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# Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

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## **Spiritual Link**

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# The Greatest Treasure of All

Love ... dissolves all the boundaries and limits we impose on life. Love is the most powerful force in the creation. Without love, life is dry and worthless. Devoid of love a mansion will appear as dreadful as a graveyard. Filled with the light of love, an ill-furnished and dilapidated hut will vibrate with beauty. Love is the richest of all treasures. Without it, there is nothing; and with it, there is everything. As Maharaj Sawan Singh says in *Philosophy of the Masters*:

*Prior to the creation of this world, God was a vast ocean-like All-Consciousness. He was all love, all bliss and self-sufficient. God was everything in Himself and was in a state of blissful quiescence, and His basic form was Love. It was not love for any other being, because none existed. It was for Himself. It was part and parcel of Himself, and He did not have to depend on anything else for this. Such is the indescribable condition of Love.*

Love is another name for the spirit of God; the spirit of God is what upholds the universe in balance and harmony. This is why the powerful forces that move in the universe are not in conflict with one another, but co-exist in perfect balance. If we put ourselves in contact with the spirit of God, we too will enjoy perfect harmony.

The same force that upholds the whole creation is also unceasingly supporting and nurturing our own life. That force is love, the positive power of the creation, that includes intelligence, joy and balance. Saints and mystics come to put us in contact with that force so that we may rise above our earthly limitations, and rediscover that love in its abundance, balance and joy.

*A Spiritual Primer*



# The Soundtrack of Our Lives

Following a spiritual path requires earnest commitment but sometimes we take ourselves too seriously. Baba Ji, however, encourages us to enjoy life, explaining that fun and spirituality are perfectly compatible. We're not expected to adopt a solemn persona or an ascetic lifestyle! This makes us think: since the mystics tell us that our existence on the material plane is nothing more than the projection of an epic film being streamed from Dharam Rai's platform, we need a soundtrack to complement the roles we've been assigned to play. Can you imagine a Bollywood picture without music? While there are plenty of songs to choose from, we've settled on using tracks from the world's best-selling group of all time – The Beatles.

## Help!

*Help!*

*Help! I need somebody Help! Not just anybody*

*Help! You know I need someone*

As the film's opening credits roll on the screen, our theme song can be none other than The Beatles' 1965 hit, "Help". Why? Because the song's lyrics – "I need [the help of] somebody" – express our realization that, without help, we'll never be able to satisfy the innate longing within us, or the sense that there's something missing. At one point, we've all turned to what we thought might help – relationships, careers, possessions and, maybe even alcohol and drugs, but no matter how much we might pin our hopes and dreams on these things, that emptiness kept gnawing away at us. We come to understand all these things are short-lived.

Our search for the 'missing something' represents the soul's yearning. Consequently, attempts to satisfy the needs of a particle of divinity with things of this world (sensual pleasures, relationships, ambitions, wealth or possessions) are doomed to failure. So, acknowledging that we'll experience completeness once the soul returns to its spiritual origins, off we go searching for the "somebody" to help us with our quest. Stumbling along one blind alley after another, it finally dawns upon us that the

help we seek can't be from "just anybody". We might not know who the "somebody" is, but our heart and soul intuitively tell us who it *isn't*.

Eventually, when our search brings us to our knees, and we cannot bear the intensity of the overwhelming longing within us, the Master appears. Marking the momentous new juncture in our life, the soundtrack to our life changes to "Sat Purush's Lonely Hearts Club Band". Readers, we can hear your groans, but we think it's an ingenious take on The Beatles' 1967 album and title track, "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band".

### **Sat Purush's Lonely Hearts Club Band**

Much like The Drifters, the American band whose seamless changes in membership has allowed it to keep performing sixty years after it was first formed – the humble hosts of Sat Purush's Lonely Hearts Club Band also change continually. It has, for instance, included Buddha, Jesus Christ, Mohammed, Guru Nanak, Soami Ji and many others. Given Sat Purush's Lonely Hearts Club Band has been going since the dawn of time, one might be forgiven for thinking that it has a huge library of lyrical messages. On the contrary, this Lonely Hearts Club Band sings but one song, key lines from which are:

*It's wonderful to be here  
It's certainly a thrill  
You're such a lovely audience  
We'd love to take you home with us....*

The above lyrics conjure up an image of Sat Purush's Lonely Hearts Club Band, singing about how wonderful it is for them to be in the same place as us, the audience. Yet, the mystics have a way of turning things upside down and inside out. Therefore, the first two lines of the above verse are not about them, but us. The world is a captivating place the mystics explain; it's ensnared us, the audience, with its thrills and spills. Unfortunately, our enjoyment has come at a huge cost in that we've forgotten our true identity and real home.

Yet, you – the mystics continue – are so much more than the physical body to which you're devoted. Your heritage is divinity, and what you label as feeling disconnected from the world is, in reality, homesickness. This is why

you've been chasing one pleasure after another. But now that life's "thrills" are losing their shine, we've arrived "to take you home with us".

As the song fades gently in the background, Sat Purush's Lonely Hearts Club Band asks if we want to listen to a very special song, one that, if we're prepared to learn, will take us directly to the musician of the universe. Going to him is essential, the Lonely Hearts Club Band informs us, because only then will we find what we're looking for and, in turn, be free of the 'something is missing' feeling. And that, my friends, is the cue for us to play the next track.

### **Do you want to know a secret?**

*Listen*

*Do you want to know a secret*

*Do you promise not to tell...*

*Closer*

*Let me whisper in your ear*

*The words you long to hear*

When bestowing the gift of Nam, the mystics, much like the lover speaking to his beloved in the song, ask that we "promise not to tell" the holy names we "long to hear".

When we were teenagers, we couldn't help wondering, if the mystics' teachings are available to all, why the secrecy? Isn't this exclusionary? Upon reading the Sant Mat literature, we learn that it's not the words that are important but the power of the Master who gives them. Even if one was to disclose Master's simran to somebody not yet initiated, this would have zero impact. As Hazur Maharaj Charan Singh explains in *Die to Live*:

*A man with a little intelligence can find all the names from our books... There's no problem in finding them, but that is not going to help him at all. A bullet kills only when it comes through the gun barrel. It is the same bullet if you throw it, but it is not effective unless it comes through the gun. Similarly, it is only when the names are given to us by a Mystic that they have any power behind them – power to eliminate the ego, to purify our mind, to bring our entire attention to the eye center. Otherwise, the words in themselves have no power.*

Hazur Maharaj Ji's reasoning helps explain why disclosing simran to a non-initiate would be of no value to them, but this still doesn't quite explain why we must keep simran a "secret".

Reflecting on this, you may realize how difficult a master's job is, not least because human nature is such that we place much more value on something when it's exclusive. By impressing upon us "not to tell", the mystics are underlining just how valuable the gift of Nam is. In *Light on Sant Mat* Hazur Maharaj Ji describes initiation as "a wonderful thing and ... the very soul and essence of Sant Mat". Nam, he said, "give[s] one an entirely new outlook on life; in fact, that is when life really begins for us".

So, after all the tears, loneliness and longing, it's understandable why, when initiated, we think, "Fantastic! Brilliant! Job done!" Yet, changing the habits of many lifetimes is not, we discover, so easy.

## **The long and winding road**

*The long and winding road,  
that leads to your door  
Will never disappear...  
Many times I've been alone,  
and many times I've  
cried...  
And still [my tears] lead me back  
to the long and winding road...  
Don't leave me waiting here,  
lead me to your door.*

Of all the songs featured on the soundtrack of our life, "The Long and Winding Road," resonates most strongly with our experience as spiritual seekers. We're so locked into the illusion of the material world that, despite our newfound purpose in life, we continue to devote nearly all our time to satisfying our animal instincts (for food, shelter, relationships, and power), thinking about our spiritual duty fleetingly, if at all, during the day. Therefore it seems unreasonable to become frustrated both with ourselves for not having made more progress and with the master for leaving us waiting by his door.

The irony, of course, is that it's our actions (or lack thereof), which make the road leading to his door long and winding. Instead of focusing on our effort and strengthening our faith in the Master, we start questioning the method, or our ability to implement it. "Why do we have to meditate, can't you do this for us, please?" we protest to the Master, or some variation of "Meditation isn't working" or "I can't do it". While we desire union, we aren't quite ready to put in the level of effort required. We behave like toddlers, wondering if, by throwing a tantrum, the Master will take pity on us or get fed up with hearing about how difficult it is to combine spirituality with life in the 21st century. However, in much the same way as a parent who, for the good of a child, does not give in to their outbursts and demands, the Master does not concede to our pleadings. He waits.

Have you noticed that it's the toddler who, upon realizing that their shouting and screaming has no effect, runs to the parent for hugs and kisses? While the parent is prepared to wait it out, the child, to whom fifteen minutes is almost an eternity, can't be without a parent's unconditional love, comfort and security for long. Similarly, once we understand that our moans and groans are of no avail and that there is no option other than to practise meditation, up we get, for the die is cast. No other road leads us to his door. Irrespective of how long it takes, now that the journey's begun, neither the Master nor we have any choice but to keep going until we arrive, together.

## **He loves you**

*He loves you*

*And you know you should be glad...*

*With a love like that*

*You know you should be glad*

The penultimate track to our soundtrack is the song that launched The Beatles into stardom in Britain, "She Loves You". Hinting at the tremendous love a girl has for her suitor, the love we each receive from the Master is by far the greatest of all. Unconditional, without bounds, the Master's love is unfathomable to our ordinary human mind. It is not our understanding of Sant Mat, but his love and mercy which is slowly and



subtly bringing about our transformation and making us fit to enter the kingdom of the divine.

It is stated in *One Being One*:

*The divine Beloved is our guide, drawing us ever on. Our effort is simply a response to His call. "If we take one step towards Him, He takes a hundred steps towards us." And He is the one who makes us take that one step. His grace is inestimable, His love incalculable. We live in it, could not exist without it. If our attention is distracted and we turn our back on it, we may think He has gone away. But He is always present. There is nowhere else for Him to go. He is helpless in His love for us, united by the bond of shared and indistinguishable being.*

Sacrificing themselves for our benefit, to lead us out of this illusionary world, the Masters' love inspires us to fill our hearts with love of the Shabd which, in turn, cleanses and purifies us to be worthy of union with the divine. So when times are tough, when things are not going as we would like or when we're feeling sorry for ourselves, let's remember meeting our Master and the sheer joy and relief we felt. In much the same way that the Master's love for us is beyond our comprehension, so too is the opportunity we've been given to liberate our soul.

Our puny efforts and Master's guidance will take us to the eye focus, where we will start to realize the truth: that all there is – is love, not the emotional or limiting kind, but a love that is pure and noble as reflected in the closing track of our soundtrack, "Across the Universe":

*Limitless undying love  
which shines around me like a million suns  
And calls me on and on  
across the universe*

As the closing credits of our film roll on the screen, the house turns on its lights, but our light within is shining even brighter.



# Never Mind

## A Conversation with Bad and Good Sense

I said some stupid things today.

*Never mind, sit in meditation for a while. You won't be called on to say anything at all!*

When I listened to the news it got me really worried.

*Never mind, listen to the Shabd instead, and hear the peace.*

I keep seeing these images from the film I watched last night.

*Never mind, the way to make them fade is to really focus at the eye centre.*

The thought that keeps going round in my head is "I think Master's forgotten me."

*Never mind, just remember to repeat the words he's given you – and you'll discover that could never be.*

I don't manage to meditate for the full time.

*Never mind, put in more short sessions.*

I've quarrelled with my husband.

*Never mind, try offering some love and humility.*

My body's full of aches and pains.

*Never mind, the nearer to the eye centre, the less you'll feel them.*

I'm worried about the children.

*Never mind, they've got their own destiny. Do your best and trust the Lord.*

I need a holiday and I'm not going to get one.

*Never mind, an hour of concentrated meditation will refresh you like a seaside breeze.*

It's all too much effort, I want to give up this spiritual path.

**NEVER!**

*Mind, sit down right here.... Yes, here, between the eyes. What do you see? Darkness? Good. Now go on being just there, repeating...*

*See,*

*It's not so hard.... You're feeling better? Settling in?*

*You want me to be quiet?*

*... Bliss ...*

# Finding Unseen Reality

*All the world's a stage,  
And all the men and women merely players;  
They have their exits and their entrances.*  
William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*

In the play *As You Like It*, Shakespeare compares the world to a stage and life to a play. The mystics use a similar analogy to reveal the reality of the human condition. However, unlike Shakespeare's monologue, which ends with an image of an old man who is left with nothing at the end of his life and descends into oblivion, the saints remind us of a life, a home, and a Father waiting to give us everything. Moreover, whereas Shakespeare uses the metaphor symbolically, the saints use it to pierce the illusion we live in. They point out that the moment a show ends, actors cease performing their roles, leave the stage and go home because neither their characters nor the story that they're enacting are real. The idea of actors associating with their roles to such an extent that they forget their identity sounds absurd. Yet such absurdity typifies our current condition. In the book, *Awareness of the Divine* it is written:

*But for the most part, human beings remain caught up in the play of life, giving scarcely a thought to the unseen Reality that affords us our existence. And then comes death – a mystery as profound as birth. These two great events that mark our coming and going are beyond our understanding. Our way in and our way out of this world are shrouded in the same essential ignorance that accompanies our life.*

The ignorance accompanying our lives is dispelled by interacting with mystics whose sole purpose is to shatter our illusion about what is real. Descending from the highest spiritual region, they inform us that we've lived in the theatre of creation for far too long. Bewitched by the magnificent set and the allure of its lights, we've fallen in love with the roles we perform, identifying with them so totally that we believe our identity is that of the person inhabiting one's physical body. Engrossed in this illusion, we fail to see that our essence is Shabd or feel its presence within and around us. Urging us to turn away from our make-believe

world, the saints teach us how to find the “unseen Reality” within each of us. In the following verse from *Sar Bachan Poetry*, Soami Ji Maharaj identifies how we can access the “unseen Reality” while also hinting at the relationship between effort and grace:

*Listen, dear soul, and let me explain:  
Unique and wondrous is my real form,  
which no one can perceive until I lend a hand.  
Practise meditation and subdue your mind  
by holding your sense impulses in check.*  
*Bachan 33, Shabd 15*

Soami Ji Maharaj is gently cajoling the soul to practise meditation because this affords the inner Master an opportunity to “lend a hand” to subdue the mind. In other words, our role extends as far as practising meditation with love, devotion and, above all, sincerity. The Master takes care of everything else, including taming the mind. But to benefit from a master’s helping hand, we must practise meditation with as much effort as we can muster over *a sustained period*. Without a master’s help, it’s impossible to subdue the mind; to invoke his help, however, we must take the first step.

The importance of our effort must not be underestimated. Masters connect us with the Shabd, but we will only become aware of it once we take action. Baba Ji reminds us that our desire for unity with Shabd must be reflected in our actions; if it isn’t, we are confused or do not want God-realization. Similarly, in *Light on Sant Mat*, Hazur Maharaj Charan Singh reminds us that the Lord never withholds his grace when our efforts to meditate are sincere and that the more effort we make, the greater his grace:

*The more effort we make, the more grace he extends to us to be able to make more effort until we have reached our goal. So with love and faith, continue the practice and he will take care of the results. No amount of effort is wasted. He is ever loving and merciful.*

Walking the path of the saints is one of effort and grace – both are necessary. However, let’s not become confused about what is meant by effort. Compared to the task before us, our effort is bound to be feeble, and that’s

okay because the masters don't judge; they accept our paltry attempts with pleasure, and there is comfort in knowing that.

To quiet the mind, the masters give us the tool of simran. By consistently repeating five simple words, with love and devotion if possible, we can silence the mind. But the other great benefit of simran is that it helps us remember Master's physical presence even when he has gone away. It's impossible to describe what it feels like when Baba Ji is with us physically – everyone has their own experience. As he also enjoys being with us, he wants us to reach out to him; therefore, he gives us simran. Whenever we consciously repeat simran – irrespective of what thoughts are flying in the background – the Master is as close, if not closer, than if we were in his presence. The more we do this, the stronger our relationship becomes with him.

Quieting the mind takes effort, and years and years of hard work, so it's easy to lose heart. However, in the following verses, Soami Ji Maharaj expresses the Shabd's unconditional love for us, reassuring us that the Master “will not rest” until he has shown us his Radiant Form:

*Have patience, keep the company of the saints  
and I shall purify you through my grace.  
I shall not rest till I show you that form –  
why are you in such a hurry?*

*I carry your burdens in my own heart  
so that you may be free of worries  
and nurture my love in your heart.*

Radha Soami is the supreme doer; we are the vessel for his love. To experience the love of the Shabd, we need to keep our vessel clean; otherwise, the Shabd will stay buried inside us, hidden under layers and layers of ego, doubts, anxieties and worries. These have no power or permanence except what we give them. Our only means of controlling them is simran. If we are drowning, we call for help – as loudly as possible. But just screaming for help doesn't save us; we are saved when someone hears us and throws us a lifeline. Simran is calling the Master, and Soami Ji reassures us that when we repeat the names the Master will carry our burdens himself,

allowing us to focus on our true work. If we give him our worries and focus on simran, all that is left within us is the Shabd. He is calling us, wanting us to meet him within. He lightens our days and softens the blows of fate. But above all, he yearns for us to turn inward to him

We don't know for how many lives we have longed to come into contact with a true master. It's our great good fortune that he has accepted us. The depth of this spiritual relationship is such that it gradually transforms our entire focus from outside to inside. Slowly, gradually, simran becomes our companion; our awareness of the Shabd increases; accepting his will takes precedence; and a profound sense of contentment and gratitude engulfs us. Life goes on, but now we see everything we do through the prism of spirituality. Worldly attractions lose their shine, and the eye centre becomes a place of refuge.

Maharaj Charan Singh assured us that by making an effort, everything will happen automatically. He advised us to let go of our thinking and planning and trust the Lord. If we fail, it's because we're trying; our failures are a necessary part of our spiritual development. He sees our true self, our soul, which wants to be free of this realm of duality and experience its essence – love. So, we should keep the Master in our thoughts by making him our companion in all that we do.

Our meditation becomes a refuge of stillness, our channel of silence. And into this comes Shabd, when it so wills. The Shabd is ringing and calling inside every one of us; it is resounding throughout creation, forming and re-forming worlds, galaxies, and universes. We need that slight shift of attention from outward to inward to hear it. The physical form of the Master is helping us on this physical plane and the inner Master is pulling us from within. The experience of listening to the sound current helps us escape the world of impermanence and leads us to our true home. Baba Ji often says that the Guru's true form is Shabd, and the true form of the disciple is the soul. It is a relationship of pure love, and that love will grow and grow until there is no difference between them.



# A Sinner or a Saint?

After a lifetime of following Sant Mat, listening to countless satsangs, and reading extensively about spirituality, I've concluded that I'd rather be a sinner than a saint. No doubt many readers are raising their eyebrows upon reading this, so let's qualify this statement with a more accurate one: a 'sinner' is what most of us are today. This article draws from the writings of the 17th century Christian mystic Madame Jeanne-Marie Guyon to explain why recognizing and accepting our limitations helps us evolve spiritually.

## Recognition and acceptance

Much of the RSSB spiritual literature describes mystics as 'perfect'. However, Baba Ji clarifies that mystics aren't 'perfect' so much as 'complete'. Unlike us, they do not exist in duality. Without the veil of the mind separating them from the divine, mystics are always at one with the Shabd, and, therefore, complete. This subtle but important difference between 'perfect' and 'complete' is perhaps necessary for the age in which we live, when striving for the former seems so unattainable and thus it may deter one from even making a start. By contrast, the idea of becoming 'complete' seems not only more achievable but resonates with an innate yearning within us.

Within this context, it's useful to re-evaluate what we understand by the terms 'sin' and 'sinners'. Typically, the words carry such negative connotations that sometimes we associate them with the concept of 'evil'. Yet, as explained in *The Path of the Masters*, evil does not exist:

*In a universe created by an all-wise God, whose fundamental essence is goodness and love, there is no room for such a thing as evil. It simply does not exist. But there are many degrees of good, of the light. In its final aspect, there is nothing bad in the world, neither is there sin nor fault in anyone. What appears so is due to our limited understanding.*

The above quotation helps us understand that the mystics do not view us – the sinners – negatively but in a state of incompleteness. Accordingly, to acknowledge oneself as a 'sinner' is nothing to be ashamed of but rather

a positive development in one's spiritual awakening. In fact, since Baba Ji often reminds us that self-realization is a precursor to God-realization, it's logical to assume that coming to terms with our current self – warts and all – is a precursor to self-realization.

By recognizing that we are sinners, we kick-start a humbler attitude in our quest to become one with our Master. Indeed, the humility to recognize ourselves as we are constitutes the first step towards our spiritual transformation. As the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* stated, “Humility ... is nothing but a true knowledge and feeling of oneself as one is.” Madame Guyon elaborates on this point, stating:

*It is extremely important that you guard against being annoyed or irritated with yourself because of your faults. Such feelings spring from a secret root of pride and a love of your own excellence. You get [upset and] hurt by seeing what you [really] are.*

*Experiencing Union with God Through Inner Prayer*

It seems that we can view ourselves as courageous, determined sinners who are madly in love with the Master. However, since we're also aspiring to deepen our love for him, we must first learn to love ourselves. As Maharaj Charan Singh counsels in *Spiritual Perspectives* Vol. III, “our thoughts should be very loving and helpful to ourselves”.

### **Our weaknesses capture the attention of the Shepherd**

Madame Guyon believed that viewing ourselves as sinners is important to our spiritual evolution because the Lord uses our weaknesses to scrub us clean, thereby rendering us pure again. From this perspective, our imperfections are fortuitous because they capture the love and attention of the Shepherd. In *2 Corinthians*, Saint Paul quotes Jesus as saying, “My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness”. In other words, it is from a divine saviour that human beings receive the grace to overcome their weaknesses and become whole like him. If we take this one step further, we realize that it's our incompleteness that allows God to shower his grace on us. If we were already perfect, what would there be for the Master to do?



Madame Guyon gives another reason why we should be happy to be ‘sinners’. She says “The discovery of your weakness and emptiness, is an evidence of God’s love; and while it is ground for humiliation, it is also ground for thanksgiving.”

Essentially, she is encouraging us to be grateful to the inner Master for shining a light on our weaknesses, because only when we are aware of them can we work towards overcoming them, and acquire the virtues necessary for union with the divine. Conversely, if we fail to see our shortcomings, we strengthen them and continue to hold ourselves in high esteem for our piety and righteousness. And pride, as we learn from the mystics, is the greatest obstacle of all in our quest to fulfill life’s principal purpose – union with the divine.

A third reason why Madame Guyon thought it important to come to terms with our weaknesses is that in doing so, we realize that our efforts to enter the gates of heaven are wholly inadequate. As we progress from intellectually understanding how inconsequential we are to feeling it in our innermost being, the more we come to rely on the grace of the Lord to see us through to the end. She contrasts this attitude with that of people she calls “self-righteous”, who try to enter heaven by way of their own strength, whether this be through charitable work, piety, or prayer. She states that “his graces are the effects of his will, not the fruits of our merits”. By submitting to his will every morning and making the effort to do our meditation, regardless of results, we invoke the Lord’s grace.

## **Remembrance**

The root of all sin lies in the mind which, manifesting as ego, creates the illusion of a separate identity from God. To end our sense of duality requires an annihilation of the ego and the best way of achieving this is to continually remember the Master. When providing guidance on this point, Maharaj Charan Singh paraphrased the words of a previous mystic, stating:

*I have got this human birth just to remember you, and I can achieve the purpose of this human birth only if I give my devotion to you. If I do not do that, I am not making proper use of the human form.*

*Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III*

While it goes without saying that we are to follow the instructions given to us during initiation, Maharaj Charan Singh is advising us to remember the Master throughout the day. This is because by repeating simran as much as possible, we develop a deeper, more intimate relationship with the Shabd Master. Ultimately, it's this living in the remembrance of Nam that reduces our sense of separation. Brother Lawrence is a good example of somebody who devoted his life to feeling God's presence throughout the day. However, as his letters reveal, this is not something that occurred automatically, but required tremendous attention and dedication on his part. We too can become attuned to feeling God's constant presence.

## **Surrender**

Striving for divine union is not easy or always full of joy; there will be times, Madame Guyon warns us, when we're likely to experience dark and painful moments. What we think is best for our spiritual welfare may be completely different from the Master's plan for us. In fact, to destroy our love of the self, he may turn all our assumptions and plans upside down. However, she also explains that, once the cleansing period begins producing its desired effect, we readily accept all that comes our way, happily surrendering to his will. This slow transformative process begins with us thinking "my Master, my Guru, my Lord" and ends with the realization that 'my', 'mine', and 'I' do not exist. Once we were sinners but now our beautiful, sparkling soul has become indistinguishable from the ocean of Oneness.



# How to Lead a Good Life

*Whatever pains mortals receive from fate  
by divine dispensation, whatever your fate,  
bear it and do not resent it.*

*To remedy your lot as best you can is appropriate,  
but reflect: fate does not give too many  
of those misfortunes to the good.*

*Many words, both bad and good, fall upon human ears;  
do not let them shock you nor obstruct your path.  
And if falsehood is uttered, withdraw amiably.*

*Be sure to apply in every situation what I shall tell you now:  
do not let anyone provoke you,  
whether by word or by deed,  
to do or say what isn't the better choice for you.*

*Reflect well before you act,  
so you don't end up in foolishness;  
only a coward acts and speaks thoughtlessly.*

*Only do things you won't have to feel sorry for later.  
Where you have no knowledge, there do not act,  
but learn whatever is needed.  
Thus, your life will be most enjoyable.*

*You should take best care of the health of your body,  
keeping due balance in drink, food, and exercise –  
I mean balance that will keep you from distress.*

*Make the pure and simple way of life a habit  
and guard against actions that provoke envy.*

*Do not spend extravagantly  
like someone unaware of what is good,  
nor be tight-fisted:  
due balance in everything is best.*

*Do what brings you no harm, and think before you act.*

*Do not accept sleep upon your soft eyes before you have gone through your actions that day three times:  
where have I gone wrong;  
what have I accomplished;  
what duty have I neglected?*

*Beginning with the first deed, go through them all in detail,  
and then if your deeds were worthless,  
reprove yourself,  
but if you did well, fully enjoy the success.*

*Be Human – Then Divine*



*Predestination versus free will:* A will is free only so long as it has not acted. Once it acts, then that very act becomes binding on it. The second time it acts, it does not act as free will, but as a “calculating will,” for it carries the experience of the first act with it. And a calculating will is not a free will but a limited will. The very creations, or acts of a free will, work as limiting factors upon it and guide it in its future activity. So the more actions one performs, the more his will is guided and thus limited. And this is real predestination. There is thus no antagonism between predestination, fate, karma, and free will. We were free at one time. We acted, and then our acts became binding upon us. They curtailed our initial freedom. They now act upon us as unavoidable fate. Since our experiences have become complex and varied, these experiences now appear in us as joys and fears, hopes and desires, each of which, in its turn, moulds or fashions our reason and intellect.

*Maharaj Sawan Singh Ji, Spiritual Gems*



# Food for Thought



# Attachment

There is a beautiful quotation from Baba Ji in *The Equilibrium of Love*.

*Well, you know Hazur loved roses. You are all his roses, and he gave me the seva of the gardener to look after his garden and his roses.*

Just as there are thousands of different varieties of flowers, we too come in different sizes, shapes and colours, even though we all enter the world via the same biological process.

Moreover, just as the roots of a plant increase in volume throughout its life, our attachments multiply as we grow older and the sphere of our connections increase. This article explores why, despite knowing that ties to our family and friends are temporary, we continue devoting nearly all of our time and energy into nurturing these attachments giving little time to deepening the one true relationship in our life: that with the Master.

## **Relationships are necessary but...**

A flowering plant has several parts, each performing a specific function to support a seedling's transformation to full bloom. The roots, for instance, anchor the plant in the soil and absorb oxygen, water and other nutrients, feeding these to the plant as needed. Sepals, located at the base of a flower, enclose the developing bud before it opens and shield it from harsh weather and pests. Similarly, our close relationships nourish, protect, and support us during life's stormy phases. As John Donne, the 17th century English poet, said, "No man is an island".

While spirituality acknowledges the importance of relationships for our physical well-being and spiritual development, it warns us not to become obsessed or overly attached to them.

Buddhism, for instance, views attachments as a significant obstacle to achieving enlightenment – a view shared by a 16th century Catholic saint, Saint Ignatius of Loyola, who developed a set of "spiritual exercises". These were designed specifically "to conquer oneself and regulate one's life" in such a way that decisions are based not on likes or dislikes, but that which is most conducive to achieve one's primary purpose in life. For Ignatius, indifference to one's circumstances facilitates union with God. The spiritual exercises,

therefore, sought to liberate these practitioners from their likes and dislikes so that their choices came to be governed solely by what they discerned to be God's will.

In most of the RSSB books, the masters say that pride, or vanity, is the last to go and thus the worst, though Hazur always used to say they're all the worst.

In *The Path of the Masters*, Dr Johnson explains why, of the five passions, attachments pose a great danger to realizing our spiritual goal:

*It does seem so very reasonable and proper that one should have and enjoy spouse, children, positions of honour and of public service, money, houses, lands, and securities. Indeed, we may concede that such things are necessary and proper. The individual knows that, and our gentle friend, moh (attachment), steps in with such benevolent airs and says: "Yes, surely, you must give diligent attention to these things; it is your duty".*

We devote so much time and effort to our relationships, our work and to accumulating wealth that we have neither the time nor energy left to shift our attention away from the illusionary nature of the world and turn it within. If we focused more on simran during the day, we would form a relationship with the Lord. However, most of the time, we're so preoccupied with the internal chatter of the mind or fulfilling our familial responsibilities that we aren't even aware that we've forgotten our simran. By falling into the trap of viewing our relationships with loved ones as real, we exceed our obligations to them and, conversely, fall short of fulfilling our duty to the Master. This is why – as noted in *Spiritual Discourses*, Vol. II – Maharaj Charan Singh often said that our loved ones are "thugs":

*A swindler presents himself so lovingly that he becomes one of us, and with our own hands we happily give him whatever we have. Once he leaves us we realize what we have done, and then we cry that we have been robbed and cheated. All those we think of as our own are swindlers.*

*We spend our lives entangled in our love and attachment for them. They do not permit us to be aware of the purpose for which the Lord has graced us with this human form; of the relationship between our soul and the Lord.*

Hazur Maharaj Ji is explaining that we lose our sense of balance with each new relationship or ambition. For example, during the first throes of a romance, we spend so much time with the person we love that we neglect our family and friends. Our attention shifts again once we have children, and we become so absorbed in every aspect of their well-being that we ignore our soul's welfare.

The same thing happens with work. We desire money, status, and respect from others, so we work long hours and even weekends. Believing we lack time, we either don't meditate or, if we do, we fail to do so with our full attention, focusing instead on the forthcoming day's demands and the tasks we need to complete. Once at work, we're in a frenzy, manically checking off items on our never-ending 'to-do' list. In the precious few hours between finishing work and the start of the following day, we manage to squeeze in a gym session before going home, feeding the family, putting the children to bed, surfing the web, looking for the latest moisturizer promising to combat wrinkles and, of course, we can't end the day without watching some television and checking our social media. By the end of the day, we collapse into bed, utterly exhausted.

The following morning, we either sleep through the alarm or sheer fatigue prevents us from meditating. Yet, to sit still and silently repeat the Lord's names for two and a half hours, a mere ten percent of our day, is such a small ask – especially considering what we stand to gain. However, ignoring the Master's advice, we continue following our daily routine until time catches up with us, and we realize we're old. Death is looming, and we realize we've failed to work towards our goal. Moreover, our loved ones, to whom we gave so much attention, are nowhere to be seen. Our children have grown and are engrossed in their lives while our spouse has died or left us.

Meanwhile, not only has our appearance deteriorated, but we've also got aches, pains, and possibly a serious illness. Reflecting on our life, we regret not making time for meditation. Is it too late? Have we lost the game? Cursing ourselves for squandering our precious chance and anxious about death, we beg the Master to shower his grace and help us.

However, as he often reminds us, Baba Ji is not here to give us false reassurances by letting us think that spirituality requires minimal effort



on our part. Isn't it arrogant, illogical and nonsensical to expect to achieve spirituality at the time of death if our entire life has been devoted to materiality? Baba Ji also informs us that immeasurable grace is continually being bestowed on us from the moment we are born; our human birth and initiation are just two examples. Rather than asking for more grace, it's time for us to show our gratitude for all we've received by practising meditation as diligently as possible.

Shabd is the only power that can sever our attachments to the world. No matter how hard we try to detach ourselves from our family, friends and wealth or become indifferent to other people's opinions of us, fighting our mind with the mind will never work. We need something more powerful and more enjoyable than anything we already have.

From our perspective, it seems God has designed and created a world that keeps us trapped by making us believe in its reality. It operates according to his will. Why? We don't know, but he has given us the technique to break free from our illusionary reality and the suffering it causes. Just as the flower's roots don't have to be forcefully pulled out, it is possible to be liberated from the creation without suffering. All we need to do is practise the method taught to us by the Master. In *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. IV, the Great Master states:

*The Kingdom of Sach Khand is within us, but it cannot be entered without knowing the proper way. We should go within. The way to do this is the practice of listening to the Shabd. It is only by this practice that we can obtain release from the mind and Maya, pain and pleasure, duality and birth and death.*

We know what to do and how to do it, so let's make the most of the incredible gift of Nam by pleasing our Master and achieving eternal freedom.



# Truth in a Nutshell

## Start with Yourself

*The following words were written on the tomb of an Anglican Bishop in the crypts of Westminster Abbey:*

When I was young and free and my imagination had no limits, I dreamed of changing the world. As I grew older and wiser, I discovered the world would not change, so I shortened my sights somewhat and decided to change only my country.

But it too seemed immovable.

As I grew into my twilight years, in one last desperate attempt, I settled for changing only my family, those closest to me, but alas, they would have none of it.

And now as I lie on my deathbed, I suddenly realize: If I had only changed myself first, then by example I would have changed my family.

From their inspiration and encouragement, I would then have been able to better my country and, who knows, I may have even changed the world.

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*Let us look to our own weaknesses and faults and try to remedy them....  
Let us be charitable in our views and tolerant in our behaviour.*

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Quest for Light*



# Happiness

“Thank God it’s Friday!” Isn’t it funny how much emphasis we put on the weekend? For most of us it’s the saving grace after a long hard week.

- Monday: The start of the working week. Ugh!
- Tuesday: Could the weekend be any further away?
- Wednesday: Halfway through, the countdown begins.
- Thursday: It’s nearly Friday, just one more day to go.
- Friday: We’re finally off to enjoy ourselves.

Of course, this is an exaggeration; not everyone struggles through the week, and not everyone enjoys the weekends. Most of us are so reactive that any number of reasons can get us down; it could be something as mundane as bad weather or something more serious such as poor health or family problems. This leaves me wondering: Must we resign ourselves to feeling glum – at least some of the time – or is it possible to be happy all the time?

Where does happiness come from? What is it that delivers happiness? Can we buy happiness or get it from a birthday or Christmas present? And why do we single out special occasions to be happy? Given that we feel able to nail happiness at these particular times, shouldn’t we feel able to do this every day? So many questions! Let’s take them one at a time, beginning with what is happiness?

Happiness is characterized by feelings of joy, satisfaction, contentment, and fulfilment and its key feature is that it comes from within. Biologically, we experience happiness each time our body releases one of three happiness hormones. For instance, our brain produces dopamine, and that makes us feel good about ourselves whenever we’ve achieved something. If we’re in pain, our body releases endorphins as a way of relieving our pain naturally and reducing high stress levels. Then there’s serotonin, known as the ‘happy chemical’. This regulates our mood and sense of well-being so that when our serotonin level is low, we’re more likely to be anxious and depressed. The point is that, even from a biological perspective, the key to happiness lies within.

Why then all the confusion about the nature of happiness? Well, we have our materialistic and outwardly focused mindset to thank for that. However, Sant Mat teaches us to focus internally so that gradually our meditative practice can detach us from the material world and help us realize our true nature as spiritual beings. Will this make us happy? How does meditation affect our infinite wants?

The shift from desiring external stimuli to emptying our minds doesn't match up with our (as yet) outwardly oriented nature. Nonetheless, with time, practice, patience and determination, our focus improves and, eventually, we'll not only realize our spiritual self but will unlock within ourselves an ocean of love for the Lord and his creation. By realizing that our true nature is Shabd and that Shabd is present in everything, our love naturally expands to encompass everything in the entire creation.

In *Light on Sant Mat*, Maharaj Charan Singh reminds us, "This physical body is a rare privilege and opportunity because the main object of life, which is self-realization, can be attained in this human body". This privilege, however, poses many challenges.

Learning to overcome the idea that fulfilling our hopes, desires, and expectations will make us complete is often a big challenge, but dealing with life's troubles, how to make ends meet, illness, losing a loved one and heartache – is also challenging. When confronted with such difficulties, we often lose our sense of equilibrium. Preoccupied by unhappiness or anxiety, our meditation shifts from being inward and upward to downwards and outward. Whenever we find ourselves in such a scenario, it's helpful to remind ourselves of three things: Our time in the present body is temporary; the issues troubling us are both temporary and inconsequential in the grand scheme of things and the source of true happiness lies within. To quote the Bible, *2 Corinthians*, "For what is seen is temporary; but the things which are not seen are eternal". In other words, instead of focusing on our troubles (for they will soon be gone), better to keep meditating because only this and the inner strength we develop with the Master's help is everlasting. In fact, the Bible includes numerous references to the love and support that the Creator provides, even during the difficult times when our happiness seems far away. The following are some examples:

1. Psalm 34 informs us: “The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart: and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.” Since the Lord resides within us, he is aware of our pain. If we continue to do everything the Master asks of us – irrespective of our pain – we will secure our liberation and become free of such pain. The important point is not to let our “broken heart” keep us from our meditation.
2. Joshua 1 advises us to: “Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.” Life can be full of challenges, sorrows, and tough decisions, but the Lord is with us constantly. We must not lose heart but submit to the Master’s will and continue meditating.
3. The Gospel of St. Matthew reassures us with these words: “Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.” Observing and practising the teachings of the Master, ensures that he will remain with us not only through our life but will meet us at death, and be with us throughout eternity. We will know true happiness, a true love that will last forever.

Without connecting with the Lord, we are missing a vital part of our existence – a happiness that will show us who we truly are. Seeking happiness without understanding this is challenging; so much so, we forgo our happiness for things that don’t even exist, i.e. the past and the future. All that matters is what action we take in the present moment. When asked to manage a complex task, don’t we try to break it down into bite-size chunks? For example, when we think about how much food the body needs in a year, do we think about eating it all at once? Thinking of the future in this way doesn’t make sense! No, we think about what we’ll cook this week and what food to buy. There’s no need to worry about the future to the extent that we currently do.

Regarding the past, how can we learn from it if we continue to make the same mistakes? So, how do we avoid losing our happiness to things that aren’t current? The key is staying present and not overwhelming ourselves with memories or future trials. Meditation is what grounds us

and keeps us present. Meditation need not feel burdensome. For example, we can get used to doing thirty minutes, forty-five minutes, then one hour, gradually increasing our time to the full two and a half hours. We can focus on the present and address the bite-size chunks in the short term, until they become second nature and easier to manage. Eventually two and a half hours will feel like second nature, a pleasurable break rather than an obligation we have to worry about cramming in to our busy day. Happiness is to be found by living in the moment, and we do this by doing our simran and bhajan – connecting with the divine.

So be happy, whatever the day of the week. Don't be glum; say goodbye to those weekday blues, because our meditation is bringing us to the realization that we are never alone. We can share a happiness, greater than anything we currently know, with our Master.

Christopher McCandless, an American adventurer, spent years being alone. When close to death, he thought of the moments most special to him and wrote, "Happiness is only real when shared". Our Master supports us on our journey through this life, so let's share our happiness with him; enjoy the mystery that each day offers us and see true happiness grow within, where we share it with our Master.



When you are happy within, you cannot help sharing happiness. If you go to a miserable person, he will make you miserable; if you go to a happy person, he will make you happy. And saints cannot help radiating happiness.

Maharaj Charan Singh Ji, *Spiritual Heritage*



# The Power of Habit

It is a fact of life that the majority of the human race are creatures of habit. Most of us wake up at the same time each day, get out of bed on the same side, put our clothes on in the same way – right sock first (or left), and so on. We usually eat the same food for breakfast, drink the same brand of tea or coffee and read the same newspaper.

So, when we first become interested in the path of the masters, habit is ready to be our ally. You see, the habit of habit, whether at work or at home, is everywhere.

Let's consider this in the context of the four principles:

First, we promise to be lifelong lacto-vegetarians, so that we incur as little karma as possible, through our food. Some of us may think, when faced with this proposition, that breaking the habit of eating what we like without thought, is too difficult. However, there is a wide choice of suitable ingredients to cook with, and plenty of vegetarian and vegan restaurant dishes to order. We simply need to develop the habit of checking the ingredients when we shop for food, and of asking the right questions in restaurants, so that we don't accidentally consume anything containing meat, fish, or eggs. As explained on the official Radha Soami Satsang Beas website: "A vegetarian diet encourages respect and empathy for all life and acknowledges that there is a debt to be paid for taking any life unnecessarily."

The second promise, to abstain from alcohol, tobacco, and recreational drugs improves our ability to concentrate during meditation and helps to calm our busy minds. Once again, habit offers the answer. When in social or work situations with others, we should habitually check that drinks offered to us don't contain alcohol. Another helpful habit, if pressed to drink alcohol, is to say "no thank you, I'd prefer something soft." Once these habits are ingrained in our everyday behaviour, we will barely need to think in such situations, but will act and speak out of habit, avoiding error or temptation.

The third promise is to lead a moral life, which includes earning our own living and, as Baba Ji frequently reminds us, to be a good person. Practicing kindness and compassion towards others pays us dividends

both mentally and socially; it smooths many of our interactions with people and helps us to tread more lightly through life.

Finally, the fourth promise, to meditate for two and a half hours every day from the date of our initiation until our death. So many of us seem to agonize over this but now habit truly becomes our friend. Having layered one habit upon another to keep the previous three vows, we have a strong foundation upon which to successfully build the essential habit of meditation. By living an honest, upright life, keeping a clear mind, not befuddled by alcohol or a heavy diet, it's easier to create the habit of getting to bed early, so that we have enough sleep, before rising for our meditation. As time goes on, it is habit (rather than our alarm) that wakes us up to sit.

Habit gives us the best chance of stilling the mind and focusing on our simran and bhajan. Hazur Maharaj Charan Singh tells us in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II:

*If you fix a particular time and place for your meditation – whether half the time you are doing your meditation and the other half you fall asleep – slowly and gradually you will get into the habit of sitting at that time, and you will not get sleepy. When you are so used to getting up at 3.30 or 4.00 in the morning, then however sleepy you may be, you will at once get up and won't sleep, because you have formed a habit of getting up at that particular time. So we should form a habit to sit in meditation and then there is no problem.*

When we attend to our meditation for the full time, every day, then we can truly understand that it is this powerful habit that will lead us to the achievement of our prime purpose in life – that of realizing the ocean of love, which is the Lord





# The Busy Guest House

Rumi's poem *The Guest House* compares our human body to a guest house and our emotions to unexpected guests. The poem encourages us to embrace all these visitors without judgement or resistance, acknowledging they have been sent by the Divine. In this busy guest house, every experience has a purpose and is of spiritual significance. We are learning to single-mindedly make the most of this great opportunity of having a human life – a chance to realize the true reality – that of our home with the Lord.

The poem reflects the Sufi philosophy and teachings, focusing on the spiritual journey and exploration of the inner way.

*This being human is a guest house,  
Every morning a new arrival.  
A joy, a depression, a meanness,  
some momentary awareness comes  
as an unexpected visitor.*

The poem sets the stage by describing the busy guest house of the human body, where every morning various experiences arrive bringing forth expected or unexpected emotional responses, much like guests arriving in our homes, sometimes expected and sometimes unexpected.

*Welcome and entertain them all!  
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,  
who violently sweep your house  
empty of its furniture,  
still, treat each guest honourably.  
He may be clearing you out  
for some new delight.*

Here, we are encouraged to welcome these experiences with openness and curiosity, they all bring a new opportunity to learn. Each of these guests should be received with open arms, regardless of whether they bring us joy or sorrow. Rather than resisting or denying those we don't like, we learn to embrace them all as God's will, treating them equally and gracefully, regardless of their nature.

The Sanskrit phrase '*Athiti Devo Bhava*' translates to "A guest is akin to God." The term represents the belief that every guest is not just a mere visitor but a manifestation of the divine. So, every life experience we have, and every emotion we go through, is coming from God. Acceptance is how we learn to live in His will, and this may be slow process, but gradually we learn to embrace all things with humility, compassion, and love.

Of course, on our journey to acceptance, we can still struggle with the concept of God's will, wondering why God would allow certain events to happen, or why we go through hardships. At these times we can remind ourselves that we cannot possibly understand God's will until we are able to see the bigger picture. Eventually, our approach begins to change, to the point where should life throw us a curve ball taking away everything that provides us with comfort and security, we may welcome even visitors such as these with honour and respect, understanding that the discomfort of such experiences serves a higher purpose. The divine is clearing out the clutter in our guest house for some new delight, and God, who is all-loving, knows what is best for us. These new delights further our connection with the Divine.

*The dark thought, the shame, the malice,  
meet them at the door laughing,  
and invite them in.*

Here Rumi advocates we greet negative emotions with laughter and acceptance; invite them in with laughter. Accept that they too are God's will. By accepting God's will, we surrender to whatever God sends and fully trust His divine plan. This trust allows us to see life objectively; we stop seeing these experiences as positive or negative. We appreciate His plan – that every moment has a purpose and is shaping our spiritual journey. As Baba Ji often reminds us – we are spiritual beings going through a human experience.

Rumi concludes:

*Be grateful for whoever comes,  
because each has been sent  
as a guide from beyond.*

The poem ends by encouraging us to cultivate gratitude for all we encounter. The divine is at work orchestrating every tiny detail of our life. In *Philosophy of the Masters (Abridged)* Rabia Basri says, “One should lose the faculty of distinction between the pleasure and pain that comes from the Lord and regard both of them as His gifts.”

Nurturing this attitude of welcoming these life experiences matures within us naturally; we relinquish our attachments and desires for specific outcomes as we learn to flow with the divine plan. Grace develops within us, imbuing an attitude of gratitude and acceptance, whereby we can recognize that all our experiences, whether positive or negative, contribute to our spiritual growth and fulfilment.



In merging, it is still separate. Being in it, you are separate from it. But you are not conscious of your consciousness. There, you just merge yourself. Even in worldly love, when you are with your beloved, you forget yourself completely and want to please only the beloved. You are so absorbed in the beloved that you do not even think about where you are or what you are, even in these physical or worldly emotions. The spiritual is much more fascinating, absorbing; it is much more sublime, nobler. The bliss of merging into the supreme being cannot be expressed in mortal language. There is no thought of individuality, consciousness, or anything else. It is all love, all bliss, for in merging we become the supreme being, and he is all, he is everything.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol 1



# The Final Word

## Embrace Life and Avoid the Gravediggers

On our journey through life, if we weigh ourselves down with a cargo of stones, we will be unable to reach our destination. If, like the mystics, we accumulate no cargo, then the winds of God's love in the form of the Shabd will power our ship. To make the journey, we need enthusiasm, fortitude and stamina. There will be many occasions when we will fail. The Roman emperor, Marcus Aurelius, advises us to think positively; to rejoice that we are on a healing, restorative path of positive action, rather than getting caught up in our failings. He says:

*Do not feel qualms or despondency or discomfiture if thou dost not invariably succeed in acting from right principles; but when thou art foiled, come back to them, and rejoice if on the whole thy conduct is worthy of a man, and love the course to which thou returnest.*

He also advises us to cultivate an approach to life where we see everything afresh every day, as a new opportunity to be true to ourselves:

*A new life lies within your grasp. You have only to see things once more in the light of your first and earlier vision, and life begins anew.*

It is because we carry around with us the baggage of our negative mental habits that we lose heart, lose courage and judge ourselves. We won't let go of them and we even seem to enjoy the misery they bring. Such emotions will take us nowhere. Jesus advised his disciples to be as little children; when we are young we see life with open hearts and minds. Baltasar Gracian warns us against a tendency towards sadness and self-pity, pointing out that such tendencies may ultimately prove to be our downfall:

*Search for the good in everything. There is nothing that does not hold some good if we but seek it. But the minds of some men are burdened with such unhappiness that, out of a thousand good points, they manage to strike upon a lone defect, and this they toss about like scavengers of men's minds and purposes. There is in it a perverse joy so that they can feel superior.*

*Avoid such grave diggers, for in time it is they who fall into the hollow opening. Be the man who, among a thousand evils, strikes upon the single good. Good finds good, but good that comes too late is as good as nothing.*

While it is good to be self-aware, judging ourselves too harshly is dangerous and counter-productive. With the same spirit and tolerance that we show to others, we need to be compassionate and charitable towards ourselves, too....

Our task is to bring our lives in harmony with our spiritual goal but, for this, we have to be patient. A child matures from infancy through childhood and adolescence into adulthood; likewise, for our long-term good, we need to be balanced and permit our development to take place naturally. If we strive to reach our goal by simply suppressing habitual negative tendencies, there will certainly be a reaction at some future date.

Suppression and repression are not the answer. The process of putting our lives in order and transforming ourselves spiritually has to be seen as a lifelong, steady evolution towards our goal.

*Honest Living*



# BOOK REVIEW

## Sheikh Fakhreddin Eraqi (Selected Works): The Face in Every Rose

BY VRAJE ABRAMIAN

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During his lifetime Sheikh Fakhreddin Eraqi (1231–1308 CE) became one of the best known and most popular of the Persian Sufi mystical poets, and today his writings continue to be highly revered among Sufis from every part of the Muslim world. He was the head of the Sohrawardi Sufi Order in Multan (in present-day Pakistan). Yet he also had close associations with the wildly ecstatic Qalandars, with Rumi, and with the nephew and successor of Ibn Arabi. Thus, within Sufi literature Eraqi occupies a unique position, bridging several distinct Sufi traditions.

This small book presents poems translated from an edition of Eraqi's complete works in Persian edited by Dr. Mohtasham Khazai. (At the end of the book references are given by line number showing where each poem appears in this vast corpus.) Vraje Abramian selected verses which "could be rendered into concise, flowing English," avoiding those where the original Persian was complex or layered with obscure references which would only confuse English-speaking readers. As he explains, the poems presented here are renditions, not translations. "The word rendition, rather than translation, underlines the focus on the message, rather than an English reproduction of the Persian meter, rhyme, alliteration, or tone – if such an idea be deemed possible at all."

He notes that the overriding theme throughout Eraqi's poetry is "message of the Sacred Oneness of Being, a doctrine that esoteric Islam, or Sufism, has promoted throughout its history." Eraqi expresses this truth:

*In all creation there is no being  
other than his Being  
All else great or small  
borrow their being from his*

All that seems to be something other than that One is only a reflection of that One. In Eraqi's poetry, the One is addressed as the divine Beloved:

*This world is your mirror –  
in it your face is reflecting everywhere  
Beloved, it is your beauty  
that has turned this world into a garden  
Joyous is the heart of the one  
who, knowing this, beholds this world  
One who can truly see  
beholds none other than your face  
on every rose petal in every rose*

Eraqi tells his reader repeatedly that the only obstacle between Eraqi and that beloved One is  
Eraqi, his ego or identity.

*I would gaze at Your adorable Face  
if Eraqi were not blocking my inner light*

We will one day realize that this oneness is and has always been ours  
whether we knew it or not:

*All day I praised You  
and knew it not  
All night I rested in Your arms  
and knew it not  
I had thought that I was me  
I was nothing but You  
and knew it not.*

*When this world  
had not yet a name  
in that state where  
the Singer and the song were one  
I was drunk on that Wine  
Whose cup is this world*

Most of the poems in this book are ghazals, a form of Persian verse frequently used in Sufi poetry. Abramian has divided these ghazals thematically into three sections under the titles “The Beloved,” “The Master,” and “The Human.”

In “The Beloved” we read:

*To the sorrow stricken  
He is release  
To the forlorn and lonely  
He brings peace  
In both worlds  
whatever you think other than him  
know it to be none other than him*

Eraqi often depicts the divine Beloved behind the “curtain” or “veil” of the visible world:

*Behind the curtain I have a Friend  
the light of Whose face  
upholds this domain of veils and curtains...  
Whatever in both worlds seems pleasing to you  
know it to be Me veiled by this curtain*

In “The Master” we read how the Master rends veils:

*From behind the veil  
the Cup Bearer appeared in our midst  
and rending all veils  
and throwing to the wind all caution  
swept away all vows and pretensions  
When the Beauteous Face revealed Itself  
all restraint vanished and I drowned in Love*

The poet speaks of the very human need to take refuge with someone:

*Other than You  
where is there someone  
whom I can trust?  
Who can hear my cries?  
Good or bad, we are all yours  
Pray, do not send us anywhere else  
I am here to find shelter at your feet  
and for a breath escape Eraqi’s company*

In “The Human” Eraqi reveals his flaws and struggles:



*My complaints are many  
but they are not of the Friend  
but of me  
this trickster of an enemy full of treachery  
With the Friend  
I am ever in harmony  
It is with me  
that I cannot get along  
All my complaints are of Eraqi  
who has not learned to rule his senses*

Yet, as a human, he can “polish” his heart till it reflects “the glories of the inner world”:

*Your heart is the mirror of the Unseen –  
polish it so in it you may understand  
the secrets of this world of matter  
and behold the glories of the inner world  
Like a pool of water which at night  
reflects the moon and the stars  
but when the day arrives and the sun rises  
it witnesses all else vanish in its light*

The final section of the book is devoted to selections from Eraqi’s Divine Flashes (Lama’at). In this work Eraqi mixes prose and poetry. For example:

*Often the Beloved grants separation and distances the lover so he may  
take refuge in Love. It is for the lover to prefer what the Friend prefers,  
be it the agony of separation.*

*Whether You grant union or separation  
it is your wish  
for your Love suffices for me  
and releases me from both*



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