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# Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

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## **Spiritual Link**

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# Be Tranquil

*See all women as your mother,  
see the wealth of others as stones.  
Be deaf to those who slander you  
and blind to the jealousy of others.*

*With such strength of mind  
you'll reach your real home.*

*Those who help others  
come to know compassion –  
be happy in the happiness of others  
if you want to find heaven within.*

*Feel no pride in your body,  
feel weary of all your ambitions –  
simply feel tranquil.*

*Love being with mystics,  
love to sing your love of the Name.*

*Drop the discords of family  
and know that God lives in all –  
day and night keep the feeling  
that the Lord lives in everyone.*

*I've given you the key  
to enlightenment, Namdev –  
don't worry, you know how to swim.*

Sant Namdev, in *Many Voices, One Song*



# Accepting More, Expecting Less

A painful fact of life is that, until we consciously merge with the Shabd and experience God within ourselves, we lack perspective. We don't see the cosmic reality that we are all a part of this Shabd – we are a drop in the ocean of God. With these physical eyes, we see only this material world, not the reality that underlies it. We largely function through our minds, which means that we have only mental concepts of Shabd, of God, of soul, of the Master.

And so we tend to make all things spiritual, including the Master, as small as we are. This naturally distorts our experience, like a child's drawing of the sun, which is nothing like the actual sun. Our perspective of the Master and the Lord is limited because we are limited by what our physical senses can perceive and what our minds can understand. Guru Amar Das is quoted in *The Path* as saying:

*Within the body he himself resides, the invisible one who cannot be seen; but those who are foolish and proud understand not and go searching for him outside.*

This is our condition. And so it is that we sometimes view the Master not as an inner presence but as an outer magician. We want the Master to do our spiritual work for us, to shower us with what we call grace, which we mistakenly believe consists of material comforts, health, domestic harmony and only pleasant things happening to us.

But our current lives have been determined by our own actions and choices in previous lives. Our poor soul is trapped in lifetime after lifetime of karmic consequences that we are reaping from actions we committed in the past, under the influence of passion

and duality. In short, our souls are bound here and it is we who have to work to free them, which we can do only under the guidance of a perfect Master. At our initiation he gives us the means to do that – instructions for how to meditate. The Master connects our consciousness to the Shabd, but it is we who must work to realize that connection, to expand our own vision, to widen our own perspective by raising our own consciousness.

We do this by way of meditation and living an ethical, moral life. That is all the Master asks us to do. But somehow we are always wheedling and whining to the Master that we can't do even those simple things, and so he needs to take pity on us. We prattle to him like babies and order him around: do this for me, do that for me, give me your grace. Gimme, gimme, gimme.

We don't realize, from our limited perspective, how much he has already given us – he has given us everything we need. We don't realize that if it weren't for his grace, we would never have heard of the path or the Master, would not have the desire to return to our spiritual home and would not have been granted initiation.

Probably if we really understood the value of what we have, we would be struck dumb – we would be speechless and overwhelmed with gratitude and feelings of unworthiness. Yet we remain ignorant of all the riches we possess and stubbornly cling to our mistaken belief that we have no responsibility for awakening our own soul. Maharaj Charan Singh tells us:

*Our expectation is that we should do nothing and everything should be done by the Master. And we oblige the Master by coming to him, now it's for him to take us back to the Father. We don't expect anything from our own self. We have no faith in our own self at all. We must build our faith in our own self that*

*we know the way, we know the path and we have to travel on it.  
And then help is always there by the Lord's grace.*

Actually, Hazur is being very kind when he tells us to build faith in our own self. We put all the expectation on the Master because we don't believe we have the capacity to do what he asks us to do. And yet Masters tell us over and over that we can do it, and that we must do it.

*It is the business and duty of every disciple to make his mind motionless and reach the eye centre. The duty of the Master is to help and guide on the path. To control the mind and senses and open the tenth [inner] door depends on the disciple's efforts....  
The primary factor in this success is the effort of the disciple.*

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *Spiritual Gems*

In the same letter the Great Master writes: "The inner Master gives all the grace and help that the disciple is capable of receiving." In other words, we don't have to beg for grace because we already have it.

Rather than ask for more, we need to digest what we already have – to become receptive to all the Master is doing for us. And the way to digest, to become receptive, is to do what he asks of us – to *accept* the task he has set for us, to accept responsibility for our part.

We need to learn to *accept* what we have, rather than expect what we think we don't have. Sant Mat is a path of acceptance, not of obstinacy. In the book *Living Meditation* we read:

*Acceptance and contentment are a fundamental part of the teachings of the Masters. They are not achieved through wishful thinking or mental affirmations. They are the natural outcome of a tranquil mind that is grounded in meditation.*

Sometimes we wonder: Is life just inherently sad, or is depression a matter of brain chemistry, or does a negative attitude cause depression? The Masters explain to us that sadness is a reality of life. But they also point out that we feel sad when things don't go the way we want them to, when we have a certain *expectancy*. So partly this depression is spiritual, and partly it's a question of our attitude. It's our attitude that *creates* our brain chemistry.

Brain scientists are proving this. The authors of *Buddha's Brain: The Practical Neuroscience of Happiness, Love and Wisdom* say that certain mental exercises – like staying present to what is happening now rather than getting lost in memories of the past and fears or hopes for the future – “have a plausible scientific explanation for how they light up your neural networks of contentment, kindness and peace”. One of these writers says, “If there is one thing I know for sure, it's that you can do small things inside your mind that will lead to big changes in your brain and your experience of living.” The work of scientists is verifying that we have the capacity to rewire our brains and by so doing to literally change our minds.

Similarly, the Masters say that just changing our angle of vision can make all the difference. If we have the attitude of accepting whatever comes our way, we'll naturally be much happier. Hazur often used the analogy of swimming with the waves. He says in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. III:

*We always want the events of life to adjust to our liking, which is impossible.... If you swim against the waves, it will be difficult. We have to go along with the waves of our destiny.*

There's an expression: Pain is inevitable, but suffering is optional. Pain and loss are part of life. But suffering arises from our reaction to,



and attitude toward the events of life. Everything becomes easier and we become happier when we have an attitude of acceptance rather than resistance. For example: make a fist, feel how all the muscles in your arm tense up and release your fist by opening your hand. The muscles in your arm relax.

A teacher of Buddhist meditation, who is also a psychotherapist, wrote a book called *Radical Acceptance*, in which she describes a 7th-century Zen Master who taught that true freedom is being “without anxiety about imperfection”. She writes, “This means accepting our human existence and all of life as it is. Imperfection is not our *personal problem* – it is a natural part of existing.”

Maharaj Charan Singh always reminded us that if we were perfect, we wouldn't be here. The Masters emphasize that we have to come to terms with who we are, with what we are, with what our life circumstances are – we've got to play the hand we're dealt. Part of our destiny is our personality – our character traits, our strengths and our weaknesses. We often make ourselves miserable by dwelling on either our imperfections or life's imperfections, all of which are endless because that's the nature of life in this creation. The Great Master writes in *Spiritual Gems*:

*In a place where mind and matter are active, there can never be peace. Sorrows and wars of nations, or communities, or individuals shall continue. The soul must seek other planes to find peace. To find peace is the business of the individual. Everybody has to seek it within himself.*

So while we're in the process of finding peace amidst our own sorrows, we can practice accepting whatever is going on around us and within us. For example, the Buddhist teacher quoted earlier

describes a therapy client she had, to whom she gave the instruction of saying to herself “This too” whenever she experienced emotions that she found difficult or scary. This too is part of life. This is the cosmic law that we’ve been born into. This expression is a reminder that life is a checkerboard of light and dark, pleasure and pain, and we need to accept all of it. We could easily apply this instruction to anything in our lives that we find hard to accept – whether it be something as mundane as our computer crashing, or a death in the family, a serious illness, or when someone hurts our feelings. “This too”, we can say.

Neuroscience is confirming that the mind has a bias for capturing and preserving negative impressions rather than positive ones. But now we have the opportunity to reverse this bias. Accepting Master’s gifts, especially our responsibility for doing our meditation, rather than expecting the Master to do it for us, can change the direction of our lives.



*In Sant Mat there are no failures, because you are trying to follow it. A child who is learning to run, well, he falls, he gets bruises, he gets up again, he tries again, tries again and starts running. If he is always frightened of falling, he will never even learn to walk. So even if we lose in this battle of love, we win.*

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

# Essence Is Emptiness

*Essence  
is emptiness.  
Everything else,  
accidental.*

*Emptiness brings peace  
to loving.  
Everything else, disease.*

*In this world of trickery  
emptiness is what your soul wants.*

*Illuminated Rumi,  
rendered by Coleman Barks*

Does our soul really want emptiness? How can one's consciousness want emptiness? What our soul is subjected to now is a continuous onslaught of activities, ideas, desires, perpetual motion generated by our thought process. Our attention is constantly distracted by a barrage of unsolicited thought waves that crowd out any awareness of our inner state, our real self.

We live in a world of trickery. What appears to be real, of substance, is all just smoke and mirrors. Everything here is in a state of flux. Nothing remains the same and nothing lasts. And because we have become separated from that which is real, we naturally look to the world to find substance. It is a clever scheme devised to keep us involved in the mirage. For countless lifetimes the mind has run after its objects, persons and places, striving for personal achievements, knowledge and enjoyment, trying to find fulfilment and peace

within the parameters of this physical plane. In doing so, we have so complicated our living, so crowded our mind, that we spend most of our precious human lifetime agitated, unfulfilled and out of touch with our true essence – our soul.

Rumi tells us what the nature of that essence is. He says “Essence is emptiness.” Our consciousness contains no words; it is unoccupied with thought forms. Who we are is nothing of this world. The identity that the mind upholds, that we believe in, is not our essence. It is our soul that is the vast pure consciousness of love.

Everything else is accidental. The word “accident” comes from the Latin “accidens”, meaning non-essential quality. Everything we are involved in here – our jobs, our accomplishments, our relationships, our strivings, even our impressions and perspectives – all are contingent on the law of karma. We reap what we have sown in the past. Everything arises from extrinsic causes – causes that operate outside of us. They happen from without, and do not form a part of, or belong to us. They originate from the past and act upon us, but are not a part of our essence. They are not who we are.

And Rumi says: “Emptiness brings peace to loving. Everything else, disease” – dis-ease, lack of ease, lack of peace. When there is an absence of everything external, we are at peace with ourselves, at peace with the love that fills that emptiness. Everything else is disease; it impairs our internal being. Only when we become empty can we experience our essence. It is what our soul wants. It wants to be free from the domination of the mind, free from the mental pre-occupations that continually steal our attention. It longs for the silent calm that allows it to be in touch with its Source.

Maharaj Sawan Singh says:

*There is a higher consciousness in each one of us, but we can be aware of it only after concentrating our attention at the eye centre. The saints have called this conscious energy, the surat or soul. Surat is another name for attention combined with consciousness. It is within us and is the very life and essence of our whole being. We have to know it (i.e., to know ourselves), and understand it, and thus free ourselves from worldly ties.*

*Philosophy of the Masters, Vol. I*



*I wish that all of you who have received initiation may go inside the eye centre, become the dwellers of the beautiful mansions your Creator has made for you, and be masters of these in your own right. In a way it is not difficult. One is only to look inside one's own self instead of looking out... With patience and skilful handling, man has trained wild animals, even lions. By repetition of the names and by hearing the sound current, all this in its own interest, the mind can be trained to sit inside the eye centre and enjoy that sweetness and bliss which it has not tasted before.*

*Maharaj Sawan Singh, Spiritual Gems*

# No Matter What

When our Master talks about the path, he encourages us to build our life around our meditation. He encourages us to live a spiritually focused life and to protect our meditation with the choices we make – like attending satsang, doing seva and reading the Sant Mat literature – and he says more too. Recently he has also been talking a lot about being positive in our daily dealings with the world.

He has advised us that, when we react positively to the karmas we are going through, the karma will finish and we move on, but when we react negatively, we risk setting off a new chain of actions and karmas that could cause us to have to come back to reap their results. This thought is extremely significant. Our negative reactions to what goes on in our lives can cause us to have negative results.

One way to always have a positive reaction is to keep in mind that this life we are living is unreal. It is quite literally a play put on by the Lord as a way for us to go through our destiny karmas and it provides us an opportunity to sow new seeds to be added to our store of karmas and paid off in future lives. But it is a play in which we – the actors – have some control over the next act. If we don't want our next act to be back here in this physical creation in another body, in another family, in another job going through another bunch of negative and positive karmas, we have to choose actions and attitudes that ensure our next act is with our Master within.

These actions and attitudes have to be based in positivity. Each of the five passions, these perversions of the mind that keep us bound to this physical creation – lust, anger, greed, attachment and ego – have opposite positive ones which help us to escape from this creation because they make us more God-like. These positive attributes of the

mind are chastity and continence, forgiveness and tolerance, contentment and gratitude, discrimination and detachment and humility. It behooves us to try to cultivate these opposites.

Gratitude is very important. Along with contentment, gratitude is the opposite of greed. If we are grateful for every little thing in our lives, like going for a walk and appreciating the beauty of the flowers we see around us, or viewing a missed airplane flight as an opportunity to do simran, it is hard to complain. Constant appreciation for the little things in life, even apparently negative things, brings contentment and peace and destroys greed.

And if we can remember that this life has no reality – it is like a dream that feels real when we are in it, but which is proven to be unreal when we wake up – that puts things in perspective.

When a questioner asked Maharaj Charan Singh if we are in the world or not, he answered, “At this time we are dreaming! When we wake up from this dream, then we will know that this world is perishable.”

The questioner then asked why we have to put in so much effort if we are just dreaming, to which Hazur responded:

*Because it's a dream that has no reality. You want to be one with the reality. We are miserable here, being separated from the Father. So we want to escape. If we had been happy here, we wouldn't have thought about the Father at all. We would not want to go to him if we were happy here.*

*Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. I*

So we make an effort because we want to escape, we want to be one with the reality, we want to be happy. He continued:

*As Christ said, blessed are they that mourn, who feel the separation from the Beloved, who are missing their Beloved. They are the fortunate ones. Having come to this creation, they miss the Creator. They are the fortunate ones, the blessed ones. The teachings are meant only for the blessed ones, for the fortunate ones.*

We have come to the Master's teachings because we feel that separation, because we are miserable in that separation. We may not have understood why we have felt so miserable despite the good in our lives, but the Master tells us that it is the soul that is miserable, and it is that misery of the soul that pushes us to find meaning in our lives, to search for the Master. In concluding Hazur says:

*Those who are happy in this dream will remain part and parcel of this dream. And those who are the blessed ones will realize the travesty of this world and will want to go to their everlasting home, their permanent abode. They will feel his separation. They will miss him. They will try to get to him.*

We miss the Lord, we miss our Master, and so we put in that effort. We live in the world, going through our destiny karmas, participating fully in the dream of our life, but never forgetting why we asked for initiation, never forgetting that our Master is waiting for us at the eye centre and never giving up our meditation, no matter what.

“No matter what” becomes our watchword. We do our bhajan and simran no matter what. Even if we don't sleep the night before, we get up and sit in meditation. Even if we are sick, we sit; and if we can't sit in our usual meditation posture, we lie in bed and do our simran and bhajan. Even if we are travelling, we sit – we can do simran in a plane





a train or a bus. And if we don't manage to do our simran and bhajan during the journey, we can sit whenever we get to our hotel. No matter what, we never let 24 hours go by without fulfilling our part of this wonderful bargain the Master offers us. We give him our two and a half hours and he gives us everything.



# Start Your Day on the Open Sea

Wait, dear friend!  
Before you dream up some new desire  
or face the first disaster of the day,  
close your eyes again.  
Start your day on the open sea!

Run out on the dock  
hidden behind your eyes.  
Call out and wave to the One  
who comes to take souls sailing  
on wondrous waves of sound and light!

Don't break your date with him, today!  
There is plenty of time later,  
for hot tea, buttered toast  
and your big fancy plans  
to take the world by storm.

Close your eyes again.  
Start your day on the open sea!  
Run out on the dock and call to the One.  
Sit down and wait for him, all alone.  
Don't take your rowdy old friends  
out sailing with you, today.

They always disturb your peace  
with the same old sad stories  
about what you've done  
and where you hope or fear  
you'll be, someday.

Instead ... sail off, silent and smiling,  
on the sparkling sea of pure spirit

with your one and only Real Friend  
standing by you at the helm.

He'll set the billowy white sail  
beneath a breathtaking sky,  
to catch the shining song of the wind  
that carries sailors on and on  
to the dazzling shores of Sach Khand.

Soon ... you'll be far far away  
from the weary old world  
of worries and wants  
and always waiting  
for a better time to come.

You'll make your escape  
from endless debts coming due,  
that long list of names and numbers,  
and all your feverish future plans.

Close your eyes again.  
Start your day on the open sea!  
Climb aboard the sailboat  
your Friend suitably named  
Welcome Home!

Soon you'll be thrilling along  
on musical waves of light.  
Feel the fresh breeze of bliss,  
and cool ocean spray of spirit  
upon the shining face of your soul.

*Original poem by a satsangi*



# A School for Wandering Beggars

*Hafiz, if you want the water of eternal life, its source is the dust at the doorway...*

*To kiss that threshold, you must be ready to scatter your life like coins....*

*Wind, tell a secret of my love, to that king of beauties ... and if he says, "I do not want a poor lover like Hafiz," tell him that true kings sit with wandering beggars.*

Elizabeth Gray, *The Green Sea of Heaven: Fifty Ghazals from the Diwan of Hafiz*

Our entire existence on earth could be understood as being in a school for wandering spiritual beggars. In order to become acutely aware of one's spiritual poverty, one need only meditate. In meditation as spiritual beggars, we discover that we are not in control of our minds. We discover that despite our best efforts and in the face of our feeble attempts, we cannot offer the devotion, faith and focused attention that is required. Spiritual beggars are increasingly aware of their shortcomings, defects and deficiencies.

This mind holds us prisoner in a realm of delusion, selfishness and separation. This mind, time after time, convinces us that we can find some sort of lasting happiness in the material world and that we are the ones who are in control. This stubborn and egotistical mind is in love with the fiction that it can give us what we seek.

But the saints come and tell us that there is something much more real than the mind. They tell us to turn inward, to go behind the appearances of personality and circumstances, and the stories that we tell about ourselves and the world we live in. The saints promise us that inside every human being dwells the living God: the truth,

the joy and the eternal reality that we have been looking for so desperately. As we seek what is true, we are not to stop at the superficial, the transitory, or the illusionary. We are urged to go beyond, within, and to experience for ourselves what is the foundation of all things: divine love.

Our spiritual teachers are the ones who give us instruction on how we can find union with God. They lead us, guide us and encourage us on every stage of the journey. What is the debt we owe our teacher? What is the debt we owe our Master, our Guide?

Simone Weil, a 20th-century French philosopher, who found her spiritual truth and inner experience in the Christian tradition, writes eloquently on this subject of how wandering beggars become embraced by divine love. She describes her gratitude to her own spiritual teacher, Father Perrin, when she wrote to him:

*Even if we only consider the plane of purely human relations, the gratitude I owe you is infinite.... My situation with regard to you is like that of a beggar, reduced by extreme poverty to a state of constant hunger, who for the space of a year had been going at intervals to a prosperous house where he was given bread, and who, for the first time in his life, had not suffered humiliation. Such a beggar, if he had a whole life to give in exchange for each morsel of bread, and if he gave them all, would think that his debt was in no way diminished.*

*Waiting For God*

The wandering beggar actively seeks the companionship of his or her teacher. Wandering beggars become focused on the One who possesses spiritual wealth. Wandering beggars actively seek the company of the saints.

Consider that all that we value in ourselves (our health, intelligence, family relations, beauty, resources) are on loan – given to us for our use, but ultimately a reflection of the generosity of the One who has given them to us.

But what about when we see things in ourselves that we don't value? Sometimes we see our own arrogance, or pettiness, or harsh judgments, or stubbornness (to name just a few of our human failings). Weil has a comforting view of those moments as well. She calls them a "blessing".

*I should look upon every sin I have committed as a favor of God.... I wish and implore that my imperfection may be wholly revealed to me.... Not in order that it may be cured, but, even if it should not be cured, in order that I may know the truth.*

Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*

Simone Weil sees God as all-important in everything we do. The Master is the giver in all situations. If we are fortunate, he asks us to do seva. But seva is the work that he wants to get accomplished, in the way he wants it done. We are merely the instrument he uses.

*May we be the slave whom his master sends to bear help to someone in misfortune. The help comes from the master, but it is intended for the sufferer ... we should be impelled toward our neighbor by God, as the arrow is driven toward its target by the archer.*

Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*

That image is a good one for our spiritual life. Every initiate is an arrow in the hands of a master archer; he has promised us that he will

get us to the target, to the spiritual bull's-eye – to the Shabd. He has promised to deliver us into the arms of divine love. Humble disciples are confident and happy, knowing that with initiation, they are placed in the Master's quiver. They are reassured to know that they are on their way to Sach Khand, and that he will, at the right moment, send them to their true home, with his strength and power. But unlike in the image of the archer and an arrow, our perfect Master, not only sends his disciples to God, he walks with us on every step of the journey.

In all of our activities, we are to heed what the saints tell us is our top priority: meditation. Simone Weil has a very simple, but effective formula to determine what we should be doing, how to decide whether an activity is right or wrong. She says:

*Uninterrupted interior prayer is the only perfect criterion of good and evil. Everything which does not interrupt it is permitted, everything which interrupts it is forbidden.*

Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*

As wandering beggars, we know we must obey. Obedience is a high calling that challenges us on a daily basis. Our first and primary act of obedience is to work hard at our meditation practice, regardless of the outcome. The saints assure us that they will take care of us: they will show up. We are destined for a very joyous reunion. Maharaj Charan Singh says in *Spiritual Discourses*, Vol. II:

*That Lord who takes care of the life in each leaf, who satisfies even their need for food – is he likely to give us birth and then forget about us, when we are at the top of creation? He has had our destiny written from the start.*

This spiritual wealth is worth waiting for, worth living for. We are to wait for our Beloved, with confidence, trust and perseverance. Remembering our Beloved, remembering our meditation, knowing that he waits for us within; that is enough for us wandering spiritual beggars.



*Through contemplation on Nam  
one finds the door to liberation  
and brings salvation to his kith and kin.  
Having himself sailed across through dedication to Nam,  
the Guru helps his disciples  
cross the ocean of existence.  
One who is absorbed in Nam, O Nanak,  
no longer wanders around begging.  
Such is the pure Nam – untainted by maya.  
One who meditates on it realizes it within.*

*Gurbani Selections, Vol. I*



# Perseverance

All beings on this earth have an expiration date marked on them. We can't see it and we don't know when the end will come, only that it will come.

Masters spend their lives reminding us that our stay in this world is limited, and they offer us a path to the unlimited. They tell us that in every one of us there is a thirst to find lasting truth, happiness and peace. We try to quench this thirst by every possible means: family and friends, girlfriends and boyfriends, worldly achievements and riches. All of this keeps us busy going from one activity to another, but none of it satisfies us because this thirst is for something higher – something that is already within us and is our real essence.

Soami Ji says in *Sar Bachan Poetry*:

*Why do you drink water, O swan soul? There is an ocean of nectar within you, which you can drink just by withdrawing your consciousness inside.*

Just as there are many different words for “water” – that substance we drink to satisfy our physical thirst – there are many different words for that inner nectar that will satisfy our spiritual thirst. Saints have called this inner nectar the Shabd, Nam, Holy Ghost, Word and many other names. It's not the words that matter, but that inner reality. Saints give us the method of meditation to withdraw our attention to this nectar, this Voice of God within us. But it is not easy to reach this everlasting bliss. That is why saints stress the importance of perseverance in our efforts to have our own direct inner experience of truth, of the Lord within us.

Helen Keller, a woman who became deaf and blind at 19 months of age, tells a story in her autobiography, *The Story of My Life*, about how she learned through direct experience. Her teacher, Anne Sullivan was trying to teach Helen to connect letters and words with the name of objects. At first Helen thought that her teacher was just playing a game. Helen memorized the words but failed to realize that these words were the names of actual objects. It wasn't until April 5, 1887, when her teacher took Helen to an old pump house that Helen finally understood. Sullivan put one of Helen's hands under the stream of water coming from the pump and began spelling "w-a-t-e-r" into the palm of her other hand. Helen writes:

*As the cool stream gushed over one hand she spelled into the other the word "water", first slowly, then rapidly. I stood still, my whole attention fixed upon the motions of her fingers. Suddenly I felt a misty consciousness as of something forgotten – a thrill of returning thought; and somehow the mystery of language was revealed to me. I knew then that "w-a-t-e-r" meant the wonderful cool something that was flowing over my hand. That living word awakened my soul, gave it light, hope, joy, set it free! There were barriers still, it is true, but barriers that could in time be swept away.*

Helen's understanding came after much effort and with much persistence on her part and with the help of her remarkable teacher. Neither Helen nor her teacher was deterred by her past failures. They pressed on and ultimately Helen developed an exceptional capacity for communication and became one of the most admired and inspiring people in the world.

On the spiritual path, we sometimes get hung up on the idea of success or failure and we allow our lack of understanding to get in the way of persistence. In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II, Maharaj Charan Singh defines “failure” and in so doing shows its value:

*Failure means that I have done my best to attend to meditation, but I couldn't succeed. Failure doesn't mean that I never attended to meditation. That is not failure – that is not even attempting. Failure means I have done my best, I have given my time, I have lived the way of life while I have been trying to build my treasure. From every point of view I have been keeping myself clean, but I have not achieved anything within myself. So that is my failure. That effort will not be lost – that is what is meant by failure.... So our attempt is there, our efforts are there, but the results are not in our hands. From that point of view we can say that we have failed, but that is no failure.*

Even from a worldly perspective, perseverance in the face of so-called failure is essential. Soichiro Honda, founder of Honda Motors, said, “Success can be achieved only through repeated failure and introspection. In fact, success represents one percent of your work which results only from the 99 percent that is called failure.” When we are committed to accomplishing a goal, we naturally make continual efforts, even when we do not achieve immediate success. Soichiro Honda understood that repeated effort is necessary for any meaningful success. It is only through persistence that we continue our efforts long enough to get to the one percent of the efforts that leads to success. As Honda recognized, that one percent and that 99 percent are both valuable and we cannot have one without the other.

Masters see clearly that what we call “failure” is a necessary part of our spiritual growth – just as Honda recognized that repeated effort and failure are integral to business and engineering success. In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II, Maharaj Charan Singh says:

*Any time we devote to meditation, howsoever imperfect that meditation may be, is to our credit. It helps. It helps us to grow towards the path. So we should not think that our meditation is not very qualitative. We should think that it should at least be quantitative. Automatically quality comes with quantity. If we don't start, we will never learn to walk. If we start then naturally we fall also, we get bruises also. But as long as we get up again and start walking again, we will ultimately learn.*

Our difficulties and “failure” in meditation have a part to play in our ultimate growth. For one thing, they provide us with a necessary lesson in humility. If we were to instantly have inner experiences, perhaps we would think that these things are in our control. The truth is that as long as we identify with our bodies and minds we are limited individuals putting forth limited efforts, which can never be sufficient to enable us to reach the unlimited One. Our transformation will only take place when we come to a higher level. This can never happen with an ego-based approach. It can happen only through the Lord's grace, the help of a living Master and the magic of love. Hazur says in *Die to Live*, “I only comes when we don't do it. When we truly meditate, then ‘I’ just disappears. Then we realize his grace.”

What counts is not what we achieve, but how much we try with sincerity. Then with persistence and perseverance, just as Helen Keller was able to grow with the help of her teacher, we will surely succeed.

Let's give it everything we can and always strive to keep our love fresh. For those who have love, nothing else matters.

*As you persevere regularly in the meditation, you get ample joy and peace, which compensate for your labours and make you cheerfully and patiently look forward to ultimate victory.*

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



*Whether you are knocking very softly at the door, whether you are knocking very hard at the door, or whether you are frightened to knock and are only shouting, you are at the door, and you want the door to be opened to you. Even if we are nervous to knock, our intention is that the door should open and we should get admission. All efforts are there. Everybody has a different approach, but everybody who is on the path wants the door to be opened. When we are sitting in meditation, whether we are knocking or whether we are too nervous to knock, we want the door to be opened. That is why we are giving time to meditation.*

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Die to Live*

# i carry your heart with me

i carry your heart with me, (i carry it in  
my heart) i am never without it (anywhere  
i go you go, my dear; and whatever is done  
by only me is your doing, my darling)  
i fear

no fate (for you are my fate, my sweet) i want  
no world (for beautiful you are my world, my true)  
and it's you are whatever a moon has always meant  
and whatever a sun will always sing is you

here is the deepest secret nobody knows  
(here is the root of the root and the bud of the bud  
and the sky of the sky of a tree called life; which grows  
higher than a soul can hope or mind can hide)  
and this is the wonder that's keeping the stars apart

i carry your heart with me (i carry it in my heart)

E.E. Cummings  
reprinted with permission



*Today God in his grace  
used my offering of the lamp of devotion  
simply as an excuse  
to let me experience this light.*  
Niloba, in *Many Voices, One Song*

# Swimming Upstream

In our human journey we have to interact with the physical world. This vast web of illusion moves us along in a powerful river of time and space. This relentless current drags us along through the whole of our lives. Sometimes the current seems to move us rapidly, sometimes slowly, but always, always, we are being hurtled towards the great abyss that everyone knows about but which few will speak of. Those who dare speak of this impending descent are the Masters. They offer instructions on how to escape the abyss. And for this they are labelled by some as dangerous. And those who listen to the Masters are labelled by some as crazy fools because they follow these instructions and swim against the great current of the world – or try.

But most of the time, heavy with desire, weighed down with our lust and anger and greed, we seem to be carried farther and farther downstream and it is hard to turn around and swim in the opposite direction, towards the source. Our attachment to the illusion is so strong that at times we cannot see or remember the purpose of swimming upstream, and our struggle becomes that much more difficult. Sometimes we ask ourselves why we are doing this. It would be so much easier to float downstream and just go with the flow. Yes, the river of time and space is powerful, but the Masters have told us the secret: right within the tumultuous flow of that mighty river there lies an awesome and dynamic current, the river of love – the audible life stream – and it flows in the opposite direction, the direction of endless peace and happiness. When we begin to resist the river of the world we find that we begin to submit to the river of love, the audible life stream.

Sometimes we find ourselves filled with Master's presence and the effort is joyous. Surrounded with satsang and seva and the community these afford, we can easily fend off the dangerous currents and eddies. At other times we feel vacant of spiritual inspiration, for whatever reason – immersed in the world up to our eyeballs. It is when this river of time seems to pull with extra strength that the swimmer is put to the test, thrashing around in the waters of illusion and trying not to drown.

As satsangis we pursue a direction against the current, almost inviting ridicule from some we pass going another way. Some shake their fist at us, "Hey buddy you're going the wrong way!" We seek the quiet refuge of simran while others are turning up the volume. We shun drugs and alcohol when many struggling souls are indulging to kill the fear of the abyss. We go to bed when the world is awake and meditate when the world is asleep. We are the vegetarians at the buffet, holding up the line, staring at a plate of beans and asking, "What are the ingredients in this dish?"

There is no judgment of any of our brothers and sisters on the planet. Everyone is looking for happiness, and perhaps we are the crazy ones. We are like salmon swimming upstream. It is an inner compulsion to find the source of our being. So we find ourselves going against the flow, living a life that is a little bit different, and raising a glass of juice to toast the perfectly insane idea of swimming upstream.

Now one must admit it is tempting to say that when living in a Western society we find it more difficult to live a spiritual life, but that's a bunch of hoey, a lame excuse propagated by people in the West like me who experience no apparent inner progress and look for excuses. The river of the world is just as powerful East or West, North or South. What is difficult is finding the blend between the



inner spiritual life and the outer worldly life. Sometimes the two seem to be incompatible.

When drawn by the spiritual life, we find ourselves simply happy. For whatever crazy reason, the path makes sense to us. But we might not feel worthy of it because however hard we try to swim upstream, we're still susceptible to the downstream currents.

When engrossed in the world, we feel like a fish out of water: like a phony, an imposter, someone taking pictures in a foreign country, developing snapshots and grasping for moments of happiness to hold on to later. We feel separated from our real purpose, being pulled in one direction, yet making great effort to swim in another.

The key here is the effort, because effort requires commitment and devotion. It requires resistance and submission to powerful currents – like the dynamic flow of a great river, or the most powerful current we could ever experience – the audible life stream.

The living Master represents the wellspring of the audible life stream; the river of love seems to pour right out from his eyes, and we just want to get close enough to see where the water comes from. He is our beacon to the inner experience, our expert river guide who will hold our hand so we will not be dragged down into the whirlpool of this world. He will point us inward, towards the source of the sound and light and into the fountain of love.



# Hide and Seek

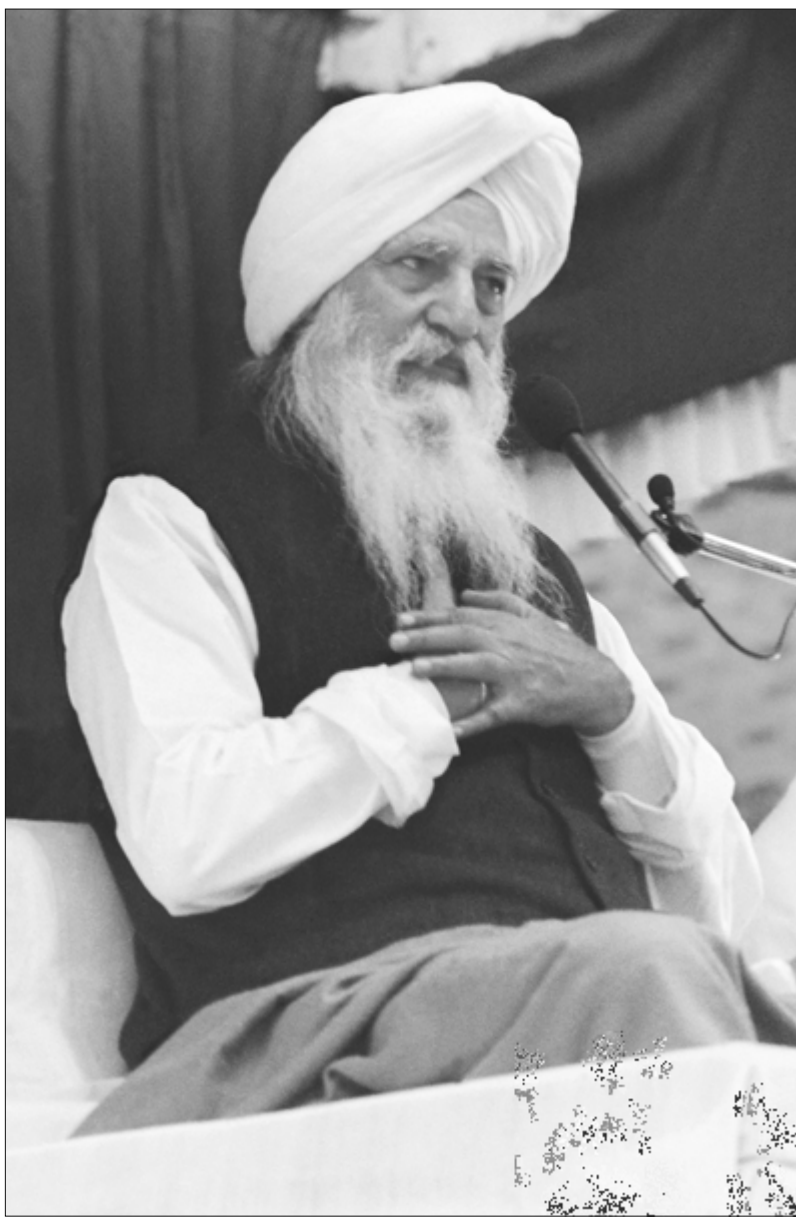
*This constant feeling of loneliness and missing something is in reality the hidden unquenched thirst and craving of the soul for its Lord.... This feeling has been purposely put in the heart of man.*

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Quest for Light*

The feeling of loneliness that Hazur is speaking about compels us to seek. In a worldly sense, we seek comfort, wealth, honour, love, a feeling of belonging. This seeking drives us from job to job, person to person, even master to master – all to distract us from the feelings of loneliness and isolation that plague us. Yet, even while we are immersed in this play of the mind and senses, something still nags at us from deep within. We realize that somehow these things and people are not what we are truly seeking. We turn to books, to scriptures, we devour every morsel of wisdom that we can – and yet we are still empty.

A time may come in our lives when we realize that the loneliness is never going away. The solace we have sought through overeating, or alcohol, music and movies, or even endless intellectual discussions and education – nothing has worked to heal us. At some point it may occur to us that we can't heal our own pain and emptiness.

If we are lucky, there comes a moment when we know that what was missing all along was a deep and abiding connection to God. At that moment we begin to actively seek to cultivate a relationship with the Lord, and we are forever changed. Our seeking takes a different turn. Cultivating a one-on-one relationship with the Lord becomes our focus. This is the very basis of the path of Sant Mat.



A fundamental assumption on this path is that knowledge of the Lord is attainable, and that knowing him is possible in this very lifetime. In fact, we can experience a loving, personal relationship with him from the moment we are initiated, when the spiritual nourishment that we had been seeking becomes ours, whether we realize it or not. For a short time we feel whole. We feel absorbed and intoxicated by our ‘finding’ the path, the Master, and the teachings. Now all we have to do is sit quietly, come to the eye centre, make the mind motionless and go within.

Having had a glimpse of what is possible, we are disappointed when we don’t see him inside the first time we meditate. But then it dawns on us that we can’t have this experience at will – because it’s his game. Maharaj Charan Singh says in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. III, “When that love arises in us, when we become victims of that love, then he conceals himself. Then it is a game of hide-and-seek.”

Sooner or later we realize that the only way we are going to remove this separation from him is to do our simran. That’s the beginning of our understanding of the commitment we made at the time of initiation.

Stilling the mind and controlling the senses is the most difficult task the disciple has, and there is only one way – bringing our attention inside with our simran. Collecting every ray of our attention and focusing it on simran is the only way to light the footpath to him. Simran is our conversation with him, one precious word at a time.

*Now just keep repeating the Lord’s Name.*

*When you repeat his Name constantly,*

*No sins will stay with you.*

*Even if you have millions of sins.*

*It won’t take a second for the Lord’s Name*

*To burn them away ...  
Kal has no access to that place.*

*Tukaram: The Ceaseless Song of Devotion*

Repeating simran constantly prevents sins from adhering to the disciple. Since these sins are what stand between the disciple and the Master, this is the beginning of reducing the distance that one experiences because of our apparent separation from the Master. And then our loneliness begins to subside.

Maharaj Charan Singh in *Spiritual Discourses*, Vol. I says:

*Except for devotion to Nam, no second method exists whereby to awaken the mind. The result of practising Nam is that as the attention is held steady at the eye focus, it begins to contact the heavenly music. Gradually, the enchanting strains of the music become overpowering and all-absorbing. It is then that the mind awakens to the Lord. Its dreams are then cut short. It recognizes the transience and impermanence of everything that surrounds us here. It gets to know the fact that the world is unreal, that it is only a shadow-show, and that God alone is real, permanent and immortal. With intense yearning and unwavering devotion, divine love permeates one's whole being. The mind begins to miss him, with the result that the bonds with the world are broken and those with God made tighter. The devotee's love then becomes one-pointed. The coats of rust begin to fall off and the mind rises up to its own source in Trikuti. The soul is released from its clutches, and purged of its physical, astral, and other coverings, it realizes its divine origin.*

What better gift in exchange for the practice of ceaseless simran than the mind's becoming one-pointed and returning to its source where we are free to experience union with Master firsthand.

When this simran is perfected and ongoing throughout the day, then the time of meditation becomes a time of joy. Meditation becomes a time when every worry and concern can be left behind, and when the flight to the presence of the Master becomes swift. Balance comes into our life. Our simran done with one-pointed attention leads us to the Shabd, the Shabd takes us to our Beloved, and we realize not only that we are in the company of the Beloved, but that he was with us all along. The game of hide-and-seek is over forever.



*What is grace of the Father? To pray to him that whatever stands between us and the Father should be eliminated and that we should become one with him. That is the mercy we are trying to seek... Our own ego, our own load of karma – our mind – stands between us and the Father... Meditation is nothing but invoking the mercy of the Father.*

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

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*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. All these are preparations. When you want to fill the vessel with milk, you have to prepare that vessel for keeping the milk... These preparations strengthen our love and devotion, and create that desire in us for meditation.*

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Die to Live*

# Embrace the Struggle

Maharaj Charan Singh was once asked a question regarding the amount of simran that an individual must do in his life. Hazur answered in *Die to Live*:

*There's no set amount. It's a whole life of struggle – that's the amount, a whole life of struggle. We have to withdraw our consciousness to the eye centre, and then we have to hold our consciousness there, that it may not slip down again. That is why it is a lifelong struggle.*

All Masters, like Hazur in this quote, emphasize that we are strengthened through this struggle, and that our happiness lies in continuing to struggle with ourselves. This suggests that we need to accept the fact that struggle is part of life on this plane. We need to focus on our efforts now, and not get caught up in expectation of the results, of a perfect future.

It is so hard to grasp the value of this struggle. Saints tell us that only in a human birth can we make true progress on our return home. Our effort is an investment into this return home. If we could truly see the potential at our fingertips, we would respond differently to the challenge. It's like the stock market in today's world. It is so easy to look at this stock or that stock and do the math and realize that, if we had only bought at a low price, a stock that was available a few years ago, we could have turned a small amount of money into a fortune. It seems so obvious in hindsight. But that is exactly the message regarding this human birth. We are guaranteed a huge return on our

investment if we take some of today's precious time and invest it in the work the Master has given us.

Behind every great achievement is someone who savoured the struggle. The greatest athlete creates his winning ability by getting up every morning, while others sleep, and pushing himself to the brink of his own limit. Then he repeats the task day after day as he slowly improves. He has no guarantee of success, yet he shows a pure determination to keep the struggle alive.

Or take the artist. We see the final painting, and we think how talented the artist is. But there are very few artists who do not struggle. The true artist is great because of his ability to persist. When others give up and say enough is enough, a real artist presses on and keeps refining his work as he reaches for perfection. No one else may ever know what he struggled to resolve in the final work. His eye, his intent, his spirit cannot find satisfaction with his effort until the final piece reaches a goal that is personal to his pursuit of perfection.

When the question arises as to why the Master doesn't just take us up now, the answer sometimes given is that we are not ready. So we just have to learn to love the struggle on this path to return to the One. It is as simple a lesson as the one Dorothy learned in the movie *The Wizard of Oz*. Through all of her struggles, all she wanted was to go home to Kansas. When she finally reached the end of her journey, all she had to do was click her heels together and home she went. She could have clicked her heels together any time and returned to Kansas, but that's not the way it worked. Only when she had had enough experiences and achieved a certain maturity did she realize how important her home was to her, and that she already possessed within herself, and had always possessed, the means to return home. Our situation is the same.



It seems that it is human nature to always pick the loftiest goal as our standard and then to consider anything short of that goal as not truly measuring up. The truth is that the Lord made us as we are. He set up this whole production to foster our growth, while he nudges us forward. This process is actually working great. This is not about our arrival at some future time into a state of bliss. This is about who and where we are now. The Lord's timing is perfect and we will progress by his grace.

Masters have often emphasized that there are really just two things for which we are responsible – effort and a positive attitude. We must not judge our effort by our assessment of the results. We do not have the necessary understanding to do that; we do not see the whole picture. The Master has asked that we put in our effort and trust him regarding the results. This is where a positive attitude is so important; it is up to us to abandon any preconceived ideas regarding results. We can simply practise seeing every event in life as an opportunity to trust in his plan. This is the essence of a positive attitude. It is all his work.

Maharaj Charan Singh took great care in answering the same basic questions in the same manner, often using the same words, a thousand times. This helped us to grasp the spiritual process we are in. He demonstrated his love and patience over and over and reached out to each questioner with a detailed answer that, if taken literally, would preclude any further thought on the question asked. The Master asks us to live these teachings. He asks us to quit conceptualizing what love is and to take steps through our meditation to help us be in love. He reaches his hand out to us as our guide and then asks us to take action towards our objective, to trust in our purpose and believe in our journey. He does not point to a future arrival that will someday satisfy our needs; instead, he emphasizes the value of the present moment.

In meditation, we seek to live in the present moment. Just because worldly thoughts pop up does not mean we have failed in our meditation. This is our opportunity to come back and focus in the moment with him. Slowly detachment will come in its own time. We can't know at this stage what success is nor can we know what failure is. We have a habit of judging results harshly. Our conditioned mind has been collecting a lifetime of thoughts and feelings that we stir together in a boiling pot, and then we allow this emotional stew to control our perception.

This is why the Master asks us to simply trust. We get confused easily because we listen to our minds. But he knows what he is doing. This is why he smiles when he says to just let go and trust in the plan. If we only knew what he knows, we would laugh at ourselves for all the emotion we waste worrying about the results of our efforts. We are not sliding down the side of a slippery slope waiting to hit the bottom. We are in the river of his care, flowing with determined resolve to return to the ocean of his presence. It is guaranteed. Why not embrace the struggle and just let go?



*After seeing you face to face,  
My eyes cannot look anywhere else.  
O Lord, my heart clings to your feet  
In a firm embrace, never to let go.  
Never again will I be separated from you.*

*Tukaram: The Ceaseless Song of Devotion*

# Spiritual Pain

*I am restless; mad in love, I pine for my beloved,  
A stream of tears constantly flows from my eyes,  
Every moment the pain of love throbs in my heart,  
And I have lost awareness of my very existence.  
My body has been denuded of sentience and sensibility,  
And I am oblivious to all my surroundings,  
I am impervious to the varied surroundings,  
I am impervious to the varied currents,  
And my mind is now dead.  
The physician knows not my malady  
Of what avail are his remedies?  
My wound is deep inside my heart,  
How shall I describe my pain to him?  
My Master, the physician alone knows my agony,  
And he has the 'herb' to cure me of my ailment.  
My malady alone he knows  
Who suffers from it, O Tulsi;  
He alone feels this pain  
Who goes through its pangs.*

*Tulsi Sahib: Saint of Hathras*

The mystics often write of their pain, their spiritual misery. In this poem, Tulsi Sahib's adoration for his Master is so strong that he feels it as a physical pain, and he weeps constantly. He has become disturbed and is hardly aware of his physical existence; he is lost; he can't even think clearly. Should he try to have a physician help him overcome his sickness, he asks? He discards this idea; it wouldn't work – he would

not be able to describe his symptoms for an adequate diagnosis. Only the Master can understand his malady; only the Master can cure him through his presence, his love, his darshan, his Shabd.

Many of us sometimes suffer spiritual pain and anguish. We may feel desperately alone, cut off even from the Master, even abandoned by the path. Here, in this verse, Tulsi Sahib, madly in love with his Master, suffers all the pain that this causes him. But why the pain? This might puzzle us. One might think that his great love for his Master would be completely fulfilling, leaving none of the emptiness that he feels.

To reach that conclusion is to misunderstand the relationship between Master and disciple. In some ways this spiritual love may initially feel like the love between a man and a woman. Sometimes one of the couple, deeply in love, feels that the other one is indifferent, no longer loving, or even angry and cold. And, often, this conclusion is faulty. The other may just be distracted, stretched too thin in work or other duties, or mildly irritated at the partner's lack of understanding, jealousy, or demands.

While this comparison may work for human affection, it does not work for spiritual love and devotion. Yes, the Master pulls us towards him, tells us about true love, describes it and its manifestation – the Shabd – and initiates us into techniques that we must follow if we are to experience the supreme happiness of this spiritual love. Then, he causes us to love him, because that is ultimately what will encourage us to try to get closer to him through meditation.

But we are complex entities – a mix of strengths and weaknesses, trust and mistrust, convictions and confusion, and many other dualities. We are like this because our fundamental spiritual nature is cloaked by our karmic past. We are karmic beings with inherited traits and sanskaras brought about through an infinite variety of past

lives. It is unlikely that early on our initial spiritual journey we are ready to travel within. Similarly, the Master is a conundrum that we cannot expect to understand, try as we may, until we merge with him. In his human form, we may have the opportunity to talk with him, or communicate with him. And it is easy to think that this communication is carried on to some extent using the same conventions that we use in everyday life. We say something, and he replies. It seems logical, but nonetheless such conversations may baffle us! We have to learn to accept this curious circumstance and recognize that he has his own design to follow, it's not a game or a strategy. It's just his work, which will carry us back to the Creator.

Even if the Master's statements seem to be contrary to all that we know, or at least what experience has taught us, we have to accept that he sees life by looking down with perfect clarity and understanding on the creation, while we try to see life by peering upwards with little lucidity, "as through a glass darkly". He understands us thoroughly; we cannot understand him or his ways. This sort of situation might be easy for us to understand if we were attempting to negotiate with, say, a lost tribe. The language and knowledge base might be quite beyond us – the same barriers separate us from a true Master even if we are not aware of it.

Sometimes in the question and answer sessions at Dera, a satsangi in desperation says to the Master, "Now I am totally confused." We should understand that it is only our ego that expects and demands to understand the Master. So, perhaps our confusion forces us to simply accept our mental limitations. Only the Master can fully understand us and our spiritual situation. We don't have to understand; in fact, we cannot understand our spiritual struggles. We just have to carry out what he has taught us and accept that we are in his hands and that he knows at all times what is best for us – even if this

may be done sometimes by denying us his presence and the clarity of his understanding.

Great Master explains in *Spiritual Gems*:

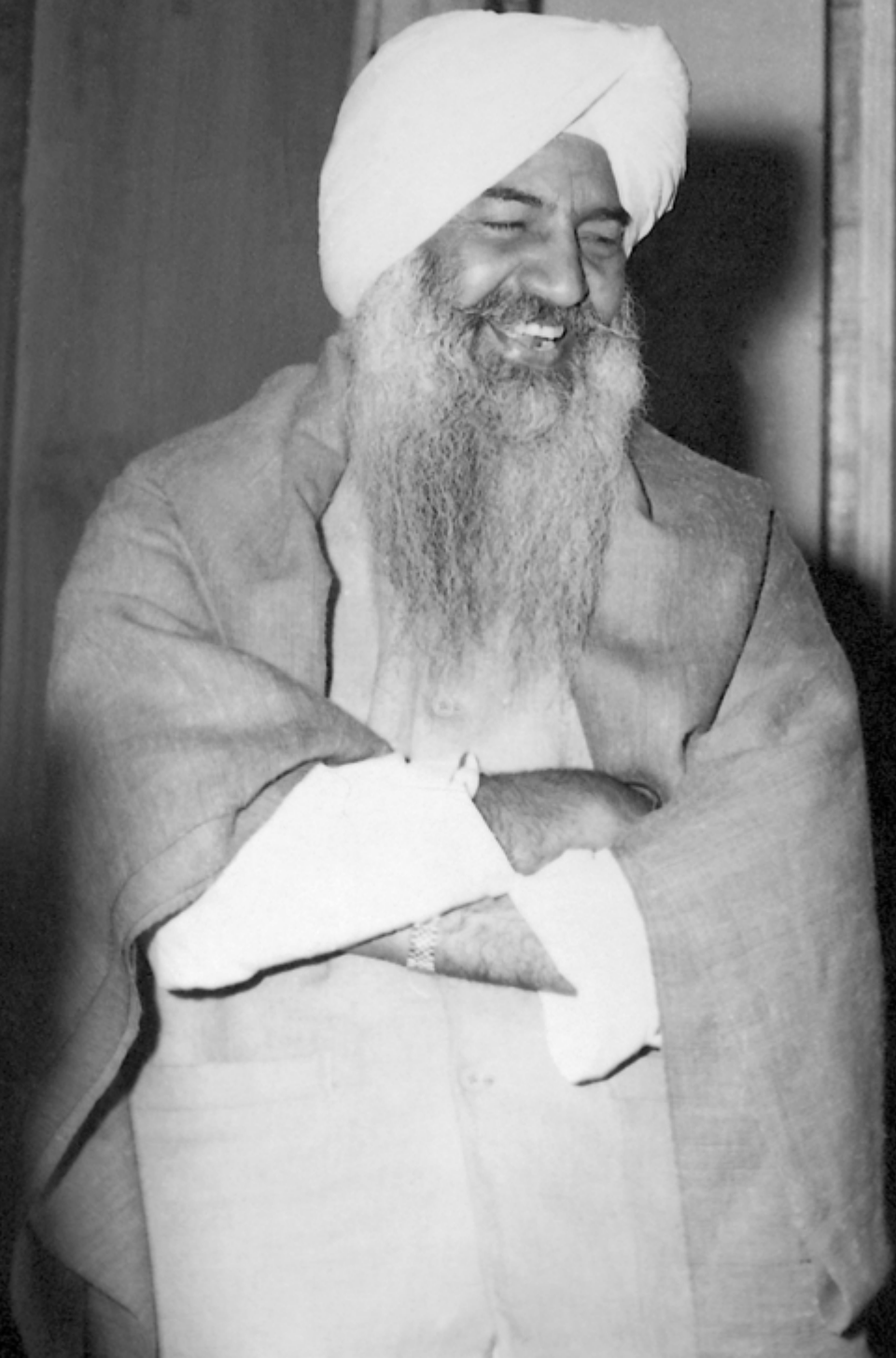
*Pain and pleasure of the devotee are in the hands of the Master. He arranges them as he sees fit. The devotee should take delight in pain, for that is also a gift from him.... A real devotee makes no distinction in pain and delight; his business is devotion.*

So, at those times when we suffer in despair over our confusion, depressed at our apparent lack of progress, our dry periods (as they are sometimes called), our urgent need to feel his presence and comfort, then we must just leave ourselves completely in his hands without question and concentrate even more on our spiritual exercises. If we can simply accept the Master's words without analysis, without question, without argument, but with gratitude, affection and acceptance, then this surrender always works to our advantage.



*In singing about your love for the Lord,  
You may do so in any language you know.*

Hafiz, in *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. IV



# Practice Makes Perfect

The following is Great Master's answer as to the best way to reach and hold the eye focus:

*That method is the same as all saints use, which is simply the concentrated attention held firmly at the given centre. What else can we say? It is all a matter of unwavering attention. Every ray of attention must be centred there and held there. If one strays away for a time, one has lost the advantage. It may be said safely that if any earnest student should hold his attention fully upon the given centre for three hours, without wavering, he must go inside. But that is not so easy without long practice. However, by and by, the mind becomes accustomed to staying in the centre. It rebels less and less, and finally yields to the demand to hold the centre. Then your victory is won....*

*It is a matter of will to hold to the centre, also not to forget nor allow the attention to go off after some other thought or experiences.... Make the spirit, instead of the mind, the commander of the situation. The mind is tricky and will run out if permitted. Conquer it. But to conquer it is not easy, of course, and it takes time. The problem is not complicated at all. The whole thing is just attention, and then unbroken attention, at the eye centre, allowing no other thought to intrude itself into the consciousness and lead you away from the centre. This was the method by which I won my way inside and it is the method by which you must win your way.*

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *Spiritual Gems*





## Sheikh Farid: The Great Sufi Mystic

BY DR. T.R. SHANGARI

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Sheikh Farid is a beloved 13th-century saint of the Punjab, the third Sufi master in the Chishti lineage in India. Sheikh Farid lived during a vibrant period in the history of Sufism, when the first wave of Persian-speaking Sufis moved into the Punjab, the beginning of the literary and spiritual expression that has been termed the “Indo-Persian cultural fusion”. He was highly educated in Persian and Arabic, graceful mystical verses in Persian spontaneously “rolling off his tongue” in response to any given situation. But he also reached out to the local population in their own language, which at that time had no written form, giving his teachings in simple verses laced with imagery from their daily lives.

In the section of this book called “Life & Teachings”, the author describes Sheikh Farid’s mystical teachings by combining what is known from the slim record of his sayings and actions (he never wrote anything himself) with what is known about the teachings in the Chishti lineage. The central pillar of his teachings was love for the divine, to be cultivated by constant remembrance of the presence of God and discipline in spiritual practice. Chishti saints taught an inner path, a “pilgrimage into the heart of man”, leading to the annihilation of the ego. An appendix describes the specific spiritual exercises taught by the Chishti sheikhs.

The book pieces together the life story of Sheikh Farid mostly from anecdotes recorded later by his disciples. These beautifully illustrate key aspects of his own discipleship: his extreme awe of his master and his chagrin when he felt he had fallen short of perfect obedience; and his gentle method of teaching his disciples: when a disciple hesitated to have his head shaved – the symbolic gesture marking one as a disciple in that

lineage – Farid said nothing until later when, after the disciple had gained some experience, he begged to have his head shaved.

On Sheikh Farid's way of life, the book weaves together incidents related by his disciples, such as how, though his own poverty was extreme, Farid was unstintingly generous, inaugurating the tradition of the free kitchen or *langar*. The author describes Farid's attitude: "Whatever came to him, he understood it to have come from the Lord. And, having no claim on it himself, he gave it away to God's creatures." He welcomed all persons to his *khanqah* (gathering place) as equals, whether Muslim or Hindu, rich or poor, educated or illiterate, men or women. While he himself was a devout Muslim, rigorously following all the practices prescribed in Islam, he saw the Sufi path as open to followers of any faith. While giving Muslim initiates a repetition practice based on Arabic words from their own tradition, he gave Hindu disciples a mantra from Sanskrit sources. In anecdote after anecdote, we see Sheikh Farid helping his followers to overcome prejudice and to treat every human being – even those who were crude, insolent, or violent – as simply human beings to be served and loved. In a famous incident, someone offered him a pair of scissors and he responded, "Don't bring me scissors; bring me a needle. I don't cut apart; I sew together."

The poetry of Sheikh Farid comes down to us through three separate traditions, to each of which the book devotes a special section. In a first section appear the verses attributed to Farid in the *Adi Granth*, a collection of hymns compiled by Guru Arjan (1563-1606 CE) including works by not only Guru Arjan and his predecessors in the line of Guru Nanak but also many other Indian saints. In a second section the book offers some of the Persian verses that Farid's biographers over the centuries said he either composed or was fond of reciting. A third section includes selections from verses in the local language of Multani attributed to Farid and passed down in a local oral tradition.

The verses in the *Adi Granth* consist of four short hymns and 112 slokas, presented in the order in which Guru Arjun placed them. From these we easily understand why Farid is known as the "Treasure of Sweetness": his all-encompassing love seems to overflow into his words. A hymn written in the musical measure called Raag Soohi Lalit says,

*When I could build my boat, I didn't.  
And now, when the sea-waves lash,  
how shall I be ferried across?  
Love not the safflower, O life;  
its colour will fade away.  
My soul is weak,  
the command of the Lord is hard to bear;  
and life's milk, once spilt, will be gathered no more.  
Says Farid, O my mates, the Lord will call you all.  
And this swan-soul will fly away, sad at heart,  
and dust return to dust.*

Because they use plain everyday language and imagery from daily life, Farid's verses have clarity and unpretentious beauty, as in this example:

*Farid, the bird is a guest  
in the beautiful world garden.  
The morning drums are beating –  
get ready to leave!*

The second section offers poems in Persian translated, the author believes, for the first time into English. These little-known verses add greater depth and scope to our understanding of Sheikh Farid. The author writes, "The voice and tone, the delicate sensibility, is quite different from the voice of the slokas in the Adi Granth or in the other Multani verses from the oral tradition." An example:

*Every dawn I alight at Your door  
as a hopeful friend  
who comes to beg and implore.  
Like a bird trailing in the dust only half alive,  
I flutter in Your presence  
hoping to surrender my life.*

The third group of poems, those in the Multani language, have been locally remembered, sung, and passed down orally, being written down only several centuries after Farid's death. The authenticity of these verses is more questionable than that of either of the first two groups, especially the slokas in the Adi Granth. Yet, drawing on the opinions of scholars and also living native speakers of the language, the author claims that it is fair to speculate that Multani verses with characteristic patterns and messages derive in some degree from Farid himself. "Certainly, the Multani verses [have] ... the stamp of his pattern of expression and his spiritual message." Again, the poems employ images from everyday life, such as how Punjabi farmers shout to frighten birds from their fields:

*O Farid, cry and cry you must,  
like the keeper of the barley field.  
Keep crying and wailing  
till the barley ear ripens and drops.*

Throughout all of Farid's verses we hear the sweetness of his devotion and love for his Beloved. His disciples reported that he loved to recite the following poem:

*I wish to turn into dust  
And find my abode under Your feet.  
I wish to live in union with You.  
I am weary of both worlds  
And my sole purpose here is You –  
To live for You and die for You.*

The words "to live for You and die for You" were said to have been constantly on his lips.

All interested in the Sheikh Farid tradition in Punjab will benefit from this book's unique effort to assemble what can be known about Farid from several divergent traditions. And seekers of spirituality will draw much inspiration from Farid's life story and his simple yet forceful poetry.



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

