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# Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

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## **Spiritual Link**

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# Cream on Milk

Meditation inspires us to become better human beings. Maharaj Charan Singh says that through meditation “all good qualities come in us like cream on milk.” Let’s take a look at five positive qualities that develop in us as we live a life of meditation.

First there is resilience. Resilience is that ineffable quality that allows certain people to readily recover after being knocked down by life and come back stronger than ever. Resilience requires a light-hearted perspective and, often, a sense of humour, as if we are laughing our way to heaven. Even after misfortune, resilient people are blessed with such an outlook that they are able to change course and soldier on. Rather than letting failure overcome them and drain their resolve, they find a way to rise above the ashes. Maharaj Charan Singh tells us in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II:

*We shouldn't have a defeatist attitude if we have fallen, if we have become a victim of human failings. When a child starts running, how many times does he fall? How many times does he get bruises? But he rises again, gets up again, again starts running. We have all passed through that same phase, and now walking or running is no problem for us. So in the same way, we are tempted, and we do fall, we do become a victim of human failings. But that doesn't mean that we have to submit to the mind, that we have to lose the battle. We have to carry on. Ultimately, success is ours if we just struggle, just carry on.*

The second good quality that develops as a result of meditation is humility. Humility allows us to quietly give what we can, to see opportunities to be of service with no egotism, no fanfare, wanting no attention for ourselves. Today the world teaches us to claim whatever we do, or know, or accomplish as our individual success. The way of the world is not the path of the saints. Maharaj Sawan Singh cautions us in *Philosophy of The Masters*, Vol. III:

*If we do not take a humble and meek attitude before doing a good deed, do not retain it while doing and do not consider it a gift by the grace of the Lord and the Master after it is done, it is snatched from our hands by pride amidst our rejoicings. “The way to God is firstly humility, secondly humility, and thirdly*

*humility. Again, unless humility precedes, accompanies, and follows every good action we perform, pride wrests wholly from our hands any good work on which we are congratulating ourselves.”*

The best way to face our limitations is to meditate. Meditation humbles everyone who tries. If we desire to become better human beings and increase our humility, meditation will do it. Maharaj Charan Singh says in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. III, “The more we meditate, the more we are driving out our ego.”

An important insight may emerge as our humility increases. We begin to see we are not the only ones in the world with problems to solve, with suffering to face, with responsibilities to fulfil or with significant challenges to overcome. When we stop focusing so much on our own needs, desires, and failings we become much more aware of others.

The third quality is compassion. As we become more aware of others’ challenges and suffering, we naturally become more compassionate – we feel empathy for our brothers and sisters. Great Master gives a beautiful description of compassion in *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. III:

*Humanity simply means love for the Lord and his creation. Its other name is sympathy or compassion, fellow-feeling, or heart-felt attraction. Its proof is that one’s heart melts like wax on seeing the suffering of another. The other man’s suffering appears to him as his own. He heartens him, feels sympathy for and is attracted to him, and takes steps to remove his sufferings.*

As we become more humble, and our hearts become softer, then we become more giving, more compassionate. Maharaj Charan Singh in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. III, is very clear about compassion when he says:

*If we can do anything to help anybody, we should. That is our duty – we are meant to help each other. Humans are meant to help humans. Who else will help? Birds and plants won’t come to help you – you have to help each other. We should be a source of strength to each other... Your heart should be very, very soft to other people and you should be very compassionate, very kind.*

The fourth virtue is charity. We can demonstrate generosity every day. We learn to let go, to share, and to offer to others what has been given to us. We can offer a smile to a cashier at a store, extend a welcome to a

friend, give a word of encouragement to someone who is exhausted, or send an email to someone who feels isolated and lonely. The practice of generosity is important. It embodies the understanding that we are here to serve. Mercy is always in the heart of the charitable.

Becoming humble, compassionate, and generous requires more than thinking. Becoming a more ethical, moral, and caring human being is all about action and effort. Becoming a better human being takes practice and persistence. It is our assignment every morning. It can be our aspiration in every interaction, in every service we perform. We are here on this earth for two purposes: God-realization and to help one another. These two aspects of our lives are intertwined – one strengthens the other. We naturally imbibe good qualities as we devote ourselves to meditation; and as we become better human beings our lifestyle aligns with and supports our spiritual focus.

The four above-mentioned virtues bring us to a fifth quality – awareness of the presence of God. One of the most extraordinary ways we can become better human beings is by beginning to act as if we are always in the presence of God.

The Lord is within us, closer than our own breathing. We will know that we are living in the presence of the Master whenever we remember him, whenever we seek his company and take refuge in him. Master is always pulling us in hundreds of ways – whenever we do our meditation, repeat our simran, attend satsang, and whenever we recognize others as being God's children.

At the time of meditation every initiate is invited to become aware that he or she is standing in the presence of the inner Master. We are not alone in this work. One day, we might even discover that the path of God-realization and the path of becoming a better human being are intimately related.



# The Lord Is Everywhere

With regular meditation we begin to see the Lord everywhere and in everything. There is no place – not a blade of grass, not a distant star, not a human life – where the Lord is not present.

When our minds turn toward spirituality we can find inspiration everywhere. We begin to realize that we share common ground with all living beings. With this frame of mind, let's take a moment to look at the words and lives of two great artists – Van Gogh and Pissarro.

Vincent Van Gogh is one of the most recognized artists in the Western world. Although he spent his life in poverty, today his paintings are world-famous. The purpose of Van Gogh's life and work was not money, fame and worldly success. Van Gogh was dedicated to learning, practising, and experimenting. About his work he said, "I risk my life for it, and my sanity is half shot away because of it." Painting was his purpose. He said, "One becomes a painter by painting."

Similarly, our purpose in life is meditation. One becomes a meditator by sitting in meditation. One achieves self-realization by sitting in meditation. There is no substitute for meditation. In the same way that a person cannot become an artist by talking a good game, by reading books about art theory, or longing to have talent, as followers of Sant Mat, we cannot experience spirituality by giving or hearing satsang, by reading Sant Mat books, or by gazing at photos of our Masters. We can take a lesson from Van Gogh and become as dedicated to meditation as he was to painting. Maharaj Charan Singh says in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II:

*We have to form a habit of meditation. If I say that I will meditate when I feel the urge, I will perhaps never meditate. If you think "I will meditate when I feel the right atmosphere" ... you will always go on giving excuses to yourself and you will never attend to meditation.*

We need to make meditation a habit, something that we do each day at a particular time – just as we go to the office or sit down for a meal at a particular time each day. Hazur says in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II:

*Daily, regularly and punctually, we have to go on doing it, and ultimately we succeed. Then we would not like to live with ourselves, we would not feel happy, we would not feel that the day has been rightly spent if we have not given time to meditation. We are creatures of habit, and when once we get into the habit of trying to meditate, then that very habit will help us in concentrating.*

With the same tenacity that Van Gogh showed for painting, we can develop tenacity for meditation. And like Van Gogh, our wealth lies in our *efforts*, not in a worldly perception of results. Do we have the courage to make our lifetime work something that is not recognized by the world at large?

Another artist we can learn from is Camille Pissarro, an impressionist who created revolutionary landscape paintings. He ingeniously used the confines of a firmly structured space (his canvas) to convey perspective, mass, volume, light and changing atmospheric effects. He turned the mundane into something beautiful. To look at his paintings is to be transported to late nineteenth-century France.

In his captivating paintings Pissarro often used a vanishing point. What is a vanishing point? Imagine we're standing in the middle of train tracks, looking down the tracks as they stretch into the distance. Eventually two rails appear to become one and then disappear. Where they disappear is the vanishing point. In his paintings Pissarro would lure the eye down a road or along a river to a vanishing point, creating depth and an intriguing perspective on a relatively small flat surface. Through his paintings, we enter a world much larger than his canvas.

What does Pissarro's vanishing point have to do with our lives on a spiritual path? Just as Pissarro transformed a small flat canvas, we can create beauty, light, and perspective on the small flat "canvas" of our lives. And, as Pissarro shows us, it is the vanishing point that makes all the difference. This vanishing point is not our physical death at the end of life, but the vanishing of ego, the merging into oneness. We are lured into the distance of a beautiful painting by Pissarro, and we are lured into a vanishing point during our meditation, where ego and individuality fall away. Hazur states in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II:

*To become one with the Other, to lose your own individuality and to become the Other, that is a real spiritual experience. To become the Father, to lose your own individuality... We want to lose that individuality and become one with the Creator. The whole purpose of meditation is to lose our identity, lose our individuality, and to become one with the Creator. That is the whole purpose.*

So, paradoxically, our lives have perspective, spiritual perspective, when we vanish. If we can't let go of our identities, we are like a crude painting with no dimension. When we see the Creator in every part of the creation, we are remembering the Lord, the Shabd, and the best moments of our meditation. Hazur Maharaj Ji says in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. III, "Attaching to everybody is attaching to none. Attaching to the One who's in everybody is attaching to the Creator."





# Pushing Away Obstacles

Masters ask us to meditate and to live in an atmosphere of meditation. But daily life puts many demands on us, and so retaining an atmosphere of meditation often seems difficult.

Maharaj Charan Singh tells us, “Meditation should be our main concern, and this should never be sacrificed to anything of this life.” If we keep that advice always in mind as the most important – the A-1 – aspect of our life, then everything falls into the right perspective. By keeping our focus on meditation, we overcome the many tricks the mind can play on us – let’s call these the “B, C, D” obstacles, in contrast to the Master’s A-1 advice.

The first obstacle, B, is boredom. We go to satsang or read a spiritual book and it all seems to be the same old thing we’ve heard over and over. We crave something new! But Sant Mat isn’t boring; it’s an adventure. Boredom is just a negative state of mind. It can be turned into a positive approach by creating new habits. We need to try doing something different, such as reading a book we would normally not pick up or going for a simran walk. Instead of watching the same old TV program we can look at the wonders of nature. Instead of gossiping we can find a satsangi to go out to lunch with and talk about the Master and the path. We need to get our creative juices flowing. But above all, we should recognize boredom for what it is – an obstacle to putting in our best efforts and enjoying the transforming effects of even the smallest efforts we make on the path. Hazur says in *Die to Live*:

*Everything is to our credit. Whatever time you give to simran – whether moving, walking, sitting – and whatever books you read on Sant Mat, or satsangs you hear, they are all to your credit.... These preparations strengthen our love and devotion, and create that desire in us for meditation. They are all a means to a certain end, and any means to achieve that end is to our credit.*

The next obstacle, C, stands for complacency. This means that we become satisfied with how things are and stop putting forth the effort to make them better. How can we improve or progress with an attitude like

that? By reflecting on our life we can find some area to work on and make a project out of it. Do we do simran while getting ready for the day? If not, let's work on that – make that a fun project. What about when we are waiting at a traffic light or in line at a store? Rather than feeling frustrated by having to wait, we could enjoy this excellent opportunity to do some extra simran. Let's recognize complacency for what it is – a negative attitude, an obstacle that encourages the mind to avoid putting our hearts into meditation. We pay a great price when an attitude of complacency keeps us away from meditation.

Lastly, there is D, for despondency. We experience this when we have the attitude of hopelessness. “Oh, I can't do this, I can't do that. I might as well just give up and stop trying to achieve my main purpose in life.” If we aren't careful, this can result in giving up meditation and possibly giving up on Sant Mat – at least for some time. Jump on this one right away! We can do much more than we imagine. For example, no matter how down and out we feel, we can sit in a chair. So why not sit in a dark and quiet place and do some simran? The cure for despondency is to not focus on how difficult the path seems but to focus on what we *can* do. Each small step moves us toward our goal of living a life of meditation.

It is easy to become despondent due to our apparent slow progress, but we are in no position to evaluate our progress. Instead of trying to assess our level of spiritual development – which is not in our control – Masters ask us only to stay positive and do our best. Hazur Maharaj Ji says in *Die to Live*:

*Great Master used to say, “If you can't bring your success to me, bring your failures.” It means, assure me that you have at least been giving your time to meditation. Whether you have achieved any results or not is a different question, but you bring me at least your failures, because that means you have been attempting to meditate, you have been doing your best. And if you haven't noticed any results, that is entirely for him to see about. We should do our best. Whether we succeed or fail in meditation is a different thing.*

All of these obstacles – boredom, complacency and despondency – are due to our karmas from past lives, but in this life we have an opportunity

to chart a new course. We do that by following the advice of our spiritual teacher to put our meditation first, as our top priority. Only by meditation do we clear or overcome our karmas. Hazur says in *Die to Live*:

*Whatever time we give to meditation, we are burning karmas. When you collect a heap of rubbish and you want to burn it, you need a matchstick... The preparation to make that matchstick is also part of burning the rubbish; in the same way, whatever time we devote to meditation is to our credit.*

We need to always watch our mind to guard against our negative thoughts. They keep us away from achieving the central purpose of our existence in this life – God-realization.

Let us strive to be positive, happy and relaxed. Let's push these obstacles to one side and put our attention and our hearts toward our meditation. We are on a sacred path to our destination and we are destined to overcome all obstacles.



# Can One Plus One Equal One?

One plus one does not equal one. Everybody knows that! We learned that arithmetic in kindergarten. If we take one rock and then take another rock, we have two rocks. If we invite one person to our house and then invite another person, we will have two guests.

If two people fall in love, they might marry and say, “Now we are one.” Marriage sanctifies that union, yet even in a loving marriage, people remain as individuals. Psychology teaches that marriage is always a balance of relatedness and autonomy. That is, individuals relate and come to unity of purpose, but they also retain personal characteristics. Their bodily instincts, their hearts’ emotions and their brains’ thoughts are different. Hopefully, each person will grow to love his or her spouse more deeply in spite of personality differences. Ideally, with enough mutual love and understanding, those differences may even become amusing. Still, some autonomy remains for each person within the relationship of marriage.

No such process exists in the relationship between Master and disciple. All arithmetic is out the window. All psychology is also out the window. The relationship is spiritual and, thus, is separate from the body, including the heart and the brain. Consequently, the bodies of the Master and disciple, with their separate instincts, thoughts and emotions, do not affect their spiritual relationship. For instance, the Master does not care if a disciple is physically distant or nearby. He cares that a disciple attends to his spiritual meditation. A disciple might even attain complete unity with the Master without ever seeing him physically.

Every minute we remember our Master, we are struggling to attain that level of consciousness where one plus one equals one. We are struggling to detach our attention from the world of duality where there are inescapable differences, where one plus one equals two. By following the vows and learning how to deepen our meditation, we approach true unity for all time.

The process of this divine realization is relentless. Every time we replace a thought with a round of simran and every time we seek the Master within, we attune ourselves to the Shabd. Through that process, we come to experience the beautiful essence of all life, the divine union of the soul and the Lord, where one plus one always equals one.

# Not One Speck

What exactly is humility? And how important is it for those who seek union with God? A passage by Soami Ji in *Sar Bachan* offers some stunningly clear directives for initiates.

*Satguru is pleased with humility. If humility is genuine, then one need not worry either about the restlessness of the mind or about the provisions for the journey. Such a one should firmly take refuge in the Satguru and rely on his protection. Then his boat will cross over to the other side.*

The intended audiences for these sublime instructions are those of us with distracted and restless minds who cannot focus our attention in meditation. Soami Ji speaks to disciples whose simran is infrequent, half-hearted or weak (or all three). He talks to those of us who wonder whether the outer circumstances of our lives are sufficient to support our continued efforts on the path, and who wonder whether our inner resources are adequate for the journey to take us to the eye centre and beyond. In other words, he speaks to most of us. And he says, if we are humble, there is nothing to worry about because we can submit to the Master and let him take us home. The implication is that if we are not humble, then we need to fight the mind.

So then the question becomes: What will allow us to become genuinely humble? We might think we know the answer to this question already.

Initially, we may hope that simply a little clear thinking and rational thought might help us to recognize and accept that our pride, our delusion is false. The saints ask us, “What are you proud of?” Your intellect? That was a gift from God. Your family? Again, you were placed there. You had no choice or say in those circumstances. Your wealth? Your achievements? Your youth? Your beauty? All of these come and go and are dependent on powers outside of our control. And any of them can vanish in an instant. But understanding that we have nothing to be proud of doesn’t help us to become humble, because we can’t achieve humility with our mind.

Maharaj Charan Singh explains in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. I, that the very source of our false pride is the mind and the ego:

*Ego comes out of the mind – so unless the soul leaves the mind, we can never realize the real humility at all.... There is always humility in the soul, but there is none in the mind. Mind always wants to assert itself.*

So, we cannot “think” our way into being humble.

Maybe we hoped that humility would come from doing a whole lot of seva? Or maybe by being a better disciple than those around us. But the egotism, pride, and arrogance in calculations of this sort *increase* the barrier between the Master and the disciple and take us farther away from real humility, rather than closer. Hazur says in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. III: “Ego only comes when we look to the creation for comparison – I’m better than him, I have much more than him. Then we feel the ego.”

Hazur even cautions us: “Sometimes, when we make a research of our humility, we find it is another form of ego.” Humility is not self-hatred or self-criticism. It is not about the self at all. Ultimately, humility has nothing to do with what we think or feel or how we judge ourselves. Humility begins when we stop thinking about ourselves, and start remembering the One who is calling us home.

Fortunately, the Masters tell us exactly how this transformation from a delusional, arrogant, self-centered initiate to a humble, self-forgetting, obedient disciple will occur. Hazur says in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. III:

*We can drive the ego from within us only when we see that light, when we hear that sound, the word of God, the holy ghost.... The more we travel on the path, the more humble we become. The more we get the devotion and love of the Lord within us, the more humble we become. The more we are in love with the Lord, the more we realize his greatness, and the more insignificant we are in our daily life – the more humble we become.... Only by the spiritual practice, only by that meditation can we kill the ego.*

Meditation, of course, is the answer – the only answer to all of our questions, to all of our challenges, to all of our longing for what is real and true and holy. Including humility. Meditation is the answer to our wanting a closer relationship with the Master.

Hazur continues in the same book: “Love makes you humble. Love makes you meek. Love means you want to do that which pleases the

other person, not what pleases yourself.” Hazur explains that when you love, when you meditate, when you put yourself under his care:

*You never want to take. You never love for advantage. You never love to bargain. You never love for wages. And that love gives you submission. And where submission comes, humility comes.... If you submit to him, his will, his creation, humility comes in you.*

*We don't become superior by following the path. If you follow the path, actually you are filled with more humility. Then we go on realizing our insignificance before the Father. Then we don't look to the creation for comparison. Then we look to the Father for our comparison.*

*You are humble when you think everybody is superior to you. And when you think everybody is superior to you, it means that you find the Lord in everybody.*

The path to genuine humility takes us directly to the eye centre, through our meditation practice. What blocks our ability to see him there and to know he is with us always? It is the ego. As Hazur says in *Light on Saint John*:

*If we do not get rid of our ego ... there is no room for the Lord, so we are “alone.” We can never be conscious of the Lord, as long as we are full of ego. As long as there is even one speck left in us, we are impure and not fit to bear the fruit of God-realization.*

Not even a speck. So, welcome to the lowest level of the spiritual nursery school where, as Hazur told someone in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. III: “Brother, it is a lifelong struggle.”

But practically speaking, we can begin to recognize that we are not alone in having a distracted mind, and in being a struggling soul with no special talent at being a good disciple. We are on a path where we are required to discover our insignificance, our poverty, and our need. Our emptiness can be filled only by him. We are simply struggling souls, initiated, loved, and being changed by God – the way he wants and when he wants. Hazur reminds us: “We say we are following the path. It doesn't mean that we follow the path. By his grace, we follow the path.”

As the Lord makes us whole and complete in his own way, our emptiness will be filled by him and we will realize who we truly are: nothing – nothing but him. Meanwhile, we do the work he asked us to do – our meditation and following the other three vows – because he is pulling us with his love.

The Master reminds us never to ask for wages, never to look for advantage. He asks us to happily, joyfully and willingly work every day at our meditation. Our spiritual work is what we came here to do. Sardar Bahadur Jagat Singh says it succinctly in *Discourses on Sant Mat*, Vol. II:

*Your real work, your own work – the one you've come here for. Do it! Anything else you do will be blessed, if it is done, keeping that in mind. But if you forget that work, then all other work counts for nothing.*

We don't do this spiritual work for wages. We do it because the Master has asked us to do it. He tells us that this work pleases him. Our meditation is the work that shows what is in our hearts.

The value of this spiritual work is so high it is not even measurable. Those of us with restless minds and few provisions for the journey have been found by the One who has promised to protect us. We have taken refuge in the Satguru. He will captain our boat across the stormy seas of the mind and the senses to the abode of the Lord.





# No Light Switch

After initiation we learn from experience that there is no light switch in our brains that we can throw on when we sit for meditation that will immediately turn *off* the downward and outward currents of the mind and turn *on* the flow of concentrated love and devotion. We can't by force of will stop our train of worldly thoughts and switch over to focused simran and bhajan. We need a lot of perseverance in meditation. Even further, if we are intent on concentrated meditation, our whole lives must conform to our number one priority; self- and God- realization. Yet we continue to get in our own way by allowing the mind to scatter our attention for most of our waking hours, making our efforts to focus during meditation difficult and frustrating.

The Master encourages us to remember the Lord twenty-four hours a day. In *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. I, Great Master says: "Simran should be done with every breath – one should so remember him with one-pointed attention that he becomes inseparable from him and does not stray away."

In *Living Meditation* we read:

*We generate thousands of thoughts every day. From the spiritual perspective this means that thousands of times a day our mind bypasses the eye centre as we run from one thought to the next without rest or pause.... We miss the benefit that is available to us – the well-being that comes from repeating the words the Master gave us at the time of initiation, through which we create that much-needed focus at the eye centre.*

Almost every one of us begins with the experience that the mind does not want to concentrate in meditation. If we are serious about focusing our attention, we need to be as ready as we can be when we sit down. In *Living Meditation* the author writes that "If we begin in an unfocused way, our meditation continues to be unfocused throughout." We need to support our meditation powerfully by doing simran during the day, so that when we sit, our minds are on simran. In *The Science of the Soul*, Sardar Bahadur Ji writes:

*With bhajan only for three hours, the scale will always weigh heavily on the worldly side. You ought to become wholly and solely God-minded.*

*Throughout the day, no matter in what occupation you are engaged, the soul and the mind must constantly look up to him at the eye centre.*

As we persevere in our practice and maintain a Sant Mat way of life, slowly and slowly the stains on the mind fade away. As the Master explains, we clear the contents in a computer's memory by calling them up on a screen and deleting them. In the same way, we do not overcome weaknesses and temptations by force of our own will, we simply lose interest in them. As we mature on the spiritual path and see more clearly the world for what it is, we no longer dread death but rather begin to look forward to reunification with the Shabd. The Master pulls us closer and closer to him and we rise in love.

In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II, Hazur is asked whether the only meditation that counts is that which is done with concentration at the eye centre. He replies:

*Meditation is living the life of Sant Mat. The whole of life is a meditation; making the mind pure – that is meditation.... So whatever makes your mind pure is your meditation – good living, right type of living, living by the teachings, having good relations with everybody, having a sympathetic nature – and also giving your time to meditation. That is all meditation, you see.... We have to live in meditation day and night. That is real meditation.*

By remaining faithful to our practice, we realize the necessity of harmonizing our external activities with our life goal. We find that doing simran during the day works magic; we just need patience and perseverance. In *Living Meditation* we read, "If we are able to keep the mind in simran throughout the day, we will experience its benefits within ourselves; meditation then becomes the crowning glory of a prize already in hand."

Of course, there are times when we have to focus our attention on external matters. We should be conscientious and efficient in fulfilling our responsibilities, giving good value to our employers and sincere affection to our families. At the same time, if we are alert, we can find many opportunities to do simran when the mind is free. We then live in a spiritually

uplifted atmosphere throughout the day. In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II, Hazur says:

*For the lover, love is a twenty-four-hour sickness. He doesn't have a specific time to love or to think about the beloved. He is in love twenty-four hours, no matter what he's doing, where he is. He is mentally with his Beloved twenty-four hours.*

Any amount of simran we can repeat contributes to an atmosphere of love and devotion. This positive habit will grow naturally, and as a bonus, our worldly activities will be marked with increased efficiency and compassion.

By persevering in meditation we become pure and clear-minded. Silencing the mind is to return to innocence. A still mind has no guile or agenda; it becomes our friend. Although there is no light switch that we can effortlessly turn on, through the process of meditation, simran throughout the day, and living our principles, the mind becomes clean and receptive. Then our only strategy is surrender and our only intention is merging into the Shabd.



# The Miracle of Simran

Let's think about the miracle of simran. First, it is miraculous enough that we have met a living Master and have been initiated. Even more miraculous is that we have been given the names that are supercharged with the Master's divine energy. But isn't it also a kind of miracle that we actually remember to repeat the names! Without his grace we would never even finish one round of simran, much less start a new round. Our mind would hijack us into some worldly thought and carry us away with it, again. So it is a miracle of grace that we remember to do even one round of simran. If we knew just how miraculous, we would say each name with reverence, gratitude, determination and joy. With that attitude the simran would change the very foundation of our being from a worldly focus to a spiritual focus.

Simran changes us. We will, of necessity, lose our sense of self and our ego if we keep on repeating the names. Simran is the solvent that dissolves our ego.

The Master tells us that we should just sit still, repeat the names and let ourselves go. This last part is the hardest. But if we say the names without letting go of ourselves, it's like trying to drive our car by pushing one foot on the accelerator with the other foot firmly planted on the brake. We won't move very far!

From another perspective, we are like a caterpillar that sees butterflies and knows deep inside that being a caterpillar is not our true state. We know we are meant to flutter among the fragrance of the flowers. So as caterpillars, we might imagine sprouting wings and becoming a caterpillar that flies. But that is not how caterpillars turn into butterflies. Biologists tell us that a caterpillar must first enter a cocoon and dissolve into protoplasmic goo, losing all traces of being a caterpillar, before it begins to re-form as a butterfly.

If caterpillars were like humans, they would need to find a living butterfly to guide them through this process. The master butterfly would gather the caterpillars in evening meetings and answer all of their questions, like: "How long will it take? I've been crawling for thirty years now and don't see any wings sprouting." Or, "Isn't there another way to

become a butterfly besides dissolving into goo?” Or, “Will I still be able to crawl if I want to?” The master butterfly would explain to the caterpillars, “You only have to do three things: sit still, create a cocoon, and let yourself go. Once you are dissolved and lose your caterpillar identity, you will become a butterfly. All caterpillars do. There are no failures in caterpillar transformation.”

For us, it is the simran practice that creates our cocoon. Simran is also the solvent that dissolves our ego, our identity, reducing us to “ego plasmic” goo – so we can be transformed. But transformed into what? As spiritual seekers, we get to uncover this mystery in stages, much to our delight. Yet there is no way to anticipate what this transformation will be like for us. We are no more able to know what it will be like than a caterpillar can know what it will be like to become a butterfly.

There is a fable of a child who was made of salt, who very much wanted to know where he had come from. So he set out on a long journey and travelled to many lands in pursuit of this understanding. Finally, he came to the shore of the great ocean. “How marvelous,” he cried, as he stuck one foot in the water. The ocean beckoned him in further saying, “If you wish to know who you are, do not be afraid.” The salt child walked farther and farther into the water, dissolving with each step, and at the end exclaimed, “Ah, now I know who I am.”

Like the salt boy, we too will become the ocean. We will dissolve our ego and lose the illusion of our separateness. When we merge into the ocean of Oneness, previous separateness will seem like a dream.

We need to wake up. We don't have time to waste. We have just enough time to fulfil our spiritual purpose here. The sand in our hourglass is filtering down, and we don't know how much is left. We have no idea how serious our situation is. We are lost in darkness and in imminent peril of rebirth. We have forgotten who we are and forgotten our true home.

But we possess the miracle of simran. It's up to us to use and cultivate it for all its glorious promise. As the Master frequently reminds us, all we have to do is sit still, repeat the names and let go.



# Taming the Mind

The mind is the biggest obstacle on the spiritual path. Yet, saints tell us that it's only by working with the mind and making it our friend that the doors to spirituality will open for us. This is similar to what we experience in this world. For example, if there is a gatekeeper at your office and you are not in good rapport with him, your daily routine will become difficult. Instead of fighting with him daily, it's better to befriend him to the extent that he himself opens the door for you.

How do we befriend the mind? As repeatedly explained in the teachings, traditional methods of either suppressing the desires of the mind or trying to fully satisfy those desires will not be successful. There needs to be a balance. We need to understand our objective in life and act on that objective.

Meditation is the key to coming to a higher level and to making the mind our friend rather than an enemy. Initially, it is difficult to concentrate the mind, but we should not lose hope and patience. The Lord knows what's best for us. Our love, faith, and determination will surely be reciprocated eventually.

With love and faith we develop the determination to walk on the path. If someone tells us to walk on a five-inch plank that goes from one skyscraper to another, we will be afraid to do that. But just imagine that the same plank is placed on the floor. Would we be willing to walk on it? Yes, we would definitely be confident and would probably succeed in walking on it. So what's the difference? Same plank, same walking. It's our faith and understanding that if we fall, we won't be hurt because the floor is close. Once we realize and have faith that the Lord and Master are always close to us, then we begin to shift our focus from the world, and we realize that we have nothing to lose and much to gain by walking on the path.

Once we are able to gradually concentrate and conquer our mind, there's no looking back. Through meditation our mind is elevated and gets

the peace that it has always been restlessly looking for. The mind becomes fully satisfied through meditation because there is nothing more appealing which has ever existed or will ever exist than the Shabd, the eternal sound and light.

The mind plays a game of keeping us entrapped in the cares and worries of this world. With love, grace, and determination, let us tame the mind and enjoy the gift of meditation.



# Bonds of Love

*Lord, my mind is in love with you!  
Cut the karmic bonds of my countless births –  
I beg for your darshan.  
I know not what to say to you;  
a sinner and a culprit am I.  
I beseech you to accept my plea  
that I may remain absorbed in your simran day and night.  
O Lord, accept this ignorant one's plea;  
bless me with your merciful glance.  
Considering Jagjivan as your own,  
do not break this bond of love.*

Jagjivan Sahib Ji as quoted in *Voice of the Heart*



# A Deepening Love

Spiritual love is indescribable. What can we say about this deep and subtle experience? When we truly love, we do not exist. Recall those moments when we were carried away by a loving feeling. So sublime, such a delight! Did we really know where we were, or what time it was, or even who we were? Perhaps not. We were lost in the feeling of love and the image of our beloved. “We” didn’t matter because a power immeasurably finer than ourselves had taken over.

When we’re in love, we feel more secure. Why? Because love is strong – consider a woman in labour, how strong she is to deliver her beloved child. Because love is free and generous – consider a man who daily sacrifices his personal desires to provide for his family. Because love is true and honest – consider a loving man who opens his heart to his wife to reveal his innermost fears and hopes.

All of us have roles in life: some are students, some workers, and some parents. With each role comes a purpose: a student needs to learn, a worker must be productive, and a parent must nurture and provide. But what are we besides those roles? When we are just a person, what is our purpose?

Our purpose is to love. Everyone, everywhere, aims to love; it is our origin and destination. Everyone has love, yet our love is incomplete until we pursue a deeper love, a spiritual love. As all the Masters teach, there is nothing more precious, more rare, more natural. Love is our divine essence, turning the ordinary into the transcendent.

Worldly love may turn into its opposite. We love our house, then it becomes old and broken down and we want to sell it. We love our spouse, then he or she is disagreeable and we want to break up. Ordinary love can become hateful, but spiritual love, experienced through the divine sound of the Shabd, is unconditional. It is independent of circumstances. No matter what, where, or when, Shabd is Shabd.

Spiritual love is unitive and natural and everlasting; it is not dualistic. We meditate in order to experience that divine love, not only in the moment of meditation, but in every minute of the day. Every time we take our attention off every day ordinary pursuits and refocus it on meditation with sincere dedicated effort, *for that moment we literally do not exist*. In that transcendent moment we have let go of the ruminations that bedevil us and turn to our attention to the beloved Master. His love has prevailed over our mind and we have placed our trust in him. We live for this union in order to experience and exist in that deeper love he radiates.



# The Dream within the Dream

Being with the physical form of the Master is wonderful. We feel such devotion to him and the path; our worries and cares about our daily life take a back seat and, if we are really lucky, they disappear completely from our minds as we drink in the words of our Satguru. Our time with him is golden.

Then, when we go back to our daily lives, not seeing his physical form every day, not hearing the truth in his company, the memory of being with him fades, till it seems much less real than our daily grind. The time with him can feel like a dream; and the teachings he gave us may seem almost meaningless in the face of the seeming reality of the lives before us.

In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. III, a questioner captures this dilemma:

*Master, I notice that when I leave India, after I get back to America, it's almost like the time I spent in India was a dream, but while I was in India, it was wonderful – I felt lots of very special feelings toward the Master. Then when I get back home, it feels like it's a dream and it kind of fades away, and that's painful. It feels very real while I am here, and yet when I go home, it feels like a dream. How can I keep all these feelings real?*

Hazur Maharaj Ji puts everything in perspective when he answers:

*This whole life is a dream. This may be a dream within a dream. This life is nothing but a dream, and in a dream everything looks real. We feel, we cry, we laugh – we only realize it's a dream when we wake up.*

The life we are leading in our homes, with our families, in our jobs, is as much an illusion as a dream we have when we fall asleep in our beds. And since the time we spend with the Master's physical form is in the material creation, the time we spend with him is a dream within the dream of our worldly existence.

In a dream that we experience when we go to sleep in our beds, everything seems real; we interact with others, feel happiness and sadness and then wake up to find that none of it really happened.

When we pass out of our body at the end of our lives, when we die, we will know then that the life we have just finished was nothing but paying

off our karmic debts so that we can move on to the next stage of our spiritual evolution.

But now, embroiled in the illusion as we are, we do not have the understanding that nothing here is real: reality is beyond time and space and can only be experienced once we go within ourselves through our meditation. For now, we have to live in the dream. To shift beyond this illusion, Hazur says in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. III:

*So keep on sleeping, don't wake up.... Live in this atmosphere – it will remain a dream. Always keep yourself in this fort, in this atmosphere, so you'll be happily living in this dream. Don't come out of it.*

Which dream is he saying we should stay in? The dream of being with him – don't wake up from that dream when we are no longer with his physical form; keep that atmosphere that we feel when we are with him physically.

In another question, a disciple says: “When I am not with you, I'm not very happy. What should I do about that?” Hazur responded, “So why not always remain in the presence of the Master? Be where the Master is always with you.”

Where is the Master always with us? Within us, at the eye centre. Hazur continues:

*Be in his presence always and always remain happy. We must bring ourselves to that level where we can always be with our Master. Naturally if that gives you happiness, you'll remain happy.*

We already know that being with his physical form brings us happiness, so being with his Radiant Form all the time will surely give us more happiness. Our Master has said that if we can remember the happiest moment of our lives, that is a fraction of a fraction of a fraction of a fraction of the happiness we will feel within at the first region, what to say of the higher spiritual realms.

Happiness comes from connecting the soul with the Shabd, which is all love and bliss. Mind is concentrated by meditation; so we might say that happiness is the fruit of concentrated simran, simran that takes us to the eye centre. It is much easier to concentrate at the time of meditation

if we have not allowed the mind to stray away from thinking about the Master, so doing simran during the day keeps that connection going. That continuous effort to keep him constantly in mind is what shows him that we want this dream to come true, this dream of being with him always.

Effort and grace go hand in hand. His grace is always showering on us; it never lets up. So many times we can see his hand in our lives in the little things that are made easier for us. We see them when we are facing him. And it is easier to face him when we choose him over the world.

As Hazur Maharaj Ji suggests, we can choose which dream in this lifetime to live in. We can choose to live in the worldly dream, where all the things that we go through with our families and our jobs is our reality. Or we can choose the dream of being with the Master, always in his shelter, as our reality.

Don't wake up. Keep the dream alive by constant attention to the Master and his teachings. Live the spiritual dream.



# Patience and Positivity

Mystics from every faith agree that the Lord is within us. It is that living water, the life stream that manifests as sound and light, which is the source of all creation, the Shabd or Nam, that can free us from the unending cycle of births and deaths. The Masters tell us that the Shabd is our life; the Shabd is who we are and what sustains us. So how can we say we don't have time for meditation?

If we have time to love our families, how can we not have time for that which provides the energy for all that we do? Meditation is the foundation on which we can build that allows everything else to run smoothly. Let's not expect it to be a day at the fair. We meditate simply to do as the Master has asked, to please him, and to help him help us.

Masters offer to hold us in their arms, take us away, and carry our burdens. We just need to let go. That is what spiritual practice is all about, letting go of all that holds us bound to this body and the world. Our challenge is to tame the mind and cleanse our heart so that we can patiently prepare to meet the beloved when he deems fit. This rare opportunity to meet the Lord could happen at any time, as demonstrated in the following fable (published in an earlier issue of *Spiritual Link Magazine*) of a disciple who was hoping to meet the Lord.

*A recluse lived under a large yew tree. Every day he spent much of his time praying to the Lord. After many years, he was visited by an angel who said it was his duty to report to the Lord on the progress of those who did their spiritual practice with devotion.*

*The recluse asked if the angel would find out when it would be his happy lot to meet the Lord. The angel agreed to do this and left on his mission. Shortly afterward the angel returned, and informed the recluse that he would not meet the Lord until as many years had passed as there were needles on the yew tree above his head.*

*The recluse immediately began to dance for joy. The angel was very puzzled by this reaction.*

*“Do you understand that there are millions of needles on this tree?” he asked  
“And that you will not meet the Lord until millions of years have passed?”*

*The recluse said he understood this very clearly.*

*“Why then are you so happy” asked the angel.*

*The recluse replied, “I am happy because at last I have received a reply from my Beloved, and he has promised that we shall indeed meet one day. When that meeting takes place is not important.”*

*At that very instant the Lord appeared and embraced the recluse. Surprised, the angel reproached the Lord, “You told me that the meeting wouldn’t happen for many years and now I look like a liar.”*

*The Lord responded, “These things are for ordinary men. When there is someone special who has transcended the laws of time and space within himself, then I also cast those laws aside.”*

This story is a lovely portrayal of reaching the one we desperately seek. The Masters tell us that is what we are working for on this path of love – reunion with the Lord, our source. Yet there are barriers in our way that must be overcome for this to happen. But they tell us this will happen if we keep the promise we made at initiation – to diligently do our meditation daily.

True love knows no limits when it comes to the laws of time and space. We too can be happy because the Beloved has promised that we shall indeed meet one day. Not knowing when that meeting takes place should not deter us because we have the Master’s guarantee that it will take place.

Our mind and senses work tirelessly to keep us tied to the world and unable to embrace the Beloved within. Mind is our greatest enemy as long as it is the slave of the senses; and under that influence continues to pull us away from our spiritual practice with one excuse or another.

This can only be surmounted by a lifetime of devoted, spiritual practice. Plus, we have the grace of the Lord who sent us the living Master. Making the time for meditation is the first step in changing the mind’s tendency from an outward to an inward focus. This may be a monumental commitment when first considered, but in time it becomes less daunting. Slowly, we see the benefits it brings. With meditation and concentration, the attention collects at the eye centre, and with the help of Nam or Shabd it returns to its own original home. Then there can be no better friend than the mind.

Devotion for the Lord may not come easily, but devotion or friendship with the one we get to meet and learn from is an opportunity we can build on. We have the emissary, the representative of the Lord as the living Master. With a straightforward spiritual path complete with a loving, patient, and humorous Master to help us every step of the way, what more could we ask for? Developing a relationship with the living Master allows us to build confidence and love.

He is Shabd, just as we are, so how can we not make time for Shabd practice? This meditation practice will give us everything. With it we develop the ability to focus at the eye centre, the door to liberation. Maharaj Charan Singh told us this many times. He says in *Spiritual Heritage*:

*What is the real form of the Master? Shabd. And what is the real form of the disciple? Soul. And what is the difference between soul and Shabd? It is the level of consciousness. The real form of everybody is potentially the same. Potentially everybody is God because we have the capacity to become God.*

Our Master has promised that we shall indeed meet one day. When that meeting takes place is unimportant. However, he continually reminds us that slow and steady is the best way to travel this path. In fact, our Master often mentions that the Lord knows our every need, so we don't have to ask for anything. Instead we can accept that what we get is what we need and a part of the overall plan to free us. We simply need to be patient and remain positive that the Lord will take care of us.

This is the awareness we are working toward; we nourish ourselves with that divine Shabd – a power mightier than all other powers. It is an infinite power that fuels the universe. Even though hidden, it is active at the back of all other sources of energy.

When the mind says meditation is difficult, Masters tell us otherwise. Make meditation our friend; learn to enjoy it. We are repeatedly told to find the positive in any situation. Maharaj Sawan Singh says in *Dawn of Light*:



*Our lifetime is invaluable. We must always be careful to utilize it in the best direction. Any part of our time not used in spiritual practice is lost. Therefore, you should always try to save your time for meditation, because to incline our mind and spirit towards the things other than the Holy Sound is to lose our fortune.*

Shabd is our life; Shabd is who we are and Shabd is what sustains us. Each moment we give to meditation nourishes the true self, the soul, and makes us stronger and more loving and gives us the strength to surmount the ups and downs of life. We just need to maintain our patience and positivity.



# What Matters

The work we have to do in this lifetime to focus our attention on returning home to the Lord is the greatest challenge we have ever faced in all our incarnations. Each of us holds on to so many things that are persistently struggling for our attention. Each thought is saying, “I matter the most.” Which comes first? Which objects and thoughts do I need the most at this moment? What do I focus on next? What problem am I going to give my attention to? Will it be the demands that are placed upon us by our family, our work, our own internal desires and fears? Or the myriad of things bombarding us through advertising, books, the internet and movies? These numerous competing demands easily scatter the mind, moving us through life in a state of emotional strain because so much matters to us in our life.

If I am sick and in pain – it matters. If I fall in or out of love – it matters. If I lose my job – it matters. If someone attacks my thoughts or feelings – it matters. If I do not get what I want – it matters. Giving our attention to all these things that cause stress diminishes our health and often makes us miserable. They all derive from that aspect of our mind that in Sant Mat we call ego. Dr. Julian Johnson writes in *The Path of the Masters*:

*The normal ego is all right, but when it begins to swell up out of all proportion, then it takes on the nature of a disease. So vanity is an overgrown ego. Ahankar is a malignant enlargement of the 'I'. That faculty, which is quite necessary for the preservation of the individual in this life and for the proper placement of that person in relation to all others, becomes so overgrown that the normal self becomes for him the centre of the universe.*

Our dysfunctional egos are motivated by the senses and the desires of our mind, overtaking the interests of our soul while pushing us to pay attention to these desires. To make things worse, what matters to us at any moment constantly keeps changing. Karmas from past lives, which the ego labels as good or bad, are continually arising. The ego goes into action to mobilize thoughts, words, money, or actions to protect what matters to it and keeps us distracted. This life-dominating ego, which wants to control things, thinks it can bring about what really matters to it, and at the same

time it resists so many things that the Master sends that would benefit us. What is the solution? To learn to see the ego the way the Master does: as a veil of illusion covering the vastness of our souls.

How do we get beyond the influence of having such a big ego that emphasizes me, me, me, me and tricks us into thinking we are so important? How can we ever make progress on this path with such big egos? Saints tell us that they see us for who we really are, the soul. The Lord does not judge our egos because to him, the ego is just an illusion. He is looking at what we cannot see – our soul. The Master helps us understand this when he tells us we would not have been initiated if he thought we could not do this work. He shows us how to transform our lives by letting go of all these things that we think matter so much and concentrating on the one big thing. The one big thing that the Master tells us matters the most is meditation. This alone will release the soul from the mind and ego that bind us to the creation.



# Love Songs

The path of the saints promises us the music of the spheres – the real music, the melody and harmony within every living being. The Shabd, the Logos, the Word, is calling us home. The Masters try to explain to us that this divine music becomes incarnate for us in the form of the Master who is complete in every way. Guru Arjan Dev is quoted in *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. V, says: “He who sent you – calls you back.... The welcoming music is playing.”

This path to truth urges us to still the mind and to enter into the silence within. To move closer to the music of the spheres, we have been given some genuine “hearing aids.” Simran and bhajan is the key to remembrance that we are given at the time of initiation. This is the primary resource that shuts out the noise, distractions, and anxiety of the transient world. Meditation gives us the chance to please the Master, to nurture our relationship with him, and to relax into the work he has given us. When we are meditating, we are listening in the silence, opening ourselves to the Shabd, and becoming receptive to the Lord’s presence.

Satsang is another opportunity to be reminded of the Shabd in a virtual concert hall where the message of the saints is repeated over and over again. As we hear the scriptures, poetry and discourses of the mystics, we remember what the world seems so determined to try to make us forget – that we are loved, that we are being called home, that only lasting joy and eternal truth will ever satisfy us. What do we hear at satsang? A message straight from God in which the Lord invites us to remember his presence, his promises, and his protection. Maharaj Sawan Singh reveals some of what we are receiving in *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. V:

*Take the words of the Master to be true. Let them dwell in your heart and make your life fruitful.*

*The words of the Master are not separate from him. The Master pervades them. His words are outpourings of his heart and are permeated with his truth and soul force. Such words pierce the hearts of spiritually minded persons like arrows and produce a sweet pain, which cannot be described.*

Even when we can't quite grasp what some of the words of the saints mean, they touch us, they help us on our journey, and they increase our receptivity. One day, we will not just be able to hear what the saints share, we will be able to act on these words so that we can know through our own experience. Until that time, we need help. When it comes to the love songs coming from God, most of us suffer from a profound hearing deficit. So we need to ask for the Lord's help to please end this separation, forgive our flaws, help us in our meditation, and walk with us on this path.

*Please end this separation.* Separation is a normal human condition, the almost universal experience that most of us feel. We often feel cut-off and alone in this universe because we are no longer conscious of our primary relationship with our Creator. We think our "I" is real and all there is. We believe our individual identity is important. Our ego thinks it should be all-powerful. Our ego wants to be God, calling the shots, pronouncing what is good and what is bad. Being separate means to be alone, strange, alienated, isolated, apart, homeless, abandoned and out-of-tune. The thirteenth-century Persian mystic Hafiz, in the book *The Winged Energy of Delight*, sums up the predicament of separation:

*I have dropped in a heap on the earth, crying,  
In the hope that I will feel a touch of His hand.  
I have fallen like a fish into deep water  
In the hope that he will throw His net....*

*Both union with you, and separation from you  
Confuse me. What can I do? You are not present  
Nor are you utterly absent from my sight.*

When we feel the pain of separation, we are also feeling the pull of the Master. Our longing for union is his gift. Without this yearning, without this sorrow, we would be lost in the world of illusion and impermanence. When we feel the pain of separation and ask the Master to please end it, we are experiencing a love song, straight from the source – calling us to return to our real home of lasting joy and union with the Beloved.

*Please forgive my flaws.* Maharaj Charan Singh was an eloquent spokesman on our need for forgiveness. In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. III, he says:

*Meditation is nothing but seeking his forgiveness, nothing else.... When we are sitting in meditation, we are actually repenting for what we have done in the past.... Now, we are asking the Father to forgive us....*

*We are all knocking at the Lord's door to forgive us for all the sins we have committed, all the karmas we have committed, right from the beginning of the creation.*

The Master offers mercy and forgiveness to all of us who are flawed. To obtain that forgiveness we must seek it through the hard work of meditation. When we sit in meditation, we have adopted the only means of invoking the mercy and the forgiveness of the Master. It is not obtained through an ocean of tears, or regret, or adopting especially harsh New Year's resolutions. It is the long, hard work of meditation.

Meditation is where we go to hear the Master's love songs to us. Meditation is what increases our capacity to receive the grace of the Master. Hazur says in *Light on Saint John*, "When we do the spiritual practice as instructed, we are gradually cleansed of our sins and become pure and receptive to his grace."

*Please walk with me.* In our helplessness and powerlessness, we learn lessons of humility as our expectations are crushed. On our own we can do nothing. Egotism, self-indulgence, pride, selfishness, arrogance – these are some of the barriers that block our awareness of the Master's presence. Only when they are eliminated, can we return to what is real and true and full of joy. We must be humbled. We must have our pride broken. We must experience just how little we can do. Humility is essential, transformative, and ultimately a blessing, but it doesn't always feel that way. Farid ud-din Attar describes our dilemma in *Conference of the Birds*:

*Creator, I am a helpless weakling in your Path.*

*I am like a lame ant, in the deep of your well.*

*I do not know where I come from, where I stand, or who I am.*

*Luckless, useless, destitute, distracted, and a coward.*

When the Master sends us love songs it appears that he wants us to respond as a lover, as someone who wants him. If there is nothing we can do on our own, if we can't turn our faces from this fantasy world on our own power or purity – what can we do? The disciple says to God:

*I have no one, and nowhere to turn –  
a lowly beggar at your door.  
I am a nobody, who happens to know a Friend of Yours.*

Farid ud-din Attar, *Sweet Sorrows*

We know a friend of God's – the Master. And the Master does know the Beloved; the saints are the ones who have an intimate spiritual connection with the Lord. So what we can say to God is, "I know a friend of yours! He initiated me!" And through the years, we develop confidence in this Friend. Our confidence is not in ourselves or in our own capabilities. Our confidence is in the Master.

*If you have the Beloved, you have all that you need,  
The seven seas will be but a bridge beneath your feet.  
Left on my own, I struggle and am a wreck,  
Take my hand, O helping hand, take it.*

*Conference of the Birds*

*Please help me in my meditation.* Ultimately, meditation is the only way home to the Lord. Only meditation will end our separation. Meditation is the only way that our flaws and karmas can be forgiven. Meditation will teach us all we need to know about our powerlessness and limitations. And only the Master's grace and assistance will take us to the inner realms that our meditation practice opens up for us. We are assured by the Master that help comes to us at every moment, and that he will see to it that we will reach the Radiant Form within and go back to Sach Khand. Great Master, Maharaj Sawan Singh, says in *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. II: "He guides the seeker in this internal practice and, like a mother, helps in the spiritual growth of the child of love, by making him drink the Divine Elixir."

We turn to the Master for help in our meditation because only the saints can help us. The question is: how can we, who feel separate from God, blocked by karmas, unable to do anything on our own power – how can we still the mind, so that we can perceive this love and help from him? According to the saints, the Master will be the one to subdue our distracted minds; the Master will be the one to wake us up. The Master

will provide everything we need. Guru Nanak is quoted in *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. V:

*The Master loves the disciple with all his heart.  
He lends a helping hand  
and sustains the disciple every moment.*

It is our privilege to wait. If we are given the grace to hear the love songs that are constantly being sung by the Master to every disciple, we can wait with confidence, contentment and trust – knowing that the anguish of separation, our need for forgiveness, and our powerlessness are all his gifts. The Master will give us all the help we require to go forward.





# BOOK REVIEW

## The Face Before I Was Born: A Spiritual Autobiography

BY LLEWELLYN VAUGHAN-LEE

PUBLISHER: POINT REYES, CALIFORNIA: GOLDEN SUFI CENTER, 2012.

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This is the account of one person's spiritual journey, a "silent wayfarer walking the ancient highway of the soul." It begins with the moment of his joyful awakening, and takes us through the discipline, struggles, and bliss of practice; from the fear of annihilation and the pain of losing his concepts and illusions about God to the beauty of longing and the peace of surrender. Most of all, it is a tale of a seeker's love for his Master and his ultimate union with him. In the author's own words, it is "how love revealed itself to me, how all my spiritual images were destroyed, how even the journey itself was tossed aside." The author says that "the Beloved makes Himself known to Himself in the fragile container of the human being. [It] is a mystery beyond words, something that can be hinted at but hardly told."

Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee, born in 1953, is a Sufi mystic, author, and lecturer. His approach integrates Sufi meditation practice with dreamwork based on the insights of Jungian psychology. His work explains the age-old universal mystical practice and journey in a modern context. It conveys an intensity of feeling, a sincerity of devotion, and a clarity of expression that incites the reader to greater awareness of his own inner path. Vaughan-Lee is present, compassionate, and shockingly honest as he relates the account of his journey and the perseverance he needed to discover his real, essential nature, which he calls "the face you had before you were born."

When he was sixteen Vaughan-Lee came across the Zen saying:

*The wild geese do not intend to cast their reflection,*

*The water has no mind to receive their image.*

Reading this, he had an experience of "life that just is... without psychological or mental distortion." The sense of self, the projection of ego, was not needed or wanted. After this initial experience of awakening, his

path was not easy and not always direct. He had a powerful longing for truth but no outlet for his longing.

*I was driven by a desperate desire of which I had no understanding: I only knew its intensity, which manifested as impatience, an impatience to reach an invisible, intangible goal. I wanted to find something, desperately, crazily, and I did not care what it cost.*

By the time he was nineteen he met his first teacher, Mrs. Irina Tweedie. He describes his meeting with her:

*This was the first real ground that I had ever felt – not the shifting sands of the world of appearances, but something ancient and present.... Here was a presence that spoke directly of the mysteries I had heard hinted at in the books I had read, a fragrance of an inner reality beyond the mind and the senses.*

Even so, as he came to understand, care was required. Tweedie stressed the need to focus on the truth of teachings and not to rely on emotions or constructs of the mind. Vaughan-Lee interpreted her message as, “Don’t trust my personality with all of its faults. Trust my soul which is merged with the soul of my teacher.” Although Mrs. Tweedie helped and guided him, he came to believe that his own Master was Radha Mohan Lal – known to his disciples as Bhai Sahib – who was Mrs. Tweedie’s Sheikh. This feeling was substantiated in a dream he had of Bhai Sahib, who appeared with his own Master Guru Maharaj Ji.

In the same dream Guru Maharaj Ji showed him an image of Guru Maharaj Ji as a young man flying a kite and conveyed the message, “If you want to fly high you have to have both feet firmly on the ground.” The dream helped Vaughan-Lee integrate the outer and the inner worlds, and “live a balanced, everyday life in the world while at the same time being lifted high by the wind of the spirit.” This, he understood, is the foundation of the spiritual path and necessary before spiritual progress can be made.

A balance of opposites is also required within the psyche. Vaughan-Lee gradually realized the need to confront the dark or shadow side of self in order to bring it, too, into the light. He was guided again by a dream in which he was told to read the works of Carl Jung. This led him to the Jungian process of individuation or psychological integration, a process

which reveals how “the psyche is transformed on the spiritual path, the way opposites are [first] separated and then united within the self.”

Once this balance and integration were achieved he felt ready to access higher levels of reality. However, first the death of his limited self was required. He found that ultimately the aspirant needs to shed everything he believes in order to experience and realize the truth. He describes this experience as “being slowly stripped naked, the painful process of the clothes of conditioning and self-image being removed.” It was “the essence of suffering, pure inner psychic pain ... but I knew with the knowledge that comes from somewhere, certainly not from the mind or ego, that I had to continue.” He knew that “something was being cleansed.” It was in this most painful experience that the strength, support and mercy of his master became most apparent.

*I began to feel the presence of my Sheikh, him whom I loved and feared. I sensed that he was guiding this process, giving me an opportunity, an opening to something. The ancient spiritual training in which the disciple is pushed beyond every extreme was being lived within me, but only because I was being held by him.*

*Then he was suddenly in my heart and in a moment of simple wonder he made me conscious that I am a soul ... that I am not just a physical, mental, or emotional being, bound by time and space, that my ego-identity is just a small part of my whole being.*

He found that his concepts about God had to shift and drop away. “On the journey towards nothingness, everything has to go.... The divine does not belong to our images – we cannot imprison Him within our beliefs or concepts.” He quotes the Sufi Dhul-Nun saying, “Whatever you think, God is the opposite of that.” Vaughan-Lee explains that every concept is a limitation on the limitless. We simply have to let God be who he is. Similarly for the Master: “Only when we are free of the projection onto the teacher is the soul’s need fully answered from within.”

*The eternal story of the mystical quest is of entering a darkness brighter than light, of losing everything and finding the nothingness that is our real essence.... It is a truth that demands only death, a complete giving of oneself.*

He insists that such an objective, though it sounds transcendent and remote, is real and attainable. “Those who are drawn to this destiny need to know that it can be lived, and that this crazy passion has a purpose beyond what one can even imagine.”

Ultimately, the spiritual journey is a story of love, a love so strong that it tears you apart, a love that destroys the mind, a love that turns you away from the world and the self and only towards God. Vaughan-Lee writes, “The world was full of beautiful things until an old man with a beard turned my heart aflame.” Once that love is awakened, nothing else matters. That love propels the seeker from separation through annihilation, and into union. Ultimately, this is all the seeker wants. “The mystic only seeks to become featureless and formless, to be annihilated in love.”

After the struggle, pain, and passion comes the greatest gift of all: surrender to the one you love.

*But it is in the moments, even the hours, when I can turn inward that the love becomes so all-embracing that there is no lover and Beloved, just a fullness that becomes a merging and melting. Then I close the door of my room, turn my face to the wall, and experience the intimacies that are known only to lovers.*



