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# Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

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## **Spiritual Link**

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# Yours Affectionately

The more time you devote to meditation, the more distinctly you will hear the sound current, which makes for peace of mind or, as you put it, helps us in chaining the monkey.

I am glad to read that your meditation is improving. For ages the mind has been developing an intense longing for the things of this world which ostensibly satisfy it for some time but cease to do so after a while. The best way to divert the mind from the mundane baubles is to give it a taste of the inner bliss which far transcends any earthly joy. This inner bliss can be attained by going in and listening to the inner Sound constantly or at least for as long as is possible every day. This is how the monkey can be effectively chained.

I am glad that you consider meditation the most important business in life. You should increase your time for meditation. It should not be for less than two and a half hours at a stretch, whether the mind takes interest in meditation or not. Sometimes the mind avoids it on petty excuses. When it behaves like this it should be punished by increasing the time that day by another half-hour. With the increase in time, the concentration will be complete, the attention will go in, and the sound current will be your constant companion, giving you joy and peace.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *The Dawn of Light*





# “Repetition Is Boring”

It was a complaint a disciple made to the Master at a question-and-answer session. The Master responded that in our daily life, we all undertake and repeat mundane tasks such as brushing our teeth, taking a bath, eating three meals a day and going to work. All these, the Master said, can be boring but we still do them in order to sustain ourselves in this world.

The challenge is how to convince ourselves that repeating our simran is crucial and imperative to sustaining our spiritual life.

So that we can become educated, our parents enrolled us in good schools and ensured that no matter how bored we were by our school routine, we still continued to attend classes. To develop our physical bodies, we were encouraged to exercise regularly from a young age. And when we gave in to laziness and complacency, our parents pushed us.

Similarly, so that we can develop spiritually, the perfect Masters urge us to pursue our spiritual practice and consider it an essential part of our daily routine.

The mystics explain that just as regularity and punctuality are very important in our daily activities, so too is this discipline crucial to our spiritual development.

*If we discipline our mind, then every day we won't miss meditation. And if you do skip your meditation, you'll feel miserable that day and feel that something is missing.*

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

Only when we realize this will we understand that our meditation is sustaining us and nourishing us spiritually.

Until we are able to discipline the mind into following a routine, we will have good days and bad days. We tell ourselves, “All right. It’s a new day. Let’s break old habits and start fresh.” We start with having an early night which enables us to rise early. We wash up, have a cup of tea or coffee and try to sit as attentively as possible during meditation. We are pleased with ourselves, and the rest of the day ends up being rather pleasant as well. Then, somehow, the next day or perhaps after a few days of following this routine – we lose steam. We lose our motivation. The mind gets bored, it cannot resist temptation and reverts back to its old habits.

Why does this happen? Perhaps we are weak and easily seduced by the glitter and dazzle of the material world. The mystics explain that there is nothing wrong with having a healthy passion for life, but they also caution us against over-indulging in anything. This, they explain, will more likely than not cause us to lose our balance between our worldly and spiritual life.

How do we get to the level where we can maintain our equilibrium while facing life’s trials and tribulations? How do we consolidate meditation into our lives so that it becomes second nature to us?

In a beautiful explanation, Maharaj Charan Singh says that we have to tie ourselves to our meditation:

*If you are tied to a strong chain, you can move only within a limited area. So if we are tied to our meditation every day, no matter how much we’re involved in other things, we will always remain within the circle – we will not be able to get out of the circle. If the chain is broken, then of course you are absolutely gone, you’re involved. So the chain of meditation should not be*

*broken. Meditation must be attended to every day, and then no matter how much you try to involve yourself in other activities, you'll never be allowed to go astray at all.*

*Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III*

In *Like the Flowing River*, Paulo Coelho writes about the importance of repetition. By giving the example of an archer who studies every detail of the sport and masters the technique to the degree that it becomes intuitive, he explains that with constant practice and repetition, we no longer think about the movement; it becomes a part of our nature. Coelho writes:

*The archer allows many arrows to go far beyond the target, because he knows that he will only learn the importance of bow, posture, string and target by repeating his gestures thousands of times, and by not being afraid to make mistakes. And then comes the moment when he no longer has to think about what he is doing. From then on, the archer becomes his bow, his arrow and his target.*

In order to be successful in whatever we do, we cannot be afraid to make mistakes. We should not be fearful of failing in our meditation and just continue with the same energetic enthusiasm that we started with. By adhering to the vow we took at the time of our initiation, we must be steadfast in our repetition and not worry about the results. Coelho continues:

*A warrior of light, once he has done his duty and transformed his intention into gesture, need fear nothing else: he has done what he should have done. He did not allow himself to be*

*paralyzed by fear. Even if the arrow failed to hit the target, he will have another opportunity, because he did not give in to cowardice.*

Therefore, we should not lose heart. Instead we should be encouraged by the immense faith our Master has in us. Every effort we make in our daily meditation takes us towards freedom from the binding contract of birth and death.

The Masters have often said that this human form has been given to us for the purpose of God-realization. If we choose not to make use of this opportunity, then we may not get this chance of a human birth again.

Hence, in order to solidify our resolution to make meditation a part of our daily routine, we should simply be positive, do our best, and trust the faith the Master has in us. After all, he is our greatest benefactor and he is anxious to see us succeed.



*Once the Master confided to us the secret – his secret – of successful meditation: it is the repetition of the holy words, done with love and devotion. The Master said, “One has to put one’s whole being into the words. One should not think of anything else, but just give oneself to the Master through the repetition.”*

*Adventure of Faith*



# Something to Think About

Reliance on salvation after death is the finest way of self-deception man practises on himself. If there is no salvation while a man is alive, it will not come after death. One who is quite illiterate while alive cannot be a scholar after death. A thief, who has lived on theft the whole of his life, cannot be a saint after death. Death is only the giving up of the outer covering of the material body. In all other respects, one remains the same. So try to get salvation now, while living.

Maharaj Jagat Singh, *The Science of the Soul*



How sad it is that we go to the places we ourselves have built as a dwelling for the Lord and search for him there day and night, completely ignoring the shrine of the human body, where he actually lives.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Divine Light*



To be alone, especially when one is so used to family life, is a very rare privilege and opportunity. One can reflect and look within. Then we see how much we are attached unnecessarily to the people all around and how we just try to deceive ourselves that we belong to someone or someone belongs to us. The realization that we are alone and nothing in this world belongs to us is a great boon and grace of the Father. Then, naturally, one looks to him for guidance and help to overcome this loneliness, which ultimately is our goal.

*Treasure Beyond Measure*

# The Attitude of Acceptance

Consider some of the things most of us find difficult to accept: criticism, discomfort, illness, mistakes, problems, failure, loss, etc. On the other hand, we cannot resist its counterparts: comfort, good health, victory and success. So perhaps the problem does not lie in our ability to accept but rather in what we choose to accept. Why can't we welcome everything into our lives in the same way?

Perfect mystics understand the nature of life. They possess the quality of equanimity because they know that everything that happens in this world is a result of the divine plan. Regardless of the challenges they face, they remain calm. They focus on the actions that allow them to resolve situations in the most effective and graceful way possible. Their advice to us is this:

*We must accept the events of life. You cannot change the course of the events of life, but you can always adjust to them. Adjusting to the events of life will always make you happy and relaxed. If you swim against the waves, you will drown. If you swim along with the waves, you will get to the shore easily.*

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

In another instance Maharaj Charan Singh adds that the very fact we have to go along with the waves automatically makes us happy because there is no other way. In modern life, we are often overwhelmed with so many choices that this reminder of not really having a choice may actually be comforting. Or rather, we have just one choice: to accept or resist that which we cannot change.

He also reminds us that we are creators of our own destiny. We have chosen our parts to play.

*You have sown your own seeds; your own seeds have created your destiny ... we can't hold the Father responsible. He has written only what we have sown. But to go through that cheerfully is contentment.*

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

We cannot choose the outcome of our past actions. But acceptance of our situation enables us to surrender to the divine flow of life. We begin to realize that the only choice we have is to watch our destiny unfold.

The Masters suggest that we become willing spectators and witness our destiny. That means going through life almost as if we were watching a movie of it. The phrase “willing spectator” implies that we can enjoy this movie even if it has some sad scenes in it.

Our past karmas cannot be changed, but we can strengthen ourselves so that we can face our karmas without losing our balance. Resisting our destiny is like adding fuel to the fire. On the other hand, acceptance can convert the painful blow of a hammer to a harmless pinprick. The Masters often say that we can help ourselves by staying positive and focusing on our objective; that success does not depend on not having any problems, but on how we face and solve those problems.

And finally, Maharaj Charan Singh also suggests that we can derive happiness by reminding ourselves of the path and surrendering to the Master's guidance.

*That very concept should make us happy – that now we have realized we have the Father, we have a destination, we have some objective to achieve. We know the path, we know what to do, and if we practise that, automatically we will have a feeling of bliss and peace within. If you are in a jungle and somebody points out the direction of your house, it makes you happy. Now at least you know in which direction you have to go. You're not looking in the dark. You will get real happiness when you reach your home, but just knowing the direction and the road which leads you back to your house makes you happy.*

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

Our journey home has been planned according to our karmic dues and we must remind ourselves often that the Lord makes much better plans than we do. We do not know what is good for us but he does. We must learn to have faith in his wisdom. And the key to cultivating an attitude of acceptance is meditation.

*Meditation trains you to accept what is in your destiny, if not cheerfully then at least with a smile. That is the purpose of meditation. Every day has to be lived. So we should plan for the day and then live it thoroughly and happily, and attend to our meditation. That is the only way one can get out of these worldly worries and worldly problems. And learn to accept rather than demand.*

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

Acceptance is a spiritual quality. It helps us to navigate the ups and downs of life and keeps us in a state of peace and equanimity.

To be freed from our karmic entanglements and led back to our true home – that is our ultimate destiny. To achieve this, we are fortunate to have the guidance of a perfect living Master. This journey can be made easier by cultivating an attitude of acceptance and attending to our meditation practice. With spiritual progress and our own personal experience, we will eventually see things for what they truly are. Once we achieve this deeper understanding of life, acceptance will come to us naturally and automatically.



*All our peace in this present life should depend on humble forbearance rather than on absence of adversity. He who knows the secret of endurance will enjoy the greatest peace. Such a one is conqueror of self, master of the world, a friend of Christ, and an heir of Heaven.*

Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*

# Ego

## As explained by Maharaj Charan Singh

Ego is nothing but an attachment to this creation. And who is not attached to this creation? But for that, nobody would be here. Calculated humility is okay, but does not lead you too far. It is like cosmetic jewellery. There is nothing wrong with calculated humility, but real humility is when we are filled with love and devotion for the Father. It automatically drives out ego from us because then our whole attention is one pointed. We are only conscious of the One and become unconscious of others. Then our whole attention pivots to one particular point.

When we are filled with that love and devotion, attachment to the creation automatically starts fading out and automatically ego will go. When we see someone greater than us, we automatically become humble before him. When we see his radiance within, his refulgence within, when we are filled with his love and devotion within, automatically we become humble. The lover has no ego when he comes before the Beloved. He always likes to do that which pleases the Beloved and tries to avoid that which displeases the Beloved. He lives in his will. He just wants to merge into another being and lose his own identity, his own individuality. That is eliminating the ego.

Just by mere talk, by not referring to the word 'I, people try to avoid it. By saying things like "this self is doing it," "this body is doing it," "I am not doing it," you don't avoid ego. It is how much you are attached that matters, not your language. We have to detach from the creation – that is eliminating ego. Shabd and Nam automatically detach us from this creation. All those objects and faces which are so important to us now – their importance automatically fades out. They hardly mean anything to us. They hardly exist for us. That is eliminating ego.

*Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III*

# Have We Burned Our Ships?

In *Quest for Light*, Maharaj Charan Singh Ji writes:

*In the life of every satsangi there comes a moment to decide whether to run after the ephemeral pleasures of this world or to value more the true and everlasting bliss of the next.*

One might think that this decision had already been made when we asked for initiation. However, Maharaj Charan Singh says this moment of decision is still there to be made by each satsangi. So this means that even after becoming disciples, we may not yet have made a full commitment to the path.

Centuries ago, a wealthy merchant became interested in the spiritual path. After much searching, he decided to seek initiation from a Guru who lived across the ocean. He acquired a ship and set sail. When he reached the harbour of the small town where the Guru lived, he dropped anchor and hurried ashore. He came before the Guru and asked to be accepted as a disciple. The Guru said: “Whose ship is that which I see floating in the harbour?” The merchant replied: “It is mine.” Hearing this, the Guru rejected him, saying he was unworthy.

The merchant was devastated. He sat for days on his ship. Until one morning, he rose and gathered his crew. Under his instructions, they set fire to the ship. When the ship had burned away completely, the merchant returned to the Guru. This time the Guru welcomed him and accepted him as a disciple. The Guru then explained to his other disciples that, as long as the merchant had his ship, he was keeping his options open. At any time when the going got tough, he

could sail away in search of happiness elsewhere. Once he burned his ship, then he had fully committed himself to seek happiness only at the feet of the Guru and nowhere else. He had abandoned all other options. This, he explained was the level of commitment required to succeed.

So the question for us is this: Have we burned our ships? Are we still reserving the option to look for happiness elsewhere? Do we truly believe that we will only find what we are searching for by following the path or is the path more like our plan B, our insurance policy, in case we do not succeed in finding happiness in the world? When we encounter difficulties, do we sail away from the Guru and try other ports for happiness? Because only when we truly commit to him and burn our worldly ship will we approach that inner goal which brings lasting happiness.



*Saints draw attention to the spiritual and material extremes of human behaviour to help us choose where we want to go. It is for us to shape our future and to choose what we want to be. If we want to obtain a happiness and contentment that does not keep changing, saints guide us to direct our attention inwards and experience inner joy. If we want the superficial excitement which is bound to end in confusion and ultimate pain of constant change, then we can put our energies to the world around us and let ourselves be ruled by our senses. Saints call a spade a spade. They do not spare their words when describing the implications of the choices we make.*

*A Spiritual Primer*



# Unanswered Questions

*But I still wake up, I still see your ghost  
Oh Lord, I'm still not sure what I stand for  
What do I stand for? What do I stand for?  
Most nights, I don't know anymore...*

Lyrics from "Some Nights" by Fun

Life is full of unanswered questions. "What if I had done things differently? What if I had just skipped work that day? What if I had never sent that letter? What if I got just one more chance?" Such questions often haunt us. We can't seem to comprehend why things unfold the way they do. Who can understand a man's deepest regret? Who can explain to a mother why she lost her son in war? Will she even understand what the fight was for? What do you tell a child whose parents go out for dinner one night and never come back? What do you tell a young girl who is in love but is arranged to marry someone else? People go on with their lives, because they have no choice. But deep within, many of us are haunted by a longing to know "why" and "what if" we had done things differently.

The problem is that we start feeling like the Lord owes us a response. The truth is that life owes us nothing. Our misfortunes are the direct results of our own past karma. Many of us have a misconception that we are owed a certain degree of happiness, comfort, care, respect, love and understanding. But in reality, whatever we get is what is in store for us. Nothing more. Nothing less.

Unanswered questions may simply be a part of our destiny – and living through our doubts is the breaking of the shell that encloses our understanding. In all his wisdom, the Lord gives us only what we can handle – and maybe at this point in our lives, we are not yet ready to

comprehend the answers. We are not ready for the truth. Until then, we need to simply be patient with life's unresolved questions and trust that we will receive the answers when the Lord sees fit. The poet and novelist, Rainer Maria Rilke beautifully explains:

*Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves, like locked rooms and like books that are now written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer.*

*Letters to a Young Poet*

It has been said that if we want to fill a cup, we need first to empty it. There comes a point when our cup is empty and we truly feel like we just do not know anything anymore. A humorous story is told of a monk who went to visit a village. The monk sat on the podium and before beginning his sermon, he asked those who had gathered around him if they knew what he would discuss. They all answered “yes”. So he told them that if they already knew the topic of his discussion then he would not waste their time and left. The next day, the group gathered again to see the monk. The monk again asked them if they knew what he would discuss. This time, they all replied “no”. So the monk said, “then why should I waste my time here?” And he left again. The third day, the monk returned and again he asked those gathered if they knew the topic of his discussion. This time, the attendees cleverly planned in advance that half would nod yes and the other half would answer no. Upon seeing this, the monk said, “Then those of you who know my message, please explain it to those of you

who don't!" And the monk left. Finally, the fourth day, the monk returned and the attendees just sat there in complete and utter silence. "Finally," the monk said, "you are ready to listen."

The truth is that as long as our minds are clouded by our own perceptions, conceptions and notions of the truth, we simply are not able to grasp the answers. There is no space in the storehouse of our thoughts for any new interpretation of the events that have transpired in our lives. But once we are able to still the mind a little, to let go – only then can we glean some understanding. Like the monk's followers in the story, or the writer of the song "Some Nights", perhaps it is possible to reach a point where we just do not know anything anymore. "What do I stand for? What do I stand for? Most nights, I don't know anymore..." It is only when we realize that we don't know, when we surrender ourselves that we can clear some room for the truth – for the answers within. Might we then, finally, be ready to listen? Perhaps then we will realize that the answers are irrelevant. What matters is the silence and stillness within us – the answer to every question.



*The real questions are very difficult to answer, because there's no answer to them. Why God is there, why we are here, why he has made all the trees green – what answer will you give? Why vegetables have so many colours, why flowers give off fragrance – what answer will you give? There's no answer, and these are real questions. All other questions, about which we have written so many books, are superfluous. There's no answer to a real question. It's not that they are answered – they don't exist. These questions have to be dissolved, so we go to that level within ourselves. Then these questions don't bother us, they don't exist anymore.*

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

# Sitting on a Treasure

A beggar had been sitting by the side of a road for over thirty years. One day, a stranger walked by. “Spare some change?” mumbled the beggar, mechanically holding out his old baseball cap.

“I have nothing to give you,” said the stranger. Then he asked, “What’s that you are sitting on?”

“Nothing, just an old box that I have had for as long as I can remember,” replied the beggar.

“Ever looked inside?” asked the stranger.

“What’s the point? There’s nothing in there.”

“Have a look inside,” insisted the stranger.

The beggar managed to pry open the lid. With astonishment, disbelief and elation, he saw that the box was filled with gold.



*None is poor, O Bhika;  
Everyone has rubies in his bundle;  
But how to open the knot  
He does not know,  
And thus remains a pauper.*  
Bhika, as quoted in *Divine Light*

# Unforgettable

We met him at a satsang centre during our travels. He seemed unremarkable at first. Over the years we had come across many sevadars who were dedicated and sincere, so he was not particularly unusual. He was just another sheep in the flock. Or so it seemed.

His task was to pick up the elderly and drive them to satsang every Sunday. He surprised us when he arrived earlier than the agreed time. In fact, we were later told that he was always very early. “I don’t want to be late for my seva,” he said with a beaming smile. We invited him to join us for breakfast but he insisted on waiting outside with the car.

He was a good driver. Not too fast, not too slow. Clearly, he was focused on delivering his fragile passengers to the centre, safe and sound. He navigated his compact car on the freeway with quiet confidence and the kind of skill that comes from familiarity and practice.

He told us he arrived from India a few years ago. His fluency in the local language and his Hindi were perfect. “But I want to learn English,” he said. And yet, his English was not bad at all.

When we got to the centre, everyone assembled for satsang. Mr Unforgettable got busy helping another sevadar, but when he was done, he gravitated back to us. Everywhere we went, there he was, attentive and ready to help. “I just want to do seva,” he said. So when someone needed a glass of water, there he was dashing out to get it as though it was a matter of life or death. “I need a pen,” mumbled an elderly gentleman, and in a flash it appeared from the hands of Mr Unforgettable.

After satsang, some of us were talking about the spiritual path and there he was seated on the floor in a corner, completely captivated. We had quickly become very fond of him. Without our even knowing it, he had carved a place for himself in our hearts.

That evening we were invited for dinner and it was there that we got to know him better. “Where do you work?” someone asked. “At an international law firm,” he replied. Wow. We were already so impressed by this devoted human being and now he is an aspiring lawyer at a top law firm! Amazing.

But what he said next made us feel even smaller. “As a janitor,” he said matter-of-factly.

Needless to say, we were speechless. Here was this devoted, helpful, generous, loving human being who had seamlessly adjusted to living in a foreign country; who was earning a living and doing seva with the kind of attitude and humility that we have only read about in the books.

And in such contrast, there we were, receiving special treatment simply because we were old satsangis visiting from another country. Who was the real satsangi here?

He was truly inspiring and while we were genuinely very happy for him, we shuddered for ourselves. We thought we were good examples. We thought we were good sevadars. But it was clear that we still had a long, long way to go.

Ironically, most of us had been on the path for over 22 years. Mr Unforgettable on the other hand, was only 22 years old.



# Make Time

*A sudden noise shatters the stillness of the night, softly at first and then louder and more persistent. A hand reaches out from under the covers flinging fumblingly at the blinking culprit. Then, just as abruptly as it began, the noise ceases. Silence permeates the darkness once more. The snooze button has graciously granted a few more precious moments of sleep.*

*Yet, in what seems like just a few seconds, the merciless culprit wails its ear-splitting noise again. The hand reaches out for the second time to strike the puny button marked STOP.*

*Finally, as deep slumber begins to settle, gray light drifts in through the curtain slits. A long list of reminders, errands, meetings and appointments come flooding in with the morning sun. Alas, it is too late. An unwelcome pang of guilt for not putting the early morning to better use starts to sink in.*

Another familiar morning we can all relate to, but on this particular morning, the outcome can be completely and positively different. How so?

As we navigate through life, there will be days when we are unable to rise early in the morning and complete our course of meditation for the day. Perhaps it was a work or family obligation that led to a late night. Perhaps we are feeling physically ill and our bodies need the extra rest.

When life takes an unexpected turn, we have two options. The first is to bury ourselves in guilt and give up trying. Far from completing, much less starting our meditation in the morning, we decide that we will never get the chance to fulfill our commitment to meditate that day. We convince ourselves that we will try to do better tomorrow.

However, for this particular morning, we can choose a second option. Instead of feeling guilty, we simply tell ourselves that we still have the rest of the day to find the time to live up to our commitment. A window of opportunity could arise after lunch or at the end of the day. We could also skip that episode of our favourite program or put aside that novel before bedtime to free up a pocket of time to meditate. Even a quiet corner in the office can be a suitable location. Anytime. Anywhere. All it takes is determination. It is this constant reminder to stay committed that becomes the gravity that keeps our attention within the Lords' orbit.

It is dangerous to believe that this day does not matter much, given all the days that lie ahead of us. What guarantee do we have that tomorrow will be better than today? In Maharaj Charan Singh's words:

*We should never feel guilty at all. We simply should try to put more time in meditation.*

*Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. II*

Yes, the ideal is to complete our daily two and a half hours of meditation in one sitting. But the Masters always say that if this is not possible, then we can divide it into two or three sittings.

The crispness and serenity of the early morning has certain advantages because we are fresh, the mind is not scattered, and the world has not arisen to the frenzy of the daily grind. However, Maharaj Charan Singh also says:

*If for some reason somebody cannot give time in the morning, he shouldn't think that his whole day is lost. He can attend any time – any time is good.*

*Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. II*



There will be beautiful days when we complete two and a half hours of meditation in the morning but today we may have missed the golden opportunity. Instead of cowering in guilt, we could ride the wave of divine remembrance throughout the day, until we are finally absorbed in the Lord's embrace once again at nightfall.

*It is pitch black outside as the world retires for the day. A hand reaches out for the TV remote, and, with the push of a button, silence and darkness engulfs the room. The blinking culprit is now a friend showing that sleep is miles away and the time is just perfect. With the steady rhythm of repetition slowly yet surely forming a cocoon of divine love, we are heading towards our goal, guilt-free.*



*If we are real satsangis, we should have no feeling of guilt. Whether you are considered good or bad makes no difference, as long as you remain a satsangi in the true sense of the word.*

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

# Did You Know?

Regarding posture – the important thing is to stick to the posture which you choose and that you remain motionless in that during simran. Any movement will interfere with the withdrawal of the life-consciousness from the body. Posture is not important in itself. Select any that suits you, but try to remain motionless in that and let numbness set in, which is a sign of withdrawal. Do not mind, but try to bear the initial pains, aches and pinpricks in the body. This happens only when the consciousness first begins to leave the body on its way up to the eye centre, and some feel it more than others. This will not last forever. Gradually, as you get accustomed to this withdrawal and perfect your simran, these pains will disappear. Then withdrawal itself will be a joyful process without any pain whatsoever.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Quest for Light*



The purer the mind becomes, the more it is attached to the Shabd and Nam. The purer it becomes, the more strength and power it gets. The more it is detached from the spirit, the more it is under the control of the senses, the weaker the willpower. As I often explain, in the body the seat of the soul and the mind is here at the eye centre. The more downward the mind's tendency, the less willpower we have. The more upward its tendency, the stronger is our willpower. So it is the spirit that actually gives you strength and willpower.

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

# The Master Answers

A selection of questions and answers with Maharaj Charan Singh

**Q:** *Master, when we know that this is the right path and we have the faith and yet there is no love in our heart, how shall we go about it?*

**A:** Sister, if you are attending to your meditation, love will come automatically. You do not have to work for love. It comes when it comes. Even in worldly love, you know, if you analyze yourself, you do not work for it. God gives this gift, and it just comes.

*The Master Answers*

\* \* \*

**Q:** *How can you keep up your interest in daily life after studying and hearing about spiritual things? For me, it is sometimes a problem. Sometimes I am feeling a little bit paralyzed after studying or hearing spiritual things.*

**A:** Brother, the main thing is, what is our interest in life? We have to keep our goal in view and we have to follow the path which leads us back to our destination. And, keeping that goal in view, we have to do our worldly duty. We should not get so much involved in our worldly responsibilities and duties that we forget the purpose for which we have taken this birth. But, keeping that purpose in view, we have to do our worldly duties also in order to attain that goal.

*Thus Saith the Master*

**Q:** *In order to reach the Radiant Form, what kind of sacrifice is really necessary in this worldly life?*

**A:** Well, sister, the question is withdrawing your consciousness to the eye centre and attaching yourself to the Shabd within. That is the only sacrifice we have to make. For withdrawing to the eye centre, you can imagine what sacrifices are required. The main thing is that we should attend to our meditation and not compromise with the principles of Sant Mat. As Christ said: If you build on sand, when a rainstorm comes, the house will fall. If you build on rock, a rainstorm won't move it. So the foundation has to be strong. The way of life in Sant Mat is very, very essential. We must stand firmly on our principles, then build our treasure on that foundation. In order to hold up this ceiling and roof, you can imagine how strong the foundation is. If the foundation were weak, you and I couldn't sit under this roof at all. So similarly, we have to build a strong foundation for building our treasure in heaven.

*Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. II*

\* \* \*

**Q:** *Maharaj Ji, sometimes we see our own imperfections and our own shortcomings, and we know that these are keeping us from being one with the Father. Yet is there a danger of us being too hard on ourselves for having weaknesses?*

**A:** There is no danger of being hard on ourselves at all. We have been too soft with ourselves all through – that is why we are part of the creation. If we had been a little hard or strong with ourselves, we would not be here today. We have been too soft. We always try to justify our weaknesses and then we become a slave of them. And then we find we are part of this creation. So we should try to be hard with ourselves.

*Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. II*



*Maharaj Charan Singh*

# Just Do It

In this fast-paced, result-driven world we live in, we often come across phrases like ‘survival of the fittest’, ‘quality improvement’ and ‘performance review’. We are constantly pushed to strive, perform, achieve, measure our developments, and assess whether we are moving closer to our goals or further away. And normally there are indicators that show us the status of our progress such as report cards for students, performance appraisals for employees, financial statements for businesses and so on. This then leads us to believe that it is necessary to see some tangible progress in order to know where we stand.

So when it comes to our spiritual practice, when we resolve to sit in meditation and instruct our minds to cooperate and our bodies to fidget less; when we then peer into the darkness and make an attempt to focus at the eye centre, we wait for something to happen. We stare into the darkness and think, if only we could see a faint ray of light or hear the slightest sound. Then, we would know that our time and efforts are being put to good use. If only our Master could give us a one-on-one ‘performance appraisal’ to acknowledge our efforts and assure us that we are on the right track.

The Masters remind us that the ways of the spiritual path are different from the ways of the world. The world will assess the end result or the ‘bottom line’ so to speak; but the Masters consider only our efforts. They are full of positive and encouraging words and urge us to continue to meditate, despite our difficulties, our countless number of thoughts or our poor concentration. They advise us not to analyze our meditation and not to sit with any expectations. They assure us that the Lord’s grace is never lacking; in fact, we are bestowed

with all the grace we need to do our meditation and our efforts are all that matter.

A questioner once requested Maharaj Charan Singh to explain a line that was written in *Spiritual Gems* that says that grief resulting from failure in bhajan is also a form of bhajan. He answered:

*Whatever time you devote to meditation, whether you achieve any results by it or not, is added to your meditation. That's what it means. Even your attempt, your "failures" are added to your credit, because only that man will fall who tries to learn to walk or run. There's no chance of falling for someone who doesn't try to run, so failures will come only when we are trying to meditate. That is "failure in bhajan." We are trying to attend to meditation, but we're not achieving any results within, so we are failing in our meditation – that's what we start thinking – but that is also added to our credit. Whatever attempt you make towards your meditation, whatever time you give to your meditation, whether you make any apparent progress or not, is added to your credit. You definitely get its effect and its results.*

*All these failures are part of our ultimate success. They should be a source of strength to us, provided we continue with our "failures", we continue giving our time to meditation, and do not become disgusted and leave meditation. We should go on making attempt after attempt – that is what it means.*

*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.*

*Die to Live*

We may have heard the example of a little girl, who was asked by her mother to fetch a glass of water. The little girl runs into the kitchen and brings the glass of water with the single hope that her mother will be pleased with her. As she rushes back towards her mother, out of excitement, water spills from the glass and by the time she reaches her mother, the glass is half empty. The little girl feels dejected and is upset with herself as she feels she has let her mother down, as she could not do what her mother asked of her. But her mother gazes at her with nothing but love in her eyes and a smile on her lips for she is pleased and happy with her daughter. She only sees her daughter's love and effort, and this was all that mattered to her.

Likewise, all that matters to our beloved Master is that we put in our sincerest efforts and that we are honest in our intentions. That is what pleases him the most.

So even if we offer a glass that is half full, but we have poured in each drop of meditation with earnest effort, sincere devotion and intense conviction, our Master will gladly accept it. And somehow, we all seem to know deep inside that if we are truly trying our best, then we are making it easier on ourselves and the Master. If we aren't, then all that needs to be done is to remember that it is never too late to just do it.

The Master tirelessly urges us to sit in meditation, to turn our attention inward and upward so we can become more and more detached from the worldly attachments that tie us down. They advise that it is this detachment that will take us back to our true home as we re-attach ourselves to the Shabd within.



*So actually, it is our attachments which are pulling us back to this creation. Meditation is the only way to detach ourselves from all these attachments. With the help of meditation, we are able to detach ourselves from all these bondages in this world by attaching our mind to the Shabd and Nam, to the Light and Sound within, which pulls us to its own level.*

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

Giving time to meditation is like accepting the Master's invitation to play the game of love. So long as we actually 'play' the game, as long as we make an honest and sincere effort, we cannot lose, even though we might feel otherwise. For as Sant Paltu once said, "In the game of love, I cannot lose. If I win, I get you, and if I lose, you get me."



*The whole purpose of every satsang, of every Sant Mat book and of the Master working so hard for us day in and day out is to give us one simple message: You can do your meditation. You can concentrate better in meditation. You have the strength to do it. Just do it. It's time to put away the books. Sit down for action and awaken to the Shabd.*

Living Meditation

# Repartee of the Wise

After this memorable and, for the British sangat, historic visit, Maharaj Charan Singh left London on June 26 for Spain, his last port of call before returning to India. At the last satsang in London, Colonel Sanders made a short speech thanking Maharaj Ji for coming and for all his kindness. The Master's reply was gracious and benevolent; he concluded it with the words: "The way is clear. Keep straight, for if you keep straight, the path also will be straight and easy."

*Heaven on Earth*



A mystic was sitting on a ship when another passenger began complaining, "Oh no! This noise is terrible! It is continually going on! It is shattering my nerves! Terrible, terrible, terrible! Hearing this all day and all night is driving me mad! Doesn't it bother you?"

The mystic replied, "I did not hear it until you reminded me of it. I hear it when I want to hear it; I do not hear it when I do not want to hear it."



"I cannot see where you have made any progress since the last time I was here," a visitor to the studio of Michelangelo said.

"I have retouched this part," the master sculptor said, "polished that, softened this feature, brought out that muscle, given more expression to the lip and more energy to the limb."

"But those are trifles," exclaimed the visitor.

"That may be," said Michelangelo, "but trifles make perfection and perfection is no trifle."

# Lifting Us Higher

The sweet melody of the verse *Prabhuji Tu Mere Praan Aadhare* – “Dear Lord, you are my life support” – streamed through the speakers, filling the air with anticipation. Thousands had gathered for the question-and-answer session in the satsang shed at the Dera, earnestly waiting for the Master to arrive.

So many faces in the crowd, young and old. Everyone had a story to tell, a history of circumstances that had brought them to this point in their life. Everyone with problems, some with commonplace difficulties and others more heavily burdened by the load they have to carry both mentally and emotionally.

As soon as the curtain opened, all eyes were riveted on the stage as the Master entered. Smiles appeared on the gloomy faces as the sangat absorbed the bliss and comfort of the moment. Currents of tenderness enfolded the crowd like a warm blanket on a cold winter night.

How true are the words from the book *Sultan Bahu*:

*If you wish to be in God's presence, go and sit in the presence of a perfect Master.... Beholding him gives peace and bliss to the heart and soul.*

One by one, the young men and women stood up to ask their questions, baring their souls, oblivious to the crowd that bore witness to this personal exchange with their beloved teacher. Those of us who sat there and listened could not help but laugh when the questioners laughed and cry when they cried.

With every response, the Master guided the sangat on how to live with truth, honesty and balance. His directive was unwavering even as he joked with the crowd, leaving everyone in peels of laughter.

It is amazing how he manages to lift our spirits to such heights, leaving us to float slowly back down to earth after his departure. Like dried leaves that have been blown upwards by a whirlwind, we swirl lightly back to the ground, pulled by the unwelcome force of gravity.

One is reminded of the song: “Your love is lifting me higher, higher than I’ve ever been lifted before..”

With every meeting, he lifts our spirits with his immense love. The heavy weight that we were carrying on our shoulders seem lighter and almost nonexistent. He knows how much we need to have this contact with him to give us the strength to carry on. The road is hard for everyone. But he moves our focal point to all the positives in our life. He is like a photographer who focuses the camera lens, adjusting all the settings, so that he can take the perfect shot.

*The purpose of the physical form of the Master is simply to fill us with love and devotion for the Father, to put us on the path and to bring us in touch with the Spirit. With the help of the physical form, we are finally able to attach ourselves to the Word and become one with the Spirit within.*

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Thus Saith the Master*

It is through the Lord’s grace that the Masters are sent to this world to show us the way home. It is also the Lord’s grace that draws us into their presence. We need a friend, a true companion, someone to keep us on track.

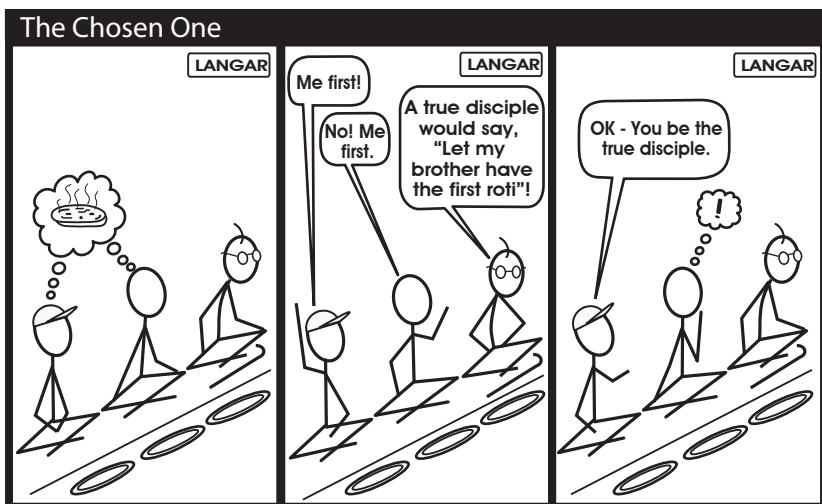
*Our past positive actions through many lifetimes and the grace of Shabd have brought us into the presence of a living Master. Since the time of our birth, the Master has been with us. He is our true companion. Whenever we have been in sorrow or despair, at the lowest points in our life, the Master has been there, waiting for us to realize the illusion in which we exist.*

*Living Meditation*

Each time we meet him, we do not want to leave, and wish by some miracle that time could just stand still. Our only respite is that we know in our hearts that there is no goodbye. This is how he pulls us and renews our determination to meditate and look for him within.



## SPIRITUALISTICKS®



# Memorable Quotes

*Take care of the spirit and other things will take care of themselves.*

Maharaj Jagat Singh, *The Science of the Soul*

*If for a moment the Master gives you a grieving heart, lasting peace on this earth He will also give. If the seal of God's love is impressed upon the ring of your heart you will have rulership of this creation*

Sarmad, *Martyr to Love Divine*

*The best ornament that adorns a devotee is humility.*

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

*Strictly speaking, we are living an abnormal life. Soul combined with mind and matter is an abnormality. Soul, the queen of royal blood, enjoying the company of servants and sweepers, is an abnormality.*

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *Spiritual Gems*

*Although this world has you still in its thrall, in your heart, you are a hidden treasure. Open now your inner eyes, the eyes of love; return at last to the origin of your own origin.*

Rumi, as quoted in *Teachings of Rumi*

*Reform thou thy mind, and preach thou to thine own mind. If this mind cometh under thy control, then shall the whole world follow thee.*

Kabir Sahib, as quoted in *Glimpses of the Great Master*

# Who Are We?

When we ask ourselves this question, we struggle to come up with an answer that satisfies us. Are we the roles we play every day? Are we our titles, our possessions, our thoughts? Or are we more than that? It seems like the answer to this old riddle could unfold the many mysteries that burden the minds of seekers of the truth.

The universe, of which the planet earth is just a pale blue dot, is full of potential. It is ever flowing, ever evolving, ever changing, inside of us and outside of us. Science tells us that 10 billion years ago we all were stars exploding into existence and that 10 billion years from now we could be the creative force of our universe – or not. The American astrophysicist Neil DeGrasse Tyson has gone on record to say:

*So you are made from exploded stars. Get over it. Or better yet, celebrate it. After all, what nobler thought can one cherish than that the universe lives within us all.*

But the mystics say that science is far from understanding the nature of the spiritual being. Maulana Rum says:

*Inside there are innumerable lands, mountains, plains, oceans – so vast that if this universe of ours were placed in them it would be just like a hair in an ocean.*

*With the Three Masters, Vol. II*

If we were essentially stardust, and are now evolving into becoming the creative force of our universe, then who are we today? And who

might we be tomorrow? Instead of asking ourselves the question, “Who am I?” maybe we should think of asking, “Who can I be?”

There is an opportunity knocking on our door, every single day. When a perfect living Master initiates his disciples, he gives us the opportunity to become the best possible version of ourselves. It is intimidating to think that we are made up of unimaginable infinities.

All saints have come into the world with the same message – they urge us to explore our ultimate reality, which is that we are part of God, who resides within us, and that we have the capacity to merge with him and thus become him, to realize him within our being. Yet we doubt that we can achieve such a high spiritual potential. Why?

Imagine if we were locked up in a prison cell for over 30 years from the age of 18. We would not have an adult life experience outside of the prison and therefore our sense of self would be very limited. Upon news of our impending release, we might struggle with the notion of who we will be outside of the prison walls, because we would have spent most of our lives believing that we are nothing more than a prisoner. In *Path of the Masters*, Dr Julian Johnson writes that we are prisoners walled in by our own ignorance. We are so comfortable with the darkness that we do not even see the light. The darkness becomes our adopted reality.

Dr Johnson goes on to say that in order to be free, man has only to walk out of his self-constructed prison. It is as simple as that. We have to challenge the view that our personalities have been formed by our childhoods and unchanging characteristics. We have to shift our thinking, think in a new way. If we explore who we really are, we will constantly revise our personal stories and open up new possibilities for ourselves.



For who are we but the stories we tell ourselves? Aristotle said, “We are what we repeatedly do.” In the same way, we are who we repeatedly tell ourselves we are. If the prisoner constantly tells himself he is a prisoner, he will believe just that, and remain just that.

We have to have faith in what the Master sees in us. If science says we are evolving beings, then it would be fair to say that when the Master looks at his disciples during initiation, he sees our potential, our capacity. All of us are born with the innate potential to realize that we are the Shabd, the creator and sustainer of this universe.

In J.R.R. Tolkien’s tale *The Lord of the Rings*, the journey of one of the principal characters, Aragorn, resembles that of a soul lost in the darkness of the world, refusing to believe his dignity and accept his lineage. In this tale, it is only when he realizes who he truly is, where he comes from, and finally decides to become king – to reclaim his heritage – that he is able to defeat the evil of that world. Doesn’t this sound familiar?

There is a choice to be made. Do we want to continue on as lost souls, or should we acknowledge our kingship – that is, our spiritual lineage? The Master often says we are either there or we are not. The journey between the two is one to be embarked upon with conviction. Once we affirm to ourselves who we are and begin our spiritual journey, through the practice of meditation, our consciousness begins to expand from one universe to the billions within us. We start to merge slowly but surely into the One. When we start to experience this we realize that we are not just a drop in the ocean. We are the ocean.



# A Prayer

*Have mercy on me, O Lord!  
With every breath I meditate on your Nam;  
My mind will attain bliss only on meeting you.  
You are merciful, benevolent  
And the ocean of compassion;  
You are the companion of the meek, O supreme Lord!  
Day and night may I remain under your shelter  
So that I do not wander in delusion, O almighty Lord.  
By your grace, vanity and pride are eliminated  
And the nectar of Nam is obtained.  
O Merciful One, grant me such wisdom  
That my mind does not stray from your lotus feet.  
Ravidas has taken refuge at your feet;  
Consider him as your own  
And hold him within your heart.*

Guru Ravidas, as quoted in *Voice of the Heart*

# Seva – A Hallmark of Love

## On the construction of the Hospital

The dedication of the sevadars to seva, their desire to accomplish the maximum in the minimum possible time, is unbelievable. During the time we were still digging the foundations, the sevadars approached the Master and said, “Maharaj Ji, please ask the engineers to put lights on the spot where we are digging.” When asked why they needed the lights, they submitted, “Hazur, we are hardly able to do much during the day’s work and so much still has to be done. We want to work for a few hours during the night also.” And when the Master declined their request with a loving smile, their faces reflected their disappointment.

Curious passersby at the site sometimes wonder at the power that makes the sevadars move with such energy and speed. At times I too feel amazed, only to remember the next moment that the sevadars derive energy from their devotion for the Master – inspired by his omnipresent grace and love. In all these months, never have I seen the sevadars complaining about the hardships of life at the construction site, made all the more difficult by the inclemencies of the weather. During the last sixteen months they have faced rain and storm, hail and frost, and the hot summer winds. They have lived in tents, under freshly laid damp roofs, under awnings, on the rough floors of the unfinished corridors. They have often been drenched by icy showers in winter and have been almost baked by the blazing sun and hot winds in the tropical summer. But nothing can shake them from their rock-like dedication to seva. It is not in their nature to complain. There is only one exception: on some days, when some of us are feeling elated, almost proud, at finishing the day’s work early, one of

the spokesmen of the sevadars comes and complains, almost in an accusing tone, “Sir, you are not giving us enough work, we are sitting idle.”

I feel very small again. Yes, no one can give enough work to them, for they sometimes finish a day’s work in a few hours. They will not stop for rest, they take the minimum time off for lunch, and I wonder if they ever feel tired. One day, seeing an old sevadar well over sixty working without a stop, I went up to him and said, “My good friend, please take a few minutes’ rest – I’ve seen you working for the last few hours without a break even to gain your breath. You must be feeling tired.” “Tired,” he repeated in a hurt voice, “I am not tired. If you could give me seva for the next twelve hours, I would be grateful and happy to do it.” And turning away, he was again engrossed in his task.

I pondered; he was right. Does a mother feel tired or complain when she keeps a day-and-night vigil over her sick child? Does a lover grudge to do the bidding of the beloved, however hard it may be? I have heard old satsangis say that if a disciple does seva with a spirit of surrender, if his approach is that of love and devotion, and he has only one desire in his heart – the desire to please his Master – he will not feel tired. And is the Master not serving his disciples with the same spirit of love: never stopping, never complaining, ever vigilant, accepting all the toil and hardships of the arduous task of looking after his flock of sheep with an unflinching concern, with an ever-loving, kind smile?

It has been a privilege for all of us to see his inspiring power, blending with the devotion of his children and taking the shape of beams and columns, walls and lintels, and day after day growing into a monument of love and devotion.

*Legacy of Love*

# Why Let Worry Worry You?

Throughout our existence in this world, given life's many challenges and unknowns, we find ourselves everywhere at any given time, except living in that moment. We are either living in the regrets of yesterday or in the worries of tomorrow. Worry clogs the mind, scatters our attention, leads to distress, and drains both our physical and emotional vitality. Interestingly enough, the word 'worry' originates from an old Anglo-Saxon word meaning 'to choke' or 'to strangle' and that is an apt definition of how our life is stifled by worry.

The mind is constantly projecting past incidents, re-enacting entire scenarios, evaluating results and then imagining future possibilities of how things could have worked out differently. Our worrisome mind is swamped with an array of fears filled with "what ifs". In fact, most things that we worry about do not even materialize, but we indulge our disconcerting thoughts and then become apprehensive about them!

*Worry is wasting today's time to clutter up tomorrow's opportunities with yesterday's troubles.*

William Ward as quoted in  
*Let Go of Whatever Holds You Back*

The problem is that every time the mind asks the daunting questions, "What if?" and "What then?" we cripple ourselves by falling into a state of despondency. Instead of being paralyzed by fear, we should take it a step further, and answer with firm belief: "Then God". "What if?" should be met with an automatic response: "Then God's grace will be sufficient to handle the matter." As the wise old adage goes, "Let go, and let God". It is another way of saying that we

should let go of our worries and let God stand beside us as we face the challenges of each new day.

When we worry, we show a lack of trust in God's providence. We should learn to cast all our anxiety upon our beloved Father, for he is willing and able to take care of it for us. One thing we can be assured of is this: for every problem there is not only a solution, but also a divine purpose. When we find ourselves lost in the valleys of mental distress, our loving Father is leading us through a shortcut to the summit of peace. In *Divine Light*, Maharaj Charan Singh lovingly advises:

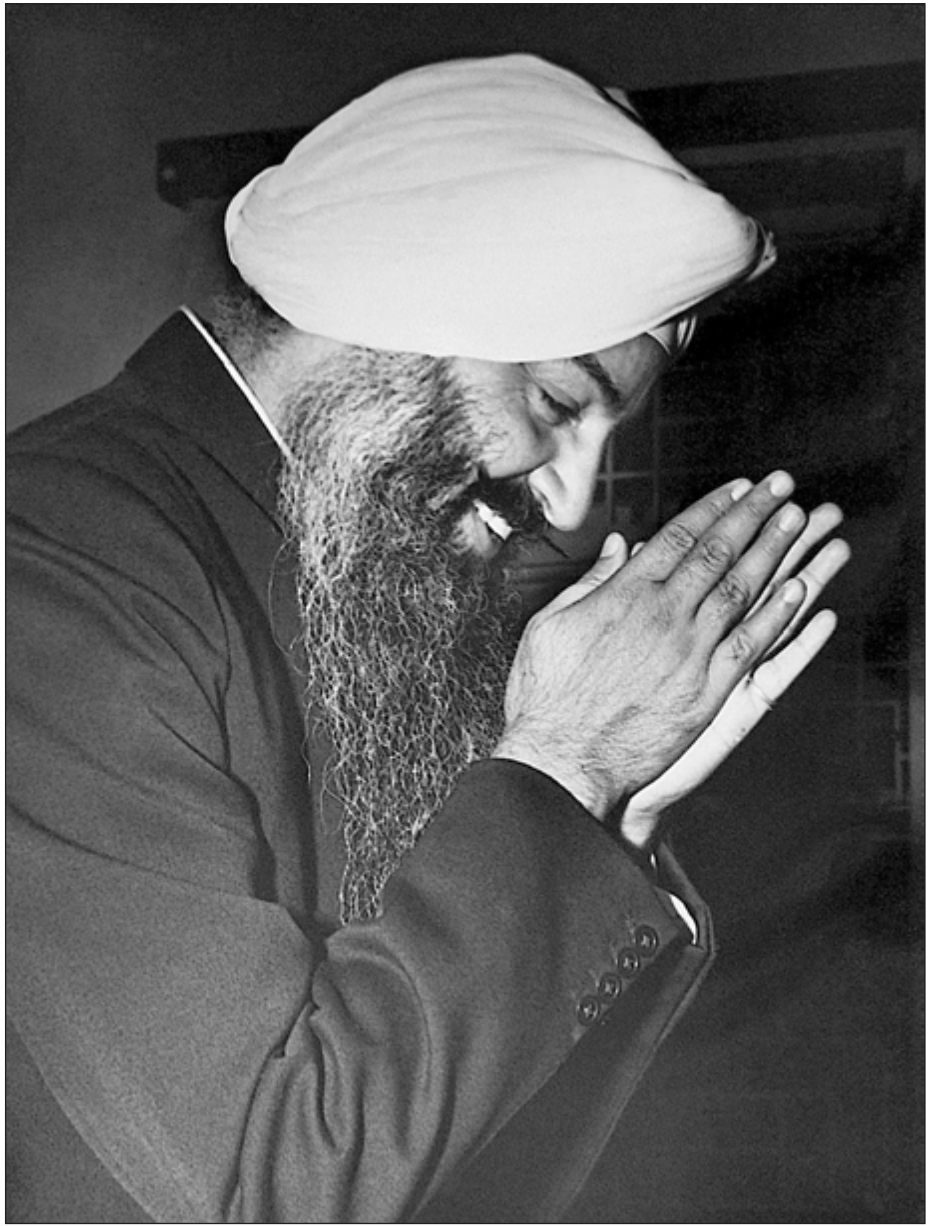
*Did worry ever help anybody? It only makes one more miserable and unhappy. Form the habit of laughing away your worries. Do not allow them to weigh down upon your heart. Try to adjust yourself to all that God sends. Let him do things in his own way rather than in the way that you desire.*

Understanding our sad plight when we are burdened by worries, he further advises:

*Give up the habit of worrying and losing your temper. It is easy to be happy and laughing; in fact, easier than it is to fret and frown. God does not want us to be unhappy. Have faith in his goodness and grace.*

The most critical survival tool in life is this: Remember that God loves us, that he has not abandoned us, that he is not indifferent to us, and that he is always by our side.





*Maharaj Charan Singh*

# Heart to Heart

Maharaj Charan Singh always had a way of looking on the bright side of life, no matter what the circumstances. Rajasthan is a hot desert state, and on one occasion some of his group had chosen to sleep on the roof terrace because of the heat. During that night, a dust storm blew up and their mosquito nets collapsed around them, causing everyone to shift beds and beddings back indoors. One person, however, unperturbed by all the commotion, slept on through the night in a tangle of bamboo poles and mosquito netting. This brought about a conversation the following morning during which Maharaj Ji commented that “a man truly at peace with himself could sleep on the edge of a sword.” Someone complained that as a result of the disturbed sleep he felt “miserable”. Maharaj Ji laughed and said he should not feel miserable: the morning air was pleasant and they had passed a good night. “I slept sound,” was another comment, “to the sound of mosquitoes,” to which Maharaj Ji responded with a mischievous smile: “My sound was much better.”

*Legacy of Love*



During one of his trips abroad when Hazur Maharaj Charan Singh Ji was preparing to leave Washington, Mr Weekley voiced the feelings of all the satsangis who had gathered to say goodbye: “Maharaj Ji, we can never repay you for all the gifts you have bestowed on us by your coming.”

“I am not leaving this place empty handed,” the Master said quite seriously. “The beautiful smiles, the laughter, the love they have given me – I will need extra luggage to carry this back to India with me.”

*Heaven on Earth*



# Book Review



## Life and Holiness

BY THOMAS MERTON

PUBLISHER: TRAPPIST, KY: ABBEY PRESS OF GETHSEMANI, 1996.

ISBN: 1614275312

Thomas Merton (1915-1968) was a Trappist monk, writer, poet, and peace activist, and also a best-selling author. His many books on spirituality have inspired both laypeople and those in monasteries, and have reached across the divisions between religions, East and West, to touch the hearts of spiritual seekers everywhere.

*Life and Holiness* outlines the basic principles of living a spiritual life. First published in the 1960s, and cognizant of the political turmoil of the era, the essays continue to be remarkably appropriate and applicable fifty years later. The book is divided into five sections: “Christian Ideals”, “The Testing of Ideals”, “Christ, the Way”, “The Life of Faith”, “Growth in Christ”. While Merton writes as a Christian, using some terminology specific to Christian spirituality, his ideals offer guidelines for disciples of any path.

Merton starts out by noting how many common ideas about sin and holiness are superficial and misleading:

*Sin is the refusal of spiritual life, the refusal of the inner order and peace that come from our union with the divine will. In a word, sin is the refusal of God's will and of his love. It is not only a refusal to “do” this or that thing willed by God, or a determination to do what he forbids. It is more radically a refusal to be what we are, a rejection of our mysterious, contingent, spiritual reality hidden in the very mystery of God. Sin is our refusal to be what we were created to be – sons of God, images of God. Ultimately, sin, while seeming to be an assertion of freedom, is a flight from the freedom and the responsibility of divine sonship.*

For Merton, 'faith' does not mean merely accepting certain beliefs; rather it is a surrender to Truth.

*A person can be detached and spiritual in a rational, idealistic kind of way and still be in the flesh. What distinguishes flesh from spirit is the virtue of faith.... Faith is not merely the acquiescence of the mind to certain truths, it is the gift of our whole being to Truth itself, to the Word of God.*

The life of faith is, in essence, a life of continual prayer:

*Prayer is therefore the heart of faith. . . . The chief meaning of the New Testament teaching on prayer is then that the kingdom of heaven is open to those who beg, by prayer, to enter it. That supernatural aid will never be refused anyone who needs it and seeks it in the name of Christ [See John 16:23].*

Merton holds that a life of faith should not result in passively accepting all the injustice and cruelty we see around us, or hiding from the pain and suffering in the world. "Sanctity is not a matter of being less human, but more human," meaning "a greater capacity for concern, for suffering, for understanding, for sympathy, and also for humour, for joy, for appreciation of the good and beautiful things of life." Merton was ever conscious of the social and moral turmoil of his era. He encourages us to be aware of injustice, knowing full well that we cannot solve all the problems of the world. If we would live a spiritual life, we must behave honourably and compassionately with all and not contribute, even passively, to suffering and poverty. He writes,

*Too often we think of charity as a kind of moral luxury, as something which we choose to practise, and which gives us merit in God's sight, at the same time satisfying a certain interior need to 'do good'. Such charity is immature ... and unreal. True charity is love.*

For anyone attempting to live a truly spiritual life, one's ideals will be tested, and the way of spiritual growth will be long and difficult. In a spiritual life one must "mortify even some legitimate cravings" with discipline and seriousness, and no compromise. Failures will happen. Merton warns against falling into a morbid self-hatred, especially if one is fooled into imagining that this is humility. Although we must strive for spiritual perfection, attaining it can only come through divine grace.

*We would do well to emphasize uncreated grace. The Holy Spirit present within us, the dulcis hospes animae, the 'sweet guest dwelling in our soul'.... To 'be perfect' then is not so much a matter of seeking God with ardour and generosity, as of being found, loved, and possessed by God, in such a way that his action in us makes us completely generous and helps us to transcend our limitations and react against our own weakness.*

This, however, is no excuse for lack of effort. As he puts it, "Spiritual perfection is beyond our mortal ability. But accepting defeat is laziness." Our effort is to "avail" ourselves of God's gifts:

*If holiness is beyond our natural power to achieve then it follows that God himself must give us the light, the strength, and the courage to fulfill the task.... He will certainly give us the grace we need. If we do not become saints, it is because we do not avail ourselves of his gift.*

While Merton believes that perfection is beyond our ability to achieve, he holds that a spiritual seeker can achieve very real peace. "Without this interior peace we cannot truly come to know God and enjoy the familiarity with him which is proper." But "peace is not the work of force but the fruit of love. And love means submission to Christ."

*Our Lord, who came to bring 'not peace but the sword' also promised a peace that the world cannot give. We, insofar as we rely on our own anxious efforts, are of this world. We are not capable of producing such peace by our own efforts. We can only find it when we have, in some sense, renounced peace and forgotten about it.*

The way of holiness, Merton says, is a kind of “madness, the folly of abandoning all concern for ourselves both in the material and in the spiritual order.” If one can fully “entrust ourselves to Christ”, it will mean “a kind of death to our temporal selves.”

*The ability to make this act, to let go, to plunge into our own emptiness and there find the freedom of Christ in all fullness – this is inaccessible to all our merely human efforts and plans. We cannot do it by relaxing or by striving, by thinking or not thinking, by acting or not acting. The only answer is perfect faith, exultant hope, transformed by a completely spiritual love of Christ. This is a pure gift of his: but we can dispose ourselves to receive it by fortitude, humility, patience, and, above all, by simple fidelity to his will in every circumstance of our ordinary life.*

Ultimately, Merton defines the essence of holiness with a simple principle: “to live not according to our own desire and our own judgment but according to God’s will for us.” For a true lover of God, “all things, whether they appear good or evil, are in actuality good. All things manifest the loving mercy of God.” For such a lover, “obstacles no longer exist.” The way of holiness “is a way of confidence and love.”



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