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Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

contents

- 4 A Lover's Stratagem
- 5 Gratitude and Love
- 9 Living in the Shadow
- 13 Be Careful What You Wish For
- 16 Diversity vs Reality
- 20 A Special Day
- 22 Where There's a Will There's a Way
- 26 Cleaning the Vessel
- 30 Taking Refuge
- 34 The True Purpose of Seva
- 37 The Supremacy of Karma
- 40 Book Review

Spiritual Link

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A Lover's Stratagem

*My beloved lord,
Now I'll not let thee go.
Whatever pleases thee I will do;
Pray become mine, remain with me.*

*After endless days of separation,
Beloved lord, I have at last met thee.
I am fortunate indeed
For thou hast come within my home
Of thine own accord.*

*My beloved lord,
I'll not let thee go.
I will cling to thy feet
And insist upon thy staying;
With all the stratagems
At my love's command
I will hold thee ensnared.
Pray rest with joy
In the temple of my heart.*

*Lord, my beloved lord,
I will not let thee go.
Kabir, O Lord, begs of Thee:
Do not be enticed elsewhere,
Become mine, remain with me.*

Kabir. The Weaver of God's Name



Gratitude and Love

If there is one sin that is the most prevalent today, it is the sin of ingratitude. The Master does so much for us. Our indebtedness to him is enormous, and yet we rarely offer thanks for what he has done. In fact, we don't even offer thanks over our meals, much less offer thanks for all that God does in our lives. We are much like the little boy who was given an orange by a man. The boy's mother asked, "What do you say to the nice man?" The little boy thought and handed the orange back and said, "Peel it."

We might say, "What do we have to be thankful for?" We might even feel dissatisfied with what the path has brought us so far – particularly with regard to our meditation.

We've been told that even if we meditate for two and a half hours every day as instructed, yet if the direction of our attention is outwards and downwards for the balance of the day, our efforts will hardly be enough to eliminate the impressions of that day. And we would certainly never be able to account for the mountains of karmas that we have accumulated since the beginning of creation.

But then our Master comes along, and he turns this base metal into gold. Yet we seem to believe that we are entitled to his grace and his love and that we don't even have to put in the two and a half hours of effort that he asks of us. We forget about the huge amount that he has forgiven and is not even asking us to account for. After all this, can we still ask why we should be thankful?

Gratitude will only begin when the sense of entitlement ends. It's important to realize that gratitude is an attitude, and it comes from a love of God and appreciation of him. Most of us have difficulty understanding this because we tend to associate gratitude with material blessings. If we were asked to list our blessings, probably most of us, before very long, would get down to things like houses and cars and so on. And yet material blessings are far down the line as far as the blessings that come from God are concerned.

On the surface, we may wonder: God is all-powerful – why does he need our gratitude? The truth is that he does not, but *we* need it – along with the benefits it brings.

Contentment requires gratitude. Moreover, gratitude also leads to peace of mind. A person who is thankful isn't given to worrying and fretting, because being thankful takes our mind off our problems and results in peace and contentment.

Gratitude is a huge deterrent to critical, negative, and judgmental attitudes. Thankfulness, by its very nature, has to acknowledge everything that God does in our lives. What happens when we focus on God and start giving thanks? Where is our focus? It's inward and upward.

But can the words 'thank you' ever convey our true gratitude for everything that we are given? Words are a weak expression of our gratitude when we owe everything to the immeasurable grace of the Master.

The truth is that nothing can be achieved through our own efforts. We express true gratitude when we recognize this truth, and live our lives as a gift from the Master; when we thank him through our actions in the way that pleases him most – by giving him our time through meditation, effort, and love.

At the time of initiation we take four vows, promising to abide by them for life. These four vows are commitments we make to our Master, and following them implicitly is essential for us to make progress on the path. We can express our gratitude to our Master not by words, but by adhering to these vows that we made to him at the time of initiation.

We should not express gratitude only when good things happen; the real test is when we accept even the most painful times of our lives as a gift from him. Mystics explain to us that all events which appear to be misfortunes are not really so. With the correct attitude, any difficult karma we go through may strengthen our sense of discipline and our power of resistance.

Maharaj Charan Singh often referred to adversity as “a blessing in disguise”, for it is during the most difficult times that we are pulled closer to the Lord. We may never understand what his plans are for us, but the mystics explain that the suffering we go through in this world purifies us and makes us worthy of that eternal joy within. We should be grateful for any occurrence in our life that reminds us of him and makes us shift our focus to him.

Even if we meditate every day, if the essential ingredients of love and devotion are missing, we still have a lot of room for improvement. It's true that our effort every day counts and that the Master loves his disciples for that effort. But that effort must eventually result in the growth of our love and devotion.

Our mechanical simran has to transform into a love so strong that instead of battling to finish two and a half hours a day, we are saddened when that time with our Beloved is over and we have to enter the world's rat race again. We have to develop a longing so great that we wait impatiently for the time when we are in his presence again. For indeed, whenever we sit in his remembrance he is most certainly present.

But is this love in our hands? Love is first in the heart of the Beloved, who then gives it to the disciple. But gratitude goes a long way towards developing this love.

Each one of us would like the Lord to make his abode in our heart. But have we ever considered whether this heart, where we would like the Lord to live, is fit for him? Have we ever spent a sleepless night out of love for the Lord or because we are separated from him? Have we ever shed tears out of love and gratitude for the Lord? Our heart longs for the world, and yet we want to meet the Lord. Until we rid ourselves of our love and attachment for everything other than him, our heart will never be fit for him.

We might say we have not seen the Lord, and we do not know how to love him. But a Master is the manifestation of his love, and to love the Master is to love the Lord. Love and devotion are needed for us to succeed in meditation, but the seed of love can only grow and be nurtured with meditation.

And if our love for the Master seems weak or non-existent to us, we can be held fast by his love for us – which, as we go forward on this path, we will find is as wide as the whole world. His love for us is love for the Lord – for the All, for the One. He embraces all in his love. And in his eyes we too are part of that One.

Our capacity to love is still limited. The love the saints lead us to is not a matter of fluctuating emotions. The affection and gratitude we feel may be

only a dim reflection of the real love, the love that dissolves all separation and leads to union.

How do we grow in this love? The Master has given a simple answer. He says that love means to give, give, and give. So we begin by giving the only gift we have – our time and attention. Two and a half hours of our time. It may seem to us a paltry gift when we consider the scattered attention we bring to the meditation practice. But nonetheless, it is a gift of love.

And then, with immense generosity, the Master accepts our poor offering and rewards us by giving us the wherewithal to turn our lives around. And as we attend to meditation with sincerity and faith, eventually we will experience his presence all the time. That includes the good days and the difficult ones. Then, there will no longer be any need for words; our entire being will be filled with gratitude.



Living in the Shadow

Within every living thing is the germ of death; a hidden saboteur that lurks in the darkness, waiting for its moment to come — as inevitably it must. Deep within is the truth that gives the lie to the pleasing seduction of illusion.

Death is ingrained in this life. Our very flesh betrays us. We are led to the gallows by the treachery of our worldly loves, there to suffer a fate of our own making – our indebtedness to the lord of this world, to whom we sacrificed our all, in order to obtain the illusion of comfort and happiness.

But there is no lasting comfort to be had in this world. Whatever passes for comfort gets taken away without warning, and we are left bereft. For what do we grieve? What was there in this experience of gentleness and warmth that was so hastily and so easily torn away by death? Should we quiver and quail at our approaching doom? Not at all! The material world is *not* the sum total of existence. If this were the case, we'd be in serious trouble!

Now we need to ask the question: what, in fact, is life? We came into this world at some point, and in the blink of an eye we find ourselves preparing to leave it again. So what awaits us when we depart? The great unknown we call death remains a mystery, in that we cannot see beyond it.

However, the mystics of all the ages have said that it is possible, with a little application, to see beyond those far horizons. But how do we get to know that which is imperceptible to the senses? And do we have the means to experience higher forms of reality than the merely physical? Do we as humans have other, unused senses or abilities that may be implemented in order to develop a higher consciousness?

For uncountable lifetimes we have been wandering about in the illusion of the material world, believing that it is real. For we have been used to indulging in the sense pleasures and becoming attached to the objects of sense, because we believed that they were the pathway to peace, happiness and bliss. The fact that we never achieved anything resembling lasting peace and bliss did not cause us to revise our position. We came to accept that it was just in the nature of things that our brief experiences of pleasure were followed by long periods of pain and suffering.

Interestingly, the mystics have repeatedly told us that the Truth or Reality we seek actually lies *beyond* the reach of the senses. Initially it is difficult to understand the reality that the mystics describe. It is entirely outside anything that we are familiar with. It is beyond our current frame of reference, so we find ourselves wondering if this is all a fantasy.

However, we sometimes have some interesting experiences that can make us wonder about the nature of reality. For instance, if we are having an intense dream in which we are pursued by enemies, and just when they're about to catch us and hurt us, we wake up and realize that none of that was real. So we do experience different states of consciousness that appear to demonstrate different realities.

Could it be that the reality described by the mystics, that elevated state of consciousness that enables one to contact the divine, could be just as real as these 'normal' states, if not more so? The issue really comes down to how we can access these higher states of consciousness. If it were easy there would be nothing to discuss, since everyone would be doing it. However, very few people are even aware that there *are* such things as higher states of consciousness. So how can we proceed?

It turns out that there is a methodology for the inner experience of higher states of consciousness that has existed since the dawn of time. In fact, all over the world there have existed methods of raising one's awareness to various levels by techniques that have stood the test of time. So, what is the discipline or practice by means of which we too can experience these higher realities for ourselves? The mystics of all the ages have come among us to tell us the answer to this very question.

The key to it all hinges around energy and consciousness. Normally our energies and our attention are all directed downward and outward, and so that is where we centre our sense of reality. However, the mystics say, if we raise our consciousness and direct our attention inward, focusing our attention initially on the eye centre, we will start to become aware of a very different perspective of life.

This is the point that can be considered the gateway that leads inward to the higher realms of existence, with a consequently higher sense of reality. This will be our starting point if we mean to travel on the path of spiritual

awakening. The mystics have often referred to the spiritual process as “dying while living”, which at first sounds like a total contradiction.

However, let us consider: what is life and what is death? If one has been privileged to witness someone passing from this world, one becomes aware that at one time that person was there, alive and present, and the next moment they have gone. Medical science will define this transition by saying that the heart has stopped or that breathing has ceased or there is no pulse present.

So, what is the difference between these two states? The mystics have an interesting explanation. They say that the difference is the presence or absence of that conscious energy body which is the true self of that individual. Furthermore, they explain that even when the physical body is declared officially dead, the soul lives on. So the presence or absence of the consciousness of the individual in the physical body determines whether it is alive or dead.

With this in mind, we have the basis for understanding what the mystics mean when they say that the spiritual path is “dying while living”. The mystical practice consists of withdrawing all the conscious energy from the lower part of the body and focusing it at the eye centre. When this has been achieved, and it is no simple task to do so, the consciousness is no longer centred in the physical body, but stands at the threshold of the inner realms; inwardly alive, yet dead to the world.

At this point the spiritual practitioner meets the inner Radiant Form of his Master, regardless of whether or not his Master is in the physical body or has passed on. This wondrous event marks the true beginning of the initiate’s venture into spirituality. Yet it is the journey to reach this point that seems to be the most difficult for any would-be traveller on this mystic way.

For one thing, one needs to adopt a lifestyle that requires becoming vegetarian, abstaining from drugs and alcohol, and living according to a lofty set of moral standards. And we should also be clear that, although the proper lifestyle is very important, in itself it will not take us to our goal. Something more is required – something that will result in fundamental and radical change in us.

Teaching us how to “die while living” through meditation is the domain of the true spiritual Masters. The message that they bring is that, having withdrawn our attention from the outer world and the domain of our senses, we should then focus at the third eye or tenth door. This is the avenue that leads to the feet of the inner (mystic) form of our Master. Having reached this point, the first part of our journey is complete, and from this point onwards, we are directly guided and helped by the Master to the end of our journey: the Lord himself.

It is only by applying ourselves assiduously to the practice of meditation and being constantly mindful of where we allow our mind to go that we can avoid the pitfalls of the road we are on. One way to help us in our quest is to consider the inevitable fact of our death.

Most people avoid this subject, but in fact it is the most useful in order to determine what is truly important and what is not. When we look at the issue of our inevitable mortality, what is it that we value? We very soon realize that a lot of things that we previously regarded as important we now see as trivial. We recognize that wealth and possessions are of no use to us at all if we are on our deathbed – and into that category fall all the things that will not accompany us when we pass from this world to the next.

However, we may realize that whatever efforts we have committed towards raising our consciousness and to detaching ourselves from the world and its distractions will be the benefits that remain ours, whether in this world or the next. Every effort in the right direction is leading us closer to our destination. And the key to all of this, the root and source of our good fortune in being on this path, is none other than the true Master who initiated us. With his help and grace, there is no obstacle that cannot be overcome.

Moreover, at the time of death the Master comes to take the departing soul across in an atmosphere of love and peace, without any fear. This is something that we can all look forward to.



Be Careful What You Wish For

For better or for worse, most of us have had our wings clipped by the Covid pandemic. We've spent time either in enforced isolation or doing much less travelling about while trying to escape the dreaded Corona virus. This virus has certainly brought home to us a clearer sense of our own mortality. Faced with this threat, every one of us must have given thought to our own readiness – or lack of it – to come face to face with death.

No doubt there may be some of us who feel more than ready to die. And probably we'd like this to be our last death – no more coming back to this imperfect world. However, we might be brought back by unfinished karmas, or dragged back because of attachments and desires.

Great Master tells us that the very reason why we are here now at all is because of past desires. We read in *Spiritual Gems*:

Do not give to the world and the people of the world a value equal to that of your own ideal. Wherever your desire is, there must your residence be. Because our love is all for this world, that is the very reason why we must come back into this world again and again.

So desires are powerful things. They lie at the root of reincarnation, and they are frequently the cause of our suffering. The only way to get rid of them is through devotion to a Master and doing the meditation that he teaches. As Great Master tells us, also in *Spiritual Gems*:

If... one daily gives time to the practices, and has no worldly desires, then there is no power which can bring one back to this plane. Birth is for those who die weeping with desires unfulfilled.

Maharaj Charan Singh used to explain that by nature man is actually happy. But over time, what makes us unhappy are our desires and our ambitions. If we don't get what we want, we become miserable. We imagine that once we do get we want, we'll be happy. But it doesn't work that way.

As Hazur Maharaj Ji used to tell us, it's impossible to get rid of desires by trying to satisfy them. The mind has to rise above all these desires

– to be contented with what we've been given. This constitutes living in the will of the Father.

We need to keep reminding ourselves that we must be careful what we wish for – because every desire will be satisfied. The trouble is: our desires might not be satisfied in this life but in the next. In another of his letters written to the early American Satsangis, Great Master told somebody:

You ask what clutches you fast in the darkness. This can be answered in one word: desires. They are the result of our own past karmas. If we can get rid of the worldly desires, there is nothing to keep us confined in this world.

The Dawn of Light

Getting rid of worldly desires means learning to live in the Lord's will. It means wanting nothing more than what we have, and accepting that we need to wipe the slate clean of all those karmas that have been bringing us back.

In *Philosophy of the Masters*, Great Master tells us that complying with the Lord's will means that whatever comes to us, we should accept it cheerfully – accept both pleasure and pain as gifts that come from the Lord. In other words, whatever he wills for us is perfect, exactly what we need at that time. Good or bad, whatever he gives us is an expression of his love for us. We read in *The Dawn of Light*:

Whatever good or bad happens to you, through whatever person or object, directly proceeds from our loving Father. All persons and objects are but tools in His hands. If an evil befalls you, think it to be His greatest mercy. We have to suffer for our past actions sooner or later. Our Master, by taking us through this suffering speedily, intends to relieve us of our burden earlier. And by this early payment of debt – because debt it is – the amount of the suffering is very much lessened. If we had to pay one ton at first, we are now released by paying one pound only.

Real acceptance means that there's no room in our lives for worry. We can then be truly contented with our lot. There's great peace of mind in contentment. But of course, absolute contentment implies complete surrender to his will, and this may be something that we can only

work towards. Absolute surrender would mean that we had achieved everything. There'd be nothing more that could hold us back, ever. And here Great Master tells us something quite startling: "If the mind could throw away all the worldly desires this moment, the soul would go up like a shot, instantaneously."

The truth is that the Lord's will is going to prevail anyway, whether we like it or not. But it's up to us to recognize what grace it is that we *want* to submit to it and then to be grateful for whatever he gives us.

When we take the initiation of a true Master, we take him as our guide and our mentor. Right from the moment of our birth he has taken full control of our lives. In fact, from the time that we were marked for initiation, everything that happens to us can happen only according to his will.

We may try our best to accept everything as his will, but strictly speaking, this is still beyond us. In fact, Hazur Maharaj Ji tells us we can't really live in the will of the Lord until we are completely free of the mind. But in another sense he says we can: by accepting without complaint the fate that's been allotted to us. But this we can only do, Maharaj Ji adds, when we are filled with love and devotion for the Father.

We talk very easily about trying to live in the will of the Father. But the truth is that as long as our attitudes and actions are based on what the ego wants, we can't truly say we're living in his will. For us to truly live in his will requires far more than the petty needs of the ego. It requires the love that we start to develop for our Master – the love that grows to the extent that we want him more than we want any other worldly person or thing.

And eventually that will happen – because he makes it happen. He gives us love for him because this is a way to let us rise above our worldly attachments and desires. It will happen because it is through this love we feel for our Master that we will finally be able to find our way back to the Father, the ocean of all love ... back to the source of love from which we once came.



Diversity vs Reality

We live in a world characterised by diversity, individuality and selfishness, and the result is disharmony. The current world population is close to eight billion people, and astonishingly, no two people in the world are the same. This is predominantly because of differences in our genes. And even genetically identical twins may differ distinctly from each other. Even the ways our bodies function differ.

These biological processes and our genetic make-up are locked in our DNA, and determine the individual blueprint of our unique evolution – to the point where science tells us that each person's fingerprints and irises are unique to that person.

Being unique, we may ask: “Do we all see the same colour when we look at something?” And science answers, “Not at all.” While our eyes all work in the same way, the colours we see are dependent on how our individual eyes and brains interpret light wave lengths.

So if we don't see the same colours, do we all see the same things? No, we don't.

What we see is viewed through the lens of our individual perception, and our perception is linked to the way our brains receive and interpret information – sensory input from our eyes and ears, from our interactions with people and animals, and from our emotional experiences. When we interact with the world, our brains construct our unique conscious experience of the world *and* of ourselves within in it.

Our perception is not simply formed by the brain's passive receipt of information. Our life experiences literally help our brain predict, construct and generate our conscious experiences of the world around us by making a *best guess* based on the input of these prior experiences. This means that the world we experience probably comes more from within us than outside of us. We don't see things as they are, we see things as we are.

This means that our perception is neither factual nor accurate – it is our personal interpretation of the world based on our individual experiences and understanding. The result is that we all see the same thing a little differently, and we create our unique illusion – our own temporary reality

– of what appears ‘out there.’ So we should not assume that our reality is everyone’s reality – because it’s not.

No two people in the world have the same genetic code, the same minds, the same egos, or share the same perceptions. The realities created from this diversity are inconsistent and constantly change – in fact, they change with every person we meet. How we each see and understand the world is our own illusory reality. It’s therefore not difficult to understand why there is so much conflict in a family, a community, a country and ultimately the world.

Eight billion people and no two are identical – eight billion different realities. To quote Albert Einstein: “Reality is merely an illusion, albeit a very persistent one.”

If what we perceive is an illusion, then what is real, and what is truth? Mystics speak of a reality that underlies the entire universe – a different reality, a different consciousness. A conscious energy, imbued with intelligence and wisdom – the very essence of life – that both sustains us and fills all space around us. It is in us and we are in it. Explaining this, the Great Master writes in *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. IV:

The Lord is the great storehouse of consciousness. He is the embodiment of reason and the treasure-house of intelligence. He is the repository of love and compassion. We are parts of Him. He is the whole. The essence of which our souls are made, its fountain source is called the Lord. If we are a drop of consciousness, He is the ocean of consciousness.

This conscious energy is distinguished by sweet captivating music and shimmering sparkling light. Many names have been ascribed to it, such as: Creative Power, the Word, Nam, or Shabd. By whatever name it is known, it is the unity that underlies the entire universe – the true reality.

Shabd is the divine inner presence, to whom we eternally belong. It guides us on the path from our limited consciousness to the vast, eternal consciousness – our ultimate potential. It is an invisible support that is always present and available to us, but we are too involved with our own perceptions and the impermanence of the world to realize this. The Masters tell us that if we turn our attention inward, and open our inner eye and our inner ear, we will experience this incredible power; its light

and its music. Then we would realize that our physical eyes see only our own illusions, while our inner eye views the entire infinite reality. Without this inner realization we remain attached to our illusory realities and bound to their consequences.

In *Radha Soami Teachings*, Soami Ji Maharaj writes: “Shabd hath he firmly fixed in our beings.” However, the powerful attraction and attachment to our own unique illusions prevents us from making use of the opportunity to turn inward and explore both Shabd and the ultimate reality. Clinging to diversity is the basis of our suffering, pain and disharmony. We must let go of our illusions, even though the transition may appear like death. Rumi tells us differently:

It is apparently death, but in reality life;

Outwardly decay, but inwardly growth.

*As quoted in *Mysticism: The Spiritual Path**

The Masters, in their kindness and grace, have given us a valid reason to let go of our illusions – to turn away from illusion, diversity and suffering. They have given us an exceptional opportunity to turn instead toward reality, unity and eternal bliss. As Great Master explains:

The Master ‘injects’, as it were, his consciousness and light into the soul of the disciple at the time of initiation. This injection of his own consciousness and light permeates the disciple like leaven and produces a new spiritual consciousness and light as the practice of Nam is continued. The spiritual light of the Master gives a new life to the soul of the disciple and begins to free it. Consequently, the disciple begins to have a feeling of fulfilment. This gift of the Master cannot be taken away.

Philosophy of the Masters, Vol. V

The Masters are imbued with the consciousness of true reality; their attention turns at will to the subtle regions of the soul and the mysteries of the universe. They offer us the chance to turn from diversity and separateness to unity, to experience ultimate reality by becoming that reality ourselves. Again and again we should thank the Master for this opportunity and for teaching us what devotion really is.

We thank the Master by doing our meditation, but are we consistent in our meditation practice? Do we miss the opportunity to explore this beautiful spiritual path by neglecting the one thing the Master asks of us? In *Mysticism: The Spiritual Path*, the author comments:

How strange that we investigate everything of the world but never care to look into our own self! We leave out no object in nature from our study, but we shut our eyes to the reality and essence of our own being.

He continues by warning us:

We cannot form an accurate idea of mystic knowledge except by following the mystic path. It is not only a knowing but essentially a seeing – seeing completely, thoroughly and intimately – on a plane above the level of the intellect and beyond the perception of the senses. Nay, it is not even a seeing: it is a becoming – it is to become the very truth that we want to know, it is to enter with our soul the transcendent ultimate reality as it is in its essence and being, and it is to know that supreme reality by becoming that reality ourselves.



A Special Day

Today is a special day. And why, you may ask, is it special? Well, in fact, because it is the *only* day. Yesterday is but a memory and tomorrow just a dream. All we have is this moment, this day. It is reminiscent of the passage in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass* where the Red Queen says: "The rule is: jam tomorrow and jam yesterday – but never jam today." Living in the past or the future is actually a denial of the here and now in which we find ourselves, and is a dangerous form of delusion.

We are actually in an eternal now, whether we see it that way or not. And it is in this now that we have to realize whatever it is that we would like to achieve. The problem that stands in our way is the mind. The mind has an overwhelming tendency to wander: dwelling on the events of the past, and worrying about what may happen in the future. This is a significant problem because in order to achieve anything at all, we have to be here and now.

If we want to do anything worthwhile with our life, we need to curb the mind's habit of meandering all over the place. If our attention is anywhere other than here and now we are living in a dream world, a fantasy, with little or no connection to reality. We need to develop mental discipline, at least to the extent that when we want to concentrate on something the mind complies.

It's not that we're incapable; after all if we watch a particularly interesting movie we tend to be totally focused on what's happening in the movie, to the extent that we forget our body and our normal lives – we actually live in the context of that movie while it's playing. But when the movie ends, then we return to ourselves and we say, "Oh, it was only a movie!"

If we could generate such concentration at will, we could achieve a great deal. One of the characteristics of those who achieve greatness is that they have the extraordinary ability to focus totally on the task at hand. But what if we have difficulty concentrating or keeping our mind focused on our goal? How can we hope to achieve anything if we have problems in this regard?

The temptation, in the face of great difficulties, is to simply give up and say, "Oh, this is too much for me – let me try something easier." But if we find ourselves starting to think like this then we need to sit down and

consider our options. If we give up the high road, then we are of necessity on the low road. If we give up the pursuit of our spiritual goals, we are left only with the world.

We should ask ourselves one question: does the world have what we truly want? Is there, in this world around us, that which promises lasting happiness and peace? Has anyone in this world ever experienced unmitigated happiness and peace without periodic phases of pain and misery?

We already know the answers to these questions. Would we really choose the way of the world rather than face up to and deal with our shortcomings and weaknesses? Would it not be better to address our perceived shortcomings and work to overcome them in order to progress towards our goal? Would it not be worth it to put forth continuous effort, knowing that it is putting us on the high road that leads to the ultimate goal of existence?

We have not to achieve anything great in the context of the world around us. Many have found that to achieve worldly success they have had to surrender their personal integrity and principles, and at the end of the day find themselves looking in the mirror at a face that they no longer recognize as their own. This is too high a price to pay for anything. We need to re-evaluate our priorities. What is most important to us; worldly success or inner peace?

In *Glimpses of the Great Master*, Hazur Maharaj Sawan Singh had this to say:

You have not to do anything in the positive sense of the word, in order to realize God. Simply undo what you have done in the way of making your prison house, and there you are, God already, Truth personified already. But this undoing of what has been done is to some a very hard task. 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. ... To realize the Truth is to become master of the universe, and to entertain desires is to acknowledge bondage, thralldom and slavery to the things of the world – flesh and objects. Everybody desires to become Christ, everybody wants to realize Truth, to become a prophet, but very few, if any, are ready to pay the price.



Where There's a Will There's a Way

Throughout our lives we will have been faced by tasks or challenges that may well have seemed impossible. One might not actually remember learning to crawl, sit, stand up, walk, and eventually run, but none of those skills was learned without a struggle. We persevered. We fell. We stood up and tried again.

Parents and teachers have constantly asked us to stretch ourselves. They have asked us to set our minds to the task and push through the difficulties. And if we ever threw in the towel and said, "I can't do this!" then the reply might have been, "Yes, you can. Because where there's a will, there's a way."

Over the years we came to understand that we could trust our parents and our teachers. They would never ask us to do something that was beyond our capabilities. No one wants a child to fail at anything. So a difficult task would be explained, demonstrated, and then handed over to us to get on with.

Now we have moved on from those early years and simple tasks. Along the way we have all mastered many extremely complicated activities. We learned from our childhood experiences and have constantly reaffirmed for ourselves that where there's a will, there is indeed a way. The path of Sant Mat is no different.

When we were initiated by our Master, we were asked to make four promises – to become strict lacto-vegetarians; to avoid alcohol, recreational drugs and tobacco products; to lead a moral life, and to meditate for a minimum of two and a half hours every day. For most of us the first three vows have been relatively easy to fulfill. However, meditation and efforts to keep simran going throughout the day may well have caused us to say: "I can't." Many, many times we've needed to remember that where there's a will, there is indeed a way.

For some reason exercising our will in this area of our lives seems to be more difficult than in others. People have exercised their will to learn to play the violin, fly an aeroplane or become rocket scientists – but when it comes to meditation, the mind is extraordinarily wily and slips out of our grasp very easily.

But meditation is definitely an area where the truism applies. The Masters tell us that, seen from a higher perspective, we have virtually no free will at all, given our karmas and conditioning. But they are adamant in insisting that we have a modicum of limited free will.

Maharaj Charan Singh explains:

We have no free will as far as our destiny is concerned. Whatever seeds you have sown in the past have become your destiny now. You have to reap the harvest of the seeds which you have sown. But as to the seeds you are to sow now, you have limited free will to sow these seeds. Whether to sow or not, you have that choice.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. 1

The Masters all say that man has the faculty of discrimination, which separates us from animals, birds, insects and plants. This sense of discrimination allows us to exercise our will, to choose one thought, word or deed, over another. If we have a goal that really matters to us, then surely, it makes sense to choose to move towards our objective rather than away from it.

Baba Ji tells us over and over again that we must safeguard our futures. The past is behind us. It is water under the bridge that can never be brought back again. It is the future we must be concerned with now. It must be protected with every breath we have.

We must exercise that limited free will we have, to choose to be good human beings and to choose thoughts, words and actions that will take us towards our Master's outstretched hand and not away from it. He wants us to accept responsibility for our present actions. If we do this well, in accordance with his wishes, then the results of our actions will be the Lord's responsibility. All he wants is sincere, constant, and consistent effort. Sitting back and saying "I can't" is just not an option.

In the book *Living Meditation* we read:

If we believe that Master will wave a magic wand and automatically give us liberation after death, we are wrong. If we believe that just by attending initiation or by having his physical darshan, without

doing our meditation, he will give us liberation after death, we are also sadly mistaken.

The Masters all tell us that as far as meditation is concerned, there is no such word as “can’t.” Maybe “won’t,” but not “can’t.” They say that at the time of initiation we are given all the grace we need to get the job done and that nothing justifies us in saying that we can’t do it. We have to step up to the plate, take responsibility, and through positive choices and actions get on with the job.

In our hearts we all know that we appear to make choices throughout each day. How much of this is karma or destiny we have no way of knowing. But we appear to act independently and have been happy enough with this concept since childhood. So why change now? With the welfare of our soul on the line, now is the time for positive and grateful actions that reflect our choice to follow our Master in every single aspect of our lives whenever and however possible.

Of course, we are only human and therefore some failures are inevitable. We are not perfect yet. So stumbling and falling can be expected. The important thing is getting up and trying again. This, apparently, is what our limited free will can enable us to do. The results may not be in our hands, but our efforts are.

It doesn’t matter how often the mind prefers to reminisce or daydream. All that matters is that we notice and try to restart that simran, both during the day and during our meditation time. Simran is the tool our Master has given us to prune away the rubbish in our minds and clear the pathway for growth in the right direction. There is never any justification for not trying.

Impatience, despair and frustration are the mind’s tools to distract us. We don’t have to fall for its tricks. We have enough free will, enough discrimination to recognize its games for what they are – the desperate efforts of a defeated foe. In the long run, with our Master on our side, victory is assured. In a recent question and answer session Baba Ji said what all other Masters have said: There are no failures in Sant Mat.

These are words to encourage greater effort, not justify laziness. It is true that the Lord sends the Master to initiate certain marked souls whom

he wishes to return home. It is true that nothing can ever stand in the way of the Lord's will. But it is equally true that our effort and struggle are part of the equation and that they please him.

We will get there eventually. Every day Master gives us countless chances to choose to be good human beings who exercise their sense of discrimination and move in his direction. Choosing to do our simran is us reaching out for his hand. Deliberately choosing simran in the face of great opposition from the mind is saying: "Where there's a will, there's a way."



Cleaning the Vessel

Shams of Tabriz, the 13th-century Sufi mystic said:

*(If) you have an eye, look with your own eye:
do not look through the eye of an ignorant fool.
(If) you have an ear, hearken with your own ear:
why be dependent on the ears of blockheads?
Make a practice of seeing (for yourself)
without blindly following any authority:
think in accordance with the view of your own reason.*

Rumi, The Divan-e Shams-e Tabrizi

In our hearts we also want this and that is why we follow the path of the Saints – to find God. Often however, we may find that instead of feeling longing for the Lord we are engrossed in our day-to-day issues and problems. Yet we continue struggling on the path, despite our weaknesses and doubts.

When we applied for initiation, most of us thought it'd take a few months, perhaps a few years, before we would be travelling through the inner regions, enjoying the blissful melodies of the Shabd .as if the greatest power in the universe could be so easily attained!

Perhaps in our naiveté we had somewhat romantic ideas about the path, believing that our salvation was guaranteed and that initiation was enough. Perhaps we imagined that no serious changes would be necessary, other than accepting the four principles of Sant Mat.

Maharaj Charan Singh said:

If not for his grace, nobody would even think about the Father. We are so mixed up with this mesh of maya, so involved in worldly and sensual pleasures, that we would never even think about the Father but for the pull which he creates within every one of us. First we start with his grace that he starts pulling us, then he makes us worthy of his pull, he makes us receptive to his pull, and then we attend to that pull – we try to achieve our destination.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. II

As Maharaj Ji said, we tend to be so mixed up in the web of maya and so involved in the world, that without grace we would never recognise his pull. However, having been given this grace we need to attend to our spiritual practice. We can't achieve our goal if we are half-hearted about the path, distracted by the world and filled with doubt and desires. Walking this path is about exercising courage and faith, growing in understanding, and developing wisdom.

There can be no doubt that we all want the sweetness of mystic transport and personal experience of the divine. But many of us may feel spiritually impoverished, having very little courage and faith. However, the fact that we're still struggling, is an indication that his pull is still there.

So what stands in the way of our spiritual progress?

Ego, our sense of self, is the primary obstacle in our way. Progress though, is not actually in our hands. How many times has Baba Ji said that if we just take care of our meditation, he will take care of everything else? Yet we still worry and stress about our lack of spiritual progress. We need to have faith and trust in the divine and we need to commit wholeheartedly to our practice.

Mystics teach that the human body is the temple of the Lord, that the soul and God are both to be found in the human body. They are separated from each other by a veil, a curtain of ego, and this is why the soul cannot see the Lord.

Our difficulty is that not only is the soul separated from the Lord but our soul itself is a mystery to us. This is because we are aware only of the physical body and the mind, through which we function, deluded by our senses and desires.

We are so absorbed in the things of this world that we become attached to them, seeing only the creation and forgetting the Creator. We cannot see the essence and life energy that pervades all the forms of creation. It is too subtle for our perception.

In *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. IV we read:

The Lord is extremely subtle. Unless we become as subtle as He is, we do not get connected with the Lord.... this subtlety can only be gained by inner exercises or by what is described as 'going within'.

Great Master goes on to speak of the form of the Lord. He says all the universe is his form, yet he is to be found within the human body. Through the practice of meditation we gradually learn how to become subtle, and perceive the subtle.

From meditation we also gain the strength to live in the will of the Lord. Our current circumstances are the consequences of our past actions. Our karmas and desires keep us embedded in the world of phenomena. Through meditation we learn to maintain our balance in the face of our karmic storms. We learn not to forget the Lord when we are rewarded with pleasures and success and not to get swamped with self-pity and worry when times are hard.

One of the fantasies with which we delude ourselves is that the Master will do everything for us. No doubt, at a certain elevated level of consciousness we see that in truth we can do nothing. All is accomplished through his grace, and once we learn total surrender, then he does all that is necessary. However, none of this excuses us from the necessity to make effort. This work is ours to do and we have to do it.

The purpose of our meditation is to chip away at this hard shell of ego and to become subtle enough to perceive the divine presence inside this human temple.

A teacher or guide is always necessary. Through our relationship with him we learn love. With time, through our efforts and his grace, our receptivity, faith and love grow. The Master is our bridge to the divine and serving him is how we cross that bridge. The more we focus our attention on him and on the Lord, the more the veils that cloud our inner vision begin to diminish, and the curtain of ego, which separates the soul from the Lord, becomes increasingly transparent. At first we don't realize that everything we know and experience is nothing but illusion, but slowly and slowly as we persevere with our practice, our minds and hearts become receptive to his influence and we are transformed.

Baba Ji has repeatedly said that all we have to do is clean the vessel. This is what our meditation is for. Simran is how we scour and polish the mind. Bhajan, or listening to the sound, will fill the vessel and transform us.

One of the great gifts that helps us in this regard is the opportunity to do seva, or selfless service. Great Master writes:

A disciple should serve his Master without arrogance and without any idea of reward, and always with the aim of pleasing the Master. By this method his mind will always be contemplating the Master. And if you contemplate on a person intensely, you will one day imbibe the qualities of that person.

Philosophy of the Masters, Vol. I

Our purpose in doing seva is to please our Master and to diminish the power and influence of our ego. It is to develop humility in us and to generate love and harmony in our environment. In seva we are given the opportunity to put aside our personal opinions, judgments, criticisms, fears and doubts and simply do what is required of us, to the best of our ability, with love and devotion.

However, the most important seva is meditation. Maharaj Ji said:

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 a means to that end.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III

Attaching our consciousness to Shabd, listening to the audible life stream is service of the soul.

Seva should help us to meditate. Seva is to clean the vessel so that it can be filled with that nectar within. Seva helps us, cleans us, and then makes the utensil ready to be filled. We have to do the meditation to fill it. Seva cannot take the place of meditation.

Legacy of Love

We can all strive to uphold the principles of this path, remembering our Master, turning our face towards the Lord, remembering that he is drawing us homeward. We don't belong here. Nothing is ours. We are his and we owe everything to him.

We can all do the most important seva of cleansing the vessel by doing our daily meditation. Eventually, through this seva the inner door will be opened. Then we'll see the Beloved within and we'll find our hearts cleansed of all stain and freed from duality. Through the gift of seva we learn to abide in his will, however he chooses to keep us, until through his grace we are able to see the Lord with our inner eyes and hear his voice with our inner ears.



Taking Refuge

In an ancient Buddhist text, King Milinda asked: how someone of evil conduct could be saved by the Buddha simply on the grounds that he had taken refuge in him and had unwavering faith in him. The monk whom he had asked replied: “A stone, however small, will sink into the water, but even a stone weighing hundreds of tons, if put on a ship, will float.”

Saints teach that our soul is pure spirit, too subtle to be perceived by our senses. Its source is none other than the supreme creative energy, also known as Shabd.

For eons our soul has been moving from body to body, life after life, bound by karma, the fundamental law of cause and effect. Our soul reaps the consequences of all past-life actions, having been separated from its source for untold ages. Maharaj Charan Singh reiterates in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. III:

There is a block of karmas between the soul and the Father. That is why we are separated from the Father. That layer of karma doesn't let the soul go back to the Father.

Through the ages we have become burdened with the effects and impressions from the many lives we have lived, but we are ignorant of the binding nature of the deeds we have committed.

In truth everything is moulded and determined by our karma. From the first moment we existed, those first steps and actions we took determined our destiny. And still we continue in our ignorance, moving from life to life, not knowing who and what we are, why we are here, and why we suffer.

This human condition is summarized thus in the book, *Buddhism: Path to Nirvana*:

We are caught in a snare of endless suffering. Yet we do not seek light. We have become so utterly blind and ignorant that we know not who we are, where we have come from or whither we have to go, although in our delusion, we may think of ourselves as intelligent and wise, able to work

our way out. We are thus not only ignorant, but also ignorant of the fact that we are ignorant.

Mired in such ignorance, how can we fully comprehend the true imperishable reality which is our soul, this tiny drop lost in such a vast ocean of chaos?

According to the mystics, underlying everything we think we are is a deep, primal longing of the soul for union with its true source. Only when we fully understand this and are initiated by a true living Master, can we achieve this spiritual goal. Essentially, this is the only reason we are given a human birth and our only purpose for being here.

What we really want is to experience the sacred, the holy. However, we are still weighed down like the heavy stone the opening quote refers to. This stone sinks deep into the phenomenal world unless lifted up onto a safe ship and carried across to a far shore.

The ship's helmsman, the Master, gives us the technique and tools to leave this world of false impressions. He connects us to him, taking us up into the safe ship of Shabd.

This weighty stone of endless lifetimes of accumulated karma that we have been carrying is easily lifted by him. Instead of sinking we begin, with his grace and love, to float to our place of refuge, our true destination, realizing that we are in actual fact a soul wrapped in our dense human covering.

Once we have been 'saved', we realize how crucial this is. But how and why is 'taking refuge' the only way to achieve it?

In Buddhist teachings there is the principle of taking refuge in the triple jewel –the Buddha, the dharma, and the sangha. For us this means taking refuge in the Master, in the path and in the sangat, our spiritual community. How do we accomplish this?

The term 'taking refuge' means to come under the protection of someone or to seek a safe haven or sanctuary. We need to remember that we are exiles from our true home, attempting to traverse this world, which threatens, tempts, delights and overwhelms us at every step.

Even if we wanted to, we cannot control our mind and its addiction to the senses. If we want safe passage on the long spiritual journey to our true

home, we need to take refuge in one who can guide us and knows the way: the Master. Rumi is quoted in the book *Essential Sufism*, “Whoever travels without a guide needs two hundred years for a two-day journey.”

We think we are searching for God, but the mystics teach that in actual fact, the yearning for the divine comes from the Lord. The Lord draws us back into himself through his gift of a true living Master. Maharaj Charan Singh said: “We need the company of the mystics so that we can be filled with love and devotion for the Father, mystics who can lead us back to the level of the Father.”

Taking refuge refers to an attitude and approach to the path – it concerns how we manage the control of our minds; how well we hold and direct our attention towards the Master. We take refuge by remembering him and by practising obedience.

We need to implicitly follow his instructions. When refugees are given shelter they go humbly, and gratefully accept their circumstances. This should be our attitude when we take refuge in the Master and the teachings.

At the time of our initiation the Master, being pure Shabd, projects his Shabd form into us. He knows our weaknesses, our receptivity, and our capacity for spiritual experience. He is even more eager than we are for us to take refuge in him. In *Spiritual Perspectives* we read that “... we will only get when and what he wants us to get, but we must make the effort by doing the spiritual practice.”

Taking refuge in the Master is to remember him throughout the day, leaning inwards by means of simran to feel his presence within and by holding him foremost in our mind with absolute focus during meditation.

But what if we fail in meditation? He says: ‘Bring me your failures.’ So we bring him our failures and take his refuge.

And we take refuge in the dharma, which in our case is the teachings, the Sant Mat way of life. We take refuge in the dharma by adhering to the principles of our path.

The teachings of the Saints are simple. There is one Creator or Lord. The way to find the Lord is within our own bodies. We need a true Master to show us the technique of meditation that will connect us to the Shabd. Spiritual practice must become an integral part of our life – it is

meditation that fosters our faith. To take refuge in the teachings means we must uphold the four principles which we have promised to obey, the most important of which is daily practice of meditation.

The sole purpose of this path is to return to our true spiritual home. Meditation is our redeemer. Ultimately, this is our refuge from the dangers within ourselves: the depredations caused through superfluous thinking. In time and with his grace, we comprehend: the less I am, the more he is. And we take refuge in him.

When we take refuge in the third jewel, the sangat, we receive strength and encouragement to persevere with our practice through being in the company of like-minded people. Doing seva along with each other we build an atmosphere of love, harmony and remembrance of the Master and the Lord. Seva is an opportunity to consider the divine in each of us. This is how the Master sees us. He never exposes our faults and shortcomings. The sangat is a community in which we can all take refuge by treating each other with love tolerance and forgiveness.

Our helmsman awaits us – his compass is truth. We have been lifted aboard his ship of Shabd, our karmas safely stored in the hold. The wind is high and the tide is right. Let's take refuge with him – our destination, home!



The True Purpose of Seva

The subject of seva is not new to seekers on the path of Sant Mat. Many seekers are fortunate to enjoy the great privilege and opportunity to do seva. Most of us will also be aware of the four types of seva – with the body, wealth, mind and soul. Seva with the body and wealth is usually tangible. However, seva with the mind and soul is less visible and may consequently be neglected.

When we do seva with the body or wealth we tend to apply the principles used by us in the world, at work and in business. So, invariably, we are guided by the principles of executing the task within the shortest possible time, with the greatest efficiency, at the least cost, with great speed and the usual competitive spirit – so common in the world and business environment. Although these principles all seem important and appropriate for any task, there is often the risk that these take precedence over the principles of seva.

Seva isn't purely about the execution of a task. It is really about principles such as love, humility, harmony, selfless service and brotherhood. These lofty principles can so easily be overlooked in favour of simply getting the job done. The task at hand must be seen as only the means to the end, which is love and humility. In *Spiritual Heritage*, Maharaj Charan Singh said, in relation to seva with the body:

Seva we do to eliminate our ego, not to inflate our ego. If the attitude of authority comes into seva, if we think that by doing seva we have become a boss over others, then we are inflating our ego and it is having the reverse effect. That is not seva. But if we are doing seva for the benefit of another person, then there is humility in it. There should be humility in seva, an attitude of serving. Service, real seva, means to please another person, not to please yourself.

Maharaj Ji makes it clear that seva is not merely the execution and accomplishment of a particular task. It is more about eliminating the ego. We must therefore realize that the task at hand is only the means to an end and not the end in itself.

Clearly, the purpose of seva is to eliminate the ego. This means that we have to remove the self in order to make our seva selfless. So, how is this accomplished practically? The critical ingredients include: an attitude of serving or benefiting others; pleasing others; eliminating any authoritarian approach, not bossing others, maintaining humility, and most importantly, forgetting about one's own self-interest, and personal agenda.

Seva with body and wealth is only a means to an end because we want to develop humility and subdue the mind in order to do seva with the mind and soul. We know that the mind is an extremely powerful instrument and we therefore need to bring it under our control. So, how do we use the mind in selfless service?

If we use the mind to think wholesome and pure thoughts it will yield wholesome and pure words and actions leading to kindness, compassion, consideration, generosity and love. In addition to making us better human beings it will create the right atmosphere for meditation.

The mind can also best serve us by satisfying the intellect, developing conviction with respect to the path, which will lead to faith and then practice. Seva with the mind is also achieved by reading Sant Mat books, attending satsangs and discriminating between what takes us towards or away from our goal.

These three sevas – body, wealth and mind – are all means for seva of the soul, which is the most important seva and is the crux of Sant Mat. Seva with the soul can only be done by meditation as taught by the Masters. This seva will help us develop love for the Master and the Lord. As Maharaj Charan Singh advised us:

The best way to develop love for the Master is to devote your time to simran and bhajan. The more time you spend in the spiritual exercises with faith, love, and humility, the greater will be your love for the Master and God.

Quest for Light

We know meditation is focusing all our attention at a single point so that our soul current is drawn inwards, which enables us to tune into the Divine Melody or Shabd within and ultimately merge with it. To achieve

this focus, the Masters teach us to use the thinking and visualization attributes of our mind. Meditation capitalizes on these attributes to bring the mind under control by controlling our thoughts.

Channeling and focusing our attention at the eye center is only a means to the final goal of listening to the Sound Current that reverberates within every one of us. By attending to this melodious current, the soul is transported inwards and upwards, as it enjoys the peace, bliss and tranquillity of the inner regions.

Eventually the mind is taken back to its home – the region of universal mind known as Trikuti – while the soul continues onwards, ultimately merging with the Shabd to become one with it. Throughout the meditation practice and the journey within, the Shabd Master is always with the disciple, forever guiding and protecting him.

In *Light on Sant Mat*, Maharaj Charan Singh said:

Real Love is engendered and fostered only when you go in, come in contact with Shabd and have a glimpse of the Master inside. In addition to bhajan and simran, the best way to engender this love is to read Sant Mat literature, associate with devoted satsangis who go in and are in touch with Shabd, render selfless service to satsang (that is, without any desire or expectation), have the company of and association with a living Master whenever possible, and last but not least, do intensive simran – repetition of the five Holy Names.

The importance of our meditation can never be overstated. The Masters reiterate this repeatedly as they draw our attention to this, our most essential practice. In fact, in the book *A Wake Up Call*, Maharaj Charan Singh is quoted as saying:

My only advice is that whatever we may do and in whatever circumstances we may live, our meditation should be our main concern, and this should never be sacrificed to anything of this life.



The Supremacy of Karma

Science tells us that, on average, a person at rest takes about 16 breaths per minute. This means we breathe about 960 breaths an hour – 23,040 breaths a day and more than 8 million breaths a year.

Fortunately for us, breathing happens automatically and requires no effort on our part. Karma works much the same way as breathing. It is continuous, consistent and happens automatically – in spite of us, whatever we think, believe or expect.

Our understanding of karma is limited to the concept of ‘action and reaction.’ We have absolutely no comprehension of the intricacies that play out from moment to moment in our lives.

The entire philosophy of Sant Mat is about the evolution of the soul as it travels through the creation, adopting countless numbers of varying forms on its return journey to its true home. It is the soul and this journey in which the Master is interested, not our individual identity.

When each body and personality have served their function the soul releases them. They come to an end, but the soul does not. It returns to higher levels of consciousness based on its evolution. Life after life, though, the soul has been confined to the earth through the bonds of karma. The Master’s task is to release the soul from its bondage to time and return it to the timelessness of eternity.

In *One Being One* we read:

Mind and spirit give rise to bodies. That’s a fundamental principle. Of course, that leaves open the question not only of how life got started, but of how the physical universe itself got going. And that’s the final fundamental mystery to consider.

The earth’s history can be read in rocks in its crust, and from this scientists estimate the earth to be approximately four to five billion years old. Imagine how many lifetimes that could mean for a soul – it’s a very long time to be collecting karma.

During its peak consumption period a blue whale can eat up to eight thousand pounds of tiny krill. Imagine how many little krill are necessary to feed just *one* blue whale – one sea creature in an ocean teeming with

life. One hundred million tons of marine fish are harvested annually. And automatically, appropriate karmas are assigned to all the life forms involved. From the fish swimming in the ocean to the people who eat them – no one and nothing is missed, not a single person escapes. The law of karma is supreme.

The earth teems with microscopic and tiny creatures that are the start of the food chain for ever bigger animals. In *The Path of the Masters* the author writes:

I look out upon my garden vegetables, fruits and flowers. In that garden are thousands of precious souls kindred to myself, struggling by means of their tiny sparks of intelligence, striving always toward the light, each one slowly rising to something a little higher than itself. They are all ascending the scale of evolution. This phenomenon emphasizes the common brotherhood, the fundamental kinship, between all living beings, including animals.

All these life forms, from the smallest to the largest, exist only because their essence is Shabd – with each soul slowly working through myriad forms of life in an attempt to finally merge again into the oneness of Shabd. Rumi is quoted in *With the Three Masters* as saying, “First I was rotated in the plant kingdom, then in the animal and was finally born as man.”

In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. I, Maharaj Charan Singh is asked whether animals are creating karma or simply paying off karma. He clarifies this saying:

Everybody is creating karma or paying off karma. But since discrimination is not there in animals, they are not much responsible for all that. ... They are creating also, but they are not held responsible so much because the sense of discrimination is not there.

But while animals and the lower species may not be held fully responsible for their karmas, these impressions have been lodged in their minds, where they are accumulated and carried forward from life to life – even to the human form. These impressions can become active in any future life.

Maharaj Charan Singh explains in the same book: “Sanskaras are deep impressions on the mind; karmas are actual actions that we have done.” And he clarifies this further by saying in *Light on Sant Mat*: “It is not the things themselves but the reaction which they produce upon us which really matters.”

In an animal, impressions are be largely instinctive; however, as the soul moves up the ladder of evolution the level of consciousness increases and the impressions retained become progressively more binding. Life feeds off life, irrespective of the pain and distress caused by the hunter to the hunted. At the lower levels of consciousness in the animal world, the hunter is oblivious to the pain it causes, because hunting is an instinctive requirement for survival. Its success overrules everything.

Nature really is brutal in its application and follows the law of ‘survival of the fittest’. In this regard Great Master says:

Nature is very relentless and strict. Bodies and forms do not make any difference to her. She looks only to the desire that is imprinted on the antahkaran (conscience) and which remains the same whichever kind of body one goes to.

Call of the Great Master

From the first movement we took on planet Earth, karma has been tracking and manipulating us. Our lives are governed by the processes of karma; it is the fabric within which we exist, and yet we have no understanding of it.

The law of karma is complex, intricate and multidimensional. It is a process that works on multiple levels of life and death, extending to the upper levels of Trikuti. Whether we accept it or reject it, is irrelevant. Either way, it encompasses everything we do and its supremacy is far beyond our human understanding. It behoves us therefore to make every effort to escape its clutches by following the path in accordance with our master’s teachings, thus passing beyond the grasp of karmas and attachments and entering into the realm of pure spirit.



BOOK REVIEW

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The name Gurdas means “servant of the Guru.” In the Sikh tradition Bhai Gurdas is a beloved figure, considered to be a model disciple and sevadar. He was initiated by Guru Amar Das, the third Sikh Guru. After the death of his own guru, Bhai Gurdas went on to serve the fourth, fifth and sixth gurus: Guru Ram Das, Guru Arjan Dev, and Guru Hargobind Singh. The author writes:

Sitting at their feet, he witnessed the way of life of these great Masters who were real-life examples. With faith and devotion, he listened attentively to every word of their teachings, which were worthy of being written in golden letters. With every breath Bhai Gurdas practiced the path they prescribed.... The spiritual guidance we get from the brilliant poetry of such a knowledgeable and devoted person as Bhai Gurdas has no comparison.

The consensus of historians is that Bhai Gurdas was born in 1551 CE, most likely in Goindwal in the Tarn Taran district of the Punjab. Goindwal was a spiritual centre that attracted disciples of Guru Amar Das as well as followers of other spiritual paths. Scholars too were attracted to Goindwal for the intellectual exploration of various religions that took place there. Consequently, Bhai Gurdas became well versed not only in the teachings of the Sikh Gurus but also in the teachings of other religions. He became proficient in Sanskrit and Persian as well as Hindi and Punjabi.

It was Bhai Gurdas who transcribed the Adi Granth as it was dictated by the fifth guru Guru Arjan Dev. The author points out how the Adi Granth is rich in esoteric meaning but not always easily understood by the ordinary disciple. Bhai Gurdas wrote explanations and gave discourses that aided followers in understanding it. He wrote poems and songs in simple language, often using everyday examples to bring home the Gurus’ message:

*By uttering the word 'sandalwood'
the air doesn't become fragrant;
by repeating the word 'moon'
its light does not appear.
So, too, merely talking about spiritual wisdom
doesn't mean that one is following a pure life –
only by actions does the Light manifest
in the inner sky.*

Many of Bhai Gurdas's poems focus on the qualities of the ideal disciple. The author summarizes some of the main themes of these poems:

The disciples' words are full of sweetness; free of ego and filled with humility, they never hurt anyone's feelings. They support themselves and their families with hard, honest work and provide for others in need. No matter how rich or how high their worldly status may be, they don't boast of their successes or misuse their influence. In the company of the holy ones, their minds become ingrained with the Guru's teachings and their hearts are cheerful in their love for the Guru. They desire no worldly reward in exchange for their good deeds.

Bhai Gurdas explains how the deeds of a true disciple are constrained by fear of offending his beloved Lord:

*The self-restraint of the disciple
lies in having no fear of the world –
but always living in fear of the Lord.*

A key characteristic of a true disciple is benevolence, or good will towards all, constantly prevailing regardless of circumstances.

*Whether hot or cold, water's purpose
is always to benefit others.
Even when hot, water extinguishes fire;
it then takes no time to cool.
This too is a hallmark of the Guru's disciple.*

Gradually the disciple acquires the virtues of the Guru himself:

*When a disciple follows the Guru's teaching
he imbibes his qualities – then there is no
difference between Guru and disciple.*

But even a model disciple like Bhai Gurdas may fall short of the ideal of humility and utter reliance on the Guru. Once, during the time of the sixth guru, Guru Hargobind Singh, Bhai Gurdas stated that if a disciple were tested by the Master, his faith should remain unshakeable. The Guru recognized the note of overconfidence in this statement and decided to test him. The story of this test is related in detail in *Tales of the Mystic East* under the title “The Guru’s Thief.” Severely failing the test, it took years before Bhai Gurdas was once again able to face his Guru. Then he wrote:

*Rare is the disciple whose trust remains unshaken
when the Guru tests him....
If tested by the Guru,
the disciple will succeed only by his grace.*

In another poem, Bhai Gurdas gave a glimpse of his humility:

*Hearing that you are the lover of devotees,
my heart fills with despair,
but hearing that you purify and redeem even the sinners,
hope arises in my heart.
Hearing that you are all-knowing,
in fear my heart fills with dread,
but hearing that you are all-merciful,
all my fears and doubts disappear...

With my efforts alone I won't find
a place, even in hell,
but I take refuge in you,
as you always uphold your honour.*

Bhai Gurdas remained in the service of Guru Hargobind Singh for the rest of his life. When he died at the age of eighty-five in 1636, the Guru lovingly lit the funeral pyre himself.

