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# Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

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## **Spiritual Link**

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# The Home of the Lord

*The home of the Lord, the abode of comfort –  
Each person has within him divine bliss.  
The Lord is the source of true joy:  
Worship him and receive all happiness!*

*With your inner eye see him,  
With your inner ear hear him,  
Contemplate on him with your whole mind.*

*Intoxicated with his love, sing the praises of the Lord,  
For he is present in each particle and every being.  
Know only him and recognize only him –  
With your entire being, praise him alone.*

*Realize him in his totality,  
Let him permeate your entire being –  
Let this, O Nama, be the consummation of all your effort.*

Saint Namdev



# The Vital Need

*I know the way you can get  
when you have not had a drink of Love:  
your face hardens, your sweet muscles cramp.  
Children become concerned  
about a strange look that appears in your eyes  
which even begin to worry your own mirror and nose....*

*O I know the way you can get  
if you have not been out drinking Love:  
you might rip apart  
every sentence your friends and teachers say,  
looking for hidden clauses....*

*That is why all the Great Ones speak of  
the vital need  
to keep remembering God,  
so you will come to know and see him  
as being so playful  
and wanting, just wanting to help.*

*Dear one,  
indeed, please bring your heart near me.  
For all I care about  
is quenching your thirst for freedom!  
All a sane man can ever care about  
is giving Love!*

Hafiz, rendered by Daniel Ladinsky in *I Heard God Laughing*

Like the writer of the poem opposite, we too “know the way we can get”. The world is a place of turmoil, animosity and strife. Almost daily the media confronts us with news of conflict and war and their consequences. People are fighting, suffering and dying because of the desire for power, territory or money and the need for freedom. Maharaj Sawan Singh writes in *My Submission*:

*The world of today is characterized by tension, worry and anxiety. Apart from realized souls, no one is free from their impact, no matter what our walk of life. The notable absence of harmony in modern life comes from the spiritual bankruptcy of a society thrown into chaos by people whose souls are in distress.*

So the unrest in the world is just a reflection of our own inner restlessness, or strife, existing in us because our mind is not under control. This strife goes on as long as we're unconscious of our soul and not united with the divine source from which everything has emanated. This is our vital need.

Mystics and saints – realized souls – live among us to show us the reality of the world and of ourselves. At the same time they point out to us that we have the potential to liberate ourselves from all conflicts and suffering, by realizing God. So they encourage us to search for God, for permanent happiness, peace and rest, within our own body.

They assure us that if we live in accordance with their teachings our inner restlessness will be dispelled, and we will be able to live in a loving and compassionate way, in harmony with everything in our environment, respectful to all living beings, because of the bliss and unconditional divine love we will find in our hearts.

Mystics say that once we are conscious of that divine spark of love within us, in our soul, we can become one with the divine source

from which we have emanated. Becoming one with God leads to a different experience of this world, they say. Instead of discord, chaos and conflict, we will experience unity, coherence and harmony. We will realize that everything has a function and purpose, that nothing is meaningless; that everything is permeated with divine love; that every creature, every form, is an expression of that love.

What does living in accordance with the teachings of the mystics and saints imply? It means that we should eat a lacto-vegetarian diet, abstain from alcohol and mind-altering drugs, tobacco included; lead a clean and moral life, and practise meditation daily under the guidance of a perfect Master. Only by following these instructions can our mind become still and under control. Only then can we reach deep concentration during meditation. Only then can we become conscious of the divine love within us, which will reveal itself as light and sound. There is a Buddhist text, Avatamsaka Sutra, in which this is beautifully expressed:

*There is a supreme concentration called peace and bliss  
Which can universally save and liberate all sentient beings,  
Radiating a great light, inconceivable,  
Causing those who see it to all be pacified.*

As quoted by K. N. Upadhyaya, in *Buddhism, Path to Nirvana*

So it is the practice of the teachings, the practice of meditation that will dispel our inner restlessness. That will bring us peace, tranquility and bliss and will make us conscious of the presence of divine love within us and around us. Not instantly, but gradually, because the inner unrest and dominance of our mind is enormous, and this becomes obvious when we start to practise.

When we start to meditate we realize that even just sitting motionless is very difficult for us. Our thoughts disturb simran – the repetition of the five holy names. When we try to adhere to the vows we become aware of our attachments, limitations and weaknesses. This might be painful and it may cause us to lose our confidence and faith in the path.

At these moments it is important to realize that this awakening has a purpose and is of great value. It helps us to become humble. It helps us to learn to let go and surrender ourselves to God, to the Master. As Maharaj Sawan Singh writes in *Spiritual Gems*:

*[Human] frailties present themselves in almost every conceivable manner and interfere in concentration. But with the help of the Master and the sound current they are overcome, one by one, with every inch of the withdrawal of the current from the body towards the focus.*

He goes on to say:

*Do not lose heart but fight courageously. The battle has just begun. Mind is not stronger than the sound current. The Master is with you. He is watching your every movement. He is prepared to fight your battles with you. Take him as your helper. Have faith in him. Fight the mind and you will succeed.*

Keep on practising the teachings of the Masters, says Great Master, and you will succeed. Our Master is prepared to fight our battles with us; he is prepared to guide us, to help us and to support us. But we have to do our bit.

Between the Master and disciple there is a channel of giving and a channel of receiving. The Master's teachings, his guidance and the continuous showering of his grace and blessings constitute the channel of giving. Listening intently to his teachings; practising his instructions faithfully; remembering him constantly with devotion; remaining in complete obedience to him and rendering service with utmost dedication in thought, word and deed, constitute the channel of receiving. This all helps to make us receptive to his grace and bounty – to put our cup the right side up, so it can be filled with his love and grace. As the present Master has told us, the channel of giving is always open. We have to take care that the channel of receiving is not blocked.

So we must remember God, practise our meditation, and take shelter at the feet of our Master. For in this world of turmoil, becoming conscious of the presence of God, and drinking his divine love is our greatest, our most vital need.



*Contemplation is a state of mind which does not need either a monastery or a desert to be practised in. We can develop the contemplative gaze which penetrates to the heart of reality in order to reach its soul in the midst of our ordinary everyday life.*

*Contemplation is the capacity to live out the present fully.*

Henri Boulard, in *The Lion Christian Quotation Collection*

# Truth in a Nutshell

## Listening and Learning

Sadik Hamzawi, the Muslim sage, was asked: “How do you come to succeed, by his own wish, the sage of Samarkand, when you were only a servant in his house?”

Sadik Hamzawi replied: “He taught me what he wanted to teach me, and I learned it. My Master said once: ‘I cannot teach the others, the disciples, to the same degree because they want to ask questions, they demand meetings, they improve the framework, they therefore only teach themselves what they already know.’”

But I said to him: “Teach me what you can and tell me how to learn. This is how I became his successor. People have cherished notions about how teaching and learning should take place. They cannot have the notions and also learn.”

Idries Shah, *The Way of the Sufi*



*The path of knowledge  
I travelled intensely.  
In the circle of mystics  
I have been elevated.  
But unveiling the heart  
I finally came to see – really –  
that I know nothing.*

Kwaja Nasir al-Din Tusi, in *Love's Alchemy*

# Choose Your Company Wisely

Sometimes events that are quite uncomfortable to go through can help us to grow. This article is inspired by recent events and feelings that unfolded in my life. I am a young seeker and I enjoy the company of other people my own age, some of like mind, some very different.

Do you believe we meet certain people to teach us something? And if so, is it the people themselves teaching us or the Creator himself? I would think and hope it to be the latter, as everything is in his power and is subject to his will, isn't it? Even if situations end negatively, there are useful lessons to be learned. Out of something seemingly negative, positivity can come, if we choose to see it. I've read in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. I:

*Whatever we have sown in the past, we are reaping some of the results now. So we have certain karmic relationships with our mother, father, wife, daughter, son, friends, associates, country and the like. Those karmas have resulted in our birth in this particular body and at this particular time. We have to fulfil all the karmas, the destiny allotted to this life. You cannot escape from your karmas.*

So every relationship we encounter in life is the basis of settling our karmic account, nothing more or less. Day in, day out, this is all that each and every one of us is experiencing. However, even when we're faced with what we interpret as bad karma, the divine is present, and does help, should we choose to be open and ready to see. All we need to do is learn to trust our Master and trust the intuition that is given to us when we put our faith in him.

I guess when we mix in a varied group of young people, we are bound to explore each other's different beliefs. My strategy is to listen and be tolerant and to respect other people's different perspectives. But of course it's not just about listening. Sooner or later there comes the desire to share one's own beliefs. So, what if the other person just doesn't appreciate the things you value – or he or she even criticizes? In this situation recently, I turned to the Sant Mat literature again and found the following good advice in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. III:

*Why should you be touchy about their remarks? Why should we be touchy? Let them say whatever they feel like. They've every right to comment and you have every right to reserve your judgment. Don't be affected by what they say. As Great Master often said, you can't pick up the thorns of the world but you can definitely wear shoes. You can't make them quiet, but definitely you can be indifferent to what they say.*

Maharaj Charan Singh elaborates:

*We have to rise above public opinion. It shouldn't bother us. When I know there is a horse before me, even if the whole world says it is a donkey, it doesn't bother me. I am convinced from within myself that it is a horse. There's no sense in my arguing and trying to convince anybody that it is a horse, not a donkey. Let them say what they like – why bother with them?*

Upon reading the two quotes above it is clear that we need to try to cultivate a strong and positive mind. I realize that this might be harder for those who are by nature sensitive and prone to think and feel deeply. However, if we don't try to adjust our attitude in this situation

it can affect our health and well-being. The way forward, for those who have been initiated, would be simran, and for others hoping to follow the path in future, perhaps it's simply trying to remember the Master and his strong and happy approach to life.

Whilst we can't expect other people to think in the same way as we do, I think we can and should at least expect them to respect us. If that respect is not there, then our sense of discrimination should tell us to avoid them. The same is true if our 'moral compass' – that still, small voice inside us – tells us that we are making a friend of someone whose lifestyle is unpleasant or vicious.

After beginning an interesting friendship recently, I found myself in just that situation. After much analysis, I had to admit that my 'friend' was making me increasingly anxious and conflicted. Something was clearly not right and it had to be addressed. Maharaj Charan Singh writes in a letter in *Quest for Light*:

*Try to live according to Sant Mat principles, sticking to the diet prescribed and avoiding all undesirable company. The company we keep has a great effect on our general way of life.*

He also explains in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol III:

*You can judge within yourself whether the person is worth your company or not, but you may not criticize him. You can avoid him.... If you think he's not worthy of your company, avoid him. The idea is to keep good company from a meditation point of view. If you find certain company not conducive to meditation, naturally you have no option but to avoid it. If you don't find a person's company helpful for meditation or he otherwise has*

*tried to exploit or misuse you, naturally what can you do except avoid him?*

So what did I end up doing? I assure you my story does end with a big positive. I ended the association, feeling a great sense of relief and as if a big weight had been lifted. Clearly the correct decision! Coming out of the situation ignited in me a new sense of self-respect. I was grateful for all the understanding I had gained from reading the Sant Mat literature and it made my faith in the path stronger. I realized that the acceptance I need is not from the world at large but from myself, based upon what I know the Master wants for us. As a result, I have now applied for initiation, thankful that some dark days led in the end to an unexpected blessing.

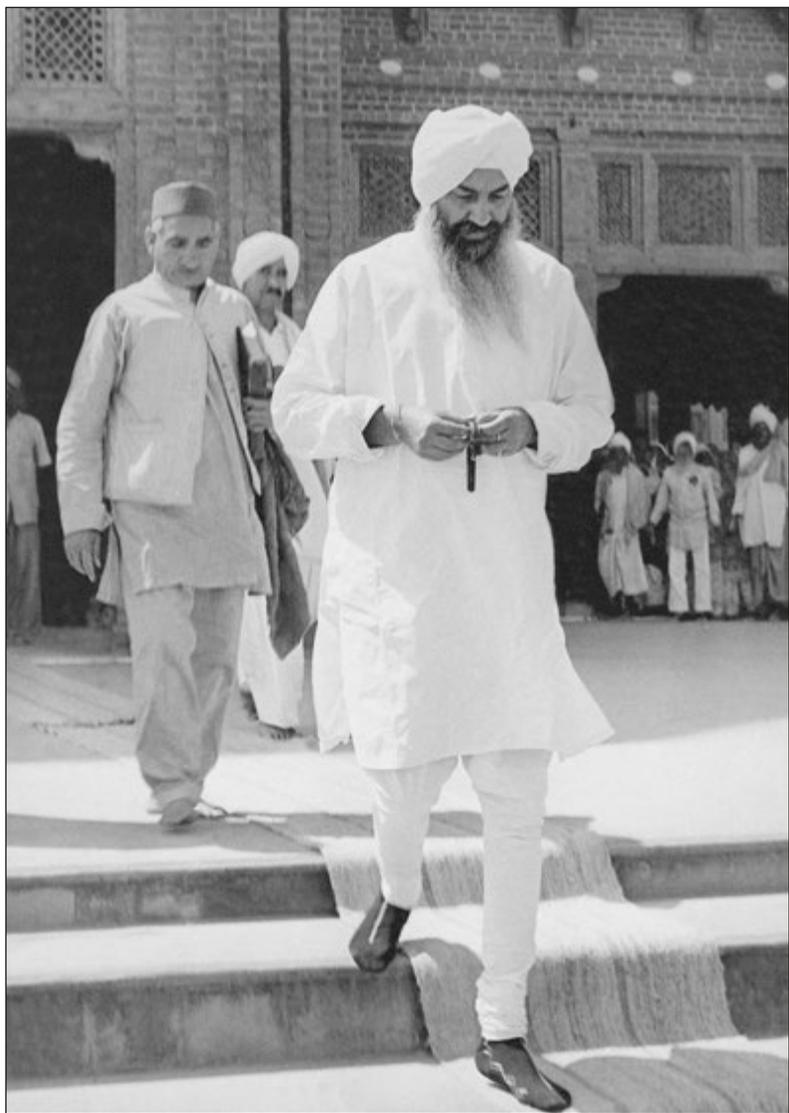
*Anything which turns our attention towards the Father, reminds us of the Father, reminds us of our home and pulls us towards our home is a blessing.... Anything which keeps us away from him is not his blessing. In that light, you can yourself weigh what is a blessing and what is not a blessing, from a Sant Mat point of view.*

*Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III*



*If you wish to be fully alive you must develop a sense of perspective. Life is infinitely greater than this trifle your heart is attached to and which you have given the power to so upset you.*

Anthony de Mello, in *The Lion Christian Quotation Collection*



# Helpless to Look

## Extracts from *Spiritual Perspectives, Vol.III*

**Q:** *Master can you speak to us of darshan, please?*

**A:** You see, darshan for a disciple is nothing but his helplessness to look at the Master because he's in love with the Master. Love compels him to look at his loving face – that is darshan... Why do we look at the face of people whom we love? We always like to gaze at them, talk about them, because we love them, and a lover never thinks what advantage he gains by looking at his beloved's face and by talking to her. His advantage is that he has been able to express his love or experience his love – that is the advantage.

**Q:** *How important is it for the Master to look at the disciple?*

**A:** Our gazing at the Master is more essential. Master is already gazing at us because he is pulling us from within – that is why we become helpless to look at the Master. So he has already done his duty; otherwise no disciple would fall in love with the Master – unless the Master wants him to fall in love with him. He sows the seed, then it sprouts, then it grows; so he is the one who is already pulling us from within. He is the one who is creating his love in our heart, strengthening it, and helping us to grow it. He's doing everything from within. Whether he looks at you from the outside or not doesn't make any difference at all.

**Q:** *Master, can satsangis get darshan from their Master's successor?*

**A:** You see, it will always remind him of his own Master. No matter how much he looks at his Master's successor, it always strengthens his faith in his own Master. There is no betrayal of love. This is just reminding you or reviving your love for your own Master.

*Q: In the big satsang in Chattarpur, there are so many people who are sitting very far away from you who have your darshan from a video screen. Someone asked me if the benefit of that darshan is different from the benefit people receive when they are sitting nearer you.*

**A:** Love doesn't diminish if you are far away. Probably the people who are trying to sit very near the dais are trying to count my wrinkles or count the hairs in my beard and nothing else. Otherwise it makes no difference. Darshan means the helplessness of the lover to look at the beloved. It is the pull which is within every one of us. That is darshan. Whether you are sitting near or whether you are sitting far away, it comes to the same thing.

*Q: Sometimes during darshan, we're lucky enough to get eye contact with the Master, and we feel very special inside. When you are looking at us in darshan, are you thinking of the person that you are looking at, or is that feeling often in the heart of the disciple?*

**A:** The master always looks at every disciple, wherever they may be. He is right within every one of us, and he is always looking at us. Sometimes we are not very happy that he is looking at us.

*Q: Master, when does darshan help to clear karma?*

**A:** You see, mere darshan doesn't clear karmas. The intention, the faith with which you look at the Master – that helps you to build your meditation. The faith, the intensity of love which provokes you, pulls you to look at the Master – that helps you.

*Q: Well, I've been told that a moment's darshan of the Master will wipe away twenty-one lives. Is that inner darshan that they're talking about?*

**A:** But darshan of what intensity? Darshan doesn't mean just looking at the Master. Just merely looking at the Master is not darshan. The

helplessness of a disciple – he cannot help but look at the Master, thinking him to be God – that is darshan. Guru Nanak has written somewhere that if you look at your Master with faith that he is God – and it is very difficult for us humans to put that faith in anybody, no matter how much we may convince ourselves intellectually – that darshan washes away all your karmas. But it is impossible to be in the flesh and to look at another human and believe him to be God. Intellectually we may be convinced, but the faith which comes from the heart doesn't accept this at all. But darshan helps us to attend to our meditation, to do better dhyan, to hold our attention within; and it strengthens our faith, our love, which is very helpful for meditation.

**Q:** *What is the difference between outer and inner darshan?*

**A:** Inner darshan is permanent. It can stay with you forever. Outer darshan can't. Outer darshan should lead you to reach to that level of consciousness where you can get the inner darshan which is your constant companion. Outer darshan only fills us with love and devotion so that we can reach to that level where darshan can always be with us. Outer darshan can't remain with us always.



# Scientists of the Soul

Maharaj Charan Singh once said:

*The greatest miracle of the mystics is that they change the very attitude of our life.... They turn everything upside down in our life.*

‘Science of The Soul’ is the official name of the registered charity of the Radha Soami path. Scientific method involves forming an hypothesis to explain a given phenomenon, then researching and experimenting to prove or disprove it. Spiritual research, like any other, involves questioning, reading, thinking, and attending talks by respected teachers. Our ultimate research is meditation, an endeavour to control the mind so that we may become conscious of the divine within ourselves. But as scientists of the soul we must use the very instrument that we are trying to control to lead us to our true self, our soul.

We are told about our divine purpose when we first approach the teachings, but we need constant reminders because the so-called reality that we experience at a physical level seems so convincingly real. That is why we need our perception to be turned upside down again and again to help us discriminate the real from the illusion. Can modern science help us, and provide information that supports the unchanging truth of the saints? In a limited way, it can.

## **Free will ?**

Bill Bryson, in his popular book about modern science, *A Short History of Nearly Everything*, does not discuss free will as such, but in his opening paragraphs he demonstrates how little control we have over our existence:

*Welcome, and congratulations, I am delighted that you could make it. Getting here wasn't easy, I know. In fact, I suspect it was a little tougher than you realize.*

He goes on to explain that “first trillions of drifting atoms obligingly combined” (to form your physical body). You are unique, so each set combines differently and in a very particular way. These atoms, which are totally unaware of you, continue to co-operate until you die. These atoms occur everywhere else in the universe – mainly carbon, hydrogen, oxygen and nitrogen and a little calcium and sulphur. Common stuff, the only thing special about them is that they make ‘you’. He says that there is no law or obvious reason for this, but they make everything that is observable too.

Bryson also talks about evolutionary theory, the survival of those most able to adapt to the earth's ever changing environment. He points out that over the last 3.8 billion years, each of our ancestors has been attractive enough, healthy enough and lived long enough to produce the next generation, so that we finally find ourselves right here and now – “That is of course the miracle of life.”

## **Time**

Mystics tell us that time is part of the mind's illusion, so what do scientists say? Now that brain function can be observed by scans, we know that there is a tiny delay while our brain co-ordinates the information that comes from our five senses because it arrives at different rates. So our perception of the present moment is always a few micro-seconds in the past. In addition it has been observed that we reinvent any given memory each time we recall it, colouring it with our present state of mind. And we all have different perceptions of any shared experience.

So the past is gone, subject to our fallible memory, and the future is only available to our imaginations based on what we believe happened in the past. We function using a series of guesses to plan our lives and we all know that the old saying is true: "Man proposes, God disposes."

The certain truth about the future is beyond our ability to know, and the truth about the past is unreliable. But now, this present moment, is real, isn't it? Or maybe just a fraction of a second old? Our senses are describing reality to us aren't they?

### **Vision**

What can we see? Vision is the brain's interpretation of light waves that enter the eye and are turned upside down as they land on the retina. This information is coded as electrochemical impulses, which are sent along interconnecting pathways of neurons where they are interpreted for us by the brain. So our reality depends on interpretations of coded impulses.

Then the colours we see are our brain's analysis of light waves, but we are only able to perceive a few of these waves with our naked eye, and even this perception varies among individuals.

Even more extraordinary, according to neuroscientist David Eagleman, is that our brain holds a template of what it has already processed, which it only amends with small amounts of new information in each moment. So we are mainly seeing what we expect to see.

### **Touch**

And our touch? Let's take something solid like this magazine you're reading now: this is real enough, surely? But we know that at the sub-atomic level everything we see, no matter how solid looking, is composed of tiny particles, full of energetic space, smaller than we can imagine and moving very quickly and precisely. The perception of solidity is created by the repulsive force of their electrical charges.

## **A Theory of Everything and the nature of matter**

Physics can take us so far, but the big questions remain unanswered. A hundred years ago Einstein developed his general theory of relativity. In the same period the study of quantum mechanics began to describe the micro-world of atoms and particles. These theories form the basis of our knowledge of the physical universe even today, but they don't go far enough. Particle physicist Harry Cliff, who works on the Large Hadron Collider at CERN says:

*The universe is far, far too interesting. Relativity and quantum mechanics appear to suggest that the universe should be a boring place. It should be dark, lethal and lifeless. But when we look around us, we see we live in a universe full of interesting stuff, full of stars, planets, trees, squirrels. The question is, ultimately, why does all this interesting stuff exist? Why is there something rather than nothing? This contradiction is the most pressing problem in fundamental physics, and in the next few years, we may find out whether we'll ever be able to solve it.*

Two properties of the universe can be measured: the cosmic energy field that holds the atoms together and therefore everything we see; and the force of dark energy that appears to be driving the expansion of the universe. Cliff calls these measurements "dangerous numbers" because if they were even slightly different, the universe would not exist. But we have no explanation for them and he wonders if we are capable of understanding these forces at all:

*We may be entering a new era in physics: an era where there are weird features of the universe that we cannot explain; an era where we have hints that we live in a multiverse that lies*

*frustratingly beyond our reach; an era where we will never be able to answer the question, 'Why is there something rather than nothing?'*

## **Consciousness**

The author of *One Being One* says that what is missing is a proper understanding of consciousness:

*It seemed to me that while the scientist looks at the outer universe with the help of his analytical intellect, the mystic explores the inner universe of the very consciousness that scientists use to perceive the outer world. Both are looking at the same one universe, the only difference being the perspective and the field of study.*

He goes on to say that human perception is limited by our particular senses, and we, like other life forms, construct our version of reality from the information we get. Dolphins are conscious of a 3-D sonar world which is as detailed as their visual one and bats can catch a speeding moth by ultrasound because they live in a dark world of vibration.

The writer presents a fascinating idea about the nature of consciousness and reverses the earlier theory that there is a slight delay to our perception of the present moment. He does this by describing a presentiment or pre-stimulus response identified in repeated experiments. The brain takes account of images presented at random on a computer screen a fraction of a second *before* they are seen. He says:

*Before!*

*It's mind-blowing! Which way round is reality?... It seems to demonstrate that the event had already happened in the mind.*

To him, it suggests that the mind is creating the material world through consciousness.

He explains this idea by using light as a metaphor:

*Everything we perceive with our senses is just a projected image. There is the light in the projector: that's the One Being. Then there's the film through which the light shines: that's the mind. And then there's the screen on which the projected images appear: that's this world.*

*And us? We are the light, of the same essence as the One Being. So we, with our minds, are part of the projection system. We are conscious beings, and everything is a projection of the One Conscious Being, the Universal Consciousness. Switch off the light in the projector and everything disappears.*

He continues by explaining that the projection system is supremely dynamic, there are multiple screens of increasing density and we are looking at the coarsest version. And what we call science is the analysis of that screen using ill understood instruments – the brain and the mind, which are actually part of that screen.

*So there is no external material world that is entirely separate from us. Our sensory experience of the material world is the material world. Or our personal version of it, for it's an entirely subjective experience.*

He concludes that these ideas don't invalidate human knowledge, they just place it in an all-encompassing spiritual picture. Later he says that a part probably cannot know the whole; we need a different kind of knowing, a wider perspective which includes consciousness, matter

and our source. We have to escape from the screen of our projected reality and climb up the beam to the light in the projector or “the axis of being within ourselves”.

## **Conclusion**

As scientists of the soul with a perfect living Master to help us, we have the huge benefit of the miracle the saints bring us. We can continue our research, knowing that it is consistent with many scientific findings that lead to the only true research: our meditation. Remembering that the Masters come to, “turn everything upside down in our life”, could help us to understand that upside down is the right way to be!



*Perhaps we have done everything in the world to find health and radiance, happiness and peace, except to listen to, and heed the soul, crying always that same plaintive cry, the cry of the stream for the ocean, the cry of the prisoner for freedom, the cry of the watcher for morning, the cry of the wanderer for home, the cry of the starving for food, the cry of the soul for God.*

Leslie Weatherhead, in *The Lion Christian Quotation Collection*

# Food for Thought

## Spot the Difference



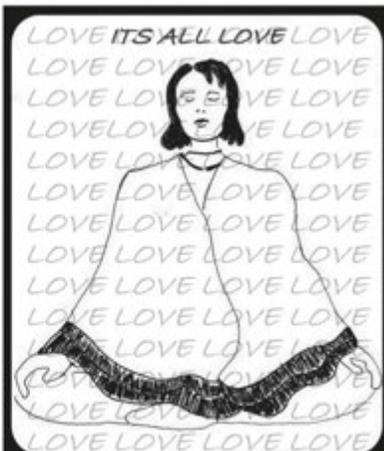
unconscious



semi-conscious



self-conscious



super-conscious

# Bulleh Shah Meets His Master

*Bulleh Shah, the well-known Muslim saint of northern India, was a devoted disciple of the mystic Inayat Shah, who earned his living as a gardener in Lahore in the early eighteenth century.*

*In the book Bulleh Shah, published by RSSB, the following story is related of how the young Bulleh first encounters his Master:*

It is said that even before coming in contact with Inayat Shah, Bulleh Shah was spiritually developed, and had acquired certain miraculous powers. One day, it happened that Bulleh Shah passed close by the small field where Inayat Shah was planting out onion seedlings. Seeing the fruit-laden trees on both sides of the road it occurred to him to test Inayat Shah's spiritual power. Invoking the name of God, Bulleh looked at the trees, and the fruit started falling on the ground. Inayat Shah looked back and saw that unripe fruit was mysteriously falling from the trees. He immediately realized that it was due to the mischief played by the young man passing by. He looked towards Bulleh Shah and said, "Well, young man, why have you brought down the unripe fruit from the trees?"

This is what Bulleh Shah wanted, to find an opportunity to talk to Inayat Shah. He went up to him and said, "Sir, I neither climbed up the trees, nor did I throw any stones at the fruit, how could I pluck it from the trees?" Inayat Shah cast a full glance at Bulleh Shah and said, "O, you are not only a thief, you are also being clever!" Inayat's glance was so penetrating that it touched Bulleh's heart and he instantly fell at his feet. Inayat Shah asked him his name and his purpose in coming to him. Bulleh replied, "Sir, my name is Bulleh and I wish to know how I can realize God." Inayat Shah said, "Why do you look down?"

Get up and look at me.” As soon as Bulleh raised his head and looked at Inayat Shah, the Master again cast him a full glance, laden with love, shaking him all through. He said, “O Bulleh, what problem is there in finding God? We only need to uproot from here and plant there.”

This was enough for Bulleh Shah. He got what he had wished for.

Inayat Shah had blessed him with the essence of spirituality in these few words. He conveyed to Bulleh Shah that the secret of spiritual progress lies in detaching one’s mind from the world outside and attaching it to God within.



*I have now seen the fair Beloved,  
Whose beauty shines through his creation ...  
The pirs and prophets are his slaves;  
Men and angels bow before him.  
They place their head on his feet.  
He is the greatest of all the lords.  
I have now seen the fair Beloved.*

*He who wants to meet the Lord,  
None can do so without a guide.  
Inayat Shah revealed the secret;  
And the mysteries stood resolved.*

Bulleh Shah

# Have You Ever?

Have you ever had the experience of sitting on a train, looking at your fellow passengers, only to feel completely disconnected? Or had a feeling of utter aloneness despite being in the midst a crowd? At such moments we may start to question why we feel that way. In *Quest for Light*, Maharaj Charan Singh wrote a lovely response regarding this loneliness:

*This constant feeling of loneliness and missing something is in reality the hidden unquenched thirst and craving of the soul for its Lord. It will always persist as long as the soul does not return to its ancient original home and meet its Lord.*

Even though we understand this and pick ourselves up when we're down, low ebbs still come and rattle our inner equilibrium.

The Masters continually tell us about the strength and calmness we can draw from our regular meditation practice. The practice of mindfulness in workplaces has become increasingly popular these days, because there have been proven results that it makes workers more relaxed, improves their concentration and reduces their heart rate. So surely, even with our most pathetic and feeble attempts at meditation every day, it is at the very least doing something to help us both physically and mentally.

We are told that once we are initiated, the Masters take over the administration of our karmas and those potential stab wounds can become mere pinpricks. The great thing is that we have the perfect method to get through those challenging times – the practice of simran.

It is a wonderful antidote and alternative. Rather than letting our mind obsess over negative, repetitive thoughts, we can give it something else to concentrate on, even if it is just for a little while. More importantly, through this action we are invoking the gift of love and faith.

In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II, Maharaj Charan Singh says:

*Put your whole mind in these words; you will automatically feel the love and devotion. Let no other thought come in your mind. Let the whole of yourself, the whole of your mind, be in simran. Love comes automatically. The idea is that love creates faith, and faith helps us to practise.*

We should do our meditation because our Master asks us to, and it pleases him. And in return he showers us with abundant grace and gives us the strength to persevere with our daily practice and to face life's many hurdles. Eventually, we will reap the ultimate reward – being able to see the Radiant Form of the Master within.

This path is a journey that is completely individual for each of us. Our lives are preordained and will unfold as they are meant to. We are often given the analogy of puppets on strings, with the puppeteer guiding our steps and actions according to the individual scripts we've written by way of actions in previous lives.

At the lowest points in our life, it may not seem possible that we have created our fate, written the play of our own lives. But the director of our play, of our very own life's movie, is only following the script. All we can do, in both good times and bad, is play our parts as actors and actresses to the best of our ability. There's no point bemoaning our fate, as we will have to play out our scenes regardless

of our complaints. The biggest comfort we have is that the Master is pulling the strings. In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. I, we read:

*We have to act in this world with detachment from our role in life, knowing that he is pulling the strings and whatever is to happen will happen, but all the same doing our best under all circumstances. Thus we make ourselves receptive and become good puppets in his hands.*

Putting into practice what we have learnt is a step in the right direction. No one said that the spiritual journey would be easy. In the beginning there are preparations. Our research may involve reading books or asking others for their insights and advice. For some of us, this can take a fair amount of time. Some of us may travel on blind faith, believing that we'll reach the end somehow; others will research very meticulously before feeling the comfort and courage to start.

Then we embark on this journey of a lifetime, of many lifetimes. Sometimes we seem to be driving through dark, cold valleys, where the road is rough and potholed. Sometimes we feel as if we are soaring above the clouds as the sun kisses our face. But the ups and downs are all part of the journey, and encountering the physical form of the Master helps us to make sense of it all. We begin to feel we have found what we were searching for all along.

Our first encounter with the Master feels special and unique to each one of us. It's as if the Master shines a light inside us and we feel that anything is possible. When we see the Master in person, everything in the world pales into insignificance – we are so completely absorbed within his physical presence. It is the one time we can say we are truly living in the present moment. If only we could find a way to make that feeling last all day, every day, no matter what we are going through.

We all know those feelings we have after a national satsang or a trip to the Dera. Initially, we feel on a high, ready to conquer the world and take our renewed lightness and optimism with us into our daily lives. But often something happens that knocks us back into previous patterns of behaviour. We find ourselves seemingly back where we started, asking ourselves, “Why am I feeling like this again? Did I learn nothing from my last encounter with the Master?”

Whether we appreciate it or not, the truth is that things *have* sunk in and we have taken something positive away with us. Slowly but surely, with each encounter and with each round of simran that we do, we are beginning to make ourselves that little bit purer. We have to put in the hard work and keep on scrubbing at those layers of dirt we have accumulated. And eventually, we will start to see the golden hue shining through. Maharaj Charan Singh commented on this subject when he wrote in *Quest for Light*:

*Please remember that this world is a furnace whose fires purify the mind and thus burn the dross away from the soul. The soul in itself is pure, but in its present state it is covered with the filth of mind and its desires. Trials and troubles are sent by the Lord for our own good, to burn away this filth. Take your woes and sorrows in that light and turn to the Lord for solace and peace.*

In *The Science of the Soul*, Maharaj Jagat Singh said:

*Regarding your statement that man is a lonely traveller in the journey of life, by and by, as you vacate the body from below, give up the path of the mind and travel the path of Nam, you will feel that you are not quite alone and that the Master always is your companion.*

For many of us, in our darkest, lowest and most depressing periods, it has felt like we were completely alone. At these times, the Master was there all along. We didn't see him, yet he was there, giving us that much-needed nudge or even carrying us. We should never underestimate the grace and love that the Master bestows on us and never forget that he is always there within us, giving us the encouragement and strength to keep going.

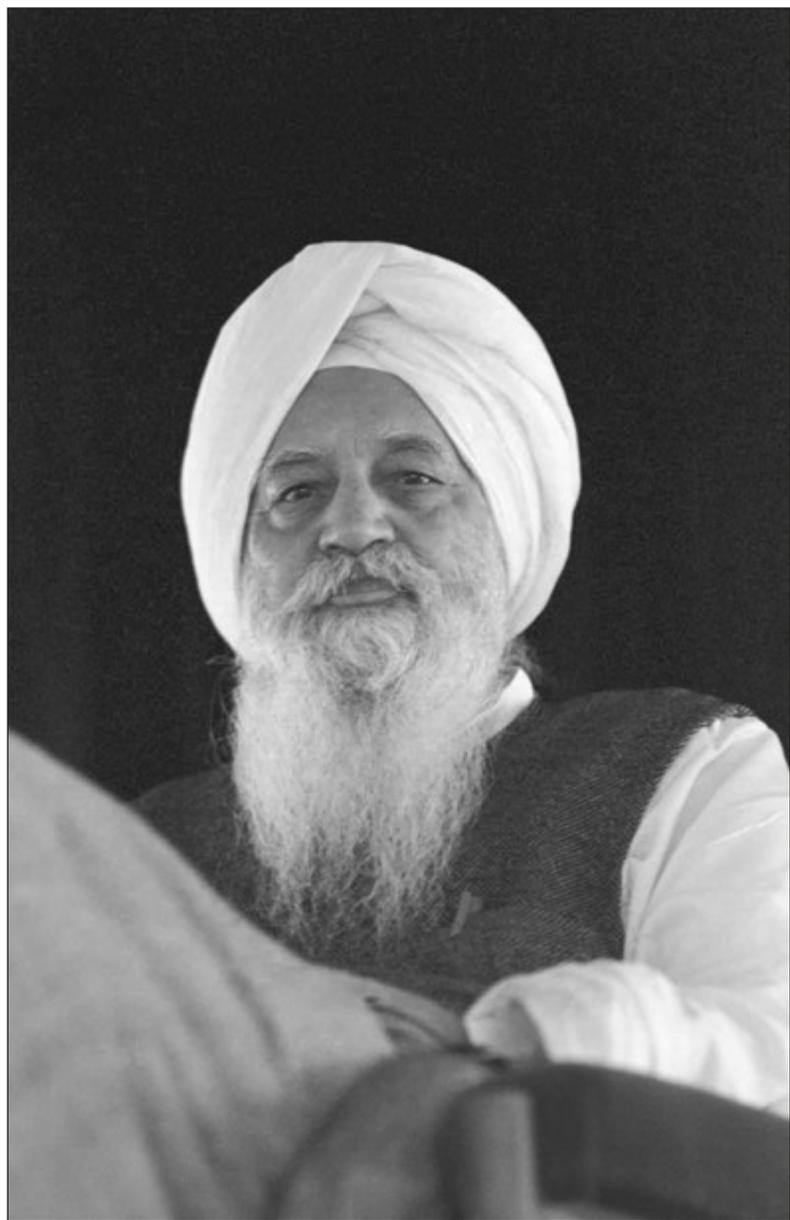
The Master absolutely believes in our ability to reach our final destination. That is why he initiated us in the first place. There are no failures on this path and he has promised unequivocally that he will take us back home. Let's keep our promise to him and do our daily meditation. The Master only asks us to meditate, not to succeed at it. Isn't that a wonderful thing in itself? We can meditate and be really 'bad' at it and nonetheless, if done sincerely, our meditation will still please our Master!

So what now? As our lives continue to unfold and we continue to make progress on this path, there will be good days and bad days – there will be dry spells interspersed with some cheerful moments, those little sweeties we receive that keep us motivated. The thing we need to keep telling ourselves is that it is all part of the grand plan, it's all been written into our life's story and we are just turning the pages as we go through the various chapters.

Maharaj Charan Singh reminds us in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. III:

*On the path, we are always going ahead and ahead. But we have to pass through so many phases; so many human failings are there. But we ultimately overcome them. The Lord doesn't commit any mistakes. If he has marked someone, he has got to pull him to his own level. We commit mistakes, but not the One who has marked us, who is pulling us from within.*





# Unwrapping the Self

The Masters describe initiation into Surat Shabd Yoga as a gift. They say we receive *Nam daan*, which means ‘the gift of Nam’ – the gift of contact with the Shabd, the divine inner sound which is resounding in all living things.

Shabd is the sound which our soul has been yearning to find since it came into the creation. It is our true self, and our purpose in life is to realize it. As a matter of fact, we have all heard the spiritual sound and had intimate connection with Shabd before. It was when we descended to this physical plane and became engrossed in mind and matter that we stopped being absorbed in it and seemingly lost ourselves – and we have been running around trying to find ourselves ever since.

The saints go further and describe initiation as ‘the gift of life’. In *Philosophy of the Masters* (abridged), Maharaj Sawan Singh quotes from the Adi Granth:

*He gives the gift of life  
He teaches devotion to the Lord  
He unites his disciples with the Lord*

The Great Master goes on to explain:

*At the time of initiation the Master gives the ray of life and connects him/her with the melody of the Shabd. He then establishes a subtle link with the disciple, guides him and takes him to the original home.*

The Masters guide us towards becoming re-acquainted with real love, with what our soul really is: a drop of love from the ocean of the Lord. Initiation enables us to take the first step towards this, which is regaining control over our mind so that it is no longer dominated by the senses. The fully concentrated mind can attain stillness and peace once more and merge into the universal mind. This frees the soul to attain God-realization, sometimes described as truth, consciousness and bliss (*sat, chit and anand*). It is a state of truth because the Lord is unchanging and eternal. It is pure consciousness, because the soul is fully aware, accepting, loving and joyful (unlike the mind which operates under the binary distinctions of opposites, or duality). And it is bliss because the soul knows that it is one with all that exists and is in love with the Lord.

### **Making use of his gift**

The Masters often say that no one is permanently happy in this world; it is the domain of both pleasure and pain. The mind is not satisfied here – whatever it gets, it wants something more, hence its restless wanderings over many lives. But Maharaj Sawan Singh tells us in *Philosophy of the Masters* that when we receive initiation:

*The Master injects, as it were, his consciousness and light into the soul of the disciple. This injection ... permeates the disciple like leaven and produces a new spiritual consciousness and light.*

The Master does not make us saints overnight. When he initiates us, he is not altering our mind. It remains exactly as it was. But he is giving a turbo-charged boost to our soul along with the means of learning to control that renegade mind.

From the time of initiation, we are trying to elevate our attention. We have been given the leaven of our Master's power and love. What we do with this gift is up to us. Have we left it unwrapped, saving it for later? Have we opened it and then, like a small child, lost interest in it? Have we become fascinated with the wrappings and crystallised the spiritual path into rituals?

### **A long and painful process**

The prerequisites for initiation are very small in comparison to what we receive, and make perfect sense for a practice which aims to develop our consciousness. We are asked to follow a lacto-vegetarian diet. We have been given an enhancement of life so why take life by eating flesh and bringing burdens on ourselves and pain to other beings? We give up mind-affecting drugs and alcohol. These substances impede the proper functioning of the frontal cortex – the area of the brain responsible for discrimination, awareness of consequences and rational thought. We live a clean moral life which is the nearest we can get to truth before rejoining the Lord – so no cheating, lying or deception; if we try to be truthful, our ego will have no 'wriggle room'. The ego is always trying to present things as it wants them to be rather than as they really are, and the Masters say that it is the ego which separates us from the Lord. Anything that helps defeat the ego is good. This is why physical and mental seva is so important as a way of reforming our behaviour.

As we develop, we may find that it's a long and painful process. Not just external events – mishaps, accidents or soured relationships – but also an internal understanding that comes from the clear thinking brought about by meditation reveal our own flawed psychology. We may feel we are much worse people than we were when we were initiated.

Maharaj Charan Singh used to use the example of a ray of sunshine coming into a dark room and revealing previously invisible dust motes floating around. They've always been there – our negativities, faults and prejudices – but we didn't recognize them. Now that we're becoming painfully aware of them, what can we do? Under any kind of stress we tend to revert to habitual behaviour; we can make an intellectual decision to change but that won't work for long. The Masters advise us not to dwell on or analyze ourselves too much. We can't analyze a negativity into extinction. All we can do is something positive, which is our meditation, and meditation will build the crucial relationship with our Master.

### **Come in, your time is up**

The Master, who has already achieved union with the Lord, has a spiritual light which the soul recognizes, feeling the Shabd's pull if it is the time for the soul to go home. It's rather like the numbered boats for hire on some lakes, in which you can go out for a row. At some point the boatman will call: "Come in Number Seven, your time is up". The Master is our boatman, each saint coming at a particular place and time for his group of disciples.

Our initiation is the beginning of a process that proceeds under his watchful eye and is destined to conclude in a positive way. Maharaj Sawan Singh advises:

*After a disciple is connected with the Name by the Master, he begins to progress on the spiritual path and to get control over his weaknesses. When the seeker progresses on the spiritual path by following the directions of the Master, he does not remain subservient to the body. On the other hand, his soul tends to soar to the spiritual regions, to break off all ties with the earth and to dwell more and more in the higher regions within.*

These inspiring words literally tell us to ‘rise above’ worldly problems – to leave the body, to die while living in order to realize the self. This can only happen by faithfully following the vow of doing two and a half hours of daily meditation and aiming in everyday life for constant simran. We are aiming to perfect our simran so that it goes on automatically – even when we have to attend to worldly work, it pauses only to surface again when our attention is free. That is loving remembrance, sustained by the deepening attachment to the Master.

### **Breaking through the barrier**

The Masters say that if we persevere with our meditation we may not have any tangible dramatic results, but we will feel the presence of the Master around us and his elevating influence. We are working to withdraw our attention from our physical bodies in this very lifetime – to die daily, rather than wait for the one big death at the end of life. The Great Master said that once we have withdrawn our attention right up to the third eye (developing the faculty of seeing within), the most difficult part of the meditation journey has been completed, because from that time onwards we have the awareness of the Master’s Radiant Form within.

Our ultimate aim is God-realization, but, before that, we will reach self-realization, the knowledge of who we really are. When we realize the self, we see that we are ultimately soul beings, not mental beings. We reach a state of consciousness at the threshold of eternity where our soul cries out, ‘I am That’. In *Sar Bachan Poetry*, we read:

*The Soul has opened the window of Bhanwar Gupha  
through which it hears the voice of Sat Purush.  
The hansas (souls) from Alakh  
come to welcome and usher in the new arrival.*

In this poem the soul has broken through the barrier of the mind. One day, with the Master's grace, that window will be opened for us. Bayazid Bastami, a Persian mystic, said:

*For thirty years, God was my mirror, but now I am my own mirror. That which used to be I, I am no more.... I have vanished. I glided out of Bayazid-hood as a snake glides from a cast-off skin. And then I looked and saw that lover and Beloved and love are One.*

We will happily and willingly discard that ego – ending the separation which has been a millstone around the neck of the soul for so long – paving the way to union with God.

In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. I, Maharaj Charan Singh explains:

*Unless the mind gets some better pleasure than the worldly pleasures, it refuses to leave the worldly pleasures. So we withdraw our consciousness to the eye centre and get in touch with the Shabd within. When we taste that nectar within with the help of that Shabd and Nam, we come back to Trikuti, the second stage. When the mind comes to its own source, the soul automatically gets release from the clutches of the mind. And the soul and mind are separated. That is self-realization. That is knowing ourselves.*



# How Desperate Are We?

There is a story about a disciple who was constantly imploring his Master for inner experience. So one day the Master took him to a river, led him into the water and held his head under while the disciple struggled desperately. The Master eventually let him go and asked him what he was thinking about when his head was under the water.

“I could only think about getting my breath and nothing else”, replied the disciple.

“When you want inner experience with the same intensity, you will get it”, said the Master.

So are we desperate? Or rather, how desperate are we?

Desperation goes beyond mere adherence to the four promises we make at the time of initiation, although these are an essential foundation on which to build. Maharaj Jagat Singh advised that “one must mould his life in accordance with the principles of satsang. Every thought, speech and action must conform to them. A satsangi’s daily conduct must bear the hallmark of excellence and must reveal that he is the follower of a true Master.” These are lofty ideals but ideals which we must constantly strive to attain by being vigilant. We must keep a close watch on our mind and if, despite our best intentions, negative thoughts arise, we should not allow them to be translated into speech or action.

The mind is like the perpetual motion machine which scientists have been seeking in vain for centuries. Its very essence is motion; it is restless and undermines our efforts to still it. When we attempt to meditate it throws up endless images and thoughts to prevent us doing simran and dhyān. However, we can use this to our advantage by accepting our helplessness. When we say we cannot meditate, it

is absolutely true: we neither can nor cannot meditate. It is all in the Lord's hands. It is his grace if meditation happens and his grace if it does not. We must go through the motions of making the effort to meditate. It is one of the paradoxes of Sant Mat that we cannot influence the outcome of our efforts in any way, and yet we must continue to strive as if we had some control over our destiny.

We sometimes see this clearly in our everyday lives when something we had endeavoured so hard to obtain eludes us, while something else of equal value just falls into our laps. Baba Ji says that we should take everything in life as a gift from the Master, as his *parshad*. We should neither become elated when things appear to be going well nor dejected during difficult times. Instead, while sitting at the eye centre, we can take it all with gratitude. Pleasure or pain, he gives us exactly what we need to burn off karma and become free. Because that is what this path is all about – becoming free, not becoming rich or successful or respected or anything else. It is a path of liberation.

We do not know what is good for us; the Master knows what is good for us. We are not masters of our own destiny: he is the Master of our destiny; and thank God for that!

To give an example of how little we understand of what is beneficial and what is not, let us return to the example of dry meditation where nothing appears to happen other than a constant struggle to rein in the unravelling mind and keep the attention focused at the eye centre. No light, no sound, just struggle. But to use a cycling analogy, how do we get stronger – by cycling uphill or freewheeling downhill?

At any rate, the Masters tell us repeatedly that the Lord wants our sincere efforts, so we must continue to strive to the best of our limited ability, offering no paltry excuses about being too busy or tired to sit. Then we should leave the results to the Lord.

In *Die to Live* Maharaj Charan Singh says:

*We have to form a habit of meditation. If you say, “When I feel the urge I will meditate” you would perhaps never meditate. If you think, “When I feel the right atmosphere, then I will meditate. I will sit in the morning, I will sit at noon, I will sit in the evening,” you will always go on giving excuses to yourself; you will never attend to meditation.*

We have to be as determined as if we were boring through a tunnel in utter darkness and do not know when we will break through to the light. It could be today, it could be tomorrow or it could be some years away. Nevertheless, two things are certain: first, we will not reach the light unless we keep on drilling, and second, once we break through into the light the difference will be absolute; we will have moved from darkness to light, our effort will be rewarded and there will be no return to darkness.

But does this motivate us? Or do we procrastinate about our meditation, putting it off for another day?

At junior school lunch times, we were supposed to eat everything on our plates. Perhaps, like me, you may have eaten the bits you didn't like first to get them out of the way, leaving the best till last. There was always an impatient dinner lady (lunch supervisor) who thought you were taking too long – or who perhaps thought you were leaving the bits you didn't like – and so would try to whisk your plate away before you had actually got to the best bit. This of course is a metaphor for procrastination. We spend so much time dealing with the things that are less significant but which have to be done – our duties and obligations – that it must seem as if these are the bits we really like. And we leave meditation – the best bit – till last, thinking that we'll enjoy it when

we've got everything else out of the way. But those duties and obligations and (let's be honest) pleasures, have a tendency to consume all our time, so at the end of the day – in fact at the end of every single day – we may realize that we have not found the time to enjoy our meditation before the remains of the day are whisked away. Worse still, what if we reach old age, and we are still putting off enjoying the best bit, and our life is whisked away? It doesn't bear thinking about – but we *should* think.

We should never assume that we have plenty of time left to live and can thus delay getting serious about the path. We are all getting older. Time may be an illusion, but it's an illusion that's running out for us. When we are young we think we have plenty of time to get round to doing what is right for our soul, so we put off our meditation and busy ourselves with trivia. Sometimes the mind is more subtle – it convinces us that we are clearing our plates so that we can enjoy fully the best bit which we are saving till last. But the dinner lady of death can come along at any moment and take away our plates before we are ready.

In a famous passage in the Bible, Saint Paul says: “When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.” He is using the example of childhood and manhood to talk about spiritual maturity. When we ‘grow up’ and realize the true value of things, we will start to re-arrange our priorities and invest more time in our spiritual well-being.

We have to get serious. As someone once stated, “This path is not a joke.” It is not something to be undertaken lightly. This doesn't mean that we have to go around looking glum and feeling miserable. Look at the Masters – they alone are truly happy because, knowing the true worth of this creation, they enjoy it for what it is. We mistake it

for reality when in fact it is illusion. For this reason we have ups and downs rather than staying balanced.

Gradually, by dint of regular meditation, we will go through our karmas smilingly, knowing them to be administered by him in our best interests. In the meantime, we must be serious about the path. We cannot pay mere lip service to Sant Mat. We cannot be Sunday satsangis or even just early morning satsangis. We must be twenty-four hour satsangis, living and breathing Sant Mat. And the only way to achieve that is by constant simran.

The five holy names are imbued with the spiritual power of our Master. They are the key with which we escape from the prison of the material world. They will unlock the door to the inner worlds. This is what the Masters tell us.

These holy words are so crucial that they should not be repeated parrot-like, uncaringly. They should be repeated slowly and consciously, with love, devotion, even desperation. If that seems an impossible task, let us at least repeat them with gratitude – gratitude to our Master for his grace in bestowing the gift of initiation. For if life sometimes seems hard, just pause to think how it would be without Nam. Nam is our sheet anchor. Imagine life without it and, in a spirit of gratitude, do simran.



# Changing Course

From the time of initiation it can be an enormous shift for our minds to change from a worldly perspective to a spiritual one. It reminds me of how supertankers, due to the huge amount of momentum they build up as they sail, take a long time to stop or turn. A modern oil tanker can be a massive four hundred metres long and will carry many thousand tonnes of crude oil. Just imagine the power needed to alter course.

Ultimately it is grace and mercy – the mystery of love, the Shabd – that brings a person to the path of spirituality and makes it possible to tread that path. However, it is our responsibility to contribute whatever we can to make the path easier for ourselves. Our contribution to this great journey, however small, is highly significant, for it is our effort to move towards the Lord that brings his grace. To make any progress, the structure of our daily life must be sound. In shipping terms, this is not like the annual polishing of a boat's hull or the spring cleaning of the cabins. This is the rebuilding of an entire engine room. This is making our mental attitude seaworthy, fit for the journey to the higher regions and beyond.

As with a supertanker, the forward momentum of our mind is enormous, and changing its direction from the downward earthly pull takes a long time. Our mind has accumulated a heavy load of karma over the eons of time that it has spent drifting through the creation. Any changes will not be instantaneous. But just as the well-directed supertanker makes its turn eventually, the Masters advise that all who take initiation and embark on this course will make it home.

Before coming to the path, we have, both as animals and humans, built a life on other living creatures' suffering and indulged our sensual appetites. That is the course that has bound us to a return to this

illusion again and again. We have killed for pleasure, to eat, to protect, to dominate. Drunk or sober, we have not realized the consequences of actions taken. Continuing on such a course can never be a source of long-term happiness. Just as a life built on a lie cannot lead to the truth, the suffering of others cannot lead to permanent happiness. The promises we make at the time of initiation help us to re-orient ourselves towards a spiritual life.

To ensure that we change our course, we must focus on programming the controls for positive action. This must be done even though most of the world may be drifting in the opposite direction, pulled by the currents and tides of physical existence. We must consciously direct our actions, knowing where we are going and keeping our destination in view.

The Masters say the mind should be turned always towards the positive, towards the highest good, the highest goal, and in this our own Master plays a vital part as he is our mentor and inspiration. So important is our orientation in life that in the Sikh spiritual tradition, the word often used for the spiritual adept is *Gurumukh*, meaning simply, 'One whose face is turned to the Guru'. Most valuable in our thinking and effort is *bireh*, or intense longing to be with the Master.

To experience the Word or Shabd so that our faith may become unshakable, we have to make time for spiritual work. We have to turn within ourselves to the quiet and sometimes lonely solitude of the inner world. We have to work in, and on, ourselves. The most important tool in changing our mental attitude is meditation.

True detachment from the world can only arise from attraction and attachment to something higher. Once we contact the Word within and experience its sweetness we will automatically become detached. Then our mind will reflect the tranquil and positive qualities of the soul rather than the fickle and negative nature of the senses. As we

build the atmosphere around us that we need to support our meditation, we will find that the ups and downs of fortune will not affect us greatly. It's as if the sound of the ship's engine fills us with contentment, and we are carried effortlessly in the direction we want to go.



### Information on Article Submissions

If you wish to submit an article for publication in *Spiritual Link*, please mail a printed, typed version by post to one of the following addresses. Emailed submissions will not be accepted.

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- Articles should focus on the Sant Mat teachings and may also draw on the universal teachings of other mystics;
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- Articles must be your own original work. If quotations from other sources are included, complete source references must be given.
- Articles should be between 500 and 1500 words in length.

If accepted, your article will be edited according to the requirements of the magazine. You will be contacted only if your submission is accepted. Please include your name, age, postal address, and email address with your article.



## The Gift of Grace

BY PAUL BRUNTON. COMPILED BY SAM COHEN

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British theosophist Paul Brunton (1898–1981) travelled to India in 1930, beginning a life-changing journey that brought him in contact with many gurus. His books on mysticism in the 1930s and 1940s became best-sellers, and he is often credited with introducing Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi to the West.

In the 1950s Brunton retired from writing books for publication, but at his death it was found that his journals, filled with notes and essays on spirituality, amounted to 20,000 pages. These journals were published in 1984 in sixteen volumes. It is from these journals that Sam Cohen has selected passages on the subject of grace. In *The Gift of Grace* Cohen has organized these passages thematically, dividing them into fourteen chapters with titles such as: “Grace and Ego”, “Self-Effort and Grace” and “Grace: Its Mysterious Arising”.

In the first chapter, titled “A Sense of Grace – What It Is and Isn’t”, Brunton observes, “Grace is a cosmic fact. If it were not, then the spiritual outlook for the human race, dependent entirely on its own efforts for the possibility of spiritual progress, would be poor and disheartening.” The reason our situation is not at all hopeless is, he claims, that “grace is always present since the infinite power from which it originally comes is always present”. Brunton puts it quite simply: “The grace of an infinite being is itself infinite”.

One central theme running through the entire book may be summed up in his statement: “It is not the lack of grace that really accounts for our situation but the lack of our cooperation with the ever-existing grace.” One aspect of “cooperating” with grace is simply being open to it. In Chapter Five, titled “Letting Grace In”, Brunton notes, “It is true that grace is given, but we ourselves help to make its blessings possible by the opening of the self to receive it, the silencing of the self to feel it, and the purifying of self

to be fit for it". And, "Grace needs a prepared mind to receive it, a self-controlled life to accept it, an aspiring heart to attract it".

Letting grace in, he says, requires inner silence and stillness. "Let us stop all this busy business awhile and stand still. Let us listen for a while for then we may hear the word which God is forever speaking to us." Brunton says that the impulse to turn the attention inward comes to us all from time to time, but we ignore or brush it aside.

*It is important that the feeling of "inward drawing" which comes to you at times be at once followed up whenever possible, by a withdrawal from external affairs for a few minutes and a concentration on what the feeling leads to. This practice is like a thread which if followed up will lead to a cord, a rope, and so on. Thus you will benefit by the grace which is being shed upon you, and not turn away unheedingly.*

Another aspect of "cooperating" with grace lies in accepting the situations and events in our lives as what they are: gifts of grace. Brunton advises: "If you cannot compel or command grace, you can at least ask, work, and prepare for it. For if you are not prepared properly by understanding, you may not be willing to submit when it does come, if the form it takes is not to your liking." In Chapter Six, titled "Grace Brings What We Need", he speaks of developing the wisdom and understanding to receive grace. As he puts it, "The divine grace brings you not what you ask but what you need. The two are sometimes the same but sometimes not. It is only with the wise that they always coincide; with others they may stand in sharp conflict." In fact, he claims, that with wisdom we will come to see that the very situations we found most abhorrent were gifts of grace:

*If you could penetrate into the so-called unconscious levels of your mind, you might find to your utter amazement that your enemies, critics, or domestic thorns-in-the-flesh are the very answer to your prayer for grace; they become so, however, only when you recognize them as such, when you perceive what duty or what self-discipline they give you the chance to practise.*

In Chapter Eight, titled “Grace and Ego”, Brunton discusses the single biggest barrier to grace. He writes, “The real bar to the entry of grace is simply the preoccupation of your thoughts with yourself. For then the Overself must leave you to your cares.” Brunton calls the divine the “Overself”, or sometimes the “higher self”, to indicate its fundamental oneness with our own true self, as distinguished from our ego. Brunton writes:

*The internal work of grace is only possible if the aspirant assents to the direction it is taking and supports the transformation it is effecting. If it is severing you from an attachment which you are unwilling to abandon and if you withhold your consent, the grace itself may be forced to withdraw. The same may happen if you cling to a desire from which it seeks to free you.*

He explains that the aspirant must play an active role in accepting – or surrendering to – grace:

*Grace is not a one-way operation. It is not, as a few erroneously believe, getting something free. There is nothing free anywhere. For when the grace starts to operate it will also start to dispel those negative qualities which obstruct it. They will resist, but if you adopt the correct attitude of self-surrender and are willing to let them go, they will not be able to resist for long. But if you hold on to them because they seem a part of yourself, or because they seem “natural”, then either grace will withdraw or it will lead you into circumstances and situations that remove the obstructions forcibly and consequently painfully.*

Brunton points out that spiritual seekers often go through phases in their development when they feel that grace has left them. They may suffer doubts or feel forsaken. However, this may all be part of the mysterious ways in which grace will ultimately crush the ego. Brunton writes, “When the ego is brought to its knees in the dust, humiliated in its own eyes, however esteemed or feared, envied or respected in other people’s eyes, the way is opened for grace’s influx. Be sure that this humbling of the

inner man will happen again and again until you are purified of all pride.” Therefore, he offers this reassurance:

*The very power whose presence you may think has denied you – grace – is taking care of you even when you are not conscious of this fact. The more anguish, at such a time, the more the higher self is squeezing the ego. The more you seem to be alone and forsaken, the closer the higher self may be drawing you to itself.*

In Chapter Nine, titled “Self-Effort and Grace”, Brunton observes, “The passing over into higher consciousness cannot be attained by the will of any man, yet it cannot be attained without the will of man. Both grace and effort are needed.” Therefore, he counsels, “If you think that the result depends wholly upon your personal endeavours after holiness, you are wrong. But if you do little or nothing to control yourself because you wait for the grace of God or the help of a master to come into your life, you are also wrong.”

He notes that the struggle to control the mind can be long and hard. “Many have failed to dis-identify themselves from their thoughts, despite all attempts. This shows its difficulty, not its impossibility.” While agreeing that for those who struggle and strive to still the mind, in the end it is grace alone that “will liberate them from their thought-chains”, he likens the seeker’s seemingly useless struggle to hoisting the sails of a ship:

*It is not by special intervention that the divine grace appears in your life. For it was there all the time, and behind all your struggles, as a constant unbroken radiation from the Overself. But those struggles were like the hoisting of sails on a ship. Once up, they are able to catch the wind and propulsion begins automatically.*

One is never alone in this struggle. “When grace has led you sufficiently far, you will be distinctly aware of an inner presence. It will think for you, feel for you, and even act for you. This is the beginning of, and what it means to have, an egoless life.”

