

January / February 2022

Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

contents

- 4 Yours Affectionately
- 5 This Precious Opportunity
- 7 Something To Think About
- 8 Strengthening Ourselves
- 10 Spiritualisticks
- 11 Maharaj Ji's First Satsang
- 13 Understanding His Will
- 15 A New Year's Message
- 16 Stillness
- 18 Not Quite Here, Not Quite Gone
- 20 Our Ultimate Seva
- 22 Moments of Happiness and Sorrow
- 24 In Quarantine
- 26 The Master Answers
- 28 Rumi Shows Us the Way
- 31 Soul Hacked
- 35 "You Ain't Never Had a Friend Like Me"
- 38 Heart to Heart
- 39 Book Review

Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre
Guru Ravi Dass Marg, Pusa Road, New Delhi-110005, India
Copyright © 2021 Science of the Soul Research Centre®

Articles and poems that appear without sources have been written by the contributors to this magazine.

VOLUME 18 • ISSUE 1 • JANUARY / FEBRUARY 2022

Yours Affectionately

Dear Son,

If we accept one fact that before we were born here our future or fate was cast and this fate cannot be altered, that we ourselves are the makers of our own fate, and we are reaping now what we had sown then, and what we will sow now, will reap hereafter, then the problem of life is considerably simplified. The problem then reduces itself to this – do your duty to yourself, your Maker, your family and society very faithfully putting in your best effort and then patiently, cheerfully and serenely abide by the consequences taking them as his will.

This view of life removes all worldly worries and makes life enjoyable.

So while discharging your official and home duties and keeping your mind clear of worries, do your spiritual work regularly, for only spiritual work counts. This on no account should be neglected.

The mind finds easy excuses for avoiding it. Mind is our enemy and if we ignore our spiritual work, we play its game and we are lost. Therefore, please put in as much time in the spiritual work as you can find so that you get first-hand knowledge of what lies within you and see for yourself what is in store for you.

Please throw out worldly desires from your mind and do not anticipate events, instead be a silent observer of what happens. The future will unfold itself in its time. The practice of the Word is the cure of all our ills. It cuts the very root of the karma.

Daily and without any break, with love and faith, put your attention in simran and the Sound Current, and bring your attention in the eye centre and meet the Radiant Form of the Master and receive as much grace from him as you like.

The Master is all grace and gives it with both hands. But to receive this gift we should reach the eye centre.

Yours affectionately, Sawan Singh



This Precious Opportunity

Over the last thirty years, there has been an amazing array of advances in technology. We are now able to carry a thousand times more processing power on our wrist or in our pocket than what was once available from an entire building of mainframe computers. We have instant access to an immense depository of information. We have only to ask the question and the answer presents itself on the internet.

The world is changing; it is moving at an incredible pace, but where is it taking us? It is as if we are racing on a treadmill, moving faster and faster, but are we really going anywhere? In the process, our physical bodies may be getting fitter, our material lives may be getting better, but our souls are more and more out of touch with their divine source.

With every passing second, our time in this human form is running out. As the old adage goes: 'We can only make hay while the sun shines.' But after the sun has set, it is game over, and if we have not realized our purpose as a human being, then we have lost this precious opportunity.

The vast amount of information available to humanity may be fascinating but is of little use to our true purpose. The problem is that we have confused knowledge with information. True knowledge is something we can verify by personal experience; information is just random data. The role of the Masters is to remind us of our true purpose and impart that truth or knowledge that will lead us to our destination. They push us off that treadmill that leads nowhere and make us walk up steadily to the eye centre.

The Master explains that listening to satsangs and reading the books are all opportunities for us to re-evaluate our priorities and reassess how we are spending our time and attention. The world is very invasive and persuasive and will steadily push us off course if we make no adjustments.

Our time is slowly running out, like the sands in an hourglass. If we are not careful, this opportunity of a human life will slip through our fingers.

In the following analogy about a professor and his classroom full of students, the professor presents this problem to them:

If you had \$86,400 and someone stole a \$20 bill from you, would you throw away the \$86,380 and try to get your \$20 back? Or would you just forget about it and let it go?

All the students said they would let the \$20 bill go. The professor explained: You all have 86,400 seconds every single day, and this time is much more valuable than money. You can always work for more money, but once a second passes, you can never get it back. Every time someone upsets you, it probably takes 20 seconds of your time, so why do we throw away the other 86,380 seconds by worrying about it or being upset? We all tend to make this mistake. We waste our time obsessing over events that have happened or imagining things that may happen. Every time we do this, we are throwing away our time, wasting it. We easily get side-tracked from making the best use of the time that we have.

The Masters are examples of how to live. In the book *Legacy of Love*, we read about how Hazur Maharaj Charan Singh was the perfect example to all his disciples. He conducted all aspects of his life in a most balanced and unassuming way. The Masters show us how to mould our lives to the teachings of the saints.

Hazur Maharaj Ji gave the following advice to a disciple:

We have to do our duty as a citizen, as a husband, as a son, as a brother, as a friend. But we should not be so obsessed by these duties and people that we forget the real purpose of life, the real destination, the real path.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III

We have to live in this world and fulfill our duties and obligations, all the while working on building our spiritual treasure within. Time is short, and this opportunity of being in a human form is too precious to waste.



Something To Think About

Satsangis should form the habit of ‘thinking’ – clear thinking. Very few people ‘think’. Why do we lose our temper? Because we do not reflect. Why do people fall prey to the attack of lust? Because they do not think. Why does a mother weep at the death of her son? Why do people commit suicide at the loss of property or wealth? Because they do not think. *Vichar* (clear thinking) is ninety percent *abhyas*. Clear thinking is a blessing. It can easily be attained by a little practice. Most of our actions are done on the spur of the moment, without thinking. Always reflect calmly. If you knew how much harm anger does to your liver and heart, you would never lose your temper over anything. Ask a physician and he will tell you how blood becomes poisoned in a fit of anger.

Maharaj Jagat Singh, *The Science of the Soul*

* * *

We are proud of our youth, health and beauty – forgetting the provider who gave them to us. We are proud of our intellectual achievements and professional successes. From where do they come? If they are in an individual’s hands, why does the intellectual’s intellect suddenly collapse? Why does a prosperous lawyer or doctor unexpectedly find his clients and patients vanishing? Successes are so transient, so much outside our control. They are God’s gifts, and he takes them back when he likes. They are apparel in which we strut about for a time. The honours they bring us are only fig leaves that cover our spiritual nakedness. It is not that we should abandon physical, intellectual, and professional achievement. The Masters say, use all the powers that God gives you, but do not be proud of them; they are not yours.

Sarmad, Martyr to Love Divine



Strengthening Ourselves

When asked about tolerating a person who is negative, Hazur Maharaj Charan Singh Ji replied:

The question is rather that we are negative to others. We are negative to certain people, so we think they are being negative to us. We have to improve ourselves, we have to become positive. Why should there be any thought in our mind about anybody being negative? Why should it affect us at all? There is some weakness hidden in us that causes it to affect us. If we are strong, then nothing affects us; so nobody is negative to us. You see, evil is there. I don't say that evil is not there. But if we are strong, there's no evil. Then this negative tendency won't exist for me at all. Weakness doesn't lie in the evil. It is our weakness that we are a victim of.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. II

To strengthen ourselves so that nothing affects us, developing and focusing on our spiritual nature, is key. We know that all human limitations come from the one great human weakness of ego. Ego is our self-centredness, our obsession with 'me, myself, and I'. Ego is our major handicap. It is the excess luggage we have accumulated on our travels, and it is by simply letting go of it that we can discover the spiritual beings who we are. Mystics tell us that we are spiritual beings having a human experience, not human beings seeking a spiritual experience.

An admirer was said to have asked Michelangelo how he made such exquisite sculptures. Michelangelo is said to have replied: "It's not difficult. I just chisel away whatever is in excess. The figures are already there."

It is not that we have to acquire any new qualities. We already have them. We just have to remove the coverings over our soul – our weaknesses, karmas, and attachments – and let our spiritual nature come to the forefront. As long as we let our senses drive us, we will keep moving away from the real treasure that exists within. Spiritual development redirects us inwards. The expansion of consciousness will take place only when consciousness is directed inwards and upwards.

With meditation our willpower becomes so strong that even if our mind has been wrongly conditioned and wrongly influenced in childhood, we can become a saint. That influence of childhood is there on the mind, no doubt, but still sometimes we get better company, or by the Lord's grace we realize that our mind has been wrongly conditioned, and we are able to rise above it and not act according to the conditioning of our mind. We act independently of the conditioning of the mind.

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

The mystics explain that when we are conscious of our faults, half the battle is won because then we begin to do something about them. In our interactions, if we focus on others' strengths, automatically their weaknesses fade into the background. We would also want others to focus on our strengths and not judge us for our shortcomings.

We will achieve real balance and lasting happiness only when we rearrange our priorities – taking into account our spiritual nature – and then act on those priorities. As long as we continue chasing happiness in the outside world, we will continue to be frustrated. When we allow others to determine our level of happiness, we give up one of the greatest freedoms offered to us: the choice to be happy despite our circumstances. We just need to return to that state of bliss to which we are already entitled to experience and enjoy.

In *Spiritual Primer*, we read that for those who succeed in overcoming the dominance of the mind, their spiritual dimension becomes their singular reality even while living on this earth. Being always aware of their spiritual nature, they remain constantly in touch with it. They live in the midst of illusion but are not deceived. They are profound and yet lead simple lives.

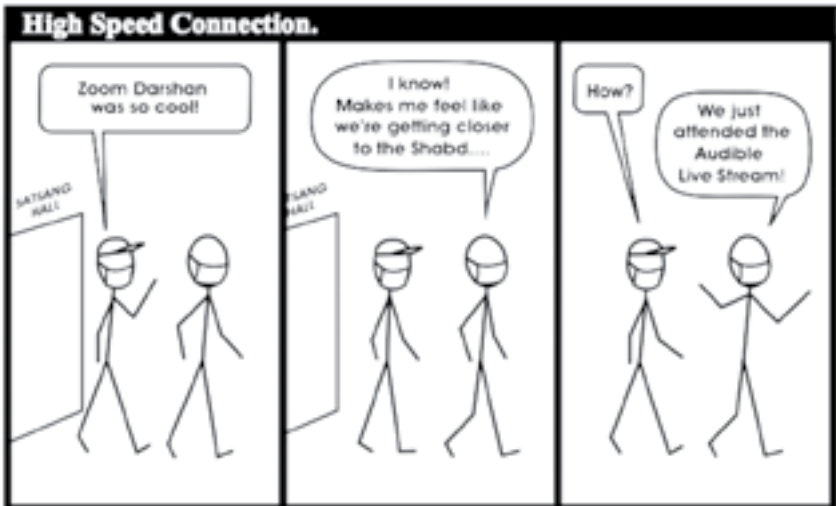
They do not think ill of anyone nor do they deceive their fellow beings. Their thinking is crystal clear and they are efficient at whatever they do. Their hearts are open to everyone. They have realized the full potential of the precious gift of the human form. They do not merely exist but live a life full of meaning, purpose and joy. They have achieved the perfect balance between their worldly and spiritual duties, and have escaped the stress and misery of the world. These are people who have made

spirituality their number-one priority, and by living the saints' teachings, they have merged their consciousness with the power behind all life.

Our ability to journey upward and inward strengthens our dependence on something larger than the problems we face. The Lord knows best how to unravel our karmic relationships so that we do not have to return to this creation. If we learn to live in his will, we will not be brought back by our desires and preferences. God has written our story. We need to trust the Author.



SPIRITUALISTICKS[®]



Maharaj Ji's First Satsang

Though Hazur Maharaj Ji came to the Dera in October 1951, he did not start giving satsang till much later. There were three elderly satsangis, Babu Gulab Singh, Sardar Gokal Singh and Baba Rameshwar Das, who used to hold satsang while Maharaj Ji sat on the dais giving darshan to the sangat.

Talking about how he started giving satsang, he said, "One day, I came to the Dera unannounced. The satsang had started when I reached. It was outside the library. I went and sat with the audience. A sevadar named Bhagat Ram was holding satsang on the shabd *Dil Ka Hujra*. I noticed that he was saying things which had no relevance to the shabd, nor did his exposition have any context with the teachings. He was only talking of miracles performed by the Great Master. I felt very uneasy and embarrassed."

"After the satsang, I asked Professor Jagmohan Lal, who had come from Dalhousie with me, what he had to say about Bhagat Ram's satsang. Professor Sahib retorted, 'If you do not hold satsang, then what else should we expect?' I explained and pleaded with Professor Sahib that I knew nothing about Sant Mat teachings. I never attentively heard Sardar Bahadur Ji's or Great Master's satsangs, though I used to enjoy them. I never even noticed which shabd was taken. I only knew one thing – how to be steadfast on the three principles and how to meditate."

"We had a lot of arguments, though I had great respect for Professor Sahib. He was like a friend to me, and I could take a lot of liberty with him. In spite of our age difference, I could argue with him. I had, in my college days, stayed with him in his house at Kapurthala for a year. I stayed also with his elder son at Rawalpindi for two years, when I was graduating in Arts from Gordon College. He emphatically argued with me and said, 'You are a law graduate and were successful in your profession, and right from childhood have been brought up in this atmosphere. I cannot understand why it is not possible for you to hold satsang.'"

"Anyhow, in the evening, I was surprised when Babu Gulab Singh came to me with one copy each of *Sar Bachan* (poetry) and *Shabd Ki Mahima Ke Shabd* in Punjabi, and told me that he had selected fifteen shabds from each book for me and I should discuss them with him, which would help

me to hold satsangs. I felt Professor Jagmohan Lal's hand was behind this suggestion. I could not say anything to Babu Gulab Singh, as he was Baba Ji's satsangi, and I had great respect for him. But he was shocked when I told him that I did not know Hindi, nor was I fluent with Punjabi. He just looked at my face blankly and did not know what to say. After some time I asked him if these books were available in Urdu. He told me he would check up and let me know, and left disappointed.”

“After three days he again came with four volumes of the Adi Granth in Urdu, which I still have with me. He brought another small book of Soami Ji Maharaj's shabds printed in Urdu by Bakshi Maluk Chand. Ultimately, I started understanding from him the various aspects of the teachings. Meanwhile, Prof. Jagmohan Lal gave me a copy of *The Path of the Masters* to read, as it had to be reprinted, and he wanted some criticism of religions to be eliminated. It also helped me to understand the philosophy of Sant Mat.”

“In winter I had gone to Sirsa for one and a half months. Munshi Ram Ji tried to teach me the Hindi alphabet as, he said, a lot of the teachings of saints were written in Hindi and it would be of great help to me to go through them. But he gave it up after a week, as I could not pick up more than a few letters.”

“Anyhow, I held my first satsang and the shabd I took was from Tulsi Sahib, *Dil Ka Hujra*, and gradually I started giving satsang from shabds of Soami Ji Maharaj and the Adi Granth.”

So, Maharaj Ji started to give satsang for two hours and sometimes even two and half hours, twice daily in those days. His inspiring soft voice and charismatic personality held the sangat spellbound. His lucid exposition – logical and convincing – was forceful. He often used to take two shabds, one from the Adi Granth and the other from Soami Ji Maharaj.

Treasure Beyond Measure



Understanding His Will

There is so much happening in the world that is out of our control. Every day we work hard and do what we can to help care for our families. We struggle and experience pain. We feel lonely, afraid and anxious. It is in these difficult times that we turn to God. Sometimes we ask for his blessings and strength to get through these tough times. Sometimes we think and ask, “Why? Why is this happening?”

We should try to face our day-to-day problems remembering our destination, remembering the path. Our problems are of our own making. We may not be creating them now, but we have created them in the past. We have sown the seeds and we are here now to face the result of those seeds.

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

The Masters remind us that everything is destined according to the will of the Lord. We cannot see or understand why things happen as they do. Everything that takes place in our lives is a result of our karmas – “What goes around, comes around.” – as the saying goes. Our karmas determine what we experience, good or bad. We do not know what the Lord has planned for us. If we choose to accept that everything is destined and that He knows best, we can learn to live in his will.

There is a story of a king who learned to trust in God’s will. One day, while cutting an apple, he accidentally cut himself and his hand began bleeding. His servant rushed over with a cloth and tied up his wound. “Don’t worry,” said his servant, “everything happens for a reason, we must thank God.”

Perplexed and in pain, the king cried “Nonsense! I’m hurt and bleeding. You are saying we should thank God?” Angered, the king ordered his guards to throw his servant in jail. Still, the servant remained calm, repeating to himself, “Everything happens for a reason, we must thank God.”

The next day, while hunting in the forest, the king was captured by an ancient tribe and was tied to a tree. “Let’s kill this man as a sacrifice to God!” shouted the tribal chief. The king struggled to break free as the group prepared for the sacrifice. The tribe’s priest arrived to inspect the

king and noticed a bandaged wound on his hand. Seeing this, the priest told the tribal chief, “This man cannot be sacrificed because he has a scar, set him free.”

The king quickly rushed back to his castle and told this story to the servant he put in jail. The servant smiled and said, “See, I told you everything happens for a reason! Your hand got cut to save your life. And because you put me in jail, my life was saved too.”

“What do you mean? How was your life saved?” asked the confused king.

“As your servant, I must follow wherever you go. But because you put me in jail, I did not accompany you to the forest. If I had been there, the tribe would have sacrificed me, as I have no scars. I was saved too.

Everything happens for a reason; we must thank God.”

Accepting that everything happens for a reason is easier said than done. We are trapped in this world of illusion and take everything that we see and everything that we experience to be real. Our scattered minds run in search of solutions to our perceived problems. This is why meditation is important.

What is the Master's will? Just to be firm on the principles on which we have to build our meditation and attend to our meditation – that is his will, that is his teaching, those are his instructions. That is the base on which we have to start. The real will of the Master we can know only when we go beyond the realm of mind and maya. Now, as long as the mind exists, we are in the realm of the mind, in the will of the mind. So naturally we have to follow the Master's instructions with our intellect, our strong willpower, obedience and submission in order to reach to that stage. These things are essential to begin with. But ultimately we have to reach to that stage where we live in the will of the Lord, the will of the Master – they are the same thing.

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

We should strive for this elevated perspective through our meditation. Our efforts to sit daily for simran and bhajan will help us to cope with the inevitable ups and downs that life throws at us. Let us observe this world, watch the dramas that unfold, and focus on emancipating ourselves from the wandering mind.



A New Year's Message

Let the dying year with all its memories and regrets, pleasant and unpleasant, bring home to us the impermanence and unreality of what we behold, and strengthen our resolve to rise above the phenomenal existence and reach the glories of the Word, the Nam that was, is, and will be.

The soul is of the same essence as Nam, and will enjoy real bliss only when it reaches the region of Nam and becomes one with Nam. You have been initiated into this mystery. It behooves you, therefore, to travel the path as far as possible, for this is the only thing that really matters.

But we are not to neglect our worldly duties. With a heart full of love and faith, devote yourself to the task. Also discharge your worldly obligations. With this motto as your guiding principle, may the New Year bring you success and happiness.

Sardar Bahadur Jagat Singh, *The Science of the Soul*

* * *

When we put our spiritual goal first, we find that our happiness and contentment increase. When our lives are clear, harmonious and balanced, we sleep well at night because we are at peace with ourselves. We discover for ourselves, through our own experience, that it is through the natural order of the Lord's creation and through our efforts that we receive whatever we have.

Honest Living

* * *

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

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *Spiritual Gems*



Stillness

*There is a way between voice and presence
where information flows.
In disciplined silence it opens.
With wandering talk it closes.*

The Essential Rumi

In our existence on this earthly plane, a feature one can rely on is change. We experience change every moment and in everything around us, for better or for worse. While change can be perceived as part of the flow of life, it can also be synonymous with disruption and trigger distress. An external change promotes ceaseless mental and emotional chatter within. It diffuses the mind with a multitude of emotions, thoughts, desires, likes and dislikes, creating a mental whirlpool. And whether one realizes it or not, that is suffering!

To respond to this suffering, we may look to various remedies to calm the mind – like trying to relax by doing breathing exercises, going for a walk, talking to someone, or even going on a retreat. While these efforts may offer momentary relief, the change that causes this anxiety and the mind that perceives it go with us everywhere. So it seems futile to seek tranquility in an ever-changing environment.

While we cannot control external changes by introducing stillness in our lives, we can certainly cope with it. When the mind is disturbed by changes in our life, stillness can give us clarity, helping us to deal with those changes better. But first we need to acknowledge that as a result of our attention being scattered in this illusive world, it is difficult to control and still our mind. Even acknowledging this fact can be a major step to self-realization.

So how then can we still this mind to experience inner calm? As saints in the past and present advise, the solution is focused attention and contemplation at the eye centre with the practice of meditation. Meditation helps us find our centre of being where we can experience that captivating silence and stillness, that state of bliss and peace.

As Guru Amardas Ji says:

*When the soul's light merges with the supreme light
and the chastened mind stands still,
we are exalted at the gate of the Lord.*

Quoted in *Spiritual Discourses*, Vol. II

The following story illustrates this: One fine morning, just before their daily spiritual discourse began, the villagers realized that their guru was missing. Alarmed, they were consumed by panic and anxiety. So setting aside their fears, they devised a plan to find the guru by splitting up into groups, covering the entire area of the land. Yet, despite their searching tirelessly all day and throughout the night, the guru could not be found.

Eventually, after an exhaustive search covering every possibility, the villagers returned, overcome by grief. Deeply disturbed, they were now convinced that their guru had fallen victim to some kind of foul play.

The villagers were troubled and miserable. Not knowing what to do next, they gathered together and sat down in silent agony calling out his name. The pain in their hearts could be felt throughout the valley, as waves of longing and sadness filled the air. Realizing their helplessness, they cried to the guru for the guru. Suddenly, when a hush fell upon the tormented village and not even a leaf stirred, the villagers raised their heads only to find the guru on top of the hillock, sitting in silence. At that moment, the villagers realized that only in silence and stillness, could they find what they were seeking.

If we give in to the commotion of this material existence, we will only find ourselves more lost and confused. So the saints tell us to still the disturbed mind by going within. As Guru Ramdas proclaims from his own experience:

*This mind does not hold still, even for an instant.
Distracted by all sorts of distractions,
I have found the perfect Guru, through great good fortune;
he has given me the mantra of the Lord's Name,
and my mind has become quiet and tranquil.*

Quoted in *The Spiritual Guide*, Vol. II

When the Master bestows the precious gift of Nam on the disciple, he also grants him the grace to meditate and the strength to raise his attention inward and upward. But it is up to the disciple to nurture and develop that strength through constant and consistent practice.

Develop the power to withdraw your attention, at will, from the outward objects and from the physical body, and concentrate it in the eye focus.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *Spiritual Gems*



Not Quite Here, Not Quite Gone

*The bell within me chimes
calling me back to my own country.*

*Desire paints no more pictures
of what I want from this place.*

*Earthbound, reaching for the Light inside,
One moment, my world is awash with Song,
the next, it is a howling valley of emptiness.*

My Beloved calls, but I'm still in chains.

*Paid debts fall through the hourglass,
setting me closer to freedom, one by one.*

I'm not quite here, not quite gone.

My hunger no longer sits at this table.

*Sweet saffron bread served on fine china
tastes like dust in my mouth.*

*My home with gardens and a view
feels like a roadhouse in some foreign country.*

Here, even love feels like loneliness.

No one here can really be mine.

I play my part but I don't belong.

I'm not quite here, not quite gone.

*Mystics say, these are the welcome signs,
like a seagull perched on the mast at dawn
proving land is not far off, though still unseen
by the sailor lost at sea.*

*Comfort comes in the dark,
where soul soars over the River of Light
that runs through the starry deep
in the luminous Voice of the One
that calls sailors home in the night.*

*It comes down to this –
live your life like the mystic says,
so you leave here with your love,
nothing more.*

*Become a lantern of longing
that lights your way in the dark.
Stay attuned to the sacred Song
that gathers the gold dust of your soul
from the dream stuff of the world.*

*With every step you take,
homesickness haunts you more.
The colours of your history
begin to fade away
like watercolor paintings
left out in the sun and rain.*

*It takes courage to walk this road
from darkness into Light.
You journey this dusk alone
except for the One within –
only lovers of leaving follow.*

*But deep in these shadowlands,
there is a place along the path
where the gloom thins into mist,
then rises and drifts away.*

*And a love inside,
so clear and clean and bright
that you always hoped was there,
breaks through your despair
and dazzles you with Light!*

*Remember, blessings await you
beyond your wildest dreams,
as you journey on and on,
not quite here, not quite gone.*



Our Ultimate Seva

For anyone on the Sant Mat path, seva or voluntary service becomes part and parcel of our lifestyle. Consciously or unconsciously, we are drawn to help out at the centre we visit. Initially perhaps, we start with small tasks in the library, garden or parking area. Over time, we come to see these involvements as integral to our being, to the point that if ever taken away from us, we would feel sad and incomplete.

What makes us feel this way? Why are we happy serving and sad when this aspect of our life is gone?

The greatest reward in seva is the contentment and happiness that you feel within, that you get an opportunity to serve someone.

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

Seemingly, it is the deep sense of gratification and fulfillment that drives us to keep doing seva. There is a universal feeling of love that fills us to the very core, a deep sense of compassion and humility as we share, help and give of our self. It may be just a small task of helping clear tables after a meal, or something daunting like preparing a satsang. But in every case, we are imbued with love and gratitude for the privilege to actually serve despite any difficulty or discomfort we might have to face. The feeling of harmony and love pervades the air when doing seva – the love we feel for the Master as we serve and, more importantly, the love we feel he has for us by granting us seva.

In fact, seva has that unique effect where the more seva a person does, the more inspired he is to do more. But before we get swept away doing more seva, we must first realize that all of our physical seva is only a means to an end. It is in fact a stepping stone to the real seva – and that is to sit in meditation and be one with the melody within.

Real seva is meditation – withdrawing your consciousness back to the eye centre and attaching it to the divine light or melody within, attaching it to the sound within. Other sevas are means to that end.

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

Many on the path are truly happy with their physical seva to the point of wanting to do more, but often complain about doing the real seva of meditation, saying that it is so difficult to still the mind and experience the

light and sound within. Often they worry about progress as they sit in the darkness without seemingly any gain.

At this point, one must remember that stilling the mind is not an easy task, as we have been in this creation for many lifetimes and have developed deep attachments and outward tendencies. All these attachments have to be severed and our outward tendencies reversed. The process is indeed difficult and long. But we must be confident, as we are constantly assured by our Master that progress is always there, even if we sit for years in the darkness. But as long as we keep to our vows and sit in meditation as we promised at the time of initiation, we will reach the eye centre and meet him. Over time, even while sitting in the darkness, we develop a deeper love and devotion for the Master and this somehow cleanses our minds and brings out in us positive qualities like patience, perseverance, kindness, compassion and humility. It is these qualities that elevate our human experience.

The benefits of meditation are truly transformational. But we have to be tenacious in its practice, staying loyal to the daily struggle against the mind. The challenges will always be there – the worry about progress, the impatience to see results, and the worldly distractions seem endless. But as long as we remain true to our meditation, our meditation will be true to us and we will be able to overcome these challenges.

Vital to our success during challenging times is physical seva. The happiness and contentment we feel as we serve the sangat in ways big or small keeps us connected to the Master. We feel his love as we work hand in hand with others in the sangat. And the spirit of humility that is palpable when we work alongside sevadars from all walks of life gives us motivation to overcome the challenges we encounter during meditation.

Collectively, the benefits of physical seva help us conquer challenges we face in meditation and keep us steadfast on the path. That is why it is called a means to an end.

Thus, we should take pleasure in the benefits that physical seva brings. But we must remember that the happiness and contentment we feel while doing our physical seva is not our ultimate goal. Our physical seva is just a means for us to do our true seva, which is to meet and merge with our Master through the diligent practice of meditation.



Moments of Happiness and Sorrow

An Explanation by Maharaj Charan Singh

This whole world is full of misery, sorrow, sickness. That is why we can never get everlasting happiness in this world. In fact, this human body – the top of the creation, the temple of the living God – was bestowed on us due to both our bad karmas and our good karmas. If we had only bad karmas, we would have been in hell. If we had only good karmas, we would have been in heaven. It is the combination of good and bad karmas which gives us the opportunity to be in a human body in this world. So the combination of good and bad has brought us here. And while being in the body we have to face the results of both the bad and the good karmas.

Some people are fortunate in having more good karma and less bad karma; so, due to that, they have more happy days and fewer unhappy days. Others have more bad karma and less good karma, so they face more unhappy days and have fewer happy ones. But every human being in this world has moments of happiness and also moments of sorrow. We will not find anyone in this world who has nothing but happiness and has not faced any sorrow; nor will we find anybody who has nothing but sorrow and never got relief or had some happy moments in his life. This world is the field of good and bad karmas, where both good and bad are harvested. Therefore, because we are in this world, we have to pay for our bad karmas, and that is adversity.

I have tried to explain that saints never come into this world to make it a paradise or a heaven. They come only to take us from this place of adversity, to take us away from this place of good and bad, which is full of ups and downs, rich and poor and the like. Their only purpose in coming is to take us back to the Lord. If we try to solve our problems in the world, we can never succeed; but the saints give us certain handles or levers, a way of meditation, through which we can always rise above these problems. If we try to pick up all the splinters of the world, we cannot succeed. But if we have strong shoes on our feet, they do not bother us at all. The saints arm us with that meditation – the strong shoes – so that the ups and downs of the world do not bother us. We rise to that stage, that level, where our worldly situation makes us neither happy nor unhappy. The real happiness we can get only when we merge back into the Lord.

As long as we are in this world, we have to face ups and downs; sometimes we are rich, sometimes we are poor, sometimes we are happy, sometimes we are unhappy. But we should not lose our balance. We should always try to keep our thoughts in meditation. That is why saints advise us to remain in his will.

What is his will? To face these karmas gracefully and boldly, by keeping our attention in meditation – that is living in his will. Why is it essential to remain in his will? If, due to our good karmas, we give ourselves to sensual pleasures and worldly achievements, we forget the Lord. If, due to our adversities, our bad karmas, we worry, we weep, we cry and are full of self-pity, our thoughts again get scattered in the world, so we can never meditate. Since good and bad will always be here as long as we are in this body, when are we going to meditate? So the saints advise us that whether we are reaping the fruits of good karmas or of bad karmas, we should always keep our attention in the Lord. We have to remain in his will. We have to be resigned unconditionally to his will.

Whatever our store of karma is, good or bad, we have to go through it. But I can assure you that by meditation our will becomes so strong that these good and bad karmas do not affect us at all. We rise above the effects of good and bad karmas, and we easily and happily account for all these karmic debts with the help of meditation. And sometimes the Lord, out of his love and with his grace, helps to reduce this load of karmas, or rather to clear our karmas without taking full account of those karmas. So we should not lose our balance when we have to face some adversities, when we have to face the effects of some bad karmas. Rather, that is the occasion when we should give more time to meditation. We should give more time to devotion, our spiritual practice, so that the effect of that karma passes off and we are again on our feet.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III



In Quarantine

A daily two-and-a-half-hour quarantine in the confines of our own mind is perhaps the greatest struggle that practitioners on the spiritual path have to face. People in today's world are waiting for their quarantine at home to be lifted so that they can go back out and resume their normal activities. Disciples, on the other hand, perpetually wait for the veil of the mind to be lifted so that they can go and fulfil their purpose in the inner worlds. But more often than not, they end up escaping the quarantine from the world for the only visibly open exit – the one that leads right back out into this world.

We don't care much for going out into the world and getting things done, because we know that this is not where our own personal treasure lies. We find ourselves in a state of limbo; we dwell half-heartedly in a world where we have to perpetually be cautious of exposure to its vices, allurements and temptations, and yet we have no other place to go – at least for now.

Perhaps this is why we are so comfortable when we are with the Master, for he allows us to experience our true home in the hereafter, with its comforts and joys, while we are on this side of the fence. It is the only means to find respite while we are stuck between both worlds. Let's face it: after being with our Master and experiencing the bliss of his presence, we may never feel comfortable in this creation again. *Our cup runneth over* when we are with our Master; he makes us forget that we have a life out there, with troubles and challenges. After experiencing the vastness of his love, we may never be able to settle for the fleeting pleasures of this world again.

We may still try to fill the void with other entrapments of this world, but that will never make us feel good about ourselves. When we are away from him, the world becomes a cold and empty place. What does the soul care about the stock market or driving a new car?

Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee, a Sufi teacher, writes in his book *The Bond with the Beloved*:

The memory of the beloved is like the grain of sand in the oyster shell that creates the pearl. It causes a painful friction between the outer world and the inner world. The stronger the memory, the greater the friction.

We often may feel we are caught between the two worlds, sometimes wondering what to choose, but the truth is that the choice has already been made. Once we have experienced the Master's love, there is no going back; the little drops have seen a glimpse of the ocean and intuitively know that they are meant to merge in it.

*If the raindrop knew its fate,
And could see the ocean,
It would not remain an empty bubble
caught between two worlds.*

Shah Maghsoud, quoted in *The Sufi Book of Life*

There is no magic formula that will relieve us of the discomfort in the interim, for there is bound to be friction, sometimes more and sometimes less. We just have to hang tight, do our best and patiently carry out our duties in this world until we merge with the Lord within.

There is only one remedy for our predicament, and that is persistence in meditation. We may cry, complain and brood, but that is not going to give us any solace – we might as well face our situation, make friends with it, and fight with dignity. In this battle between both worlds, one of them is meant to give in sooner or later, and the outcome depends on which world we are rooting and fighting for.

Sometimes also in meditation a stage comes when we feel a great void in our life, because the effect of meditation is that we get detached from all the worldly pleasures, worldly faces. They don't interest us anymore. And nothing holds us inside to catch our attention or our thoughts, so then we feel a void. The world doesn't please us, and we have nothing else to please us within.

Not finding anything within and not being attached to anything outside, we feel that void, but that should not cause us to despair at all. That is for our own good, our own advantage. We know the reality of this world, we know our real self, so we try to find the reality. This should help us to attend more to meditation, to overcome that void and emptiness.

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



The Master Answers

A selection of questions and answers with Maharaj Charan Singh

Q: *Is it true that we are born alone and that we live and die alone?*

A: You see, currents in a river bring together so many scattered pieces of wood, but another current comes and just scatters them again. A wave of karma comes, we all collect together; another wave of karma comes, we all scatter to our own destinations. That is why we say the world is like a stage and we are all actors. An actor never gets so attached to another actor that after getting down from the stage he starts crying. He knows he has been given a part to play – maybe of a husband or a wife or a child – but after he gets down from the stage he has no relationship with them. So the world is just like that. It is self-deception to think that the part which is given to us is real.

That is our whole problem and misery in this world. If we could only remember that we are all just playing parts on a stage. People come and go in different roles in this life. There's no real relationship. If today we have forgotten all our friends, all our loves, our romances in each of our past lives, how are we going to remember our current relationships? We are not going to keep remembering them forever. They come and go. We will forget them also.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III

Q: *You often say, "Do not analyze." Why not analyze so much?*

A: It will lead you nowhere. We just start feeling self-pity, and where does that lead you? Instead of analyzing your own self too much, attend to meditation. That will take care of the coming events in a more practical way than brooding over the past, over the present, over the future. Why not prepare yourself to face the present and face the future – by meditation.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III

Q: *Master, I'd like to hear what you have to say about this line from Paltu. It says: "In the game of love I cannot lose. If I win I get you, and if I lose you get me." Is that right?*

A: If I win, naturally I'll be in your lap. If, in my struggle, I lose, you will pull me to your level. So there are no failures if I am doing my best. One only loses a battle if one fights it. You can't lose a battle sitting at home. When you are fighting, either you win or you lose. But you are fighting. As Maharaj Ji (Maharaj Sawan Singh) used to say, in Sant Mat there are no failures, because you are trying to follow it. A child who is learning to run, well, he falls, he gets bruises, he gets up again, he tries again, tries again and starts running. If he is always frightened of falling, he will never even learn to walk. So even if we lose in this battle of love, we win.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III

Q: *It's a very strange battle in that Master pulls us first, then we come towards him, and then he seems to go away.*

A: He doesn't go away. We come and go, come and go. He is always pulling, but we are not always receptive to his pull. Christ gave the parable of the sowing of the seed. The seed falls on marshy ground. It grows, but along with the weeds. One is attending to meditation and is receptive to the pull, but is also a victim of his weaknesses. The pull is always there, but we are not 100 percent receptive to it.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III

Q: *How much capacity do we have in planning our future, Master? Is it set for us when we're born?*

A: We have only one future: to go back to the Father. There's no other future.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III



Rumi Shows Us the Way

Someone asked, "What is the way?"
I said, "To leave your desires."

Jalal al-Din Rumi

Most of our lives we pray to the Lord for the fulfillment of our desires. Although it is human nature to want more and more, Maharaj Charan Singh tells us:

Desires can never be fulfilled. If you go on putting wood in the fire, the fire will always go on burning. If you stop feeding it with fuel, naturally there won't be any fire.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. I

Saints tell us that our endless desires and ambitions are the cause of all our anxiety and stress. If we were to pause and reflect, we would find that there is a price tag on everything, and inevitably the cost is our time, energy and peace of mind. We want more money, better relationships, successful careers, luxuries, more likes on our social media – but which of these can assure us permanent happiness?

Then, when we come to the spiritual path we realize that maybe our desires now should be spiritual in nature. Yet again, we start to complain about lack of spiritual progress; we want specific sevas; we beg for personal interviews or to be in close proximity with the Master. The nature of our desires evolves from material to spiritual, but our appetite is as insatiable as ever.

Masters always point out that the path to God-realization is narrow, and a true devotee cannot afford the luxury of wanting anything other than God himself.

I know that for the right practice of it the heart must be empty of all other things, because God will possess the heart alone; and as He cannot possess it alone without emptying it of all besides, so neither can He act there, and do in it what He pleases, unless it be left vacant to Him.

Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*

Great Master tells us:

The truth is that all your attachments, all your loves and hatreds, all your desires are shackles and chains – these bind you. These do not allow you to see God. These are your prison house. Your desires bind you. You cannot serve God and mammon at the same time. You cannot be a slave of the flesh and at the same time the master of the universe. To realize the Truth is to become master of the universe, and to entertain desires is to acknowledge bondage and slavery to the things of the world – flesh and objects.

Glimpses of the Great Master

Rumi goes on to say:

*Your failure to obtain your wish
is because you seek your wish.
Otherwise, all wishes would be granted
as a gift to you.*

The Masters often remind us that if the giver has the capacity to give, shouldn't he also have the capacity to know what we need?

The moment we submit to the will of the Lord, the struggle is over. The Lord gives us that which is best needed for our journey back home. It is for us to accept this gift with gratitude and faith.

All the Masters have told us time again that meditation is the answer to all that we seek. As Hazur often said, "From meditation everything will come – love, submission and humility." Similarly, Jesus Christ explained, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

Again Rumi reminds us:

*As long as you have desire,
know that desire is your idol.
Once you become the beloved,
you become existence –
you have no more desire.*

Jalal al-Din Rumi

When we place our wishes and wants higher than the true purpose of our existence, we clearly follow the path of the mind. We chase our desires, but then, we are chased by the consequences of those desires.

In the final answer to our predicament Rumi, elsewhere in his writings says:

When a naked man is being chased by hornets, his only escape is to jump in a river and completely immerse himself in the water. This river is remembrance of God and the hornets are the man's worldly desires.

The Essential Rumi

Perhaps, the hornets of the world will not exist for us when we become one with the water. This is why it is said that human being minus desire equals God. Through our uninterrupted and concentrated simran, all the wishes and desires which arise like turbulent waves in our mind are put to rest. The attention becomes one-pointed, waiting for the Beloved to appear, and then there is absolutely no thought of me, mine or I. It is only then that we will truly understand what the great Indian mystic Kabir says:

*Narrow indeed is the path of true love
For it can hold but one, not two.
When I was – ah! the Master was not,
But now the Master is, and I am not.*

Quoted in Adventure of Faith

In a nutshell, Rumi shows us that the true way to God is to eliminate all desires, preconceived notions, concepts, and anything that has to do with our illusory identity. He helps us to understand that life is not about getting and having. It is about being and becoming. It is about being that lover who just loves and who wants nothing.



Soul Hacked

Shabd masters tell us we are Shabd. We however believe a different truth. We believe we are the body.

In their own way, Shabd masters warn us that our soul's identity has been hacked. The mind and senses, like a computer virus, has hacked our Shabd-consciousness and taken over. This virus has created a personality that has posed as our Shabd-consciousness. We are so identified with this imposter that now we think we really are the body and mind. We have forgotten we are soul, Shabd, higher consciousness.

The way to “unhack” our soul's identity is to apply a strong anti-virus fix – doing Shabd meditation. First simran, then bhajan. In simran we talk to God, in bhajan we listen. When we are in bhajan we are becoming receptive to the sound our own consciousness emits. This consciousness is the spiritual being that is going through our life experience. It is our soul or surat, our higher consciousness. It's the real “us”.

Imagine that instead of being identified with our body we become identified with Shabd-consciousness. In Shabd-consciousness there is no suffering. Shabd is alone in majesty, bathing in its own glory. We can access its periphery by putting our attention in the inner sound, no matter how faint it is. Even if the sound is barely audible, that is enough to transform our life and to take us out of the realm of suffering and reincarnation.

The way to regain our true identity, to unhack our soul, is to put the thinking mind in pause mode while our attention becomes receptive to the sound. When we sit in meditation, we are doing something extraordinary – transforming ourselves. We are reaching a higher level of consciousness.

That is the best thing we can do for ourselves and the greatest seva we can do for Baba Ji. To see that his disciples are becoming spiritually mature is what makes him happy. Baba Ji's mission is to help his disciples get free of the wheel of transmiration and to merge back in Shabd. He tells us that the way to do this is very simple. All we need to do is simran and bhajan, and we will become aware of a higher level of consciousness beyond our body, personality, thinking, feeling; beyond good and evil;

beyond the physical and astral realms. It all begins with our daily practice of meditation.

To experience that we are the “really real”, we need to dive deep, past the thinking current and into the sound current. This is not complicated – it’s really simple. All we have to do is put our attention in the inner sound, even if we think it is only some noise or buzz in our head. Baba Ji has told us over and over again to pay attention to any sound we hear inside. Don’t think that this subtle, almost inaudible inner sound has no importance. This is the greatness of Shabd appearing in the modest, humble disguise of a “nothing” sound. Actually, this sound is our life thread. It is the life that will continue to exist after we have died. And it’s in us now. It is the real “us”, our soul, our true reality, the spiritual being that is going through a human experience.

Many of us say we don’t hear anything inside. No sound, no noise, no buzz, nothing. Sometimes if we pay close attention, we will notice that there *is* a small sound, barely audible. But if, after due inquiry, we still hear no sound, then we should pay attention to the silence within us. With absolute concentration on the silence, slowly a sound will emerge.

The reason Baba Ji tolerates so many questions about meditation, and answers them unreservedly, is to encourage us to practise our meditation so we can experience this inner sound and become whole again. We have the opportunity now to regain our Shabd-consciousness, and the way to do this is simple: just do your simran and pay attention to the sound. That’s it. Once you have done your simran, become receptive to the sound. We cannot “do” bhajan. Bhajan is an act of receptivity. It’s not about doing, but about being, about becoming receptive to the sound within. When becoming receptive to the sound, don’t think about anything. Don’t think about Baba Ji. Don’t think at all. Just put your attention in the sound and dive deep within.

By putting our attention in the formless inner sound, our individual consciousness can contemplate on our higher or Shabd-consciousness. By paying attention to the inner sound we enter a different realm of consciousness. It is nothing that we can relate to from our previous experience. It is not important if we are almost unable to hear it. If we are able to locate it, we can fix our attention in it. That’s all – and by virtue of

putting our attention in the inner sound, we are bypassing the thinking mind and reaching a higher level of consciousness where peace abides.

During bhajan we need to have the ability to keep the attention in the sound. Simran is a great help to focus attention. It helps us to develop concentration. The focus we develop in simran has to be applied to bhajan. By keeping our attention in the sound we go above the realm of thoughts where illusions are created. When the attention is absorbed by the sound, there are no concepts. When we think, we are back in the world of concepts.

Shabd is beyond concepts and illusions. Shabd is beyond karma, in a dimension of its own that permeates everything. By bringing our attention to the sound within we enter a state of awareness in which there is no consciousness of our personality or body – there is only sound-consciousness. That's who we really are.

To contact the Shabd within is not complicated. All of us can experience it, even if only for as long as we are able to keep our attention still in simran or in the inner sound. That should be enough to give us the experience and certainty that we are on the right path with the right spiritual “director”, helping us to become better human beings while gaining peace of mind. If we are able to put our thinking-mind in pause mode, we will not only gain peace of mind but also regain our true identity.

The Great Master, Maharaj Sawan Singh, describes our real form as “a shining light – a formless radiant divine energy that does not belong to this physical plane.” In *Die to Live*, Maharaj Charan Singh says: “Ultimately, you become pure soul, without form and shape, and the soul just merges into the Shabd.”

We are in a body, but we are really higher consciousness or soul without form or shape. That is who we are – soul, a pure shining light, a formless radiant divine energy. In other words we are Shabd, and to unhack our soul and take back our true identity we need to control our mind.

To pause the thinking-mind, the technique that the Shabd masters teach is given in the book *Spiritual Letters* by Baba Jaimal Singh. In Letter 44 he says that the way to control the mind is: “First, to hear the Satguru’s instructions; second, to hear the Shabd-dhun; third, to love the Dhun; and fourth, to experience its bliss.” Baba Jaimal Singh continues:

When day by day the mind's faculty of focused attention, which is an aspect of the soul, becomes pure through continuous practice, and all worldly desires have left the mind, the mind will never follow any external attractions, but stay only with the Satguru's form. Then the Satguru will look upon the disciple with his glance of mercy; and as the Satguru's compassionate glance keeps falling upon the disciple, all the gross and evil tendencies of the mind will go away, and the mind will love the soul. The flow of consciousness will then love the Shabd's current, and the celestial Sound, taking measure of that soul's worth, will blend it within itself, giving it a little taste of the spiritual bliss.

Thereupon the mind's subtle (suksham) defects will also disappear. The Shabd-dhun will then keep the mind tightly in tow – tugging at it like a goat or an animal tied to a rope. Pulling the mind thus little by little, the Dhun blends it with itself and leaves it in Trikuti.

When the consciousness again descends from Trikuti to the lower Dhun (Sound), it brings along the mind, but the mind then stays with the consciousness and does not indulge in any temptations. This, my son, is the technique by which the mind is subjugated.

Our soul has been hacked. If we want to free it from the mind and senses and get it back, we need to pay a ransom. The ransom is payable only in inner-Sound currency, in small daily installments. All we need to do is listen every day during bhajan to the inner sound. If we do this, we will regain our true identity – Shabd. That is who we are. A pure shining light, formless radiant divine energy.



“You Ain’t Never Had a Friend Like Me”

Two friends were once camping in the woods. As they were having their morning coffee near their tent, they heard a rustling sound in the bushes. Suddenly, they saw a large, grizzly bear heading towards them at full speed. One man grabbed his running shoes and started to put them on. His friend asked him, “What are you doing? Do you think you can outrun the bear?” Without turning around, the man answered, “No. I just need to outrun you!”

*You will move in the direction of the people that you associate with...
It is important to associate with people that are better than yourself.*

The Warren Buffett Book of Investing Wisdom

Today, our lives are driven by social media, where we seek constant validation from our many online “friends”. We comfort ourselves with the idea that the more friends we have, the more people we can rely on when things get tough. However, as we go through life’s adversities, we may have experienced times when friends or companions whom we imagined to be by our side were nowhere to be found. We see how easily people “unfriend” us socially and digitally. We eventually realize that we can never achieve the kind of security and comfort we seek from the world.

The company and friendship of worldly people is transitory and evanescent. Some leave us when we face difficulties, while others desert us in the end. But the Master is the true protector and helper of the disciple. He is always with him at the time of need or difficulty. He does not leave him alone at the time of death or even later.

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

Our relationship with the Master is not only the most intimate bond of trust, but also an unbreakable pact that lasts throughout this life and beyond death. Sadly, we are so blinded by our transitory attachment to near and dear ones that we fail to realize that it is only the Master who is our greatest benefactor and everlasting friend. He is here to extricate us from the cycle of transmigration and take us back to our true home.

And yet, we do not take the time to establish and cultivate that relationship with him.

What kind of relationship should we cultivate with the Master? As disciples, we tend to put the Master on a pedestal. By doing so, we distance ourselves from him and create a barrier, which is not conducive to an open and loving relationship. In fact, the Master wants us to be so close to him that we walk beside him as friends.

Don't walk behind me, I may not lead.

Don't walk in front of me, I may not follow.

Just walk beside me and be my friend.

365 Meditations for Teachers by Teachers

The Master does not expect us to literally walk beside him. But if we could imagine walking together with a close friend, what would that entail? It would mean communicating, sharing our thoughts and problems. Our simran repeated with love and concentration is the only vocabulary we need to communicate with our Master. Repeating our simran regularly as promised at the time of initiation is the first step to strengthen our relationship with him. It is through simran that we shift our attention from the worldly to the divine.

In addition to our daily meditation practice, we can try to consciously live in the Master's presence as we go about our daily lives. For example, before each meal, we can take a moment to acknowledge his presence and give our heartfelt thanks through simran. At work, when we are at a business meeting or talking with our colleagues, we can visualize his form right beside us. When we walk anywhere alone or when we have fears or worries, we can imagine that the Master is lovingly holding our hand. We then discover that we are not alone. The Master guides and protects us every second of every day.

As Saint Teresa of Avila says in *The Way of Perfection*:

Imagine that this Lord himself is at your side and see how lovingly and how humbly he is teaching you. If you become accustomed to having him at your side, and if he sees that you love him to be there and are always trying to please him, you will never be able, as we put it, to send

him away, nor will he ever fail you. He will help you in all your trials, and you will have him everywhere. Do you think it is a small thing to have such a Friend as that beside you?

Practising Master's presence in our daily activities will calibrate our relationship with him. He will stop being the Master who is distant from us in Dera or elsewhere and instead become our everyday companion and intimate friend.

This bond between Master and disciple – this friendship is eternal; it is something which cannot be compared to anything else in the world. In the movie *Aladdin*, there is a song called “Friend Like Me,” in which the genie tells Aladdin that he is a friend unlike any other. He ends the song with the words: “You ain't never had a friend like me!”

When we attend to our meditation diligently and practise the Master's presence in our daily lives, we will finally understand that the Master is a friend unlike any other, and we ain't never had a friend like him!



Heart to Heart

Once while we were with Hazur Maharaj Ji's mother, Beji, she mentioned another very interesting incident concerning Maharaj Ji. It always amazes me that at this age of over ninety, how sharp her memory is. She said, "You know that by nature Maharaj Ji is full of humour, and enjoys making humorous remarks." One day he was travelling by car with Sardar Bahadur Ji Maharaj on a visit to Pathankot. During the return drive, Sardar Bahadur Ji was sitting with Lala Munshi Ram and Maharaj Ji on the back seat, whilst Bhai Shadi, who was also with them, was sitting on the front seat beside the driver. While they were driving along, Maharaj Ji saw a 'naga sadhu' riding on horseback, with his disciple following on foot. The disciple could not keep pace with the horse and was almost running. As it was summer, the weather was very hot, and the road was burning, with heat. The poor disciple was sweating and his feet were burning, as he had no shoes.

Seeing this scene, Maharaj Ji folded his hands and bowed his head. Sardar Bahadur Ji noticed this and asked smilingly, "Why did you do that?"

At first Maharaj Ji kept quiet, but then, on the insistence of Sardar Bahadur Ji, he said, "I was thanking the Lord and was grateful to him that as a disciple, he chose to give me Masters like you and the Great Master. At least by your grace we wear nice clothes and ride in a car with you. I was wondering how it would have been if the Lord had made me a disciple of such a sadhu on horseback. I shudder to think of my plight!" Hearing this, Sardar Bahadur Ji (who also had a great sense of humour) had a hearty laugh.

Treasure Beyond Measure



BOOK REVIEW

One Hundred Days of Solitude: Losing Myself and Finding Grace on a Zen Retreat

BY JANE DOBISZ

PUBLISHER: BOSTON: WISDOM PUBLICATIONS, 2008. ISBN: 0-86171-538-1

In *One Hundred Days of Solitude*, Jane Dobisz, the guiding teacher at the Cambridge Zen Center in Massachusetts, shares her reflections and insights from an extended solitary meditation retreat. In the introduction Dobisz recounts her own search for a spiritual teacher, a search which finally led her to Zen Master Seung Sahn, a Zen patriarch from Korea. In their first meeting, something about his spontaneity and infectious laugh, his teaching which “is streamlined to the point of brilliance,” told her that she had found her teacher. As she says, “Even after all these years as his student, I haven’t grasped one-tenth of all he has to impart.”

Knowing that her teacher had undergone the discipline of a one-hundred-day solitary retreat when he first became a Zen monk, Dobisz decided that she would do the same. The questions What am I? What is life? What is death? were like “tigers stalking around in my mind.” She chose a cabin in the woods of northern New England as the place she would spend her hundred days. Beginning in January, with deep snow all around, she settled into a simple cabin with no heat, electricity, or running water, three miles from the nearest road.

Dobisz writes with humour and refreshing honesty about the many antics of the mind as she struggled to fulfil the commitment she had taken on. Her mind seemed to vacillate between congratulating her on doing the spiritual practice and accusing her of being completely insane. It flooded her with doubts, fears, memories, and fantasies. Paraphrasing Vipassana teacher Joseph Goldstein, she compares “meditation practice with training a puppy to ‘stay’.” The puppy is our thinking mind. It runs here, scampers there, wagging its tail and sniffing things, and in general acts according to its nature. Meditation is the practice of bringing the puppy back as we say, “Stay.”

One chapter begins with the observation: “The Judge came by during sitting today. What am I saying? The Judge lives here with me, incessantly commenting on everything.” The “Judge” is that voice in her mind that

continuously makes comparisons and judgments. “The Judge compares all things to each other even when it makes no sense.... This kind of snow is *much* better than that kind of snow.” One morning, Dobisz had had enough:

I've decided now, after listening to her all morning, to just let her do her job. I'll do mine, which is to go straight ahead with the mantra and not pay one scrap of attention to her. I'll let her be like the wind blowing by. Let her go ahead and scream; she's just the call of a wild bird to me. Or an airplane flying overhead. Why should I be like a dog that runs after every bone she likes to throw?

For each chapter there is a verse or short saying from a Zen master or Buddhist scripture. Many of these are quite cryptic, and Dobisz's reflections on them often help us to understand them. One chapter, for example, opens with a poem by her teacher:

*In your mind there is a diamond sword.
If you want to understand yourself,
take it and cut off good and bad,
long and short, coming and going,
high and low, God and Buddha.
Cut off all things.*

Dobisz describes an evening when the silence was broken by a sudden scratching sound. Remembering that she was alone in the woods, fear took hold, even though reason said it was just a squirrel. Only the mantra could bring her mind back to its centre. Dobisz writes that the mantra is her “diamond sword.” Even though, in her unskilled hands, “it’s more like a cheap metal knife, it will have to do for now.”

Dobisz's daily spiritual practice included periods of sitting meditation, alternating with periods of chanting, bowing, and walking meditation. Occasionally she reflects on the meaning behind these spiritual practices. For example, Dobisz recalls her teacher being asked: Why do we bow? To whom are we bowing? The answer was that “our small self is bowing to our true self.” The “small self” is the “I, me, my” and “feels like a separate person.” The true self is eternal and one with everything. However, Dobisz does not waste much time on such speculations. Her commitment is to complete 300 bows each day, and she finds the deepest wisdom in the phrase: Just do it.

The practice of Zen (as opposed to the study of Zen)... requires a complete suspension of disbelief, which amounts to trusting that there is something much deeper than reason and logic, and that if you follow it, you might just end up where you belong. No analyzing.... Just do it.

She quotes Zen master Nam Cheon: “Mind is not Buddha. Cogitation is not the path.” Dobisz concludes: “When you are thirsty, no explanation will quench your thirst like a glass of water. Similarly, when you embark on a spiritual journey, you have to taste it for yourself or it will never become yours. If it isn’t yours, then it’s never there when you really need it.”

The food she had brought for the duration of the retreat was extremely simple: rice, beans, miso, and barley tea. Two months into the retreat, she decided to try fasting. She writes:

I’m not trying to be macho. I’m genuinely curious about the nature of desire. My whole life has been spent chasing one desire after another. Where does it come from and how does it control me? What happens if I don’t follow each desire that comes into my mind? What happens if I don’t eat for a short period?

What happens is what any idiot would have guessed would happen: I am ravenously hungry.... My mind is focused almost exclusively on food-related topics.... I write a few imaginary cookbooks and open an imaginary Zen restaurant called Café Joju.

For all the struggles she describes, all the ups and downs, one senses peace and well-being settling in. Even the daily tasks of splitting wood and hauling heavy buckets of water became deeply satisfying. In her growing appreciation of the natural world around her, she saw beauty even in the patterns and varied colours of woodchips strewn across the snow around her splitting stump.

People think that the silence is the most difficult aspect of a retreat only because they haven’t tried it. The silence is the best part. It is unimaginably rich and spacious. The sounds of the woods are varied and natural,... the cold creaking of branches, the soft slumping of snow melting off the roof, the chickadee’s song.... The wind has a thousand sounds.

She describes a “kind of pure joy” that comes from “the profound contentment of appreciating life and every small experience it brings.”

She uses the word “rapture,” a word “typically reserved for the most rarefied of moments.” She asks, “Why not let that kind of joy into all the ‘little’ things, like smelling the air, hearing the insects singing on a spring evening, washing the dishes, or seeing our family at the end of a day’s work? Isn’t that what our whole life is?” Dobisz notes that one of her favourite teaching phrases of her master is “Everything just like this is Buddha.” She writes,

We think somehow it will always be ours for the taking, but we must keep in mind that every experience we have is very precious.... We must live our lives accordingly, with every fibre of respect and attention we can muster.

Dobisz never names a single objective for her intense spiritual practice. If she has one, perhaps the “traditional Chinese poem” she places on the first page of the book suggests what it is. The title is “The Human Route”:

*Coming empty-handed, going empty-handed, that is human.
When you are born, where do you come from?
When you die, where do you go?
Life is like a floating cloud, which appears.
Death is like a floating cloud, which disappears.
The floating cloud itself originally does not exist.
Life and death, coming and going, are also like that.
But there is one thing that always remains clear.
It is pure and clear,
Not depending on life and death.
Then what is the one clear and pure thing?*



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