

January 2011

# Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

# contents

- 2 Dear Soul
- 4 The Broken Straw
- 8 Much Ado About Nothing
- 9 Embrace the Struggle
- 14 The Most Useful of Servants
- 16 Name, the Guru's Grace
- 19 Love
- 20 One Plus One Equals One
- 22 A Divine Invitation
- 28 Life Is But a Dream
- 30 Mystical Space
- 34 Lighten Up
- 41 The Time Is Now
- 42 How Much Is Enough?
- 48 Book Review

## **Spiritual Link**

Science of the Soul Research Centre  
Guru Ravi Dass Marg, Pusa Road, New Delhi-110005, India  
Copyright © 2011 Science of the Soul Research Centre®

Articles and poems that appear without sources have been written by the contributors to this magazine.

**VOLUME 7 • ISSUE ONE • JANUARY 2011**

# Dear Soul

*I know, dear soul, that you have been in distress –  
in distress ever since you forgot Shabd  
and made friends with the mind.*

*This fool, the mind, tied you down to the body  
and charmed you with sensual pleasures....*

*This time therefore you should remember God  
and go home,*

*or you will continue wandering  
through the four forms of life.*

*Attend satsang, seek your true destination  
and lose yourself in your Master's love.*

*The Master will help you find  
the jewel of Nam within yourself  
and retrace your way  
through the inner skies.*

*Just do this now, in this very life,  
and the Master will take care of the rest.*

*Act on Radha Soami's advice  
to end your pains  
and find your way to peace.*

Sar Bachan Poetry





# The Broken Straw

Soami Ji Maharaj relates the following story:

*Some people say to a Satguru, “Here I break a piece of straw. If you are a perfect Satguru, make it whole again.” The Satguru replies; “Ask him whom you believe to be Brahm to make whole the broken straw. If he makes it whole, I too shall do it.”*

*Sar Bachan Prose*

The saints never allow themselves to be drawn into trivial discussions or proofs of the existence of God with insincere people. Christ demonstrates the same thing. When asked by Pontius Pilate “What is truth?” he offers no reply (Bible, John 18:38).

Soami Ji, in *Sar Bachan Prose*, goes on to explain the real miracle that is performed by a perfect Master. He says:

*But if anyone loves the Satguru and believes in him, he will be brought back to life and the broken straw of his life will also be made whole.*

Only the Master has the ability to accomplish this miracle: the mending of the broken connection between the soul and God. This is the only miracle worthy of the name. By comparison with this, so-called miracles that overpower the laws of nature are trivial. Miracles may excite the curiosity of the mind, but they do nothing to make the soul whole. They do nothing to solve the central problem of life, which is to reunite the soul with its source. Our main problem is to remove whatever stands between us and God. This is the work of which

Maharaj Sawan Singh writes: “This done, all is done; this not done, all else done is as if nothing is done” (*Spiritual Gems*). This is the only work that gives us permanent satisfaction.

What then is it that stands between us and God? One is tempted to be glib and say, “we do”, and this would be quite right. Masters who have won their freedom from the net of the material creation have all said that it is our desires for the illusions of this creation that imprison us. This was the second of the four Noble Truths of the Buddha (*The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*). Christ says the same thing: “No man can serve two masters” (Bible, Matthew 6:24).

It is a certain fact that one cannot travel in two directions at the same time, and yet this is what we are attempting to do until we wholeheartedly apply ourselves to solving the problem of our scattered mind and desires. We are hoping to reap the benefits of spiritual life while maintaining a covert allegiance to the world. This can never give us what we really want. Spirituality is like any other endeavour: We will get out of it what we put into it. If our effort is shallow and intermittent, we will receive shallow and intermittent results. We cannot just forcibly detach ourselves from our involvement in physical life.

Sincerity, and how that sincerity is compromised by our deep-seated desires for worldly gratification, becomes the issue.

All God-realized masters and saints have said that our ego is the chief obstacle to enlightenment. Ego is that which blinds us to the wonders of God and traps us in a self-created prison cell. Ego is the seductive voice that tells us that in separation from God we will find happiness and come to the fullness of our powers. Ego is the noise that fills our ears even as we try to attune ourselves to the Word of God.

How is it possible to overcome a foe that seems so central to our identity? The fact is that it is impossible for us to overcome the affliction of ego without the grace of the true Guru. We are adrift in the

fearsome sea of the material creation, far from our real home. Our typical means of surviving the waves and tides of that immensity is to cling to the life-ring of the ego or sense of self. It is beyond our ability to voluntarily give up our grip on that life-ring. We can only release that grip when we find something surer to replace it. The Master comes into this world as the embodiment of that surer reality. From his unshakeable anchorage in the permanent, he offers a firm hand of support to the imperilled soul. He brings illumination and indicates a way of escape. Through his unique power, he activates a dormant capacity within the soul to rise up and cast off the shackles of the mind.

There are certain seeds that may remain seemingly inert for centuries, and yet when exposed to the vivifying elements of heat and moisture, they awaken and begin to grow. So it is with the slumbering soul when it is sparked into wakefulness by the power of the Guru. It awakens and seeks the Father whom it has forgotten.

As the “force that through the green fuse drives the flower” (*The Poems of Dylan Thomas*) causes the manifestation of life in this creation, so this life-giving impulse from the Master begins the manifestation of a new inner life for a disciple. This inner renewal is characterized by a slow but profound reorientation of consciousness, from a preoccupation with the outer world to a growing awareness of an inner reality. Like the flower turning slowly to face the sun, the face of the disciple gradually turns inward, towards the source of this light that is within. Thus does the miracle of bhakti, or devotion, appear within the embodied soul.

This bhakti is the natural magnetic attraction of the soul towards its home. Just as the unbound iron filing must fly to the magnet, so must the soul fly to its source if it is freed from the ties that bind it. It is this reunification of the fragment with the whole that is the mission of the

saints. The object of Surat Shabd Yoga is to fuse the limited individual awareness or surat with the power of the Shabd or Word of God.

This fusion is no mere metaphor but is, in fact, the most profound experience for the disciple. To give an analogy: In this world, arc-welding is a process whereby an arc of high-voltage electricity is used to permanently fuse two pieces of the same type of metal into one whole. There can be no impurities or gaps in the welded seam. In like manner, the spiritual path is a process whereby the impurities in the disciple are burned away, so that this perfect fusion can occur. Thus does the disciple once and forever give up lesser identifications to become one with the imperishable reality.

Maharaj Charan Singh frequently declared, “Love means losing your identity to become another being” (*Legacy of Love*). Through the application of the divine spark conveyed by the Master, the attention of the disciple is fused with the Word of God within and thus transformed into a divine being fit to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. In this way, the broken straw of life is made whole.



# Much Ado About Nothing

Time is marching on and still we are pretending to be somebody.  
“Be bold enough to struggle,” he said.  
‘Nobody son of nobody’ is not a poetic idea. It is the only Reality.  
Not the ‘reality’ of Reality TV.

The ideal of being a ‘nobody’ is a finger pointing beyond  
the illusion of being a somebody –  
the banner of the Visitors to a Foreign Land.

It’s time to get serious about being a nobody  
or we’ll end up becoming a real somebody,  
and that would be the grandfather of all catastrophes –  
Forever doomed to ‘many happy returns.’

‘Do you understand Spirituality?’ he asked.  
It is freedom from everything, including our crystallization of  
‘nothing.’  
So, be confused, confounded and strongly rudderless.  
Out! Out of here!  
Through this perfect everywhere.  
Gone!



# Embrace the Struggle

Maharaj Charan Singh was asked a question regarding the actual set amount of simran that an individual must do in his life. This was his answer:

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

*Die to Live*

Baba Ji was asked a question about ending this struggle and returning to our divine home. He was asked why the Lord doesn't just take us in sooner rather than later, since this will happen eventually. He replied by saying something like he wished that it were so simple, but in time we will see that there is value in the struggle.

What could this mean? It seems that he is suggesting that we should embrace the struggle. Yet it is often so hard to grasp the value of struggle. Saints tell us that only in a human birth can we make true progress on our return home. Our daily effort is an ongoing investment into this return home. If we could truly see the potential at our fingertips we might respond differently to the challenge. It's much like the experience of driving around the town we grew up in and seeing a big development on property that we could have purchased for next to nothing when we were younger. It seems so obvious in hindsight. But that is exactly the message regarding this human birth. We are

guaranteed a huge return on our investment if we take some of today's precious time and invest in the struggle before us.

Every great achievement has been accomplished by those who have accepted their struggle. The greatest athlete creates his winning ability by getting up every morning when no one is around to notice and pushing himself to the brink of his own limit. Then he repeats the task day after day as he slowly improves. With no guarantee of success, he puts on a pure demonstration of his ability to keep the struggle alive.

Or take the artist. We see the final painting and we think how talented the artist is. But there are very few artists who just paint a painting. A true artist keeps refining his work as he reaches for perfection. No one else may ever know what struggles he has had to resolve in the final work. His eye, his intent, his spirit cannot find satisfaction with his effort until the final piece reaches a goal that is personal to his pursuit of perfection.

When the question arises as to why the Master doesn't just take us up now, the answer given most often is that we are not yet ready. Perhaps the answer is that when we are ready, we will accept all that we encounter as his gift. And through this acceptance, we will understand that every effort we endure is a step closer in our return to the One. It is as simple a lesson as the one learned by Dorothy, the leading character in the movie *The Wizard of Oz*. Through all of her struggles, all she wanted was to go home to Kansas. When she finally reached the end of her journey, it turned out that all she had to do was click her heels together and home she went. She could have clicked her heels together any time and returned to Kansas, but that's not the way it worked. Only when she was ready, and when she had endured the challenges she encountered, did she become aware that she already possessed the means to go home. We are working with the same set of rules.

When we are ready, we will surrender and click our heels together, and Master will bring us home.

In Sant Mat we are dealing with an individual relationship between ourselves and our Creator. He has made us as we are. He has set this whole production up to benefit our growth while he nudges us forward. We are all putting in effort to increase our understanding, our love and our devotion. We are all being our best and doing our best today, right now. This is not about some future arrival into a reality of bliss. This is about who we are now. We are not here as a result of our failures or our successes; instead, we are here in his perfect timing and we will progress by his grace.

Masters have often emphasized that there are really just two things that we are responsible for: our effort and our attitude. They have asked that we put in our effort and trust our Creator regarding results. This is where a positive attitude is so important. It is up to us to abandon any preconceived ideas regarding results. We can simply practise seeing every event in life as an opportunity to trust in his plan and, therefore, believe in the necessity for things to work out as they will. This is the essence of a positive attitude. This is all his work.

Maharaj Charan Singh used to take great care in answering the same basic questions a thousand times in order to help us grasp the spiritual process we are in. He demonstrated his love and patience over and over and reached out to each questioner with a detailed answer that, if taken literally, would preclude any further thought on the question asked. This was wonderful. It was great that we had this information to feed our intellect and encourage our quest from within. But even this has its limits.

Our present Master has drawn a line in the sand and asked us to step across. He has asked us to quit analyzing these teachings and instead just live them. He has asked us to quit conceptualizing what



love is and to take steps, through our meditation, that will help us to be in love. As our guide, he reaches out his hand to us and asks us to take action towards our objective. He asks us to trust in our purpose and believe in this journey. He does not point to a future arrival that will some day satisfy our needs; instead, he emphasizes the present moment.

In meditation, we are simply asked to be ourselves and to commune with our Master within, beyond thought, beyond intellectual perception. That's all. This is an act of trust. Slowly detachment will come in its own time. Embrace the struggle. He knows what he is doing. This is why he smiles when he says to just let go and trust in the plan. If we only knew what he knows, we would laugh at ourselves for wasting time worrying about and questioning this destiny.

Let's surrender to the struggle, click our heels together and go home.



*My Beloved, this torture and pain  
I suffer because I am so addicted to Your Beauty.  
People ask me whether I prefer Your  
company to being in heaven.  
Heedless fools, what would heaven itself mean  
Without the Friend's Presence.*

*Nobody, Son of Nobody, rendition by Vraje Abramian*

# The Most Useful of Servants

Those aspects of our mind that are easily dissatisfied, restless, discouraged, fearful or brittle seem to reappear despite our best intentions. The saints, however, assure us that there is hope with the double-edged sword of the mind. Maharaj Charan Singh says this:

*Mind is the deadliest of foes, but the most useful of servants. When it turns wild and gets out of control, it heads for certain destruction. When properly awakened and controlled, there is no limit to what the mind can do.*

*Die to Live*

So how exactly are we to encourage the mind to become our “most useful of servants”? In *Sar Bachan Prose*, the restless and agitated mind is compared to an elephant in rut on a rampage of destruction, trampling everything in sight. Soami Ji Maharaj writes:

*The mind, intoxicated by the passions, as it is, can be controlled only by a person who has sincere longing to see the Lord. An elephant in rut roams about unrestrained in the forest and nobody can stop it. But under the goad of the elephant driver, the same mad elephant is tamed and used by the king for riding and thenceforth lives in comfort. Likewise, only the gurmukhs (those who are guided by the Guru) will be admitted to the mansion of the Lord.*

Being guided by the Guru seems simple to understand; but it will take most of us a lifetime of effort to accept that guidance. The work begins with obedience.

*Leaving everything else aside, one must implicitly obey the Satguru of his own time, and faithfully follow his instructions. This will lead him to success. This is the long and short of everything.*

Sar Bachan Prose

And the instructions of all the spiritual teachers on this path are clear: do simran and bhajan, follow the vows, try your best. However, we can't stop the wild and uncontrolled mind by ourselves, but we know someone who can help us. We are invited to take refuge with the Master.

*This world of sunshine and darkness can be crossed only by taking refuge in the company of the saints and carrying out their directions with love, faith and devotion. It is only when we give up the frail boat of the mind and step on to the seaworthy ship of the living Master that we can safely reach the shore of light, love and wisdom.*

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *Spiritual Discourses*, Vol. I

The mind has no power in comparison with the power of the Master. Following his instructions, accepting his protection, and taking refuge with his loving kindness, the mind will become what Maharaj Charan Singh has promised it will be: "the most useful of servants."



# Name, the Guru's Grace

There is but one God;  
true is his Name....  
He is realized through the Guru's grace.

*Jap Ji: A Perspective*

These three lines from the Mool Mantra of Guru Nanak's *Jap Ji* express the essence of the teachings of the Gurus, which offer the promise of realization of the Lord's Name through the Guru's grace. A more beautiful and concise statement of the gift that all satsangis have been given is hard to imagine.

The first line, "There is but one God", is a concept that doesn't pose much of a problem for most people. However, while many millions of people embrace this concept, each has a slightly different image of who God is and how he interacts with his creation. We give God a gender and a place in our family. We give him human attributes and call him by countless names. A problem arises when we try to realize who God is and experience him directly. We might say we have a strong belief in God, but is our belief based upon a concept or a thought that we are very attached to? Sometimes our beliefs have no basis in reality. Our romantic notions of God probably don't help us very much. The saints say it is impossible to contact God directly.

This leads us to the second line, "true is his Name", a very interesting statement. What is Guru Nanak trying to tell us? He is certainly not referring to God's spoken name. His spoken names are countless. While spoken names might inspire devotion in us, no spoken name could be God's true Name. To be true, a name would have to be timeless and changeless. It would have to be unborn and deathless. Only

God himself has these attributes. This indicates that the Name is an expression of God himself. The Name is, in fact, none other than God. The saints teach us that, although God cannot be realized directly, his Name can be realized. To realize his Name is to realize God.

As Sant Namdev has so eloquently expressed:

*The Lord's Name is his form, his form is his Name –  
His Name is not apart from his form.  
The formless One has taken the form of the Name  
And within Namdev he has made his abode.*

*Saint Namdev*

The saints have written volumes extolling the glory of the Name. So many saints have spent their lives tirelessly working trying to encourage us to take advantage of this great gift they have given us.

This brings us to the last line: “He is realized through the Guru’s grace.” This is such a beautiful and meaningful statement. It goes directly to the heart of our quest. Having been given the treasure of initiation by the Satguru, the Name is realized through his grace. Satguru’s grace is given through the process of meditation. How does this happen?

When we first see the Guru, we might have a feeling of warmth and friendship, or awe and mystery. When we recall his image, there are feelings and emotions that are attached to that image. If the Guru should give us the gift of darshan, we might have a glimpse of his divinity and love and have a deeper recognition of his Name. Now, when we recall the Guru’s form in dhyān during meditation, that same feeling arises with the form. For us, this is now the Guru’s Name. Contemplating on his form and Name deepens our concentration. It holds our attention. As we progress, the Guru will give us the vision of

his Radiant Form and the accompanying Name. The Name at this level brings bliss and unwavering devotion and concentration.

All along the way, it is our practice to focus on the Guru's Name and form. Though the Guru's physical form may grow old and leave us, his Name, his essence, is true and timeless. Repetition of the names given to us by the Guru, over time, brings the recognition of the true Name by the grace of the Guru. Our meditation, which consists of our bhajan and simran, will accomplish this.

Guru Nanak says:

*Meditate on the true Name  
And reflect on his greatness.*

*Jap Ji: A Perspective*

The Guru is our only salvation. Let us keep him in our mind throughout the day and “reflect on his greatness”. Let his presence be always felt. Let us always keep his Name in our hearts. There is no other way. Contemplation of the Guru will save us from the suffering of rebirth and bring us the bliss of his Name.

Sometimes we may not appreciate the great gift we have been given, but with practice we may obtain the treasure within and awaken to realize that the Guru is true. He is real and it is only by his grace that the Lord will be realized.

All he asks is that we adhere to the principles and give full time to our meditation. So little to ask, so much to gain. The treasure is ours. All we have to do is receive it. The Guru's grace is raining down upon our heads. Let us have confidence that it is always there. Let us turn our attention toward it.



# Love

*Loving everybody means loving the One who is in everybody, but not being attached to any particular person. And we can only love that One after we have merged our identity into his. Through meditation, by his grace, we become perfect and pure so that we can merge into the perfect and pure One.... If love is there, it is there. If it comes, it just comes. But by meditation everybody can grow that love.... Everybody can grow that feeling, that love, that intensity, by meditation.*

*Die to Live*



*Whoever is initiated by a Master comes under his complete protection. Gradually, the idea takes root in the mind of such a disciple that God pervades everything and there exists nothing without him.*

J. R. Puri and K. S. Khak, *Sultan Bahu*

# One Plus One Equals One

One plus one does not equal one; everybody knows that. We have known that since kindergarten arithmetic class. If we take one rock and add another rock, we have two rocks. If we invite one person to our house and then invite another person, we have two guests.

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

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

Every minute we remember our Master, we are struggling to pay attention to that level of consciousness where one plus one equals one. We are struggling to detach our attention from the world of duality

where there are inescapable differences, where one plus one equals two. By following the vows and learning how to deepen our meditation, we approach true unity for all time.

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



*The present moment is the most valuable thing there is. Nothing happens tomorrow, nothing happens yesterday, everything always happens now. In fact, the 'now' is the only time there is. It is impossible for us to do or to think something outside the present moment. When we remember, it is always in the now. When we think about the future, it is always in the now. When the future catches up, it is always in the present moment.*

*Living Meditation*

# A Divine Invitation

Hakim Sanai, an early Sufi poet, says:

*Whoever is caught up in the bonds of this world stands only to gain if he flees its might; for this world is the source of pain and sorrow: the wise have called it a transit camp.... It is surely the height of folly for you to linger on this bridge.*

*The Walled Garden Of Truth – Hakim Sanai, translated by D. L. Pendlebury*

This is a very good description of the situation of satsangis and seekers alike: we are on a “bridge” between two worlds. Through the grace of the Lord we have, in spirit at least, left the material world. Sometimes we are confused and bewildered, many times we only see obstacles, but our heart wants more than anything to move forward. We are tired of our part in this play and want to go home. The Lord is moved by our plight and our real longing, and sends the Master, the Satguru, with his divine invitation to come back to his court. Hafiz says:

*You have been invited to meet  
The Friend.  
No one can resist a Divine Invitation.  
That narrows down all our choices  
To just two:  
We can come to God*

*Dressed for Dancing,  
Or  
Be carried on a stretcher  
To God's Ward.*

*I Heard God Laughing:  
Renderings of Hafiz,  
Daniel Ladinsky*

You see, when the Master asks us to come to his court, we cannot refuse – we must go. Maharaj Charan Singh used to jokingly say something similar. To paraphrase: When God calls, you can go willingly or be dragged by a bulldozer.

The point the saints are making here is that we only get that invitation when God wants us back, which means that in our soul we are ready to go back whether we think so or not. Think about all the satsangs that the Master has given, think about all the poetry and *bachans* (teachings) of the saints – aren't they always just an invitation for us to leave this place and return home? Isn't that the most singular message of the saints? So once we receive that invitation, isn't it the height of folly to linger here?

Rumi almost commands us to leave here, to move on:

*Lovers of truth – rise up!  
Let us go toward heaven.  
We have seen enough of this world,  
It's time to see another...*

*Rumi – In the Arms of the Beloved,  
translated by Jonathon Star*

Soami Ji Maharaj, in a similar way, also exhorts us to leave here:

*My mind, abandon this abode of pleasure and pain,  
rise above it and attach yourself to Satnam, the true Lord.*

*Sar Bachan Poetry*

He goes on to explain to us why we should abandon this place and tells us of one of the great obstacles in our way. He says:

*Your stay in this body is short-lived,  
it is a city you will have to abandon one day.  
Neither your wealth, nor your wife,  
nor your children and grandchildren  
will be of help to you then.*

How easy it is to forget that we too must die. We see or hear about death all around us, but we don't want to believe that it will happen to us. The obstacle that he is referring to is our attachment to the people and things of this world.

In another poem Soami Ji refers to the attachment to wife, children, grandchildren and our own bodies as a four-stranded cord that can expand into five, six, seven, or more strands that tether us to a stake. He is not saying that we should not love our wife, children, grandchildren, etc.; love is very different from attachment. Love, as saints define it, is giving compassion and understanding, without expectations of anything in return. Attachment is always taking or having expectations. The saints say that to put our faith in a relationship built on attachment is foolish. These relationships are only for a short time; they will not last, and when we die none will go with us. Maharaj Sawan Singh, the Great Master, says the following about attachments:



*Do not give to the world and the people of the world a value equal to that of your own ideal. Wherever your desire is, there must your residence be. Because our love is all for this world, that is the very reason why we must come back into this world again and again. But if we give our love to the Lord, we attain salvation. The Lord and the world are in the scales, and that side to which you give your love will go down (outweigh the other). The world is to be dissolved and her people also. When the gurmukh detaches his love from this world and its people, and has taken the path from the Master, he should give his love to the Lord. If we give to him our true love, then no one can ever bring us back into this world.*

*Spiritual Gems*

Besides attachment to family, another cord of attachment that tethers us to this world is the attachment to our own body and personality. Now we are so attached to the body that we have forgotten all about death. If we really did understand that we are drowning in the ocean of this world, and if we realized it is the Master that throws us a lifeline, then truly we would hang on to it for dear life. The Master has thrown us a lifeline, which is the path of Sant Mat. This lifeline is the rope of Shabd, which comes from its source in the Lord through the hands of the Master. When we grasp on to this lifeline, slowly but surely the Master pulls us out of the current of this world back to his arms.

Our problem is that we don't believe that we are drowning, so we can hardly realize that someone is saving us. One reason for this is the fact that we believe we have the luxury of time. So the saints are constantly trying to shake us out of this lethargy and urging us to take

action now. Maharaj Charan Singh interprets John 4:35 in the Bible by saying:

*When you have raised your consciousness to the eye centre, you have, as it were, the crop of your meditation ripe and ready for harvesting, and you can begin to gather it. He [Christ] says: The Lord is always waiting for you there.... waiting to pull you to your own destination, your eternal home of peace and bliss.... Do not put off your meditation on one excuse or another.... The harvest is ready for you; the Lord is waiting for you there.*

*Light on Saint John*

How do we overcome these obstacles that our attachments present? How do we break free from these attachments that hold us so firmly to this earth? The answer of course is to have faith in the Master and our meditation. This is no simple matter, but it is the only remedy. Ultimately, we must surrender the ego entirely. So don't hesitate, "don't linger on this bridge". Grab hold of the Master; he is patiently waiting. Once again, Soami Ji sums up all of these thoughts and words so beautifully:

*Love your Master  
as a lover adores his sweetheart.  
Stay in his company with a heart filled with longing  
and hold on to his feet with all your mind.  
Be open with him – no cunning or deceit –  
and try to grasp his message.*

*Sar Bachan Poetry*



# Life Is But a Dream

In meditation, thoughts will always come and flit around in their undisciplined silly ways. As soon as we are aware of our shift in attention, we gently bring it back into focus, back into simran. We all know what it is like to have our attention wander. Between one word of simran and the next, a thought intrudes, or a whole train of thoughts, or a sound causes our attention to leap in its direction. We gently bring our attention back to simran, simran, simran.

There is a childhood song we may remember called, “Row, Row, Row Your Boat”.

*Row, row, row your boat  
Gently down the stream,  
Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily,  
Life is but a dream.*

There may have been a lot more wisdom, especially spiritual wisdom, in that song than we ever suspected when we sang it as a kid. It advises us to “row, row, row your boat” – no one else can do it for us. Don’t just sit in the boat and do nothing. Take action, take control and steer, and keep on rowing, keep on going. Keep on repeating those names – simran, simran, simran.

Then the song specifically advises us how to do that: “gently”. That’s the same message Baba Ji gives us when he advises us to just relax and do it. Don’t fight it, do it gently, joyfully, relishing each name.

The song further advises us in which direction we should go: Go down the stream, go with the flow, without resistance. Never try to

row up the stream. And when we do this we discover that “life is but a dream.”

So it seems that ever since we were kids, there were hints that this world is only an illusion, only a dream and not real.



*You will get the feeling that you are nothing, when you merge in the love of the Master. You are not mentally nor symbolically to feel that you are nothing, or, “I am nothing,” nor to feel that you are everything. You will just forget what you are. When you absolutely blend yourself into the love of another person, then you forget what you are. Then you know you are nothing. Everything is ‘he’ or ‘she’. Similarly, we have to forget by meditation that we are anything and know that everything is the Master. That will only be, as I have just explained, when we drive our ego out of us by meditation.*

Maharaj Charan Singh, *The Master Answers*

# Mystical Space

There are many ways of looking at the world around us. We all have different perspectives, according to our individual needs, habits, education, culture, social background, temperament, talents, and so on. Essentially, however, as human beings, we are all put together in the same way. At the bodily level, we share the same senses, and so presumably we all perceive things in a similar manner. What gives us a different take on things is our individual minds. Such is human life, and it need not be a problem. Difficulties only arise when we take our perspective to be real, and the perspective of others to be somewhat less than real. But is any of it real anyway, even our own perspective? Does the world itself have any reality?

In modern – as in ancient – times, one of the prevailing world views is that the universe consists of nothing more than material substance, of no more than what we can perceive with our five senses. Good old solid matter. Or is it? Until around one hundred years ago, the idea of the indestructibility of matter held firm. But the advent of physicists like Ernest Rutherford, Niels Bohr and many others brought laboratory proof that far from being solid, matter is mostly comprised of empty space. Further research has led to the realization that the only reason we don't fall through the floor under the influence of gravity is due to electromagnetic forces between and within atoms.

Encouraged by these discoveries, enthusiastic scientists have subjected atoms and subatomic particles to increasingly higher energies, breaking them into ever smaller fragments, with the net result that after one hundred years of study, they have realized that so-called matter is nothing more than a dance of tiny particles. And if you

apply enough energy, you can generally break these particles into even smaller ones. Someone called it the 'particle zoo'.

The question is, from a mystical as well as a scientific perspective, what are these particles made of? And more than that, what keeps them endlessly zooming about? To cut a long story short, the scientists' conclusion is that these particles are not little solid blobs of something at all. They are nothing more than vortices or tiny pumps of energy spinning or pumping energy out of pure space. They have properties such as mass and electrical charge, which give us the illusion of something substantial. But actually, they are just patterns or points of energy in space. So the question then becomes, what is space? And the answer seems to be that far from being empty, space itself is pure energy in potential, ready to be whipped up into the particles and atoms that go on to give us the illusion of good old solid matter. Space, by the way, is an aspect of the fifth element – ether, or *akash*, in Indian terminology.

The physical universe is thus no more than a dance of energy spun out of the space that defines it. It is all a magic show. Mystics have called the world an illusion, *maya* in Indian terminology, and it seems that the scientists have verified this at a deeply fundamental level. What they have as yet been unable to determine is the source of the energy that keeps it going; for an integral aspect of this energy dance is its motion, which never seems to diminish or stop. Mystics, on the other hand, have no difficulty in identifying the source of energy. The divine source, they say, has created everything by means of a creative power. They have called it sound, word, voice, music and a multitude of other names. It is a dynamic vibration that "rolls and flows through all things"; it is the power of God in creative action. It is also consciousness and intelligence in action – a consciousness and intelligence that is divine.

Scientists have made considerable progress in describing these forces. Intriguingly, they also feel that it should be possible to describe all the fundamental forces of nature in one grand unified theory (GUT), one grand formulation, one “theory of everything”. This in itself is significant, for it seems to indicate that there is an unconscious acknowledgment that all of nature originates from one source. In essence, the problems with the current scientific description of basic matter boil down to trying to reconcile the macroscopic force of gravity, which holds entire galaxies and solar systems together, with the submicroscopic forces of electromagnetism that hold atoms and molecules together. One of the most successful GUTs or unified mathematical descriptions of these forces is known as “string theory”.

String theory says that all subatomic particles consist not of points in space but of vibrations in ultra-tiny one-dimensional energy strings. As theories go, it’s pretty good, but it has one drawback. These strings are so tiny that the theory cannot (so far) be tested in the laboratory. It therefore remains at the level of mathematical speculation, or philosophy in the language of mathematics. It also has various bizarre, allied but essential notions, like the suggestion that space is really ten-dimensional, the extra dimensions being wrapped up so small that we can’t see them (whatever that may mean!). String theory is also responsible for the notion of an infinitude of parallel universes, much beloved of science fiction writers. It has other, more fundamental problems too, like its inability to describe some of the basic properties of matter, such as mass.

So it’s a good idea, but other descriptions of the material universe as originating from the energy of space may yet prove simpler, more testable, and more able to describe the properties of the subatomic world with which physicists are familiar. It may even be possible to extract clean energy from the space around us for human needs. But however

the scientists try to describe it, the fundamental problem still remains – what keeps it all going? Where does the primal energy originate? And where has all the order, organization and seeming intelligence that we observe in the universe come from? Mystics have the answer – the divine Word, the Shabd, the ultra-dynamic, creative and intelligent divine presence within us and in all things.

But for most of us, this – like string theory – remains just a description that appeals to us, a perspective we can relate to. The only way to know for sure what's going on is to forget all the theories and to sit down in meditation; allow our consciousness to expand and be taken up by the Master, so that we can see for ourselves how the whole show is put together. Then we will see how matter is an expression of consciousness, and how consciousness is the essence of the divine. Out with the theory and in with personal experience.

So it's back to our pads, guys!



*Through past actions  
we attain the robe of human form –  
through grace, the door to liberation.*

*Jap Ji: A Perspective*

# Lighten Up

Recently, Baba Ji said several times that we need to lighten up. In that context, he was talking about not taking life too seriously, but instead about finding time to enjoy ourselves and participating in things even when we are not very good at them – things like singing or dancing. “Lighten up” can have other meanings too, so let us look at three additional ways we can lighten our lives.

Having a lighter attitude and being positive on the path is very important, even when things are not going well in our lives. Smiling is important. It is said that it takes something like forty-three muscles to frown but only seventeen to smile; therefore, smiling is physically easier. This may not be literally true, but Maharaj Charan Singh supports this idea when he says:

*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. It is a sin to worry. Have faith in his goodness and grace and try to keep simran on your lips at all times.*

*Divine Light*

He doesn't say, “Try not to worry.” He says, “It is a sin to worry.” He says, “God does not want us to be unhappy.” In other words, God wants us to be happy, to laugh. The Masters themselves often show us this light-hearted side, where they can joke and laugh easily. Many of us have fond memories of Maharaj Charan Singh throwing back his head with a hearty laugh; or of hearing him say something unexpected

and then hearing the audience break out into peals of laughter as a wide grin spread across his face.

In the pictorial album of Hazur's life, *Legacy of Love*, we are reminded of his delightful humour:

*His laughter was spontaneous, vibrant, joyful and infectious. He would catch his lower lip in his teeth as though this were the only way he could stop himself laughing too much. Were he himself not to limit it, one felt his merriment might shake the whole world.*

In *Heaven on Earth* we get a glimpse of Maharaj Sawan Singh's humour:

*His keen sense of humour delighted the sangat, and when he laughed, his eyes, lips, his whole body radiated joy. Who could resist laughing with him?*

In the same book, the humour of Maharaj Jagat Singh is revealed in this encounter:

*Once a satsangi said to him, "Maharaj Ji, when I sit for meditation, my soul withdraws to my knees, yet I do not see anything inside." Sardar Bahadur Ji replied, "Brother, the Lord it seems, has erred a little. He put the eyes too far away, high up in the face. If he had put them in the knees, you would surely have seen something." Then he affectionately told the man to try to attain more concentration in meditation and come to the eye centre. He further added, "When you come to this point you will hear the sound and also see the light."*

Here the Master was responding to his disciple with love and humour. The questioner was anxious, but by making him laugh, the Master helped him with the problem and also cheered him up. Humour, laughter, and enjoyment are all parts of this path.

The Masters can make us laugh because they are overflowing with love and happiness. The laughter of the Masters springs from an inexhaustible well of happiness and bliss, which, as they repeatedly tell us, is to be found inside every one of us.

Maharaj Charan Singh tells us in *Quest for Light*:

*In fact, no other person should be so happy in this world as an initiate who is on the path. He should always keep his final goal in sight – the treasures, the joys and the bliss that await him in his true home.*

*Give up all feeling of depression and live a joyous life, fully relaxed and thanking the Lord for the great gift he has conferred on you. Keep your thoughts in simran and bhajan and see what happiness you will find within yourself. Do not worry about anything in this life, which is all an unpleasant dream. The real life lies beyond, where your Master awaits you.*

Keeping an attitude of joy and gratitude while also focusing on our meditation is how we should live our lives. We should enjoy our life – even love it – but without attachment to it. This is the first way that we can lighten up and not take ourselves so seriously.

Another way to lighten up is illustrated in this quotation written above the Victory Gate at Fatehpur Sikri near Agra in India. It says:

*The world is a bridge. Cross it but build no house upon it. The world endures but for an hour. Spend it in devotion.*

This world is a bridge; it is a means to the end. It is a step on the way to our true home. Just as we would not build a house in the middle of a bridge, we should not live as though this physical existence is our final destination. Our stay on the bridge of this world will end before long, so we need to use that time to make spiritual progress, not to accumulate possessions and attachments. We need to travel lightly while we are here.

In the Bible, Matthew 6:20-22, Jesus talks about the value of building up spiritual wealth in comparison to the futility of accumulating material wealth. He says:

*Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal; for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*

The Masters tell us that in order to live a normal life we only really need a roof over our head, a shirt on our back and food in our stomach. Our problem comes from striving to over-provide for our future by gathering wealth and property beyond these practical needs.

Baba Ji once humorously alluded to this, joking about women's inability to reduce their wardrobes because they justify a need for every last item in it: a white dress for an Indian funeral, a black one for a western funeral, another dress for a family party and so on. On reflection, we can see that men are certainly the same with their attachments.

Why do we worry about what others will say about us if we don't wear the latest styles, in the latest colours, with perfect accessories?

Each day we can only wear one outfit. How many clothes do we really need? Maharaj Jagat Singh is reported to have had two handkerchiefs – one in his pocket, and one in the wash (*Heaven on Earth*).

In *Quest for Light* Maharaj Charan Singh says:

*You can never get rid of desires by satisfying them. That would be adding fuel to the fire. The more fuel you add, the more the fire blazes. Mind can never be satisfied and will never be satiated. The more you give it, the more it desires. We have to resist and overcome temptations. Simran and bhajan coupled with love for the Master and the Lord are the ways to do that.*

Meditation develops love in us for the Lord and the Master, which naturally detaches us from things. Meditation gives us perspective, makes us prioritize our true needs and develops contentment in us. With that contentment, we no longer strive to change our circumstances or to fill our lives with nonspiritual things. It allows us to travel lightly in this world; it allows us to lighten up.

Meditation affords us a third meaning of the expression to lighten up. When we meet the Master we come in touch with the inner light. Christ says, “As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world” (Bible, John 9:5). These words are usually quoted to explain that only a living Master, not a dead one, can help us to return home to the Lord. Only someone to whom we can talk and ask questions can explain the teachings of past mystics. Only a living Master can initiate us during this human birth. But it also has another meaning: the Master is literally light.

When we meditate, when we withdraw our attention from the world to the eye centre, we meet the Radiant Form of our Master. Christ further says, “The light of the body is the eye: if, therefore,

thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light” (Bible, Matthew 6:22).

In *Light on Saint Matthew* Maharaj Charan Singh explains what Christ means:

*So Christ says that if you want to be one with the light, the light is in the body. And if you want to see that light in this body, the temple of the living God, open your single eye. Be here at the eye centre. Close these two eyes, detach yourself from the whole world and open the inner eye, the third eye. Draw the attention back to the eye centre. Focus it there. Open this door. Then you will see the light. There is nothing but light in your body.*

So ‘lighten up’ can also mean to merge ourselves in that inner light and be filled with it.

This path is all about light. Just think of the names of some of our books: *Light on Sant Mat*, *Light on Saint Matthew*, *Light on Saint John*, *Dawn of Light* and *Divine Light*.

At initiation, we were given the passport, the visa and the ticket, but now we have to get on that plane. The Master is the pilot; he knows where to go – towards the light. All we have to do is to sit down and keep his company while he takes us there. If we love someone, how can we not pay attention to him and follow him to the destination he has chosen? This is a path of bhakti, of devotion, of love. If we love him, we want to go to where he is and where he is going. We want to lighten up our lives, because that is what he wants for us too, to lighten up our attitudes, to lighten our physical lives, to become enlightened, to become full of light.

Sultan Bahu says:

*In the dark, fathomless night of ignorance,  
love is a torch that brings light.  
From it emanates a Melody  
that enraptures lovers' hearts!*

*Sultan Bahu*

That love, that light, that melody is the Shabd; let us go within,  
merge with it and become light ourselves.



*The inner light one can see even in darkness, and even a blind  
man can experience it, because it is not the physical eyes but the  
attention that sees within.*

*Divine Light*

# The Time Is Now

*Faced with the sighs of lovers,  
even the mountains crumble to earth.*

*Faced with the sighs of lovers,  
even deadly snakes flee to their holes.*

*The sighs of lovers cause the stars  
to tumble from the heavens above.*

*Faced with the sighs of lovers,  
only the lovers remain steadfast.*

*Give up all procrastination  
and awaken your soul...*

*Have faith in the Lord, like the birds  
that fly through the air without carrying their food....*

*Bliss and grace reign in the heart  
that glows with the light of love.*

*Sultan Bahu*

# How Much Is Enough?

The Masters have used the analogy of a prison in describing our state in this world. We find ourselves very much here – in this physical state, in this prison – and subject to the pulls on our attention that keep us bound to this body, this identity, this world. That is, we continue to choose those things and do those things that keep us imprisoned and away from God.

The saints tell the story of four philanthropists, and how one philanthropist in trying to improve the condition of the prisoners, brings food and secures clean drinking water for them. Another philanthropist provides clothing and blankets, so that they're not exposed to the elements. A third philanthropist arranges for the education of the prisoners, so that they can better care for themselves. But in all these cases, the prisoners are still prisoners. Is not the fourth philanthropist, who brings the key to release them from the prison, the one who provides the greatest and longest-lasting service? This is the job and the role and the service of perfect living Masters. They come from the Father to wake us up and then to liberate us. They say yes, you can get out of this prison.

This path requires the total transformation of the disciple. And what are we transformed into? We don't really have a clue – and that's frightening; it's like jumping off into the great dark unknown. But we have to be prepared to be more than we think we are. We have to be prepared to drop and leave behind those mental constructs, those habits and behaviour patterns that impede whatever it is the Master wants us to be. We have to be prepared to let go of all the nuances of self-identification in our meditation. We have to be prepared to become him, to be light, to fly. All our efforts make us

more malleable in the hands of the Master, and the more malleable we are, the more capable we are of being transformed into that which the Lord desires. We – at this level of consciousness – don't really know what we will become. Does the caterpillar know when it spins a cocoon that it will become a beautiful butterfly, not to mention a butterfly with a particular pattern and set of colours on its wings? Does the caterpillar consciously know what to design? It's doubtful. A higher consciousness knows it will become a butterfly, but the caterpillar doesn't know ahead of time what it will become. It knows instinctively it should make certain preparations, certain efforts, such as spinning a cocoon. In fact, if it does not take those actions, it will not become a butterfly.

So, by the Master's transformative process, we will escape the prison of this body and the physical world, as well as the prison of the emotional and mental worlds. Our lifeline in this process is the Master, who is one with the Shabd or Nam. We need to trust him, we need to hold on to him with love in our hearts, and eventually we need to surrender to him.

You know how we all love to see the Master, be near to him, sit in the front row? What if the Master told us that we were the first in line to go home? First in line! What if he said that to us? It would make us feel wanted and motivated to get out, break out of our prison cell. But the fact is that he really is saying that to each one of us. We are first in line, each one of us. It's not as if he is attending to someone else better or first, and then he will attend to us, that we are second class citizens. No, he is inviting each one of us to walk out of this prison house, this imprisoning self we are captivated by.

He is the fourth philanthropist with the key to the prison door. He opened the door to our cell when he connected us to the sound and light within, the Shabd, the Nam, at the time of initiation. The door

is open. It is for us to find that door and walk out. He has given us the directions to the door and given us instructions on how to walk out. We are to raise and concentrate our attention at the door, the eye centre, through simran and contemplation on his form; then we will merge into his Radiant Form within, which resonates with sound and light, and follow that inner sound back to the Father. We have just to walk through that door and attach ourselves to him. He will take care of the rest.

The Lord has seen to it that each of us has enough to eat – maybe not every sensory explosion we desire but enough to sustain us. Also, every one of us has enough clothes to wear; we are not walking around naked. And he has seen to it that we have a roof over our head and a blanket for our bed. We have all been given circumstances where we have the basic necessities of life. Our only real task is to walk through that open door.

But we have become accustomed to life within the prison and especially within our own cell. We are like flies in a glass jar. Scientists have done experiments raising flies in a jar where they eat, sleep, procreate, and carry on with whatever life it is that flies have. But the scientists have found that if they take the lid off the jar, the flies just keep carrying on; they do not fly out. They have become accustomed to life within the jar, all their needs are being met in the jar. Their attachments are there. Perhaps they are afraid to fly out, or perhaps they just don't notice that the lid is open. But they do not come out.

Our lot is somewhat the same. We have become accustomed to life in the physical body, to life in this creation. The prison door has been opened, but we just carry on as before. And this is all the more pitiable because humans have discrimination, can make decisions and have the capability of exerting willpower or effort.

We are attached to faces and places, to situations of power, to the beauty of the physical creation, to the rush of physical sensations and to a sense of security through the acquisition of physical things and money. Generally, that is, we have become accustomed to life the way we have known it these many eons inside the glass jar. The lid is off, the prison door is open, but we are perhaps afraid, perhaps despairing, perhaps not even noticing.

We just have to do our meditation and, as Baba Ji advises, let go in our mind of all those associations and recurring thoughts; let go of our causes and concerns; let go of our attachment to how we think life ought to be. If we are not holding on to all these worldly thoughts and desires, we will be able to walk out that door to freedom. Baba Ji once said something like: It's all self-imposed limitations – you can do it!

You know, when we play a game, we all want our turn – our turn to hit the ball, our turn to catch the ball, our turn to jump the rope and our turn to deal the deck of cards. Perhaps we wait a long time for our turn, but we want to be recognized as an equal participant in the game. So we are very careful to make sure we get our turn.

But when is it God's turn? When is it God's inning? What are our priorities? How are we spending our time? How much is enough in this life within the glass jar? How much money do we really need? Yes, we need some money to maintain a stable life. But how much money is enough? We need food to sustain ourselves, but how much food is enough? We need to use our mind constructively and be properly educated, but again how much is enough? We need to be of service to others, but if it occupies all our attention, how much is enough? We were supposedly sent to this creation for experience, but how much experience is enough? Isn't it time to look beyond the glass jar? Isn't it time to grow beyond this fly mentality? The Master is telling us that this is our time, this is our turn to move beyond the constraints of life

on this physical plane. He wouldn't have initiated us if it was not possible to walk out that door. What are we waiting for? More experience? It's time for a prison break.

Maulana Rum is quoted in *The Path*:

*This world is a vast prison  
and we are all prisoners in it;  
make a hole and escape.*

The Master has given us the mental equipment with which to break out of this prison. We have just to do our meditation and let go of life in the glass jar, let go of the self that separates us from the one we love.

Maharaj Charan Singh was asked whether the time was destined when desires and attachments would leave us. He says that it will change from those desires:

*By giving time to meditation, by colouring our mind in Shabd and Nam, dying our mind in Shabd and Nam, by changing the tendency of the mind inward and upward.*

March 10, 1988

So there we have it. He asks us to train our mind to detach from the desires we encounter in life. He says a lot depends on us, that we have to turn the tendency of the mind from looking outward and all the activity we encounter there to looking inward and upward, and that we do that in our meditation, where we dye the mind in Shabd. He is saying we must take some actions in the transformation that is required. We must spin a cocoon, which shuts us off from the world and turns us inward, in order to be transformed into the butterfly that can fly in the light.

Maharaj Charan Singh says:

*When the wrappings are being removed, you first see that light and all those things inside your own self, and you know that the wrappings are being removed. Then you become nobler, more loving, and more and more devotion for the Father comes in you. When the clouds start disappearing, then the light of the sun starts shining. You always know when the clouds disperse and light comes. Similarly, you also know about yourself. When the mind becomes better or purer or nobler, that light penetrates you and your whole attitude in life changes, your characteristics and approach to life change.*

*Die to Live*

That is the beginning of the great transformation that we undergo as disciples. We have only to take those actions to change the tendency of mind from outward to inward, to do our meditation, and “Let go.” We will walk out of that prison door and find our Master. We have only to maintain our focus solely on the Shabd with which he resonates. As Maharaj Sawan Singh writes in *Spiritual Gems*:

*If a soul were to stick to the current, and not look aside or go off the current, and were to leave behind the memory of this world, there is no power that can keep it here for a second, or that can stop it on the way.*



# Book Review



## Signs of the Unseen: The Discourses of Jalaluddin Rumi

TRANSLATED BY W. M. THACKSTON, JR.

PUBLISHER: BRATTLEBORO, VT: THRESHOLD BOOKS, 1994.

ISBN: 1570625328

It is not often that we have a chance to “eavesdrop” on informal talks between disciples and their Master. *Signs of the Unseen* is Persian scholar W. M. Thackston’s translation of Rumi’s *Fihi ma fihi*, which literally means “in it is what is in it.” This title has also been translated as “table talk,” a phrase that perfectly describes these free-ranging conversations and talks held by Rumi with his followers.

Reading *Signs of the Unseen*, we can easily imagine Rumi sitting among his disciples and fielding all sorts of questions – some relevant and others not so relevant but all answered in a spirit of loving kindness. The topics in the *Discourses* range from Sufi states of consciousness, to admonitions to remember the objective of our lives, to why are the Turks bothering everyone so much? Some of the questions and responses concern orthodox aspects of Islam; others parse fine points of philosophy, often with a healthy dose of paradox. But even when Rumi’s discourses are long and technical, he always weaves in pithy stories. In the midst of one such discourse, he relates,

*A king once said to a dervish, “When you enjoy glory and proximity at God’s court, make mention of me.” “When I am in that Presence,” said the dervish, “and am exposed to the radiance of that Sun of that Beauty, I am unable to make mention of myself, much less of you!”*

Rumi uses poetic, powerful images. For example, while emphasizing the importance of gratitude, he says, “Gratitude is to suckle at the breast of good things. Even when the breast is full, its milk will not flow unless you suck.”

He often inserts into his discourse an anecdote which is capable of many interpretations, leaving the reader to ponder. In the middle of an extended analogy, where he says that the planting of a seed is a “question” and the tree that grows is the “answer,” Rumi tells a story:

*A king read three petitions from a subject but wrote no answer. The subject wrote a complaint, saying “I have petitioned thrice. If my petition is acceptable, please say so. If not, please say so.” On the back of the petition the king wrote, “Have you not realized that no answer is an answer?”*

He goes on to claim that all of a man’s actions are “questions.” Weaving in quotations from the *Qur`an*, Rumi explains that man complains about the “answers”:

*Every move man makes is a question, and everything that happens to him – grief and joy – is an answer... If the answer is unpleasant, one must quickly ask forgiveness and not ask such a question again. Yet when the affliction which We sent came upon them, they did not humble themselves, but their hearts became hardened [6:43] – that is, they did not understand that the answer was in accord with their question. And Satan prepared for them that which they had committed [6:43] – that is, they saw the answer to their own question and said, “This ugly answer is not appropriate to that question.”*

Rumi’s *Discourses* are sometimes startling, disturbing to our preconceptions. For example:

*We said, “Some with a desire to see you kept saying, ‘I wish I could have seen the Master.’” That person will not see the Master in reality just now, because the desire he has to see the Master is itself a veil over the Master. At this time he will not see the Master without a veil.*

Rumi goes on to explain, “All desires, affections, loves, and fondnesses ... are all ‘veils.’” He gives the analogy that when winter comes, people bundle up and stay inside. Plants also curl up, and animals take to hiding in the earth. But when spring unfolds, all their problems “are answered at one blow. The secondary causes disappear. Everything sticks its head out and knows what has caused that calamity.” Similarly, “When one passes beyond this world and sees that King without these ‘veils,’ then one will realize that all those things were ‘veils’ and ‘coverings’ and that what they were seeking was in reality that one thing.”

Rumi tells the story of one sheikh who was in a state of complete absorption in God. He was so lost in his love that he did not heed the Muslim call to prayer. The sheikh’s disciples turned toward Mecca in obedience to the call to prayer, except two who remained facing their master. It was revealed to another disciple that the disciples who were praying had their backs toward Mecca while the two disciples facing the sheikh had their faces toward it.

*Since the master had passed beyond the state of ego-consciousness and become lost to himself, consumed in the light of God, as is the meaning of the prophetic saying, ‘Die before you die’ – he had then become the Light of God, and whoever turns his back on the Light of God to face a wall has assuredly turned his back on the kiblah [the direction of Mecca].*

In commenting on the *Qur’anic* verse, “Whithersoever ye turn, there is the face of God,” Rumi says: “That Face is ever current, uninterrupted, and abiding, never ceasing. True lovers sacrifice themselves to this Face and seek nothing in return. The rest are like cattle.”

Rumi exhorts us,

*With God there is no room for two egos. You say “I,” and He says “I.” In order for this duality to disappear, either you must die for Him or He for you. It is not possible for Him to die.... He is so gracious, however, that if it were possible He would die for you in order that the duality might disappear....*

We are sent into this human life for this one specific purpose, to become a true lover, sacrificing oneself for love. “If you neglect to accomplish the task for which you were sent, it is as though you did nothing.” One day of human life “is worth more than the life of the whole world from beginning to end.” Using this human life for other purposes is like using a golden bowl to cook turnips. “One fraction of that bowl could buy one hundred pots.”

*Day and night you cater to your body. Now this body is your steed,  
and the world is its stable. A horse's food is not fit for its rider...  
Since you have been overwhelmed by your bestial and animal  
nature, you have remained in the stable with the horses and have  
no place among the ranks of the kings and princes of the world  
where your heart is.*

He counsels his disciples to make all the effort they are capable of, and only when they have expended all, when they collapse helpless and exhausted, will God's grace carry them forward.

*We say to you, “Travel this endless road on your own weak legs.”  
We know that with your weak legs you will never be able to finish  
the way – in a hundred thousand years you will not finish even one  
stage of the way. Only when you make the effort and come onto the  
road to fall down at last, unable to go another step, only then will  
you be uplifted by God's favor.*

Another excellent translation of Rumi's *Fihi ma fihi* is also available under the title *Discourses of Rumi*, translated by A. J. Arberry (Samuel Weiser, 2001, reprint of the 1961 original).



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

