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Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

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Spiritual Link

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My Restless Mind

*My restless mind doesn't listen to me –
how can I deal with it?*

*The Master always advises and explains the method,
and I sit in satsang with an attentive mind.*

*When I listen to his words I deeply repent of my actions,
but then the mind deceives me again and I go astray.*

*I devise many ways of my own to crush this mind,
but I never get to the threshold of Surat Shabd,
so how can I rise to the inner sky?*

*My mind continues to waver and doubt –
I am unable to let go of worldly ambitions.*

*I can be rid of the degeneracy of this mind
if I surrender myself
and take refuge in the perfect Master.*

*The web of this world is utter torment,
it is the fire in which I constantly burn.*

*I now put myself under the protection of Radha Soami,
for nothing is accomplished without his grace.*

Soami Ji, Sar Bachan Poetry



Randomness versus Order

When we look at the events and progress of our lives, we might be forgiven for thinking that we are the victims of random and chaotic forces. We never know what will happen next. When the phone rings, we never know what news it may bring – will it be good news or bad?

Aeroplanes crash killing hundreds, or perhaps the happy news that a new baby is born in the family. A virus arrives on the scene with the potential to kill millions of people, sending everyone into a frenzy of fear and paranoia. Scientists tell us there is a strong possibility that a huge asteroid could collide with the earth, causing another mass extinction. The world seems to be a place where human beings strive in vain to create order out of chaos.

In fact, nothing could be further from the truth. There is neither randomness nor chaos in the universe. Everything in the entire universe is operating precisely according to law. To illustrate this, let us imagine two snooker balls on a snooker table. If we strike the first ball with our cue, it will travel precisely in the direction we strike it, with precisely the energy or speed that we give it. Then if it strikes a second ball, the two exchange energy and both will head off in different directions that can be precisely calculated.

Theoretically the balls would keep on going indefinitely, colliding and interacting, changing direction and energy. But in the real world they would slow down and eventually stop, owing to the drag of the felt surface of the table and a bit of air resistance proportional to their speed. However, if we had enough information we could calculate the exact path and speed of each ball at any stage, and know exactly where and when they would collide, and where they would eventually stop.

This could be taken as a very much simplified illustration of karma and its effect on our lives. When we came into this world, we came with a certain momentum – a specific direction and energy. Even now we are moving along in a manner determined by our past actions. Our path will intersect with others, and the nature and effect of our interactions could be calculated or predicted absolutely, if we had the relevant information.

Now, if we imagine removing the snooker table, we can consider millions and millions of snooker balls all moving in different directions in three-dimensional space. And each one is on its own predetermined course – colliding with various other balls at various places and times, according to the predetermined path of each ball. In addition to their movement and collisions, each of these balls is blinking in and out of existence.

Each ball represents a life, and as each soul comes to the end of its earthly life it disappears, because it is no longer on the physical plane. Then it reappears, moving in the direction determined by the karmas assigned to that new life, with an energy or speed that has been likewise determined. This may give the impression of absolute chaos, that each collision takes place in a totally random way. But this response is incorrect because nothing is random.

Our own karmas have been incurred by our own actions, and will shape the events and nature of our onward journey in life. Only that which is written in our karmas can and will happen – nothing else is possible! Nothing and nobody can change this fact. As we undergo these karmas we are actually progressing towards our goal, in that we are in the process of accounting for all these debts that stand in our way and bind us to this physical plane.

Viewed from that perspective, everything relating to this life has already been taken care of, so there's no point in wasting time and energy worrying about it. So what then should be our focus? Meditation!

We are on the path to our home, and our prime directive is to raise our consciousness to the eye centre, where we will meet the Radiant Form of our Master, which is the true Shabd. By Shabd alone we start to clear our path through the maze of the mind and find our way back home.

As Soami Ji says:

*Establish your base at the third eye
and have darshan of the inner Master...*

*This form of the Master is of unsurpassed beauty –
it will light up your inner being
like the radiant glow of the sun.*

Sar Bachan Poetry

We are so fortunate to be on a path that is actually leading us to this objective. We will only fully realize this when we finally rise above the material plane and see for ourselves the wonders of the inner regions. Then, for the first time, we will truly see that nothing is random.

Our perception of randomness is really just the consequence of our inability to grasp the enormous truth of the Lord's creation. He has created the universe to operate precisely according to his law – his will. As he wishes it to be, so it is. When we realize this, we should take a step back and reassess our priorities. What should be our focus? What should we be attending to as our prime directive?

The fragility of life should instill in us a sense of urgency, because we cannot afford to sit around amusing ourselves with the trinkets and toys of the material world. Time is fleeting. Death is coming for us, no question about that! We just don't know when.

When we fully realize the implications of our mortality, we need to re-evaluate our situation. What are we doing with our life? Where are we directing our attention and our time? The sad fact is that most of what we do is merely passing time in the most comfortable and pleasant way that we can manage. When we reach the end of this life and we're about to leave this body, will we do so peacefully, or will we be gripped with mortal terror at the prospect of being flung helplessly into the jaws of death?

And herein lies the problem. Are we keeping our eye on the ball, so to speak? Have we, in fact, taken refuge in the Master? To gain access to the realms within which the mystics so often refer to, is no easy task. We may complain that we do not see, we do not hear, we do not experience all the wonderful things we have been told about. That spiritual state is like the legendary pot at the end of the rainbow – it never seems to come any closer.

But we should not concern ourselves unduly. The process the Master talks about is actually ongoing within us, whether we are aware of it or not. We have changed, and are changing. The process may be subtle, but it is unstoppable. As long as we are trying, as long as our attention is directed to our Master within, we are making steady progress. Of this there is no doubt. But our attention should be towards the divine rather than the mundane.

Every round of simran, every thought of him, are carrying us forward towards our ultimate goal.

We do not want to find ourselves on our deathbed thinking “if only...” *Now* is the time to decide what kind of end we want and *now* is the time to firmly set our priorities, so that at our last moment we will have absolutely no regrets and will be able to joyously face the next phase of our soul’s journey.



Dying Well

In *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. III, Great Master writes:

Man's days are numbered. It is not known when they will end. Every day, every hour, every minute brings us nearer to that great final change, which is called death.

Steve Jobs, the American entrepreneur and co-founder of Apple Computers, spoke about this change, saying:

Death is very likely the single best invention of life. It is life's change agent. It clears out the old to make way for the new.

It does indeed. We see this change in nature, when plants die in winter to make way for new birth in spring. We see it in life, where the elderly die to make way for a younger generation. A year ends, opening up to a new year and new opportunities. And in spirituality, we learn that relinquishing the physical body makes way for us to enter a new realm of understanding and experience. Death of the old makes way for the new.

Yet, despite centuries of analyses, explanations and debates, death and what happens after it continue to be unexplained, controversial, and beyond the scope of our understanding. It remains a matter of belief. Many people have experiences which simulate death, but nobody ever comes back from death itself to tell us about it. And no matter how many times we ourselves have died, we do not recall the event.

Because of this total lack of information, the mystery of death both haunts and fascinates us, and to most people the finality of death is horrifying and frightening – hence their quest for immortality.

In *The Path of the Masters*, however, Julian Johnson gives us a different perspective. He writes: “Death is a glaring deception.... People fear death because they do not know what it involves.” He tells us that we can experience death now, through the spiritual system taught by the Masters.

This system of spiritual exercises, taught and practised by all the Masters, carries the student actually through the gates of death.... This solves once

and for all the most serious problem which has ever confronted the human race – the problem of death and what lies beyond it.

The experience he refers to happens while we are still living in the body. The Masters refer to this experience as ‘dying while living’, which is possible during this very life. We understand and accept birth into physical life, which is the known, but we find death more difficult because it leads into the unknown. The result is that we focus more on life than we do on the process of death, relegating death to some distant time in the future. The early philosopher Plotinus echoes the Master’s advice. As the author of *Return to the One* writes: Mystics such as Plotinus urge us to live life with one goal in mind: that we die well.

This means that we should focus our attention on the process of “dying while living” – which is, through meditation, the ability to withdraw our consciousness from the body to the eye centre, where our true spiritual journey begins. The author of *Mysticism, The Spiritual Path* explains this: “Mystic transport takes us into a different world altogether and brings us knowledge of things which are different from our daily experience.”

Our meditation practice is preparation for this mystic shift, our transition from one world to another – from a physical state of being to a more subtle and very different experience. So why is it that, with such a promise, we persist in clinging to the restrictions of our attachments and worldly pleasures, rather than putting in the effort to take the leap into our spiritual future? We need to take heed of Maharaj Charan Singh’s words: “If you are in darkness now, then what else can you expect after death?”

Death will bring us to the edge of a new experience, a new discovery, a new process. How can we not prepare for this? This is the most important journey we will ever undertake. It is the journey not only to know God – but to become God. No small undertaking.

In *With the Three Masters*, Vol. I, the Great Master is quoted as saying, “When we go on a trip, we carefully plan our method of travel, our accommodation and eating arrangements and so on, but we make no preparations at all for our journey after death.”

Why is it that we neglect the preparation that is so essential for this journey? Do we really understand and accept the incredible opportunity

that is within our grasp – *if* we would only grasp it? If we could see our past lives, we might cringe with fear at the thought of wasting this opportunity and not making full use of the good fortune the Master has given us now.

From the time we are initiated, our entire life should be a preparation for death. It's up to us to use our inborn capability to undertake the journey into God-consciousness, which is our birthright. Although we are familiar with the concept of consciousness, it is still largely an unknown, possibly the most mysterious aspect of our lives.

Consciousness or Shabd is inherent in everything. When it manifests in a physical form, that form takes life. When consciousness withdraws, that form dies. Death is simply the withdrawal of consciousness from a physical form. The Masters tell us that we are much more than our limited consciousness, occupying one dense material body after another, somewhat like a hermit crab occupying empty gastropod shells.

In an article titled “On the Importance of Spiritual Knowledge” the author writes:

“A human body is a unique structure that allows covering the distance between the state of ‘an ordinary person’ and the state of God.”

In other words, we have the ability to move from our everyday experience of consciousness to the highest, absolute level of consciousness – the refined spiritual levels far beyond what is experienced in daily life. As with most aspects of spirituality, however, these altered states remain merely an intellectual concept and are meaningless without the actual experience.

The Masters teach that the practice of meditation is a journey through these various levels of consciousness. It is a journey that will eclipse the barrier of death and will ultimately lead us to a direct experience of God, while still being in the body. We understand this intellectually, but we don't appear to grasp or believe that this is really possible. If we did, we would be far more proactive in our efforts to attend to our meditation. After all, what can the world offer that even comes close to the promise of this mystic shift?

Developing the conscious awareness of who we truly are must take priority in our lives. The Master has solved the riddle of death for us.

He has brought us to the threshold of possibility. We can move towards the Creator, the Shabd, God-consciousness, or we can remain immobilized where we are. Either way, death will find us.

The only certainty in life is that we *are* going to die. The uncertainty is that we don't know when. And even though it is obvious that we must die, we're often not able to come to terms with it. Rather than be traumatized by this prospect, we should, as Plotinus advised, aim to "die well."

As Rumi wrote:

*I died as a mineral and became a plant
I died as a plant and rose to animal
I died as an animal and I became a man.
Why should I fear?
When was I less by dying?*

Quoted in Amit Goswami, *Physics of the Soul*



Our Heart's Desire

There have probably been times in most of our lives when we have felt weary and defeated, when the world in general, and our own lives in particular, have become too much for us. Sometimes there seems to be no way forward, no solution to our problems. Probably we have all had times where we simply want to fall at the Master's feet weeping, begging him to accomplish this task for us, because we feel that we just can't do it.

Surely we are all familiar with the feeling we get sometimes when we find that once again we have fallen asleep, or spent our entire meditation time in useless remembrances of the past or fears for the future. How unequal to this task we may feel. But in an odd way, this defeated state may be positive and possibly even a result of Master's grace.

As Soami Ji writes in a poem from *Sar Bachan Poetry*:

*The Lord then spoke, saying:
Accept my will and stay calm.
Have patience, have faith,
I shall bring to fruition your heart's desire.*

Maybe at this point we should ask ourselves: just what is our heart's desire? As young people we probably think that a good partner, job, family, or home might be our heart's desire, but as we age these desires change. Some of us might say death is our heart's desire, because we falsely believe that we will not unite with our Master in his Shabd form until then. But we should not be discouraged: God has put us here in this human body, in this particular set of circumstances, because this is the best place for us to be to pay off our karmic debts.

The mystics have never said we should sit back apathetically waiting for God to fulfill our heart's desire. There seems to be a paradox here: we have to admit defeat, recognize our true helplessness, and then act positively in order to bring our heart's desire to fruition. For most of us, that heart's desire is to make space for Master's love to flourish through increasing our love for him.

So what is it that we must do now to grow Master's love in our hearts? Perhaps the first thing to understand is that spiritual love is a gift from God.

It grows at his bidding alone. He will bring our heart's desire to fruition in his own time, which is why we are exhorted by Soami Ji to have patience.

The Lord gives the love, nurtures it, and brings it to fruition – which would not seem to leave a lot of room for our personal effort or involvement. But this is not the case. We are encouraged by our Master to put in the effort, for there can be no sitting back passively on the path waiting for him to grow our love. Only the relationship that we form with our Master will go with us beyond the grave.

We should ask ourselves: how urgently are we trying to attach ourselves to the Master and the Shabd? We know this will be a tremendous battle with the mind, which yearns for the world and all of its many attractions. But is Master's love not worth enormous struggle?

Ultimately, of course, we know that it is the Shabd that will cleanse the chamber of our heart. But perhaps we can help prevent the mind from leading us astray by taking the advice of Maharaj Charan Singh in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. III:

You have only to be conscious of attaching yourself to the divine melody within.... If you fight to attach yourself to the Shabd and Nam within, then automatically your mind will become detached.

So it is not that we need to detach from the world: rather we need to focus on becoming attached to the Master, to the Shabd within. Once that attachment is formed, automatically we will become detached from all else. So how are we to achieve this? Through simran and bhajan. To allow our heart's desire to flourish – to increase our love – we must give more of our attention to Master and God.

It is no simple or quick exercise to turn Godwards – not after being in this world for so long and being so dominated by the mind and senses. Thus we have to stay calm and have patience and quietly and lovingly refocus our minds every day.

Thanking God for everything can become a habit, and gratitude is the most positive habit we can cultivate. Why allow the mind to dwell on all our negative experiences in the world? It is such a waste of our time and attention. We can choose our thoughts; we can reject the negative and choose the positive. The Masters tell us that this is within our power.

Everything we are to receive in this lifetime has already been decided, so why waste time longing for and worrying about things that may not be in our destiny? Rather, we need to just accept that our Master will send exactly what we need to clear our karmic accounts, while we focus on trying to attach ourselves to the Shabd within with determination and persistence.

But we cannot force this – we cannot do *any* of this ourselves, because even the desire itself is God’s gift to us. And what a gift it is! To want our Master’s love in our hearts above all else is nothing short of a miracle. How grateful we should be for this gift!

We have been given the extraordinary privilege of helping in this endeavour. We have been provided the gifts of simran and bhajan, which give us the means to purify our mind. That is why the author of *Essential Sant Mat* writes that nothing can substitute for daily meditation. He writes that meditation alone can purify the mind and prepare it for contact with the Shabd, which transforms the darkness of ignorance into the light of understanding.

Our true heart’s desire is a gift from the Lord. Recognizing that this is so is another gift of divine love. Fulfilling it is also God’s gift to us, as and when he sees fit. We must strive most urgently and sincerely to direct our attention within so that the desire may grow.

Our efforts may actually achieve very little, but they show our wholehearted commitment to this great and glorious path of love. Our Master, the personification of divine love, cannot resist sincere and loving effort. He always responds, because he loves us so.



The Struggle

For a butterfly to emerge from a tiny opening in its cocoon takes an immense amount of struggle. The restricting cocoon and the butterfly's struggle are nature's way of increasing its strength, in order to force the fluid from its body into its wings so that the butterfly will be ready for flight once free of the cocoon.

Sometimes struggles are exactly what we need in our lives. If God were to allow us to go through our lives without any obstacles, we would not be able to develop the strength required to overcome the many hurdles we have to face on our challenging journey through life.

The butterfly's struggle is a fitting analogy for our mental struggle, and for the effort required for our journey to the eye centre to release our soul, trapped in the cocoon woven by the mind. This struggle invokes our Master's grace. It is only through his grace that we will develop the love and spiritual strength required for this gruelling battle of escape.

The butterfly's cocoon is woven from miles of silk thread, whereas the cocoon that entraps our soul has been drawn from the spinning wheel of the mind. The thousands of powerfully resistant threads it wraps around our soul are made up of endless thinking, imagining and worrying, intertwined with our memories, fears of the future, attachments, and our pride of possessions. Are we not tired of creating this endless spool of thread? It is up to us to stop spinning it!

The Master is aware of the enormous effort that is required of us to break free of the mind's cocoon, and he has taught us the method required to succeed in this battle – our simran and bhajan. By doing simran at every opportunity throughout the day it will eventually become a habit, rolling along in our minds automatically, as it reverberates ceaselessly within. The more our simran grows, the less thread we spin for the mind to weave.

Having been made aware of the trickery of the mind, we should therefore try to become more conscious of our thoughts and actions. Perhaps we could keep in mind the wise words of Omar Khayyam, the Persian mystic and philosopher:

*The moving finger writes; and, having writ, moves on:
nor all thy piety nor wit shall lure it back to cancel half a line,
nor all thy tears wash out a word of it.*

In other words, whatever we do in our life is our own responsibility and cannot be undone. Furthermore, we are currently reaping consequences of the karmas we ourselves have created over many lifetimes.

It is now up to us to clear away the layers of karma that cover our mind and soul. Just as the rust on a knife is removed with a grindstone, so our mind is cleaned by rubbing it with simran. This in turn will free the soul, restoring it to its original pristine state.

It is vital to be aware that our lives are unfolding exactly as they should, for the Master is orchestrating our daily lives and arranging the repayment of these karmas as he sees fit. Everything is happening according to his will.

Whether we are a butterfly struggling to escape from its cocoon, or a soul struggling to escape from the prison house of the mind, we have to follow the divine laws laid down by the Supreme Being. This is his divine play operating by his rules. He has designed the perfect spiritual system, in which we can develop a love for him that will ultimately help us escape the binding threads of the mind – an escape that must be conducted with patience, perseverance and dedicated effort.

The Master so often tells us that our most important duty is our meditation, because it is through meditation that our soul will escape from the dark cocoon of the mind and return home. Now at last we have met the Master, who has made us aware of the route back home. It is his love and grace that support and strengthen us on our journey, and we should therefore undertake this task with love, faith and deep devotion.

So with a heart full of love and a profound sense of gratitude, let us do everything in our power to please our Master through our actions. By following his instructions with faith and love we will stop the mind's endless spinning and be reassured that our escape from the mind's cocoon will come when the time is right.



Trying to Describe Hazur Maharaj Ji

There is a story of a man walking along the beach, beside the mighty ocean, trying to figure out the meaning and purpose of the creation. As he walked, he noticed a young boy carrying buckets of water from the ocean to a small hole he had dug in the sand. Again and again the boy went back and forth from the ocean to the hole. Each time he tipped the water in, it was absorbed through the wet sand and disappeared. “What are you doing, child?” the man asked.

“I’m emptying the sea into this hole I’ve dug,” replied the boy.

“Don’t be silly,” said the man. “That’s impossible.”

The boy was no ordinary boy. He knew what the man had been thinking as he walked, and he laughed a merry laugh. “If you think that’s impossible, I’ll tell you something equally silly. There’s a man I know who’s trying to understand life’s mystery with his mind.”

Trying to describe Maharaj Ji in words could be seen as an equally impossible task. One can certainly write about his activities; one can write about the events of his life; but to attempt to convey who he was, and claim to convey anything close to the truth, would be as foolish as the activities of both boy and man....

The one word that comes to everyone’s lips who knew Maharaj Ji is, without a shadow of a doubt, ‘love’. The personality of every Master would appear to be different in that one is remembered for his compassion, another for his kingliness, one for his humility, another for his dynamism. In the case of Maharaj Ji, it was love.

On either side of the word ‘love’ we have to place two companions: ‘humility’ and ‘generosity’. Never did Maharaj Ji put himself forward, never did he take credit for anything, never did he see himself as other than a sevadar or friend. And as for generosity – he was generous of heart, generous with others’ weaknesses, generous in praise and encouragement, generous with his time and generous with himself.

Extract from *Legacy of Love*



Devotion, Love, and Longing

The seventeenth-century French mathematician and theologian Blaise Pascal once famously wrote: “The heart has its reasons which reason knows nothing of.”

These words come from a collection of his writings on Christianity, and mean that spiritual love cannot be understood by the intellect. Another faculty, the spiritual heart, so to speak, is needed for this purpose.

We have all experienced worldly love, which is fragile because it is easily broken, and is fickle because it changes all the time. Spiritual love is different. Its focus is not outside but within, and can be experienced only when the consciousness rises above the level of the intellect. And whereas worldly love thrives on ego, spiritual love eradicates our sense of individuality and leads to the merging of our consciousness with the source of all love – the Lord himself.

Logically, in order to love God, we first need to know God. But Maharaj Charan Singh told us that before we can know God, we must know ourselves. He says in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. I: “Self-realization is essential before God-realization. Unless we know who we are, how can we know who God is?”

But then, what is self-realization? Mystics tell us that there’s an energy emanating from God that endows every aspect of creation with the essence and power of his being. This power is the Shabd. The soul is a particle of this Shabd and therefore is man’s real essence. By implication then, the Creator, the Shabd, and the soul are of the same essence.

However, we are unaware of not only the existence of our soul but also this divine energy. Self-realization is the direct experience of our soul. This experience requires us to free the soul from enslavement by the mind, at which stage the soul’s innate love will be magnetically attracted to and drawn upward by the Shabd.

In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. I, Maharaj Charan Singh tells us:

When we know our real self, it will be pure devotion, pure love, pure faith of the soul in the Lord. That alone can take it back to the Lord.

This knowing of the soul can only happen through labour and through love. The disciple must work, and love will be the fruit of that work. The disciple's work is to realize the Shabd that rings within his own body. Devotion and love form an indispensable part of this realization, where the focus of this love is always on the Master himself. It starts with devotion to his physical form and faith in his teachings. Then, as we progress within, it deepens into a more intense and selfless love. For, as Maharaj Charan Singh tells us in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. I:

*We can only love what we can see, what we can touch, what we know...
We have only a concept of the Lord. We neither know what he looks like
nor do we know anything about him, so how can we love him?*

The Master is in the world with us, and we can relate to him on a human level. We find him beautiful and captivating. When he speaks we listen, because his words are filled with wisdom. His presence fills the atmosphere with an aura of peace, power, and love, which irresistibly attracts us to him. And since the essence of our own soul is love, we feel a deep bond of attachment to him. Drawn by his physical qualities, we crave his darshan and we declare our love for him.

But is this just an empty declaration? Without meditation, this feeling of love cannot be more than a shallow emotional love that we experience through the mind and senses. It is only through our meditation that we develop real love for the physical form of the Master, which in turn grows into a more enduring spiritual love.

When, through meditation, the attention is withdrawn from the world and from the body to the eye centre, we commence our journey inward. Eventually the Radiant Form of our Master will be revealed to us. The radiant beauty of this form will irresistibly attract us, and for the first time we will experience real spiritual love. The book *The Gospel of Jesus* tells us:

If the disciple has found the physical form to be beautiful beyond all other human forms, that is nothing compared to the light, the beauty, the radiance and the love that surround and emanate from the Master as he is seen on the inner planes.... There is nothing that can compare with

this experience; and it is the longing for this meeting which ultimately drives and draws a disciple to attend assiduously to meditation.

If it is by devotion that we reach this state of love, then it is by longing that this love for the Master can be sustained. We may feel as though the Master is hiding his inner form from us, separating himself from us. But actually, it is our attention that falls, and we think the Master is no longer there. The desire to find the inner form fuels our longing, resulting in greater spiritual effort. Longing provides a boost to our spiritual practice.

In truth, the source of the disciple's love is the Master himself. The disciple feels the love, but it is the Master who gives it. He even creates the desire in us to meditate and gives us the strength to struggle on the path.

This love transforms the disciple's consciousness. From knowing only the limited reality of the world, the disciple becomes spiritually awakened and a humble instrument of the Master's love, in harmony with his will.

Ultimately, the disciple is destined to merge his consciousness into the Lord's ocean of love. Then the disciple will know that his true self is his soul, and that its essence is the same as that of the Lord. He will be self-realized. He will know himself. And in this state, when his soul merges with its source, he will become God-realized – one with God.



Spiritual Awareness

When a little child asks her mother numerous questions, the mother, out of love for her child, will provide only answers that the child can understand at her age. The mother doesn't want to confuse the child and is aware that the child's comprehension is extremely limited. So the mother's answers may not be entirely accurate or complete – but as long as the mother responds, the child is satisfied.

Because the child is unaware of her limitations, she assumes she can understand everything and asks all these questions. Eventually she grows to understand all that the mother knows.

In the same way, we assume that our intellect is capable of understanding everything, so we ask endless questions and interpret the answers in accordance with our own understanding, without knowing whether that understanding is accurate or not.

We can use the example of a victim of a violent crime. Based on our own understanding of the law of karma, we may conclude that it is in that person's karma to be a victim of such a crime. But do we actually know that? Do we know when and what that person previously did to incur such karma? No, we don't know. At our level, we just assume that this is how the law of karma works.

Our understanding is extremely limited and only theoretical. Yet we apply our concept of karma theory to everyday situations without understanding all the intricacies involved.

If we knew how the law of karma actually worked, we would know the exact karmic effect and timing of our every action, including the karmic effect of the food we eat, of everything we do and say, of whatever we take for free, of how we earn our living – of everything. But we are ignorant of the details of how the karmic law plays out.

At the same time, when it comes to spirituality, we seem to want to understand everything about it before we commit fully to the spiritual path. Yet in material or worldly matters, our lack of understanding doesn't stop us from trying new experiences or activities.

How many of us know exactly how the engine of a car works? Yet our ignorance doesn't deter us from driving a car. Similarly, how many of us

know anything about flight – and yet has this stopped us from boarding a plane? We don't even know who the pilot is or how capable he is – yet we trust him with our life. What about cell phones, computers, smart watches, and the myriad electronics that we use daily – do we understand how they work?

Isn't it amazing then that when it comes to spirituality, we generally want to understand everything – every detail about how it functions – and yet we don't have the capacity or ability to comprehend these esoteric matters. Why can't we just adopt the spiritual practice as we do electronic gadgets, without understanding the intricacies of how they all work?

The answer may be very simple. With electronic gadgets we experience immediate tangible benefits and we come to depend on them – so who cares how they work? They just do!

A child doesn't wake up one morning knowing everything, but she gradually learns to speak, read and write. If the child insisted on knowing the reason for the sequence of the letters of the alphabet before she learned to read and write, she would never be able to do so, because there is no acceptable answer to the sequence of the letters in the alphabet. As the child grows and her awareness increases, the question of the order of the letters becomes irrelevant.

So too spiritual awareness isn't something that happens overnight or with a flick of a switch, like switching on an electronic gadget. It grows extremely slowly and somewhat unconsciously, and as it grows our questions simply dissolve.

Since we expect instant tangible results, we have great difficulty understanding or believing how what seem like our meagre efforts in meditation, do in fact evoke giant leaps in subtle awareness. With this increased awareness, we also gradually change our perspectives on various aspects of spirituality.

Repeating our simran may seem like a mere mental exercise, but we do not realize the power behind those words. Simran will ultimately lead us to merging with God – can there be anything in the universe more powerful? No power or force known to us can achieve what simran can. So let's not underestimate the power and value of simran, as it will lead us to experience the Shabd.

Our theoretical understanding is that Shabd is sound and light, and our impression is based roughly on the sounds and lights we experience here on earth. But we will know the true brilliance, intensity, and melody of the Shabd only when we experience it within.

Similarly, we may initially see the Master as a guide, but with heightened awareness we come to realize who the Master really is and what he does for us throughout our spiritual journey. At our present level of awareness we can debate who the Master is; we can speculate and assume who he is, and we can even imagine what we want him to be. But when we experience who the Master really is, when we meet his Radiant Form inside, then nothing will shake our conviction.

Until we reach that level of awareness, we won't know what our seemingly meagre efforts in meditation can achieve. Why would the Master ask us to practise meditation if our efforts would not yield results? We may feel that our efforts are inadequate, when in fact we are slowly growing in spiritual awareness. This is similar to a child learning to walk. Its initial feeble efforts may seem futile, but every attempt to stand and take a step strengthens its limbs and improves its balance and is a major contributor to the child's progress in learning to walk.

The real effect and impact of our efforts in meditation may not be visible or perceptible to us, but in due course we will realize their true value. It is the spiritual practice alone that will increase our awareness, which is why the Master urgently implores us to do our meditation. Let us never underestimate the importance and significance of the Master's appeal.



Shabd

Shabd alone takes us into the innermost recesses of pure spirituality; it alone casts off from over our eyes the veil of ignorance and delusion and shows us truth in its divine glory and celestial splendour. In a moment of eternal consciousness of Shabd, the soul embraces the whole of the cosmos and comprehends the totality of being; in a rapture of spiritual ecstasy it beholds the light of transcendent truth and bathes in the radiance of divine glory.

We are ignorant of that glory and have forgotten our true home with God, and we therefore suffer a perpetual round of misery and trouble. Our ignorance, however, is not intellectual; this forgetting is not mental. It goes deep into our being; it is stuck firmly to the root of our existence. If we are anxious to shake off this chronic lethargy and come out of this universal oblivion, we should try to find the Shabd.

Shabd is a superconscious transcendent power. It can neither be heard with the ears nor uttered by the tongue. Pen cannot write it and language cannot describe it. It passes all human perception and conception; it transcends all limitation and dependence; it goes beyond all duality and relativity. For its transmission it does not depend on any material element; it penetrates all things and all beings.

Shabd is the essence of all reality and existence – the divine Word, the heavenly Harmony, the celestial Music. It is the light and life of all creation; it is the very being of the ultimate absolute; it is the supreme current of spirituality, a wave or tide in the ocean of Godhead. It permeates all creation; it pervades the whole cosmos. Only the transcendent soul can come into contact with it; only in a superconscious rapture of mystic transport can we touch it and know it; only in a divine ecstasy of spiritual flight do we embrace it; only in a moment of eternal consciousness do we become one with it.

Extract from *Mysticism, The Spiritual Path*



Ceaseless Commentary

Over aeons of lives we have succumbed to the mind because it was comfortable and easy to do so, and we have fallen into the bad habit of letting the mind control us. When we relax our control of the mind, we give it the power to create havoc in our lives. If we want spiritual enlightenment we have to take back that power and, as the saying goes, there's no time like the present.

In *Die to Live*, Maharaj Charan Singh said:

Mind is the deadliest of foes, but the most useful of servants. When it turns wild and gets out of control, it heads for certain destruction.

We can use the analogy of a motor vehicle to explain the scenario of the mind being in control of us, rather than us being in control of the mind. Although many cars today have software apps that require the driver to do little more than steer the car, the application of those apps must be initiated and set by the driver – the car has no will of its own to do this. When under the control of a responsible driver, a motor vehicle is a safe and convenient form of transport. But driven by a reckless driver it probably will head for destruction.

Our body represents the vehicle; the mind is the reckless driver and the five senses are the boisterous passengers. They entice the driver to recklessness as they relentlessly chase insatiable desires and seek ever more and greater thrills. We have the power to put a stop to this scenario. It means we must allow the soul to move back into the driver's seat to take charge of the steering wheel and take back control of the vehicle and its unruly passengers.

The mind belongs in the navigator's seat next to us. It may be a reckless driver, but it is a very good navigator. After all, its primary function is its work under the law of karma steering us through our lives in the world – which it does to perfection. In this activity we see the mind as the very good and loyal servant that it obviously can be.

As conscious beings we are aware of the mind because we use it constantly. It enables us to think, reason and feel – to be aware of the

world and our experiences of it. It gives us imagination, perception, judgment, language, memory and numerous other faculties that are necessary to negotiate our karma. It is responsible for processing the feelings and emotions which result in our attitudes and actions.

The mind is a masterpiece with immense potential – but most people do not explore or realize that potential. In spite of all its wonderful attributes, however, the author of *The Path of the Masters* tells us that mind is not self-acting. He says:

Mind alone cannot think, cannot will, cannot love. It cannot remember nor suffer nor enjoy. To do all of these things it must, in every instance, be activated by spirit.... Without spirit, mind is as inert as steel.

It is this association with the soul that gives the mind its exclusive potential, that of acting as a conduit through which we are able to reach the soul and consciously experience its great power and love. If we learn to harness the mind and work with it, then this potential – which is spiritual awakening – is within our grasp, and this should be our focus as we coerce the mind to change its tactics.

If we have learnt one thing from our meditation practice it is that the mind is not a pushover. Changing seats is not easy because the mind is rigid and resists change. It clings tenaciously to the steering wheel – the age-old grooves from which it so comfortably operates. But unless we make that change it will never support us in our spiritual quest, making our meditation extremely difficult.

We may feel as though we have already changed much of our thinking, and to a large extent we probably have. But the very mind that is thinking it has changed is the self-same rigid and inflexible mind that we have always had. Perhaps we simply have moved from one set of beliefs to another, as the mind surreptitiously continues in the habitual grooves in which it is so very comfortable – and remains largely unsupportive of our spiritual growth and our spiritual quest. We need to remove the blinkers of rigidity by occasionally pressing the *refresh* button of our thinking.

The French philosopher, René Descartes, famously said, “I think; therefore I am.”

He found that he could not doubt that he himself existed, as he was the one doing the doubting in the first place.

But our existence is not reliant on our thought. If I suspend thought, the body still exists – only the thinking process has stopped. The mind is no longer active, but the senses, which are a function of the brain, still are: the eyes still see, the ears hear and the nose smells. It's just that the mind is no longer interpreting those activities. Its constant commentary has been suspended temporarily.

Our senses provide a very necessary mechanism, helping us to negotiate the physical world. The sensations they produce also help protect us from harm. However, it is not necessary for the mind to comment every time the senses are engaged. Yet that is precisely what the mind does.

The brain and the senses are already connected so we don't have to initiate a constant commentary on what's happening. But we do! We appear to have an innate need to tell ourselves about everything we see, smell, hear, touch or taste.

The mind has no power of its own; it is simply a narrator delivering a running commentary on the actions of the brain and the senses. We are not even aware of this useless repetitive chatter. But we *can* suspend thought, and simply allow the senses to send messages to the brain without the wearisome commentary, without *telling* ourselves about it.

The Master has given us a foolproof method for doing this – simran. If we occupy the mind with simran we can learn to witness our environment without engaging the mind's ceaseless commentary. But we have to work at the art of suspending the commentary and filling the gap with simran.

How can we ever hope to experience spirituality while living a life characterized by the pursuit of worldly desires and the resultant constant commentary? We must allow our soul to take back control of the car and subdue its unruly passengers. It is therefore incumbent on us to focus on our meditation and practise bringing our mind under control – letting the Master take control of everything else.



Amrit Vela – The Time of Elixir

In *Die to Live* Maharaj Charan Singh tells us that Nam is within every one of us, forever resounding in resplendent glory. It is Nam that we strive for in meditation.

But our pursuit of Nam is often forgotten as we navigate the quagmire of our daily karma, while chasing satisfaction in our busy, complex lives – consumed by our perception that we are the decision-makers in these daily events. Sadly, when we stop to take stock, after another hectic week, we often find that the two-and-a-half-hour daily slot assigned to our meditation has slipped by unused. Lost to the demanding activities of our days, it is irretrievable – an opportunity missed.

In the same book Maharaj Charan Singh tells us that no opportunity for meditation should ever be lost under any circumstances. He goes on to say, “When the Lord gives the opportunity now to leave the body and to materialize the effect of meditation, then we should make use of it.”

The Masters repeatedly tell us that any time of the day or night is good for meditation. However, they also tell us that the early morning hours are especially favourable. At this time the house is quiet, the family are asleep, interruptions are minimal, and we have rested our body and mind.

This magical time of day is called *amrit vela* – the time of elixir. In the *Jap Ji*, we read:

*In the amrit vela,
The ambrosial hours before dawn,
Chant the true Name,
And contemplate his glorious greatness.*

The Great Master discusses this special time of day in his book *My Submission*, where he also tells us that the early morning hours are especially beneficial for the practice of meditation. He writes:

The time of elixir starts at three o'clock in the morning, and saints attest that it is far more conducive to concentration of mind than any other time of the day or night....

Another reason why this is the most opportune time is that the currents of consciousness, which remain scattered throughout the body during

waking hours, are concentrated during sleep in the throat or the navel centre. Undertaking the practice of detaching the spirit from the body at that time – before the soul re-establishes full contact with the body – makes the task much easier. Furthermore, the currents of mind are more concentrated before sunrise than after, and the seed of Nam nurtured in the soil of the heart at that time is sure to bear fruit – both here and hereafter....

At the time of elixir the Lord bestows his special favours on those who are awake in his remembrance. But those who are asleep at that time and deprive themselves of these blessings are, according to Sheikh Farid, the living dead – alive in body, dead in spirit.

This message from Great Master clearly indicates why these early hours of the morning are particularly favourable for meditation, and we should try to adjust our lifestyles to take the best advantage of them. The author of *The Life of Christ* writes beautifully of this unique time:

There is an hour of the Indian night, a little before the first glimmer of the dawn, when the stars are unbelievably clear and closer, shining with a radiance beyond our belief in this foggy land. The trees stand silent around one with a friendly presence. As yet there is no sound from awakening birds, but the whole world seems to be intent, alive, listening, eager. At such a moment the veil between the things that are seen and the things that are unseen becomes so thin as to interpose scarcely any barrier at all between the eternal beauty and truth and the soul which would comprehend them.

So it seems that God's spiritual bounty may be more readily accessible to us – making our spiritual effort more fulfilling – during this mystical time of the day. Yet, we appear not to value the opportunity offered by these hours before dawn. When we should be devoted in our pursuit of Nam, we seem to prefer to remain snuggled in bed with our attention lost in deep sleep. Again the Great Master advises us:

The night offers a calm solitude that is full of profound serenity and flows like a river washing ashore innumerable pearls of divine wisdom. A disciple who is deeply engaged in devotion at that time gathers these pearls and becomes rich, as he hears the celestial melodies of the Shabd.



Black, White or Grey

Most disciples agree that the principles of vegetarianism and abstinence from alcohol and drugs are as definite and unambiguous as black or white. This means that, by choosing what we consume, we can easily ensure we are pure vegetarians and do not take any alcohol and drugs. If there is doubt about anything it is best left out.

However, when it comes to the principle of moral living, somehow what was previously black or white has merged into a shade of grey. It may have become grey as far as countries' laws and religions are concerned, but as far as universal laws are concerned, what was black remains black and what was white remains white. The so-called grey areas have been created by man, but universal laws cannot accommodate man's modifications.

For example, marijuana used to be outlawed in most countries, but today it is legal on medical grounds in certain places. However the Master has prohibited marijuana in all forms on this spiritual path of Sant Mat.

Abortion has been legalized in many countries, but categorizing it as 'grey' and potentially acceptable doesn't negate its karmic consequences. Every action moves us either closer to spirituality or further away from it. Regardless of our ignorance of the workings of the law of karma, it will continue to keep us enmeshed.

Maharaj Charan Singh writes in *Quest for Light*:

Regarding legal abortion, anything that becomes legal does not necessarily become free of sin. Worldly laws are made by men according to their convenience, and these continue to change from time to time and country to country. Criteria of a good moral and virtuous life from a spiritual point of view are quite different from the civil and criminal laws of governments. There are certain fundamental truths and codes which never change and are universal.

Another example is euthanasia, which has become legal in some countries. Can this negate the karmic consequences of deliberately ending the life of a "terminally" ill patient? Baba Ji reminds us that we do not have the power to give life, so we do not have the power to take life.

Man is ingenious in blurring black and white and creating huge areas of grey. Although a country's laws and religions may debate these issues and accommodate the grey areas, the universal laws are unalterable and the karmic consequences remain. Euthanasia may be legal, but it is still murder, no matter what the extenuating circumstances.

Similarly, veterinarians often recommend killing a pet when it is very ill, using the euphemism of "putting down" the animal. But our duty is to look after these animals and provide whatever help we can – it is not for us to decide to kill them because we can't bear to see them suffering. Hazur asked us to imagine applying the same principle to human beings: millions if not billions would be killed if they did not meet our criteria for living.

The mystic Dariya recommends that we think carefully about killing. We should examine ourselves and "kill" our own negative tendencies, and get intoxicated on Nam, not alcohol! He writes:

*If your mind is truly fond of killing,
Then do kill and I shall show you how.
Hold the sword of wisdom firmly in your hand
And kill the warriors such as lust and the other passions....*

*If you wish intoxicating drinks
In order to remain oblivious to worldly sorrows,
Then be addicted to Nam, discarding pride and hypocrisy,
And remain intoxicated forever.*

Dariya Sahib, Saint of Bihar

Maintaining the highest standard of moral living for the most part requires clear-cut decisions. We cannot justify our actions by applying the shades of grey created by man and the laws of any particular country. The principles of vegetarianism, abstaining from alcohol and drugs, and moral living are all essential for spiritual practice, and should be diligently practised by all initiates.



Tobacco

The Master has included tobacco in his list of products to be avoided by satsangis as part of their observance of the four principles. A recent Dera publication, *Caring for Your Health*, explains why this is necessary:

Keep away from tobacco in any form.

- *Being a non-smoker is one of the best ways to stay healthy.*
- *Tobacco smoke has over 4000 harmful or poisonous chemicals like nicotine, tar, carbon-monoxide and many others. Cigarettes, bidis, hookahs, chillums, and pipes are all harmful.*
- *Nicotine is an addictive substance like cocaine, heroin, and other addictive drugs. Once nicotine captures a person, the person is dependent on it and cannot give up the habit easily. That is why many smokers find it difficult to stop smoking. Tobacco damages your body and creates lung, throat, and other cancers, heart disease and chronic lung diseases like bronchitis, asthma, etc. It causes loss of stamina. It may also lead to infertility and to still-births in pregnancy, If you wish to stay fit and healthy, say 'NO' to smoking, Do not get influenced by your friends or advertisements for cigarettes. Do not give in to the curiosity to smoke. It is just not worth it.*
- *A smoker harms the health of others around him too. The burning tip of a cigarette or bidi releases smoke into the air. Moreover, when a smoker exhales the smoke he has inhaled, he increases the smoke level in the room. The persons sitting in the same room become 'passive smokers'. This means that although the others are not smoking themselves, they may have their lungs and heart damaged by cigarette smoke. This way a smoker harms his family members, friends and others around him.*

Of 1000 teenagers who smoke today:

- *500 will eventually die due to tobacco-related diseases*
- *250 of these will die in their middle age. Compared to non-smokers, they lose 22 years of life on average.*
- *250 will die in old age but will have suffered ill health due to tobacco-related diseases in middle age.*



Life in the Land of Kal

Look upon the world as a bubble: him who looks thus upon the world the king of death does not see. Come, look at this world, resembling a painted royal chariot. The foolish are sunk in it; for the wise, there is no attachment for it.

The Dhammapada

When we stay at a hotel, we don't try to fix the problems we face. This is because we are guests at the hotel, not attached to it, and we know we will soon be on our way. Similarly, a bridge is meant for crossing, so we don't build a home on a bridge. Is it not strange, then, that even though we know we will not be in the world permanently, we act as if we will be here forever? Soami Ji says that we are so attached to the creation and love it so much that we have forgotten the Lord, forgotten our true home, and forgotten who we really are. We are trapped in this world of illusion and take everything that we see to be real.

It is not only mystics who tell us that this is a world of illusion, scientists say the same thing. Science tells us that at the subatomic or quantum level, nothing of the material world is left intact. There are only energy fields with no solidity at all, nothing for the senses to see or touch. Our physical senses are too dull and too slow to sense, feel, see, or experience these energy fields that are in fact vibrations taking place in a void. All the suns, stars and galaxies in the whole cosmos are a quantum mirage, winking in and out of existence millions of times per second. The whole universe is like a blinking light. The illusion in which we exist isn't restricted to the material world. Our mental perceptions, emotions, and attachments are part of the illusory realm of mind and matter.

Meditation is the means to realize the fleeting and impermanent nature of human life, of all our attachments and endeavours – even of life itself. Meditation is the means to realize a higher, more permanent level of reality.

Yet how difficult it is to retain the spiritual perspective and resulting clarity as we live out our daily lives in the material world! Wherever we look, we see change, suffering, and conflict. Influenced by what is going on around us, we easily take the path of least resistance. How natural it seems

to go with the flow – so we too ‘flow’ with the downward, superficial tendencies that appear to characterize our times, even though our Master demonstrates the benefits of choosing the upward path and shows us how to disengage ourselves from all and everything that pulls us down.

In a place where mind and matter are active, there can never be peace. Sorrows and wars of nations, or communities, or individuals shall continue. The soul must seek other planes to find peace. To find peace is the business of the individual. Everybody has to seek it within himself.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *Spiritual Gems*

To choose a positive path is to affirm one’s spiritual nature. And while we may never be able to make the world into a utopia, the saints tell us that we can transform ourselves. Through the practice of meditation, we can gradually reclaim for ourselves a higher state of being. By turning inwards, by exploring and experiencing the spiritual reality of inner life, we can gain the strength of character to remain sane even as the entire world goes crazy around us.

Extract from *Living Meditation*



The Greatest Love Story of All

What is the most enduring love story of all time, the greatest romance that has ever existed in the entire history of the creation?

A good love story begins with an initial irresistible attraction. This allure grows stronger as the intense longing of the lover to be with the beloved increases. The lover feels a deep yearning to have his intense love returned. Because the pain of separation can be excruciating, lovers crave union with one another. A love story is an account of the journey of the lover towards the beloved. It is filled with joys and sorrows as the story moves through various trials and tribulations.

Surely the greatest love story of all is the love of the soul for its Creator. And the greatest fulfilment must be the realization that this love is not unrequited. In fact, it is the beloved who draws us closer and, in fact, loves us more deeply than we could ever imagine.

Yet we have no understanding of this or of how much our soul aches for union with its greatest love, the supreme Lord. This, the oldest and most profound love story, has its foundation in the eternal and unbroken bond of love between the soul and God. Despite all we have accumulated in life, we experience a loneliness that yearns to be satisfied. Maharaj Charan Singh explains:

This constant feeling of loneliness and missing something is in reality the hidden unquenched thirst and craving of the soul for its Lord.... This feeling has been purposely put in the heart of man.

Quest for Light

So it seems we were designed to yearn, to seek union with the Lord. For some the journey to contentment and eternal peace may be longer and more arduous than for others. And many may feel as though they have journeyed in this direction before. Our Masters have completed this journey and personally experienced this great love. They share with us the eternal truth of the bond of love that has existed between the soul and its Creator since the dawn of time.

The individual soul wants nothing more than to merge again with that great soul, and there is a very specific method to bring about such a merging: through our meditation. Simran is the first part of our meditation,

with the power to move us inward to the eye centre, where in due course we will be able to experience our Master. Simran is our knocking at his door as we gently and longingly call to him. It is the sweetest love song ever sung to the beloved – but how often do we sing it?

If we want the experience of this love story, we need to develop an inner relationship with our Master, through the song of our simran. He is our only hope of liberation, and we will only succeed if we follow his instructions implicitly.

He has taught us that through our meditation we will be able to perceive the Shabd, to hear the divine melody. That melody will draw us out of this world and back to him. We have been connected to the Master for the benefit of our soul, and we should take advantage of this and use every opportunity we get to dedicate this precious life to him.

It is our Master who, during initiation, hands us the key to freedom, the key that will unlock the prison cell of misperception and suffering that we are trapped in. So it is our Master to whom we should devote ourselves. Every step we take, every breath we breathe, should be dedicated to him. Every thought, word and action should be an expression of our enduring love for him – the one who loved us first.

We should want nothing more than to sever the bonds that keep us in duality and keep us separated from him. This separation creates the intense yearning in us to be reunited with him, to once again be immersed in his love. We need to forge the bonds of love that unite us with him, because it is love and love alone that will draw us back to him on our quest to finally return home.

The only way to achieve this is by doing our meditation. In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. III, Maharaj Charan Singh told us that meditation creates love, increases love, and helps the love grow. What better way is there to show our gratitude for this love – which exceeds all human understanding – than through meditation?

We give our hearts and minds, our time and our effort, to reach that depth of love where we become receptive to his divine love and grace. In doing so, we open ourselves to his divine love. As Maharaj Charan Singh said: “He gives the love – we have only to become receptive to this love.”

As this great love story unfolds in our lives, we come to realize it is a process of give and take, a circle of love in which we are simply returning the love that he has already given us. The circle has been set in motion by him, and is the ceaseless flow of love sustained by the grace of the Lord himself, as explained by Maharaj Charan Singh in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. III, when he said: “He is the one who is within us, who’s helping us to give and then helping us to receive his grace.”

By doing our meditation, we place ourselves in a position to receive this love and grace, and to finally be able to perceive the blissful Shabd – to merge with it and revel in its loving embrace for all time.

Let’s ask nothing of the Lord but the Lord himself, as we immerse ourselves in that great love that is so freely on offer. So little is asked of us in return. What are we waiting for?

Meditation is the only way to get to the happy ending of the greatest love story of all time – the eternal tale of longing for a love that endures all and conquers all, and ends in bliss.



BOOK REVIEW

Introduction to the Dao

BY MIRIAM CARAVELLA

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This book offers an inviting and accessible introduction to a subject many find hard to fathom: the Dao (often spelled Tao). Its author approaches the subject as an open-minded outsider seeking, with sincere curiosity and careful inquiry, to comprehend some of the profound spiritual teachings of Daoism.

During her course of study the author travelled to China where she interviewed three practicing Daoists: Master Meng Zhiling, a Daoist true master of the Longmen (Dragon Gate) Quanzhen lineage; Heven Qiu, a disciple in the same lineage; and Yin Zhihua, a professor at the Daoist college at Bayun Guan (White Cloud Temple) in Beijing. She devotes the first chapter of the book to relating these interviews in which she asked questions on a wide range of topics such as free will, karma and reincarnation, meditation, discipleship, the role of love and devotion. She comments that when she met Master Meng she found him “very welcoming, with a gentle, respectful demeanour,” and it was “his smile and logical, yet modest way of speaking that charmed and relaxed me enough to bring up the deep subjects I had been mulling over.”

In subsequent chapters, the author explores the key concepts around which all Daoist teachings revolve: the Dao, *dé*, *ziran*, *wu-wei*, and the nature of the “true man” or “real person.” When facing difficulties discerning the meaning of one of these terms, she consulted the American scholar of Daoism, Professor Russell Kirkland, who advised her:

I think that your problem is that you seem to be seeking precision and singular meanings of term for which Daoists do not offer (or generally even seek) precision or singular meanings.... Daoists do not generally try to “find” an exact “meaning” of terms – even of “Dao” itself. Once you “have gotten the sense” of a term in a way that speaks to you, that is its “meaning” for a Daoist.

The idea that one's grasp of meanings gradually evolves through practice and experience was confirmed when Heven Qiu answered the author's question about the practice of reading and chanting the scriptures. He said, "The master only teaches me how to read or chant, but he does not explain the meanings of the scripture. It is up to the individuals to understand the scriptures." Thus, disciples generally chant the beautiful, evocative, but often mysterious words of *The Scripture of Clarity and Stillness* every day, morning and evening, singing with tones and music. Then, as the disciples individually pursue the disciplined practice known as "cultivating the Dao," the meaning of the Scripture gradually becomes clear to them.

The author emphasizes that one can never know the Dao through words and intellect. She quotes the opening lines of the *Daodéjing*, a fundamental text of Daoism:

*The Dao that can be spoken of is not the eternal Dao.
The name that can be named is not the eternal name.
The Nameless is the beginning of Creation.
The named is the mother of myriad beings.*

Daoist texts circle around the meaning of Dao with various metaphors. For example, one text relates an extended dialogue between two ancient sages Ziyu and Ziqi, which concludes:

*Ziyu replied: I understand:
The music of earth sings through a thousand holes.
The music of man is made on flutes
and instruments.
What makes the music of heaven?*

*Master Ziqi said:
Something is blowing on a thousand different holes.
Some power stands behind all this
and makes the sounds die down.
What is this power?*

It is perhaps typical of Daoism that the dialogue ends with a question that can only be answered through experience, not through intellectual analysis.

A basic tenet of Daoism is that one must seek and find as one's teacher a "real man," meaning someone who embodies the Dao. The author quotes *The Scripture on the Three Pure Subtle Natures*:

It is necessary to seek far and wide for the guidance of truly elevated people. If you do not meet real people (zhenren) who can point out the profound subtleties, you will not understand the great Dao.... Authentic teachings are received individually from a master (shi). His guidance in the dark reveals flashes of enlightenment.

Master Meng himself faced arduous challenges in finding his master, spending many years in the mountains in solitude facing extreme physical hardships. For him, as for many practising Daoists, such a period of trial and hardship is necessary to prepare one for the ultimate inner transformation. He said:

The process of finding the master is very difficult. There are many people seeking Dao. Some never found a master in their whole life.... I once wrote a little poem, "I will seek Dao until (the bones in) my knees are exposed." ... You must truly humble yourself, clear your mind, until nothing bothers the mind. When the student is ready by making himself a true, great vehicle of Dao, any one of the masters appears and can guide and teach the student.... So it's not a disciple looking for the master, but the master is looking for the disciple.

Once seekers find a master, they turn to the disciplined work of "cultivating the Dao." Master Meng told the author that once he met his master, "The first thing I did is to stop reading books. So in twenty-four hours, except for a short time for sleep, all I did was to focus the mind." He explained:

Sitting in meditation is to separate our spiritual consciousness from our physical body, because the spiritual nature is independent of the body. Our ancestral master says that the practice is 70 percent work on xing (human nature or character), and 30 percent on ming (inner life; the inner world) so meditation is 30 percent of the work. The other is on the temperament of the mind, which cannot be refined through meditation.

This work on character, on cultivating the right temperament, is a central focus of Daoist practice. The classic texts of Daoism stress humility, simplicity, and living in harmony with nature. Other aspects of right temperament are balance and a steadiness grounded in inner stillness, a state conveyed by comparing the Dao to a "pivot." The author explains:

The pivot is the central axis of the wheel around which all revolves. The rim of the wheel revolves, but the pivot or axis stays in one place, totally still.... Therefore, the person who keeps hold of the pivot, keeping his mind merged in the Dao, can go through life with balance and not be buffeted by changing circumstance. He is steady because his centre is still.

The purpose of Daoist practice is simply to get back to our original nature. This truth, repeated so often in the texts, is also reflected in Master Meng's words:

Our original nature is connected to immortality, to the formless. It is like a glowing pearl, but through our day to day lives, with all our thoughts and desires, we accumulate dust which covers its original condition. But if we remove this dust, then the pearl will be able to shine again.... So once we've removed all the dust from our heart then our true nature is revealed. And our true nature is Dao.

When the author asked Master Meng what advice he could give beginners who wished to follow Daoism, he replied: "This might seem basic, but the most important thing is to keep your heart simple and clear."

