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Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

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Spiritual Link

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Forsake Me Not

*Forsake me not, kind Master!
I am a feeble woman,
Helpless and devoid of strength;
Forsake me not.
You alone are my shelter, O Lord.
I have no merits,
Full of faults am I;
You alone are faultless and powerful.
I belong only to you,
Where else can I find shelter
Except at your feet?
You alone are the jewel of my heart,
You alone are Mira's Lord;
Except you she knows no other saviour.
Pray save her
From further humiliation
Of return to this world.*

Mira, The Divine Lover



The Lord Giveth

*Far more than my destiny allows
From your gracious hands I receive;
Yet even my destiny
Is but a gift from you to me.*

Urdu couplet, as quoted in *Legacy of Love*

As humans, we try to pass on to our children a better life than what we have inherited. Much of our definition of success and progress stems from this criteria. Do we have a better house today than we did ten years ago? Do we have a larger bank balance? Do we have the trappings of a more luxurious lifestyle corresponding to our social standing?

In this endeavour to make our life better, it is easy to get carried away in the rat race. The saints ask us to reassess both our perspective and our priorities. They tell us that everything in this world is impermanent – that which comes and goes is maya or illusion. They also ask us to appreciate that everything in our lives – whether good or bad – comes from the Lord.

So we need to keep a balance in life. When we lose what is precious to us – whether a loved one or a job we covet – we must remind ourselves that ultimately, it is the Lord that has decided that it should be so. While we may be quick to ask ‘why me?’ in times of adversity, we must reflect whether we asked the same question when things were going well.

One is reminded of the story of the Sultan who conquered a vast region. One of the old kings in that region whom the Sultan had defeated started to live as a recluse, spending all his time in prayer and weeping bitterly. This went on for many months until one day, the

Sultan summoned the old king. Seeing the old king's lamentable state, the Sultan was moved and offered to return the old king's riches. The old king responded, "O Sultan, it is not the loss of my kingdom that makes me weep. I fear the day of judgment when the Lord will say to me 'O fool! It took an army and a crushing defeat to make you think of me. I gave you riches way beyond your needs, and in return, all I received was your thanklessness.' "My fear, O Sultan, is that I will have no response to this judgment."

The Lord has given us so many blessings. We must remember to be grateful children in times of prosperity as well as adversity. As Maharaj Charan Singh explains with simplicity:

O Lord, if you were to make me a ruler of the world, I would have no other work but to worship you. If you were to have driven me from door to door through the world, still I would have nothing else to do but worship you.

Spiritual Discourses, Vol. II

Of course, it is easier to thank the Lord when times are good. To accept difficulties as blessings is a much harder task. Kabir puts a different perspective in front of us by asking the Lord:

By surrendering to you that which is yours, what can I possibly lose?

As quoted in Spiritual Discourses, Vol. II

Quite simply, the harsh corollary of leaving behind a better world for our children is that we came into this world with nothing and we shall leave with nothing. Everything belongs to the Lord. Rather than thinking the Lord has taken something away, we should change our attitude to one of surrendering back what he has given us.

To a disciple who was going through a difficult time, the Great Master offered these encouraging words:

Do not feel perturbed; after all, adversities do come to human beings. We should face them with patience and steadfastness. All days are not the same. When good days do not last, why expect bad days to persist? Much of our bad times have passed away. Only a little is left; bear it with fortitude. Satguru is within you and is every moment looking after you. Have faith in his grace and compassion, and do not feel dejected. Do not let patience desert you. Contemplate on the Satguru's form and continue to attend to your meditation regularly.

As quoted in *In the Footsteps of the Master*

Maharaj Sawan Singh beautifully explains that we must not feel dejected. Rather, we should be thankful, as the ultimate Giver has blessed us with the most beautiful gift of all – the gift of initiation. It is through this gift that we can pass through life and hang on to our sheet-anchor, our Master.



*My Beloved,
giver of all needs, and their satisfier too,
pray see to it that I need none but You,
and knock on no door but Yours.*

Shaikh Abil-Kheir, *Nobody, Son of Nobody*,
As translated by Vraje Abramian

Something to Think About

Life is so simple and beautiful to live, provided one can rise above human failings. They always keep one entangled in the net of worry and misery, and we human mortals are just helpless spectators. If we can just withdraw this 'self', then only can we enjoy this drama of life.

Maharaj Charan Singh, as quoted in *Treasure Beyond Measure*

* * *

If a sightless person recovers his sight by an operation, he feels greatly indebted to the surgeon. The inner eye is millions of times more valuable. Without it we cannot see the Lord, and we remain wandering from birth to birth. The Master opens the inner eye to enable us to see the Lord face to face.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *The Dawn of Light*

* * *

It is not only the mechanical meditation of giving two and a half hours and then forgetting it the rest of the time. Our whole day, every day, should be lived in Sant Mat. We have to live in meditation in our whole life, in our dealings with everybody. It is not only that particular time spent sitting in meditation that matters; it is our whole living that matters. We have to live the teachings. We have to live in Sant Mat, for Sant Mat, in that atmosphere, day and night. That helps in the long run, and not only the daily two and a half hours. It must be a part of our life. We have to live it.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *The Master Answers*

Actions Express Priorities

Twenty-four hours in a day seem to fly by so quickly. Most of us barely have time to finish off the daily chores and the endless errands that we are expected to run. Sure, we wake up and attempt to do our meditation, but it does not seem like there is enough time to finish the two and a half hours that we have committed to.

The Masters have constantly emphasized that twenty-four hours in a day are more than enough to get both our worldly and spiritual work done. It only takes a thorough look at the way we spend our spare time to understand that, in fact, we waste time. We surf the Internet mindlessly, attend numerous social events, shop for more clothes in spite of overflowing closets, watch television programs till late night, talk for hours on end with friends on the phone – most of the time trying our best to find another topic of conversation to jump to. The truth of the matter is that most of us would even prefer boredom to sitting down and doing our meditation. When it comes to the rest of our worldly duties, we are forever ready and able to attend to them, but when it comes to doing our meditation, we become plain lazy.

This may seem a bit harsh to some of us, but in essence, is that not how we are?

Let us think about it – we choose to do all the things mentioned above, knowing that none of them will serve any purpose in this journey of self-realization. The Masters always ask us to think logically – and in this case, do we? What will running after all this materialistic wealth and distraction help us achieve? Has it kept us happy thus far,

that we believe by further indulging in the illusion, we will be forever happy? Maharaj Charan Singh says in *Quest for Light*:

The aim of human life is the achievement of God-realization and if we do not find the way to achieve it, we have wasted the human life with which the Lord has blessed us.

It eventually all comes down to one thing – our priorities. We choose to add all the extra activities to our daily life and when they become so overwhelming, we complain that we simply do not have enough time for our meditation.

Even after years of being on this path, if we were to spend a minute to contemplate our situation, we would realize that we have hardly made any sacrifices in terms of our lifestyle. We have not prioritized Sant Mat, so when life in all its materialistic glory overwhelms us, we complain that we do not have time.

The truth of the matter is that we are trying to fit Sant Mat into our way of life rather than changing our way of life to fit into Sant Mat. We get carried away in the illusion and try to squeeze Sant Mat in somewhere. We have to constantly remind ourselves that we are spiritual beings going through a human experience, and not the other way around.

In *Die to Live*, Maharaj Charan Singh aptly puts it:

Sant Mat teaching is very simple, but to follow it is much more difficult than it looks. It's a constant struggle with the mind, and one has to change one's entire way of life and one's attitude towards life. To follow Sant Mat requires a complete transformation, so it's not easy. One has to sacrifice a lot in life.

If we truly ask ourselves what sacrifices have we made to achieve our spiritual goal, how many of us could genuinely answer that we have in fact moulded our way of life according to the principles of Sant Mat?

It would help to remind ourselves that we are temporary residents in this world. We feel like we are here permanently and therefore have set up our lifestyles accordingly. We have to keep in mind that we are going to die someday; that is an eventuality that we cannot deny. By doing so, we will realize the importance of meditation and will make more of a conscious effort to prioritize our time.



*You have to dwell there; why crave and collect things here?
Live in the world like a guest; do not get involved in the affairs
of others. As long as the breath in your body comes and goes,
adore the Lord's Name. You have come to earn the wealth of
redemption; do not gamble your life away to earn a few shells.
This is your chance to amass the treasure of the true Name;
gather as much as you can, for soon death will come.*

Kabir, The Weaver of God's Name

Memorable Quotes

We would do better to judge ourselves first than to judge others.

Maharaj Charan Singh

So long as every word of our prayer does not raise all our feelings from the core of our hearts, we can derive very little benefit.

Maharaj Sawan Singh

Make so much effort on this path that even at the time of death, you fall forward on the path, not backward.

Rumi

The more a man is at one within himself and becomes single in heart, the more he understands higher things without labour; for he receives the light of understanding from above.

Thomas à Kempis

If only we knew how much we need God's grace, we would never lose touch with him. Believe me. Make a commitment never to deliberately stray from him, to live the rest of your life in his holy presence. Don't do this in expectation of receiving heavenly comforts; simply do it out of love for him.

Brother Lawrence

No one can describe the glory of the moment when the mind is still and the soul is in a state of complete absorption.

Soami Ji Maharaj

A Real Positive Attitude

Having a positive attitude is a fundamental aspect of the spiritual life. Entertaining good thoughts, staying optimistic in the midst of adversity, and steering clear from negative influences complement the teachings of Sant Mat and are an indispensable aid towards achieving our spiritual goal. In theory, it is the perfect plan. But from a practical perspective, how does one stay positive in a world that is constantly bombarding us with negativity?

Be Positive. This counsel is offered to us all the time. And it is a welcome reminder, especially when one is embroiled in the karmic retribution of everyday life. With a little introspection, we can look at the bigger picture, come to terms with our situation and perhaps, feel a little bit better about our circumstances – at least, for the moment.

As disciples on a path of love, there is a part of us that can accept in a second that everything is good; that everything happens for a reason and is ultimately beneficial. But to be able to apply this understanding intuitively, all the time, while being buffeted by waves of excruciating karma, is not easy – unless one has a real positive attitude.

A *real* positive attitude is a natural viewpoint that is based on a wisdom that comes from within. It is an insight born of a clear understanding of who we are, what is the purpose of our existence and what this life is all about. Our spiritual life plays a big part in the development and application of this understanding.

In *Spiritual Gems*, Maharaj Sawan Singh explains that there are two ways of looking at this creation. From the top, looking down – the Creator's point of view; and from the bottom, looking up – man's point of view.

From the top, it looks as though the Creator is all in all. He is the only doer and the individual seems like a puppet tossed right and left by the puppeteer. It is his play and there is no question. Looking from below, or the individual's viewpoint, one comes across variety as opposed to oneness. Everybody appears to be working with a will. The individual thinks he is the doer and thereby becomes responsible for his actions and their consequences.

The mystics explain that both viewpoints are correct; the difference lies in the angle of vision. From an individual perspective, we all look out at the world through an inner lens called the mind. Clouded by karma, attachments and impressions from our previous lives, our view is hazy and has a limited span.

Sant Mat teaches us that as the mind is purified and elevated to the eye focus by concentration, little by little it develops a healthier perception and, consequently, a clearer understanding. And, as the individual continues to make further progress still, the inner consciousness rises and one is able to appreciate a divine purpose in all things. It is clear, therefore, that the depth of one's insight is largely dependent upon one's level of spiritual understanding.

The individual, clothed in coarse material form, sees only the external material forms. His sight does not go deeper than that. The same individual from Daswan Dwar will see the spirit current working everywhere.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *Spiritual Gems*

The path of Sant Mat is a journey to the highest perspective; to the single, most positive power in the universe – the One that supports and sustains the entire creation, the Shabd. The mystics assure us that every soul is a drop of this ocean of love, making us, by default,

positive in nature. The only thing pending is our realization of this vital fact.

Thus, the perfect Masters implore their disciples to lead a way of life conducive to this awakening. Attending satsang, doing seva, reading spiritual books and remembering to do simran when the mind is free are all positive influences that assist us. They confine us within the orbit of purity and goodness and shield us from negative influences.

But most important this uplifting way of life cultivates in the disciple a humble need, the need to beg the Lord for forgiveness in the only way that invokes His limitless grace – meditation. It is in that inner sanctum of sweet solitude that the divine energy of the Shabd washes away the impurities of the mind, creating the impetus for a deep and profound level of understanding.

Ultimately, it is this precious understanding that becomes the basis for a real and enduring positive attitude. It helps the disciple accept his fate and go through his destiny with strength and confidence, without losing his balance. It is the inevitable outcome of diligent and loving discipleship – the beloved Father’s gift of grace to an obedient child for his untiring faith and steadfast devotion.



Attitude is more important than circumstances, failures or successes; than money or poverty, illness or health. If we have a positive attitude, we will make the best out of even the worst conditions. If we have a negative attitude, we will be miserable even in the best of circumstances.

A Spiritual Primer

Walking the Spiritual Path

Walking the path of the Masters often seems to me like trekking through jagged mountains where one has to climb steep rock faces and go over ridges without seeing the peak. It is still an adventure of faith for me to tread this path, even though I have at my side the guide who prompted me to set out long ago, long before I knew of any Master actually living on earth.

On this journey, turning to the Master and looking up at him is extremely important, but it is not always easy to keep this 'eye contact' with the Master when one is feeling dejected or guilty on account of one's lack of zeal and love. But Maharaj Sawan Singh encouraged his disciples to take even their weaknesses and failures to him; with nothing but their shortcomings in their hands, they could and should come to him. Therefore, in Sant Mat, those who feel that they have failed have every reason to go to their Master instead of covering their faces in shame as if to hide from him. Similarly, the Master of Nazareth once encouraged his disciples to come to him with their entire labour and heavy load, saying that he would give them rest.

Even if tangible success in meditation is a long time in coming, the years that a disciple spends trying to walk the path of the Masters are not spent in vain. "Every minute in meditation is important," Maharaj Charan Singh once assured me. Not a single minute is lost, not even the time spent in seemingly unsuccessful meditation. Walking on the path transforms the disciple slowly but steadily. Every satsangi will be able to confirm this. When he looks back at the time before initiation, he will become aware how much Sant Mat has changed him and how the Sant Mat teachings also help him to master his worldly life. Many a disciple have confessed to me that without Sant Mat and the Master, they could not have coped with life.

Shraddha Liertz, *Adventure of Faith*

You Snooze, You Lose

It could happen to anyone. We may wake up bright and early in the morning with a positive attitude, a clear and focused mind, reminding ourselves that our meditation is the most important task we shall accomplish today. But soon after a few rounds of simran, we doze off and are eventually lost in deep slumber. By the time we wake up, we realize that the majority of our time has already flown by and the time has come to prepare for the rest of the day. Sadly, many of us fall victim to falling asleep during meditation. What is worse is that it has become a habit for some – a habit seriously detrimental to our spiritual progress.

Some of us may take this situation lightly, perhaps even laugh or joke about the issue, thinking it to be a trivial matter. But we should keep in mind that sleep is an immensely vicious enemy – a challenging obstacle many initiates encounter during prayer. Maharaj Charan Singh has acknowledged sleep as a hindrance we must battle against.

Sleep and idleness are two big obstacles in the path of all initiates, but we have to overcome them in order to achieve our goal. This is all a trick of the mind.

Quest for Light

Though sleep is essential to rejuvenate the body, it is also a powerful and potent tool, employed by the mind to distract and dissuade us from devoting time to meditation. To further elaborate on the importance of active and alert meditation, Maharaj Charan Singh clearly explains:

Only the time you devote to meditation is to your credit, and not when you are snoring and sleeping.

Thus Saith the Master

During his days as a spiritual practitioner, Baba Jaimal Singh himself had to struggle and overcome this difficult challenge. Before attending to meditation, he would tie his hair around a nail hammered on the wall behind him. Therefore, if sleep would ever overcome him, he would immediately be woken up by a sharp and painful tug on his hair. He would then take proactive steps to wake up from his sleepy state before resuming meditation. This was his determination to succeed. This is how serious he was about staying alert. His example has always been a great source of motivation and inspiration.

There are several reasons why we fall asleep during meditation. We may have had a series of exhausting and strenuous days; or are facing insurmountable stress and tension over family issues or work. Our late night gatherings and the social events we partake in along with the heavy meals we consume throughout the day can be blamed as well. There are endless reasons; but regardless of our excuses, as true seekers on this path, we must take full responsibility for our weaknesses and strive harder to achieve alert and conscious sessions of meditation.

Do we ever fall asleep whilst interacting with our family and loved ones? What if our country's president or our favourite celebrity were to meet us? Would we take a nap in their presence? Do we ever doze-off watching our favourite television show or movie? If a student sleeps throughout classes at school or while attempting homework, could he ever learn anything?

Sleeping during meditation reflects our lack of seriousness on the path. Our actions essentially show that our worldly pursuits take priority over our spiritual quest; that we care more about a television

show, or a coffee meeting with friends, than our daily promise of being in the presence of our divine Father. Instead of reducing our worldly pursuits, we try to meditate at the cost of insufficient rest, and thus fall asleep at the most critical time of our day.

I do not know why, but in this modern society, we have so many types of engagements. We do not try to compromise with them, but we do compromise with our sleep and our health in order to fulfil those engagements. We would like to work all day and enjoy sleep all night, and from the sleep time we take our meditation time, disregarding what the body needs.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *The Master Answers*

As Maharaj Charan Singh accurately points out, our priorities are at the crux of the matter. If we are truly serious about the path, our actions must reflect our intentions. We can try to go to sleep early, avoid heavy meals, avoid late nights and manage our social calendar better. There is a lot of practical advice that we can implement in our daily life. We also know that we should sit upright – a straight spine helps us stay active and alert, compared with when we slouch. Maharaj Charan Singh has further advised:

If we sit when we are still half dozing, then sleep overpowers us when we try to meditate. So if you wash your face with cool water, stretch yourself a little or move about in the room and thus refresh yourself, you may be able to avoid that sleepiness.

Thus Saith the Master

We should do whatever it takes to overcome sleepiness. Meditation is our one and only channel to show our appreciation for the love, guidance, and support we endlessly receive from our Master. He has blessed us with his mercy and grace, and will tirelessly continue to do so. As his disciples, we should aim to uphold the teachings.



If you get proper rest, you generally don't sleep during meditation; but the difficulty is, we don't take proper rest. We always try to sit in meditation at the cost of sleep. We don't give proper time or rest to the body. When the body gets proper sleep, then of course you won't easily fall asleep. It also depends upon your diet. If the diet is wholesome and healthy and light, then you won't feel sleepy at all. If you tire yourself and eat too much and sleep too little, then naturally you'll always be sleepy.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Thus Saith the Master*

The Driving Force

Most dictionaries define the verb 'drive' as to guide, to direct, or to motivate. Whether we are driving a car or playing golf, we are guiding, controlling and directing at that instant. But what is the driving force in our life? What is the purpose of the things we do? Where is the road we have chosen taking us? Are we really going somewhere – or is our road taking us around in circles?

There are numerous circumstances, values and feelings that can drive one's life. Below are some of the most common ones.

Driven by Possessions

The desire to acquire more can become the whole goal of one's life. This drive to always accumulate more than we need is based on a myth that having more objects will lead to happiness. Possessions only provide temporary happiness. We eventually outgrow our material possessions and want even bigger, newer and better things.

It is also a misconception that if one gets more, one becomes more important. Self-worth and net worth should not be confused with each other. Our value is not determined by our possessions.

Two verbs have built two empires, the verb 'to have' and the verb 'to be'. The first is the empire of things, material possessions and power. The second is the empire of the Spirit, things that last.

Saint Augustine, as quoted in *The Secret of Happiness*

The most common myth about money is that having wealth will make one more secure. Wealth can be lost instantly through a variety

of uncontrollable factors, such as natural disasters like the recent earthquake in Japan, business failures or even stock market crashes. Real security and happiness can only be found in that which can never be taken away from you, such as your relationship with the Master and your connection to the Shabd. The fact is, without a tangible relationship with the Lord, man is a spiritual pauper. Do we want to strive for the wealth of this physical plane or the wealth of Nam, the Word that is waiting for us within?

Driven to Create a Lasting Impression

Many people want to be remembered after they have passed away. They believe that their purpose is to create a lasting legacy on earth. Yet, what ultimately matters most is not what others say about your life, but what the Lord says.

What we do not realize is that everything on this plane is temporary and never-lasting. 'Ashes to ashes, dust to dust'. All achievements will ultimately be surpassed, records will always be broken, reputations will fade and fame forgotten. Living to create a worldly legacy is like building your house on sand. A better use of time would be to build an eternal legacy, by building on a spiritual foundation, which the Master has shown us how to do.

Driven by Anger

Many of us are driven at some point in our lives, by pain and bitterness. We hold on to our anger instead of releasing it through forgiveness. We relive the past in our minds over and over again. Some of us may close up and swallow our anger inside, allowing it to fester, while others may blow up and release it on others. Both responses are detrimental on the path of spirituality.

The action of anger is to stir up strife, cause confusion and scatter the mind. Then it cannot concentrate. It is a fact of experience that no person can possibly concentrate as given by the Master so long as he indulges in fits of anger. It is an utter impossibility... Anger is the extreme opposite of love. As love is the sum of all good, so anger must be the sum of all evil.

Julian Johnson, *The Path of the Masters*

The Masters explain that all our relationships are the result of our past karmas. Whatever has happened in the past and whatever is happening to us now is the boomerang effect of our own actions. Nothing can hurt us unless we hold on to that pain. If we could let it go and forgive those around us, we would feel lighter, happier and closer to our Master. After all, the Master is all mercy and forgiveness. We would do well to live by these words:

*Lord, grant that I may seek rather to comfort
than to be comforted.*

To understand than to be understood,

To love than to be loved.

For it is by giving that one receives,

It is by self-forgetting that one finds,

It is by forgiving that one is forgiven.

Saint Francis of Assisi as quoted in *From Self to God*

Do we want to become a victim of anger? Do we want our lives to be driven by such an ugly emotion?

Driven by Peer Pressure

We all know how it feels when we try really hard to fit into a group, to be one of the gang, so to speak – when we try to be accepted and not left out, and when we allow ourselves to be moulded by other people's expectations and public opinion. Unfortunately, those who follow the crowd usually get lost in it.

It takes a very strong conviction not to succumb to the pressures exerted by those around us. In trying to be accepted by the crowd, if we compromise our principles, we are most likely going to make decisions that we may regret later. The Masters always urge us to think for ourselves. They never try to influence us. In fact, they encourage us to satisfy our intellect before treading the path of Sant Mat.

It becomes very easy for us to justify our actions, even when we know that we are wrong, by saying: "It's just a little lie, it's just a tiny little indiscretion; it doesn't hurt anyone." But it does hurt – we hurt ourselves. The fact is, there is no gray area when it comes to right and wrong.

Let's take the analogy of the human body: it is mostly made up of bones, tissue, veins and arteries. If the tiniest little vein were to become damaged or blocked, the consequences of that damage could adversely affect an organ, weaken the infrastructure of our body, leading to illness and ultimately even death. And if the smallest stone were to be removed from the foundation of a building, it would weaken the structure, possibly leading to the collapse of the building. It may not happen that day, or that week, but ultimately every action that we undertake will result in an equal reaction.

Do we adjust ourselves and our values to fit in with the world, or do we cleanse the chamber of our heart so that we can be worthy of the Lord?

We have posed many questions in the process of discussing each of these four ‘drives’, but the Master provides us with just one answer to all these questions.

There is a very beautiful analogy that Hazur would often give, about the child and his father going to the fair. While the father is holding the child’s hand, he is busy enjoying the sights and sounds around him. But the moment the child lets go of the father’s hand, the child cries. Without his father, the child is insecure, unhappy and lost. No matter how enjoyable the fair may seem, no matter how lovely the lights and sounds, nothing can compare to being with his father.

In the same way, if we want to feel secure, if we want to be happy, if we do not want to become victims of our emotions, if we do not want to get lost in the crowd, like the child, all we have to do is to call out for our Father. This is the one answer.

Driven by the Shabd

How do we hold on to the Father? He has given us the means – he has given us the connection whereby we can hold on to him and listen to his resounding voice. The Masters refer to this connection, this Sound, as the Shabd. In *The Path of the Masters*, it is referred to as the ‘audible life stream’. It is also known as the sound current or the Word. In the Adi Granth, this has been called Nam. Greek mystics refer to it as Logos. The Bible refers to it as the Holy Spirit. It is the one fundamental principle of all paths leading to God.

Masters of all ages have emphasized this Shabd as the central fact in their system. This life stream is, in fact, nothing less than the Supreme One, projecting himself on all planes of life in a

constant stream of musical vibrations through which flows the most incomprehensible power, life-giving and creative.

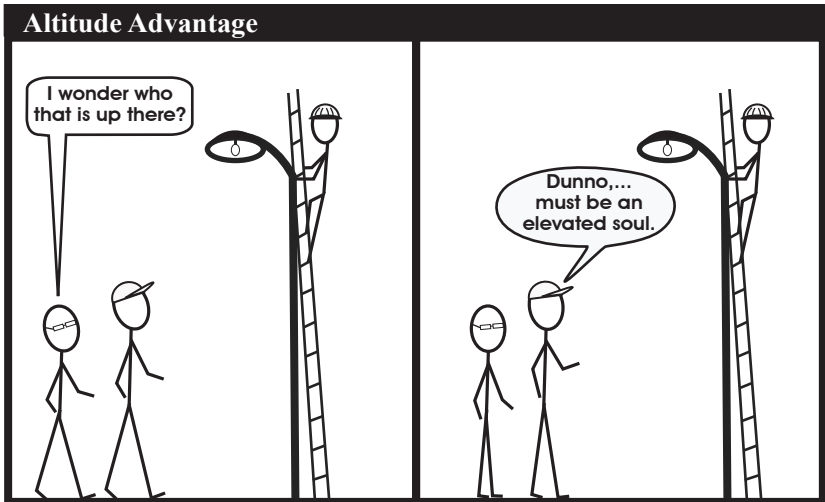
Julian Johnson, *The Path of the Masters*

The force of the Shabd is always with us and within us. We only need to bring our attention to that focus where we can perceive it.

Human nature is frail. When we follow the path of spirituality, we begin to realize that we are full of weaknesses. Frailties present themselves in almost every conceivable manner and interfere with our concentration. But with the help of the Master and the Shabd, they are overcome, one by one, with every inch of the withdrawal of our attention from the outside environment of temptation and pain, towards the inner focus of love, peace and light.



SPIRITUALISTICKS®



The Master Answers

A selection of questions and answers with Maharaj Charan Singh

Q: *Maharaj Ji, I practise as a doctor and I am sure there are others here who are lawyers. How far are we to go in our efforts in our work? In many cases you can extend beyond treatment. How far should we go?*

A: You should treat the patient according to the best of your ability, with the knowledge and skill that you have acquired. Still, with your best efforts, you can never get all the results that you want. If people could be saved by doctors and medicines, nobody would have died. We have no cure for certain diseases, though we do our best. We find that some medicine has cured some people, but others are not affected at all by the same medicine. We know all this, so we should try to use our knowledge to the best of our ability and then leave the rest to the Lord.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III

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Q: *What is the best way to bring our children up in Sant Mat?*

A: Bring them up lovingly and do your duty as a parent, and try to prepare them for love and devotion for the Father. Don't try to condition their minds with any philosophy, but give them the general teaching of love for the Father. You have to prepare them for the Father and then let them make their own decision. Children are influenced by their parents and automatically start following them. So be a living example. That will be sufficient.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III

Q: *Can we live a life of service to the Master – of body, mind and wealth – before our mind has risen to a higher level?*

A: Sister, the time we give to meditation is nothing but service to the Master. You cannot serve the Master in a better way than by following his instructions and living his way of life – attending to your meditation. This is the best service to the Master. You have seen the gardener working harder on the trees that don't yield any fruit, than on those trees which yield fruit. Those which yield fruit are actually helping the gardener by not demanding much of his time. They are serving the gardener. And those which don't yield any fruit at all are making him work harder and harder, more and more. So we can serve the Master by following the teachings, and by living the teachings, thus bearing the fruit for which this human birth has been given to us.

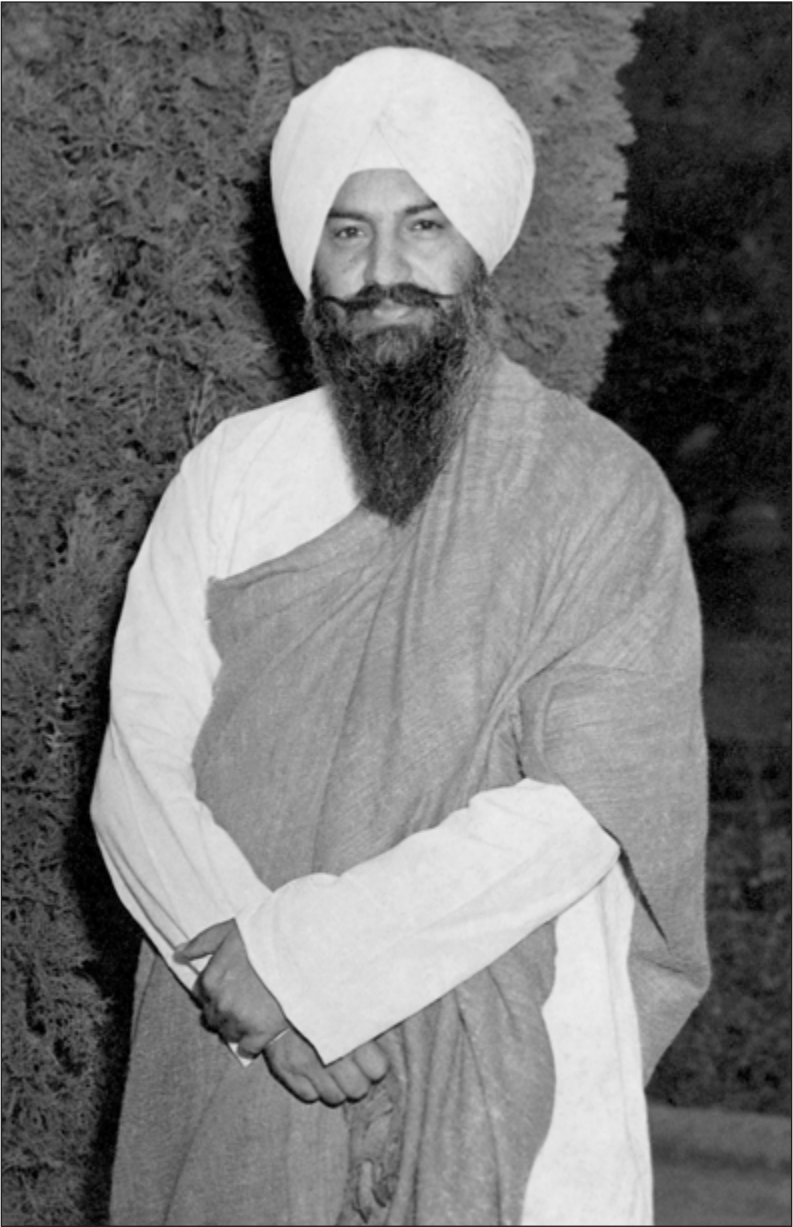
Die to Live

* * *

Q: *Are we protected by the Lord only after initiation? Suppose we are still seekers?*

A: The protection of the Lord is everywhere. When we sincerely want to follow the path, when we sincerely want to go back to the Father, his protective hand is always on us. We should not worry about not being protected before initiation. Those souls who are marked to be initiated, who are allotted to a mystic, are protected right from birth in one way or another. Protection starts right from birth. They are not allowed to go so far astray that they cannot come back to the Father. When you fly a kite, you always have its string in your hand. The kite is flying in the sky. But whenever the person holding the string pulls that string back, the kite is pulled back. Similarly, every allotted soul that has been given over to the care of the Master is always protected by him right from birth, even if that soul is not yet initiated.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. I



Maharaj Charan Singh

To Sir, With Love

*... My best friend,
A friend who has taught me right from wrong,
And weak from strong ... that's a lot to learn.
What can I give you in return?
If you wanted the moon, I would try to make a start,
but I would rather you let me give my heart,
To Sir, With Love.*

Lyrics from the song, "To Sir, With Love"

The relationship between a Master and his disciple is one filled with evolving stages of emotions until the disciple matures enough to understand who the Master really is. Who is the Master? He is the Shabd in human form – however, it often takes a lifetime before a disciple can truly realize this. Before then, the Master takes on a series of metaphorical roles in the disciple's life, often starting with that of a nurturing parent. He then becomes the disciple's dearest friend and trusted confidant, and finally, his Guru or ultimate "Sir".

Starting as a skilled parent, the Master understands each one of his disciples and the nurturing process required to take us from spiritual infancy through our rebellious teenage years into adulthood, until we can finally see eye to eye. We all mostly start at the same place, as helpless little infants clumsily trotting down this path in desperate need of his constant love and care. As babies, he knows that we require this special attention, and he tenderly swaddles us with it. However, the main task of any parent is to make their children independent.

As disciples on this path, independence means being able to soothe our own turbulent minds by sitting quietly in meditation and learning

to turn within. Nonetheless, as tiny toddlers, we start to holler when we can no longer feel the warmth of his physical presence. But like any good parent who knows what to do, although he hears us, he patiently endures our cries so that we learn to seek him inside. And just as a child learns to calm himself, we start to meditate, and without even realizing it, we have taken one of our first major steps towards spiritual maturity.

As teenagers on this path, we rebel, become arrogant and often feel a strong disconnect from our special parent. Some of us become overly sensitive and feel misunderstood or even abandoned. But skilled as he is, he knows how to mould each one of us. For those of us who tend to be overconfident, he repeatedly sends struggles our way to teach us humility. Others lack confidence, so he constantly raises them up. Although at this stage of our journey, we may feel misunderstood, the truth is that he actually understands us better than we can ever understand ourselves, and works tirelessly to instil proper values in us, such as humility, sensitivity, understanding, loyalty, honesty, sincerity in thought and action. Basically he wants to mould us into good human beings. And with each of our personalities being as varied as they are, what a task it is!

With continued efforts in our meditation, we finally overcome this difficult stage and begin to trust the Master as we would a friend. Looking back, we understand that everything he did for us was out of his selfless love. It is not that he did not hear our cries as infants – but he did not always carry us so that we could learn to walk. It is not that he did not understand us as teenagers – but he responded by giving us what we needed, not what we wanted. When we strayed from him, he never once abandoned us. The German nun, Shraddha Liertz in her memoir, *Adventures of Faith*, explains how, when she looks back on her life, she now understands this:

But I was not forsaken; the Lord saw my hopelessness and despair. Although I had strayed away from him, he was as close to me as ever.

A time comes when our hearts swell with gratitude towards our special friend, our Guru and ultimate Sir for having taught us “right from wrong, and weak from strong.” How could we ever repay him – “What can I give you in return?” If he asked us for the moon, like the author of the song writes, we would probably “try to make a start”! But the truth is, he would prefer our undivided hearts.

The legacy of any Master is his sangat. The best gift that we can offer our special Sir is to become living examples of the values he labours so hard to instil in us: to love one another, and to love him through our meditation practice. We can say, “It isn’t easy, but I’ll try...” He knows how difficult this is, so he only asks that we put in our most sincere efforts and surrender the rest – “To Sir, With Love.”



*O Lord, You opened to me
the doors of generosity and clemency,
and my heart blossomed like a flower
of a hundred colours – the envy of the garden!
I could never describe
even one of your thousand attributes,
even if my whole being becomes a tongue
to express my gratitude.*

Sarmad, Martyr to Love Divine

Submitting to His Will

A Letter to a Disciple

In our everyday life, while adopting the principles of Sant Mat as our guide, we should be content to accept whatever comes to us because things are predestined according to our own karmas. This method we call 'bhana', or submission to his will. But this does not mean that we should be lazy or inactive. The idea is that we should do our duty fully and conscientiously, but leave the result to God; whereas if we go on praying for the fulfilment of our desires, we are not only lengthening the chain that binds us to this world, but will have to come back again and again.

We obtained the human body because of a mixture of good and bad actions. The result is that, in the course of our life, we are bound to have both pleasure and pain. If we were to feel elated at the time of pleasure or happiness and depressed or sad when in pain, we would always be praying for one thing or another, and would have no time for bhakti (devotion), without which our coming and going cannot come to an end. To complete our bhakti and avoid repeated incarnations, it is necessary that we submit to the will of the Lord.

When one feels very upset or finds oneself on the horns of a dilemma, one may sit in meditation and seek guidance within. The best prayer, however, is to ask the Lord to give us strength to face boldly and gracefully whatever is in our destiny.

The one thing that you should always keep in view is that the principles of Sant Mat are always to be kept in mind, whatever be your career. Whenever you feel puzzled, sit in bhajan, meditate sincerely, and after that, make your decision.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Light on Sant Mat*

Man – The Architect of His Destiny

Life is preordained and every birth has been marked with its own uniqueness. A child may be cradled in the lap of luxury, bestowed with all the comforts at his fingertips and gifted with intelligence and fine physical qualities. Another could be born in absolute poverty, combined with poor health and living in utter misery. Why would one child be gifted with a perfectly healthy body while another may be born blind, deaf or even deformed? Why should an old couple, having lived life to the fullest, receive the devastating news that their beloved grandson has just left this physical plane due to a random accident?

Does God work arbitrarily and allow such inequality among mankind? Could this be defined as ‘injustice’? Or could this diversity of circumstances be attributed to happenstance or blind chance without any rational reason behind it?

In no uncertain terms, mystics and perfect saints point out that our life unfolds according to what we draw to it, as dictated by our thoughts and actions of yesteryear. Each and every current chapter of our life has been created by us, through our own actions which have germinated from thoughts that we once permitted to inhabit our mind. Our thoughts are fleeting, and thousands of thoughts stream incessantly through our minds each day. Although we can never completely divorce ourselves from the influence of our dominating restless mind, we can certainly choose which thoughts our mind should dwell upon. Whenever we dwell on any thought, an imprint is made on the mind. When a thought is repeated, we subconsciously allow that imprint or groove to become deeper. This ‘dwelled-upon’ thought eventually triggers a desire, and subsequently this desire is sculpted into the physical through our actions. Each act that we

execute becomes a link in an unbroken chain of causes and effects, each effect becoming a cause and each cause leading to another effect. Our thoughts and actions are the 'cause' and what is manifested into the physical is the 'effect'. The fact that every action has some degree of influence upon the future means that we are personally accountable for the effects we indirectly cause. The exact day and hour that the effect will take place is never known to us, but the one fact of importance, which stands absolutely unalterable, is that the effect must take place.

Man is the doer of his own deeds; as such he is the maker of his own character; and as the doer of his deeds and the maker of his character, he is the moulder and shaper of his destiny. He has the power to modify and alter his deeds, and every time he acts, he modifies his character, and with the modification of his character for good or evil, he is predetermining for himself new destinies – destinies disastrous or beneficent in accordance with the nature of his deeds.

James Allen, *Mind is the Master:*
The Complete James Allen Treasury

Strangely, we seem to think of everything, but never stop to ponder on the dominating thoughts themselves and the role they play in manifesting into actions. Our destiny is not something that is imposed upon us; rather we are, at each moment, spinning the threads of our deeds into the pattern of our future. Although we have no control over the causes and effects that have produced this present life that has been marked out for us with absolute precision, we certainly have a good influence on the seeds of our future destiny. In the book

As a Man Thinketh, James Allen writes, “Act is the blossom of thought, and joy and suffering are its fruits.”

From here on, we must make a constant effort to consider the mind as an instrument, for when its behaviour and its functions are understood, we have the capability to become its independent director and controller. Mind has never considered what is best for the individual except to act upon its own whims and fancies. In other words, it is not a rational entity. Therefore, the mind must be carefully kept under guard or else it will head for certain destruction.

By diverting our attention inward, through meditation, our thoughts can be regulated and channelled properly, so that nothing can permeate through our mind without our consent. Supported by a spiritual focus and the habit of clear thinking, the mind has the ability to discriminate and to eradicate its degrading thoughts. This is an important chapter in the individual's life, for as the mind is slowly purged of all its impurities, his future fate undergoes a complete change, an entire metamorphosis. It is for this reason that man is known as the “master of his thoughts, controller of his actions and the architect of his own destiny.”



*The supreme lesson is that whatever is destined is bound to happen,
and it is best to surrender to the will of God.*

And that destiny is the product of our own past actions:

If you are wounded by thorns, you planted them;

And if you are clad in satin, you were the spinner.

Rumi, as quoted in *Sarmad, Martyr to Love Divine*

Repartee of the Wise

A king visited the monasteries of a Zen master and was surprised to learn that there were at least five thousand monks residing there at that time. Wanting to satisfy his curiosity, the king casually asked the monk, “Exactly how many disciples do you have?” The Master replied, “Four or five at the most!”

* * *

A man travelled far to search for a true Master. When he came across one such Master, he asked one of the disciples, “What are some of the miracles your Master has done?”

“Well,” the disciple replied, “there are two kinds of miracles. In the country you come from, it is a miracle if God acts on someone’s will. In our country, it is a miracle when someone acts on the will of God.”

* * *

A disheartened disciple said to his Master, “If only I had the same kind of faith that you have, I would be able to live your life.” The Master replied, “If you follow and live my life, you will soon have my faith.”



Given

The fundamentals in attitude, while may be correctly instilled into the novice on the spiritual path, do not take long before they are tainted with the ways and workings of the world. Meditation, a sacred and intimate space shared between Master and disciple, can often on our part be reduced to a mundane chore carried out rather reluctantly.

Perhaps on some level, we believe that the onus of the herculean task of transforming man into God lies on our feeble shoulders. Failure to observe any visible signs of progress, coupled with the innumerable 'fleeting of time' reminders in satsang can easily add to the pressure, leaving one with the feeling of much disappointment.

The solution to combat this mental state blatantly stares us in the face in almost all of Maharaj Charan Singh's answers, "Attend to your meditation." He did not say, "Do your meditation", but *attend* to it.

Do you think your meditation is taking you up? Nobody's meditation is taking him up to the Father. It's absolutely wrong. It's only the Lord and the Master who are uprooting us from here and taking us to that level. If anybody says, "I can reach back to the Father by my effort, by my meditation," he's wrong.

Everything the Lord is doing himself. What are we doing? Leaving all these things to one's own effort, one could never go back to the Father.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Die to Live*

Clearly, given our current predicament, we lack both the capacity and the thrust to even initiate the 'A' of spiritual progress. The reason is obvious: we are thinkers, employed by the mind attempting to think

outside of its limitations. Encapsulated within the confines of time and space, the mind can only guess at best what unfathomable elevated states of bliss lie beyond its reach.

It is critical, therefore, that the spiritual catalyst that we so badly desire must come from outside of our petty and finite parameters. The aid cannot be self-induced. It has to be given. And given by a Power that itself is not confined to the limited.

The perfect mystics are that Power. They transcend both time and space, and are the epitome of ultimate love and compassion. How immensely fortunate to come under the shelter of such a Master, where we are externally blessed with a physical mentor who offers spiritual guidance, while simultaneously we are watched over and protected from within.

Attending to meditation, as the Masters instruct, is to be present in that sanctified space. While silently bearing witness to our limitations, we learn to surrender not only the act of thinking, but eventually also the mind itself. Having become free from the burden of all thought of results, we are left emptied, ready to experience the mercy and grandeur of his love. We realize that what we once longed for, and much more, has already been given.



The Shabd is truly the essence of everything ...

It is the greatest gift which can be given.

Tukaram, The Ceaseless Song of Devotion

Did You Know?

One of the objects of running the langar is to provide an opportunity for the satsangis to serve others. It increases mutual love and understanding amongst the satsangis. It enables them to rise above the narrow distinctions of the rich and the poor, of the high and the low.

Maharaj Charan Singh, as quoted in *Treasure Beyond Measure*

* * *

So long as mind is our master, it will keep us on the wheel of birth and death. When we are its master, it will be our most faithful ally. Therefore, its control is imperative; and the object of human birth is to control it and thereby get off the wheel of life and death.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *Spiritual Gems*

* * *

There is a very sweet and captivating melody in the Name, on hearing which the soul is attracted to the spiritual regions, just as a needle is drawn towards a magnet, since our souls, the Name and the Lord have the same common substance. By the attraction of the Name, the soul leaves the tomb of the body and rises out of it. Maulana Rum says: "If I were to tell even a little about the divine melodies, the dead would rise from their graves."

Philosophy of the Masters, Vol. IV

His Love

Not Again

Again, the mind revolts at the face of yet another turning point in life. Why are there so many crossroads, so many turning points? Why could life not just be a straight highway home? Just when we think we have nearly reached a straight path, it curves yet again. And the road never ends.

But what is it that is actually happening when these crossroads come about? There is a very inspiring passage in *One Being One* that describes our situation and reminds us that the Lord may just want us to realize his presence through our struggles. The author writes:

He constantly seeks opportunities to flood us with an awareness of his inner presence, if only we will acknowledge him just a little.... He cares for us, and is always ready to nudge us, to give us a gentle reminder of his presence.

His reminder can come at any moment, often when we least expect it.... Or maybe we are in distress. Life has hurled its javelins at us, piercing our heart.... There is no clear way forward, and present circumstances are almost more than we can bear.... Or maybe we need to develop greater inner depth and sincerity. And with the kind of love we find so hard to understand, he sends us pain and hardship. And without our knowing, he simultaneously sustains us.... Or perhaps, our heart is dry, even disconsolate and, without our even thinking why, we pick up a book and happen upon a sentence or a passage that strikes us.... And inwardly, we are refreshed. In so many ways, each particular to our own selves, and to our own

inner state at that time, he reaches out to us. Or rather draws us in – into the orbit of his love.... Such is the magic of the love with which he tends us, and which he weaves around us.

Each of us may have experienced that feeling described above. That feeling when everything seems to be a mess ... but we still feel him. That feeling when we are upset at the people around us, we are stressed and troubled, but we still feel his love. And *that* keeps us going.

Yes, Once Again

So yes, just when we think we have had enough, and we want life to be a silky road, difficulties and troubles come storming once again. But, at least, during these painful moments, we feel his presence. At least, because of these difficulties, we call out to him, we cry, we beg, we make promises, we meditate.

And, at the end of the day, how big are our troubles anyway? There is a story that describes how a young boy's older sister used to give him hair pins and rubber bands, pretending those were the keys to his bicycle. One day, the young boy lost his 'keys'. He was undoubtedly afraid and this was a crisis to him. What was he going to do? But when he confessed his mistake to his sister, she just smiled. She was much older, and she had a better perspective. The Master has a better perspective as well. In the Master's view, our severest struggles are nothing worse than lost hair pins and rubber bands.

He has already mapped our destiny out for us. We just need to have faith and patience. In *One Being One*, the author also acknowledges this, and sums up the state of serenity he bestows on us: "Time is no problem for the Being who created time. In the end, we discover that we ... have always dwelt within the sanctuary of his love."



Blessings

A man went to see his Zen master and requested him to write something that would bless and encourage his family for the generations to come. It would be something that his family could cherish.

The Master wrote a few words on a small piece of paper, which he handed over to the man. The man gasped in amazement at what he read. The Master had written:

Father dies

Son dies

Grandson dies

“What sort of blessing is this!” exclaimed the man. “Why would you write something so depressing?”

The Master gently explained. “My dear son. If your son dies before you, your family would suffer unbearable grief. If your grandson dies before your son, this would also bring great sorrow. Death is but the natural course of life. If your family should go in the order that I have written, therein lies the Lord’s grace.”



The Gift of Mystical Darkness

On the spiritual path, there is a certain phase that seekers have described which reveals deep anguish and feelings of separation from the Lord. At the time of meditation, the disciple's inner world is filled with an intense darkness and his heart feels cold, empty and alone. The disciple longs intensely to meet the Radiant Form within, but feels incapable, as he believes his devotion is lacking. At times, the disciple may even feel abandoned or orphaned by the Lord.

Mystics and saints who have gone through this phase describe their pain using different metaphors such as: “the dark night of the soul” or “the cloud of unknowing.” Saint Thérèse of Lisieux wrote:

He allowed my soul to be overwhelmed with darkness, and the thought of Heaven, which had consoled me from my earliest childhood, now became a subject of conflict and torture. This trial did not last merely for days or weeks; I have been suffering for months, and I still await deliverance. I wish I could express what I feel, but it is beyond me. One must have passed through this dark tunnel to understand its blackness.

The Story of the Soul

What does one do during this most painful phase of the spiritual journey? How does one focus on meditation when faced with such unbearable inner pain? The mystics who went through this painful experience show us by example that they persevered in their spiritual practice despite how they felt. They begged for forgiveness for feeling abandoned by the Lord and asked for strength to go through this agonizing phase. They knew that it was only amidst their dark, empty prayers that the Lord would hear their cries of help, and so they

continued with faith to knock and knock, persistently for as long as they needed to, until the Lord responded.

Those of you who find yourselves in this predicament need to comfort yourselves. Patiently persevere and do not let yourselves get upset. Trust in God, who does not abandon those who seek him with a simple and righteous heart. He will not neglect to give you what you need for your path until he delivers you in that clear, pure light of love. You are meant to receive this great gift, yet it is only through the dark night of the spirit that he will bring you to it.

Saint John of the Cross, *The Dark Night of the Soul*

The Masters explain to us that spiritual darkness is, in fact, a blessing in disguise. It is during this phase that we grow spiritually. We learn that we cannot accomplish the spiritual journey without the guidance and presence of our Beloved, thereby teaching us to believe in the Master's grace. By going through the furnace of dryness, the pain of longing, our love for the Master becomes stronger and we develop the strength to persevere in our spiritual practice. When we diligently practise because we want to follow his instructions, because we want to please the Master, we are, in effect, building a strong foundation for our spiritual life. Our faith is strengthened and our meditation becomes our greatest treasure.

The mystics explain to us that this darkness does not imply that the inner Master is absent, for he never leaves his disciple; they assure us that the Master leads the disciple every step of the way throughout the spiritual journey, even when the disciple does not feel his presence. The darkness is there to teach us, to cleanse our inner hearts, strengthen our faith and make us fit to stand in his presence. If we were in a dark room and someone were to switch on the light

suddenly, our eyes would momentarily hurt due to the brightness. In the same way, this phase prepares us to experience the true form of the Master. It is a necessary part of spiritual progress.

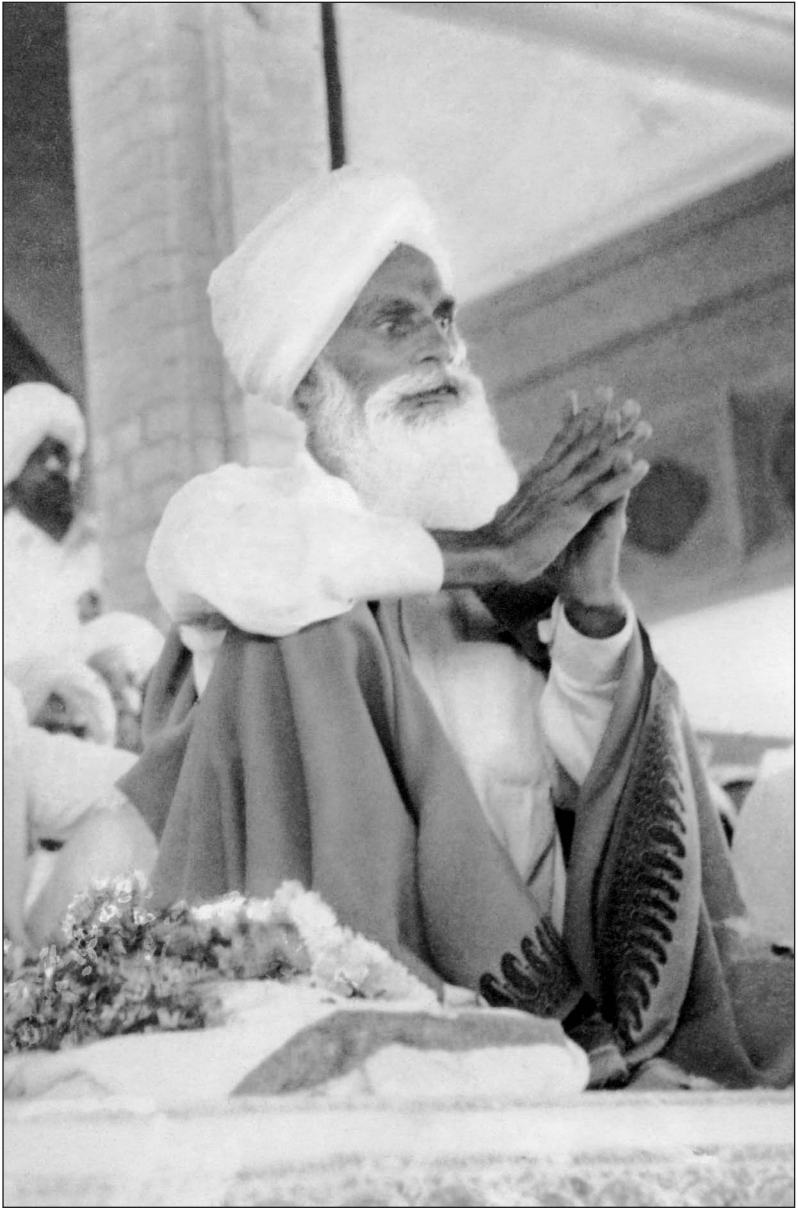
Suppose you are going to fill some holder or container, and you know you will be given a large amount. Then you set about stretching your sack or wineskin or whatever it is. Why? Because you know the quantity you will have to put in it, and your eyes tell you there is not enough room. By stretching it, therefore, you increase the capacity of the sack, and this is how God deals with us. Simply by making us wait, he increases our desire, which in turn enlarges the capacity of our soul, making it able to receive what is to be given to us.

Saint Augustine, as quoted in *When the Well Runs Dry*

Meditating in the 'dark night' is about being fully present in the tender, emptiness of our souls. It is not about turning away from the pain but learning to rest in it. As we grow spiritually, we begin to love the darkness and feel the need to pray more because we truly believe that beyond this veil, the Master awaits us with open arms. We begin to realize that the pain, longing and agony is part of the Lord's plan to mould us into perfect beings. In time, we understand that the darkness is there to fill us with the light of the Lord's love. If it were not for the darkness, we would not persevere for the Light; without his absence, we would not yearn for his presence.

It is through this mystical darkness that we travel towards the Light. Moreover, just as the metaphors imply, we understand that this pain and agony is just a temporary phase, and we accept whatever spiritual circumstances he puts us in, for 'the dark night' will eventually turn into the bright light of a new day; 'the cloud of unknowing' will make way for the sun to reappear.





Maharaj Jagat Singh

Heart to Heart

Once a satsangi approached Sardar Bahadur Jagat Singh and said, “I want to ask your advice about the education of my son and about his career.” Sardar Bahadur quietly listened – at that time he was not the Master. I often used to go to him when he came here from Lyallpur. He would just sit quietly where there was a spare space in the upper room. He was a man of very few words. He would hardly speak unless it was necessary. If his answer was essential, he would speak; otherwise not. That gentleman was talking and telling him all the problems concerning his son. Then he added, “I have also asked the advice of the Great Master.” Sardar Bahadur said, “What! How dare you think I could say something different? And if you could not have faith in him, how are you going to have faith in what I can say?” Then he was absolutely quiet.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Spiritual Heritage*

* * *

In a letter to a disciple, Maharaj Sawan Singh writes:

Never think for a moment that you are at such a long distance from me. The Master in his Shabd form is within you and looking after you in every way. If you rise a bit more, you can talk with him when you like. Kabir says: “If a Guru resides at a distance, then direct the soul towards him, riding the steed of Shabd, and instantly the soul is in communion with him.” My connection with you is not limited to this life, but is for all times. All of us are to reach our own home, Sach Khand.

Dawn of Light

Book Review



The Mathnawí of Jalálu'ddin Rúmí

TRANSLATED BY REYNOLD A. NICHOLSON

PUBLISHER: LONDON: GIBB MEMORIAL TRUST, 1990.

ISBN 0-906094-27-5 (3-VOLUME SET IN ENGLISH)

The Muslim scholar Jalal ad-Din Muhammad (1207-1273) was educated at the best Islamic universities of his day, and was respected in his community as a preacher, legal scholar and Sufi master in the spiritual line of his father who was also a Sufi master. Though born in what is now Tajikistan, Jalal ad-Din lived in the city Konya, capital of the Seljuk sultanate of Rum, in what today is central Turkey. In 1244, he met the Sufi dervish Shams-i-Tabriz (the “Sun of Tabriz”), whose light transformed him into the deeply venerated spiritual teacher whom history knows as Mevlana (or Mawlana) Rumi (i.e., our master from Rum).

In Shams’ form of Sufism (Islamic mysticism) one ‘annihilates’ one’s personality in the personality of the spiritual guide or teacher (*pir* or *murshid*), as a necessary step towards ‘annihilating’ one’s personality in God. Ecstatic poetry, music, and dance, all in the name of Shams, began pouring out of Rumi. (After Rumi’s death, his followers would form the Mevlevi or Mawlavi Sufi order famous as the ‘whirling dervishes.’) The poetry, among the most exquisite lyrics of Persian Sufi mysticism, comprises the *Divan-i-Kabir* (the Great Work or Collection), also called the *Divan-i-Shams-i-Tabriz*.

These lyrical *ghazals* (odes) only whetted the appetites of Rumi’s disciples, who were devotedly reading the long didactic *masnavis* (literally couplets) of Sufi mystics such as Sana’i (d. ca. 1131) and Attar (d. ca. 1221). In 1258, Rumi’s fellow disciple (of Shams) and successor-to-be Husam al-Din Chelebi requested Rumi to write such a work. Rumi responded with the famous “Song of the Reed” which begins: “Listen to the reed how it tells a tale, complaining of separations – saying, ‘Ever since I was parted from the reed-bed, my lament hath caused man and

woman to moan.’ I want a bosom torn by severance, that I may unfold (to such a one) the pain of love-desire.” This poem in eighteen lines became the commencement of the *Masnawi-i-Ma’navi* (Couplets of True Meaning), or more simply the *Mathnawi* (also spelled *Masnawi* and *Mesnevi*). Over the next fifteen years, with Husam as his secretary, Rumi dictated the six books of the *Mathnawi* – about 25,000 couplets – now acknowledged as a Sufi, Persian and world literary classic. In honor of this iconic master’s 800th birthday, UNESCO declared 2007 to be the International Rumi Year.

Until today, the only complete English translation of the *Mathnawi* appears in three of the eight volumes of *The Mathnawi of Jalaluddin Rumi* by Reynold A. Nicholson, which was published starting in 1926. In addition to Nicholson’s translation, this eight-volume work contains Nicholson’s commentary and an edition of the Persian original. A scholar of Persian and Arabic literature at Cambridge University, Nicholson preferred to emphasize scholarly exactitude rather than literary beauty in his translation. For example, he uses parentheses to set his own interpretations off from Rumi’s literal words, and inserts many footnotes to explain obscure religious and cultural references. While many readers will be reassured by such a precise and exhaustive translation, others may find it a bit dry and cumbersome. The latter may prefer one of the many partial translations of the *Mathnawi*, such as the one-volume abridgement by E. H. Whinfield, *Masnawí-i Ma’naví, the Spiritual Couplets of Mauláná Jalálu’d-din Muhammad i Rúmí*. A list of other English translations can be found at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Masnawi>.

Even apart from issues of translation, the *Mathnawi* isn’t always easy going for modern readers. Certainly, our ideas of good taste or ‘political correctness’ are different from those of Rumi’s thirteenth-century Persian-Islamic culture. As a result, the poem must be approached with good-willed tolerance – the same tolerance one might accord to, say, Dante, Shakespeare, or even Mark Twain. Nevertheless, and regardless of their religious affiliations, many readers consider the *Mathnawi* to be the greatest work of mysticism ever written.

The *Mathnawi* is a spiritual love letter to Rumi's followers, engaging them with entrancing poetry but also innumerable stories, parables, jokes, anecdotes from history, scenes from everyday life, as well as references to the Qur'an and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad. Yet, however, entertaining the material often is, Rumi's obvious purpose throughout is to teach profound spirituality. As he himself explains in the short Arabic prose preface to Book One, the purpose of the *Mathnawi* is to reveal "the roots of the roots of the roots of the (Mohammedan) Religion in respect of (its) unveiling the mysteries of attainment (to the Truth) and of certainty; and which is the greatest science of God and the clearest (religious) way of God and the most manifest evidence of God." In fact, scholars often declare that the significance of the *Mathnawi* is not only Islamic but universal. Yet it is notable that Rumi does not achieve that universality by setting aside his Islamic religion and culture, but, as he said, by going to "the roots of the roots of the roots" of that religion.

One fruitful perspective from which to read the *Mathnawi* is as a reflection of the needs of Rumi's followers – answers to their many doubts, advice for the ticklish problems of their lives and encouragement to struggle onward on the path to union with their Master, and thence the Eternal. Because Rumi is responding to his disciples' interior as well as exterior needs, he doesn't proceed in a linear keep-to-the-point fashion, but interrupts his stories with stories, pertinent discussions, and often direct challenges to the knee-jerk interpretations that the lower self – the *nafs* – continually attempts to foist on unwary readers.

Rumi has much to say about this *nafs*, translated by Nicholson with such terms as the "ghoul-like soul", the "fleshly soul," or the "carnal self." Rumi warns, "to regard the self as easy (to subdue) is folly, folly. O son, if you seek (to know) the form of the self, read the story of Hell with its seven gates. Every moment (there proceeds from the self) an act of deceit, and in every one of those deceits a hundred Pharaohs are drowned together with their followers."

How is one to overcome this great and only obstacle, the *nafs*, and thus successfully traverse Rumi's path? By seeking refuge with a saint: "Though you be rock or marble, you will become a jewel when you

reach the man of heart (the saint).... Go not to the neighborhood of despair: there are hopes. Go not in the direction of darkness: there are suns." Rumi has the Almighty explain: "These saints are My children in exile, sundered from (My) dominion and glory; (They are) despised and orphaned for the sake of probation, but secretly I am their friend and intimate. All of them are supported by My protections: you may say they are in sooth parts of Me."

In early December 1273, some fifteen years after beginning the *Mathnawi*, Rumi dictated the poem's final verses (the last story is unfinished), and a few days later, on December 17, the mortal candle relinquished its flame to the eternal flame from which it had come. Aflaki, a fourteenth century Mevlevi, describes "Jews, Christians, Turks, Romans, and Arabians" flocking to Rumi's funeral procession because "they had learnt from him more of the mysteries shrouded in their scriptures, than they had ever known before; and had found in him all the signs and qualities of a prophet and saint."

The *Mathnawi*'s final story concerns "the injunction given by a certain person that after he died his property should be inherited by whichever of his three sons was the laziest." Rumi describes the first two sons, and interrupts the narrative with an explanatory parable, but he never describes the third son, thus leaving the account unfinished. Yet he drops a hint: "The Gnostics are the laziest folk in the two worlds, because they get their harvest without ploughing. They have made laziness their prop (and rely on it) since God is working for them." Perhaps this is a humorously-worded invitation to the reader to become that "laziest" son or daughter who, by relying solely on God, shall inherit the Father's kingdom. The final encouraging words from this most sublime of poems: "for there is a window between heart and heart."



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

