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Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

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Spiritual Link

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Reveal Your Form to Me, Master

Reveal your own real form to me, Master.

*You have assumed this physical form
to lead souls to their salvation.*

*Show me now your other form
that is inaccessible and boundless.*

*Let me see that form and be absorbed in it,
and grant me the gift of fearlessness.*

*This physical form is also very dear to me,
but let me experience that one through this one –
the hidden through the manifest.*

*Without the help of this form nothing can be accomplished,
for without the help of this form,
how can you possibly reveal the other one?*

*This one is therefore to be greatly valued,
but show me now the other one too –
the one that is your eternal form,
while you take on the physical to awaken souls.*

*I have learned this secret from your many explanations
of the path of Surat Shabd.*

*Let my soul now merge in your Shabd form,
which is truly your own, real form.*

*Merciful Radha Soami, benefactor of souls,
help me realize the purpose of life.*

Soami Ji, Sar Bachan Poetry



Discipline and Spirituality

What is the place of discipline in following a spiritual path? Sant Mat can be seen as a path requiring tremendous discipline. We hear that it will be a 'lifelong' struggle with the mind. This is a little worrying when for some people adhering to a vegetarian diet or giving up alcohol can seem to require great discipline, let alone meditating for two and a half hours every day. But let's be clear-headed about this and remind ourselves how much effort and dedication many of us put into making a living or looking after our families, or getting a degree; why, then, should we expect to attain self-realization without putting at least as much effort into our spiritual development?

However, here, as in many other aspects of Sant Mat, we must take care not to oversimplify what we hear or view it from a narrow perspective. Most of us tend to equate discipline and struggle not just with effort but with tension, stress and fatigue. Maharaj Charan Singh, on the other hand, often used to say that we should lead a relaxed life and meditate with a relaxed mind; we therefore have to ask ourselves what kind of lifelong struggle it is that can be undertaken in a relaxed way? It would seem that there must be 'right' effort (relaxed, peaceful, harmonious) and 'wrong' effort (stressful, tiring, frustrating), and we probably have experience of both, not just in meditation but also in seva and in our daily lives.

If we accept that effort in meditation or seva can be effective or ineffective, then clearly just putting in as much time and effort as possible may not necessarily be useful. There may be a sense in which more time and effort is a good thing, but if taken to extremes it can be quite egocentric and destructive, leading to the neglect of work or family for example, or causing friction with others. If we can be more

discriminating and see the bigger picture, then our effort may be more productive. Maybe that is why the Masters have explained that we should meditate with a relaxed mind and why they have emphasized the importance of harmony in seva.

There are two aspects to 'discipline'. Firstly, there is discipline imposed from outside by others, which one dictionary defines as "controlled and orderly behaviour resulting from training." Secondly, there is self-discipline, which is defined as "self-imposed controlled and orderly behaviour."

When we follow Sant Mat, we do so purely out of choice – not compulsion – and therefore we can say that the way of life is self-disciplined. To assist us in achieving this self-discipline, the Master presents us with various examples of order and obedience, such as that of soldiers who must obey the orders of their commander. In a letter in *Divine Light* Maharaj Charan Singh writes: "Before enlisting in the army, it is open to a person to join it or not. But after enlistment one's duty is to obey the orders of one's general and to remain under military discipline." But the Master then closes the letter with a further sentence. He says: "The mind should be trained to acquire the habit of obeying your orders." In other words, we are the ones in control – we are the general. The Master is the loving mentor. He doesn't judge, accuse or punish but constantly offers encouragement, as in the following letter, also from *Divine Light*:

I am sorry to learn that you find it difficult to keep yourself in the Sant Mat discipline ... one should never be disheartened over falls and failures.... Buck up and ever keep the true purpose of human life before you.

The Master also provides us with needed reminders; he asks us to remember the alternative to a life without discipline. When, in

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. II someone asks the Master, “I’ve heard that there’s so much pain involved in the Sant Mat path as far as denial of worldly things. Can this be a path of joy also?” Maharaj Ji challenges the notion that discipline is joyless by replying:

Well, you mean to say that those people who do not follow the path are happy? Go to all the mental asylums and find whether they’re happy or not. People are just miserably living in comfort, nothing else. Those who deny themselves the pleasures of the world ... are much happier than those who become slaves of the pleasures of the world.

External discipline is also relevant to us as satsangis, as we are not just a loose collection of people following an individual spiritual discipline but – in so far as we wish to make use of the outward arrangements that are made for us – we are members of an organization too. The organization has the responsibility to manage finance, properties, the allocation of seva and so forth. Such a structure cannot work without its own discipline, as practical decisions have to be made and implemented.

At a Question & Answer session with Maharaj Charan Singh, someone once began a query by saying that the previous night Hazur had said that we should “obey the sevadars”. But before the questioner could get any further, Hazur interrupted by remarking that he had not said “obey” – he had said “co-operate with”. Let’s consider the definition of these words: to ‘obey’ is to do what one is told to do; to ‘co-operate with’ is the action or process of working together to the same end. ‘Co-operation’ often requires some give and take and negotiation to arrive at the best way forward; it is not simply blind obedience. Co-operation demands humility and mutual respect. In

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III, Maharaj Charan Singh, discussing seva, advises:

Think humbly: this body doesn't belong to me – even this belongs to the Father, even this belongs to the Master. Do not use your body as your own. Use it as if it belongs to your Master, and then you won't ever do evil deeds.

The Master is advising us to observe a very loving mental discipline whilst carrying out our seva, and it is actually only this attitude which will help us to co-operate with each other.

This is where our spiritual discipline (the meditation, the way of life) informs and supports the discipline we need in our seva. In seva, as in other organizations, all kinds of dilemmas can arise and it may be very difficult to know what to do. We all have a limited perspective so we will make mistakes. The most important thing to keep in mind is that co-operation or harmony is essential.

Both outward and inward discipline are needed on this path; in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II, Maharaj Charan Singh reminds us of the value placed on discipline when, acknowledging our struggles, he says:

You see, if the student is very obedient in class, and very disciplined, the master, the professor, is always anxious to pull him through with one excuse or another.... Let us at least be disciplined and good and obedient enough so that we can invoke his grace to get through.

If we felt love in our hearts at all times and our actions flowed from that, then of course there would be no need to talk about harmony, co-operation or discipline. Everything would just flow on the basis

of mutual love and understanding. In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II, someone asks: “Maharaj Ji, how is discipline connected with love, and what is the difference between discipline and love?”

Well sister, to remain in the Father's love actually is to remain in his discipline. To submit ourselves to him – that is to remain in the discipline or to remain in his love. Anything which takes us away from his love makes us undisciplined, so whatever keeps us within his love, within his devotion, that is a discipline for us that we have to follow.

Both meditation and seva need the initial application of some self-discipline and this has to be applied whether the impetus comes from love or from fear of the consequences if we don't apply it. Maharaj Charan Singh says:

If we are not disciplined out of love, then we have to be disciplined out of fear. Mystics sometimes tell both sides ... [they depict] the misery of this world, of this creation, and they also fill us with love and devotion for the Father.

Once we set the ball rolling by accepting the need for spiritual discipline, our understanding has the opportunity to gradually mature so that our efforts are applied intelligently. As this happens, and we grow in love, the discipline we follow becomes as natural as breathing – the automatic result of experiencing the Father's love for us and our capacity to respond to him in meditation, in daily life, and in seva.



Initiation is Destined

Maharaj Ji (Maharaj Charan Singh) was once travelling by train to Dehra Dun, on his way to Mussoorie. While travelling, he became acquainted with an affectionate lady – Mrs. Hazara Singh. The acquaintance developed over the course of time – Maharaj Ji became very fond of her, and she loved him as her own son....

Because of his affection for her, Maharaj Ji entertained a keen desire that the Great Master would give her Nam. So Maharaj Ji told Bhai Shadi how wonderful it would be if this were to happen.

That evening, Maharaj Ji and Bhai Shadi were pressing the Great Master's legs, as was their usual practice. The Great Master was in an informal mood, so Shadi took advantage of the opportunity and told him of Maharaj Ji's wish. But the Great Master replied, "Tell him, he may initiate her himself."

Maharaj Ji was greatly surprised to hear such a response from the Great Master and could not understand its meaning. Then, after a while, the Great Master continued, telling him that it was not in her destiny to receive Nam in this life.

When Maharaj Ji came to the Dera, after the passing away of Sardar Bahadur Ji, the lady was a regular visitor, remaining here for long periods of time. On several occasions she mentioned to Maharaj Ji that she would like to receive Nam, but for one reason or another the opportunity did not arise, and she passed away without being initiated.

To be initiated by a perfect Master signals the end of our coming and going in the cycle of birth and death. It is the most significant event in the history of a soul since it left the Lord at the time of creation. The moment of initiation is destined, and the Masters know exactly when that moment will come.

Based on story told in *Treasure beyond Measure*

Do We Really Want to Be Happy?

Being happy is what most people would consider to be their main aim in life, although the word 'happiness' is often confused with the word 'pleasure'. Pleasure arises from the gratification of a particular desire and since everything is always changing, including our desires, pleasure is short-lived. Happiness, on the other hand, is something different; happiness provides a sense of such deep satisfaction and blissfulness that our worldly desires just drop away. It is found in a state of consciousness above and beyond change and can be reached through meditation. Actually, the peace and tranquillity experienced by those who devote themselves wholeheartedly to spiritual practice affects the whole atmosphere around them. It is as pervasive as the scent of flowers in a garden. Maharaj Sawan Singh writes of an experience he had as a young officer in the foothills of the Himalayas:

Once when I was riding my horse through the Murree hills, a feeling of immeasurable happiness came over me. I could not think of any reason for this. Sometimes one gets into a happy state of that kind when one thinks of one's children or one's worldly position. But no, that was not the case. Then I thought perhaps it was due to the fragrance from the surrounding trees, because it was the month of April and the trees were in full bloom. Then I thought to myself, "I have not been in such a state of wonderful happiness for the last eighteen years. Why is it that I am so buoyant today?"

As I rode on farther, my buoyancy increased. And lo! I beheld a fakir in a trance sitting by the roadside. I then realized that the bliss and happiness I was experiencing was radiating from

him. Therefore, I got down from my horse to pay my respects to him. Seeing me, the fakir remarked, "O friend, a man with a discerning nose is very rare."

Discourses on Sant Mat

Until such time as we take seriously to meditation, we are obsessed by our desires, driven by the attempt to fulfil them. In fact since we spend most of our time trying to attract pleasant experiences and push away the unpleasant ones, there is a risk that we miss the point of our existence. There is an Indian saying: "When a pickpocket sees a saint, he only sees his pockets." In other words, since the pickpocket is only concerned with stealing the money from the saint's pocket, he misses the golden opportunity to attain what is priceless – spiritual wealth. Let us not miss our golden opportunity. We should have only one desire: to please our Master through the daily practice of meditation and if we do this, then everything else will fall into place. As Christ said in the Sermon on the Mount: "Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need." We shouldn't be overly concerned about daily necessities, but instead focus upon practising our meditation. It will help us get through the difficult times, and take us to the place of true happiness, where there is no desire, but only bliss.

Reaching our final destination requires us to repeat simran at every opportunity throughout the day, not just in the formal sitting period. As countless devotees recount, there is joy and happiness to be found by concentrating on the present moment and remembering the One. A Buddhist monastery in Thailand, for example, has a room dedicated to displaying art painted and sketched by its monks. In one picture, a monk, with an enormous smile on his face, is leaping up into the air proclaiming, "What joy! To find there is no happiness in this world." This realization has set him free at last to look inside and find the

real joy. No doubt he experiences it when he is meditating, but just as importantly, he finds joy throughout the day by practising the art of mindfulness, that is, by focusing on the present moment and not being concerned with tomorrow, next month or the year after.

We also have records of a seventeenth-century French monk, Brother Lawrence, who wrote letters about his experience of living in the present moment, some of which have been compiled in a book called, *The Practice of the Presence of God*. Full of inspiration, they highlight the overwhelming joy he felt in constantly thinking about God and feeling his presence whilst performing even the most mundane tasks. The following extract describes the fruits of his practice:

I do not know what God intends to do with me. My happiness keeps growing. Everyone is suffering, and I, who deserve the severest discipline, sense joys so unbroken and so great, that I have difficulty in restraining them ... faith enables me to touch him with my finger, and he never withdraws from us unless we have first withdrawn from him.

Similarly, in *The Way of the Pilgrim*, we learn about the inner journey of a Russian pilgrim who, upon reading the words of Saint Paul in the Bible, was determined to devote his life to ceaseless prayer. His travels led him to a *starets* (a spiritual father) who taught him the Jesus prayer, “Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me”, which he repeated as a mantra. Eventually he wrote:

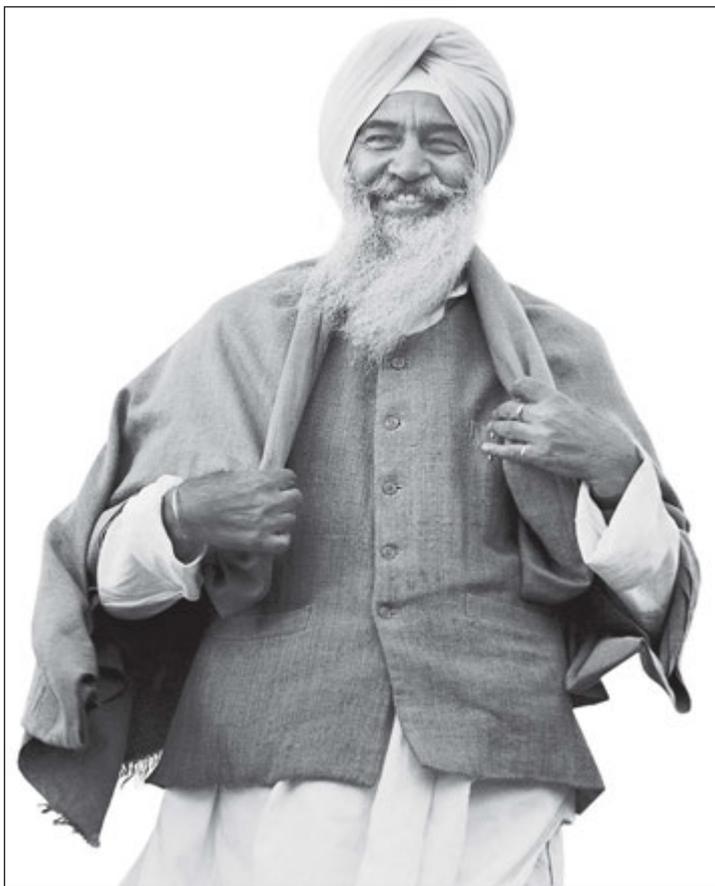
I felt a most delightful warmth, as well as consolation and peace.... I felt a very great joy.... Sometimes my heart would feel as though it were bubbling with joy, such lightness, freedom and consolation were in it. Sometimes that sense of a warm gladness

in my heart spread throughout my whole being and I was deeply moved as the fact of the presence of God everywhere was brought home to me. Sometimes by calling on the name of Jesus I was overwhelmed with bliss, and now I knew the meaning of the words, "The Kingdom of God is within you."

The experiences of travellers on the path of spirituality are inspiring; they encourage us to find the same joy and peace by repeating our simran constantly throughout the day because, in so doing, we cannot help but think of the Master. In effect, the joy comes not so much from the holy names themselves but from their association with, and therefore our remembrance of, the Master. Eventually, we too will come to realize that the 'Kingdom of God' is within us. This is precisely why the Masters continuously remind us that the happiness we yearn for is inside; it is not to be found anywhere else. However, there is no need to pull a long face in life. In fact the Masters encourage us to be happy, to laugh, and to enjoy the gifts that the Lord has given us. They advise us to be content and go through our karmas smilingly, whether they seem to us to be good or bad. Ultimately, the Masters want us to do our duty, not to worry and, simply to surrender to God's will. In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. I, Maharaj Charan Singh says:

What is happiness? It's when you have no worry, when you're relaxed ... when you are in the lap of the Beloved. The real happiness can only come when the soul shines and becomes one with the Father.... The more it is nearer to the Father, the more happy it will be.





Maharaj Charan Singh

The greatest miracle of the mystics is that they change the very attitude of our life, the way of our life. They turn everything upside down in our life. That is the greatest miracle the saints come to perform in our lives.

Legacy of Love

Everything Has Two Handles

Imagine trees in a storm. A group of trees in full leaf take the impact of the wind as it comes blustering around them, tossing the crowns wildly to and fro. But in spite of this rough treatment, and although the tops have been lashed by the wind, the trunks remain still and quite immovable; the storm passes and it is as if it had never happened.

Don't you sometimes wish that you could be like those trees; moved yet unmoved – in your inmost self quite untouched by the events that knock you about?

Stoicism is the name given to a school of philosophy that flourished in the Graeco-Roman world from around 300 BCE and for the next five hundred years, and stoical thought has much to say about choosing a handle to life that will keep us as inwardly steady as those trees.

We would probably agree that many of our difficulties in life arise from wanting things to be other than the way they are. There are outward events or conditions, like the wind, that we may not want, but we cannot prevent. The tree survives wind not by resisting it but by being flexible enough to bow to it – the leaves and branches bow, that is, while the trunk supports this bowing and holds fast. The trunk is like our core beliefs which help us accept the conditions of life, allowing us to endure them and quickly regain a peaceful state of being.

Nicholas White, writing about Stoicism in his introduction to the *Handbook of Epictetus*, says that Stoicism proposes that a human being in an ideal state would “lack all dissatisfaction with anything about the world, while at the same time being conscious and intelligent.” And Epictetus himself, who lived from 50–130 CE, said:

Everything has two handles, one by which it may be carried and the other not. If your brother acts unjustly toward you, do not

take hold of it by this side, that he has acted unjustly (since this is the handle by which it may not be carried), but instead by this side, that he is your brother and was brought up with you, and you will be taking hold of it in the way that it can be carried.

Handbook of Epictetus, translated by Nicholas White

What he means is that we always have a choice in whether to bring a negative or a positive approach to any situation. With a positive approach we can ‘carry’ that situation; with a negative handle we can’t. Transposed to the example of the trees, we can bow to the wind or we can break. Epictetus’ advice is deeply practical – just like Baba Ji’s nearly two thousand years later, when in question and answer sessions with his disciples Baba Ji addresses the everyday dilemmas on which we ask for guidance. Stoicism and various other branches of ethics may not be spirituality as such, but they are essential preparation of the ground in which spirituality is to grow. Urging us to empower ourselves by managing our own thought processes, Epictetus says, “What upsets people is not things themselves but their judgements about the things.” He also reminds us:

Remember that what is insulting is not the person who abuses you or hits you, but the judgement about them that they are insulting. So when someone irritates you be aware that what irritates you is your own belief. Most importantly, therefore, try not to be carried away by appearance, since if you once gain time and delay you will control yourself more easily.

Doesn’t this remind you of Baba Ji advising us time and again not to react to provocation? If we’re able to take this advice we will of course make life more comfortable for ourselves but, more importantly, we’ll

avoid making things worse by creating further karma; most important of all we'll also find that our mind is quiet and under control when we come to sit for meditation. This is why ethics is so closely linked to spirituality.

Yes, it is indeed simran, the spiritual practice itself, which helps us to keep our mental balance in provoking situations, but a bit of philosophical thought doesn't go amiss. In the two quotations above, we are being asked to understand what is within our control and what is not. We also have to understand that the things outside our control have been pre-determined to be like that so *they cannot be otherwise*. This means that there really is no point in fretting about them. Epictetus says:

Remember that you are an actor in a play, which is as the playwright wants it to be: short if he wants it short, long if he wants it long. If he wants you to play a beggar, play even this part skilfully, or a cripple, or a public official, or a private citizen. What is yours is to play the assigned part well. But to choose it belongs to someone else.

If we can recognize this, it should be easier to have realistic expectations of what we may meet in life. Obviously the beggar is not going to have the pleasure of living in a king's palace and the king will not be able to enjoy the freedom of behaviour that a beggar might have. Toning down our expectations extends to the little details of life too. Epictetus gives the following example (referring to Roman public baths):

When you are about to undertake some action, remind yourself what sort of action it is. If you are going for a bath, put before

your mind what happens at baths – there are people who splash, people who jostle, people who are insulting, people who steal ...

And he continues by reminding us that if we are prepared for the reality of experience (good and bad) rather than indulging in a fantasy of perfection, we will be more able to accept the hiccups without annoyance. Along the same lines, Baba Ji advises us to reflect on the reality of human relationships: for instance, there are no perfect partners! We must get along together by forgiving and forgetting, taking the rough with the smooth. “I beg your pardon; I never promised you a rose garden” are the words of a popular song which, in its light-hearted way, conveys the same message.

In defining those things that we can’t control and must therefore put up with, the reverse also becomes clear – we begin to see what is in our power, and a sense of our true identity, together with its possibilities, becomes apparent.

Spurring us on to recognize our true nature, Epictetus warns us not to identify ourselves with possessions or attributes, as we are something greater than these:

These statements are not valid references: “I am richer than you; I am superior to you”, or “I am more eloquent than you; therefore I am superior to you.” But rather these are valid: “I am richer than you; therefore my property is superior to yours” or “I am more eloquent than you; therefore my speaking is superior to yours.” But you are identical neither with your property nor with your speaking.

This is more than good, sound sense; it leads us – much as the sound sense we hear from our Master today leads us – to adopt a high

objective and then set our spiritual selves free to live up to those ideals. Epictetus advised his followers:

Abide by whatever task is set before you as if it were a law, and as if you would be committing sacrilege if you went against it. And: Put to yourself the question, "What would Socrates or Zeno have done in these circumstances?" and you will not be at a loss as to how to deal with the occasion.

He also said, "You, even if you are not yet Socrates, ought to live as someone wanting to be Socrates."

His words of encouragement echo down the years and reverberate again as Baba Ji walks before us as our example, smiles back at us, and assures us that we *can* do it.



Think always of the universe as one living creature, comprising one substance and one soul: how all is absorbed into this one consciousness; how a single impulse governs all its actions; how all things collaborate in all that happens; the very web and mesh of it all.

In all this murk and dirt, in all this flux of being, time, movement, things moved, I cannot begin to see what on earth there is to value or even to aim for. Rather the opposite: one should console oneself with the anticipation of natural release, not impatient of its delay, but taking comfort in just these two thoughts. One, that nothing will happen to me which is not in accordance with the nature of the Whole: the other, that it is in my control to do nothing contrary to my god and the divinity within me – no one can force me to this offence.

Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*

The Storm of the Mind

During a question and answer session at the Dera, a young man wanted Maharaj Charan Singh to comment on the Great Master's statement that the satsang of the saints is the haven of the agonized. Maharaj Ji's response, as we read in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. III, was as follows:

Yes, it is an anchor. You see, if your boat is caught in a storm and you reach the shore, you feel so relieved. We are all in the storm of our mind, and when we go to the satsang of the mystics, we find we can land on a shore. How relieved we feel.

We can easily imagine a boat out at sea – caught in the midst of a raging storm – being violently tossed about by the waves and then, somehow fortuitously, finding a shore upon which to land. Yes, what a relief that would be. Most likely, we can see ourselves in that picture because we are all caught in, and exhausted by, the storm raging in our minds. Yet, being in the company of the Master – where we feel calm, quiet and protected – is like finding a shore on which to land. Let us not think, however, that going to the satsang of the mystics is simply a matter of being in their physical presence. Going to the satsang of the mystics means being aware of our connection to them. That connection is, quite simply, love. Maharaj Charan Singh says:

We must seek a devotee and lover of the Lord, a true Master, who is connected by an all-consuming love to the Supreme Being. We must keep his company and associate with him so that through him our thoughts and love may also be attuned to love and devotion for the Lord.

Spiritual Discourses, Vol.II

How fortunate we are to have already found a lover of the Lord. As we spend time with him and fall in love with him, we simultaneously begin to develop love and devotion for the Lord. In this way, as we read in *Legacy of Love*, we follow through on the hope and aspiration Maharaj Charan Singh had for each of us when he wrote, “May your love for the form culminate in the love of the formless.” But whilst being in the Master’s physical presence is very precious and it does indeed awaken love in our hearts, we can’t stop there! Baba Ji has told us over and over again that the only reliable way to strengthen and deepen our love is by spending time with him individually, one on one. We get to choose the time, but he has picked the meeting place – the eye centre. This is the one daily invitation that we can never afford to turn down.

If, by going to the satsang of the mystics, we are serious about awakening love for the Lord, we are advised to live by certain principles. These are invaluable for several reasons: from a spiritual perspective, they are essential prerequisites for developing our own, direct and eternal relationship with the Master, and from a practical viewpoint, they help control the storm of our minds. For example, by faithfully adhering to the vegetarian diet, refraining from the consumption of alcohol and drugs, and living a moral life, we help calm our overactive and excitable minds. These lifestyle changes, which we are able to make through the Master’s grace, are highly valuable gifts because so much of our mental turmoil arises from not living this way.

At our disposal are numerous other means for calming the mind. These include performing seva, attending satsang, reading Sant Mat literature and, overall, trying to be a good human being. The most important of all, however, is meditation. It is meditation that will eventually release us – our soul – from the grip of the mind and bring it to a point of stillness.

Maharaj Charan Singh made this clear in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II:

We have to get ourselves into that habit of meditation, of concentration. Daily, regularly and punctually, we have to go on doing it, and ultimately we succeed.... But in order to achieve this, we must struggle with the mind. It is a constant struggle for light. It is not so easy. From age to age, from year to year, our mind got into the habit of scattering out into this world. Everything is drawing us out, pulling us out.

As the Master makes clear, we have not only become accustomed to focusing on the external, but our mind is constantly thinking about one thing or another. Meditation is the one tool that reverses these habits. In fact the very reason we have been given simran is to eliminate such constant compulsive thinking. What a relief it is when the mind stops – even for a few moments! Maharaj Charan Singh expressed this beautifully when he was asked to talk about the stillness within. Again, as we read in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II:

The purpose of simran is to eliminate all those thoughts so that we may not think of those worldly things at all – to achieve that silence where the mind can be absolutely still.... The moment that you are there, [when] you have been able to eliminate worldly thoughts, light and shabd will absolutely pull you, [it] will catch you there.

As Baba Ji reminds us with almost every question he answers, it is through our meditation that we will be able to withdraw the mind to the eye centre, hold it there and keep it still. It is in the stillness that we will contact the Shabd, the real form of our Master. It is in the stillness that we will find love, joy and contentment as the Shabd, once and for

all, quietens the raging storm. Maharaj Charan Singh explains why we find it difficult to contact the Shabd and how we can overcome this:

You see, naturally in the initial stages the sound is not very distinct and clear. The more successful we are in concentration, the more distinct, clear and pulling the sound becomes. So we have to give more time to simran and dhyān.

Actually, simran is the key to our spiritual journey. Given its power over the mind, its value is beyond words. But simran only works if the words to be repeated are given by a perfect living Master. In *Die to Live*, Maharaj Charan Singh gives the following analogy to explain this:

A bullet kills only when it comes through the gun barrel.... Similarly, it is only when the names are given to us by a mystic that they have any power behind them.

Without being given to us by the Master, the five holy names comprising our simran are just like any other. But when they are given by him, they carry his power against which the mind is no match. When we repeat them, we are not only reminded of him, we are in his company. In fact, simran is even better than having the Lord's email address! It is how we can stay in touch with him instantly: any time, any place, anywhere.

The more we repeat simran during the day, the more likely we are to replace our mental noise with quiet and stillness during our meditation. The more we practise meditation, regularly and punctually, the more likely we are to remember simran during the day when the storm of the mind is bearing down on us. Simran connects us to our Master and, in his presence, we find a shore on which to land. How relieved we feel.



The Pillar of Satsang

One of the principal ways the Lord showers his grace on his souls is through the medium of satsang. Those who are marked by the Lord for his special grace are pulled to the satsang of the living Master. To come to the satsang of a saint may not be a conscious decision but that doesn't matter. We sometimes respond sincerely but subconsciously to the inner yearning generated by the Lord in our heart.

The meaning of satsang is “association with the Truth” and the Master is the embodiment of Truth. The Master possesses the wonderful ability to touch our hearts and change our direction in life. In his abiding love for us, the Master is absolutely determined to bring about an inner transformation in all who come under his direct protection.

Satsang is that unique atmosphere in which everyone benefits, even those who are in a negative state of mind. Maharaj Charan Singh used to give an example of a stone immersed in water. The stone may not change but it still manages to escape the intense heat of the sun. Some of us can be stone-hearted in that we do not allow ourselves to absorb the teachings of love. Nevertheless, at least during the time of discourse, we remain in a safe and protective environment and escape the materialistic heat of the world.

Another example Hazur gave was that of a blind man passing through a rose garden. Even though he will not be able to perceive the beauty of the colours, he will surely enjoy the sweet fragrance of the flowers that will pacify his troubled mind. We humans, suffering from the affliction of the body and mind, need some soothing words of comfort and encouragement, and there is no greater persuasion than the sweet melodious voice of the Master. The physical sight of him brings peace and calmness and generates love. Even when he is not physically present, we benefit.

Alongside our need for instruction in the basics of spirituality, we stand in greater need of inspiration to meditate. In *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. I the Great Master writes:

Together with the thought currents, the waves of spirituality that emanate from the Master during his discourse help to make the subject matter clear so that everyone can comprehend it thoroughly. In this way the dirt of evil thoughts gets washed away, the gloom of ignorance vanishes and in its place emerges the light of knowledge.

Satsang is a unique boon which the Master distributes free to both the learned and the ignorant. His over-powering grandeur, his refulgence and magnetic force attract each person according to his merit, with the result that they become oblivious of the world and its objects and completely lose track of time and the manner of its passage.

Satsang is a pillar of spirituality alongside meditation. There is a direct link between satsang and meditation. Those who fail to appreciate the real value of satsang are often waylaid by the mind. We are told that satsang is a fence around the crop of meditation. Without this protection, the precious crop is liable to be looted. Attending satsang is a basic discipline of spirituality and a fundamental requirement if one is to remain steady and make progress.

When we gather in satsang when the Master is not physically present, the dignity and significance of the occasion is not diminished. The Master is always spiritually present when we meet in his name and memory. Christ said: "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them." In a similar vein, the words of Maharaj Charan Singh come to mind. He has been memorably quoted as asking, "How do you know I am not there, when I am not there?"

Something to Think About

A Compassionate Heart

When Bankei held his 'seclusion' weeks of meditation, pupils from many parts of Japan came to attend. During one of these gatherings a pupil was caught stealing. The matter was reported to Bankei with the request that the culprit be expelled. Bankei ignored the case.

Later the pupil was caught in a similar act, and again Bankei disregarded the matter. This angered the other pupils, who drew up a petition asking for the dismissal of the thief, stating that otherwise they would all leave.

When Bankei had read the petition he called everyone before him. "You are wise brothers," he told them. "You know what is right and what is not right. You may go somewhere else to study if you wish, but this poor brother does not even know right from wrong. Who will teach him if I do not? I am going to keep him here even if all the rest of you leave."

A torrent of tears cleansed the face of the brother who had stolen. All desire to steal had vanished.

Paul Reps, *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones*.



We should not unnecessarily sit in judgement on others or try to hurt people.... We can be helpful to them, we can feel sorry for them, and we can be a source of strength to them rather than hurt them or condemn them.

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

A Path for the Brave

Written by Patanjali in the second-century BCE, the *Yoga Sutras* is a classical text from the yogic school of Indian philosophy. It contains many timeless aphorisms, one of which is, “From contentment comes the attainment of the highest happiness.” But who among us is content? We can spend our lives chasing those things that we think will bring contentment such as physical comfort, relationships, or fashionable adornment. Why then do we read in newspapers and magazines that so many wealthy people are turning to yoga or meditation to help cope with stress? And what of the poor, desperately struggling to find food and shelter, and even safety in war-torn circumstances? Surely no contentment there. Could it be that what the world has to offer does not actually lead to contentment?

The illusionary world

Ever since the beginning of time, mystics have been teaching us that the physical world is an illusion. In fact, we are surrounded by clues indicating that what we see is not real. Clouds, for example, make magnificent shapes and look solid enough to touch, but flying through them, we realize that they are just vapour. Similarly, water looks buoyant, but jump in from fifty feet and it's as hard as concrete. So if our very senses are constantly being fooled by the physical, how can we ever hope to recognize or understand that which we can't see, the subtle, imperceptible workings of the universe? This is why we need the mystics to encourage us to be brave enough to see through the illusions upon which we build our lives. They make clear that we will never find happiness in the material world because our mind prevents us from being content. Never satiated, it constantly projects new

desires that need fulfilment. The mystics also dispel any notion that we live only once, or that there are no consequences to our actions. Informing us about the karmic law of ‘as you sow, so shall you reap,’ they describe the world as a spider’s web in which we are intricately bound to one another in a complex network of relationships. Soami Ji explains this clearly in *Sar Bachan*:

*You have come into the world and entangled yourself in an intricate web of attachments.
Your first bond is confinement to your body,
the second, attachment to your spouse.
Attachment to your children is the third bond,
and the fourth is to your grandchildren,
Who only lead you into a further network
of their own relationships.
Where is the end to this chain of involvements,
let alone your other attachments to wealth and property?*

The chain of attachments from which we seek happiness is an illusion because each link exists so long as there is a karmic debit or credit and, once that is done, the closest of relationships comes to an end. As the saints remind us, if our own body does not stay with us, how can we possibly rely on other people for comfort, or find happiness in the material possessions that the mind first craves and then rejects?

The precious gift of human life

After dispelling our long-held illusions, the mystics then tell us where to search for permanent happiness, and how to liberate ourselves from our endless karmic dues. Such an opportunity is only available

to human beings, which is why all masters emphasize how precious human birth is. As human beings, we have been given the gift of discrimination – the capacity to reflect on our circumstances and make choices. Moreover, it is only as human beings that we are imbued with that sense of longing, which Maharaj Charan Singh described in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. I, as “the yearning of the soul to become one with the Father”. Fundamentally, however, the greatest sign of our good fortune in being born as a human being is coming into contact with a perfect living Master. It is the Master who helps us understand the true nature of our condition and gives us the technique through which we fulfil our soul’s longing to reunite with our Father. Maharaj Sawan Singh was advised by his Master, Baba Jaimal Singh, “Nam alone is true. Hold fast to it.”

This Shabd, this Nam is the sound of the Lord reverberating within every one of us. It is the power that will draw us back into the Lord, whereupon we will lose our worry-laden identities and never again have to return to this vale of tears. The Shabd is not something new, it has been calling every one of us ever since we entered the creation. It has never stopped calling us, but, in our state of delusion, we have remained ignorant of its presence. No wonder we have never been truly contented, – how could we be, with this great inner symphony going on, yet encased in ego as we are, cut off from it?

Now, however, having been found and initiated by a perfect Master we have the opportunity to listen to the voice that calls us. To do so, we need to lose the biggest attachment of all, that relating to the body. As long as our attention is confined to the body, both in terms of satisfying sensual desires and in believing only what our mind and senses can perceive, we cannot contact the Shabd. A massive impetus is needed to kickstart our desire to stop the attention from running out through the sensory gates and raise it to the eye centre. That impetus

will come from faith, love and devotion for our Master, virtues which slowly, but surely develop within us when we please him. And what pleases the Master the most is fulfilling the vows taken at initiation, including practising two and a half hours of meditation each day and repeating simran whenever our minds are free.

The way we approach meditation is significant. Baba Ji advises us that each time we sit for meditation, we should remind ourselves why we are doing so – what is our objective? In *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. II, Maharaj Sawan Singh commented:

If one is arrogant or greedy in devotion, that devotion is the lowest or tamasik form of bhakti. If the idea of self-praise or fame enters one's mind, the devotion is known as rajasik bhakti. But if all our desires are eliminated and we offer our devotion as part of our natural and innate duty, it is called satvik bhakti.

“Our natural and innate duty” – what a beautiful phrase this is; it draws attention to the fact that, as spiritual beings undergoing a human experience, meditation is an instinctive practice. However, with so many attachments and passions wrapped around our soul, we have to work hard to reach the stage at which meditation is indeed instinctive and devotional. This is why all Masters have emphasized that we must be courageous to follow the path of the saints. We have to be prepared to offer up body, mind and ego in order to turn the wayward and errant attention inwards and upwards to the eye centre and beyond in our spiritual practice. This is difficult because our attention is scattered and the mind does not want to concentrate upon repeating the five holy names. And rather than practising dhyān – visualizing the form of the Master – it conjures up images of new desires and how to satisfy them. Unlike the soldier who stands to

attention on a single command, the mind must be ordered time and time again to remain focused at the eye centre. Every time we do this, we are expressing a preference, making a choice to follow the Master rather than the dictates of the mind. When the mind eventually becomes still, it enjoys its own peace and becomes contented, freeing the soul to unite with Shabd. As we read in *Philosophy of the Masters*, “All desires vanish on getting the wealth of contentment. When one is desireless, worry disappears and mind becomes restful. Those who desire nothing are real kings.”



*I am He Whom I love, and He Whom I love is I.
We are two spirits dwelling in one body.
If you see me, you see Him;
And if you see Him, you see us both.*

*I saw my Lord with the Eye of my heart,
And I said: Truly there is no doubt that it is You.
It is You that I see in everything;
And I do not see You through anything but You.*

*I wonder at You and me.
You annihilated me out of myself into You.
You made me near to Yourself,
So that I thought I was You,
And You were me.*

Mansur Al-Hallaj, in *The Little Book of Eastern Wisdom*

Our Duty

Excerpts from 'Quest for Light'

There are always ups and downs in life. Things never remain the same, and we should try to face these moments of trial with patience and courage, keeping full faith in him. Our destiny is already marked out according to our past actions and we have to undergo this in any case. It is our duty to make an effort to overcome our difficulties and solve our problems. We should make use of the understanding and wisdom that the Lord has given us to function in this world also. To make an effort is our duty, but the results are not in our hands. Sometimes we have to learn to live with our handicaps when efforts fail. This is the time of test for us and we should not lose our mental equilibrium, but say and sincerely believe that this is the will of the Lord and we accept it in all humility. Who knows? Things could have been worse. So our feeling of gratitude to him must never be lost. He alone knows what is best for us and it is for us to live within his will.



Give Sant Mat a trial and give all the time you can to meditation, without expecting any visible signs of progress. That is not in our hands, but in the hands of a higher power. Our duty is to remain at the door of the Lord, like a beggar, and pray for his mercy and grace.



We should not feel disappointed and dejected in the least. All are struggling souls on the path and when we are given initiation it means the Lord now wants us to come back to him. If that is his wish, who can stop us from achieving our goal? But we must become fit for

presentation before the Lord. He does not touch or accept anything that is soiled. We have to cleanse ourselves and shine like crystal before we can stand before him. It is only a question of time. The battle with the mind has to be won. Many blows will be given and many received, but with the Master and the Lord on our side victory is assured. Do your duty every day without worrying about anything. All grace, blessing, purity, love and devotion will come from bhajan and simran.



Do not worry but go on doing your duty in the world and as far as meditation is concerned it is not for us to judge what progress we are making. This only he knows. With our limited intellect being unable to see ourselves as we are, we cannot have any idea of what the Lord is doing for us all the time and in how and in what way he is making us fit to enter his palace. Our duty is to do our meditation every day with love and faith. The rest he will do himself.



There is no occasion to feel any disappointment upon the path of the saints. We are all struggling souls and each one carries his own burden of karmas. The very fact that the Lord has brought you upon the path and has shown you the way inside is proof enough that he is now ready to receive you back to himself. The time factor is the only thing that is left. When on one side you think of your sins also think upon the other side, of the infinite grace and mercy of the Lord. That is always there. Do your duty every day with love and devotion, attend to your bhajan and simran and keep your thoughts in him. Leave all the rest to him. He will not fail in his duty.



The Tree of Life

A learned man once related a story about a wonderful tree in India. Anybody who ate its fruit would never become old or die. On hearing this, the king of his country became obsessed with the idea of immortality. He sent an envoy to India to find the tree and bring back the fruit.

The envoy travelled far and wide, first to one village then to another, climbing mountains, trekking through valleys, leaving no place untouched in his search. He asked the countless people he encountered where he might find the tree, but met only with disbelief or mockery – no one could help him.

At long last the envoy ran out of energy. No trace of the tree had been found, so he began the arduous journey back to his king. Then, along the way, he met a *shaykh* (a wise man) who asked him why he was so downcast. The envoy replied: “There is a tree, unique in all the quarters of the world; I have sought it for years and seen no sign of it.”

On hearing this, the *shaykh* laughed: “You have searched for an outward form instead of the essence. Sometimes it is named ‘tree’, sometimes ‘sun’, sometimes ‘sea’ and sometimes ‘cloud’.” The *shaykh* explained that it was no physical tree at all but that it was “the tree of knowledge of the wise ... it is the water of life from the all-encompassing sea of God.”

*It is that which gives rise to a hundred thousand wonders.
Life everlasting is just one of them.
Although in essence it is single, it has a thousand effects,
And innumerable names belong to it.
Pass on from the name and look at the attributes.
They will show you the way to the source.*

Rendered from R.A. Nicholson, *Mathnawi*, Book II

An Expression of Infinite Life

*We are an expression of infinite life,
which had no beginning and shall never come to an end.*

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Quest for Light*

Who or what is God? This huge question, which has been perplexing humanity since time immemorial, is one I never gave much thought to until recently. This may seem like an odd confession to make for one who is a traveller on the spiritual path. Yet, is it really so strange? In terms of spirituality, for many of us Baba Ji is our primary focus because we can see him, talk to him, be with him. We can relate to him and he understands us. By contrast, God, who seems to be out there somewhere, feels too distant, far removed from our daily experiences. Moreover, as we are unable to resist the charm of Baba Ji's physical form, we may find it difficult not to equate spirituality with the physical, so that any serious intellectual consideration of God seems unnecessary. Finally, like me, you too may have readily accepted the limitations of the intellect and therefore decided not to give the matter any further thought.

The book *Jap Ji – A Perspective*, however, greatly inspired me to think more deeply about the nature of God and our relationship to him. This book provides a beautiful exposition of the opening section of the Adi Granth from which it takes its name. The Adi Granth comprises an anthology of hymns compiled and edited by the fifth Guru in the line of Guru Nanak – Guru Arjun Dev (1563–1603). The opening section, the *Jap Ji*, is made up of thirty-eight stanzas that explain the 'Mool Mantra', which is a short, cryptic precept embodying the heart of spirituality and upon which the whole of the Adi Granth is based.

In the *Jap Ji*, Guru Nanak describes the essence of God and his qualities. A recurring theme throughout the anthology, however, is that we are unable to comprehend God through our intellect. As quoted in the *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. V, *Jap Ji* tells us:

*He cannot be understood by thinking a million times.
Even if thousands of intellectual efforts are made,
They will be of no avail.*

Whilst Guru Nanak emphasizes that God needs to be experienced through spiritual practice, the insights he provides about our Creator are truly wondrous. In this article I will explore four key lines of the 'Mool Mantra' that reveal who God is and how we can realize him.

*There is but one God;
True is his Name.
He is the Creator,
He is realized through the Guru's grace.*

There is but one God

This may at first seem like an obvious point, but these words are telling us that God is unique and absolute. He is unique in the sense that there is no other like him and he has no second. He alone is responsible for bringing forth the entire universe. Without him, nothing exists, not even death. God is absolute in that nothing can be added to, or subtracted from him. The absoluteness and uniqueness of God is of significance because it highlights to us that anything less than God cannot unite us with him and, therefore, only he should be the focus of our attention.

“There is but one God” also draws our attention to the unity of the universe and the doctrine of universal oneness. As the source of all life is God, neither are we separate or distinct from each other, nor is there any distinction between him and us. This raises a couple of implications for us. First, as we all originate from one single source, it is futile to create artificial barriers between ourselves and others on the grounds of race, religion, caste, age, gender or anything else. We are all too aware of the violence and hurt that occurs when such divisions are made.

Second, if there is no distinction between God and us, it is logical to ask how we can actually realize this truth for ourselves – being told is one thing, but wholehearted conviction will only occur from our own experience. The means by which we can do this is explained in subsequent lines of the ‘Mool Mantra’.

True (Sat Nam) is his Name

In the ‘Mool Mantra’ God is referred to as “Sat Nam”, which in English translates to True Name. Originating from the Sanskrit language, *Sat* means truth, reality, existence. In simple terms, truth and existence are inseparable, as that which is untrue has no permanent existence. By referring to God as *Sat*, we are being told that he is a reality, he is no figment of the imagination, he exists regardless of whether we are conscious of him or not.

Sat also draws our attention to the eternal and permanent qualities of God. Whereas our physical selves and all other matter are confined within the limits of time and space – they are subject to change, and are transitory – God is beyond all this because he is ‘true’. He is timeless and permanent, without beginning or end; nor is he subject to change – he is always the same. *Nam* too originates from a Sanskrit root where it is commonly used in the sense of the name of a person or a thing. Here, however, *Nam* is not being referred to as a spoken

name, but as the divine power, the Word, the Shabd through which God created the universe, including us.

Essentially, Guru Nanak is conveying two fundamental truths to us. First, our Father, the Creator of all things, is called Sat Nam and this name reflects his eternity. It is to him and his abode, Sach Khand, the true realm, that we are to return. Second, because anything less than God cannot unite us with him, and God's Name is also his divine and interactive power. This means his Name is the means by which we can realize him.

God is the Creator

Guru Nanak explains that in the beginning God was alone in an eternal, meditative trance – a state of absolute silence and absolute oneness. He was hidden in himself and had no form or attributes. During this unmanifested state, in which he is sometimes described as the Immaculate One, the Formless One and the Nameless One, God was not the Creator and there was no creation. When he decided to start the creation, the creative power within him started functioning to fulfil that task. This creative power is called the Name, the Word, the Shabd. It is this power that created the universe and is sustaining it. In this respect, Shabd is the manifestation of divine energy – it is God in action – it is all that he has ever said or done.

Shabd is the source and the essence of all life – it is the beginning and end of all things and is our essence too. There is something particularly wondrous about Shabd. As action and motion create sound and vibration, the creative power of God, the Shabd, comprises a divine sound, an uplifting melody that is ringing and reverberating throughout the universe. This explains why reference is sometimes made to God as the 'Word', the 'sound current' or 'the audible life-stream'. In effect, Shabd is the voice of God and it is the mechanism through which we can connect with him.

Even though the Shabd represents God's language, it cannot be spoken, written or heard with the outer ears. Yet each and every single one of us has the faculty to listen to, and connect with, the Shabd. This faculty belongs to our soul. As we have yet to understand what soul is, we probably underestimate its capabilities, capacity and power. In fact, the soul is a direct manifestation of Shabd and, as a result, we are, and should see ourselves, as a particle of God. It is the soul that is the basis of our existence and our true identity, not the physical body or the mind. These are just instruments through which the soul operates in the material world.

As we are a particle of God, it follows that the qualities and powers that exist in him, exist in the soul. The Great Master expresses this most beautifully in *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. V:

The soul is the consciousness and the Lord is the storehouse of consciousness. The soul is capable of thinking, and the Lord is an ocean of thoughts. The soul has intelligence and knowledge, and the Lord is the embodiment of knowledge and the treasure house of intelligence. The soul is full of love, and the Lord is the source of all love. We are made in his image. Every particle is a part of the whole, and so are we.

As particles of the Lord, the relationship between us and the Lord is that of a part to the whole. There is no distinction between the sun and its rays or the ocean and its waves. Yet in its current state of separation, our soul is highly distressed, whether we realize it or not. We can never attain absolute, permanent and true peace until we reunite with our Father, Sat Nam. He too is anxious to have us back, which is why he has given the soul, in the human body, the ability to listen to the Shabd and find the only way back home. He sends the perfect Masters to explain how to do this.

He (God) is realized through the Guru's grace

The truth contained in this line is of immediate importance to us. It explains how we can personally realize God. Who is the Guru? What is his grace and what role are we to play in our own spiritual evolution? These fundamental questions, which receive detailed explanation in the *Jap Ji*, can only be dealt with briefly here.

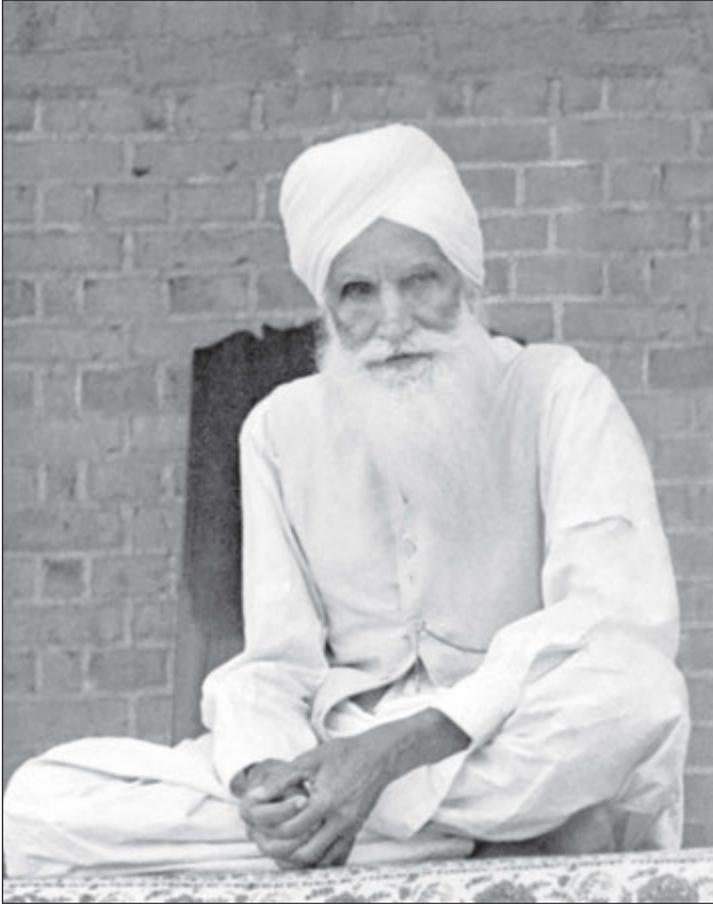
The universe is operating in accordance with several divine laws. One such law is that if we are to return to full consciousness of God, we need the guidance and help of a perfect living Master. He is the key to our liberation and spiritual freedom, teaching us how to connect to the Shabd, which is residing inside us and which will carry us back home. Only a perfect Master has knowledge of Shabd because he is no ordinary human being. He has travelled the path himself and has merged his soul with Sat Nam. As Guru Arjun Dev states:

*God's devotee [i.e., the Master] is like God himself –
let the human form not delude you.
He is like the wave that surfaces in varying forms
and then again merges back into the ocean.*

In order to give us instructions in a way that we can relate to, our Father, Sat Nam, leaves his home and assumes the form of a human being.

Putting us in contact with the Master is the ultimate sign of God's grace upon us. If we want to benefit from such grace, we should act upon the instructions given to us by our Master and give him all our love and devotion. This is the only way to God and the only way to realize that we are an expression of an infinite life that has no beginning and no end.





Maharaj Sawan Singh

Some people being far away may be nearer to the Master than people nearer to him. This 'nearness' and 'far away' doesn't make any difference at all. How much love people have in their heart, that makes them near or far away – it is not the physical nearness which matters.

Legacy of Love.

Resolving Life's Struggle

In the Hindi language, the word *pagal* literally means 'mad' and this expression seems apt to describe the unenlightened mind when life seems to be a struggle. I call my mind *pagal* because, as yet, it's still dominated by pride, anger, greed, attachment and lust. We madly run after the things of the world, thinking that without physical love, a stable home, financial security, a good job – the list is endless – we can't possibly be happy and contented. Our needs are few, but our desires are infinite; once we have what we want, there is always something else our heart desires. But are our desires really worth all the heartache and the effort we put into acquiring them?

Life can sometimes seem a struggle because of the karmic load with which we were born. We settle our account as we go through life and hopefully, as initiates, no longer add to our load. Nevertheless, when times are tough, it can be hard to remember that tough times won't last forever. And life can also seem difficult because we worry about the past. As struggling souls with powerful minds, we all make mistakes, but rather than dwell upon them, we should ask the Lord for forgiveness and promise not to make the same mistakes again. We cannot demand forgiveness but if we are truly sorry we should trust in the love that the Lord has for every single one of us.

But how do we achieve this confidence and faith? We may well acknowledge that the pursuit of material possessions beyond what we need is futile, but reason alone will not end our desires. Nor will it give us the strength to face the tough times with equanimity – and it certainly won't be reason that will deepen our love for the Lord. How then do we resolve life's struggles? In *Quest for Light*, Maharaj Charan Singh advises us:

Meditation, when done with love and devotion, always gives peace and strength. It is when the mind is too worried about some worldly problems that pleasure in meditation is temporarily lost. Try to enjoy bhajan and simran with a relaxed mind and forget everything else at that time. Then you will get much peace and strength within yourself.

Maharaj Ji's advice about meditation is invaluable. Whilst we are told about the power of simran and reminded in satsang and in the Sant Mat literature, somehow we forget. Maybe it's because we can't see the slow, subtle, transformative effect simran has on us. If we truly acknowledged its power, then perhaps we wouldn't find meditation so difficult.

The reason we find meditation difficult is not because the power inherent in simran is lacking, but because our progress is slow. And one reason our progress is slow is because of the karmic burden we carry and constantly analyze. We often think too much rather than just sit and let go. However, as difficult as meditation is, we cannot afford to give up. We have to keep trying because this is the way to end life's struggles – permanently. Given how long we have been in this creation, collecting all sorts of karmas, we must train ourselves not to expect miracles within months or even years. Meditation is a lifelong struggle, but one that is worthy of all our effort and energy. In the same way that it is useless for a beggar to shout at the door of a millionaire because no amount of shouting will open the door, we have to remember that not everything can happen just because we want it to. It is humility and submission that will move the heart of the Lord. We cannot demand anything from him. We can only fold our hands and beg.

We have to become both good planners and good dreamers. We use the ability to plan when we visualize the one future that we all share – death – and set our goals appropriately. Do we want to die to live forever or do we want to die only to die again? If we want death to lead to the liberation of our soul then we have to put in our daily meditation practice and, yes, occasionally put up with what we perceive to be setbacks and disappointments. We have to take on the challenges if we want success because challenges are a part of success. Now, all this may seem daunting, but actually it's not so difficult.

We can also allow ourselves some hopeful dreams. Thinking about all the effort and the discipline required to practise meditation is far worse in the mind than in reality. Our Master promises us that the challenges we'll meet on the road to success are far less difficult to deal with than the struggles and disappointments that come from not making the journey at all. In fact, confronting and overcoming the challenges of being on the Sant Mat path is an exhilarating experience. We strengthen our mental muscles, feed our soul and, over time, become more than what we were before.

Challenging ourselves to succeed, it is time to think positively, relax and calmly attend to our meditation every day. Let's see where this takes us! At the very least, it will strengthen our faith in the Lord and enable us to live in his will. Once we realize the truth of the saying that 'not even a leaf stirs without his command', we will go through our destiny with a sense of understanding and acceptance, and with life's struggles automatically resolved.



The Clay Balls

Exploring caves along the seashore one day, a man discovered a collection of hardened clay balls. It was as if someone had rolled clay by hand into small balls and left them in the sun to bake. They didn't look like much but they intrigued the man, so he collected them up and carried them out of the cave with him. As he strolled along the beach he playfully threw the balls, one at a time, out into the ocean as far as he could.

He thought little about it until he dropped one of the balls and it cracked open on a rock. Inside was a beautiful precious stone!

Excited, the man started breaking open the remaining clay balls. Each contained a similar treasure. He found a considerable fortune just in the few clay balls he had left.

Then it struck him. He had been on the beach a long time. He had thrown maybe thirty or forty clay balls with their hidden gems into the ocean waves. Instead of the half dozen jewels he had found, he might have taken home five or six times that number and become a millionaire. Why hadn't he thought to look inside?

This story is an analogy for our attitude to other people. We look at someone, and we see the external clay vessel. It doesn't look like much from the outside. It isn't always beautiful or sparkling, so we discount the whole being. We see that person as less important than someone more charming or well-connected or wealthy. We haven't taken the time to find the treasure hidden within and as a result we treat them too casually.

There is a treasure in each and every one of us. If we take the time to get to know other people, and if we ask God to show us that person the way he sees them, then the clay begins to peel away, the brilliant gem begins to shine forth, and we gain a treasure in human friendship.

So let's not put ourselves in the situation of the man who found that he had thrown away a fortune because the gems were hidden in bits of clay. May we see the people in our lives as God sees them.

Love Personified

Whilst they come to us as fellow human beings, the Masters are human in such a perfect way that we are naturally drawn towards them. In their humility they always describe themselves as average – but we find them far from average. When we experience the way they answer all our questions with such great patience, we cannot help but realize how unique they are. The Masters' combination of magnetism and humanity has a profound and deep effect on us, leading to a life-long adventure of love.

A perfect living Master is a role model for his disciples. As we are fortunate enough to come into contact with such a Master, we should try our hardest to make the most of such a rare privilege. A living example, the Master demonstrates that we can perform all our worldly duties and have fun without forgetting our primary objective – spirituality. No one could claim to have a busier schedule than his. Despite being constantly on the move, performing duties at the Dera and travelling across the globe to interact with countless disciples, the Master undertakes spiritual responsibilities which we cannot even begin to understand, at the same time as being a good family man. As our mentor, he helps us realize how much can be attained in this very life. However, just as we have to work hard to achieve material success, we have to make an effort to attain our spiritual goal. We cannot just sit back and hope the Master will do all the work for us. Nor can we use the excuse that we are too busy. The Master proves that it is possible to balance personal and spiritual responsibilities.

Leaving behind the heavenly abode of Sach Khand, saints descend to our level for our sake, to take us back home. Given our limited understanding, we fail to realize the true significance of who they are.

Nor are we able to comprehend their unconditional love for us. The Master shows us the way to return to our long lost home but, for some reason, we find ourselves delaying the journey. Yet, how different we are with the material goods in our lives. Notice how we rush to make sure we don't lose out on retailers' time-limited, bargain basement offers. How ironic it is then, that when it comes to taking advantage of the biggest offer of our lives – and one that is given freely – we procrastinate. Is this because we don't believe in our good fortune or in our ability to make use of the gift of Nam? Question and Answer sessions are often laden with people asking the Master for his grace. As he emphasizes, we have already been given all the grace we need – now the ball is in our court. We must make room for more grace by doing as he has instructed, meditation and living in his will.

How blessed we are to have come into contact with a perfect living Master. Clearly, if we do not seize this opportunity, we will lose out. The good news is that, having taken us into his fold, the Master will not let us go astray; let us not take advantage of his graciousness. Instead, let us fulfil our promise without further delay. We have a guide – let's learn from him, set our priorities straight and reprogramme our minds. Let's restructure our routines, get rid of all the excuses and habits that take us away from our daily meditation, for that's all that really matters.

We have been taken into the care of a perfect living Master and given the glorious chance to return to our true home, reasons enough to be happy and celebrate life. The Bible tells us that God is love and on the physical plane, the Master is the epitome of love.



Book Review



The Lost Masters: Sages of Ancient Greece

BY LINDA JOHNSEN

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In *The Lost Masters*, the author Linda Johnsen informs us that many of the Greek philosophers who shaped Western thought were actually mystics whose teachings paralleled those of the ancient sages of India. Johnsen, who is best known as an author on Hinduism and yoga, was struck on reading the writings of Plotinus by the similarities between his teachings and those of Indian mystics. On further reading, she found that many Greek masters trained their disciples in various meditation practices, believed in reincarnation and the law of karma, and were avid vegetarians.

The book covers philosopher-sages of the Classical Period (500 BCE – 200 CE) through Late Antiquity (200 - 529 CE) and ends with the final closing of Plato's Academy by the Christian Emperor Justinian in 529 CE. This wide span of history includes the spread of Greek culture by Alexander the Great, the birth and death of the Roman Empire, and the beginnings of Christianity. Johnsen writes in an entertaining style with simple language so that the lay reader can understand the complex and rich history of Western mysticism.

Pythagoras (c. 570 - 495 BCE) is best known today for developing mathematical principles that became the foundation of Western science. Yet, Johnsen explains, "we've forgotten that in his own time he was best known as a spiritual master, a guru of the highest calibre, whose teachings would survive over the next few centuries to profoundly influence the great minds of Western civilization." Johnsen points out that the community he founded was similar to an Indian ashram. "The devotees were vegetarians, they didn't drink or take drugs, they dressed in white, they got up before sunrise to do stretching exercises and sit for meditation. They practised long periods of silence, and sex outside marriage was considered inappropriate."

Plato (c. 424 – c. 348 BCE) asked the fundamental questions: What is the nature of the soul? What happens after death? What can we know about the Supreme Being? Johnsen summarizes Plato's teachings thus:

The soul itself is immortal.... At one time a soul's association with a particular body comes to an end, and at another time it is reborn in another body, but the soul itself never perishes. Therefore it's imperative that we live pure lives. What ruins our lives is injustice and senseless aggression. What allows us to flourish is justice and a way of life that is sensible and self-controlled.

As Johnsen explains, Plato described man's plight in the world using the allegory of a cave,

in which we are born, live, and die. We're tied down so we can see only the wall in front of us. On that wall we see nothing but the play of shadows, yet those shadows are the whole of reality for us. Imagine that one man pulls loose and finds his way through the dark tunnels out of the cave. The first moment he steps into the daylight he'll be blinded by the Sun, but as his eyes adjust he'll be amazed at the spectacular world he sees around him. Now what if that man re-enters the cave and tells his friends about the amazing sights he's seen, and encourages them to escape too? Most people in the cave won't believe him; they'll think he's either crazy or a liar.

Apollonius of Tyana (c. 15 – c. 100 CE) is one of the spiritual masters of the Classical Period who is definitely known to have visited India. Records have survived of the period he spent "living with a community of yogis in the Himalayan foothills." The exact location is difficult to trace, but it appears to have been the Punjab or perhaps Kashmir. While he was there he received intensive yogic training, learning the Vedic system of astrology and techniques of controlling matter through the manipulation of sunlight. His Indian guru taught him that "when the mind is purified, the divine knowledge at the root of our being is revealed, and we locate our own Higher Self in the Self of all." Near the end of his life when he was

called to Rome to answer to charges of sorcery, he explained that he was practicing sciences he had learned in India and claimed that many of the mystery schools of the West originated in India.

Plotinus (204 – 270 CE) was “perhaps the most articulate and inspired master in Western spiritual history.” He started the school of Neoplatonism – rooted in the insights of Plato, but enlivened by Plotinus’s own teacher Ammonius Saccas – and thus sparked a spiritual revolution. According to Johnsen, his teachings influenced the development of Christianity. Nearly a thousand years later, Jewish rabbis blended his teachings with Jewish mysticism and reshaped the Kabbalah. His mind-expanding essays helped spark the Renaissance in Europe. Johnsen states that Plotinus’s teachings posit that “the soul is, in a sense, ‘amphibious,’ living sometimes ‘here’ in the deep and turbulent waters of material existence, and other times ‘there’ in a tranquil realm of light.” She paraphrases Plotinus: “The chains of our senses keep us bound here, as if we’re trapped in a cave. However, deep within, the soul remembers its true nature. This recollection motivates it to begin meditating.” Johnsen points out that this haunting remembrance of one’s real nature is called “*anamnesis* in Greek and *pratyabhijna* in Sanskrit.” Plotinus counselled the spiritual seeker, “Try to unite the divinity in yourself with the divine in all things.”

Hypatia (c. 350 – 415 CE) was a Neoplatonist in the tradition of Plato and Plotinus. She was a highly reputed scientist and spiritual master who trained her students intellectually as well as spiritually. Johnsen notes that professors at this time were more like the traditional gurus of India.

Students were initiated in mental and spiritual disciplines so that they not only understood the higher realities Plato and Plotinus had spoken of intellectually but also experienced them directly in meditation. It was not enough to speak about the One; a true master had directly experienced the One, and a true student made every effort to do so too under her guidance. Hypatia was widely recognized as one of the great spiritual lights of her time.

However, the cultural atmosphere in which she lived was hostile to intellectual and spiritual freedom, and although Hypatia was a beloved

educator, she was brutally murdered by a mob accusing her of being a demoness from hell who used sorcery and magic to captivate the crowds.

Proclus (412 – 485 CE), a committed vegetarian and an avid student of the Platonic lineage of mystics, wrote that “the ultimate purpose of life ... is to return to the One, the very root of our being.” According to Johnsen, he described spiritual teachers as:

special pure souls who descend into physical bodies in order to serve humanity. They bring with them personal knowledge of higher realms and are able to redirect the minds of ordinary men and women toward states of increasing awareness. Because the highest reality is so far beyond what we normally experience, we need divine grace, whether from God himself or from special souls like these, to make the breakthrough to enlightenment.

Proclus believed that a true man of wisdom should be a “priest of the universe,” and should honour all religious traditions. However, as the murder of Hypatia in 415 CE and the closing of Plato’s Academy in 529 CE illustrate, the atmosphere of religious tolerance in the Greek world was coming to an end. As Johnsen puts it, “The Golden Chain of enlightened Western sages – with the living tradition of spiritual knowledge and practice it preserved – was about to be broken forever.”

Beginning in 313 CE with the adoption of Christianity as the state religion by Roman Emperor Constantine, Europe was slowly becoming Christianized. As monasteries became the centres for spiritual and mystical practice – even being referred to as ‘Christian philosophy’ – the contributions of the teachers of the Graeco-Roman world began to be forgotten. Johnsen comments,

Today we consider meditation, reincarnation, vegetarianism, spiritual practices designed to turn us inward, and a recognition of the essential unity of all things to be purely Eastern. We’ve forgotten that these teachings were once an integral part of our own Western spiritual heritage.

