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# Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

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# contents

- 2 Association with the Masters
- 4 An Unexpected Journey
- 7 For the Birds
- 11 Computer Viruses
- 13 Inspiration for Simran
- 16 Come Now, Dear Soul
- 23 No Thought
- 26 Moths
- 27 Patience and Perseverance
- 31 Shadow Play
- 35 The Example of the Masters
- 38 The First Thing We Heard Him Say
- 41 The Company of Saints
- 42 Who Do You Say You Are?
- 46 Surrender
- 48 Book Review

## **Spiritual Link**

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# Association with the Masters

When we associate with the Masters, we come under their influence. They talk of our latent strength, of our spiritual origin, of our Kingdom in Heaven, point out the way within us of going back to our eternal spiritual home – not merely point the way and ask us to go alone, but go with us all the way and further, put us under no obligation, and charge no fee. Could there be a better offer?

Masters in the flesh are rare.... They are universal although outwardly they appear as individuals like others. When in the flesh they speak to us of other superior worlds and the Creator, and of our aim in life. To strengthen our belief, they place before us the writings of the past Masters as authority, and induce us, in all rational ways, to experiment and investigate.

Man learns of the universal from a man universalized – a Master.... To follow a Master means practising the Word – catching the sound current from the eye centre and riding on that. Only a living Master can give us the Word....

Saints are love personified, and they love not only their disciples but all creation and all around them. They look upon the whole creation with love and kindness....

The Radiant Form of the Master may seem to be far away like the Evening Star of Wagner's opera, but still it is within you. It is not far away. There is a veil between you and it, and it will be torn by your labour of love.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *Spiritual Gems*



# An Unexpected Journey

In a recent session at the Dera, Baba Ji kept urging us to be positive. To a question posed at the evening meeting, he noted that being positive is not establishing a delusional alternative to reality. Rather, he indicated, that in everyone's character there are negative and positive aspects. If attention is given to what is negative, that gets amplified. Likewise, if attention is given to what is positive, that gets strengthened. On another occasion, when someone complained that they weren't that enthusiastic about the prospects of life in this world, and would rather leave sooner, instead of later, the Master emphatically said, no. We must cherish this life as the Lord's gift. We must appreciate our lives. We should have something to look forward to every day. It was almost as if he was commanding us to live with joy, and to enjoy our being alive. For some of us this is a challenging assignment.

Nevertheless, I was somewhat skeptical about my own capacity for being positive and appreciative when we were all asked to leave Dera a day and a half early. It seemed that the trains in the Punjab would not be running on our scheduled day of departure. Those of us who imagined and hoped that we might have a relaxing last few days of darshan, evening meetings, and plenty of time to pack and clean our rooms were startled by the announcement that we had less than twelve hours to pack, clean, and get on the train. I remember thinking that there was not much of a chance that anything positive would come out of this rapid change of plans. But being in the presence of the Master leaves one open to the possibility that there might be surprises ahead.

And indeed, when the Master is your ‘travel agent’, there is every reason to remain optimistic.

That night, rooms got cleaned and suitcases were packed. At an early breakfast in the dining room, we were offered fruit to take on the journey along with our new train tickets. Then the buses came, and carried us out through the gates and back into the world.

Standing on the railway platform with the other guests was rather fun. People were sharing food and offering generous sprays of mosquito repellent. When the train arrived, the prodigious amount of luggage belonging to over one hundred guests was rapidly tossed on board by an enthusiastic line of sevadars. There was not an inch on that train car that was not filled with satsangis and their suitcases. And away we went! Only this was an especially slow train. The express train, which most of us thought we would be on, takes five hours to get to Delhi. This train was scheduled to take eight hours, but in the end actually took twelve hours.

Along the way, we started to discover the most amazing abundance. At the very first stop, sevadars brought on-board cold bottles of water and fruit for everyone. Then about two hours later, in Ludhiana, we were met by sevadars serving hot samosas and tea. Again, that same snack was waiting for us at another station further down the track.

Yes, it was a long trip. But everyone on board this car was from the Dera and there were wonderful conversations, lots of good humor, amazing laughter, and acts of thoughtfulness and kindness. People who had only found a seat lying down in one of the upper bunks traded off with those who were by the windows. People chatted in the aisles and helped one another negotiate through the cars of the train.

Still, by the ninth hour of travel people were getting restless. Even seated with good friends and lively conversation, weariness was setting in. That is when our compartment started to sing Broadway

show tunes, ballads, gospel songs, old folk music, and Beatles songs. We sang with great feeling and enthusiasm, if not always with perfect harmony. We sang for over two hours until we were all hoarse.

It felt like the Master had travelled with us all the way to Delhi. Although it is usually quite difficult when plans get rearranged, on this train trip, it seemed to me as if we were all on a wonderful journey: light of heart, able to sense the grace that was moving with us, seeing with our own eyes that the Master was always taking care of his guests, no matter what the circumstances.

At the Dera, away from the Dera, on slow trains or fast ones, wouldn't it be wonderful if we could always remember that he is travelling with us? If we could remember, if we could keep positive, we would enjoy the journey. Occasionally we might even sing as we make our way home.



*Dance with abandon, cast off your veil!  
Let the whole world watch your free dance.  
Your aim is to please the Lord –  
Who can stop you from dancing to your own heart?  
You are fortunate, says Paltu, to have won his love.*

*Sant Paltu, His Life and Teachings*

# For the Birds

The journey of the soul from the realm of separation and selfishness to union and joy with God, has been described by many saints, using many literary forms. One of the most imaginative allegories was written by Farid ud-Din Attar, a twelfth-century Sufi mystic and poet. In *The Conference of the Birds*, Attar compares a wide variety of human seekers to many species of birds. Then the king of the birds, the Hoopoe, invites them all to take an extraordinary journey. Although written some nine hundred years ago, readers may find it surprisingly familiar and may take comfort in the fact that we are not unique in our struggles.

The story begins with an invitation. All the birds of the world are gathered and invited to make the journey to the palace of the king. The Hoopoe bird is chosen to lead the expedition because he himself has travelled to the king's realm. He asks all the birds in the creation to accompany him. All are welcome. All are wanted. All are included. The Hoopoe is quite specific. While sincere seekers are especially invited to travel towards truth, so are the passionate and the self-involved. The fearful and the skeptics are particularly welcome. The insightful, the depressed, the unfaithful rebels, the activists, and the escape artists are also urged to join the great exodus from complacency and delusion to the freedom and joy that will be experienced in the king's palace. It is explicitly stated that each of them must travel in their own way.

The Hoopoe, the leader of this particular expedition, explains that the birds will need to leave behind their timidity, their self-conceit, and their lack of trust. But other than that, he says, "Come as you are." He encourages them to travel the distance that separates them



from the generous king. He explains that only what is real and true can satisfy their hunger.

And then, like in any assembly of seekers of the truth, the excuses for inaction, passivity, and paralysis start pouring in. The nightingale doesn't want to abandon the rose she loves in her very own garden. Why leave the beauty she has right now, right here, for some garden she has only heard described? The parrot complains that the realm of truth sounds like it is much too far away. The peacock contends that the good work he is currently accomplishing is sufficient. The duck announces that she is already holy enough. The partridge confesses that she is too weak to undertake a long and challenging adventure. The hawk proclaims that he already keeps the company of kings and rulers and exercises all imaginable power and influence. The heron chimes in that his passion provides all the needed excitement. The owl is much too in love with the treasure he already possesses. The sparrow, in sharing how frail and powerless she feels herself to be, suffers from what can be described as "a humility which is a form of pride".

The crippling condition of the birds is that they are in love with the status quo. They suffer from apathy and a lack of imagination. They cling to the small pleasures they now enjoy. They are birds without inspiration or understanding. Their consciousness is asleep. It is the Hoopoe who awakens them. How exactly he does that is somewhat of a mystery. But it has something to do with love.

The Hoopoe speaks to them of the love and truth that has been awaiting their return since the beginning of time. He reminds them of a powerful longing in their own hearts that nothing in their current circumstances has been able to satisfy. He tells them stories of such power and beauty that soon all the birds are tinged with a fiery desire to go on the journey. They are full of zeal and enthusiasm

and strength. At the setting-out place there were so many birds that they hid the moon!

As with all earnest seekers everywhere, and apparently in every age and culture, even though they say that what they want is to move swiftly towards truth, they have doubts and a few questions. They seem apprehensive and fearful that they might not be properly equipped for the journey. They are more than willing to express their doubts and misgivings to their leader. They want discussion, listening sessions, and opportunities for feedback.

*The Conference of the Birds* is a marvelous testimony to the struggles and objections of a diverse flock. With infinite patience the Hoopoe listens to each individual objection. After most of the objections have been heard, the last three birds approach the Hoopoe.

They approach him with an openness and a sincere desire to learn. They plead, “Please teach us to accept what is real, what is true. Teach us to give up our desire to be in control, show us how to go forward with integrity and boldness and confidence.”

But the Hoopoe isn't especially impressed with this last crop of eager seekers either. While their speech reveals great faith, he wants them to know that the actual journey has nothing to do with how they put words together. He says that pretentious verbiage won't get them very far. This journey is not one of words. Instead it is a practical path of action. What is required is a single sigh of love. And the purpose of the journey is not to describe or imagine spiritual wealth, but to experience it. If they wish to reach the palace of the king, the Hoopoe explains, they have to go on the wings of love. The Hoopoe explains the kind of love that is required is the passionate variety. And he cautions that this will not be an easy, smooth journey. It will require bravery and determination. “He who undertakes this journey should have a thousand hearts so that he can sacrifice one at every moment.”

The hundreds of stories that the Hoopoe tells to his flock of argumentative, skeptical, and lethargic birds are sometimes obscure. Yet all the stories are intended to help his seekers to think in new ways. Of the thousand birds that set out on the quest, only thirty travel all the way to the king's palace. And the thirty that do make it to the palace are in pretty bad shape. They are weary and have lost all their feathers. They have used up all their strength, courage, and passion. As far as they are concerned, there is nothing left of them. They seek refuge in the king's court. They don't have their beauty to offer, or their eloquence, or their wisdom. All they have to offer is their need.

This story of *The Conference of the Birds* has a very happy ending. A miraculous transformation happens when the birds reach their destination. There, they encounter one thousand suns and stars and moons, each more resplendent than the previous, to light their way. All of their feathers grow back, an important detail to a bird. And not too surprisingly, the truth that they had risked their lives to find, the place of genuine refuge, it turns out, was located within their own hearts and minds and souls. The kingdom of God was to be found within their own being. Their Master, the Hoopoe, says to them, "O you who love me, I am not absent from you for a moment." The writer's last words to his readers are, "I have described the way, now you must act."



# Computer Viruses

Our mind can be equated to a computer. A computer is a machine that is multi-faceted, racing, high speed, with many functions. There are countless programs, applications and search engines available for many different uses. Just like a computer, our mind is boundless.

The mind is so powerful in racing from one thought to the next, that before we know it, we have come up with countless things to worry and ponder over. One thought and worry generates countless worries – just like a computer that moves at rapid speed to present the daily highlights, coupon discounts, weather report and celebrity statuses all on the same webpage.

Computers can be contaminated with viruses. These viruses can block the normal computer functions and also deceive the computer so that programs and even virus protectors are invaded. Similarly, our mind can be contaminated with worldly images. These viruses can take the form of worldly temptations like cheating, gambling, immoral thoughts and other negative activity. They can also invade our mind with worldly desires and stimulate thoughts of wanting more and more material goods.

We can control our computer activity by limiting what we do with it. In other words, we can use it only for researching, word processing and checking email or corresponding with friends. We can avoid reading about daily gossip, or looking for ways to make more money. Similarly, we need to protect our minds from the external viruses. We need to hardwire our minds and install our own virus protector (simran) so that we stay focused on our primary life goal, which is God-realization.

Just as we reboot a computer and install firewall protection and an antivirus program, we need to reboot our mind to keep it on track to perform its normal daily functions. By doing so, we can cultivate an environment that is conducive to God-realization and that helps us perform our daily task of meditation.

The next time we decide to upgrade our computer to a higher model, perhaps this should remind us to control our mind and upgrade it to a higher level of thinking, one that surpasses worldly desires and attachments and stays on track to achieve our ultimate goal of becoming one with the Lord.



*We can only control our mind when we attach it to that word, that shabd, that nam. Attachment to that automatically detaches us permanently from the world. Then the mind goes back to its own origin, and the soul gets release from the mind. It is only then that the real love and devotion of the soul takes it back to the Lord. Socrates said: Know thyself. It is only after the soul is released from the mind that it really knows itself. Only then do we realize who we are. Only when we know ourselves are we capable of knowing the Lord.*

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

# Inspiration for Simran

An inspiration for us to add more simran to our lives can be found in the anonymous little book *The Way of the Pilgrim*. In the foreword to the book, we are told by Father Hopko that the story, in many ways a spiritual mystery, was written perhaps only to propagate a spiritual understanding of the value of the prayer of the heart. Whatever the origin and intention of the story, it makes certain things very clear to all spiritual seekers. He says:

*[The Way of the Pilgrim] makes several things clear to spiritual seekers. It affirms first of all that the source, goal and content of human life is not spirituality or religion, liturgical ritual or ascetic regimes, but the living God Himself. It tells us that life is communion with God: personal, direct, immediate, real, painful, peaceful, and joyful. It tells us ... that constant, continual, ceaseless prayer in His name opens the door to Divine reality and puts us in immediate contact with the One who is the source, substance, and goal of our life, and our very life itself.*

This is just like what our Master tells us. The very purpose of life is God-realization. The purpose of our life here and now is to get to the eye centre. The way to the eye centre is through our spiritual practice – simran and bhajan. Repetition of the holy Names and listening to the voice of God within is communion with God. Master suggests that we should do our simran like one side of a conversation with him. Communion with God is our very life.

The pilgrim, in *The Way of the Pilgrim*, was a Christian, and his simran was the Jesus Prayer, “Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me.”

*The pilgrim also tells us that constant repetition of the Jesus Prayer, or any other prayer of the heart ... is a personal calling upon the personal God.*

The pilgrim's *starets* (spiritual advisor) also gives advice from his own experience; he advises the pilgrim to repeat the prayer three thousand times a day to begin with.

After increasing his repetition of the prayer to three thousand times a day, the pilgrim then increases his repetition to six thousand times a day. He relates:

*For an entire week, in the solitude of my hut, I repeated the Jesus Prayer six thousand times a day. I was not anxious about anything and paid no heed to any thoughts, no matter how strongly they assailed me. I concentrated only on precisely carrying out the starets's instructions. And do you know what happened? I became so accustomed to the prayer that when I stopped praying, even for a brief time, I felt as though something was missing, as if I had lost something. When I began to pray again, I was immediately filled with an inner lightness and joy.*

The results of the pilgrim's repetition of the Jesus Prayer are inspiring. Our *simran* will give us similar benefits, but also much, much more because the Names were given to us by a living Master who imbues the *simran* with his power. In *Philosophy of the Masters, Vol. I*, Maharaj Sawan Singh writes:

*The names that a Master imparts are ... energy-charged and help the transference of spiritual energy to the disciple, with the result that rapid progress follows.*

We are lucky – we have a Master who, by comparison, makes very few demands of us. Does he say repeat our simran three, six or twelve thousand times a day? No. He says sit for two and one-half hours a day, look into the darkness, repeat your simran, and remember your Master as much as you can throughout the day. Does he say go out begging for your food? No. He says live a normal life, earn your living in an honest way, eat healthy vegetarian food and don't drink alcohol or take mind-altering drugs. He says just do your meditation; just sit there, just put in the effort and that he will take care of the results. How could we not love such a Master? All he asks is for us to just be with him. And he will take care of everything else.

In *Philosophy of the Masters, Vol. I*, Great Master says:

*The results of repetition will be in direct proportion to the love and faith brought to bear upon it. Carry out the simran of the Lord with love and faith. His names have a great power. When repeated with faith one feels intoxicated with joy, with the result that he forgets his body and himself and is aware of the presence of the Lord. How potent and blissful is the Name of God! It creates in the devotee a fast-flowing current of bliss, peace and soul force, and he feels truly blessed.*

*To do simran, it is not necessary to give up the world and its tasks. Carry on your duties and still keep your attention fixed in simran. If you wish to be filled with the grace of God, you should banish all else from your mind. Leave everything else aside and cherish the Name of the Lord alone in your heart. As soon as you empty your mind of all thoughts by means of simran, you will find the way to the Lord's mansion.*





# Come Now, Dear Soul

*Come now, dear soul, to the Master's country,  
where there is neither body, nor karma, nor conflict.*

Soami Ji Maharaj, *Sar Bachan Poetry*

Each moment of each day, an open invitation from our beloved Master is extended to us. This invitation is wrapped with enduring love and affection and is addressed to our “dear soul”. No matter our circumstance, whether or not we are experiencing the “good things in life”, the Master always considers our soul with love.

The soul is invited *now* to come to Master’s country. But what is the Master’s country? It’s not in India or any other nation – we disciples are scattered all over this earth. Perhaps it’s in satsang, when we feel his subtly divine atmosphere. Perhaps it’s in reading his profound teachings, when we remember him, or when we enjoy his physical presence and are paying attention. Actually, though, his country is located within the body at the third eye. We can be with him there, no matter whether we live near or far from him.

Why would we focus on the Master’s country? We might say, to experience “spiritual bliss”, to have “a better life”, to become “a better person”. It seems that we can’t resist the river of his love; words fail us when we try to describe them. We know we are going nowhere without him. Wherever we are, Maharaj Jagat Singh says in *Discourses on Sant Mat, Vol. II*, the Shabd is with us. “It should be like a garland of flowers round our neck, for the gateway to freedom is Shabd.” Soami Ji continues in *Sar Bachan Poetry*:

*This world, this alien land,  
Is a game of body, mind and senses.*

Each of us, in our heart of hearts, has a deeply personal desire for enlightenment. We only want pure love and, at some point in our life, we find it embodied in our Master. Nothing else makes us happy like he does. In the moments when we are with him, we feel comfortable and at peace, as we might imagine that being home would feel. Our cares and worries seem to dissolve and we believe that anything is possible. Even that perhaps we can be like him one day.

We feel disturbed not to find this feeling anywhere else in life. In fact, given our own experience, the world seems like a dark game with strange rules and outcomes. Survival requires the taking of life. Pleasure may lead to pain; pain may lead to pleasure. People love us, then leave us. Others treat us like possessions. Conflict is everywhere, even in our own hearts. What a disappointing game of “body, mind, and senses” this is.

The world says power brings happiness; but if that were true, all politicians would be happy. If wealth or knowledge brought happiness, all rich and educated people would be happy. If family or friends brought happiness, all people with large families or lots of friends would be happy. Should we give our precious life to such a game?

Watch how our desires run from one thing to another. Meanwhile, in fleeting moments of quiet reflection, we may stop and wonder, what we are doing. We are not facing the darkness within, which is the outer border of Master’s country. We feel uneasy playing this cruel game, yet we still don’t seek where he lives, within. Meanwhile, his open invitation rests in a quiet corner of our heart, calling to us silently.



No wonder we suffer a deep nostalgia, a sense of having lost a most precious friend, and our sorrow feels inconsolable. This pain is a gift from the Master, as Rumi writes:

*Till the cloud weeps, how should the garden smile?  
The weeping of the cloud and the burning of the sun...  
keep the world fresh and sweet.*

*The Rumi Collection, edited by Kabir Helminski*

Our mind can turn this life into an alien land. Under the mind's sway, we may envy the lives of other people we know. We envy them, even if we do not know them, but those lives are not ours. We want to be somewhere else, but we are here. We want to have the Master's consciousness, but we only have our own. Consciousness, however, can change, no matter who we are or where we live. We can attune our heart to his by meditating, and our consciousness will rise and "keep the world fresh and sweet".

There is a story about the early years of the Dera eye camp: Some doctors were hired to work with the sevadars to care for the patients. After one session, Maharaj Charan Singh handed each of the sevadars a small gift of parshad as a gesture of gratitude. The doctors were handed their fee for services. One doctor, however, who had watched the sevadars receive their parshad, held up his hand when Hazar reached him. "No, sir," he said, "I do not want my payment. Whatever you gave the sevadars, I want that." Was he talking about the handful of sweets? No. What did he really want? Soami Ji continues:

*Listen to the Guru's message with full attention,  
through Surat Shabd practice head for your home.*

Sometimes we fail in our devotion. We may find ourselves ruminating about our troubles and our insecurities. We aren't rich enough or good-looking enough or prominent enough. Now, wait a second. Who is making these ridiculous claims? It is the mind talking. This talk is like dancing with the devil; nothing good comes of it. Who cares how poor or ugly or outcast we are? Certainly Master doesn't care about that. If he doesn't care, why should we? The Master sees we are trapped and he offers release. Maharaj Jagat Singh in *Discourses on Sant Mat, Vol. II*, says:

*Whatever weaknesses are to come in the way of your devotion will gradually disappear as you continue with your meditation, and the entanglements in your heart will be taken care of... Gradually, gradually, devotion will bring its own sweetness.*

In meditation, we face a mirror that reflects our hopes, fears, excitement and anguish. It is all about us, and personal insecurity is the inevitable result. Simran repeated with our attention at the eye centre turns that mirror into an open door through which we enter our Master's country. While staring into our own personal mirror, without the focus of simran, we remain in the country of the mind. The pull of the world is so powerful that we can even forget simran, the eye centre, and our Master.

Sooner or later, however, the mirror loses its allure. We get sick of it. We are humbled to find out that we don't even have the power to repeat five simple words, and that we are not the person we thought we were. That is a good thing! Surrendering, we approach meditation again, seeking only to keep our attention at the eye centre and call his Name. Soami Ji's poem continues:

*Through the true Guru's grace you arrive in that country  
which only admits the consciousness of a saint.*

Our body and heart are limited. There are limits everywhere outside in the world. Only grace is unlimited, and that is the consciousness of a Master. Maharaj Sawan Singh writes in *Spiritual Gems*:

*There are two ways of looking at this creation:*

- 1. From the top, looking down – the Creator's point of view;*
- 2. From the bottom, looking up - man's point of view.*

The Great Master continues:

*All the saints, when they look from the top, describe the creation as His manifestation. They see Him working everywhere....*

*Looking from below, or the individual viewpoint ... the individual thinks he is the doer and thereby becomes responsible for his actions and their consequences.*

Can we give up our viewpoint? Can we change? The Masters say we already live in his country, only we don't know it. We don't realize that our identity is Nam; and, if we did, our journey would be complete. No force anywhere can challenge the Shabd.

Imagine the security we would feel if we realized that this country we experience with our hearts and minds, and the spiritual country we long to experience are both under the absolute control of the Shabd. Where is the worry then? Karmas would still come at us every day; apparent obstacles would still present themselves. But our perspective and behavior would rest in the consciousness of a saint.

When we are at the bottom of a mountain, we can only see one small area. Almost the entire mountain is unknown to us. After a long ascent, reaching the summit, we can see in every direction – above and below. At the bottom, there are many of us. At the top, there is only the One.

Reaching the Master's perspective, we transcend the mind. May his grace be with us at this moment, that we may always take another step toward the Master's country – right now and forever.



*Spirituality is not attained by merely reading or writing, but by practice. A theory without practice is not of much value.... So the saints always advocate self-experience through practice as far more important and beneficial than sheer theoretical knowledge, for spirituality is the knowledge gained through inner realization, and that cannot be had without practice and without learning from a Master....*

*If, to our knowledge of spirituality, we add practice, then such a knowledge will adorn the seeker like a garland of flowers.*

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

# No Thought

Much as we might like to think of the mind as nimble, creative and vital, it is not. Mind is a coral reef – dense, solid, and unmoving. God is the ocean – vast and unbounded, an eternal, ecstatic dance of love. Despite the fact that the reef of the mind is surrounded and infused by this joyous celebration, it has no part in the dance.

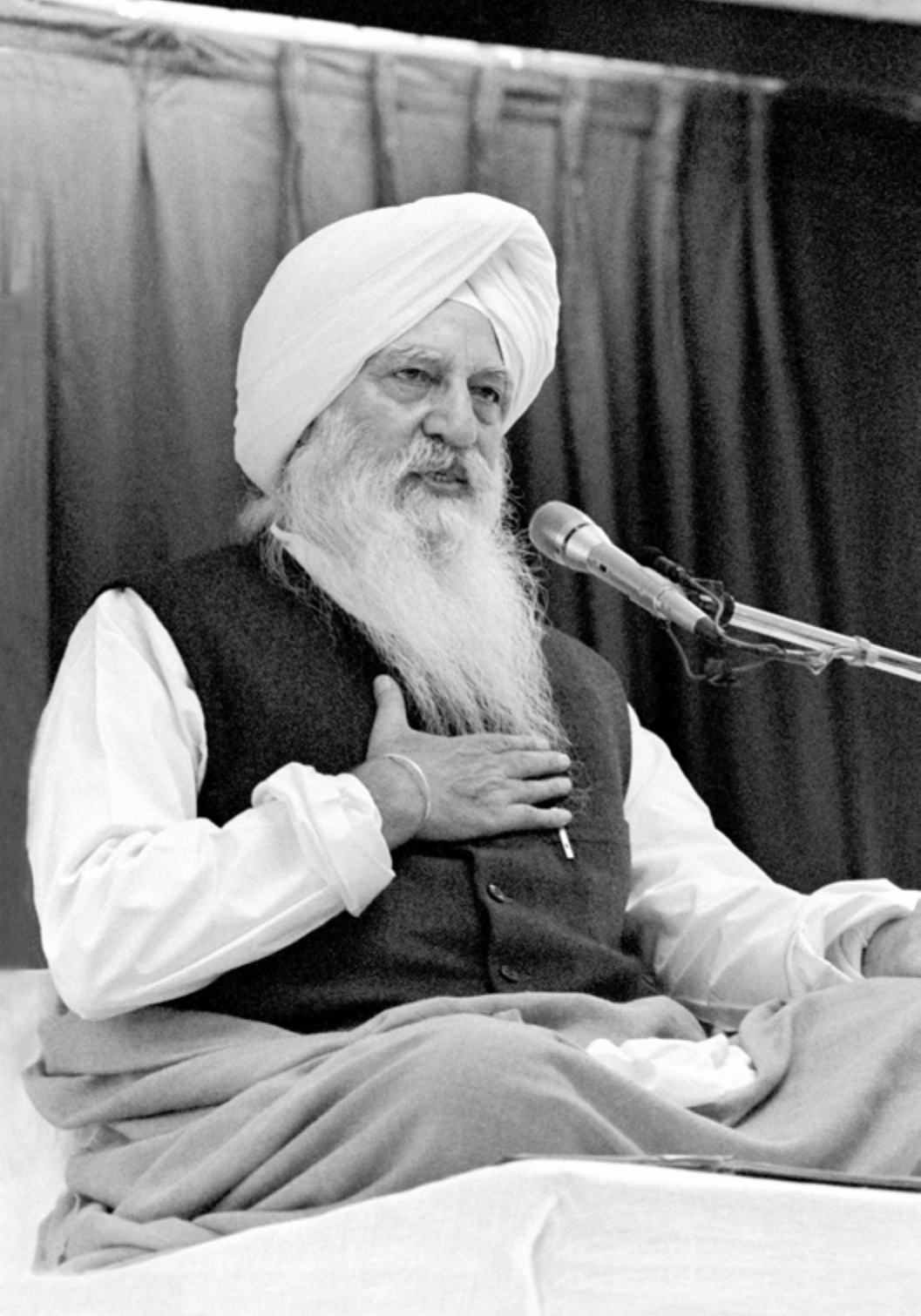
Mind's sole action is to secrete thoughts. Just as the tiny coral polyp animal secretes calcium, the mind squeezes out thoughts, simply performing its function. Consider it our 'thought gland'. And as the polyp builds up the coral with more and more secretions, the mind builds on thoughts by secreting them again and again, repeating and polishing and cementing them.

In this way one coral polyp and a few zillion of its closest friends and relatives – each producing a modest calcium secretion – can accumulate to become the Great Barrier Reef. And a thought secreted here, a thought secreted there can in time create the Great Barrier Ego. Yes, every thought, and every idle moment of idle thought, adds up! And as the polyp's secretion encases the tiny animal, the secretion of our worldly thoughts traps us. We construct a dense, limited and false definition of self; we live in it and we call it us.

Who we are is not the reef at all; we are the lagoon enclosed by the reef. We are the soul enclosed by the ego. The soul is our nimble, shining, vital identity. That solid, concrete ego is not going to take us anywhere. Or at least not where we want to go.

Where does the soul want to go? Back to the Creator. Where does the mind want to go? Out into the creation. Maharaj Charan Singh says in *Divine Light*:





*Our brain's reasoning can properly value and understand things that are known through the physical senses, and even then it fails sometimes. God and things of God can be understood by the soul alone, and intuition is the eye of the soul.*

As the lagoon water alone can experience union with the sea; the soul alone can experience its oneness with God.

The wave of the ocean that is the Master washes down upon us. His vitality recharges and inspires us. He tells us that we can indeed experience oneness with God, and the way to do this is to meditate.

Meditation deconstructs the barrier reef of the mind. Simran not only halts the daily accumulation of mental secretions, it chips away at the great mass. Shabd, God's divine music, simply dissolves the reef of our ego and allows the ocean of love to rush in, cleansing, revitalizing, and reuniting us with its current.



*O benevolent Lord,  
from you has proceeded the Word,  
and from the Word has sprung the whole creation.  
You are Truth and Beauty, ever in bliss.*

*Jap Ji: A Perspective*

# Moths

Like moths dancing in darkness,  
lifted on the breath of every breeze  
beckoned by each odd fragrance  
of the night,  
raptured by the pull of sheer magnetic  
sounds –

Like moths on random roads of air,  
blown down the monstrous back  
of being,  
we ply our routes in search of merchandise:  
rare gems and baubles of the sensual –

Until, riding the black sea to its edge,  
we gasp to find ourselves in a fleet of wings,  
no longer alone,  
borne toward a breathless flame,  
plunging with sudden speed  
into the white light of God,  
that ineffable oblivion.

*Original Poem by a satsangi*

# Patience and Perseverance

In our modern-day world many of us demand that everything be done quickly. From instant communications such as email, Twitter and tweets, to instant mashed potatoes for dinner; from speedy oil changes for our cars to speed-reading classes. We can't seem to do things quickly enough to satisfy the mind that wants more and more at a faster and faster pace.

We have ignored the saying, "That which is worth doing is worth doing well." To do things well takes time. Since the Masters tell us our meditation is the only thing that will follow us beyond the grave, perhaps it is certainly worth taking our time and doing it well. Anything of importance – anything we value – will take time to achieve. It takes time to reach our worldly goals; it will certainly take time to reach our spiritual goals.

If we look at a few examples we see that it takes years to complete formal education. It takes many years to achieve a successful career or to raise a family. Anything worth achieving will take time, effort, and fortitude.

A Chinese proverb says that the constant drop of water will eventually wear away a stone. With his grace, our daily meditation of two and one half to three hours and our constant remembrance of the holy names – our simran – will eventually leave its mark on the karmas that we have collected over many, many lifetimes. Eventually the vessel will be cleaned and the soul will shine forth from under its many coverings. Now is the time to do our spiritual work, and this will take patience and perseverance.

Maharaj Jagat Singh says in *The Science of the Soul*:

*As you probably know, our attention has been 'out' for ages and to draw it 'in' again requires both time and effort. The tendencies established for such a long time are at once up against us when we attempt any reorientation. It is certainly not impossible but it is naturally difficult and slow. For some it is slower and more difficult than others.*

The Masters tell us that as we draw our attention inward from the world and upward from our physical bodies, we will need to persist with patience, hope, and faith, for it is a slow process, though one that can be accomplished in this lifetime. But we need to put in the effort before we can accomplish our mission. When we experience the true reality of things, faith, hope and patience are no longer problems for us.

Even though effort is very important, it is not the only thing that affects our progress. His grace and the amount of karma we have collected over this and previous lifetimes also have a great effect. So it is futile to compare our effort, our progress, or our results in meditation, with what we imagine others have achieved.

Maharaj Charan Singh says in *Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. II*:

*Everybody has an individual load of karmas, an individual heap of rubbish, to burn. And you also can't know whether this is your first birth on the path or second birth on the path or third birth on the path. You may have burned a lot of rubbish in the last life so you have very little to burn in this life. That is why Christ said, the first may be the last and the last may be the first. There's no seniority, you see, for spiritual progress on the path – that since I have devoted more time and I started meditation earlier, I should have better results than the other*

*person who has come at a later stage on the path and so has devoted less time to meditation. You can't compare like that because you don't know his background. Your background is different than his background; your load of karmas is different than his load of karmas. So you can't compare that with anyone at all.*

There's no seniority on the path. We don't have that kind of agreement with the Master. But we do have the guarantee that some day we will succeed. Hazur encourages us with this advice:

*We should try to do our duty, and then it depends on how much load we have to carry or we have to burn. His grace is there; our effort should be there... But for that grace, we wouldn't be in touch with that voice of God within at all. We wouldn't be given this human life, we wouldn't be on the path at all, we wouldn't meet a mystic at all, but for his grace. So when he has marked us to be part of a certain fold, of a certain Master, he doesn't withhold his grace after that. He's more anxious than we are! So his grace is always there, but we have to do our duty. We just can't look to the grace without even doing our duty. We should do our best; then his grace is always there.*

Baba Jaimal Singh succinctly says in *Spiritual Letters*:

*You must do your meditation daily... Love for the Shabd-dhun develops gradually, it does not come quickly. The Satguru himself will ferry you across.*

We need to practice patience and continue meditating because the results are not in our hands. The results are in his hands. We are not in control; he is in control. He is waiting for us, waiting for the time when our mind has been conquered and the coverings over our soul have vanished. He knows the exact moment when we will be ready for him to take us back to the Father. He is more eager to do his job than we can ever imagine. Now is the time for us to do our job.



*You should only develop insight and improve your mind: do not make any outward display; nor should anyone know you have made great progress.... You meet with many hindrances when you advertise yourself: it is like boasting to others about your wish-granting gem.*

Pbongka Rinpoche, as quoted in *Buddhism: Path to Nirvana*

# Shadow Play

There is a famous parable titled *The Cave* written by the ancient Greek philosopher Plato in which people are confined in a cave. They have been there for a long time chained to a wall that faces another wall. These prisoners spend their lives interpreting their own shadowy reflections cast on the wall by the fire burning behind them. Their lives are projections on a cave wall, but are construed by them as real. It's not until someone from the outside comes into the cave and has them turn around to face the sunlight from the outside world that they see and experience the brightness and warmth of the sun.

This is the human condition. We too live a distorted reality under our own veil of darkness, the veil of ego. What we are actually experiencing is a shadow play but we endow it with false value and meaning and take it to be real. Then we act accordingly upon our false impressions. It is said that we see the world through tinted glasses that colour our perceptions of reality. And what are the results of our misperceptions? We only perceive the superficial, external aspects of this creation that we experience with our physical eyes, ears, and other senses. And, since we humans tend to be satisfied that we know everything, we can easily interpret the world according to our own limited, subjective perspectives. If we haven't had our spiritual eyes opened, we can't accurately see the world from the Lord's point of view.

Perhaps this is why Master says that a dark veil of ignorance covers us. Even though we think we have knowledge of the world, what we are really lacking is true understanding about the most important aspect of the creation – the Creator. We may have the best degrees



from the best schools and the best job, but what have we accomplished in life if we have no knowledge or experience of God?

Maharaj Charan Singh says in *Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. I:*

*You see, this ego, this intellect, makes us think we know everything. When we eliminate that ego, we realize we know nothing....*

*It is absolutely useless to have all the knowledge of the world if we do not know the Creator, who is within every part of his creation. When we know the Creator, then we realize that we know absolutely nothing. It is the Creator who knows everything....*

*If you're full of ego or intellect, this will keep you from the real wisdom, from the spiritual experience and spiritual truth, which the Lord has put within every one of us.*

So our ego, our instinct of “I-ness”, is the dark veil of ignorance which keeps us from seeing the greatness of the Father and his creation. We can't help but see everything in our life from our subjective point of view in which we are focused on what the Master says is me and mine. And we don't even see how deluded we are in believing that our way of seeing the world is all that exists so, of course, our view must be right, and everyone else must be wrong.

It is only the Masters who can open our spiritual eyes and broaden our perspective. Masters are spiritual physicians who come to open our spiritual eyes. When we realize the enormity of our ignorance, it humbles us, and we grow to understand that there really is someone in the creation who can see us and the entire creation from a perspective of truth. He or she may not even be educated in the worldly sense, but

they have experienced the inner sound and light, the inner truth. The intellectual may have knowledge, but the Master has true wisdom, experience.

Recently, the Master made a distinction between spiritual teachers and Masters. He pointed out, using an example of the Shabd, that a teacher can talk about a subject. The teacher can explain it to us and describe its attributes. He can do this through thoroughly studying the scriptures and writings of various mystics or spiritual Masters, and he can do it without speaking from direct experience. However, a true Master may not even be able to read the scriptures or write down his experience with the Shabd, but he can speak directly with conviction and credibility from personal experience. A Master knows of what he speaks, while a teacher is simply describing what other Masters have said.

So, the benefit of coming into contact with a living Master is that he or she can show us how to gain wisdom through spiritual experience. They can be an example to us that we can see with our physical eyes, but we grow to understand more deeply as we put into practice their instructions. In our spiritual ignorance, we need someone who is awake in this world, who knows about God and the mysteries of death. And this is what the Master does for us. He shows us how to see through the dark veil of ignorance and understand this creation from the Lord's point of view. He tells us that we are more than a body, an intellect, emotions, ego; that our real, inner self is of the same essence as the Lord, and that we are connected to him through the holy spirit or sound current. Our Master says that we are all rays of light emanating from the same sun.

It's by following Master's instructions and turning our attention

towards him that we finally leave the shadow play of this world behind us. This is accomplished through meditation.



*Attend satsang, seek your true destination  
and lose yourself in your Master's love.  
The Master will help you find  
the jewel of Nam within yourself  
and retrace your way  
through the inner skies.  
Just do this now, in this very life,  
and the Master will take care of the rest.  
Act on Radha Soami's advice  
to end your pains  
and find your way to peace.  
Soami Ji Maharaj, Sar Bachan Poetry*

# The Example of the Masters

The Masters are interested in one thing only: taking us home. They are not interested in properties, personalities, organizational structures, or seva positions. Everybody is the same to them. Whatever organization there is exists only to provide a minimum structure to meet the needs of an expanding sangat.

There are two aspects to the Master: physical and spiritual. There are two aspects to the disciple also: physical and spiritual. The physical Master makes the physical disciple aware of the path to truth. But the real union is spiritual.

Spiritual union is achieved in meditation. Through meditation the real disciple – the soul – achieves conscious realization of the Shabd. This is the end point of everything. This is the primary endeavor of the Master and the disciple – to merge with the ever-flowing radiant creative power of Shabd-dhun.

Mind is the obstacle to this realization. All efforts are aimed at controlling and reorienting the mind. The Master employs three methods of assisting us in controlling the mind: satsang, seva, and meditation.

Satsang, as spiritual discourse, is the age-old method that Masters use to communicate with the disciple on the conscious level. In satsang we get information. In satsang we learn what is true. In satsang when the Master is physically present we see him speaking or even answering questions, but there is also the satsang that is unseen. Satsang is a spiritual power centre radiating invisible spiritual currents that have a subtle and uplifting effect on the subconscious mind. These currents awaken and enliven the soul. Sitting in the satsang of the physical Master is sitting at the power plant of the spirit – we are irradiated with an incurable dose of divine love. Even

when the Master is not physically present, satsang creates a spiritual atmosphere where we remember the Master and, if we are receptive, can be imbued with his love.

Seva is voluntary service to the Master and his sangat. Through seva we learn humility, fellowship, and surrender. In seva the teachings are put into practice – we put our sweat and muscle into the stream of divine love. We wake up early and stay up late to serve not our own needs but the needs of others. Seva inverts our value system. In seva we work for no reward, no recognition. In seva we are focused not on results but on a harmonious process. In seva we give away our wealth rather than hoard it. Seva connects us to our spiritual family. Seva is a refuge in a sometimes cruel and dangerous world. Seva is a field of positive action.

Satsang and seva are foundational to the essential practice of meditation. Meditation is the be-all and end-all of spirituality. There is no higher purpose, no better relaxation, no further course of study needed than meditation.

Meditation, as the saints remind us, is a gathering and stilling of the waves of the mind at the eye centre. Through satsang and seva we prepare for meditation. The mind becomes open and receptive. Then in meditation we collect the attention and direct it to the upward flowing river of inner light and sound, the Shabd-dhun.

The task of the satsangi is to still the mind. Mind flows. It is always moving, flowing, running – a raging torrent of unbridled energy with limitless appetite and unimaginable power.

The panorama and confusion of the world is the uncontrolled mind made manifest. In modern times the mind is supremely dominant – the world is passing through a period of extreme degeneracy. Modern technology provides ten thousand ways to scatter, split, and divert the attention from what is real and true to what is unreal and untrue. Cell

phones, email, Internet, and TV grab, expand, and scatter the attention worldwide. The media magnifies and amplifies whatever is happening anywhere on the planet. And then it repeats the images until the attention is trapped. It takes a disciplined attitude of mind to keep focused on the real.

The Masters are living examples of how to do it. They have families to whom they are devoted. They earn their own living as businessmen, lawyers, teachers, farmers, or in other occupations. They are quiet, anonymous sevadars. They balance everything: meditation, satsang, seva, family, and even worldly responsibilities. And they do it with the devotion, discipline, and love that their Master has given them for the responsibility of guiding the entire sangat.

Watching them, we learn how it is done. Their attention is focused. They make no pretense. They are present. They are engaged in the world without being immersed in it. Their minds are clear. They are calm, light-hearted, and thought-provoking. They provoke laughter too. They are compassionate, strong, uncompromising, understanding, dynamic, fluid, go-with-the-flow, beacons of light, personalities without personalities, captivating and amazing human beings.

They teach by example and show us the unrealized potential within each and every one of us. They call on us not to worship them but to devote ourselves to the true form of the Master – Shabd. They challenge us not to limit ourselves to the physical but to recognize our true nature as souls.

The Masters tell us our task is to bring the mind under control and open it to the divine flood of grace. And they give us the tools to get the job done: satsang, seva, and meditation.



# The First Thing We Heard Him Say

It was the first thing we heard the Master say. It was the first time Baba Gurinder Singh came to the West. It was 1991 in San Francisco, and the meeting hall was packed. This gathering of love had magnetized every single soul that filled the hall. To arrive at this venue they had travelled great distances across the country, and the collective electricity hung in the air like an impending thunderstorm.

This was a big deal because everyone in the room had recently been blindsided by the devastating and sudden loss of their Master. Even the living Master sitting on the dais shared in the grief. He had been given the service of shepherding this group and now was on the “hot seat”. Our questions were vital, wonderful, and stupid, and we all wanted answers.

It was the first thing we heard him say. It could have been the last. Just before the questions started flying, just before he was about to spend the rest of his life answering all our questions, he tried to give us the only piece of advice that we would ever really need. It was simple: The answer to all of your questions is meditation.

There was a frozen pause, and then the hanging electricity in the room crackled and discharged with a great nervous laugh because everyone in the room knew he was serious. But in spite of having given us the one true answer, with his very next breath and a wave of his hand he said, “Please proceed with your questions.” It was a dynamic exchange that followed. If we were reserved, he was gracious. If we were anxious, he was patient. And if we were filled with confusion, he was strong and filled us with love.

Many years have passed and he is still answering our questions with his patience, graciousness and love, which seem to be increasing all

the time. We stand there and we know what the answer is – he told us – yet we clamour to get near him. Every day, every minute, with every single breath, he only exhibits more patience, more grace. Although we can't fathom the boundless nature of his love, our awareness of his love for us continues to grow and expand, like a magical fairy-tale beanstalk that breaks through the cracks in the earth, brushes aside the trees, and soars above the clouds.

We seekers are made of earth, with feet of clay, and we are crushed under the weight of all the immovable objects crowded into our minds. We are clouded with doubts and delusions that occupy and divert our precious attention. He pierces our mundane world. He rearranges our priorities. And he makes great effort to give us the essence of this path of the Masters.

And every time we straighten our spines to stand up, walk to the microphone and ask a question, we are awe-struck by his presence. When we stand in front of him we are humbled in many different ways. Even if our mask, our ego, is torn away for just one fraction of a second and we catch a glimpse of who he really is. We do not feel humiliated, for he never tries to make us feel inferior.

He doesn't simply erase pieces of our ego while we sleep – that would be too easy. We are called upon to actively participate in the dismantling of our ego, piece by piece, through our own intense personal effort. Our assignment is simply to wade through both the agonies and ecstasies of our life, while at the same time submitting more and more of ourselves – our attention and love – to him. This we do through our simran and bhajan. This we do by following the first piece of advice we heard him give us, those many years ago – by doing our meditation.

He gave us the road map and the vehicle, but we have to make the journey. When we accept the challenge and take this spiritual road



trip, we automatically begin to lose baggage. And before we can be as vast as he, we will have to shed everything that is not our true self. Then we will be weightless particles of light, breaking through the cracks in the earth, brushing aside the trees, soaring upwards through the clouds and reaching for the inner sky.



*Through meditation we fulfill the very purpose of human life. Meditation is the only worship that pleases the Father. Through meditation we become worthy of his grace and receptive to his love. We build and grow the love and devotion which he gives us to carry us speedily towards our goal. So attending to meditation is submitting to the will of the Father; it is being obedient to our Lord and Master. It is through meditation, by his grace, that we develop an intense longing to return to our Source. The effect is truly a miracle! We turn from the world, and with the same intensity that we once ran towards it, we now run towards the Father. We experience that bliss and joy of real love and real devotion, as we ultimately merge with our Master to be transformed from the drop into the Divine Ocean itself.*

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Die to Live*

# The Company of Saints

The mind is our chief enemy. It has the might of an elephant and few have courage enough to face it. But he who cultivates the company of a saint – whom Paltu compares to a lion – has nothing to fear.

The elephant will die without being killed  
if you cultivate the company of a lion.  
Cultivate the company of a lion and become like him...  
So has a saint conquered all appetites and desires.  
He looks upon miraculous powers  
and the treasures of paradise as garbage.  
Friend and foe are alike to him;  
alike to him are heat and cold.  
He cares not for praise or blame  
and carves out his own path.  
The false cannot stand before him, O Paltu,  
until they have been dyed in the colour divine.  
The elephant will die without being killed  
if you cultivate the company of a lion.

*Sant Paltu, His Life and Teachings*



# Who Do You Say You Are?

We've been told by the Masters that we are spiritual beings. To some extent, in living day to day, we believe this is true. However, when someone asks us who we are, we typically provide them with our name, occupation or role in life. But truly, who are we?

In the Gospel of Matthew 16:13, Jesus asked his disciples, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." We know that we too are sons and daughters of God. But actually, what does this mean?

It means, in part, that we are taking our soul home by following what our Master has told us to do at the time of initiation: to do our meditation, to do our simran whenever possible throughout the day, to attend satsang, to abstain from eating meat and other animal products, to refrain from drinking alcohol and using drugs, and to live an ethical, moral life.

Maharaj Charan Singh in *Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. I*, explains who we are:

*What is the real self that we have to know? That is the soul, which is our real self.... We can only know our self when we get released from the mind. For example, you see the ocean. Some of the water evaporates, becomes a cloud, and goes up; it becomes rain and comes down again. It merges into the ground, becomes mud and dirt. At that stage the water absolutely forgets its real intrinsic value, its pure qualities, and thinks itself nothing but the dirt. Then it begins to realize: That dirt is something else and I am something else.... I thought I was part of this dirt. When it leaves the dirt, only then does it realize that its real self is*

*something different from the dirt. Similarly, it is when the soul gets released from the mind that it really begins to know itself. Then it realizes where its origin is, which is that supreme Father, that cloud. Then it evaporates, leaves the dirt behind and merges back into the cloud.*

That's exactly the true condition of our soul. It is the essence of the Lord – the supreme Father. But the soul is a slave of the mind, and according to our karmas we are part of the fabric of living in the world. With the help of meditation, we can untie the knot of the soul and the mind, and the soul can again merge into the same supreme Father. As long as we are separate from the Father, we are slaves of the mind; therefore we cannot say, "I and the Father are one."

In order for us to attain this awareness, we have to rely on our Master. In the *Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche is quoted as eloquently expressing the vast and noble qualities of a Master:

*He is a great ship for beings to cross the perilous ocean of existence, an unerring captain who guides them to the dry land of liberation, a rain that extinguishes the fire of the passions, a bright sun and moon that dispel the darkness of ignorance, a firm ground that can bear the weight of both good and bad, a wish-fulfilling tree that bestows temporal happiness and ultimate bliss, a treasury of vast and deep instructions, a wish-fulfilling jewel granting all the qualities of realization, a father and a mother giving their love equally to all sentient beings, a great river of compassion, a mountain rising above worldly concerns unshaken by the winds of emotions, and a great cloud filled with rain to soothe the torments of the passions.... To*



*make any connection with him, whether through seeing him, hearing his voice, remembering him, or being touched by his hand, will lead us toward liberation. To have full confidence in him is the sure way to progress toward enlightenment. The warmth of his wisdom and compassion will melt the ore of our being.*

So who do we say we are? We are spiritual beings who have realized that the purpose of life on earth is to achieve union with God. We have been sent to a strange, dark country to realize and embody our true being. There is only one way to do this, and that is to undertake the spiritual journey, with the Master's guidance, with all the ardour, intelligence, courage and resolve that we can muster for this magnificent transformation.



*I have heard, O Lord, that you are  
the saviour of the fallen.  
I am fallen, and you are the saviour of the fallen.  
We are so well-suited.  
The Teachings of Goswami Tulsidas*

# Surrender

The following are the words of Maharaj Charan Singh on surrender extracted from *Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III*:

Surrendering to the will of the Master means helping ourselves to rise above the realm of mind and maya, helping our soul leave the mind. When we make the soul whole and pure, then we are surrendering to the will of the Father, the will of the Master.

Before that, we are still living in the will of the mind. We are not living in the will of the Master at all. You can say, I am living in the will of the Master because I am steadfast on the principles of Sant Mat – I am attending to my meditation and living the way of life as taught to me. So, in a broad sense, you are living in the will of the Master.

Actually, you live in the will of the Master only when you are able to release your soul from the clutches of the mind. You have to go beyond the realm of mind and maya for your soul to be absolutely pure. Then there is no covering on the soul and it lives in the will of the Father. Otherwise, the soul is always enveloped by and under the sway of the mind....

Surrender is when we take our ego and I-ness out of us. As long as the mind dominates the soul, there can be no surrender. When the soul dominates the mind, then you can say you are in a position to surrender to somebody.... We have to surrender ourselves to the Master. It means we have to take our ego out of us and blend our whole heart with his heart. He is already merged with the Lord, and by merging ourselves with him we are automatically merged into the Lord. That can be done only by meditation. The more we meditate, the more we are driving out ego. By doing so, we will be drawn towards

the Master, and we are automatically surrendering to him; and through him, we are surrendering to the Lord himself...

So we can surrender unconditionally only when we go inside, see the Radiant Form of the Master, merge ourselves in him and then go ahead. That is the real unconditional surrender. But we have to work for that while living in this world. To attain the real surrender, which we call *sharan*, we have to remain within the dictates and principles that were told to us at the time of initiation. We have to put forth our honest efforts to remain on the path, to give time to meditation. That, in a way, is surrender to the Master, and this surrender will lead to the internal surrender, the real or unconditional surrender. That will be when we see the Master inside, forget our self and merge in his will, in his love. We will feel that we are the Master there – ‘we’ do not exist.



*If my tongue were to multiply into a hundred thousand,  
or even twenty times that, with each tongue  
I would repeat a hundred thousand times  
God's one Nam.*

*Gurbani Selections, Vol. I*



# Book Review

## Shams-e Tabrizi: Rumi's Perfect Teacher

TRANSLATED BY FARIDA MALEKI

PUBLISHER: NEW DELHI: SCIENCE OF THE SOUL RESEARCH CENTRE,

2011. 344 PAGES.

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With this book we enter into a new world of knowledge about Shams-e Tabrizi, the legendary master of the most renowned Sufi poet of all time, the late 12th to early 13th-century Persian mystic Molana Rumi [*sic*]. Until recently, very little of any authenticity has been known about Shams, and some even believed he never existed. Nothing he wrote was known, though Rumi attributed to him a book of his own poetry, calling it the *Diwan-e Shams-e Tabrizi*. But, starting in the 1940s, various manuscripts of a work entitled *Maghalat-e Shams*, or “the spoken words of Shams,” began to be discovered in Turkey, appearing to be notes of Shams’ words as taken down by Rumi’s students during the three years that Shams spent with Rumi. A famous Iranian author and translator, Mohammad Ali Movahed, concluding that the work is authentic, collated the available manuscripts and produced in Persian a 1000-page scholarly edition, with extensive notes and commentary. Several translations of parts of Movahed’s *Maghalat* into English have now appeared, of which this book is one.

With access to the *Maghalat* have come many surprises. For example, Shams has always been represented as an uncouth, unlettered dervish, especially in comparison to Rumi himself, who, when he met Shams, was already a highly respected scholar of Islamic religion and mysticism, with his own disciples. But the Shams of the *Maghalat* turns out to be himself a scholar, especially of Islamic law, and to be widely read in the literature of Sufism. We even learn the names of his own teachers and spiritual guides.

In this book the translator has freely selected from the vast offerings of the *Maghalat*, choosing statements by Shams that “offer insight into typical

questions asked by seekers of truth, irrespective of culture and period, and reflect the universality of the teachings of the God-realized.” She avoided statements that, because they are closely tied to Islamic religious law or to Persian culture, would be impossible for the average reader to grasp without extensive explanations. Even then, some explanations of historical or cultural points are needed, and are provided in footnotes. The reader also derives much help from another mechanism: at the end of each quotation, the translator inserts a short phrase of her own, offered to point out connections or suggest interpretations that might appeal to the reader, but not constrain the reader’s own search for Shams’ meaning.

The resulting book offers spiritual insights on every page. Most of Shams’ messages are simple and clear. Some offer pithy wisdom. “[A man] says, ‘O God, do this; O God, do not do that.’ It is as though he tells the king, ‘O King, take that pitcher and put it here.’ He has turned the king into his own attendant, ordering him to do this, or not to do that.” And,

*Once he comes on the path, he must remain steadfast to avoid slipping every moment. For the father’s [Adam’s] tradition was to sin once – only once. Even for that one time, a man must be sorry, remaining awake and alert so that it will never happen again. Yet if it does happen, it should receive no thought or attention, for time passes, and regret and sorrow are of no use.*

Other statements use unexpected imagery, shocking the reader into fresh understanding. For example, he says. “A Sufi was asked, ‘Do you want a silver coin tomorrow, or a slap in the face now?’ He answered, ‘Hit me and pass by.’ Now a fortune is passing by. Be fearful of the pain of regret and the loss of this fortune.” Others use humour and irony to make their point: “However much consideration you have for a touchstone, a scale, or a mirror, they will never feel inclined to change the truth. Someone went to a scale and said, ‘Change my hundred silver coins into two hundred, and I will give fifty of it to you.’”

*You said to me, “I speak about my inner experiences so that my heart is empty.” How strange! When you empty your heart of that, then*

*with what will you fill it? It is like the man who was selling wine. Another man said to him, "Strange! When you sell the wine, then what will you buy instead?"*

Other statements by Shams are more difficult to understand, and require the reader to ponder over them. Some are densely packed with many meanings and implications. "A body without knowledge is like a town without water; a body without abstinence is like a tree without fruit; a body without modesty is like food without taste; and a body without effort is like a slave without a master." And,

*I explained clearly about the treasure of God-realization, and generously gave away the key to the treasury. Yet veils are still being created. You become your own veil. There is no dearth of thought. You yourself provoke the thought, make it your veil, and amuse yourself with it. Then you provoke another, then another in the same way. Yet all of it is nothing. It has no reality.*

And, "Lift your load off others, and carry their load for them. Have no greed or expectation of gain from them, but offer them what you have. If they want prosperity, then ask for poverty [for yourself]. If they want esteem, then ask for humility."

Some statements seem to offer evidences of spiritual truths almost beyond worldly comprehension. Yet if the reader patiently ponders over these sayings over and over again, wonderful apprehensions dawn. To give some examples: "The radiance of a Man is equal to beholding God for those endowed with the perception to behold him. Now come in, come in, so God can behold Himself. He looks at Himself. He looks through His devotee."

*The domain of words is so vast that applying meaning to them feels restricting, and there is a meaning beyond the domain of that meaning. This true meaning pulls all other meaning within, gulping the words and their sound, so that no phrase remains. Thus, a mystic's silence is not because he is so empty of meaning, but rather because he is so full.*

A fascinating aspect of the book is that it reports how Shams would, boldly and uncompromisingly, describe himself and his state of realization. One time he said, “My words . . . are so high that looking up at them causes your hat to fall off!” Some who heard accused him of being haughty. He remarked, “If they criticize, it is as if they are saying God is haughty, but that is true and what is the problem?”

But perhaps the most wondrous trait of the *Maghalat* of Shams is that it offers a glimpse into the world’s most renowned spiritual love affair, the three-year encounter between the two great masters Shams and Rumi. An introductory biography of Shams brings out a number of striking facts about that encounter that became known to us only with the discovery of the *Maghalat*. For example, Shams took only one disciple in his life, and spent many years preparing the ground in himself and Rumi for that event. “This was a barrel of divine wine carefully concealed, and all were unaware of it. I kept my ears open in the world, listening and waiting. This barrel opened because of Molana [Rumi]... The fact is that we [Shams] are his [Rumi’s].”

The book often quotes words Shams directed to Rumi personally. What comes across is an extraordinary relationship – profoundly respectful, tender, and affectionate, but also uncompromising and rigorous.

*The “you” who expresses need is the real you, not that “you” who shows himself needless, acting like a stranger; that one was your enemy. I was hurting him because that was not you. How could I hurt you? For even if I kissed your feet, I fear that my eyelashes might prick and wound them.*

Readers who are striving to follow a master of their own will gain as much from this book’s portrayal of this interaction, so monumental in the history of mysticism, as from Shams’ surprising revelations of spiritual truths.



