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Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

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Spiritual Link

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Yours Affectionately

Take for granted that all that has happened, is happening or will happen, is with his will. So whatever circumstances we find ourselves in, we should remain contented. If he sends us misery, we should accept it with pleasure, and if he keeps us happy we should take it as his children. So do not consider that your life is not a bed of roses. Take it as his gift and be happy in it. “Misery is a blessing in disguise,” says Shakespeare. Misery is a medicine and pleasure is a disease, for in pleasure the mind dominates and keeps us away from the path. You say you are thirsty for knowledge; knowledge is in the sound current. It is within you. Go within, ride the sound current, and be the master of all knowledge.

From the time of initiation, when the Master takes over the charge of a soul, he is more anxious than the soul to see it installed on the throne of bliss and peace. Even if the devotee, through some chance, leaves the Master or loses faith in him, he, on his part, never leaves. He will someday bring the devotee on the path again. His mission is to take souls up, and a soul once initiated is never deserted. This is the law.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *The Dawn of Light*



One Simple Question

Death. What impressions do we conjure up in our heads when we think about it? Unpleasant. Ghastly. Horrific. Disease. Old age. Unfair. Not happening soon. Not to me.

We certainly see death on a daily basis: Gun violence, slaughter farms, terrorism, deforestation, and powerful devastating natural disasters. Although we are well-versed in the laws of nature, most of us choose to ignore the subject of death and the reality of our own eventual demise. Or if we do acknowledge it, we tend to have a negative, depressing and pessimistic outlook on it. No one ever has anything positive to say about dying and no one is looking forward to it.

Well, no one except for a handful of exceptional souls who know precisely what death entails. They have experienced first hand what happens at death. Not only that, they experience death every day, while living. We generally call these extraordinary people, saints, mystics, spiritual gurus, or perfect living Masters. Their names are irrelevant; what truly matters is learning from these realized souls.

There is a simple and interesting, albeit possibly depressing question that we all should spend time thinking about. It is interesting because it applies to each of us differently. More important, this is probably the most critical issue we will ever come across. The answer practically determines where we are headed after death, and working towards the right answer could lead us to eternal bliss. On the other hand, ignoring this question could lead us back into more suffering and pain.

The question is: At the time of your death, when you are taking in your last breath, what will your final thought be?

Regrets? Accomplishments? Promises made? Pending tasks? The love of your life? Money owed? Money to be collected? Your will? Children and grandchildren?

As we have all experienced, we have little or no control over our thoughts. They are random, sporadic, and often not even logical. However, our final thoughts are critically important. They determine the direction nature will take. Part of nature's role is to fulfil every pending desire, hope, dream and aspiration that we have. The time of death is the critical point where we could either go back into the world and fulfil these pent-up desires or, if we are spiritually inclined and have a genuine yearning to merge back to our origin, to follow our Guru.

This is where the perfect living Masters can help us. By teaching us the proven method they have personally used, they are able to reach out and pull us up to their level. By teaching us the art of meditation, they show us how to first calm the mind and make it motionless. With our mind constantly running throughout the day, it is impossible to see what lies deeper, within us. Our perception of reality is thus shallow, superficial and clouded. Maharaj Charan Singh would often say that to see one's reflection in a pond, the water must be absolutely still. A slight disturbance could create a long-lasting ripple effect.

Although the process of stilling the mind sounds simple enough, it is a long and challenging process.

Stilling the wild mind and withdrawing the attention from the body and concentrating it at the eye focus is a slow affair. Concentrating the attention at the eye focus is like the crawl of an ant on a wall. It climbs to fall and falls to rise and to climb again. With perseverance it succeeds and does not fall again.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *Spiritual Gems*

Only upon stilling the mind are we able to truly go within and experience the ultimate reality.

In 1933, an American living in Dera, Dr Julian Johnson, wrote a fascinating letter to his friends in the West. Being a disciple of a great mystic, Maharaj Sawan Singh, he produced an extraordinary account of what he had learnt as a disciple. What follows is merely an excerpt, but the entire letter deserves to be read in its entirety, as it is truly remarkable. Discussing the process of leaving the body at death, he writes:

The mind is often compared to a monkey hopping around. But it must be brought to a standstill, to absolute rest at the given centre. In due time, if the process is complete, the individual spirit current or substance is slowly withdrawn from the body, first from the lower extremities which become feelingless, and then from the rest of the body. The process is identical with that which takes place at the time of death, only this is voluntary, while that of death is involuntary. The whole spiritual being gathers at the given centre, or focus, its powers increasing because of the concentration. Eventually he is able to pierce the veil that intervenes – which in reality is “not thicker than the wing of a butterfly” – and then he opens what is called the tenth door and steps out into a new world. The body remains in the position in which he left it, quite senseless, but unharmed by the process. He can return to it at will. He may remain out of it for hours, or even weeks and months. The life processes slow down almost to a standstill, but the body remains in perfect health until the owner is ready to return to it. In all this the student is neither asleep nor unconscious – not for a moment. In fact, the

reverse takes place. He is superconscious. He knows all that is going on in and around him and vastly more than he ever knew before.

With a Great Master in India

The one thing we can deduce from this letter is that without practising and becoming proficient in this process, it is all talk. It is all speculation; it is just theory. And all the talk, speculation and theory in the world will not cut it. It will not take us very far, and it certainly will not help us gain control over our mind.

So coming back to our original question of where our thoughts will be when we die, the answer is simple. It depends. It depends on our state of mind. If we have worked hard throughout our life and followed our Master's teachings, our life will have a very pleasant ending. If, however, we have been ignorant, and all we have done is eat, drink and be merry, well then, all we can hope to do is to efficiently utilize the time we have left. The choice is ours.



Something to Think About

We are born alone, we will go alone; and the one who belongs to us is the Father. Unless we go back to him, we will not be able to overcome this feeling of loneliness. That is why no matter how many friends we have, how many good relations we have, how much wealth of the world we have, when you sit alone, you will feel you're all alone in this world. Having everything, you are all alone. There's no contentment within you. Still you're yearning for something which you do not know, which you cannot account for. That is the natural inclination of the soul towards its own origin. Unless we let it go to its own source, we will not be able to overcome this feeling of loneliness.

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



Those who complain of sleep at the time of taking exercises usually sit halfheartedly and only as a matter of routine. Tell these people to keep the mind's attention directed toward the eye focus, even during working hours. Work needs attention only momentarily. Most of the time the mind is off the work anyway. This inner utilization of the attention within will not hinder work; in fact, the work will go on better.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *Spiritual Gems*



Champions of a Distracted Mind

Every disciple needs to understand what keeps us bound to this creation, so that we can learn how to escape it. Every second passed is an opportunity lost that cannot be recovered. It pays to remember that the short-term pain of accepting a truth is better than the long-term pain of believing an illusion.

A disciple once asked Hazur Maharaj Ji: “Master, what is the force that seems to keep us from spirituality? What is this negative force?” The Master replied:

The mind. The Lord has created this whole universe, and he has entrusted the working of this creation to Kal, or as Christ called it, Satan or the devil. The ‘prince of this world’ also refers to the same negative power. As long as we are under the prince of this world, we cannot go back to the Father. Unless we rise above the realm of the prince of this world, we always remain attached to this world. And the mind is the agent of the prince of this world. The mind has taken hold of the soul, and the mind is fond of sensual pleasures; so whatever actions the mind performs under the influence of the senses, the soul also has to come to the mind’s level to reap the results of those karmas, those sins. Hence the mind is keeping us attached to this world, attached to this creation.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. I

Hazur Maharaj Ji explains to us in one concise paragraph how the creation works. It is a self-perpetuating system made possible by ignorance; fuelled by the mind (which controls the soul) creating

endless karma, and it is this simple fact that keeps the creation going. Simply put, the souls that populate the creation provide the fuel to run the machine of creation through their karma. Karma is the fuel that drives the creation, and it is also what keeps us chained to it. The only hope to escape the system is further explained by Hazur Maharaj Ji:

When the Father wants the soul to go back to him, he sends somebody from his level. And when he comes to our level, he is one with the Father and has no load of his own, no karmas of his own. He puts us back in touch with the spirit again, and then the soul will be able to go beyond the realm of the prince of this world and will be able to merge into the Father. So it is the prince of this world who is very anxious to keep the souls tied down to this world. That is his duty.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. I

So we need to follow the rules of the game and work the system in order to get out of it. This is the clarity that Sant Mat teachings bring, which allows us to circumvent and escape the creation.

To accomplish this, we need to still our mind. And to still the mind, the Master gives us the technique of meditation. Meditation hones our concentration, it focuses our mind and takes it away from the thousands of distractions that haunt us every day. Meditation requires us to sit alone in silence and stillness for two and a half hours each day. It is that focused stillness and silence that leads the disciple to the transcendent Light and Sound. This requires a lot of discipline and steadfast commitment. It also requires that we bring a certain degree of structure into our life.

There are only twenty-four hours in a day, and every moment that we dedicate to meditation invokes the Lord's grace. We cannot choose

the cards that we are dealt. The following story will give us an idea of what we face.

After winning several archery contests, the young and rather boastful champion challenged a Zen master who was renowned for his skill as an archer. The young man demonstrated remarkable technical proficiency when he hit a distant bull's eye on his first try, and then split that arrow with his second shot. "There," he said to the old man, "see if you can match that!"

Undisturbed, the master did not draw his bow, but rather motioned for the young archer to follow him up the mountain. Curious about the old fellow's intentions, the champion followed him high into the mountain until they reached a deep gorge spanned by a rather flimsy and shaky log. Calmly stepping out onto the middle of the unsteady and perilous bridge, the old master picked a far away tree as a target, drew his bow, and fired a clean, direct hit. "Now it is your turn," he said as he gracefully stepped back onto the safe ground. Staring with terror into the seemingly bottomless and beckoning abyss, the young man could not force himself to step out onto the log, much less shoot at the target.

"You have much skill with your bow," the master said, sensing his challenger's predicament, "but you have little skill with the mind that lets loose the shot."

Like the champion in the story, we are champions of a distracted mind. Many of us love to multitask and consider it a great skill, which may be of value in today's fast-paced technical world, but in the centripetal realm of spirituality, it is as useless as it is destructive. It only serves to fritter away our concentration, thereby lessening our focus and the amount of time we can sit in meditation. The more we entertain activities that scatter our consciousness into the world, the longer it will take to focus our mind in meditation and the longer it will take to make progress.

So what can we do to improve our meditation practice? There is only one word, and we have heard our Master repeat it over and over again – practise. Practise, practise and more practise. But if that word is not pleasing to the ear, you can then use the alternative – effort. Effort, effort and more effort. The bottom line is there is no way around it, and we have to put in the time. No amount of discussion or intellectual debate will get us to the eye centre.

We clean the vessel of our mind with simran, and then fill it with bhajan. This is the long and the short of meditation; to submit ourselves without having any expectation of results or inner visions. If we sit in meditation, anxious for results, we get further distracted. So, if we just lower the intensity of our expectation for results, and heighten the level of our concentration, we will find a balance that will give us the right attitude to pursue this primary seva with all our heart.

However, without our effort at meditation, without putting in the time, we will not get any results, regardless of our best intentions. We have to do our homework. Master has given us this boon, the opportunity to be the best we can be, all it needs is our sincere effort.

*You have been a prisoner of a little pond,
I am the ocean and its turbulent flood.
Come merge with me,
Leave this world of ignorance.
Be with me, I will open the gate to your love.*

Rumi, as quoted in *Words of Wisdom*



Destiny

As explained by Maharaj Charan Singh

We are all born with a destiny and we have to go through that destiny during this span of life. You may not be affected by the events of destiny, you may be able to rise above the events of destiny, but you can't change destiny at all. You have to go through it. With the help of meditation, you are not affected by the events of destiny. You don't lose your balance. You face it smilingly.

You see, in destiny there is not much interference. If you have to bump your head, you will have to bump your head. But you may not be affected; you may not feel the pain when bumping your head. But you can't change the course of events. There may be a little remission here and there, but normally, you don't change the events of destiny because our course of karma is not independent, it's connected with so many people. If one has to have an accident, it's not just an accident. Now the car is involved, the passengers are involved, the hospital is involved, the doctor is involved, the nurses are involved, relations are involved. The person who's sending flowers is involved. So many people are involved with that person's destiny. So if his course of action is changed, what about the destiny of the other people? That will also have to be changed.

So saints never interfere with the destiny of anybody at all. But it's possible that there may be an accident and you just laugh over it and not feel affected by that accident at all. You may take it very easy and may not feel any pain about it and take it very lightly. But you can't say that accident should have been avoided because I've been meditating. Our load of karma is not independent, it's always interconnected with other people. There's a long chain, so all that can't be changed. The mystics never interfere with the destiny of any person.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. I

The Lion's Whiskers

There is an ancient Ethiopian story of a man and woman who fall in love and marry. The man has a little boy from his previous marriage, who is still full of sorrow over his mother's death. He is hostile towards his father's new wife and rejects her as a mother. She always tries to be kind to him but he does not even speak to her. The woman consults a sorcerer: "What can I do to be accepted?" The sorcerer tells her, "Come back to me with three lion's whiskers." The woman is incredulous. How can anyone take three whiskers from a lion without being devoured?

The woman looks for a lion. It takes a long time, but at last she finds one. She keeps her distance initially. For a long time, she just watches it from afar. It comes and goes, and finally the woman decides to offer it food. Every day, she leaves some meat and goes away. Gradually, the lion gets used to her, till finally the woman is part of its life. The lion is calm with the woman – by now it can only expect good things from her – and she is less afraid. One day, when the lion is asleep, she removes the three whiskers. Easy.

The woman does not need to return to the sorcerer. Now she understands. During these months, she has changed, for she has now understood the value of patience. With patience, the woman has learned that even something that at first seemed impossible became possible.

Despite the advancement of technology and the many time-saving options we have available today, it seems as if we have become more impatient. We need everything done at the click of a button, and if for whatever reason we are not able to get things done in a quick and efficient manner, we become annoyed and feel we have wasted our time.

The impatience we have developed has an effect on our meditation. As disciples on a spiritual path, it is necessary for us to understand the importance of patience. We are told to sit each day in silence and give time to meditation. Giving that time daily is a struggle for most of us; even harder is to let ourselves absorb the calmness and peace available to us during that time.

We sometimes feel we are not getting anywhere in spite of putting in our best efforts. Each day we put forth our best, but we question if that is really taking us anywhere. And if it is not, then what is the point? We become impatient. How are we supposed to develop that patience in our meditation?

Imagine workers who are digging a tunnel. Each day, they work in darkness. It takes days, months and sometimes even years to reach the goal of seeing the light at the end. Suppose they were to give up at some point, tired of working and doubting whether they would actually get anywhere. However, they continue and persevere in their efforts each day and eventually see the tunnel built. It is the same with us – even if we do not see immediate results, we have to continue to do our best because we know that our Master has placed his faith in us.

The Masters come to us as living examples, and their patience with us is one of the many qualities we can learn from them. We have often heard Hazur Maharaj Ji answer questions about meditation by saying ‘bring me your failures.’ The Master awaits us each and every single day – patiently. Even with our often half-hearted attempts, he showers us with his love and grace, never for a minute giving up on us.

Yet how quick are we to give up on him. How often do we become impatient because we feel like our meditation is taking us on a never-ending journey. We have to learn to place our trust in him, just as he has placed his trust in us. We have to learn to be as patient with him

as he is with us. The way to build that up is to continue to persevere in our meditation.

As Hazur Maharaj Ji said, we have no alternative but to have patience, because nothing is in our hands. If it were in our hands, we wouldn't remain separated from the Father. So when it is in his hands, then the question of impatience does not arise. We can only put forth an effort and then leave everything to him.

Patience comes from love, and in love there is no calculation. Each day that we sit for our allotted time, we have to remind ourselves that we have to give our very best, and slowly but surely we will grow closer to our goal.



Have patience! In time, even grass becomes milk!

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

Repartee of the Wise

In a question and answer session, a disciple asked Hazur: “How much capacity do we have in planning our future? Is it set for us when we’re born?”

Hazur replied: “We have only one future: to go back to the Father. There’s no other future.”

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III



The Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh describes enjoying a good cup of tea. You must be in the present moment, mindful and aware, to enjoy the tea, to savour the sweet aroma, to taste the flavour, to feel the warmth of the cup. If you are ruminating about past events or worrying about future ones, you will look down at your cup and the tea will be gone. You drank it, but you do not remember, because you were not aware. Life is like that cup of tea.

Live in the present, not the past or the future. The past is over; learn from it and let it go. The future is not yet here. Plan for it, but do not worry. Worry only wastes your time and energy.

When you are not experiencing the present, when you are absorbed in the past or worried about the future, you bring great heartache and grief to yourself.

Brian Weiss, *Messages from the Masters*

The Natural Way

One of the greatest challenges that an initiate faces is living the spiritual life while confronting the world-at-large. With all the distractions, desires and peer pressure constantly hammering the spiritual practitioner, it would seem that leading a life dedicated to returning to our true source is almost an impossible task. It does not help that we have also to deal with the load of karmas from countless past lives, tipping the scale heavily against us.

Nevertheless, the Master tells us that if an initiate sincerely follows and practises the path within the parameters of the four vows, balance can be achieved.

We have to go through the karmic accounts which we have collected in past lives; that is why we have taken this birth. But we should not forget why we have been given the opportunity of being born in this human form. It is to go back to the Father. If you withdraw your consciousness to the eye centre and become one with that spirit, that holy light within yourself, you will be able to discharge your worldly duties better. Also, you will be able to go back to the Father. That is keeping a balance in this world.

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

The key is ‘balance’ – to be mindful of not being extreme. The Masters give the gift of Nam and teach us the practice of meditation, which in turn helps us to take charge of our focus, in both the outer and inner worlds. They graciously provide satsang – a protective atmosphere where we continue our study of Sant Mat and spirituality;

seva, where we learn humility and fellowship by serving others; and a support system among fellow disciples where we strengthen our faith and conviction to face life's daily ups and downs. But at the same time, the Masters remind us that even meditation, satsang and seva are just a means to the ultimate end, and therefore these activities should not be undertaken at the expense of our personal duties and family obligations. Here too, the Masters favour a balance; they strongly discourage us from being obsessive and over zealous in our spiritual duties at the cost of performing our worldly obligations..

We have to live in the world, but we have to meditate also. We have to keep the balance, because a certain load of karma can be cleared only by facing life, not just by attending to meditation. When we become too absorbed in meditation, sometimes the Master withdraws the grace so that we work in the world also. You are not to leave your worldly work. Rather you may even be pushed to the world, to face the world.

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

Leading a spiritual life does not mean one is to become reclusive or a hermit whereby we avoid discharging our responsibilities and obligations to family, friends and the community.

Sometimes people just try to close themselves off in a room and don't want to lead a natural, normal adult life. They try to meditate all day and the mind reacts, and they lose their balance. They behave quite abnormally. Meditation is a slow process. That is why it is known as 'sahaj marg' (the natural way). You have to be part of the world and also attend to meditation. You cannot fight with your mind day and night.

You also have to divert it into worldly affairs, and then bring it back to meditation. Otherwise, sometimes you build too much suppression, and the mind can react, sometimes violently. That is not a healthy approach. So we are never advised to cut off all our worldly activities and just attend to meditation. We have to lead a normal human life. We have to be a part of normal society and then also to attend to our meditation. Meditation is a way of life, it's not just closing yourself in a room and cutting yourself off from everybody and sitting in meditation. That's not meditation. Meditation should reflect in your whole life, your whole day. It becomes a part of your life, your way of life. That way your whole day is spent in meditation.

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

It is extremely dangerous to assume that we have any control over our mind and that we have the ability to conquer it. The mind being our foremost adversary cannot only destroy our balance in life but hinder our spiritual progress as well.

The Master has often counselled that sitting for two to three hours is just whetting the appetite. We have to live in Sant Mat daily – twenty-four seven. Eventually, it is how we balance our worldly life with our spiritual life that will help us build the atmosphere conducive to living the path of the saints.



The Master's Only Concern

Reflections of a Disciple of the Great Master

The Masters are always more concerned about the needs of their disciples rather than their own. I remember once Maharaj Ji (Maharaj Sawan Singh) had a cold and high fever; some of us begged him to rest and not to go to satsang that afternoon. He said he was all right and must go to satsang. Bibi Ralli and a few close satsangis knew that he was far from well and was in great discomfort. They almost insisted that Maharaj Ji stay in his room and rest. But he replied, "The more this body is utilized in seva the better. After all, it will be consigned to flames one day. I should never neglect the duty entrusted to me by Baba Ji." At satsang, his face was radiant and his voice so powerful that the sangat did not suspect that he was ill.

Later in the evening, as I was coming out of the Master's residence, a man approached, running, and said that he had just arrived and must see the Master. I told him that Hazur was ill, had just given a two-and-a-half-hour satsang, and it was not proper to trouble him now. But he would not listen. He said he had to report on duty at Meerut Cantonment the next morning. He became very insistent in his demands, so I bolted the door on him.

When I returned to Maharaj Ji, he said, "There is a man outside who has come from a long distance. Please bring him to me." I replied that I had already sent him away, but Maharaj Ji told me to find him and bring him back. I looked everywhere, and only after giving up the search did I see him on Hazur's veranda, the very picture of misery. I apologized to him and told him that Maharaj Ji wished to see him. He was overjoyed. With tears of gratitude in his eyes, he went upstairs with me to Maharaj Ji's room.

The man requested initiation. Hazur agreed and asked him to sit down. Anxious for Maharaj Ji's health, I begged that the man be initiated the following morning. Though unwell and looking tired, Maharaj Ji overruled my suggestion and initiated the man. A few weeks later the Master gave me a letter to read. The man had died just ten days after initiation. He had had a fever for only two days when he announced to his wife and brother that his inner eye had opened, and Hazur was with him. He told them that his end had come, and asked them not to grieve over his death. His wife asked what she would do without him. He said, "Go to the Satguru at Beas and take his refuge." To his brother he said, "If you want liberation, you should also go to Beas and get initiation."

A lump rose in my throat as I read the letter. Now I realized why the Master, in spite of his own ill health, had initiated the man so late in the night.

Heaven on Earth



The disciple knows, after he has progressed a little distance on the path, that he has no other such friend and well-wisher in all the world as his beloved Master, either here or hereafter. The soul loves God intensely, but God, and the Master who is His son, love the soul even more intensely.

Joseph Leeming, *Yoga and the Bible*

Did You Know?

An ounce of practice is better than a ton of knowledge. What use is it to know the principles if one does not live them. A learned person without practice is no better than a beast of burden carrying a load of books on its back. It is infinitely better to practise than to preach. Example is better than precept.

Maharaj Jagat Singh, *The Science of the Soul*



The day of our initiation is the day of our spiritual birth. Then, through spiritual practice, we grow and grow to become one with the Lord. As a child grows into a man, so after initiation, the disciple grows spiritually to become the Father. That is why initiation is referred to as a new birth, being “born again”.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Die to Live*



With meditation our willpower becomes so strong that even if our mind has been wrongly conditioned and wrongly influenced in childhood, we can become a saint.

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

Shoes

Between the murky banks of our preconceived concepts and our karmic liabilities, the river of life runs deep and wide. And its perils include every obstacle that hinders our evolution towards the ultimate consciousness.

At every bridge and potential crossing, we are beset by confusion and fear, always doubtful of our success, as we journey across the treacherous divide. Decisions become arbitrary and lacking in confidence because clarity is elusive, so we question ourselves at every step even as we desperately try to assess our own situation.

And yet, coming up with solutions to someone else's problems is a completely different story. Those answers surprisingly come quickly to mind – often bordering on the obvious as they roll off the tongue so readily, by way of counsel and advice. It is a strange phenomenon that we can have such insight into someone else's problems so easily, and make tough decisions on their behalf so effortlessly, yet are unable to do the same for ourselves.

Mystic wisdom explains the reason for this phenomenon – it is the shoes that we wear.

To be more precise, it is our attachment to the constant experience of living exclusively 'in our own shoes.' It is our inability to look beyond our immediate sphere of existence. We are submerged in life and all its mundane problems; a twenty-four seven experience, engaging us physically and mentally to the degree that leaves no room for the most important aspect of existence – our spiritual side.

Life appears to be fully immersive. But it is not, if we practise the key element of Sant Mat teachings – the one simple exercise of trying to step out of our shoes; of detaching ourselves from our habitual

attachments, our concepts and notions, and even our physical world; detachment that is free of emotional baggage and past prejudices, free even from the comfort zones of our physical and mental spaces where we have lived from birth.

Such detachment is the key to transcending this paltry existence of pain and pleasure. It is the fundamental formula of every perfect Master – they speak, think and live it. And through it, they teach their disciples the true path of self-realization.

Stepping out of our own shoes gives us the ability to do the one thing that only a human being can do: step into another person's shoes, and understand his problems with real depth and sensitivity. We become open to different perspectives, and we learn to accept new points of view that we probably never imagined possible in the past.

The profound act of putting ourselves in someone else's situation, and to share their suffering, is an important part of our evolution as caring, gentle humane beings. And it is this evolution that triggers the beginning of our final voyage on the spiritual path, the journey of transformation, where nothing can accompany with us – not even the shoes on our feet.



The Master Answers

A selection of questions and answers with Maharaj Charan Singh

Q: *What should be our approach to meditation?*

A: Our approach to meditation should be that of gratitude. The Lord has given us the opportunity of this human form and then the environment in which to attend to meditation. So we should always approach meditation with gratitude.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III

* * *

Q: *Could you talk about the importance of satsang, where the Master is not present physically?*

A: Well, brother, the purpose of satsang, of holding meetings is just to strengthen our faith and meditation, to create the atmosphere in which we have to build our meditation. If we have any doubt, any question, any obstacle, it gets answered, dissolved, resolved. And we are able to hold that atmosphere in which we have to build our meditation. That is the real purpose of satsang. It is no ritual, no ceremony. You will not get anything by merely attending satsang. The atmosphere that you carry home from the satsang and attending to your meditation will give you everything. The mind's doubts that are resolved and dissolved in the satsang will give you everything. The faith and devotion which the satsang builds in you will give you everything. Otherwise it is all the same old questions, same old answers – nothing new. But we are a source of strength to one another, and that helps us a lot in meditation.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III

Q: *Since Masters or saints always give their grace, where does the value of effort come on the path?*

A: The grace forces you to put in effort, unless you want to resist the grace. You see, you will feel the pull from within to sit in meditation, to achieve something within. That is the grace. Now grace is pushing you to make the effort, making you sit in meditation, making you awake early in the morning, and making you feel guilty the whole day if you don't attend to your meditation. That is all grace. That is forcing you to put in effort. So saints have their own way of giving grace.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III

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Q: *Maharaj Ji, my meditation is so poor that I feel that it doesn't even count as meditation.*

A: Well, you can count all twenty-four hours in your meditation. If you build around you an atmosphere of meditation, every breath you breathe is meditation for you. If you build that atmosphere of meditation and you live in that atmosphere of meditation, then meditation is always around you in one way or another. If the Lord is always in your heart in one way or another, then every breath is meditation. Meditation is not closing yourself in a room for a couple of hours – meditation is a way of life.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III

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Q: *Is the time of our death already set?*

A: Yes, it is definitely set. You cannot increase even a breath. You cannot change even the place where you have to die. It's all set. If all little detailed things are set for us in this world, if we have no free will, death cannot be in our hand, cannot be our choice. Even that is destined.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. I



Maharaj Charan Singh

Looking for Heaven

There is a story that is told of a master and his disciple. The disciple asks his master to please show him what heaven looks like. So the master teaches him how to meditate and explains to him how to go within himself and see heaven. A few days later, the disciple returns feeling somewhat disappointed. The vision of heaven that he had did not match with what he had read in the scriptures. There were no gems and jewels, no milk and honey and no angels floating around in white robes. He wondered if perhaps his master had made a mistake and showed him a different place.

So he went back to his teacher and asked him to show him what hell looked like. The master again teaches him how to meditate and explains to him how to go within himself and see hell. The disciple follows the master's instructions and sees in a trance that there is certainly such a place, but there were no evil spirits or burning inferno like people have described over the ages.

The disciple goes back to his master and says to him, "Master, I have seen heaven and hell as you have shown them to me, but I did not see in heaven all the things that have been promised, and the hell that I saw was not what the scriptures described."

"My child," the teacher replied, "your heaven or your hell is not kept ready for you. You will take them with you when you go. If you take sorrows with you, that is what you will find. If you take love with you, then that is what you will find there. The mind records everything you have experienced in your life and it will play it back for you when you die. So you will create your very own version of heaven or hell. In fact, you do not even have to wait for death in order to experience it. You can experience it even now."

Looking at our lives, we can see very clearly how true this is. Whatever we experience, whether it be joy, sadness, love or hatred – all depend on our thoughts, on the state and activity of our mind. If we are depressed, it is because of the repetitive, depressing thoughts that keep bombarding our minds. And if we are happy, it is because we are in a positive state of mind.

The saints explain that the only reason we go through these experiences is because our mind is beyond our control. If we had power over our minds, why would we intentionally choose to create hell for ourselves? So the question that arises is one that mankind has been asking since the beginning of time: How can we control the mind?

In the language of the mystics, controlling the activity of the mind is achieved through the process of concentration. They explain that the meaning of this word ‘concentration’ is often misunderstood; that there are many who think that concentration simply means closing one’s eyes. But one may close one’s eyes for hours – it does not stop the relentless onslaught of thoughts from assaulting the mind.

People are never at rest, never at peace; anxiety and sorrow do not disappear just because they close their eyes. It is concentration that does that. Concentration is activity of mind in the direction desired; our desire dictates in which way the mind is to be active; the mind acts according to our wishes.

Hazrat Inayat Khan, *The Sufi Message*

The Sufi mystics explain that the condition of the human mind is like a wild, unruly horse. And the key to controlling it is in the hands of the Murshid, the teacher who has an understanding of the horse’s nature, having trained and mastered it. By teaching us the method of

concentration through meditation, he shows us how the mind can be tamed and transformed into a vehicle completely under our control. Because only under this condition will we be able to still it.

And what is the effect of a still mind? All we have to do is look at those who have accomplished stillness in their life, who have enabled the ears of their heart to be in constant touch with the Word of God, the Shabd. The atmosphere such persons can produce and the effect of their presence is the reason why we can never have enough of being in the presence of our Master.

Even the memories of being with him have such a potent power, that just thinking about him brings comfort to the troubled mind and immediately uplifts anyone who is going through worry and anxiety.

The very presence of one whose mind is stilled gives such hope, such inspiration, such sympathy, such power and life. All the heavenly properties flow so smoothly and freely from the person whose mind is stilled that his words, his voice, his presence all react upon the mind of others; and as he stills his mind, so his very presence becomes healing.

Hazrat Inayat Khan, *The Sufi Message*

In living the Sant Mat way of life, we are reminded of our Master in almost everything we do, whether it is in meditation, satsang, seva, simran, at work or at home. And as long as our thoughts are with him, we will always be safe within the parameters of a positive state of mind. By itself, that alone is one of the greatest blessings conferred upon a seeker of God.

But what surpasses that is the extraordinary privilege of being in the physical presence of the Master. When we see his beautiful,

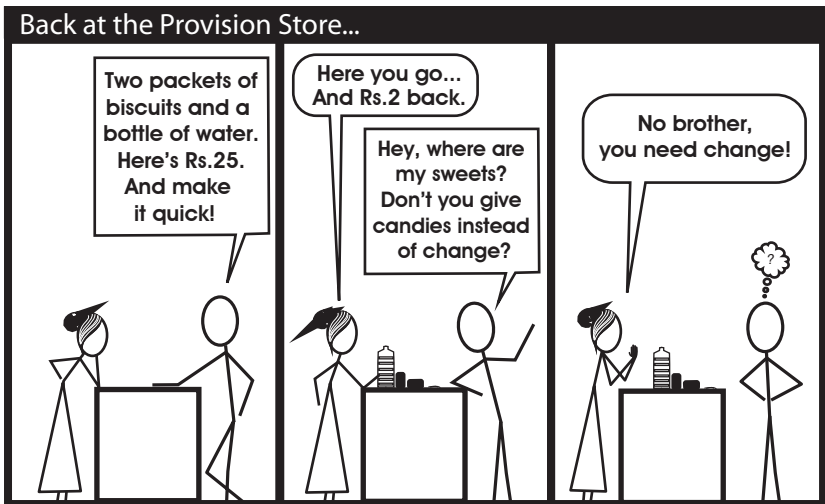
illuminated face, glowing with the kindness and compassion of a loving father, in that significant moment, heaven comes to life. Then there is absolutely no doubt. You are looking at heaven and it is the only place you want to be.



To derive bliss from the mere darshan of the Master is a great thing, because it indicates that the seeker has love – very essential for spiritual life. Having had the darshan of the Beloved, the devotee naturally desires nothing except to have as much darshan of the Master as possible, which results in drawing the devotee closer to the Master on the inner plane.

Maharaj Charan Singh, Die to Live

SPIRITUALISTICKS®



Living in His Presence

One of Guru Gobind Singh's disciples, Bhai Kanhayya, who was responsible for the supply of drinking water to the Guru's soldiers, was seen offering water to the enemy soldiers wounded in the battlefield. When the matter was reported to the Guru, he called Bhai Kanhayya immediately to explain his conduct before those who had charged him with treason. Bhai Kanhayya said, "My Lord, I am unable to distinguish enemies from friends. I see you in all of them – how can I refuse you a drink?"

Hearing this, the Guru said that Bhai Kanhayya had rightly understood his teachings and commented:

A person who has shed the veil of ignorance from his heart will treat everyone the same, whether Hindu or Muslim.

As quoted in *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. V

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A Sufi said to Rabia when she was ill that if she prayed to the Lord, he would relieve her suffering. She answered, "O Sufi, do you not know who it is that wills this suffering for me? Is it not God who wills it?"

"Yes," he answered.

"When you know this, why do you ask for what is contrary to his will? It is not well to oppose one's Beloved," replied Rabia.

As quoted in *Kabir, the Great Mystic*

The Pain of Separation

The Master fills, and fills to the brim, the cup of love and offers it with his own hands.

Sant Dadu Dayal, as quoted in
Kabir, The Weaver of God's Name

When we are in the Master's presence, nothing else gives us more joy. He lifts our spirits and fills us with calmness and peace. Our worldly problems instantly dissolve and we revel in the moment. Without the exchange of words, we communicate through the voice of our soul. Sitting before him, we try to absorb every word he speaks and every loving glance.

Before we know it, the Master folds his hands and walks towards the door, leaving us to hold on to his words, that he is always with us. In those priceless moments, he has filled our hearts with so much happiness and love – yet why does the heart feel heavy?

Every disciple longs to be with the physical form of the Master. What is it about the Master that is so attractive and alluring? Why does our gaze not want to leave his form? And why does the heart constantly yearn to be with him? Maharaj Sawan Singh explains in *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. II:

A Master is a lover of God. In him there are boundless currents of true love. He is the physical form of that love. To love him is to find the most important medium for developing love for God, because he is a manifestation of God, and his heart is full of love for him. His face shines with the light and energy of God. By seeing him, love and longing for God increases.

Being in the Master's presence reminds us of God's selfless love. In his company, the deep longing to return to our source is awakened. Because of his divine qualities, we are irresistibly drawn to him and long to be in his presence. Hazur Maharaj Ji explains the importance of the physical form:

I don't think you can help having an attachment to the physical form of the Master. If you love the teachings, naturally you love the person giving you the teachings. But ultimately, as Christ says in Saint John, it is in your best interest that I leave you. Now you are running after my physical form; you're not trying to give your attention to the holy word within yourself. When you are no longer able to find me physically, the only way to find me will be within yourself. So this physical attachment is only meant for one purpose: to create in you a longing to remain with the Master. Our real Master is within ourselves. So we should try to use this love and devotion within ourselves to find the Radiant Form of the Master. If from that point of view we are attached to the physical form of the Master, then of course we gain everything. But if we do not direct this love towards the form within ourselves, then we are not making the best use of our time.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III

When circumstances separate a disciple from the physical form of the Master, a deep yearning develops for the inner Master. And when the disciple cannot reach the inner form, his pain further intensifies. Writings by the saints are filled with longing and often describe the excruciating pain of separation. They express their sole desire to see the Beloved, and to be with him – a desire which consumes all other

desires of the world. Their love is pure, emanating from the depths of their soul.

*If my whole body were adorned with eyes,
I would gaze at my Master with untiring zeal.
If only each pore of my body had a million eyes,
Then even if some eyes blinked
Others would remain open to see.*

Hazrat Sultan Bahu, as quoted in *Voice of the Heart*

The saints tell us that longing is a necessary prerequisite for union with the Lord. The Great Master has said (as quoted in *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. II): “Where there is no *bireh* (intense longing), there can be no meeting with the Beloved.” It is through intense longing, that we persevere on the spiritual path towards our true home.

It is an agonizing pain. No amount of material comfort can soothe the disciple. However, ironic as it may sound, there is a pleasure in this pain, for the disciple’s thoughts are constantly focused on his Beloved. The Beloved may be out of his sight, but never from his heart.

When he saw me burning in the flames of longing, my Master came running; he sprinkled the cool nectar of love and quelled the blaze. The pain of separation whispered to me: “If you hold on to me with all your might, I will carry you to the bliss of the Beloved’s lotus feet.”

Kabir, the Weaver of God’s Name

The pain of separation and longing is given to us when the Lord wants us to return to him. What is most heartening, however, is that

the Master is more anxious for us to become one with him; his longing is far greater than ours. Hazur Maharaj Ji explains:

He is there waiting for us and is longing for us to come, more than we are to go, no matter how strong we may think our urge to return to the Lord.

Light on Saint John

The Masters explain that the only remedy to this pain of separation is meditation. The more time we give to meditation, the greater the pain of separation. And the more pain of separation we feel, the further progress we make on the spiritual path. All the Masters have spoken of its significance in the journey to God. The Master engenders love in the disciple's heart and the disciple's longing for him sustains it. Ultimately, it is this deep longing which leads the disciple to become one with God.



Your happiness will know no bounds when you meet me within yourself. Then you will absolutely forget all your trials and sorrows. You will be so filled with love, joy and indescribable happiness that there will be no room for anything else. You will then not even remember that you were ever sad. When you merge into my Spirit Form, the Holy Ghost, all your doubts will vanish because everything will be clear to you. And whatever you wish will be granted by the Father. When we merge into the Father, our desires are more than fulfilled and there is absolutely nothing more to wish or hope for. Whatever we may ask for has already been granted – not only that, but much more than we could ever hope for.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Light on Saint John*

Mind Your Own Business

When we were children, if we interrupted while our elders were speaking, or if we eavesdropped on someone's conversation or tried to find out the neighbourhood gossip, our wise mother would shoot a stern look in our direction and say in a firm voice: "Mind your own business!"

As we got older though, conditioned by the world we live in, we started believing that it was quite normal to comment on how others live their lives. We do it so casually and seem to have developed an opinion about almost everything and everyone – from how our neighbours should maintain their lawns to what schools our nieces and nephews should attend, how our bosses should run their companies and even how a particular dish needs to be cooked – nothing seems off limits anymore. We comment on people's parenting styles, business ethics, diets, priorities, values and belief systems. It has become human nature, and the irony is that we often have such strong opinions about subjects in which we rarely know all the facts, and in which we have little or no expertise at all. Do we hold a master's degree in any of these fields?

Where does this need to constantly judge others stem from? And is our constant judgment of others helpful to them or ourselves in any way? If not, then perhaps it is time to recall the words we were often told as children and once again learn to mind our own business.

What *is* our "business" in this world, and how do we "mind" it? Let us start by taking a closer look at the words themselves. If we break them up to their simplest form, it means to concentrate our mind or turn our mind and thoughts towards our business. If we must be busy

bodies, then let us start by analyzing, or turning our minds towards ourselves.

Maharaj Ji beautifully explains:

Christ said in the Bible very clearly that we don't see the beam in our own eyes, but we are very anxious to see even just a little straw or something in another person's eyes. We don't sit in judgment on ourselves, but we are always anxious to sit in judgment on others. We don't look within; we always try to look out, to see how others behave. We never try to see what we are, how we behave, where we stand. We're only concerned with where other people stand. We want them to be perfect but we don't want ourselves to be perfect. Actually we love them more than we love ourselves. We hate ourselves. So we don't try to look within to see that we must love ourselves, that we must sit in judgment on ourselves and make ourselves whole, make ourselves pure.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III

It seems then that our true business in this world is to learn to improve ourselves, or, as explained by Maharaj Ji, to learn to love ourselves and make ourselves whole. Generally, when we take care of ourselves first, we are considered selfish. But in this case, the Master is openly telling us not to focus on making others perfect, but to direct that energy inwards towards making ourselves perfect. Doesn't that seem like a much more fulfilling cause?

How do we go about the business of making ourselves 'perfect'? Of course, there is no better business plan than meditation for the task of purifying our minds. Rolling up our sleeves and facing our biggest

enemy head on for two and half hours daily eventually turns each one of us from self-haters into his lovers. In addition, Sardar Bahadur Ji also provides some practical advice about daily introspection. He says:

Give a few minutes every day to introspection and close self-examination. Carefully scrutinize your day's work. Thank the Lord for the good deeds done and repent for the evil ones, with a strong resolve never to do them again.

The Science of the Soul

The truth is that no matter how much we may introspect, or turn our mind towards our own business, there will always be people who seem to unjustly meddle in our affairs. Once again, we need to concern ourselves only with whether we have been fair, sincere and honest. If so, and if our intentions are truly noble, then our egos should not be bruised when others do not take our advice or if we get unsolicited criticism. On the contrary, Maharaj Ji tells us that critics can often turn out to be our best guides in life. He advises us on how we should take their advice and also use it to our own benefit:

We should always keep our ears and eyes open to our critics. We must weigh their criticism without any ill will towards them. If it has any weight, we should try to learn from that criticism and try to improve ourselves. If it is just for the sake of criticizing, you can just ignore it. But our critics are the best guides in our lives, for our improvement.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III

In fact, large corporations often hire costly consultants or experts to assess the company's deficiencies in an unbiased manner. They do

so because their ultimate objective is the success of the company, and they rather tackle their problems head on. In the same manner, critics can be viewed as experts sent by the Lord to help us in the business of bettering ourselves. When we are so eager to hear people's praise, why not be just as open-minded towards their criticism? If anything, aren't their opinions the ones that will truly help us demolish our egos?

If that is the case, doesn't it also follow that we have a duty to correct a wrong when we see it? Definitely, there are certain relationships that require action on our part. For example, as parents to younger children or in taking care of our elderly parents, we are often required to be very involved in their day-to-day decision making – their business seems to inevitably be linked with ours. Even at work or in seva, when working with a team, our opinions may often clash with others'. Maharaj Ji explains that in such situations, what is most important is that our intentions stay sincere.

Our approach should be one of love, of helpfulness. But if we think we are superior, then we are only using the truth to humiliate the other person.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III

On another occasion, he elaborated:

Sister, you can tackle the same problem in two ways. You can be polite and lovingly explain with constructive suggestions, or you can condemn the same action. It all depends on how you approach the subject. So even if we have to criticize or correct anybody, there must be love behind it, with the aim to reform the other person.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III

The problem is that when we criticize others, we often do so behind their backs, because we lack the love or the true intention of reforming or helping the other person. On the contrary, we often judge others because it helps us feel superior – and we use judgment as a means to cover up our own insecurities.

But there is a better way to make ourselves feel whole, or to love ourselves, as Hazur Maharaj Ji put it– and that is simply by turning within.

So, is aimless judgment helpful to others or ourselves in any way? The answer is clearly no. Perhaps it is time for us to change the mission statement of our lives from judging others to loving ourselves – and in doing so, it might be helpful to recall the advice of our first truly loving critic, our mothers, who often reminded us to “mind our own business”.



*Think not of the faults of others,
of what they have done or not done.*

*Think rather of your own sins,
of the things you have done or not done.*

Siddhartha Gautama Buddha, *Sayings of the Buddha*

Loving the Darkness

Never let anything so fill you with sorrow as to make you forget the joy of Christ risen.

Mother Teresa, *Come Be My Light*

Going within, as we can all say from experience, is no easy task. At first the mind wanders restlessly. Then, just when we think it is finally trained to focus in the darkness, when thoughts no longer shoot in from every direction, when we feel that bliss in the dark night – one thought still remains: how long is this darkness going to last?

That one small thought can be very deadly. It can trigger a long chain of thoughts – when, where, why?

The objective is to start loving the darkness – but how? *Come Be My Light* is a book about the trials of Mother Teresa's inner life. She went through a period of total emptiness. She had thoughts about God abandoning her totally. Yet while she felt as if God was not caring for her, she knew in her heart that she was a 'child of his love'.

After reading the letters that she had written to God, Father Neuner, who was her spiritual guide, summed up her notes as follows:

My answer to the confession of these pages was simple: there was no indication of any serious failure on her part which could explain the spiritual dryness.

It was simply the dark night of which all Masters of spiritual life know. The sure sign of God's hidden presence in this darkness is the thirst for God, the craving for at least a ray of His light. No one can long for God unless God is present in his or

her heart. We cannot long for something that is not intimately close to us. Thirst is more than absence of water. Who knows more about living water, the person who opens the water tap daily without much thinking, or the thirst tortured traveller in the desert in search for a spring? Thus the only response to this trial is the total surrender to God and the acceptance of the darkness.

Thanks to Father Neuner, Mother Teresa's understanding of her inner condition deepened – so much so that she wrote, “I have come to love the darkness.”

Although her inner struggle continued and she had to face the physical suffering of the poor around her, her attitude remained positive and worthy of praise. She wrote: “The greater the pain and darker the darkness, the sweeter will be my smile at God.”

That is real acceptance. She further stated that the darkness was not hers, but God's as well: “I do not know whose thirst is greater, his or mine for him.”

One of her favourite prayers, offered from the depths of her heart summed up her feelings:

Take whatever he gives and give whatever he takes with a big smile.

Surrendering to his will is the most humble attitude a disciple can have. We must, however, remember this very important point – that as eager as we may be to meet our beloved Master, the Master is

much more eager to receive us in his open arms. Learning to love the darkness is a beautiful experience, for it is through the darkness that the light will shine.

It is a law of spirituality that if a disciple takes one step on the path indicated by the Master, the Master takes a hundred steps to meet him.

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



○ Beloved, dearer than life, meet me now!
○ compassionate benefactor of the meek
and gracious ocean of mercy – please forgive my sins.
I am restless, my entire body is in intense anguish
and tears stream from my eyes.
Every day I intensely look for you in all the ten directions,
and I pass every night counting the stars.
The suffering that I endure I cannot describe in words;
you know my inner condition, ○ knower of all hearts!
Like a shimmering lamp, ○ Lord, manifest your radiance
and dispel the darkness within me, prays Dharni.

Sant Dharnidas, as quoted in *Voice of the Heart*



Heart to Heart

A disciple relates an incident about young Charan Singh's love for his Master. When he was only ten or eleven years old, he went to the Great Master one day after returning from school and bowed at his feet, almost embracing them. The Great Master lovingly patted him on the back and said, "Son, I am very pleased with you. Ask for anything and I will give it to you." He replied, "I have nothing to ask for." The Great Master said once again, "Ask! Whatever you want you shall have." When the boy made the same reply and the Great Master repeated the question, Charan Singh replied, "I only want you – nothing but you." The Great Master's face lit up, and with pleasure he said, "Yes, my son, you shall have me."

Heaven on Earth



We returned to the Rhine and continued along it to Bonn, the German capital. We stayed in a hotel for the night. The next morning, it was slightly drizzling; we wanted to go to the garden show in Bonn. As we pulled off, Hazur Maharaj Ji settled down in his seat and remarked, "Ah, fine weather!"

"How can you say that? It's wet," we retorted.

"It could be pouring," was the optimistic reply and so typical of him throughout the trip. We weren't allowed to say anything negative; he would immediately find something positive about it, which would always result in a burst of happy laughter.

Legacy of Love



Emanations of Grace: Mystical Poems by A'ishah al-Ba'uniyah

EDITED AND TRANSLATED BY TH. EMIL HOMERIN

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Emanations of Grace is a masterful translation of Arabic mystical poetry by A'ishah al-Ba'uniyah (d.1517), along with an informative introduction by the translator. A'ishah al-Ba'uniyah, who lived in Egypt and Syria, was initiated into the Qadiri Sufi order by Jamal al-Din Isma'il al-Hawwari. Her poetry expresses her great devotion to God and the Prophet and her love and longing for mystical union. She was also an Islamic religious scholar, considered to be one of the greatest female scholars in Islamic history. Indeed, she composed more works in Arabic than any other woman prior to the twentieth century.

The poems in this book are taken from A'ishah al-Ba'uniyah's *Fayd al-Fadl wa-Jam' al-Shaml* (*The Emanation of Grace and the Gathering Union*), a remarkable collection of over 350 poems offering a sort of autobiography spanning her mystical life. As A'ishah herself says, it "contains poetry inspired by Him regarding intimate conversations with the divine and spiritual meanings, states of grace and mystical struggle, matters of desire, and passionate ways". Emil Homerin has wonderfully selected and translated poems from this work, choosing poems representative of her many mystical themes and poetic styles.

Homerin offers an introduction including a brief yet detailed account of A'ishah's life – her family, childhood, education, talent, erudition, fame, thought, works and spiritual guides. It recounts how she eventually became a Sufi Master herself. He also describes some of the numerous other works in prose and poetry of this prolific mystic and scholar.

A distinctive feature of *Emanations of Grace* is that A'ishah often added a short note at the beginning of each poem which describes her state in life (physical as well as mystical) when she wrote that particular verse, making the collection a sort of spiritual diary. As examples, poems have descriptions such as: "in the early days", "importance of recollection", "rapture was intense". Homerin notes that it is very rare in any literary tradition to have such information.

The opening verse describing "her love for God and union with him" goes:

*The sun and moon appeared on the horizon of my spirit,
and the heart beheld what eyes could not see,
And sheer beauty revealed itself in guises
to insight's clear vision.*

*I behold beauty with eyes lined by his light,
and his splendour was the eyes' sight.
My love's beauty is my vision, his presence my gardens,
and their fruit is his love talk devoted to me.*

In his introduction, Homerin also comments on A'ishah's multiple poetic styles. She explored the full range of Arabic rhymes, meters, and poetic forms. He notes that, as *Emanations of Grace* continues, the poems become longer and more complex, indicating A'ishah's rising confidence and her transformation into a knowledgeable mystical guide instructing Sufi novices. Homerin provides a detailed explanation of how in his translations he tried to keep intact the poems' order, form, content, tone, moods, and deeper meanings. Most of the poems have footnotes explaining, among other things, the meanings of the Sufi terms and practices and Quranic references mentioned or alluded to.

The poems in *Emanations of Grace* have various religious and mystical themes but are mostly focused on love of God and his Prophet, the importance of recollection, spiritual intoxication and mystical union. Some of her poems are as follows:

From his inspiration upon her regarding her certainty of the nobility of recollection (dhikr):

*When sin soils the hearts,
and their light grows dim and dark,
Then recollection of God is their polish
wiping the spots away.
In recollection of God, how many hearts
remove the rust, revealing the light within.*

From his inspiration upon her:

*I could do nothing about my existence,
looking after my selfish soul
and giving it what it fancied.
There is no refuge
save clinging to a Master
whose grace tames and trains the soul.*

From his inspiration upon her, for spiritual guidance and realization:

1. *Leave society,
leave it all;
seek the Lord,
and union will come.*

2. *Stand at the door;
kiss the floor,
obey the rules,
and hear: "Welcome!"*

From his inspiration upon her, concerning the rules of recollection:

*You seeking all the rules for the recollection of the Master,
take them from me:
Fear, and hope in tears, and remorse,
purity, fidelity, and standing before his door with humility.*

Towards the end as A'ishah becomes a spiritual guide and instructs disciples, she writes:

1. *Sufis, to the tavern!
The kind God will serve you now!
Lose yourselves in him, erase all else,
and he will keep you there as friends.*
2. *Sufis, this is wine
whose tavern is the presence divine,
and a drop of it the dead revives
with its sublime intoxication.*

At the end of the book, Homerin has translated one long poem titled 'A'ishah al-Ba'uniyah's Ode in T' and provided his own commentary on and analysis of the poem. This poem has many allusions to the Quran, Sufism and verses by Ibn al-Farid.

Overall, this ingenious translation of select poems by the master mystic al-Ba'uniyah will enthrall and inspire a reader inclined to mysticism and spirituality.



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

