowing this, we try to move heaven and earth to satisfy these fleeting desires, sometimes risking everything we have in their pursuit. Again in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. I, Maharaj Ji explains:

Desires are nothing but strong thoughts. These strong desires – even if no action follows – they are all grooves on our mind. And the grooves pull us back.

Desire fuels our effort to achieve and possess. As the American author Napoleon Hill wrote: “Desire is the starting point of all achievement.” It is our desires that move us along our karmic path compelling us to satisfy their fulfilment. Ultimately all our desires are going to be fulfilled – in one way or another. But their fulfilment may not come in the way we intended, because it is the impression that must be satisfied, and that depends on the type and the intensity of the desire.

In *The Call of the Great Master*, the Master explains this saying:

Suppose, for example, that a young married woman dies without a child. She had been praying all her life for a son and this desire weighed heavily on her heart at the time of her death. Well, nature may give her a body (say of a female animal) through which she will

get in each litter half a dozen offspring every six months. Nature is very relentless and strict. Bodies and forms do not make any difference to her. She looks only to the desire that is imprinted on the antahkaran and which remains the same whichever kind of body one goes to.

Underlying the mischievous mind, the bulging ego and the runaway senses lies the enduring soul. In *The Divine Romance*, the author explains the soul's predicament in the creation under the influence of the mind:

She mistakes the love offered by the temptations of physical life for the only true love in existence, the divine love between the soul and God. ... But under the influence of the mind and senses, the soul mistakes the outer reflection for the inner Reality. She seeks a faded counterpart of the true, divine love in the fleeting images and associations into which that pure love has been splintered and divided by the processes of creation.

Sadly, we do not identify with our souls. We identify with our mind and our ego, hence the epic tale of the soul's sad captivity is like a fairy story to us. Little do we consciously realize that the soul in her formless, pristine purity is our true self.

Many delightful things have been written about the soul and its beauty. Over the centuries many mystics and their disciples have tried to describe both the brilliance of the soul and its noble and spiritual qualities. Yet we have no idea of the radiance and beauty of the light hidden deep within us. We have the theory – the map of where the jewel is buried. But it is only through dedicated practice – the search – that we will uncover the jewel within.

Mystics tell us that the soul wears a garment or robe of light – its own pure spiritual light. In the *Path of the Masters* the author describes the astral body by saying that it is also called the light body because when seen, it appears to sparkle with millions of little particles resembling stardust. If this is the description of the astral body, can we even begin to conceptualize the beauty and radiance of the soul?

The conscious energy of the soul is within us and is the very life and essence of our whole being, and it is up to each of us to realize it and to experience it for ourselves. Then we will not only free ourselves from worldly ties but also free ourselves from the deception of illusion. As in Chuang Tzu's riddle, we need to resolve the mysterious relationship between the dream and the reality.

To us the world is limited to our sense of self, bound up in the individual experiences and memories we have accumulated. The innocence and wholeness of who we truly are, that we brought with us as babies, appears to be forgotten – but this is also part of the illusion. That essence of a new-born baby – that innocence – remains within us and its apparent loss is a factor of this creation only. The magic still works beyond what we can see, hear and touch in this dream we call life.

We have a wonderful spiritual Master, a beautiful spiritual path and a great opportunity to solve a Chuang Tzu's riddle – to awaken from the dream to the reality of what lies within. Let's not waste it – let's experience the magic.



Success or Failure

Thomas Edison is quoted as having said:

Many of life's failures are people who did not realize how close they were to success when they gave up.

The difference between those who succeed and those who call themselves failures is often just one step. Anyone who is enjoying success today has faced failure, and not just once but many times.

What if Thomas Edison gave up trying to invent the light bulb after ten thousand attempts at finding the right materials and combinations? After all, ten thousand attempts is a lot of time and effort.

“How did it feel to fail ten thousand times?” a reporter asked Edison. “I didn’t fail ten thousand times,” Edison simply replied. “The light bulb was an invention with ten thousand steps. I successfully eliminated, ten thousand times, materials and combinations which wouldn’t work.”

His life certainly demonstrated his determination to succeed. Failure was not an option. His focus was on success, and he achieved it.

Unlike Edison, many of us dislike the prospect of failure. In fact we’re so focused on not failing that we don’t aim for success, settling instead for a life of mediocrity. When we do make mistakes we gloss over them, selectively editing out the miscalculations or mistakes in our life’s résumé.

So when Edison didn’t get it right the first time, did he immediately throw a wobbly and say, “I’m a failure”? Did he throw his arms up in the

air and sigh, “This is just too hard. I give up”? No. When his experiment didn’t work the first time, Edison made a note of exactly what he’d done. Then he made an adjustment to the experiment and tried again. And when that failed he tried again, and again and again. He kept learning from every experiment. And each time he found a way that didn’t work, he knew he was closer to finding a way that would work. He simply had to keep at it, failing and learning, until he worked out the right way to do it.

Our spiritual life is not much different. Each time we try to meditate and feel as though we have failed, we have in fact moved closer to success – we simply don’t realize it. The moment we become initiated we receive all the grace we need to do our meditation. From there on, what counts is our effort. The Master will not do this work for us. We will go within only when we sit down for meditation, and settle our thought waves at the eye centre – which is something only we can do. Our actions must reflect our spiritual desire. If the desire for communion with Shabd is not reflected in our actions, perhaps we do not have a strong enough desire to evolve spiritually, for as Maharaj Sawan Singh Ji says in *Spiritual Gems*:

It is the business and duty of every disciple to make his mind motionless and reach the eye centre. The duty of the Master is to help and guide on the path. To control the mind and senses and open the tenth door depends on the disciple’s efforts. ... The primary factor in this success is the effort of the disciple.

To succeed in anything in this world we must apply time, attention and effort. During our meditation time, the mind will come in and tell us that it is insane to do two and a half hours of meditation daily. But this is just a trick of the mind; if we are willing to challenge it, we will find the mind is all bark and little bite.

The Master has enjoined us to challenge it. We have to tell the mind: “We have wasted enough of our lives; we have wasted enough of this valuable treasure. The time has come to utilize this precious human form for its singular and most important purpose.”

It is time to follow the Master’s advice and take full advantage of the opportunity given to us. With our effort we show the Master that we care, and we become receptive to and worthy of his grace. We can put in the effort to work towards the inner life by doing our meditation and devoting ourselves wholeheartedly to attain self-realization, or we can commit half-heartedly and achieve half-hearted results. The choice is ours and ours alone. Grace is always there, but it is our effort that makes the difference.

We should take heart in the words of Saint Francis de Sales:

*Do not be disheartened by your imperfections,
but always rise up with fresh courage.
There is no better means of attaining the spiritual life
than by continually beginning again.*

Every day is a fresh start, another opportunity to forge on towards our goal. We should never look at our attempts at meditation as failures. No matter how bad we feel about our efforts, each attempt at meditation is to live in our Master’s will. Each attempt is one of the thousands of successful steps that will take us further along the pathway towards our home, until – like Edison switching on his light bulb – we finally see his radiant light within.



Our greatest weakness lies in giving up. The most certain way to succeed is always to try just one more time.

Thomas A. Edison

Cool

Masters are the coolest of the cool. “Cool as sandalwood, serene as the moon are saints.”

A Master is an extraordinary, yet completely natural human being. To be around him can be so spiritually uplifting that people know intuitively that they are in the presence of someone very special. The way he speaks, the way he laughs, the way he does everything is unique. It reflects his inner condition. He can, in turn, be wise and perceptive, loving and affectionate, kind and gentle, humorous and witty, strong and masterful. He does fierce, tough and scolding, pretty well, too, and much else besides.

Every moment, within himself he is totally present in the presence of the One. He carries no baggage with him from the past, and no concerns for the future. “My yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” This means that he is totally aware, and totally free to live his life and to be loving in an entirely selfless manner. The best of human qualities are therefore manifest in him. ... He is not a theorist, but someone who has learnt to control his own mind. He knows all the ramifications of the spiritual path, and all its pitfalls.

He is always the giver, too, one with the supreme Giver. He has arranged his life in such a way that he never needs to charge a penny for all he does. He gives materially, emotionally and mentally, and most of all, spiritually. He is a never-ending source of grace and divine inspiration.

His reality is the conscious creative Music, the Sound of creation, the creative Word, and as such he is with everyone at all times.

One Being One



The Long and Winding Path

Have you ever watched a dog out on an adventure? They never go in a straight line. They always take a long and winding path as they follow their noses and the smells that attract them. Their noses buried deep in leaves and dirt, they give one hundred percent concentration and attention to what entices them – and they are oblivious to their master's call.

When we are initiated we think we will follow a direct route home. Little do we realize what a long and winding path it can turn out to be. Like a dog out on an adventure we are jostled this way and that way, back-tracking here and stumbling forward there – following the dictates of our destiny. We seem to have no control over either the direction or the situation.

But does it have to be a long and winding path or can we follow a more direct route? First we need to realize there are two paths: Firstly, the merciless outer path – dictated by our karma – with all its stumbling blocks, twists, turns and challenges that sap our energy and destroy our peace of mind. And secondly, there's the inner path, which begins from the toes of the feet and ends at the crown of the head.

This has two stages: the first is from the soles of the feet to the eye centre and is completed with simran. Simran is so powerful that it has the ability to withdraw the soul currents that are spread throughout the body and concentrate them at the eye centre – the point that leads to the second part of the journey, which is from the eye centre to the top of the head – the fifth spiritual region named Satlok. This part of the journey is undertaken with the help of the Shabd that resounds throughout the vast inner regions. This second part of the spiritual journey leads us directly home.

The eye centre is the key to both stages of the journey. It marks the end of stage one and the beginning of stage two – the real spiritual journey. This centre is the point – not physical – from which consciousness spreads throughout our body. It is our mental or thinking centre.

In *Kabir: The Weaver of Gods Name*, the author tells us that the eye centre is not a symbolic or poetic expression coined by the Saints, nor is it an imaginary point. It is, in fact, the point of focus to which we withdraw our attention from the senses – to concentrate inward. Reaching and opening the eye centre is a very real experience, as the inner worlds are as palpable to the soul as the outer one is to the senses.

In the Gospel of Matthew Jesus says:

*Wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction,
and many there be which go in thereat.*

Matthew 7:13

The wide gate and the broad way are the path to illusion – that is, our attachments to the material world. When our attention is trapped in the material world we become obsessed with illusion – in fact, with anything other than God – so that our attention moves farther away from God. Many people are not interested in God and spirituality; they are only interested in worldly pleasures and living a hedonistic life, while blindly toiling to accumulate possessions, wealth and status. Their lives focus predominantly on ‘I’, ‘me’ and ‘mine’.

The destruction that Christ speaks of is the yoke of our constant accumulation of karma that keeps us tied to the world, like a poor bullock tied to an oil press. The bullock is portrayed as having to suffer ceaselessly at the hands of its owner – just as we suffer at the hands of our unrelenting karma. We are not even aware of the heavy load we take on ourselves as we circle the wheel of birth and rebirth to repay our debt. Under the yoke of karma we may be forced to go through immense suffering in this world.

Those who enter into the broad way of materialism are blind to the treasure within themselves. The more they gain, the heavier the burden. They are oblivious to their yoke and its crushing weight on them. The Great Master discusses this phenomenon in *Discourses on Sant Mat*, Vol I:

Actually, no words can describe the agony experienced by the unliberated souls as they travel, life after life, through the round of eighty-four. Thousands of them in animal bodies are butchered every day. They keep crying out in anguish, but who pays any heed to their shrieks? What court is there to grant them justice? Millions of goats and sheep are sent bleating with fear to slaughter houses and have their throats cut mercilessly. The necks of hens are wrung while they struggle in intense pain. Time was when they too were human beings, and quite possibly of a higher status than you or I. They may well have been aristocrats, millionaires, kings or emperors. But today they are hens or goats. And who will listen to their agonized pleading? None, of course.

The long and winding path we negotiate is not only related to this life and this day – it is also the cycle of our birth, rebirth and transmigration. Without devotion for the Lord and without a Master, how does anyone ever get the chance to end the cycle? As in quicksand, the more one tries to free oneself, the deeper one sinks. It is simply not possible to end the cycle without the help of a spiritual guide.

Following on from his previous words Christ indicates a way out of this hell, but he warns us it is not easy. He says:

Enter ye in at the strait gate ... because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

Matthew 7:13-14

This refers to the inner path. Once our consciousness has accumulated at the eye centre we continue on to the second stage from the eye centre inward – this is the path that leads to eternity. This is what the Master's teachings are all about: how to travel the direct and narrow way home.

It's a constant source of amazement to us that we – out of the billions of people on earth – have been pulled into the Master's orbit and brought into his fold because 'few there be that find it'. Now, finally, we have been given the opportunity to end this cycle.

To open the inner eye is the major milestone in our journey towards God. It is only reached by living according to the Master's instructions – one of which is to live a moral life. This principle is broad in scope but, importantly, it includes the awareness of right and wrong in our thoughts and conduct.

We get up in the early morning to sit in meditation. We travel to India to sit in front of the Master, professing intense love for him and his spiritual path – yet frequently our thoughts and actions are in direct contradiction to the principles of the path and what the Master asks of us. We say one thing but we do another. We seem unable to control our anger, our lust for the world and the physical desires that pull us away from spirituality.

Part of us longs for the inner peace and bliss promised by adherence to the Sant Mat way of life. But the mind and the senses seem only too willing to yield to whatever overwhelming desire comes our way – forgetting that there is a Sant Mat perspective to every situation. Time and again we give in to the mind and then we try to justify our actions in terms of karma.

Like the dog out on his adventure, his nose buried in the dirt and unmindful of his owner's voice – so too, our mind runs rampant as it happily explores the long and winding path, oblivious to the spiritual consequences and the Master's call. How do we think we will ever get out of this world if we don't put on the brakes and stop our obsession with the physical? We need to regularly assess our attitude towards our spiritual endeavours.

The problem is that when the illusion is offering us such interesting and exciting options, who is interested in self-discipline and self-control? Only the really devoted disciples turn their backs on the illusion. Are our actions and our thinking keeping us spiritually poor?

The Master alerts us to the wealth within us, and he gives us practical guidance on how to follow the path to get that wealth. It is not enough to simply listen to the Master's advice – we have to act on it. So when the Master tells us to live our lives according to the four principles, that is exactly what he means. And when he says meditate for two and a half hours, that is what he wants us to do.

Our meditation is the best gift we can give both to ourselves and to our Master. It is the Master who inspires and moulds every detail of our lives. Surely we can put in the effort to turn our attention away from the long and winding path and focus on the direct inner path and meet him within.



*He who does not undertake
The barter of love,
Who does not tread
The lane of Nam,
Is a bullock
That strolls about
Wearing the hide of a man.
Kabir: The Weaver of God's Name*

Life in the Body

Our life is focused on the needs of our body – because we mistakenly think that without it we do not exist. In his book *Autobiography of a Yogi* Paramahansa Yogananda writes:

The reflection, the verisimilitude, of life that shines in the fleshly cells from the soul source is the only cause of man's attachment to his body; obviously he would not pay solicitous homage to a clod of clay. A human being falsely identifies himself with his physical form because the life currents from the soul are breath-conveyed into the flesh with such intense power that man mistakes the effect for a cause, and idolatrously imagines the body to have life of its own.

Most of our life is spent paying homage to our body. How many hours of our life are spent in a kitchen preparing food and feeding the body; what about time spent cleaning and exercising it? How much money have we spent on clothing the body, and the other expenses we incur in its favour? These activities are all undertaken so that the mind can feel good in the body.

Our homes are a shrine to our body. Everything in our homes is there because of the body. Even our relaxation is geared to our body, so that we can chill out in a comfortable chair and watch TV.

And we may spend eight to ten hours a day working to earn the money to pay for all this. And then – after all this daily activity focused on our body – we sleep for six or eight hours a night to rest and rejuvenate the body, so we can go through this repetitive process again the next day.

And then, ironically, we might say simran is boring!

When we spend that amount of energy, time and focus on something, it is akin to worshipping and idolizing it. We idolize our body, thinking it has life of its own, but without the Shabd the body wouldn't even be able to stand erect, let alone undertake all the activities we give it credit for. The body is simply the mechanism for settling karma, yet we focus more on the body and its needs than on the life-giving Shabd within.

Shabd is the heart of the spiritual path. In fact, the Great Master says, "it is the distinguishing mark of spirituality", and Hazur Maharaj Ji says that when we are able to concentrate our attention behind the eyes, we will find the sweetest and most melodious sound reverberating there. This is the sound that attracts us and pulls us towards itself. It comes directly from Sach Khand, so by attaching ourselves to Shabd it will pull us back to its source. This is the only way we can ever find our way back to our true home. And yet, we spend more time focusing on our body – the vehicle that carries the Shabd – than we do on the Shabd itself. It's like focusing more on the wrapping paper than on the gift it covers. Our true purpose in life is to be in tune with the Shabd, and this must be our focus.



*Old age brings greying hair at my temples,
Which whispers that my date with death
Is drawing near.
O mind, wake up now
And know that your life's objective can be achieved
Only through the practice of Shabd.*

Tukaram: The Ceaseless Song of Devotion

Why Worry?

It's likely that none of us live lives that are absolutely easy, with no reason to ever worry. This funny old world of ours can give us plenty to worry about. And even if our lives are fairly comfortable, the chances are we would still find reasons to worry. We might feel anxious about our children, or our financial situation or our health, or about changes that we have to make. Even the simple act of picking up a newspaper can become a cause for concern, when we read about some of the awful things that are happening in our world.

And our minds just love to worry. We cling to our worries and find it hard to let them go. Even when we should be meditating. Especially when we're meditating! And what is all this worry doing to us? Perhaps we should take a closer look at it in the light of our Sant Mat teachings.

In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. III, Maharaj Charan Singh poses these questions:

When are we happy? When are we relaxed? When there is no worry on our mind. ... If we throw our worry on the Lord, live in his will, accept what comes and think that whatever comes is best for me, naturally we are happy and relaxed. When we take all those worries on our shoulder, we will never be able to solve those worries. ... When you take all that burden on yourself, then you are crushed under that burden of worry.

So we're told that if we want to be happy and relaxed, we just need to throw all our worries on the Lord and then accept whatever he gives us – just hand all our worries to our Master and let him deal with them.

But then, this raises an important issue for us: trust. Do we really *trust* our Master, or the Lord, to deal with our problems? We would probably say we do. But here's the acid test: can we just hand over all our troubles and then stop worrying? Most likely not. Or probably we're just not sure that our Master, or the Lord, would deal with our problems in the way we'd like.

Well, we can be sure that the Master is *not* going to arrange our lives in the way that we want – because he's not going to change the pattern of our destiny to suit us. Karma is karma. There are many things which just can't be avoided.

But then, if we do sincerely turn to him for help, we can often feel or see how he is looking after us. He might not give us everything we want – that might not be in our karma – but he helps us cope. If we open our eyes we'll probably see that this has been happening all our lives. So what does this tell us? He knows best what to give us. And we should just accept what he gives.

But can we do that? If we're honest we'll admit that most of the time we don't. And this is where a change of attitude has to come in. We must cheerfully accept whatever comes to us and be happy to live in his will. If only we could do this, then a big load would be lifted from our shoulders.

But still, all of us, even the most advanced satsangis, fall prey to worry. In *Spiritual Letters* we see that Baba Jaimal Singh (often called as Baba Ji Maharaj) wrote to his then disciple Babu Sawan Singh to console him after he was thrown from his horse and broke his leg. Babu Sawan Singh was worrying, not only about his leg, but also about how he would support his family if he couldn't do his usual work. So Baba Ji wrote to him:

Do not worry about how your family will be fed, or how you will be able to carry on. The Lord will take care of everything. Our house belongs to the Lord, as also does our wealth. ... He will look after everything to the end.

Such wonderful letters Baba Ji wrote to him! They must have brought such comfort. In another letter he tells his disciple: “The Satguru in Shabd form is always by your side; he is protecting you at every breath.”

And we can absolutely take it for granted that the same assurance applies to us. Our Master is always with us in his Shabd form and he has everything firmly under his control. In fact, as we have been told, he is doing everything himself. He is behind everything that ever happens to us. And through it all, he has us safely in his hands while we go through our karmas. All that we need to do is have faith in him – and do our meditation.

But then . . . it may be that our biggest worry is our meditation itself. We come to satsang and we read the books and we see that the Masters stress the importance of focusing the attention at the eye centre. But after so many years of trying we’re just not getting there. (That’s true of those of us who struggle with our meditation. Maybe there are others who *are* getting it right.) But the Masters urge us to just carry on. They tell us that progress is going on all the time, even if we are not aware of it.

In *Divine Light* Maharaj Ji writes to an initiate:

Do not mind whether you see any light within or not, or whether the Sound is audible. You simply do your duty and leave the results to the Master. When a man pays wages to one who works for him, do you think that the Lord would not do so? He alone knows what is good for us and when it should be given. He will pay in abundance. Have faith in him.

The Masters don’t expect results from us; they ask us only for our effort. The Master himself is the one who will give us results – when the time is right; perhaps only at the end of this whole lifetime. We worry about our poor meditation, but he tells us that every bit of meditation has value.

But maybe we do get sad that we can't find our way to our Master's form through our meditation; and possibly we do get frustrated that even though we do try to fix our attention where it should be, our minds don't want to cooperate. They'd rather fixate on anything but simran. And worry is a wonderful distraction. But if our worries are keeping us away from concentrating our attention in the eye centre, then one might even say it's a sin to worry.

Maharaj Jagat Singh was a Master who wrote quite a lot about the habit of worrying. He pointed out:

As a rule concentration becomes difficult when we have cares and worries, for then the attention sticks to the heart centre instead of rising up to the eye centre. We should take the right steps to meet the situation, so far as it lies in our power, and then worry no more. We should leave the rest to be worked out as the Master thinks fit.

The Science of the Soul

So we should see for ourselves that worry is a definite obstruction during our meditation. How often have we not sat in the mornings (or whenever we sit) and spent that time worrying about something instead of doing our simran. Even though we really do want to do our simran, our stubborn mind keeps reverting to the thing that's worrying us. It's even possible that many of us have become so conditioned to worry that it's almost become second nature. But if it's holding us back, then this is a habit we need to break. And how to do this? How else but through our simran and our daily meditation? These somehow help to lessen the effect of our karmas, so that we don't feel their effects so much.

One can't help thinking about the advice and encouragement that Baba Ji Maharaj gave to Babu Sawan Singh after he broke his leg. Here's an example:

My son, please do not mind this suffering. ... The body is a house of pain and pleasure and in it both will certainly come to pass. So endure the pain as good for you – it will last only a few days. Years and years of a satsangi's sufferings are paid off within a few days. So do not worry about anything.

Spiritual Letters

It's interesting what Baba Ji is saying here: that if we're going through tough times we should endure it – because we're going through in a short time what would otherwise have lasted for years. Acceptance of our destiny – that's what it's all about, acceptance of his will. If we can accept everything as his will, then we must know that he has everything under his control. Then, where is there room for worry?

Perhaps when we feel anxious about anything we should remind ourselves that the future may hold losses for us or it might hold gains. Whatever comes is already written on our foreheads. For the moment we can just do our best and leave the rest to him. And if we do have to worry, let's worry about our spiritual work ... which is, after all, what we're here for.



The One True Friend

It is good to cultivate a circle of friends for oneself because most of us feel the need for companions as we go through life. Is this not part of what being human is all about? Through friendship we develop the qualities of giving and helping one another; we learn to love one another, to make sacrifices for the benefit of others.

But how do we ensure that the friends we choose are the 'right' ones? After all, we automatically acquire the colours and habits of the friends we keep. Perhaps we should be a friend to all – but only associate with those with whom we have a kinship and mutual understanding.

Maharaj Charan Singh's love of flowers is beautifully expressed when he likens flowers to friends:

Flowers are your best friends, always smiling. You can stand before them weeping and they will still be smiling. They were made for that – so many colours and shapes, different expressions and shades. Nature wants us to enjoy these innocent pleasures.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III

In the same book he defines a friend:

A friend is someone with whom you have a clear understanding, who accepts you for what you are and whom you accept for what he is. There is a clear understanding between both of you. He wants to help you; you want to help him. That is friendship. It is very rare.

There is an old saying that you can choose your friends but you can't choose your family. True! But what's to stop us from making our relatives and family our friends? Some are good friends, while others may not fit into our category of 'friends' at all - but they need not be enemies.

Rumi, in his inimitable way, tells how enemies can be friends and friends, enemies. Speaking first on enemies, he writes:

I understand, again, that what they want is not what I want. They keep me on the spiritual path. That's why I honour them and pray for them. Those that make you return, for whatever reason, to God's solitude, be grateful to them. Worry about the others, who give you delicious comforts that keep you from prayer. Friends are enemies sometimes, and enemies friends.

The Essential Rumi

A really good friend is one you can count on in an emergency. Nonetheless, we human beings, in spite of being superior to all other creatures, have no control over our destiny. We breathe in, but at any moment that could be our last breath - that's how close to death we are all the time. Perhaps this helps to drive us towards the living Master, who becomes the friend who never leaves us - not even in death.

To follow the path of Sant Mat is not a walk in a rose garden. We are putting into practice what will eventually amount to the conquest of the mind. But the mind is not at all willing to shift from its position of dominance. The Masters tell us that we must now turn inside, towards the spiritual life, away from all that previously pulled us outward. But that is not easy. It is only by taking hold of the Master's hand that we have any chance of shifting the mind's position. This is why the Master becomes our only true friend, and the only one who can guide us on this tortuous journey.

Our initiation into this beautiful spiritual path means that the Master has become our real friend. Hazrat Inayat Khan, a twentieth-century Sufi master, discusses the relationship between the disciple and the Master as true friendship:

This friendship, this relationship which is brought about by initiation between two persons, is something which cannot be broken; it is something which cannot be separated; it is something which cannot be compared with anything else in the world; it belongs to eternity.

As quoted in Sheikh Farid: The Great Sufi Mystic

Initiation is a remarkable and personal event between a Master and a disciple. In the following extract from *Sheikh Farid* this relationship is beautifully elucidated:

In Sufism, initiation is called bayat, meaning a pact, a bond, an oath of allegiance sworn between two people. Sheikh Sharib, who was an attorney by training, explains bayat using the language of contracts:

The relation subsisting between the disciple and the teacher is everlasting. It is not a contract voidable at the option of either party. The dictum governing the mutual relations is that once a disciple, always a disciple, nothing but a disciple. ... Colloquially, Sufis refer to initiation as 'grasping the hand of the sheikh'. This expression gives a hint of the loving relationship that is cemented by the oath of allegiance at the time of initiation: the Master offers his hand to help and support the disciple; the disciple grasps his hand to accept his loving protection.

Sheikh Sharib writes:

The spiritual guide is, at once, a guide and philosopher to his disciples. By accepting the hand of his disciple, he has agreed to be responsible for the moral, spiritual, and ethical development of his disciple. The spiritual teacher must stand by his disciple and lend him his helping hand.

Being befriended by and receiving initiation from a living Master is an event of the greatest magnitude in any person's life. The five names we are given to repeat are a treasure – a gift beyond compare. Meditation is the Master's gift and our initiation is our pledge to practise it daily. This practice is how we build our friendship with the Master – and the present Master urges us to make him our friend. Setbacks and lapses are inevitable but a habit, once established, isn't easily broken. Remember: this is the lane of love we are walking on and where love is, no force can counter it. It must prevail!

Sultan Bahu describes most beautifully and succinctly the ultimate result of this relationship, this friendship, between Master and disciple:

*Love flourishes in that heart
in which glows the Name of God.
The love of God is like the fragrance of musk—
even a thousand wrappings cannot hold it in;
or like the sun, which cannot be hid behind one's fingers,
or like a river that cannot be stopped in its course.
My Friend is in me, in my Friend am I;
there is no distance left between us.*

Sultan Bahu



Forgiveness

In his book *Quantum Warrior: The Future of the Mind*, John Kehoe explains the effects of anger and forgiveness:

Let's say we're angry with someone and have cut off contact with them. We might feel justified in this anger. Anger, resentment, hate and bitterness are always fuelled by righteous indignation, by events, real and imaginary, that we chatter about in our mind. We let this anger vibrate within us and are weakened every time we think of this person. Perhaps our internal dialogue takes over and we have numerous fictitious encounters with this person, all unpleasant, and each of these encounters weakens us.

From an energy point of view, forgiving this person would make a lot of sense, even if we don't want to. When we forgive someone, energy that has been trapped in the anger, hate or resentment is released and then can be used in other ways. Forgiving releases captured energy, strengthening us. The benefits of forgiveness always go to the one who is forgiving, not to the one forgiven. There is wisdom in living this way. When we drop pettiness we strengthen ourselves.

We gather and harvest moments of fun, joy and beauty because doing so makes us strong. It is wasteful and disrespectful to not enjoy and appreciate the simple, everyday pleasures of life. It means we are either unconscious, neurotic, captured by pettiness or lost in our mind. ... When we enjoy ourselves and drink deeply from moments of fun, joy and beauty that happen daily, feeling gratitude for these simple pleasures, we feel better and have more energy and become conscious.



Divine Addiction

Addiction is the condition of being habitually occupied with or involved in something to the extent that we become consumed by our addiction, and our whole day is geared towards its satisfaction. It is always on our mind, driving us crazy with desire.

Previously our addictions were for the attractions or substances of this world, but once we manage – with the help of meditation – to quiet our minds, we start to come under the exquisite spell of divine addiction. Now we become increasingly drawn to the meditative state – to the ocean of Shabd that gently pulls us away from the complexity of this world towards the simple state of a permanent awareness of the divine presence.

We become so enriched by this awareness that we begin to experience it not only during meditation, but even as we move and breathe in this world. This is divine addiction: when we cannot stop thinking of the Lord, when we see him everywhere and our whole day is geared towards our daily meditation.

During our initiation we are taught how to tune in and listen to the divine Sound – the Shabd. This is done by closing the outer physical ears that take our attention into the world and opening the inner spiritual ear. It is this ear that hears the Shabd and takes our attention inward, towards the Lord. This has to be practised every day if we want to achieve any results, and it must become the purpose of our life here on earth. It is the only credit that we can take with us beyond death. All else that we do or achieve here will be left behind.

Shabd is the Supreme Being in sound form. It is the dynamic power of God that creates, enlivens and sustains the entire universe, and through which the soul returns to its source. This spiritual path teaches us how to

allow our soul to experience the Shabd. But first we have to turn our interests, fascination and attachments away from the world and aim them inwards.

There comes a time when we become disenchanted with what this creation has to offer us. After being bullied and battered by the ups and downs of duality we finally turn our attention towards the peace, tranquillity and love promised by our return to the Lord. But we cannot do this alone. This is the time that we need to direct our attention towards a spiritual Master – an adept on the path to spiritual liberation – and beg him to guide us on our inner journey homewards.

We all have unfulfilled desires and suffer inner loneliness, a constant yearning, an unsatisfied craving. This feeling of a lack of fulfilment and aloneness is actually the constant yearning of the soul for the Lord – which is why the things of this world can never satisfy us for long. It is this aloneness that drives us towards the Master as the soul yearns to be back in the fold of the Creator – its true home.

Our mind is the master of indulgence. It thrives on overdosing in a hedonistic and addictive way of life that has no purpose. Such indulgent behaviour ensnares us in a web of self-destruction. Using the five senses, we desperately but mistakenly try to satisfy the soul's yearning with the attractions of this creation, but all we succeed in doing is to lock ourselves into the circle of life and death. We cannot find permanent satisfaction for this inner ache out in the creation.

The result is that our yearning continues to hop from one distraction to another in a cycle of never-ending frustration and worldly addiction. Many try alcohol or the latest street drugs to try and soften the craving and constant dissatisfaction that follows us day after day. Our mind is never calm, never still and never content. Our intoxication with the world leads us to momentary exhilaration as our senses are excited for a short while. Then we plummet back into unhappiness and worldly cravings.

We need to turn this worldly addiction into spiritual addiction. When we first learn of the Master, his teachings excite us and we become curious about the path. Once our curiosity is satisfied through reading the books and attending satsang, we apply for initiation. Then we need to put in the effort of meditation to truly achieve spiritual progress.

In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. III, Maharaj Charan Singh explains how the spiritual hierarchy has been reversed by the mind:

Mind is dominating us. We don't dominate the mind at all. You see, the soul, no doubt, is the essence of the Lord. But it has been dominated by the mind, so the mind has become the master and the soul has become the slave. But the mind itself is not independent and has also become a slave of the senses. So actually, the senses are the master of the mind and the mind is the master of the soul.

We have to turn this mind-dominated hierarchy around, so that our soul is in command and the mind obeys the soul. This can only be achieved with our daily meditation, when the chatterbox mind – highly active and seeking satisfaction through things of this world – quiets down. Then our emotional cravings and yearnings will subside. We will become less engaged with our five senses and the world and more connected – to the Shabd within.

Although we may sometimes feel frustrated about our spiritual progress, over time we do make headway. In everything we do or apply our minds to in this creation, there is always an expectation of results. Whether in sports, weight-loss, business, studies or any worldly activity, we expect results. We have to understand that in spirituality we are not the doers – the Lord himself is the doer. While we just sit in meditation he is the one doing what needs to be done. All we need to ensure is that every morning we get up and sit, which is what pleases him.

Where is the space for frustration or guilt if we are doing what we were asked to do – which is sitting in meditation? Our job is to sit at the door. In due course he will open the door. No credit is due to us and there is no need for frustration on our part. He will give his gift when he sees fit. We should have faith and patience.

While still outside in the world, we may have many doubts and questions. But on the day that our addiction for the divine leads us to meet the Radiant Form of our Master inside, we will have nothing more to ask.

An addict has no option but to follow the source of their addiction, mesmerized like a moth to a flame – as if in a daze. When we are blessed with divine addiction we move towards the Lord as if on autopilot, offering him our total surrender. And who but the Master can be the example of a perfectly surrendered lover of the Lord?

The ultimate result of this addiction is unity with the Lord. Actually, we have never been separated from him, but because of the dictates of the mind we turned our backs on him – and our five senses keep our backs turned. Now, finally, we have again turned our faces towards the Lord, and in time we'll find that our perceived separateness was only a deception of the mind.

So let us be content in our faith. If we can turn our worldly addiction into divine addiction, then even if we have had no signs of progress during meditation, we can rest assured that at the time of our death we will meet the Radiant Form of our beloved Master.



Take Refuge in the Master

*Take refuge in the Master, O yearning soul!
You have no friends in this world –
make Nam the mainstay of your life.*

Sar Bachan Poetry

To take refuge means to flee from danger to a place of safety. It is related to the word “refugee”, and we are all spiritual refugees. We now realize that through the mysterious grace of the Lord we have an opportunity for a better life – a spiritual life. But to embrace that life and to reach its shores of truth, bliss and love we have to leave our bodies behind and board the often rickety boat of our meditation and devotion. We need to cross the stormy seas of sense pleasures, obsessions, distractions, addictions, attachments, laziness and other bad habits.

This perilous journey is impossible without the Master. He lives in the land of truth, bliss and love, and is a master of the voyage we need to make. He provides the map, tells us how to keep our boat seaworthy, and although we are mostly not aware of it, he watches over and protects us as we make the hazardous journey.

What does Soami Ji mean when he says we have no friends in this world? On one level it seems untrue – we do have friends, people we care about and people who care for us. However, on a much deeper level none of these lovely friendships last forever. Sooner or later our karma whisks our friends and family away. Maharaj Charan Singh gives us some practical guidelines on how to live in the understanding that we have no true friends:

We should think that nothing belongs to us in this creation. Everything belongs to the Father, and we have been allocated certain responsibilities and duties which we have to discharge. So as a matter of duty, we must discharge those responsibilities and duties truthfully and honestly.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III

If we ponder on the idea that nothing belongs to us and everything belongs to our spiritual Father, this means that my friend is the Lord's daughter or son, who is on a temporary loan to me. My body is the Lord's temple given for a limited time only. My house and my car and even my food are not mine, but are gifts from the Father. In the same way that a worldly father provides for us and looks after us, the Master – our spiritual father – takes care of us. We do not have to worry about anything. If we remember that we are being cared for by one who knows more, loves more and is infinitely more powerful than we are, we will live a happier and more relaxed life. This is not to say that we can be lazy in any way. We have to do our very best to appreciate and take care of what we have been given by the Master.

Great Master repeats the same theme in *The Dawn of Light*:

Try to live this short span of life in a manner which best pleases God, that your wanderings in this world may cease and you may reach your eternal home where it is all bliss unalloyed.

The Master is our perfect example, for he has seen through the illusion and taken his soul back to its true home. As a result, the Master can teach us how to do the same. In a very real sense the path is the Master.

Bhai Gurdas, a mystic of sixteenth-century India, tells us:

*If you take one step to take refuge in the Master,
The Master meets you on the way
By taking hundreds of steps.
If you remember the Master just once,
The Master remembers you again and again. ...
I bow again and again
To the one and incomprehensible Master.*

As quoted in Living Meditation

Sardar Bahadur Ji tells us that our fort is our Guru and we should stay within the four walls of his teachings, which are the four promises we make at the time of our initiation. If we are struggling with our meditation and feel that we are getting nowhere, we are most likely to find that one or more of these walls is in need of repair – or even total rebuilding. There is no time like the present for doing the necessary spiritual maintenance to aid our precious souls on their journey home.

Soami Ji's poem continues:

*Tie the thread of your consciousness to Shabd
so the door to the Lord's court is opened to you.*

Here we are introduced to three subtle concepts: the thread of consciousness, the Shabd, and the door to the Lord's court. Modern science associates consciousness with the waking state and with awareness. But Soami Ji is much more specific, and explains in *Sar Bachan Prose* that the soul is subtle and conscious, while the mind, the senses, the body, worldly actions, enjoyments and the like, constitute the unconscious. The conscious is connected to the unconscious with a knot, which has to be unravelled if the soul is to be released from the mind's grip.

This is pretty mind-blowing information. It means that from a spiritual perspective, almost everything we do in our daily lives is from a state of unconsciousness. No matter how wide awake and aware we think we are, on a spiritual level this world is an illusion, and we are spiritual zombies going from one drama to the next. Soul is consciousness. So when Soami Ji tells us to tie the thread of consciousness to the Shabd, he means we have to connect our soul to the holy Sound. This is no easy task when we don't know much about soul or the Shabd.

“Shabd” means song in Hindi, but Soami Ji is not telling us to tie our soul to any old worldly song. If that were the case musicians would all be saints! Soami Ji means the spiritual song, the divine creative power that Great Master calls the holy Sound.

These concepts may seem wonderful, but most of us have to admit that we know even less about Shabd than we know about soul. Therefore, it's not going to be easy for us to tie our consciousness to the Shabd. We are going to need a guide, a living Master, who connects fortunate souls to the Shabd through initiation.

The door to the Lord's court is a subtle point within us called the eye centre. Behind this door the Radiant Form of our Master waits for us to join him, so that he can guide us from the eye centre to the true home of the divine soul. In *Spiritual Discourses*, Vol. I, Maharaj Charan Singh gives us some powerful insights, saying:

This is the pivotal point that holds the mystery of life. It is from here that our attention continually descends and spreads into the world through the nine outlets of the body. ... The ageless secret, the ancient wisdom, the path of the saints lies in drawing the attention back to this point.

Our all-important spiritual journey takes us to this point where we find the Master's Radiant Form. If we have not yet reached our Master, it's because our driver – our mind – is still not under control. In spite of the slow progress we make, the Masters endlessly encourage us. They tell us that if we have been initiated we can do it. The present Master asks us to question deeply why we are on the path, so that we can reprioritize and recalibrate our lives to make the journey quicker and less convoluted.

For most of us, the experience of soul and Shabd is impossible without a God-realized mystic who has reached the highest spiritual region within himself and is immersed in Shabd. The translator of Soami Ji's poems uses these delightful words to describe a saint:

The Guru is a river that flows in whichever direction he likes. He is free, he has no limitations or boundaries. ... Everything the mystics do ... is like a bird in flight enjoying its freedom, riding the wind.

It is very difficult to understand anything about a Master. Only once we have met the Radiant Form of our Master will we know more of his glory, majesty and tremendous power. These great spiritual Masters and saints who live among us are incredibly kind-hearted. They truly have our very best spiritual interests at heart. Everything they ask us to do is for our own highest good.

A visit to Dera demonstrates how extremely gracious these great Masters are on an earthly level. Only once we have succeeded in tying our soul to Shabd and have immersed our self in the holy Sound, will we know how great the gift of initiation by a Master truly is. And it is then that we will truly take refuge in our Master.



The Bag of Jewels

*None is poor, O Bhika;
Everyone has rubies in his bundle;
But how to open the knot
He does not know,
And thus remains a pauper.*

Bhika, as quoted in *Divine Light*

We are all born with a bag of precious jewels, but this treasure remains a secret until, as our spiritual understanding grows, we gradually learn about the Lord's gifts. Then we open our hearts to him in gratitude.

Maharaj Charan Singh writes in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. III, that the Lord has given us so much in life, but we don't have a thankful heart:

Instead of asking the Father to give us the boons in life, we should ask him to give us that heart which is full of gratitude for what he has given to us. . . . But we are always protesting what he has not given. We must believe that what he has not given, is not meant for us, is not good for us, it is not to our advantage. And for whatever he has given us in life, we should be grateful to him, we should be thankful to him.

Most of us are not even aware of our utter dependence on the Lord's grace. Even this human birth – for which we seldom thank him – is ours because of his grace. God has given us many valuable gifts such as wealth, beauty, strength, power, good health and knowledge. We are naturally fond of these things, but they all have an alternative aspect. Wealth makes a man proud, beauty makes him conceited. Power may cause cruelty and

arrogance, while good health may cause him to be less sympathetic to those who suffer. Knowledge may puff up his ego so that he fails to realize that his proud intellect is a delusion.

These gifts are beneficial if they are combined with the sweetness of love. God is love. He gives and demands nothing in exchange for his gifts, just as love demands nothing in return. It knows only how to give – hence it is free from all selfishness. We should be grateful for whatever he gives us for he will give us only what we need in spite of what we pray for.

Let's dig into our bag of jewels and examine the first and most important jewel – the gift of love. Again we refer to Maharaj Charan Singh who, speaking on love, tells us:

Love is always there in every soul. But for that love, nobody would worship the Father. ... Meditation not only creates love, it strengthens love. It helps you to grow and grow to become one with the Father. That is the love ... which helps us to lose our own identity, our own individuality; which helps us to become another being. That is love. And that is why we say that love is God and God is love.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. I

Ultimately, the lover wants to merge with the Beloved. The Masters explain that potentially every drop is the ocean, but it has to evaporate and become the cloud and the rain before it can be one with the ocean. An important aspect of loving the Master is obedience. To attend to our meditation and live the Sant Mat way of life without compromising on the principles denotes obedience, which is born of our love for the Master.

Sacrifice is also part of a relationship of love. The Masters have a deep love for the sangat and they devote their lives to their satsangis. As they guide us towards the truth they teach us how to overcome the barriers of the material world while pursuing a spiritual goal. And importantly, a living Master is available to us in the physical. We are able to meet him and

he answers our questions and talks with us, guiding us and dispelling our doubts about spirituality. He has chosen us for this path, and we must live by its principles and follow his instructions. The Master encourages us to introspect deeply and to ask ourselves what we are prepared to sacrifice so that we may experience God.

The second jewel in our bag concerns our soul, which is so ethereal that it is almost impossible to know if it is real and if we can be in touch with it. The only way to learn about the soul is from a Master who has first-hand knowledge of it. Such a Master will teach us about the inner path that leads to the realization of the soul, and he will guide us to that realization within ourselves.

In *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. V, the Great Master describes such a Master saying:

He is the radiant sun of purity, universal wisdom, truth and spirituality. He is spiritual, and seekers after spirituality gather round him like moths and make their lives fruitful by obtaining spiritual benefit.

Saints or Masters are pure souls who are tasked by the Lord to address the needs of our soul. The Masters explain that our soul exists within us but it has neither colour nor form – we cannot detect it with our physical eyes nor with our physical ears. Kabir uses the metaphor of a bird to illustrate the reincarnation and transmigration of the soul as it transfers from one body to another. It can only give life to one body at a time, which is the present body that it occupies. At some time in the future a different life will require a different body.

*No one tells me about the bird
That sings within the body.*

*Its colour is a colourless hue,
Its form a formless form,
It lives under the shade of Nam. ...
It hops, it pecks, it eats,
And from branch to branch it flies.
No one knows where it comes from,
No one knows what makes it sing.*

Kabir: The Weaver of God's Name

Our third beautiful jewel is the inspiration we receive from the Masters. They encourage us not to dwell on our past mistakes but rather to make a fresh start and keep moving forwards. They inspire us to continue meditating even though what we accomplish on our own is hardly noteworthy. However, with the hand of the Master guiding us, our life's work can be truly beautiful. When we are struggling with our meditation we should know that he is there with us, bolstering and helping us – inspiring us to keep trying.

Our fourth jewel is the gift of the divine Sound. In his book *The Path of the Masters*, Dr Julian Johnson, speaking of this Sound, says that what concerns us most is the fact that it can be heard within ourselves, which he says is an amazing thing, too marvellous to contemplate. He writes:

This fact of hearing the Sound is our supreme joy, for it points directly to our ultimate spiritual freedom. The Masters teach their students exactly how to develop this inner hearing. After that, the life stream can be heard as distinctly and perfectly as we can hear anything on this plane by means of the physical ears.

To gain access to the divine Sound we need the fifth precious jewel, which is the gift of simran. Simran directs our thoughts to the

remembrance of our Master. Whatever we may be doing we should remember him so that we can be in his inner presence at all times. Guru Nanak writes in the *Jap Ji* that ceaseless simran is the ladder by which to reach the mansion of the Lord. We need to put in the effort to do our simran – this is within our power. To do simran with love and devotion is the gift of the Master.

There can be no greater gifts than these. Because of our spiritual immaturity we cannot know why we were chosen to be recipients of these gifts. The Masters dedicate their lives to teaching us that our meditation is the only way to untie the knot in our bag of jewels. Meditation is also our only means of saying thank you for this precious gift.



Some day, after mastering the winds, the waves, the tides and gravity, we shall harness for God the energies of love, and then, for a second time in the history of the world, man will have discovered fire.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin





Letters of a Sufi Master: The Shaikh al-Arabi ad-Darqawi

TRANSLATED BY: TITUS BURCKHARDT; PREFACE BY MARTIN LINGS
PUBLISHER: LOUISVILLE KY USA: FONS VITAE, 1998

This small volume presents a collection of letters from Shaikh ad-Darqawi (1760 – 1823 CE) to his disciples. Darqawi was a master in the Shadhili Sufi Order, which was founded in the thirteenth century and flourished throughout North Africa. The Darqawi branch of the Order was named for him. In the preface Martin Lings points out that this collection of letters serves to correct the mistaken belief of many scholars of Sufism – that by the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries all Sufism in North Africa had descended into mere ritual and superstition. Lings writes, “The spiritual radiation of Shaikh ad-Darqawi brought about a sudden great flowering of Sufism in Morocco and Algeria and beyond.”

Lings describes the letters as an expression of “practical Sufism.” In them we find practical advice from master to disciple, rather than discussions on abstract doctrine. According to Lings, in Sufism such practical teachings are usually delivered only by word of mouth, and in many cases never get preserved in writing. In this case, “the collected letters of al-Arabi ad-Darqawi were compiled by himself, copied by his disciples and printed many times in Fez in lithographed script.” Selected by the Shaikh himself, these letters have been studied by disciples, not only in the Shaikh’s own lifetime, but throughout the centuries since then. Even today this collection of letters is “still read, with commentaries, in the *zawiyahs* of the Darqawi line.”

In collecting his own letters to serve as a teaching tool, Darqawi was following the example of his own master, Mulay al-Imrani, known affectionately as al-Jamal, who had done the same. Unfortunately, only a couple of manuscripts of al-Jamal’s letters still exist, and they have never yet been translated into English. Titus Burckhardt has translated the letters of Shaikh Darqawi from the original lithographed edition and two nineteenth-century manuscripts.

Darqawi often quotes his master. For example, he relates al-Jamal's words on the power of the contemplation of the divine Beloved:

If you contemplated Him in everything, contemplation of Him would veil all things from your sight. For He is the only thing outside of which there is no thing – if you bring together the ephemeral and the eternal, the ephemeral is extinguished and the eternal alone subsists.

The dominant theme of Darqawi's work is the importance of the practice of remembrance of God. Darqawi writes:

The faqir, when he exchanges the remembrance of all things for the remembrance (dhikr) of God, purifies his servitude... So remember only God; be God's alone; for if you are God's, God will be yours and blessed is he who belongs to God so that God is his.

His disciples, like spiritual seekers of all times, had to face and overcome the persistent distractions of the lower mind, called the *nafs* by Sufis and translated here as "passionate soul." Darqawi advises simply ignoring this enemy whose only goal is to "molest you."

If you wish to free yourself from your passionate soul, reject what it tries to suggest to you and pay no attention to it, for it will more certainly continue to molest you and will not leave you in peace; it will say to you, for example, you are lost! Let its insinuations neither disturb nor dismay you.

Sheikh Darqawi warns the disciple to flee sense pleasures:

Always flee from sensuality, for it is the opposite of spirituality and opposites do not meet. Inasmuch as you strengthen the senses you weaken the Spirit, and vice versa... Many are they who have freed themselves from sensuality in order to plunge into Spirit for the rest of their lives.

He describes those who are entangled in sensuality:

It is as if God (be He exalted) had not given them Spirit, and yet each one of them is part of it, as the waves are part of the ocean. If they knew this they would not allow themselves to be distracted from the Spirit by sensory things; if they knew this they would discover in themselves boundless oceans.

A second common theme in the letters is God's presence in all things. Sheikh Darqawi often stresses the importance of seeing God in everything. He wrote:

The Prophet (may God bless him and give him peace) has said: "I have seen nothing without seeing God in it"; and we say, it is impossible to see our Lord while seeing anything other than Him; and all who have reached this degree of knowledge affirm the same.

It is important to remember that each letter was written to a specific disciple, with reference to that disciple's spiritual condition. Darqawi explains the seemingly contradictory guidance given by a true master:

Sometimes he sees that the disciple's Spirit will be freed by fasting, so he makes him fast; at another time, on the contrary, he will make him eat to repletion for the same purpose; now he sees that the disciple will benefit from an increase of outer activity; at another time, from less activity; at one time from sleeping; at another time from staying awake; sometimes he wishes the disciple to avoid people; sometimes, on the contrary, he advises him to frequent people.

Darqawi's letters are peppered with vivid aphorisms handed down from earlier masters of the Shadhili lineage. For example, he quotes the *Hikam* ("wise sayings") of the great thirteenth-century Sufi, Ibn Ata-Illah: "Since you know that the Devil will never forget you, it is your business not to forget Him

who grasps you by the forelock.” As a footnote explains, this Arabic idiom refers to controlling a horse by grasping its forelock.

In other words, the way to defeat the Devil is to remember that one, God, who holds all power over you. Darqawi reinforces this point with a quote from his own master:

Our master used to say: “The true way to hurt the enemy is to be occupied with the love of the Friend; on the other hand, if you engage in war with the enemy, he will have obtained what he wanted from you and at the same time you will have lost the opportunity of loving the Friend.”

Naturally, true submission – to give oneself over to the control of the Beloved – is not easy for the struggling disciple. As Darqawi says, “Dethronement of the ego is a necessary condition according to us and according to all Masters of the Way.”

Sometimes Darqawi illustrates his teaching with an easily understood, down-to-earth metaphor. To teach his disciple to choose his goal wisely and then persevere single-mindedly towards it, he writes:

I would like you not to be scattered in your love... We see that some people become attached now to one thing, now to another. They are like a man who tries to find water by digging a little here a little there and will die of thirst; whereas a man who digs deep in one spot, trusting in the Lord and relying on Him, will find water; he will drink and give others to drink... The Sufis used to say: Knock persistently at one door and many doors will be opened to you: submit to one Master and the multitude will submit to you.



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

