

August 2011

Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

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Spiritual Link

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I Have Come

*I have come to drag you out of yourself
and take you in my heart.
I have come to bring out the beauty
you never knew you had
and lift you like a prayer to the sky.
If no one can recognize you, I do
because you are my life and soul.
Don't run away, accept your wounds and
let bravery be your shield.
It takes a thousand stages
for the perfect being to evolve.
Every step of the way I will walk with you
and never leave you stranded.
Be patient, do not open the lid too soon.
Simmer away until you are ready.
In this game I make the rules.
I roll you like a ball and chase you
when I choose.*

Rumi, Hidden Music¹

Translated by Mafi and Kolin

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A Master's Love for a Master

Each one of us has it within to reach the same level of spiritual attainment as the Master. This is the reason that he initiates disciples: to realize within ourselves the divine perfection that is God.

No one comes to God without going through the Master. We come in human form and we are taught by the Master or Guru in human form. That is the will of God. Every single Master that has come on to the earth in human form has had to find a Master in human form in order to travel the inner journey back to God.

The love that the Masters have for their own Masters is indescribable. Still, we have books full of love songs, poems and stories written to express the depth of their adoration, gratitude and respect.

The woman saint Mira was born in 1498, the grand-daughter of the ruling prince of Merta in Rajasthan. Her Master was the low-caste cobbler Guru Ravidas and she followed his path of divine love with unflinching dedication, in spite of public censure, persecution by her family and even attempts on her life.

Mira repeatedly pointed out the necessity of a Guru in order to realize the Lord. The Guru, she said, is the doorman to the gates of salvation: he alone holds the key to open the door. With the key of divine love he opens the lock and flings wide the portal of liberation for the soul to enter. "Without meeting the Lord I cannot live," she says. "But without the Master He cannot be realized."

In her prayer to her Master she says:

*Pray come, O Master, illumined and wise;
A glimpse of your face has enchanted me.*

*When you come my way, inquire for the one
Who, pining for you, is frenzied with pain.
Day and night I have no peace or respite,
And I writhe like a fish out of water.
Save for your darshan nothing can soothe me;
In constant anguish I am nearing my end.*

Mira, The Divine Lover

The lovers of the Lord tell us that there is no human love that can compare with the experience of divine love. We have only the merest glimpse when we compare our love for each other and the divine love that the Masters write about. Ours is worldly love. But the love of the Masters is constant and never-failing.

Mira describes the pain of separation from her Master as the writhing of a fish out of water – nothing can soothe this terrible agony except the darshan of her Master. One might think that Mira is being dramatic, but it seems the greater the love, the more the pain of being denied the darshan of the beloved.

In his poem “The Malady”, Saint Paltu speaks through the voice of a girl who has fallen in love and is disclosing her secret to her mother. Knowing that many will be able to identify with this powerful emotion, he draws the listener to his own condition as he talks about his own malady:

*I have lost my heart, O Mother, I feel so helpless!
I feel so restless without a glimpse of my beloved.
My life I shall lay as offering at the feet of my Lord.
This malady of mine will cost me my life, for sure.
There is but one remedy: if I could but meet my beloved.*

*I have been smitten with poignant love,
And the dart of His Name has pierced my heart.
Unconscious, I fell down, oblivious of public slander.
Who can treat me, O Paltu, except Master, the Physician?
I have lost my heart. O Mother, I am so helpless!*

Saint Paltu

The poignant love that Saint Paltu describes is very moving: having met his Master he is now sick with love for the Lord. Often in human love we are caught in the paradox that the one we love is also the one who makes us suffer, and the one who makes us sick with love is also the one who has the power to cure us. Paltu calls the Master his Physician, the only one who can cure his malady. He refers to the “dart of His Name” and uses the ancient analogy of the dart or arrow of love to describe the sweet pain that he experiences.

Every story told about how a Master met his Master is a love story. In *Heaven on Earth* Daryai Lal Kapur describes the three-year search by Baba Jaimal Singh to find a Master who could teach him about the five shabds. Alone and barely 15 years old when he left home, Baba Ji had travelled on foot to every place where there was talk of a Guru. The author describes the meeting with Soami Ji:

Baba Ji sat on the banks of the Jamuna River, deeply distressed and not knowing what to do next. He had spent almost three years in his search; he had covered thousands of miles, visited hundreds of places and met countless sadhus, yogis and holy men.... Now on the brink of discovery, his search seemed destined to fail. His heart was torn with desire to meet the Master he could not find. With tears rolling down his cheeks, in his helplessness, he prayed to the Lord.

Suddenly Baba Ji became aware of two bathers engrossed in a discussion about a holy man and the wonderful discourses he gave. Baba Ji moved closer to them and listened for a while. He asked them the name of the saint they were speaking about and where he lived. They told him that the great saint, Soami Shiv Dayal Singh, known as Soami Ji, lived in Panni Gali.... He quickly went to the house and found Soami Ji Maharaj sitting in the courtyard among his disciples, about to start satsang. The moment Baba Ji saw him, a sense of peace filled his heart and he approached and bowed respectfully at Soami Ji's feet. Soami Ji smiled and remarked: "He has arrived – my old friend!"

Baba Ji became Soami Ji's most devoted disciple, deeply immersed in meditation and unquestioningly following his Master's instructions. And in *Sar Bachan Poetry* we read Soami Ji's love poem to his own Master:

*I am in love with the form of my Master,
My heart is enraptured by his sweet words.
Ever since I embraced his feet and bathed
In the dust of those feet
The darkness of my heart has been entirely driven out.
His charming face, his elegant form
And his radiance
Have slain the devil in my heart.
The company of my Master and his words of wisdom
Have proved this world and the next to be false.
The body's inner mysteries
Have been revealed to me by my gracious Master
Who has travelled the path himself.*

The love that the Masters have for their Masters has been told in the stories of their lives and in the letters that passed between them, as well as by the Masters themselves in intimate conversation with close disciples. Books such as *Heaven on Earth*, *Treasure Beyond Measure* and *With the Three Masters* are filled with accounts of the devotion of the Masters for their Masters.

Making contact with the Master is a necessary precedent to the working of his grace. The key to the inner door is held by the perfect Master who has himself travelled through the inner regions and become one with the absolute. The key is the method of meditation that enables the seeker to go within – that is, withdraw his consciousness to the eye centre and enter the inner regions of divine bliss.

It is the Master who brings us to the path and guides our every step along the way. It is he who connects us with the divine melody within. It is he who gives us initiation and teaches us the method for meditation so that we can return home to the Lord. It is he who softens our hard and ego-driven hearts and teaches us to love him. He is there at the beginning and the end of journey. He is the faithful friend who never leaves us, who never rejects us and who never abandons us. He is the one who is worthy of our love and devotion!



When the inner eye is opened one realizes that the Master is the one before whom all should prostrate themselves. He is the life of the universe. He is Truth personified or Reality in human form. He is of the Truth and reflects the Truth. He is the top of creation. There is no one better than him. There is no one greater than him here or hereafter. Both the worlds should bow at his feet.

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

The Prince and the Gypsies

There's a well-known story that Maharaj Jagat Singh used to tell in his satsangs about the infant son of a king who is snatched from the palace by a band of roving gypsies.

The king never stops looking for his son and after many years learns where his son is living. In order to reclaim him the king disguises himself as a gypsy and enters the gypsy camp.

The prince, now a young man, has forgotten his father and his royal heritage and believes himself to be one of the gypsies. He could not imagine any other identity or way of life. So the king, understanding this, becomes a gypsy. He lives in the gypsy camp and befriends his son. As they sit round the campfire in the evenings, he begins to tell him stories of his true home and of the happiness that abounds there. Little by little the son tentatively begins to believe, and the dormant memories of his origin start to awaken within him. He begins to want to return home with his father.

But his father tells him, "The bonds and habits of this place bind you here, and I wish to take you with me as speedily as you can manage. So, in order to journey with me to this other country, there are certain things I want you to do."

And so begins the wonderful tale of how the king remains with his son through all the ups and downs and vicissitudes of life at this level, until at last the bonds of gypsy life are broken and he returns home with his father.

Have we become too complex in this absorbing modern world to understand the significance of the king who comes himself? Do we understand enough of this story to enhance our appreciation of the Master? He is not what we see. He is not who we think he is. He is

in fact an enigma for us until, after having made some headway on the journey, we see him not just as his body form but as something entirely other.

We are soul – drops of the divine ocean who find ourselves encased in bodies. Not knowing the truth of our divine origin, we believe ourselves to be the body and therefore base all our hopes and desires, our joys and aspirations, on where this body dwells – the world. But this world is not the home of the soul. It is a place where the body lives and experiences life through the mind and the senses.

Like the camp of the gypsies, this is the only home we know. What a task to convince us otherwise! How can the soul ever know otherwise unless somebody comes from its true origin to awaken it to the truth?

So, the father comes, looking like a gypsy and dressing and speaking like a gypsy. For how else would he be able to communicate with us? And then something about him and his explanations ring true for us and we begin to believe him. Our souls begin to awaken from the deep sleep in which we have been lost for so long.

Baba Ji has said that the soul is asleep in the creation. The mind, senses and passions encase it in a trance-like state. This world is really just a tourist destination, a place we came to visit, and the only way out is through the grace of God, when he sends the Master with an invitation to come home.

Where and what is the way home? Firstly, the soul must be in a human body and, secondly, it must be contacted by a perfect Master who can put the soul in touch with the Shabd. The saints tell us no one can meet the Lord except through this current of Shabd, and it is only the Satguru who can connect the soul with it. This way of emancipation is the rule laid down by God himself.

What does the perfect Master do for his disciples? Remember, it's all about getting souls, burdened with mind and karma, to become

light enough to complete the journey: our journey within ourselves to know ourselves as soul.

When we move house, look at how much we have accumulated that we have to clear out. In the same way, this journey requires that we travel light. No excess luggage. Those old human conditions: pride, anger, greed, attachment and lust – where is the room for them on the journey?

The pull of the gypsy camp is very strong and so the Master gives very specific instructions on how to live out our days in this world. These instructions are specific and define our whole lifestyle. And the focal point of our lives has to become a daily practice of meditation, aimed at lifting the attention to the eye centre.

The Master knows very well how difficult it will be for us to find our way to the eye centre. Remember, we have been in the gypsy camp all our lives. This will be no light proposition. Time and again we will fall into the old ways of thinking and behaving, and that is where satsang, reading our Sant Mat books and doing simran will all come to our aid.

With attention fully focused, we are to make our way to the door in order to walk through it and into the many and various spiritual planes that lie above our body consciousness. In his radiant form the Master waits for us at this door to guide us further on the journey. Once having met him there, we truly start on the journey within leading us to the Shabd.

The King has invited us to return to his court and we cannot resist his invitation.

The Master has put us on the path and told us how to prepare for the journey. Sooner or later we will leave this gypsy camp, having broken our bonds here, and enter the vehicle of Shabd that will take us home. He will make this possible for us through his abundant and

never-ending grace. All we have to do is continue making our feeble efforts to get up and leave.

No one is saying that the journey will be easy. We know very well how weak and feeble we are. And the Master also knows this. That's why he tells us how dependent we are on his grace. In *Die to Live* Maharaj Charan Singh tells a questioner:

Leaving all these things to one's own effort, one could never go back to the Father. The question of going back would not even arise. One would never even think about the Father. So it is not the meditation which is taking us back to the Father. It is the Father himself, through the Master, who is taking us back to the Father.

The Master is not telling us that our efforts are meaningless. What he is bringing home to us is that we should always be aware that our efforts are due to his grace.

We cannot understand how we have somehow landed in the company of a Shabd Master. What we do know – from his letters and satsangs and through personal contact with him – is that he is thoroughly and lovingly attending to the task of taking his marked souls home.



The greatest miracle of the mystics is that they change the very attitude of our life, the way of our life. They turn everything upside down in our life. That is the greatest miracle the saints come to perform in our lives.

Maharaj Charan Singh, as quoted in *Legacy of Love*

Meditation Is Non-Negotiable

Meditation practice has to be done. For us as disciples, that's non-negotiable. Why is this? Well, the spiritual life without meditation is like spending weeks collecting good soil, cleaning it, sifting it, fertilising it, watering it and then not planting the tree. The tree, if planted in such soil and if looked after, will grow strong and give much delicious fruit, but if the tree is not planted, no matter how good the soil, how can it grow?

To meditate is to live the teachings; to meditate is to move closer and closer to the Master; to meditate is to plant the tree in the ground. The four principles are like cables that lead to the “power station”, but it is only the practice of meditation which actually switches the power on. There is not a Sant Mat book, not a satsang, not a spiritual question answered by the Master, where this point is not made clear, one way or another.

So why does the Master constantly tell us that meditation practice is non-negotiable? Let us take a different approach for a moment. Everyone has a date with death. This statement may seem a little harsh, but seventy or eighty years from now, how many of us will still be in the physical body? So where will we be and what will have happened to us? What about our families, our beloved pets, our houses, our possessions – everything that is so important to us now?

Perhaps even something else that we don't like to hear will have happened. The Master who guides us today will not be in the physical body. That exquisite form will be gone. Maybe there will be another exquisite form, or maybe there will not. And even more scary is the possibility that all the words that we hear

from the Master himself, over and over, begging us to wake up and prioritise our lives, are forgotten within a few minutes of us hearing or reading them as we step right back into the world, living our lives as if death will not visit us.

In the true tradition of the great mystics, the fifteenth-century saint Kabir was not concerned with life after death, but with the conquest of immortality within this fragile body. He tells us that, while still in this body – this “bag of skin” – we can fathom the mystery of life and death, and the secret that lies hidden within man at that unknown depth where death finds no place.

Death is a topic that is generally not discussed openly and candidly. After all, we think, it is something that happens to others. And if it is something that we do have to face, then it must be far off in the future – certainly something that we do not need to consider now.

Yet Great Master tells us that death is a time of much anxiety if we have not done our meditation practice. He says that at death the suffering is acute and only if one has learnt to die daily can one withstand this pain.

So when our date with death arrives, it is going to be very tough and difficult to deal with unless we have experienced dying whilst still living – through meditation practice. Perhaps we fail to grasp and to understand just how very serious Baba Ji is when he tells us that it is a matter of the utmost urgency that we make sincere and persistent effort to do our meditation practice.

Whatever is worth doing is worth doing now – not tomorrow, not the day after, but now, from this moment onwards. If we do not do it today, what guarantee is there that

we will be able to do it tomorrow? If there is one thing that we should be aware of it is that we should indelibly engrave on our consciousness that our meditation practice is totally and absolutely non-negotiable in our lives, irrespective of our circumstances.

Each and every one of us has our own individual destiny to go through in this life. It is the nature of this world that there must be ups and downs in all our lives. If we are to face these with equanimity and dignity, keep our balance and fulfil our worldly responsibilities to the best of our ability, then, as Baba Ji has so emphatically told us, it is our meditation practice – the doing, the effort, not the talking – that counts. Without our meditation practice becoming the central core of our lives, we cannot hope to make the inner journey.

Most of us who have been initiated into Sant Mat believe intellectually and even instinctively that what the Masters teach us is true. Why is it then that we have great difficulty converting this understanding into a reality and making the teachings and particularly the meditation practice part of the core fabric of our daily lives? Is it that we don't take the teachings seriously – allocating them to just a segment of our lives – or is it that we find it difficult, maybe impossible, to register the reality that we actually have precious little time left in this human body that we now occupy?

Living the teachings is not the same as belonging to a club or going to a church, temple, synagogue or gurdwara for a few hours and then forgetting about what we have heard. For us, following the teachings of Sant Mat is a 24-hour-a-day path – every day until we die!

Baba Ji has often said that even if we keep our promise to do two and a half hours of meditation every single day of our life, but we are in the world for the remaining 21 and a half hours, we can hardly expect to tilt our life towards the spiritual. If we casually meander along God's private pathway, we will neither enjoy the company of the world nor share the company of the Lord. A real disciple is always, at every moment, either doing simran – the repetition of the words, or dhyan – beholding the inner form of the Master, or listening to the inner sound, our bhajan.

Baba Ji has also often told us that our way of life and particularly our meditation practice must become a normal and natural part of our lives, just as breathing, eating, sleeping and other activities have become integral parts of our lives. Easier said than done! But how do we make these simple, clear teachings part of our everyday lives while living in the world and fulfilling our responsibilities?

Maharaj Charan Singh puts this into perspective by telling us to make our meditation a habit. He says:

Habits are easily formed and soon become part of our daily routine, and then if we neglect them, we start missing those things. Similarly, by giving the same time every day, this meditation will become part of our daily routine.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Thus Saith the Master*

We have to take our meditation practice seriously and understand once and for all that it is non-negotiable, for we cannot have both the world and God. As Kabir put it, two swords cannot fit into one scabbard.

The world is not in love with satsangis. Almost everything in the world is designed to pull us right out, to pull us away from the teachings, to pull us off the path. This world is doing its job extremely well. It does not want us to leave this creation. So unless we start to take our meditation practice seriously, we will come back to this creation.

Again, Hazur Maharaj Ji has told us that meditation is the first thing and that everything else is secondary to that, for without meditation practice we will always remain scattered in the world and the mind will always remain busy with worldly matters.

If we do not develop clarity of thinking through our meditation practice; if we do not acknowledge what is truly valuable to us in this life; and if we do not actively rearrange our priorities to reflect this, then we cannot complain when we are knocked off-balance when faced with problems or crises. The events of our lives may force us to make difficult decisions in difficult circumstances, in a difficult, dangerous and uncertain world, and we need to do this with the tranquillity, calmness, stability and clarity of vision and understanding that dedicated meditation practice brings.

Our physical bodies are so weak and fragile that it is vital to look beyond the body to find the real purpose of life. Everyone knows that nothing from this world has ever accompanied a person beyond death. Would it not be terribly sad if, when death comes, we see that we have been deluded, and that what we thought was real was in fact just a shadow of reality? How utterly awful it will be if, having been initiated into the mystic path, we then sacrifice our spiritual practice to gain perishable rewards during the journey of our lives, and we die with great regret and remorse instead of ecstatic joy and happiness.

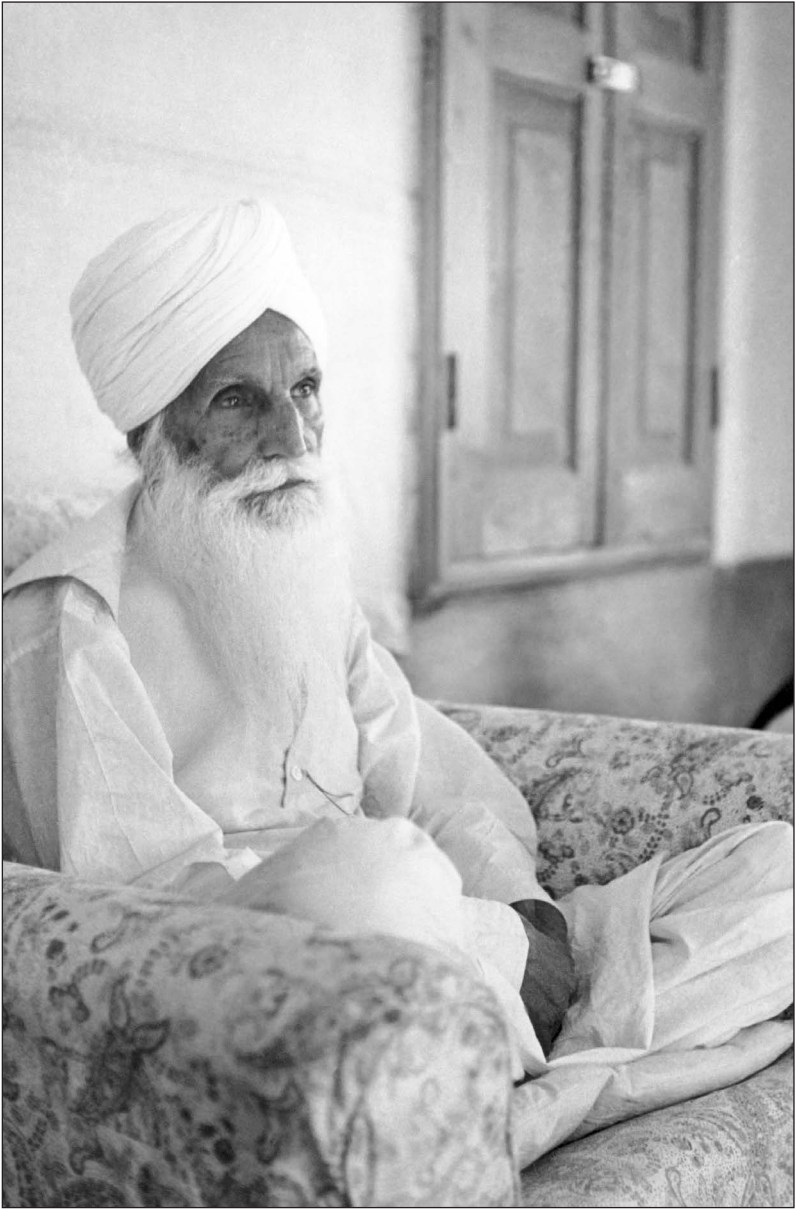
With great courage and determination we must keep the promise made at the time of our initiation to regard our meditation practice as non-negotiable. We have a rare and unique opportunity here. Human birth and contact with a perfect living saint are not exactly an everyday occurrence. Are we using this opportunity? We ask the Master for the wealth of Nam, to initiate us onto the mystic path. He gives it to us for the asking. It is priceless, and yet we so often do not appreciate its value. We don't treasure it. Instead, we barter it for all the shiny short-lived trinkets of this world.

But by ensuring that our meditation practice is absolutely non-negotiable, we will live such a life that, while others weep and wail, we will depart this physical world laughing and full of joy.



One does not become a satsangi simply by being initiated. One must mould his life in accordance with the principles of satsang. Every thought, speech and action must conform to them. Actions speak louder than words. Thoughts are even more potent. A satsangi's daily conduct must bear the hallmark of excellence and must reveal that he is the follower of a true Master.

Maharaj Jagat Singh, *The Science of the Soul*



Maharaj Sawan Singh

'You Must Name His Name!'

In Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* the rough-and-ready working men of Athens have been greatly honoured: they are to perform a play in celebration of a wedding, which is to be performed for the aristocracy of the city.

Their major concern, once they start their rehearsals, is that they, as working men, must not upset or offend the highly refined and aristocratic members of their audience. Their biggest problem is that there is a lion in their play which, they are afraid, is something "which the ladies will not abide". They consider various ways of reassuring their audience: Should they have a prologue to explain that the lion in their play is not a real lion? Or should they have the actor's face visible through his lion's mask? But Bottom, the weaver, solves their problem brilliantly. "Nay," he says, "you must name his name! ... Tell them plainly that he is not a lion, but Snug, the joiner!"

As satsangis on the path of God-realization, we need to perform a similar "naming of his name" – but with the difference that doing it once only will not do. Our "naming of his name" must happen continuously and unceasingly. There must be uninterrupted clarity in our minds about the identity of the Lion in our lives, the Master.

The theme of clear identity is an important one in our lives as satsangis. When, with our simran, we continuously "name his name" during the course of the day, we are maintaining his identity and his presence in our lives. We should similarly be naming the name of whatever it is that we are busy with during the day. We must always know what we are doing, what we are on about. We must be absolutely clear about the good things and the bad things as they exist around us.

It is only when we name their name that we clearly recognize identities – and can respond suitably.

When, as they say, you are picking over the garbage dumps of the world, you must know what it is that you are doing. You must name its name. You must say to yourself, “These are garbage dumps which I am picking over!” When you are bending down in a garbage dump, you must not think that you are reaching out for the portals of Sach Khand. Your mind is a deliberate and stubborn entity, and there are millions and millions of lifetimes of garbage-picking deeply ingrained into it. To change its orientation will require years and years of very accurately naming the name.

Bhajan requires even greater clarity from us. We must be perfectly clear about exactly what it is that we are trying to achieve. Bhajan is about “catching” the Shabd, and about holding on to whatever we catch for as long and as tightly as we can. It is listening to his Name. It is the goal and purpose of our being satsangis. It is a holy thing, a holy Name, and all our focus and all our attention must be aimed at “catching” it.

We as satsangis share an important characteristic with Bottom and his actor friends: we are as serious about our path as they are about their play. We both see ourselves as playing for very high stakes indeed. Our Master has initiated us, and in doing so he gave us an important role in his own play. What he wants from us, no doubt, is that we take our role seriously – as seriously as do Bottom and his friends – and that we practise hard, and focus as hard as they do on pleasing their exalted audience. In our case, we also have an exalted audience – of One!



I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine.

Bible, Isaiah 43:1

Knowledge and Knowing

The path becomes an experienced truth when you begin to walk it. Nothing short of that has any reality.

Priests and politicians recite principles and practices. The intellectual types build argumentative mazes. But the theory, the principles and the instructions are not the path. It's not possible for the mind or the intellect to know God. Maharaj Sawan Singh tells us we can find true spiritual knowledge only by transcending our intellectual knowledge (*Philosophy of the Masters, Vol. I*).

Knowledge and knowing are quite different. An expanding intellectual grasp is a world away from the sureness of a deepening conscious experience. Ignorance of this makes the door to consciousness invisible. Obscuring concepts and intellectualizations hide it. The door to consciousness is an impenetrable mythical barrier to people for whom knowledge is the highest reality. Yet it is there and swings open easily. This is achieved by spiritual practice, by taking the attention out of the mind.

Many dream of opening the inner door. It is the rare person who does it. The need for spiritual practice is missed because the difference between knowledge and knowing is elusively subtle before it becomes glaringly obvious. A comparison makes it simple to uncover the difference.

The fantastic projections of science fiction a few decades ago are now so ordinary and mundane. A momentary hiccup in an almost miraculously instant transglobal multiperson video-conference is cause for complaint. Full-colour pictures seen on satellite television of other galaxies hundreds of thousands of light years away are only mildly interesting.

All this technology is the result of understanding and mastering some aspect of physical law. This is perceived by our mind-centred culture as an expansion of man's consciousness. But is it?

A long time ago, like many people, I grew up in the practical world of an old-style farm. In the naturally lit, dim interior our communication technology was a wooden-cased telephone sharing a common line with all the other farms. It was only used when necessary. With a turn of the crank handle generator all the phones on the line rang. Two long rings and a short one was the ring code of our two-digit phone number.

The other technological marvel, a shortwave valve radio in the living room, required such dedication to make head or tail of its static crackles that no one really bothered with it. The real world that required attention existed outside the mesh-screened back door. Farming was practised – not discussed or theorized about. Plants grew and produced and died. Animals were born, grew, reproduced and died. People too. The cycle of life was the reality. Even to children.

The “facts of life” informative talks usually given to suburban adolescent kids were just the realities of life to us. It was the whole cycle of life. Conception, birth, life and especially the reality of death. It was not an intellectual knowledge but a knowing arrived at from experience.

Experience is the fruit of practice. Nowadays the farmhouse back door has been replaced with a vast, conceptual, non-reality instant experience in our digital screen world. And 5.6 million references to whatever can be found in 0.23 seconds, giving an experience of reality to anything your mind drifts into.

We can so structure our inquiry that nothing contrary to our preconceived perception appears. Join the worldwide congregation of whatever you wish to believe in. Nowadays our conditioning no longer needs experiential proof. Conceptual experience has taken its place.

This becomes the depth of experienced reality. People occupy a world of projected and grasped concepts. This is “knowledge”. It does not open doors.

The Master says a concept is just a concept until it is experienced. You “know” by experiencing. There is conceptual Sant Mat and there is practised Sant Mat. To how many satsangis is Sant Mat more than a concept? How much experience of Sant Mat do we have?

Many people experience the concept in an emotional way and translate that experience to themselves as experiential proof. This is the “proof” of many people following a ritualised, book-based, conceptual, speculative belief system.

Concepts are constructed out of calculated and projected thought. Neither is possible in the absolute here and now. The here and now is experienced when you bring your entire attention into the moment. It is in the here and now that the whole path will unfold for you. Sant Mat is entirely a here and now experience. Keep checking on the whereabouts of your attention. It is so easy to get lost in explanations.

All through the ages the Masters have had to explain something beyond the explainable. To do this they have used what the people they are speaking to can grasp. They have explained using analogies, anecdotes and metaphors. If you try to understand them with sympathy you will attain an understanding. If you take them as literal you will miss the point. And just see the pointing finger.

The pointing finger is so often later mistaken for the truth itself. It is revered, temples are built for it, books are written about it and wars fought over it. Man’s attention and his life are held captive by a thought form. The reality lies in the experience. The experience lies in the practice.

Vegetarianism as a concept would serve no practical purpose. As a practice it has positive results. So, too, sobriety and morality. Practised

together they provide an environment that spirituality can take root in. Practiced spirituality is a method or exercise by which the consciousness is applied to getting into complete harmony with the life force.

In the vastness of possible experiences, sifting the real method from the mimicked real is an intellectual impossibility on your own. A living guide who has traversed the path from beginning to end is essential.

The default guide for the masses throughout history has been a traditional authority who points out an uncertain path informed by limited and conditioned thought. The books or scriptures by now-dead authors that guide these authorities are subjected to all sorts of intellectual interpretations, which are often based on the agendas of the interpreters. Consequently the unverifiable path of the masses is lit by second-hand, speculative and sometimes imagined knowledge. Their faith is maintained by blindly and unquestioningly holding to a speculative belief system.

As the Great Master advised us, “Transcend intellectual knowledge.” Knowledge based on concept and passed along a path of speculation and guided by conditioned thought instead of tangible experience tends to mutate. Knowing as opposed to knowledge is based on experience with repeatable consistency. It is reliable. It is the result of conscious experience.

The Masters know. They teach from experience. They point out where to go and what to do, based on their own experience. Their experience results from following the instruction of their own living Master. This is the same instruction as guided their Masters. They have verified it from experience. Our salvation lies in following the instruction of an experienced, perfect living Master. To waver is fatal.

The Master has warned us that we are on a knife-edge of becoming a religion if we don't focus on making the path a reality.

Conceptualization, speculation, interpretation, too much book-based conviction, and a bit of ritual are the harbingers of religion.

Truth and purity blossom into the most beautiful inner flower, but their beginning is rather dull compared to more exciting and colourful but unverified suppositions. But spiritual practice as revealed by a living Master is going to give you that wonderful inner experience.

Practice starts with becoming a decent human being – a sober and moral vegetarian at least. Then, initiation by a perfect living Master. Then, simran.

The value of simran cannot be overstated. It is the foundation of the whole system. Simran, standing humbly and inconspicuously covered in its seemingly boring and plain exterior, has the sweetest character – and the most awesome power. Simran awakens one to super-consciousness. Simran bestows concentration. It is concentration that takes us inward to the astral, the causal and beyond. Simran gathers the energy resulting in concentration. Concentration leads to the Radiant Form of the Master. Contemplation on the Radiant Form enables the attention to stay there. And the divine melody is heard. The life force becomes an experienced reality.

This inner journey is not speculation or concept or a patch of sand to bury your head in. It is to be experienced consciously. If you are experiencing difficulties, load the genuine Sant Mat program. Do it consciously, before you find the sign on your screen that says “fatal error encountered, the system will now shut down and reboot”.

All that matters in the end is your meditation. You don't need a concept to follow. You don't need anything in the mind. Sant Mat is real. Meditation is the way.

The mind is for interacting with this outside world. It is your tool. Use it. But when its job is done, put it back on the shelf and return to remembrance. The results are obtained quickly, the Great Master assures us, if the instructions are followed with love and faith.

The Creative Word

The creative Word is light and sound, which can be experienced within ourselves, not with material eyes and ears, of course, but with their spiritual counterparts. The divine light of the Word can be seen within ourselves, and the vibrations of the Word can be heard as the sweetest and most compelling music.

This is our salvation. Meditation ... is only a preparation. To withdraw all consciousness from the body, and to focus the attention in the forehead is only coming to the railway station. We have yet to board the transport that will take us to our destination. That transport is the creative Music, and we board it simply by listening to its enchanting melody.

Some of the world's greatest composers and musicians may have heard this Music within themselves. But try as they might, they could never capture, in the music of this world, its heart-rending beauty, its wonderful innate harmonies, and its consciousness-bestowing qualities.

This cosmic Music is the Axis of Being, the Axis of Love, the creative centre of the universe. It never stops. If it did, the universe would cease to be. It is the natural link between the One Being and the little beings who feel themselves to be separated. It is a blissful ladder to the One, a column of glory leading to the Eternal, an ascending stairway to the Infinite.

There is no higher kind of meditation than listening to this celestial symphony. It leads beyond all bodies, minds, birth, death, and everything else in created form.

John Davidson, *One Being One*



Maharaj Charan Singh

An Irresistible Force

Maharaj Charan Singh once revealed that if disciples feel true longing for their Master, this is something that he cannot resist. He proved this while on tour in the hills of northern India.

During one of his satsang programmes in Mandi in Himachal Pradesh, there was an interval of two days between the official engagements that enabled Maharaj Ji to make an overnight trip to Manali, a hill station renowned for its beauty. On leaving the Mandi circuit house in the early morning, Maharaj Ji instructed the driver to turn left – the opposite direction to Manali. His host pointed out the mistake but Maharaj Ji insisted. Again the host, thinking that Maharaj Ji was under some misapprehension about the roads and the route, said that turning left would take them towards Pathankot and not Manali. Maharaj Ji insisted.

Not far down the road, they came to the Mandi satsang ghar, where Maharaj Ji immediately got down from the car, climbed a few steps leading into the building, and entered a small room where two sevadars were seated on the floor with their heads bowed, eyes closed. Both men were physically disabled. Both had missed satsang the previous day due to the seva they had been given. Now with all the excitement of the first satsang over, they were experiencing a sense of loss that they, too, had not heard Maharaj Ji's words and had not enjoyed the sweetness of his darshan along with their colleagues. Maharaj Ji stood quietly before them until they opened their eyes.

One can well imagine what their state must have been when they realized who was there. After a few moments he said to his host: "All right, let's go!" And they retraced the road until they reached the turning to Manali.

Legacy of Love

The Pain of Separation

*One who has suffered the misery
Of separation from Thee, O Lord,
Alone will know the ache of my heart.
The uninjured can never know the pain
The wounded have to endure.
To him who has no eyes,
Morning is the same as evening;
A barren woman cannot know
The throes of childbirth.
Only the one parted from Thee, O Lord,
Will know the pain in my heart.*

*I feel the agony,
Although the wound
Somewhere deep within
I cannot see.
Beloved Lord, pray come,
Be my healer, make me whole.
Only the one parted from Thee, O Lord,
Will know the pain of my heart.
With whom shall I speak of my anguish?
Who can share it with me, O Kabir?
I hold the tears within my heart,
In silence I bear my agony,
For the one parted from Thee
Alone knows the pain of my heart.*

Kabir, The Weaver of God's Name

Embrace the Pain

People have long debated the subject of happiness. Is it possible to achieve real happiness in this life or not? Many people strongly believe that it is indeed possible to achieve happiness in this world.

This presupposes that there is such a thing. We don't have to go far to see evidence of unhappiness in this world. The hospitals are full of people who are sick and suffering, the prisons are full of people who have fallen foul of the law, many are stricken by poverty, and so on.

But is it actually possible to be happy? When we find ourselves less than satisfied with our lot in life what can we actually do? Generally we all do the same things. We pursue the gathering of wealth and possessions or we look for meaningful relationships and position and power. In short, we turn to the world.

But even when we are successful, sooner or later we return to feeling insecure, uneasy or unhappy with ourselves. Even when we have everything, we still feel something is lacking. Why do you suppose this is so?

The reason is that before we first incarnated here, throughout our descent from our original home, we retained a sense of connectedness with the Divine, but when we incarnated here on the material plane, the assault of the senses and the sensory experience so overwhelmed our consciousness that we turned our backs on the Lord and lost our sense of being connected to him.

Ever since then, no matter what we did, we felt lost and alone – we felt miserable. And in our ignorance we have turned to the world for consolation. But in so doing, we have bound ourselves to the faces, places and things of the world. We did not understand the principles of karma and attachment; we were driven by the dual motives of

seeking pleasure and avoiding pain. What we did not realize was the enormous price that we would have to pay for all these indulgences.

But now the Lord has seen fit to bestow his richest blessings on us. First among these is the gift of human birth. We cannot overstate what a privilege this is because, out of all the many forms into which a soul may incarnate, it is only in the human form that it may aspire to liberation. Only as a human being can the soul engage in spiritual practice and, in so doing, work its way out of the maze of mind and maya and return to the home it left so long ago.

Then we were fortunate to come into contact with a true living Master and to be receptive to his teachings. How many people live virtually on the Master's doorstep, and to them he is just another Sikh – admittedly with a large following.

Third, but by far the most important, is the inestimable blessing of the initiation that the Master has bestowed on us. This single fact has to all intents and purposes guaranteed us passage home to our beloved Father. All that we don't know is how long it is going to take.

But has anything really changed in our lives? If we wish to go home we need to rise above the duality of pleasure and pain. We need to stop being a victim of the world's agendas, reacting to every event that comes along and threatens to knock us off our perch. If we continue in this vein we will continue to be bound to the cycle of birth and death. If we want to go home, we need to stay focused on our goal.

Now here's a statement that could seem somewhat surprising: The pain that you feel inside you, until and unless you have passed beyond the portal of the third eye, is the most real thing in your whole life. This pain is not something that you should be running away from; you should be embracing it! Why? Because this pain is the pain of the soul separated from its source – the pain of the soul longing to go home to where it truly belongs. This is the pain born of true love. This is our inner truth and our reality.

But what have we been doing instead? We have been running away from this pain with all the speed our legs can manage. We have been fleeing the pain of separation within us and have been running straight into the arms of Kal, the power that governs this world. We need to turn and face this pain. This pain will take us straight to the feet of the Master within, and it is only when we merge into the Master's Radiant Form that this pain goes away and we re-establish our connection with the Divine, and in fact begin our journey back to our true home.

So when you find yourself alone in the dark of the night, don't fight back the tears. Just turn to him and let go. Understand that he is the key to your happiness; it is his grace alone that will get you home. So let the tears flow, for it is through the flood of these tears that we will end our long separation and find ourselves at the feet of our Beloved. By his will, and by the fact of our initiation, our future is the eternal bliss of union.



*The one to whom's unveiled the mystery of love
Exists no longer, but is annihilated in love.
Place before the sun a burning candle,
See how its shining disappears before those lights:
The candle exists no longer, is transfigured into Light.
There are no more signs of it; it itself becomes a Sign.*

Rumi, as rendered by Andrew Harvey
in *The Teachings of Rumi*

For God So Loved Us

The relationship between the Lord and the Master and us, his disciples, is an interesting one. In general, the dominant figure on the path is that of our Master. Yet this is ultimately a path of God-realization: a path that seeks to reunite the individual soul with its source that is God, the Father.

In fact it is quite easy to lose sight of God – the ultimate destination – given the fact that we cannot see him or relate to him directly in any way, while we can relate to the Master. There is no doubt that for most of us the Master is the crucial, pivotal figure on the path of Sant Mat. Yet our strong bond with our Master, our desperate desire to love and be loved by him, must not blind us to God's presence and role in the whole scheme of things. He is after all the Creator.

In one of the poems in *The Odes of Solomon* we find the key to discovering what our relationship with the Lord really is. The key is love, of course. But it starts with love for our Master. The poet tells us:

*I should not have known how to love the Lord
if He had not loved me.
For who is able to know love,
except he who is loved?
I love the Beloved and my soul loves him,
and where his rest is, there too am I.
And I shall be no stranger at His door,
for there is no begrudging
with the Lord Most High and Merciful.
I have been united to Him
because the lover found the Beloved.*

*And because I love him that is the Son,
I shall become a son,
For he who is joined to him who is immortal,
he, too, will become immortal.*

So we will become immortal through our love for the Master.

Most of us have heard a great deal about the Lord God but very few, if any, have actually heard him or seen him. Yet he wishes to communicate with us. But he chooses to do this through the physical embodiment of his very own Shabd form: the Master.

The Master can tell us all about God because he is a soul that has reunited with the divine source. He is in constant communication with that divine source, while simultaneously being here at this level in a human body. In this way he forms a bridge between God and man.

These souls who have realized the Lord are one with God and in fact have his powers, and they could be anywhere, doing anything they choose. Yet they remain here at this dirty level of creation out of love. It is the Master who collects souls that are lost and lonely and takes them home. Were it not for our Master's intervention in our lives, we would never even think of God, let alone find our way back to him.

This is how the seventh ode from *The Odes of Solomon* speaks of the Master:

*My joy is in the Lord, and my course is to Him:
this my path is beautiful.
For I have a helper to the Lord.
He made himself known to me,
without grudging in his generosity:
For in his kindness
he set aside his majesty.*

*He became like me,
in order that I might accept him.*

While the Master is our own personal “helper to the Lord”, he is also the embodiment of the Lord’s qualities. Loving him is both journey and destination combined in one magnificent package deal. We cannot resist loving the Master. We all have a drop of divine love in us – that is our own soul. But the Master is no drop, he is a tsunami! And who can stand against such a powerful love?

In the Bible Jesus says: “For the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I come out from God” (John 16:27).

That is the first thing God wants us to know: that he loves us and wants us to love him. The second thing is that he wants us to come home now. Many souls have begun to grow tired of this world and have started to long for a state of permanent peace and joy. These are the souls marked by the Lord for return to Sach Khand. The weariness, loneliness and longing that we feel are given to us by the Lord and they prompt us to respond favourably to the message the Master brings.

This message is quite simple. He says that he will give us initiation, teach us a technique of meditation that needs to be practised wholeheartedly, and then in time he will take us back to Sach Khand. It is the gift of initiation that will ensure our release from the cycle of birth and death in which we currently find ourselves trapped.

The Lord also wants us to understand how he can assuage those very feelings of fear and loneliness even now, if we will only turn to him for solace through meditation and constant simran. He knows we live lives of restless anxiety, depression and stress, and he longs to comfort us and give us peace. Out of his love for us he gives us access

to it now, if we will only turn to him, love him and obey him – which we can do by following, loving and obeying our Master.

At the time of initiation the Master places his radiant Shabd form within each of his disciples, and from that moment onward he never leaves us. He also explains to us that turning to the Lord for help in meditation and daily constant simran will always bring a loving response from God. However, if we don't turn to him and use the life jacket held out to us, we shouldn't be surprised to feel ourselves sinking. Nor must we blame the manufacturer of the life jacket if we begin to sink because we haven't inflated the jacket!

Everything we know about the Lord has to come from a perfect living Master. Everything the Lord wants to give us has to come via a Master. Everything God feels for us will be expressed by a Master. The Master is God's right hand and he also conveys to us how we can please the Lord and thank him for his love.

We're taught that there are two main ways in which we can please the Master and thereby please the Lord: We can follow his instructions implicitly and we can try to become more and more like him.

Obedience is not always the flavour of the month in this day and age, but it is the hallmark of a true and loving disciple. Obedience and love are two sides of the same coin. If we love someone or wish to learn to love someone, then we must be obedient to their wishes. Obedience is a part of love. There can be no true love for the Master or the Lord without true obedience.

In the Gospel of St John Jesus says: "If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him" (14:23).

There it is. To love Master is to obey – to "keep" his words. What exactly does this mean for us? Obviously it means following the vows we take at the time of initiation to the letter.

And the most appreciated gift we can give the Master, and therefore the Lord, is our meditation.

There is yet another way to try to please the Lord, although the Masters themselves are too humble to stress this at any length. However, trying to become like our Master, God's beloved Son, would surely be pleasing to the Father. If he could see us trying to emulate our Master in word and action and attitude, surely he would look upon our efforts, no matter how puny, with favour and love.

The Master is our yardstick for good behaviour in every aspect of our lives. The Masters are the embodiment of obedience, love, energy, determination, patience, humility, kindness and sympathy. Every good and positive quality known to mankind is to be found in our Master. We need look no further for our role model and guide on how to go through life. The Master does want us to become sons and daughters of God; fully realized as he himself is. He offers us the living example of such a Son and is both the example and the means if we wish to follow in his footsteps and reunite with our heavenly Father.

This path is all about our heavenly Father, about his Son our Master and about his love. It is pure love that prompts the Lord to send his beloved Son, the Master, into our lives. It is pure love that prompts the Master to initiate us, care for us for the rest of our physical lives and then escort us home to Sach Khand. It must be love that prompts us to follow and obey our Master and in so doing, learn to love both him and God, the Father.



A One-Night Dream

Scientists tell us that the creation as we know it started some twelve to fifteen billion years ago with the Big Bang. This was an explosion of an extremely dense sort of primeval atom, which sent particles of matter flying out into space. And some of these eventually coalesced to form stars and planets and constellations and galaxies. This is of course just a popular theory, and a debatable one, but it's a theory that's widely accepted.

What we do know is that everything that has come into being since that theoretical Big Bang consists of atoms – minute particles, each consisting of a nucleus made up of protons and neutrons with lots of little electrons flying round it. This is true for every single thing, whether it's the stars and the planets or the trees and the birds or our own bodies.

What we may or may not know, though, is that while everything is made of atoms and that an atom consists of a nucleus and electrons, these make up less than one percent of the volume of an atom. The rest consists of ... nothing. Empty space. Everything that seems so solid and real to us is mostly nothing – just empty space. That's what scientists have proved: that our world is not what we think. It's mostly just an illusion.

And that's something that the mystics have also been telling us for as long as they've been walking this earth with us. It's an illusion. But it's an illusion that'll keep us trapped in this material creation until we learn to see it for what it is.

In *Sar Bachan* Soami Ji warns us to make the best possible use of this human birth and free ourselves from this world of illusion:

*You have received this rare human form
and this opportunity may not come again.
The pleasures of wife, children, wealth, property
and social repute will ultimately end in pain.
Save yourself from these,
sit in the company of the Master
and seek refuge in him.
This whole play is but a one-night dream
and I have now woken you up.*

Just about all the Masters describe this world as illusion – a play, a ‘one-night dream’ as Soami Ji puts it. It’s a play or a dream in which souls only occasionally get the opportunity to play a human role. The vast majority of people don’t even realize what a privilege this is because they’re fast asleep. That is, unless they’re extremely lucky and a Master wakes them up; unless he grants them initiation and teaches them a method to gradually free them from this trap.

But even if we come into contact with a Master, still we seem to spend most of our lives caught up in the illusion. It’s what we’ve been used to for so long. We just can’t break free of it, because we think of the world as our home. And we’ve become comfortable in this trap.

The Masters describe this world as a dream, a play, in which each one of us is playing an allotted part. And they emphasize that, as in a play, our attachments here are unreal and only for the purpose of working off our karmas. We have debts to pay to some people and debts to collect from others. We have rewards to reap from good actions in the past and penalties to pay for actions that were not so good. Or rather, we have lessons to learn, to teach us the consequences of our actions.

But do we learn? Sadly, we usually do not. Maharaj Charan Singh used to tell us that if we did learn from our mistakes, we wouldn't keep making them. Most of our thoughts, words and deeds are the result of old conditioning. We find it difficult to unlearn old patterns of behaviour. And we find it difficult to loosen our hold on anything we see as necessary for our comfort. It never occurs to us that we'd be far more comfortable if we could let go of all those things that we think of as ours: my home, my children, my books, or car or whatever. And therefore we stay attached to the world.

There does come a time, though, when some souls start to feel restless in this world, when they start to feel they don't belong here. This restlessness is of prime importance in the journey of the soul. It's the mark of the soul that's been singled out of many to return to its home. And once a soul has been drawn to the living Master of its time, that restlessness is transformed into longing for its Master – a powerful force that starts to burn away karma, attachments and lower desires, and focuses on uncovering one's spiritual identity. Once this inner yearning takes hold of a disciple, nothing in this world can really satisfy him any more. He wants only his Beloved.

And this is all part of the Master's plan. He attracts us like a magnet. He plants his love in us. And then he makes us long for him. And the fire of love and longing that starts to burn in us is what destroys our attachments for anyone or anything else. He also teaches us a way of life and a method of meditation which will slowly release us from the chains of the karma and turn our attention and desires away from the world.

But there's more. We're told that whoever wishes to tread the path of devotion needs to cultivate a level of detachment from worldly circumstances and people. A true disciple has to reach a stage of equanimity where he's neither elated when other people praise him

nor depressed by disgrace or dishonor. He has to learn that nothing can happen to him unless it's the will of the Lord. And knowing this, he should never worry about anything, because worry will stand in the way of his spiritual progress.

All these qualities are the mark of a disciple who has learned real detachment. And if we look at ourselves we might think that this is a very far-off goal. Of course, if only we could see this world as nothing but illusion, detachment could come easily to us. But, as we know all too well, we struggle with this concept that everything around us is not real. Our logical minds find it really hard to accept that everything – everything and everyone that have shaped our very lives – is nothing but illusion. At this level, these things *are* our reality.

But what we can understand is that nothing lasts, nothing is permanent – not our health, our wealth, our happiness or our friends and family. In a moment they can be taken from us. And if we want to be spared the pain of their loss, we do need to learn detachment. We need to free ourselves from the strong chains that bind them to us. What a blessing absolute detachment must be!

For a moment, let's try to imagine what it would be like if we could see the world as a dream with no reality. Let's imagine what it would be like if we could see our lives as nothing but a play in which we're only playing a part. For one, we would become free of all worries, anxieties and fears because we would know that nothing is real. No one would be able to hurt us. No one would dislike us, and we would dislike nobody; we wouldn't resent anybody or be jealous of anybody. In fact, we would never think badly of anybody, no matter what they did.

Can you imagine how free we would be? And how free of pain or distress? And because we would know that as we are only acting out a part, others too are only acting their own parts. No one could do us

any harm, because their words and actions would be nothing but the words and actions prescribed for them in the play.

And while we could certainly feel love for everyone in our lives, there would be no restrictive attachments. We would not be plunged into sorrow every time somebody we loved went away from us. We would see that parting for what it is: somebody simply exiting the stage for a while, or even forever.

Even if we were to be seriously injured or ill, we would have a different perspective on our suffering, because we would know that this physical body is also part of the dream, and that it is having to go through certain experiences that may have to do with karma, but which cannot touch our real being, our soul. Even if we were to become destitute we would be able to endure it with equanimity because here too we would know that loss of wealth does not affect our real self, and we would probably know that the One whose child we really are would take care of us.

This is not to say that there wouldn't be illness in our lives, or loss of wealth, or the loss of people who are dear to us. No, the play would go on. And others could continue to behave towards us in ways that might be considered hurtful. But we wouldn't feel it so much. We would be free from the effects of just about everything, because we would see it for what it is: just part of the dream.

And this is how the Masters say we should try to see our lives in this world of illusion. Wouldn't it be glorious if we could! But we are working towards that. With every round of simran, with every bit of meditation, we are becoming a tiny bit more detached from the world. Slowly it's losing its power to hurt us or stain us with its dirt. It's losing its power to tie us down. One day we will become totally free. One day we will become more like our Master.

Man, Make Use of Your Life

By trade, lending and great effort a miser accumulated great wealth. He then decided he would spend one year enjoying his riches and after that he would think further about what to do with his future. But he had no sooner started enjoying his life of leisure and luxury when the angel of death appeared to take his life away.

He begged the angel of death – with every argument he could think of – for just a little time to enjoy what he had spent his whole life working for, but the angel was adamant that he leave now. Then he offered the angel half of all his wealth and possessions if he could have but two more days. Still the angel refused. Even for all his wealth the angel would not give him one more day.

So finally the miser asked him for enough time to write down one little thing, and the angel agreed. And the man wrote, with his own blood: “Man, make use of your life. I could not buy one hour for three hundred thousand dinars. Make sure that you realize the value of your time.”

Idries Shah, *The Way of the Sufi*



We always try to give the time we have no use for to the Father. Once we are rejected by society, by our children or friends, then we want to devote our time to the Father. When we become old and our senses don't go with us, our eyes refuse to co-operate, ears and limbs refuse to co-operate – then we want to worship the Father. We have to give the best time of our life to the Father.

Maharaj Charan Singh as quoted in *Legacy of Love*



Maharaj Charan Singh

Thoughts, and an Ant

It's early morning. I'm having coffee and reminiscing over my misfortunes and what could have been better.

My thoughts progress to the path I have chosen, or rather, the one chosen for me. I make a concerted effort to bring my mind to the essence, to remember the teachings. Thoughts start moving away from the misfortunes, towards fortunes: to be sitting where I am, clothed, a place to stay, fed, kept. Thoughts remind me now how good I have it, saying I have no idea most of the time how good my life is.

For most of us this is a reality – this unawareness. In honesty I try to have faith in my teacher's words: that all is written – that everything is part of a plan, that all is towards the good.

Suddenly thoughts jolt me: How, when it started seconds ago dwelling on my spiritual path, my mind started drifting away from the negative towards the positive. It occurs to me that what I busy myself with is what I become. And then thoughts at last silence me, momentarily focus me...

A black ant is walking towards me on the kitchen counter. Seems to be searching for something, probably food, I think. Been working long and hard to get here, I suppose. But I cleaned the counter last night, with an industrial cleaner, "... that might cause harm to you, ant. Here, let me help you..."

I look for a piece of paper, carefully placing it in front of the ant for it to step onto without effort. Willing it to trust. "I will not hurt you, ant. I know you don't know, but I'm going to put you outside in the garden where there are good things for you. No danger, lots of food, nature. That's where you belong. Trust me, I can see it clearly."

See it clearly? Can I? Do I?

Ant hesitates, mistrusting. It takes small steps onto the paper. I pick up the paper with the ant and slowly walk into the early morning sunshine, taking care. I put the paper down among the leaves for the ant to get off, and it does.

As I walk back, thoughts return. What have I just done? Have I settled an old debt or created a new imbalance? The ant must have been seriously shaken. After probably having worked the whole night, climbing vertical cupboards, struggling upside down, no doubt, to reach the top, towards what it was sure would be very good, it is taken away and put down somewhere else – where, initially, there might be daunting surroundings – scared, alone.

So, do I see? I smile as it strikes me, and I realize again I do not see. I almost laugh out loud as I tell my ego that I am not yet as conscious as I so wisely told the ant just now.

Who is the wise one here? Me or the ant? From a higher perspective, albeit still very limited, I could see what is better for the ant. It trusted me. So the least I should be able to do from this higher perspective where I think I am, is to realize how much higher the saints' perspectives are. How they can see what I cannot. What they know that I don't. How I am assisted every day in ways I cannot understand.

But more... Because the saints can see, they tell us that if we have faith and trust, they will show us the way. We can experience for ourselves the higher truth – experience the science of the soul. They suggest our actions and thinking, and if followed as prescribed, they assure us of the outcome. All we need is faith.

Kinder towards myself, I accept that I am here, now, and that I will struggle and fall. But this morning is bright with sunshine. For me and for an ant. And at last I'm silently reminded that my effort is all that is required. My sincere effort. And the faith of an ant.

Book Review



This Heavenly Wine: Poems from the Divan-e Jami

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RENDITIONS BY VRAJE ABRAMIAN

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Jami (1414–1492) is popularly known as “the seal of the poets” or “the final poet,” because he is recognized as the last of a long line of great Persian-speaking Sufi poets who, over a period of 500 years, produced some of the most beautiful poetry the world has known.

Jami spent the early part of his life obtaining a rich and varied education. Leaving his home in Jam (in present-day Iran), he studied first in Herat (in what is now Afghanistan) excelling in logic, languages, and the sciences. When he was about twenty, he moved to Samarkand (in present-day Uzbekistan) to complete his studies. By his late thirties he was one of the most learned men of his time.

It was apparently the unrequited love of a woman that opened his heart to a greater kind of love. While he was still nursing a broken heart, he had a dream in which a luminous figure appeared and said, “Brother, go find a beloved who cannot abandon you.” After this episode Jami returned to Herat and sought out the company of Sufis. At the age of forty, he met Sa’id al-Din Kashqari, a master in the Naqshbandi Sufi Order. Recognizing him as the luminous figure from his dream, Jami knew he had found the beloved who could not abandon him.

His initiation closed a circle begun when Jami was five years old. His father had taken him as a little boy to see an earlier Naqshbandi master who was passing through Jam. Even at the age of sixty-five, sixty years after this brief encounter, Jami commented that he still felt the joy from that meeting and believed that all of his spiritual wealth stemmed from the influence of that master’s glance.

Jami wrote many works during his lifetime, including a treatise on Sufism and a collection of biographies of over 600 Sufis. His major works

in poetic form present epic versions of classic love stories, including those of Majnun and Leila, Yusuf and Zulaikha, and Salaman and Absal. The poems in this volume are drawn from *Divan-e Jami*.

Readers may be familiar with the work of the translator, Vraje Abramian, from his renderings of the poems of Abu Sa'ïd in *Nobody, Son of Nobody*, reviewed in an earlier *Spiritual Link*. In his introduction to *This Heavenly Wine* Abramian describes the challenges of translating from the Persian (Farsi) language:

Persian poetry by Sufi mystics often combines multi-layered content with awe-inspiringly polished form. It also draws on, and is informed by, a collective consciousness at least one thousand years old, and one ... saturated by Sufi cosmology, and its many-layered manifestations.

Since English speakers largely lack knowledge of that complex world, Abramian has focused on rendering the message of Jami's words, rather than attempting a direct translation. He has grouped his renditions of eighty-eight of Jami's poems into the following seven sections: *My One and Only*; *Of One's True Friend*; *Of You and Me*; *The Divine Music*; *Of Love*; *Of Wine and the Tavern*; and *Jami, the Man, the Poet, the Mystic*.

In his renditions, Abramian uses very little punctuation. Its absence forces the reader to slow down, allowing the poems to sink in more deeply, stirring the heart. As Jami writes:

*all you who read these lines
read them with your heart and not your head
for not his head but Jami's heart has brought them forth*

Jami speaks in vivid images – by turns bold, shocking, transcendent, funny, and paradoxical. For example, Jami presents his view of the world using one image, grim and disturbing:

*this world and all in it is a rotting corpse
and the worldly are here for their piece of flesh*
and then he turns to another image to suggest how we should spend our

time in this world:

*when the dawn comes be of the early risers
during the day keep aloof
better be as lowly as the dust on the road
despised and rejected by everyone*

Similarly Jami vividly portrays the miracle that the Lord dwells in his entirety in the miniature human form:

*heaven and earth are unable to contain
a speck of your glory
but this tight human chest You have chosen as your territory*

and yet He pervades everywhere, though we do not see Him:

*there isn't a particle in creation
that doesn't carry your Light
yesterday I was asking others for a sign of You
today there isn't a sign that isn't of You*

Jami also betrays a marvellous sense of humour:

*do not become attached to what life gives you here
for in time you will give it to someone
to hold your hand
or to some dog
to let go of your foot*

In the section entitled *The Divine Music*, Jami speaks of the inner music and its power. He says that he needs no musicians or bards because he hears “the Celestial Song of Love’s Sweet Captivity”:

*though the entire creation is filled with this Melody
the unawake can hear It not*

*glory, glory, glory to the Musician to whose Tune
every ecstatic particle in creation dances accordingly*

The most common subject of Jami's poetry in this collection is love and its mysteries. Jami speaks of its wonder, pain, frustration, anguish, and joy. He is alternately drunk with love and bleeding from its torments. Having been drawn far along the path of love, he speaks knowingly of its many facets, of its agony and its bliss. He writes:

*The ascetic's lips are parched and the Sufi's eyes are flooded
woe to those caught in this Love for it burns both the wet and the dry*

But he is completely clear that he would not trade his condition for anything.

*how beautiful it is to be snared by this Beauty
glory be to the bird who is caught in Love's trap*

A magnificent image illustrates the power and endurance of love:

*I am all tears and anticipation now
and though your company I am denied in this affliction
when this is done and I am no more
my dust will blow only in your direction*

This book, when approached with an open heart and unhurried pace, yields countless fresh insights into the mysterious world of Lover and Beloved. It gives Jami the opportunity to tell us, in many different ways:

*you are Love's creation
look nowhere else for sustenance
turn to Love*



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