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# Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

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## **Spiritual Link**

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# The Treasure Is Yours

*Why do you keep your eyes closed?*

*Blinded by the dark,*

*Why not search for the eternal light*

*Which radiates within?*

*The Master has chosen you, O precious one,*

*He has put on you a special mark;*

*Awake into the sombre night,*

*Lest in sleep you miss his call.*

*A hidden journey awaits your coming,*

*A stream of love does flow,*

*Follow the magnificent path,*

*Gleaming with rays of radiant glow.*

*The unceasing melody resounds aloud,*

*Leading to the chambers of infinity.*

*There are treasures to be found,*

*Your birthright, to attain with dignity.*

*This treasure is yours indeed,*

*O Listen to the Master and let him lead.*

*Go within and ride the wave.*

*In the Master's lap, you will forever be safe.*



# Our Mission Statement

*What I hear, I forget. What I see, I remember.*

*What I do, I understand.*

Confucius

A mission statement has become an integral part of the corporate identity. The statement might include what a company stands for, its values and its vision. From the time of King Arthur, when shields carried by the knights were ingrained with mission statements by way of symbols and insignias, to the present day business world, the mission statement acts as a beacon to keep us focused in the right direction.

Most of us, at some point in time, have probably tried to script a mission statement. A typical corporate mission statement might include the following: to be the best in our field; to provide first-class service to our customers; to increase company profits.

In Sant Mat, we can also make use of this concept to reach our spiritual goal. Not simply by putting our aims down on paper, but by keeping a mental focus on our purpose and objective. We might begin by asking questions like the following: What is the purpose of my existence? What am I going to accomplish with my life? What is my mission?

The declaration of our mission is not a mental act of conception; it is a mental elevation from which we are able to recognize if our lives are on a trajectory aligned with the greatest power of all – the universal truth. Just as a game of chess would be meaningless if there were no rules, so would our lives be meaningless if there were no laws that guided our true selves.

The Masters explain that the purpose of our existence is to realize ourselves and ultimately connect back to God. As Maharaj Jagat Singh has stated:

*This life is but a link in an infinite chain of existence. The body perishes but the soul lives on – immortal, treading the path back from its painful separation and prodigality to its blissful return to the mansions of the Lord.*

*The Science of the Soul*

Mystics tell us that although we are in a body, we are not the body – we are spiritual beings going through the experience of being human. From this encouraging point of view, we are pure beings of a spiritual nature already, but whose purity has been temporarily obscured by our mind and senses.

The Master comes here on a mission of mercy. He comes to initiate us, to put us in contact with the universal truth within us. His task is to teach, guide and protect us, as he leads us on our journey homeward. However, even as he sets us on the path, our wayward mind pulls us into seemingly harmless detours that take us off track.

The Sufi mystic, Rumi, likens our situation to that of a servant who was sent by a king to a country to accomplish a specific task. The servant went to that country and did many amazing and wonderful things, and eventually returned back to the king's court. The king asked him, "Did you complete the task that I sent you for?" The servant answered, "My Lord, please, first let me thank you. The place you sent me was a magnificent place. I met a beautiful lady and married her. We had children and so, to support my family, I went to work and ..." The king interrupted, "But what about the task that you were sent for? Did you accomplish it? I did not send you to make

money or to get entangled with the people there.” The subject bent his head in shame and quietly admitted, “My Lord, I forgot ...”

And so it is with us – we tend to forget our purpose. We easily get sidetracked and lured by the mind and senses. We forget our true nature. In the physical world, living forms are like pieces of pottery. Obviously, they are useful and necessary if the soul must exist here. But consciousness or life itself does not depend upon these transient objects – they are external shells that can be changed or broken or disintegrated by time, leaving only a few mournful remains for the archaeologist; they are made of matter that ‘moth and rust doth corrupt’. A true mystic is only concerned with the release from the forms and cycles that imprison our soul.

We need to focus on our target, keeping our mission in view, as an archer might take aim with a bow and arrow. Our mission is to recognize and acknowledge the universal truth. To attain it, submerge in it, be enveloped by it, to the point where we ourselves become the walking truth.



*Each of us has a mission to fulfil: a mission of love.  
At the hour of death, when we come face-to-face with God,  
we are going to be judged on love; not on how much we have done,  
but on how much love we have put into our actions.*

Mother Teresa, *Living in Love*

# Something to Think About

Humility is not weakness. It is such a powerful thing that all the powers of the world have to bow to it. Man conquers himself with pridelessness. No one can defeat a prideless man as behind his humility is acting the secret power of the Lord. Humility is an ornament of great men.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *Philosophy of the Masters, Vol III*

\* \* \*

If so much can be achieved with modern science, what about divine science? If you can hear BBC here today, across thousands of miles, why can't we hear the Lord's voice within ourselves? When we enjoy so many plays on TV, why can't we enjoy the inner realms within ourselves? It's just a question of tuning the mind.

Maharaj Charan Singh, as quoted in *Legacy of Love*

\* \* \*

The combination of key letters that enables one to open the safe or the prison of the body is the raising of the body-consciousness so that it hears and unites with the Shabd, the voice of God. This is the ancient wisdom, which all messengers of God come to teach in this world. This law is eternal and cannot be changed or modified; it is same today as yesterday and forever. This act is real or true worship. It is all embracing and comprehensive.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *The Path*



# The Commitment Factor

*There is power in keeping a commitment, in knowing that our word is worth something. There is great value in just making that commitment to meditate.*

*Living Meditation*

It has happened to many of us. We make a commitment and later realize we cannot follow it through. We compromise our personal integrity and let ourselves down. We let other people down and project the impression that we are not serious and dependable. And to make it worse, we are saddled with guilt.

The ability to keep a commitment affects various aspects of our life – our relationships, our careers and businesses, and so on. But the impact that it has on our spiritual life is perhaps the most significant, and the one that affects us the most, as it has a bearing on our relationship with the Master.

As disciples of a perfect living Master, we are explained very clearly at the time of initiation, what is required of us. There are no grey areas. We voluntarily committed to adhering to a 100 percent vegetarian diet, abstaining from alcohol and mind altering drugs, living a life that is grounded on morality and, most importantly, practising meditation for two and a half hours daily. We made these choices. The question is how have we held up on our commitment to the Master? Is our integrity intact?

The term commitment implies dedication to a certain purpose or line of conduct. It also means practising one's beliefs consistently. Therefore, there are two fundamental conditions for commitment.

The first is having a sound set of beliefs, and the second is faithful adherence to those beliefs by one's actions.

If we truly believe that spirituality is the core of our value system and the foundation of our way of life, then not only should we structure our lives around it, but we need to further apply the highest level of commitment that it deserves. It follows, therefore, that our spiritual beliefs have to be channelized into action. Our actions express our level of commitment which clearly demonstrates how seriously we take our beliefs. As Arthur Gordon, author of *A Touch of Wonder*, aptly says:

*Nothing is easier than saying words. Nothing is harder than living them, day after day. What you promise today must be renewed and re-decided tomorrow and each day that stretches out before you.*

It has been said that commitment is approached in one of two ways: from the outside, where external factors determine whether we will keep our commitments or not; and from the inside, where choices have to be made based on our value system. It is a well-known fact that external circumstances and conditions are subject to change and are not in our control. Change is the nature of the world we live in. If we wait for perfect conditions to put us in the right frame of mind to honour our commitments, we will surely be left behind. Those perfect set of circumstances may come, but rarely do we know when, and even more rarely do they last. Therefore, our level of commitment will fluctuate and wane with those circumstances.

What is of essence is the internal factor, where our choices that we have control over will either strengthen or compromise our level of commitment. By making the right choices, keeping our spiritual

development a top most priority, we are in a position to control our level of commitment.

But to achieve and maintain the correct frame of mind is the one big battle that we all have to overcome. Demonstrating commitment particularly on the spiritual path requires a great level of determination and persistence and that does not come easily. As the spiritual Masters remind us ever so often in their discourses and writings, anything that is worth having or pursuing does not come easily. In fact, it is usually a struggle, albeit a worthwhile struggle, for something we deeply believe in.

We need, however, only be concerned with developing the right attitude that will support our efforts in sustaining our commitment to the path. The mystics remind us that the moment we are initiated, we receive all the grace we will ever need to do our meditation. When we lack motivation, effort is the solution. With our efforts, we show the Master that we are trying, and thus we enhance our receptivity to his grace. Repeated effort and Master's grace allow us to take control over our minds. Moreover, we can renew our commitment daily by reminding ourselves that every time we sit for meditation, we are honouring the most important commitment we could ever make.



*Put all your worries aside,  
because there is nothing higher than meditation.  
Increase the duration of your practice from day to day,  
never decrease it; always keep this in your mind.*

Baba Jaimal Singh, *Spiritual Letters*

# Become Like Children

There once was a little boy who walked into an ice cream parlour with a piggy bank in his hand.

As he stood there looking at the showcase, he asked the attendant for the price of a big cup of ice cream. The attendant said, “It is seventy-five cents.” The boy then emptied his piggy bank and ended up with a big bunch of one-cent coins in his hand. After counting them carefully, he asked the attendant again, “What about the smaller cup?”

Irritated at the amount of time she was wasting on this boy, she rudely answered, “Sixty-five cents – if you want it take it, otherwise please leave ...”

The little boy gently said to her, “No, I am sorry. Please give me a small cup of chocolate ice cream.”

When she counted the coins he had given her, she said to him, “But you’ve given me seventy-five cents!” The boy answered, “Yes, ten of those one cent coins are your tip.”



*Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children,  
you will never enter the kingdom of Heaven.*

Bible, *Matthew* 18:3

# Courage

When we are initiated, we are given an opportunity to discover an ocean of bliss, but we will not be able to actually carry out this journey if we remain scared of losing sight of the shore. In order to take steps towards embracing our mysterious reality, we will have to slowly start walking away from the comfortable and secure illusion we currently live in, and more often than not, this requires an enormous amount of courage.

We often mistake courage with fearlessness. Yet, courage is not the absence of fear but the mastery over it. If there is no fear, the question of having the courage to face it will also not arise. It has been beautifully said that courage is the art of being the only one who knows that you are scared to death.

All of us have our share of fears and worries; all of us have our own shortcomings and weaknesses. When we hear about the bravery and courageousness of the perfect saints and their ardent love for the Lord, we find ourselves so inadequate in comparison. But then again, discipleship is not about being perfect; discipleship is about striving for perfection.

It is not easy, though, to bring back our attention over and over again in meditation when the mind keeps dodging us and escaping. It is not easy to accept the hard blows of life that take place because of our karmas, but which are difficult to bear nonetheless. It is not easy to put up a front and smile for the world, when the heart and soul are deeply aching for something more meaningful.

All our Master expects from us is that we put up a strong fight against the mind, but the result of that fight, be it success or failure, is equally welcomed by him. Sometimes we will be able to control the

mind and sometimes it will control us, which is why, as disciples, the greatest test of courage is to keep struggling without losing heart.

The question then is: how does one develop this kind of courage? There are no schools or colleges of bravery so to speak, and nobody has ever learned the art of being courageous through reading books. Courage is a quality that is developed within us as we keep practising it, just like a muscle that becomes stronger with constant exercise. Initially, we pretend to be courageous and eventually such courage culminates in an unwavering and heartening inner strength. Times of misery and distress are actually our biggest benefactors in that sense, because this is when we are given the opportunity to build that muscle of courage.

*Times of calamity and distress have always been producers of the greatest men. The hardest steel is produced from the hottest fire; the brightest star shreds the darkest night.*

Andy Andrews, *The Traveller's Gift*

Similarly in our life, which is now a life of discipleship over and above anything else, there will be many a challenging moment. What we must remember though is that each of these moments will come with scores of great opportunities – opportunities to experience our Master's unrelenting grace and protection, opportunities to put our faith in Master's love to test and turn it into conviction, and opportunities to show the kind of courage that will one day undoubtedly be rewarded with a real sense of freedom and fearlessness.

So let's take each heartache in meditation, each moment of hopelessness, each instance of doubt and each anxious cry and turn them into them into flowers of courage – flowers that will entice our Master to embrace us, no matter how unworthy we may be, as we stand carrying them before him every morning in our meditation.

# Understanding the Process

## A Letter from Maharaj Sawan Singh

I am glad to learn that you have received initiation. Now it is for you to concentrate your scattered attention and withdraw it from the limbs and the body into the eye centre, and sit there within yourself. When the eye centre becomes the headquarters of your attention, then the sound current will be able to pull the attention upward.

The method of concentration (repetition of the names) is a natural process. Everyone is busy in repeating words, audibly or mentally, concerning his work in life. Here, words connected with the spiritual journey have been substituted in place of words used in daily routine life. The withdrawal of the attention from the limbs and the body into the eye centre is not new either. Everybody who goes to sleep, brings his attention – intentionally or unintentionally – into the eye centre, but lets it fall down to the throat and navel centres instead of holding it in the eye centre. The only difference in the process of concentration is that we are to hold the attention in the eye centre and not let it drop down.

The sound current is present in everybody already, only its presence has been explained at the time of initiation. Therefore, the whole process is perfectly natural. There is no artificiality in it. It is safe, does not cost anything and has no outward symbols. No other person can interfere in it; it can be practised by all and does not clash with any religion.

With love and faith, devote time to this work regularly. The achievement of results will depend on your effort. There should be no hurry here. A calm, peaceful mind, working slowly but steadily, will attain success.

It is only when we sit in meditation that we begin to discover the power, the waywardness and the obstinacy of the mind. The mind has been running wild ever since we came into the wheel of life and death, and so will take time to yield. You are just beginning the fight against it. It is a lifelong fight; and the reward is, if one conquers the mind (makes it motionless in the eye centre), he wins the world.

You say you feel lonely. The whole creation and the Creator are within you. If you take your attention inside of you and attach it to the sound current, you will be at peace with yourself and with the world. The lasting peace lies inside of us. It is not to be had outside, in worldly objects and worldly companions.

*Spiritual Gems*



*I entered even into my inward self, Thou being my guide, and able I was; for Thou wert become my helper. And I entered and beheld with the eye of my soul (such as it was), above the same eye of my soul above my mind, the light unchangeable. Not this ordinary light which all flesh may look upon, nor as it were a greater of the same kind, as though the brightness of this should be manifold brighter, and with its greatness take up all space. Not such was the light, but other yea, far other from all these. He that knows the Truth knows what that light is, and he that knows, knows Eternity.*

Saint Augustine, as quoted in *Philosophy of the Masters, Vol IV*



# A Forgiving Heart

Many times in life, we are confronted with hurtful incidents triggered either by disagreement, a slip of the tongue, blatant rudeness or a deed committed in bad judgment. The occasion generally accelerates the harbouring of thoughts and feelings of ill will. We hold grudges, and the desire to get 'even' with our intimidator fuels the flames of anger and hatred within us.

These emotions are part of an automatic retaliation response. Only later do we realize that these feelings of bitterness, vengeance, hatred and anger have penetrated into our lives and become our predators. Instead of diligently shielding us from harm and safeguarding us, these feelings often build up into another crisis. They clutch on to us, feed on themselves, and destroy our true character. These negative emotions quickly play havoc in our lives and overpower our minds to such an extent that we can no longer function rationally.

In the book *Embodying Forgiveness*, L. Gregory Jones clearly warns us of the dangers of hatred and revenge:

*We are not permitted to allow our anger at those enemies to ossify (solidify) into hatred ... To do so would be to return to complicity in sin. That feelings of hatred and vengeance might surface and might be real is undeniable; but they need to be struggled against. For the habit of hatred and the desire for vengeance not only perpetuate the cycles of violence; they also constrict and thereby distort the vision of the hater.*

For a sincere spiritual aspirant, there can be no intimacy or closeness with God where bitterness, resentment and hatred dwell. In the book *The Master Answers*, Maharaj Charan Singh explains:

*If you are carrying a grudge against anyone or have hatred in your heart, it is not pure, as its tendencies are always downward. Then you cannot receive what He wants to give you. So, if we have no ill-feeling against anybody, we have become pure and receptive; and we receive His grace, His love ... A heart full of love has no room for hatred.*

The saddest part of revenge is that it puts us at the same rank as those who have wronged us. We may feel vulnerable and wounded, powerless and paralysed with grief, yet it is precisely in this state that our beloved Father urges us to forgive and move on. The importance of forgiveness cannot be stressed enough for it not only absolves the offender of his wrongdoings but it helps us in seeking our own forgiveness as well. This principle is echoed by Christ when he said:

*But when you are praying, first forgive anyone you are holding a grudge against, so that your Father in Heaven will forgive your sins, too.*

Bible, Mark 11:25, 26

But how does one define forgiveness? The dictionary says it is “to stop feeling angry or resentful towards someone for an offence or mistake, to pardon someone, to overlook an offence, to give up the desire to punish.” There should also be no constraint as to the number of times one should extend forgiveness if it is asked in the spirit of sincere penitence. An incident is recorded in the Bible where Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Till seven times?” In no uncertain terms did Christ reply, “I say not unto thee: until seven times but until seventy

times seven.” What Christ meant was that the number did not have any real significance but our mercy must be just as unlimited and unbinding as that of God.

The best response to an intimidator is when we retaliate with weapons of love and forgiveness rather than anger and hatred. When we forgive those who have wronged us, they are overcome with awe, with wonder, because we did not respond with bitterness and violence as they had expected, and perhaps, as they had keenly anticipated and sub-consciously wanted.

However, forgiving others may be a very difficult act for the tormented soul because it can seem like giving in or being feeble. It can send wrong messages to our intimidators who may mistakenly believe that we are giving an endorsement to their vicious attacks or extending an invitation to be mistreated again. But forgiving others does not mean condoning their ruthless acts. It simply means that we need to release ourselves from the heavy burden of unrestrained anger, intense hostility and bitter resentment that weighs so heavily on us when we refuse to let go. Without forgiveness and absolution, we remain captive in our own emotional chamber, thereby prolonging the original pain that has been inflicted upon us.

*Not being able to forgive, however, makes us more deeply entrenched in our suffering – we carry the wound in our hearts, and that stands in the way of our progress.*

Vilayat Khan, as quoted in *Awakening: A Sufi Experience*

Forgiveness challenges us to give up all thoughts of vindictiveness brought about by the thoughtless actions of others and to trust in the possibility of a better future. It allows us to build on the assurance that we can endure the pain and cultivate from it.

Even in our weakest moments, we are equipped with the inner stamina to do what needs to be done to liberate ourselves from the bondage of the past. We must utilize the selfless qualities of being 'human' by learning to forgive and spreading our love.

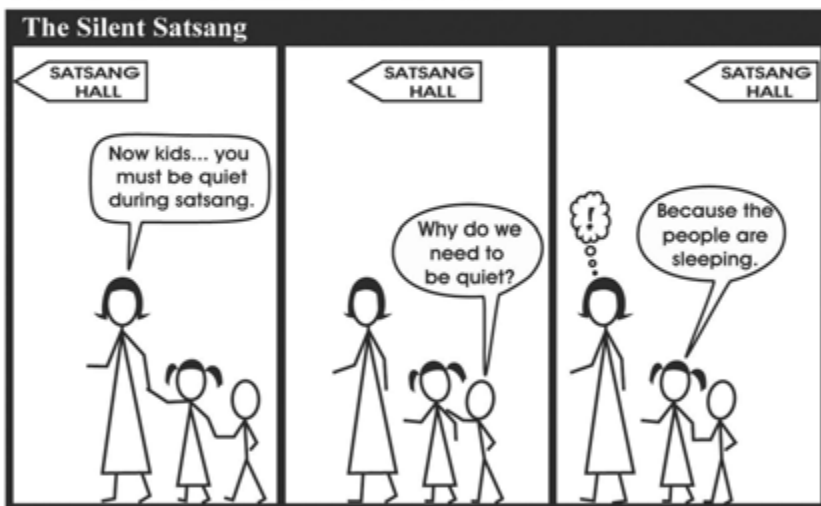


*If anyone feels that he has hurt someone's feelings,  
he should immediately make amends by admitting his fault  
and asking for forgiveness from the injured person.*

*In this way the clouds of guilt and uneasiness are lifted  
and love again comes in.*

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Quest for Light*

## SPIRITUALISTICKS®



## “My Heart Is His Real Home”

After returning from the Dera, there is a certain feeling of completeness and inner happiness. One feels stronger and more confident to face the challenging world with a positive frame of mind. Spending days in a Sant Mat filled atmosphere, where the focal point is the living Master and where there are minimal worldly distractions – no telephone calls, no emails, no television – one feels spiritually recharged and very much at peace. However, at the same time, when leaving the Dera there is a feeling of loneliness and sadness – loneliness, for not being in the Master’s physical presence; and sadness for leaving our father’s home.

Once, at a question and answer session, there was a disciple who was feeling downhearted as he was about to leave Dera. Comforting him, Hazur Maharaj Ji told him, ever so lovingly, to take the Master back home with him, and to conceal him in such a place that nobody would know that he was taking him. In other words, he told the disciple to keep the Master and the teachings constantly present in the secret chambers of his heart – at all times, at every moment.

In Dera, the satsangs that we hear, the physical presence of the Master, the different forms of seva that we participate in, are all gifts from the Master to each one of us. And each of these gifts serve a purpose. As much as they are uplifting and inspiring, these experiences should drive us to go within, to attend to our meditation with love and obedience, and to make us aware of the Master’s presence and guidance within us at all times. These experiences are not intended to bind us to his physical form or even to the Dera as such.

We are often reminded that if we were to limit the Master to a physical being, then the relationship with him would exist only at a physical level. However, if we were to build our relationship within, then we would never experience any form of separation for we would be nurturing an eternal bond with the Master within. We become aware that he is ever present in the seat of our hearts whether or not we are at the Dera.

*A thousand miles away is my Master's abode,  
but I always see him nearby.  
It's of little consequence if he's physically out of sight;  
My heart is his real home.*

Sultan Bahu

Whenever we listen to Master's satsangs, we often feel overwhelmed by the powerful message he gives us. We talk about what he said with great emotion, with so much love amongst our friends and relations. But do we truly absorb that precious message he gives us and engrave it in our hearts? We are very blessed to have the opportunity to be in the presence of a living Master and to listen to his teachings. These beautiful satsangs are not meant to be confined within the walls of Dera or just be spoken about; they need to be always remembered, applied in our daily lives and practised with all our heart. Otherwise, as the Master often reminds us, attending satsangs becomes yet another ritual.

Listening to the Master's satsangs reminds us of a loving parent who is willing to give up anything for his stubborn child just so that he will obey, just so that he will stay on the right track. The Master is willing to do so much for us only for that one purpose – to turn our attention towards the Lord so that we can eventually return to our true home, to Him, to where we truly belong. Enough time has gone by. How

much more does the Master have to do for us so that we realize the importance of our spiritual practice? How many more births do we wish to take?

*For myriads of births have I been separated from Thee, O Lord,  
This birth is dedicated to Thee.*

*Only in the hope of Thee, I live, sayeth Ravidas,  
It is long since I have seen Thee.*

*Guru Ravidas, Life and Teachings*

If we were to sincerely dedicate this life solely to God-realization, we would eventually achieve our ultimate objective. Just think, if the Master is ready to give us everything, why give him only a fraction? It is only when we give ourselves fully to him that we will become receptive to his love within.

Going to the Dera and being in the presence of the Master's physical form is truly a wonderful experience. But, once we return to our families and our daily routine, we can bring back that same Dera atmosphere within ourselves by dedicating our lives to him, by putting his teachings into practice, by making every act into an offering to him. After all, this life is a precious gift from him. Whilst we attend to our duties and responsibilities, if the Master is our focal point in everything we do, we would never feel alone or distant from him. He would forever live in our hearts.



*Be aware of me always, adore me,  
make every act an offering to me, and you shall come to me;  
this I promise; for you are dear to me.*

*Bhagavad Gita*

# Special Moments with Hazur

When we arrived for western satsang, we found the Master laughing in good humour, Louise having drawn his attention to a small ink spot on his hand which she had noticed. He said, “The slightest thing out of the ordinary is noticed. One day I had a small rent in my trouser leg and about twenty satsangis remarked on it to me after satsang!” Someone asked him how many ways there were of tying a turban and he said, “As many ways as there are wearers – I only know one way,” pointing to his own. I said I supposed each way was characteristic of the wearer like a thumb mark, and he said yes.

One satsangi caused a good deal of amusement when given her parshad. She said she had not known till recently that it was anything special and had eaten hers at one sitting! The Master was very diverted by this and said, laughing, “No harm! No harm!” The Indians are most careful of their parshad and will meticulously pick up and eat the smallest crumb even if it falls in thick dust.

All departing satsangis were given parshad and if anyone offered to pay money into the langar, our gracious Master smiled and gently told us that we had done enough seva in coming here and paying our fare. “Besides,” he said, “you have done seva here also, I have seen you!”

*In Search of the Way*



*The Master is gracious and equally gives his love to everybody, to every disciple, in the same way. Some people, due to their past sanskaras or past associations, do surround him or come nearer to him, but that does not mean that the Master loves them more than those on the back benches, or those who are silent, or those who do not exchange words or exchange letters. It is wrong for them to think so; perhaps he loves them much more.*

Maharaj Charan Singh, *The Master Answers*



# The Swing

So it was one of those ‘question when and question how and question why’ days. Faith had become a textbook term collecting dust on the shelf. Yet, the Lord still managed to shower a sprinkle of understanding on the unwilling mind that held a know-it-all attitude, as it browsed a random book.

Think of a swing. Children love to swing. There is nothing like it. Thrusting your feet toward the sky ... spinning trees. As children, we only trusted certain people to push our swing. If I were being pushed by people I trusted (like mom or dad), they could do anything they wanted. Twist me, turn me, stop me ... I loved it! I loved it because I trusted the person pushing me. They wanted my safety before I even knew what safety was. I was relaxed and carefree. (The parents among us must know this experience!) But let a stranger push my swing – like distant relatives or guests, and it was like “hang on!” Who knew what this newcomer would do? When a stranger pushes your swing, you tense up. It is no fun when the swing is in the hands of someone you do not know.

We may live in a stormy world. But who is pushing our swing? We must put our trust in Him. We cannot grow fearful or doubtful. When we are in His hands, we will find peace even in a storm ... because He is pushing our swing! With the swing of our lives in His hands, we still question. He sees our life from beginning to end. We should let Him swing us. He may lead us through a storm at age thirty so we can endure a hurricane at age fifty.

Are we the ones who know that there is only One who is in control of everything? Or are we the ‘manager of the world’ types where we secretly think that even a day without us would cause havoc to

some? Which is an easier type to live by? Which type helps us in our meditation? We understand that a shift in attitude is not a day's job, but if we persistently try, reminding ourselves, we will be able to let go much more – and slowly but surely, we will also flow with that current that runs through life.

An instrument is only useful if it is in the right shape. A dull axe or a bent screwdriver needs attention, and so do we. A good blacksmith keeps his tools in shape. So does He. A silversmith was asked, “How do you know when the silver is pure?” He replied, “When I see my own reflection in it.” Should He place us on His instruments desk, we should be grateful. It means that He is thinking of us! It means that He thinks we are still worth reshaping!

We can learn from Baba Jaimal Singh, in one of his letters to Great Master, as quoted in *Spiritual Letters*:

*Surrender yourself, my son. All that exists – the inner faculties of surat and nirat, the gross mind, the higher mind, the vital energy, the physical body, etc. – do not let your mind desire any of these. Nor should you concern yourself with what will happen next, or how you will do it. Put aside all such anxieties. All your possessions were given to you in the beginning by the Satguru, so they should have been held in trust. They were never to be regarded as your own ... So surrender yourself and step aside, my son. Consider that each and every thing in the world – body, mind and wealth – belongs to the Satguru, that you are nothing. Do all your work knowing it to be thus, and stay within Satguru's instructions. He will then take you with him when he considers you fit.*



# The Power Within

When was the last time we can remember actually washing up? Not just the mechanical motion of scrubbing and rinsing, but to truly be present in the moment to experience every aspect of it. While the exterior filth is cleansed, the mind, for the most part, has raced miles ahead carrying out chores and other activities in the future.

Life has moulded itself into a series of guesstimated futuristic events without our ever really experiencing the present. We're here, but we are constantly distracted by how we need to be there, at some later point in time. And when we arrive at the 'there', we are then consumed by the thought of how we need to meet a commitment some place else – thus, never really being alive to the present moment.

It comes as no surprise that when complaints about meditation are put forward to the Master, the advice given, more often than not, hints towards casting off any thoughts of results, that is, some outcome in the future. Thoughts are the ever changing canvas that the mind exploits to paint millions of pictured scenarios, calling them the future, which may or may not ever come to be.

Thoughts are also the raw and primary food for the ego. The ego, a false yet dynamically powerful aspect, is born from the illusionary identity that who we are is different from our source. The ego employs time as the gatekeeper to prevent any entrance into the realms of reality. With every futile thought and circular analysis, the mind further empowers the ego causing its make-believe identity to become more distinct. Clarity of the moment is lost as predictions of the future are confused with the present.

It seems transparent now why the saints have cautioned us to do away with all the procrastination and start taking action. Actions

can only be taken in the present. But what actions are they referring to? The action is not just sitting for meditation but rather in *focused* meditation which must be endeavoured sincerely, encompassing and fulfilling the Sant Mat way of life.

The mystics further reveal that the secret lies in learning to witness each moment with a sense of presence and awareness. Being with it. Not resisting it, and not judging it. Just accepting it. And this can only be done now! Not tomorrow, not a little later, not in the next minute, but now – where there is neither recollection of the past, nor speculation of the future. It is in the now that the mind voids itself of all thought and instils in itself a deep and sanctified silence. In this state of total stillness and complete awareness, the present moment – now – then becomes the portal of entry to the Power within.



*The present time is most precious;  
now is the accepted time,  
now is the day of salvation.*

*It is sad that you do not employ your time better,  
when you may win eternal life hereafter.*

Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*

# The Master Answers

**A selection of questions and answers with Maharaj Charan Singh**

**Q:** *How does one keep from judging and criticizing others and thus take on a posture of self-righteousness? How does one control one's temper in the presence of such a person? How does one deal with such a person?*

**A:** Everybody has to train his own mind. We have to develop our mind to that extent, that we are not affected by any criticism. In fact, we have to train ourselves rather than to train the other person in that situation. We must train ourselves to fit into that situation. If the other person loses his temper, we cannot help it. It is for him to control his mind. But we can control our own mind. If there is one fool under a roof, why have two? We must control ourselves.

*The Master Answers*

\* \* \*

**Q:** *Why are we imperfect?*

**A:** If we were not imperfect, this world would not exist today, and we all would have returned to Him. Because the Lord wants this world to go on, He wants this creation, so imperfection is bound to be here. The world is the region of the combination of good and bad.

*The Master Answers*

**Q:** *Is there any essential difference in the souls of, say a person who is very bad and one who is very good? Is that not just the action of their mind, and there would not be any difference in the souls as such?*

**A:** Brother, a diamond is a diamond. If you throw it in the mud, it will be encrusted with mud; but the moment it is washed it is again as brilliant as before. The soul is a diamond. Every soul is the essence of the Lord. It is pure in itself, but having taken the company of the mind, and the mind having become victim of the senses, it has covered itself with evil, darkness and filth. So, when it leaves the mind, every soul is the same. There is no difference in their purity. Some souls fall into very dirty mud; some fall on a little cleaner ground; some have only little specks and stains stuck to them; and some are completely wrapped in filth, so more drastic measures have to be taken to cleanse them. But a diamond is a diamond.

*The Master Answers*

\* \* \*

**Q:** *The hardest task facing the new seekers is that the mind can't be held so steadfast.*

**A:** It's not a question of new seekers. Even with initiates, the mind is not so easily subdued. The real struggle starts with the mind when you are on the path. As a seeker, you don't realize the extent of the struggle with the mind. When you become a disciple, an initiate, then you'll understand how real the struggle is. Then the mind realizes that you are going to escape from it, so it becomes more active than before. We are all struggling souls on the same path. We shouldn't simply throw up our hands; we should try to do our best to control the mind.

*Thus Saith the Master*



*Maharaj Charan Singh*

# The Crescent

The father carries his little girl on his shoulders on a warm summer's night. He walks along the beach and admires the brilliant reflection of the moon on the shimmering ocean. "Daddy look up; God is smiling," says the little girl. Her father looks up at the sky and sure enough there is a huge smile – a luminous crescent. He then looks into his little girl's eyes – purity, calmness, joy and innocence shine in them – her eyes reflect the beauty of her soul. The words of the Gospel echo in his ears: "For it is to those who are childlike that the kingdom of the Heavens belongs."

The Lord likes this childlike heart – filled with simple love, purity and innocence. A child is happy with the little joys in life. A child trusts his father without question, and a child's faith is simply implicit.

We, too, were once innocent little children. We should rekindle the purity of this childlike part of the self.

*Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.*

*Bible, Matthew 5:8*

Life goes by too quickly and before we know it, just like a spider, we weave a web and eventually get entangled in it. Those days of childhood and laughter seem long gone. Now each step in life seems to be edged with trials and tribulations; and our weak attitude and lack of faith just drag us down further, sometimes making us wonder if this existence is nothing but meaningless.

Our biggest dilemma in life is not the trivial problems of life themselves but the lack of faith in God. Faith in God is like the crescent the little child sees and smiles at. If only we had the



conviction that God is watching over us every moment of our life and His guiding hand is protecting us, then like the little child who trusts in his father implicitly, we would be free of the sorrows which we ourselves create.

*Life itself is very simple. And our needs are very simple in this creation. We complicate our needs by our requirements. We create problems at every step and then we try to solve them.*

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Legacy of Love*

To overcome all our fears, doubts and uncertainties in life, we need to have faith in the Lord. Faith is our triumph over all these trials. And such faith, as the Masters stress, comes as a result of daily devotion to meditation. Our love and devotion for the Lord will build such faith. Daily practice is necessary because we are building on something concrete; then our faith will not waver with the little trials in life. We will realize that trials may come, but they are not here to stay! Rather faith should always stay with us – faith that is woven out of conviction.

*If you try to pick up the thorns of the world, you can never succeed, but if you put strong shoes on your feet, no thorns will bother you. Similarly, we can never solve the problems of this world, but we can always rise above the problems.*

Maharaj Charan Singh, *The Master Answers*

Meditation will fill us with immense love for the Lord and such devotion will strengthen our faith and purify us. Filled with these beautiful childlike qualities, we will feel the inner reservoir of calmness and an assurance of trust. As a result, all things in life will seem to

flow smoothly as we will have the conviction that the One behind all life's events knows better, that someone wiser has a master plan ahead – for the best is yet to come.

*Faith is the most precious of gifts that the Lord can confer on a devotee. If one has little meditation to his credit but has full faith and love, his future is assured.*

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Quest for Light*

The crescent is indeed a smile from above – a reminder that He is always there because we tend to forget one too many times that His guiding hand is protecting us at every instant. Yet again, we fall at the slightest shake and He picks us up ever so lovingly and smilingly says: “O ye of little faith!”



*God, saith He, has infinite treasure to bestow, and we take up with a little sensible devotion, which passes in a moment. Blind as we are, we hinder God and stop the current of His graces. But when He finds a soul penetrated with a lively faith, He pours into it His graces and favours plentifully: there they flow like a torrent, which, after being forcibly stopped against its ordinary course, when it has found a passage, spreads itself with impetuosity and abundance.*

Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*

# Repartee of the Wise

A disciple asked his Master, “Why do we have to go through so much suffering?”

The Master explained with the following story, “A bird in a desert would take shelter every day in the withered branches of a tree. One day, a whirlwind uprooted the tree, and the poor bird was forced to fly a hundred miles in search of another shelter. The bird had to go through several obstacles until it finally found a forest of fruit-laden trees. If the withered tree had survived, the bird would not have been driven to fly out to another home; it would have remained in the same dry surroundings. In the same way, it is through pain and suffering that we evolve and achieve enlightenment.”

\* \* \*

A Master once told his devotees, “What is it that stands higher than words? Action. What is it that stands higher than action? Silence.”

\* \* \*

A disciple asked his spiritual teacher, “You are spending most of the night in meditation and all day long you work. How long can you go on doing this?” And to this, the teacher replied, “At night, I pursue God and during the day God follows me.”

# Perfecting Our Love

Throughout ages, the saints have stressed that love is the most important precept in Sant Mat. Hindu mystics have referred to the path of the masters as the path of devotion. Ultimately, sifting our way through the philosophy, we find that love is the foundation on which Sant Mat is based. We want to see our Master because we love him; we want to do seva because we are devoted to him; we wake up in the early hours of cold, chilly mornings to attend to our meditation because our Beloved has asked us to.

While all disciples love the Master in their own way, each has the same objective: to work towards perfecting his love for the Master. However, to judge the depth of love is a futile exercise. As Rumi has beautifully written (as quoted in *Rumi's Sun*), "However much we describe and explain love, when we fall in love we are ashamed of our words." In the same vein, Maharaj Charan Singh used to say love has to be experienced and that if we dramatize our love, it loses its depth.

Spiritual love, much like its physical counterpart, manifests itself in many ways. There is the seemingly insatiable need to be with our Beloved at all times, there is the inevitable pain of separation, and there is the desire to please the Beloved. But surely the ultimate act of love is when the lover loses his identity and implicitly surrenders to the Beloved. At that perfect stage of love, we neither care about the degree nor the depth of our love; all that matters is to live in the Master's will.

Saints have told us that on the path of love, we should be prepared to surrender our ego. The Sufi mystics, in particular, emphasized that the giving up of the self is an important aspect of love.

*If on its path, love forces you to yield,  
Then do so gladly, throw away your shield;  
Resist and you will die, your soul is dead –  
To ward off your defeat, bow down your head!*

Farid ud-Din Attar, *The Conference of the Birds*

One is reminded here of the often-told story of the sultan and Ayaz. The courtiers were jealous that Ayaz, a mere slave, was so favoured by the sultan. One day, the sultan brought a magnificent pearl to the court. He turned to his viziers and ordered them to smash the pearl. Each one of them demurred and protested, saying that given the value of the pearl, it would be tragic to break it. The sultan then turned to Ayaz and repeated his order. Without hesitation, Ayaz smashed the pearl into pieces. The courtiers all started to scream at the illiterate slave who had done so much damage to the sultan's treasury by breaking the priceless pearl. Ayaz silenced them all by saying, "The command of the sultan is more precious than this pearl."

The command. Saints emphasize the importance of accepting the command as the first step in submitting to the Master. Indeed, in surrender there is an implicit realization that everything in our life comes with the Lord's approval. As Baba Jaimal Singh wrote to the Great Master:

*Pain or pleasure comes from the Lord Himself. Since it comes by His command, why should we treat it as bad? The Lord, ever present, always watches over us; and if our good lies in suffering, He sends us suffering; if it lies in happiness, He sends us happiness. Both, beloved son, are within His will.*

*Spiritual Letters*

However, our modern minds tend to recoil at this concept of surrender. From a very early age, we are encouraged to form opinions and think for ourselves. It is perhaps a testament to our self-centred thought process that words such as 'surrender' and 'submit' tend to have negative connotations associated with defeat rather than salvation. So, we may feel that giving up of the self may sound good, but we would not be able to achieve this on a practical level.

Ultimately, we cannot force ourselves to live in the divine will, much as we cannot force ourselves to love the Master. What we can do at a practical level is to abide by that prime command he gave us at the time of initiation – to attend diligently to our meditation.

By attending regularly to our simran and bhajan with devotion, we will obtain the grace and capacity to be worthy of his love and to be able to accept and understand that whatever happens in our lives, it is from our Master.

By submitting ourselves to his will, by putting into practice this full measure of our devotion, we are able to perfect our love and, in doing so, perfect ourselves.

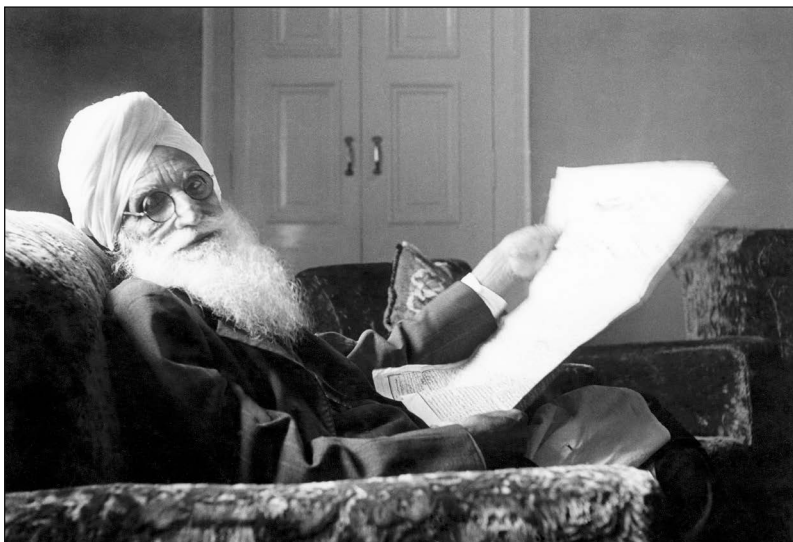


*From meditation, love will come,  
submission will come, humility will come.*

*Everything will come.*

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Die to Live*

# The Secret Is Love



*Maharaj Sawan Singh*

The bane of every disciple's existence, laziness is perhaps one of the biggest obstacles facing the seeker on the spiritual path. Haunted by the desire to take the logical approach to overcome this weakness, failure is the persistent outcome of most genuine attempts. And it is precisely these failures that multiply and fester into a nagging source of guilt. They leave the individual helplessly trapped in a weary state of mind, because he knows that it is the unspoken truth, the undeniable answer to the age-old question, "Why am I not progressing on the path?"

It's difficult to admit but the bottom line is that it's true. And there is ample evidence. It explains why one falls asleep in meditation, but not during a movie. It accounts for why showing up on time for business meetings is a natural way of life but being regular and punctual at

meditation continues to be a struggle. And it justifies perfectly why during meditation one can ponder, think, analyze and contemplate upon everything under the sun except do the one thing that one is supposed to – simran. So, perhaps the question that really needs to be addressed is: why do we succumb to laziness?

The mystics explain that the problem is the mind. And ironically, we are led astray by both its weakness and its strength. Its weakness comes from having been enslaved by the senses. Hence, when faced with a choice, the mind pays allegiance to the famous five. It picks the easy way, the fun way, the lazy way and the way that coddles and pampers the self. It chooses to make the senses feel good rather than take an objective decision. Then, it uses its strength to convince, to make excuses and to justify its choices which, while on the surface may appear rational, conceal a lifetime guarantee of remorse and regret. And this whole routine repeats itself over and over again until finally, ambushed by this modus operandi of the mind, one turns into the proverbial spider caught in its own web.

But there is a way out and the perfect Masters in their supreme kindness offer us their advice. Precious and perfect, it is as simple as it is profound and they give it ever so lovingly in two short words. They tell us just to 'do it'. To convert all our thoughts into action, all our emotion into devotion, all our concepts into reality and just do our meditation – sincerely, devotedly and with single-minded purpose, following the instructions given at the time of initiation.

They make it perfectly clear. Wholehearted obedience is the first step towards freedom from this inertia and all it takes is this singular act of submission to start the process. For in this sublime moment, when the disciple turns over his cup to receive the Master's grace, he develops the strength and the will to work diligently at his spiritual practice. Then, just as a labourer earns his wages by virtue of his hard



work, so too does the disciple who works hard at his spiritual practice earn wages of love from his Master.

And eventually it is this love that becomes the disciple's ultimate driving force. It is this love that annihilates the mind's lethargy, transforming it into a fervent desire to please the Beloved. It is this love that propels us to focus at the eye centre in loving remembrance of our Master; and it is this love that we hear from the depths of our being in the form of the Shabd, relentlessly calling out to us, urging us to hurry, for time is passing and the Beloved is waiting ...



*I once asked the Master how one could attain such a love.  
"By meditation," the Master answered. Therefore, the time of meditation is the most precious time of the day for the disciple – even if he is not always aware of it – because, as a gift of grace, it awakens the love within us and makes it grow. It is the time that a disciple spends with his Master or, at least, in awaiting his coming. Once, the Master confided to us the secret – his secret – of successful meditation; it is the repetition of the holy words, done with love and devotion. The Master said, "One has to put one's whole being into the words. One should not think of anything else, but just give oneself to the Master through repetition."*

*Adventure of Faith*

# Did You Know

Heavy work and heavy duties do not stand in the way of the performance of simran and bhajan. On the contrary, they cultivate in us the habit of concentration and hard work, which is actually helpful in meditation. When we are tired, our attention naturally tends to go in, instead of going out and thinking of things and persons. Thus, also the tiredness resulting from the performance of our duties proves helpful. You will find that as you develop good concentration and proceed regularly with your meditation, you will be able to attend to your outward duties also in a better and more efficient way.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Light on Sant Mat*

\* \* \*

Your attention may remain focused for no more than a minute or two, or five or ten, or it may barely hear the Sound, but even then the news of your effort will reach right into Sach Khand, that you are offering a prayer.

Baba Jaimal Singh, *Spiritual Letters*

\* \* \*

Feelings of loneliness do automatically creep over our mind when we take to bhajan seriously. It indicates the natural inclination of the soul towards its original Home, and its innate disgust with the world and its attachments.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Divine Light*

# Growing Up on the Path

Life is filled with its ups and downs. No one can skate through life problem-free. Whenever we try to run away from the difficulties in life, we short circuit the progression; we delay our growth and end up with a worse kind of suffering. If we are facing terrible times right now, we should not lament, “God, why me?” Instead we should ask, “God, what should I learn from this?” The most terrible experiences are sometimes a way of bringing to pass some hidden good, and the hardest sufferings generally have a positive and constructive purpose behind them. And, like everything else in the material world, suffering cannot last forever. Sooner or later, it must come to an end; just as the night ends when the sun rises.

Any problems we face come from ourselves, yet we keep asking: How can this be? Saints say that the individual human being is the maker of his own destiny. We reap what we sow; the sowing may be done in one life, and the reaping may be done in the same life or during subsequent lives. Whatever suffering or difficulties we go through are because of our past deeds and we receive neither more nor less. Under the law of karma, we are meted out even justice. But whatever consequences we reap from our actions are not to be considered as some sort of punishment; on the contrary, they are designed to push us towards the right path and contribute to our spiritual growth.

It is so easy to get discouraged and let these negative thoughts dominate us and hamper our spiritual growth. The little negative thoughts like “I am afraid” or “I cannot do it, it’s too hard” or even “I knew this terrible thing would happen” easily clutter our mind. There is a saying, “When the going gets tough, the tough get going.” We do

not have to literally be tough but we need to assert a more positive outlook towards everything in life, thus enabling us to face our obstacles with maturity.

Some may say that their obstacles are not fabricated and that what they are facing is insurmountable. But nothing is insurmountable. We are here to learn that the purpose of human existence is God-realization, and the law of karma helps us and forces us to be aware of the absolute truth that sustains us. Saints have identified that truth with Shabd, the divine Word or melody. Through Shabd the creation emanates, through Shabd it ends in dissolution, and through Shabd again it comes into being. Shabd permeates every being and can only be grasped and comprehended through actual inner realization.

*Says Kabir, realize the Shabd, O brother, for Shabd is the Creator Himself.*

*Kabir, The Weaver of God's Name*

Life after life we have been in the habit of running after pleasures that only bring misery and unhappiness. We have been so absorbed in our struggles, hopes and fears that we have forgotten the real purpose of human birth, namely God-realization. All of our activities have created karma and have brought us to where we are today. We, ourselves, entwine the rope of karmas, which becomes a noose around our own neck.

Life is continuous and its purpose is development, unfoldment and growth. The lessons taught by experience are carried over from one life to the next to help us discover, little by little, the purpose of our life here on earth.

There is a divine plan in all things and our life is simply a spiritual education. The suffering brought about from our past lives is a part

of this. God has never deserted us and whatever happens is for the ultimate spiritual evolution of humanity. The greatest of His gifts is the Word or Shabd that lies hidden within the human body. When we enter into the sphere of Shabd, we will end the recurring misery of endless lives. Then our soul will meet the Lord and merge with the radiant reality within.



*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, remembering that whatever suffering we have to undergo, we have brought on ourselves by our conduct in past lives.*

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Quest for Light*

# Memorable Quotes

*True quietness of heart is won by resisting our passions, not by obeying them.*

Thomas à Kempis

*Nothing is so strong as gentleness; nothing so gentle as real strength.*

Saint Francis de Sales

*Nothing belongs to me, all is Yours. In giving You what is Yours, I lose nothing.*

Kabir

*Simplicity doesn't mean to live in misery and poverty. You have what you need, and you don't want to have what you don't need.*

Maharaj Charan Singh

*Throughout the day, no matter in what occupation you are engaged, the soul and mind must constantly look up to Him at the eye centre. All the twenty-four hours of the day, there must be a yearning to meet the Lord, a continuous pang of separation from Him.*

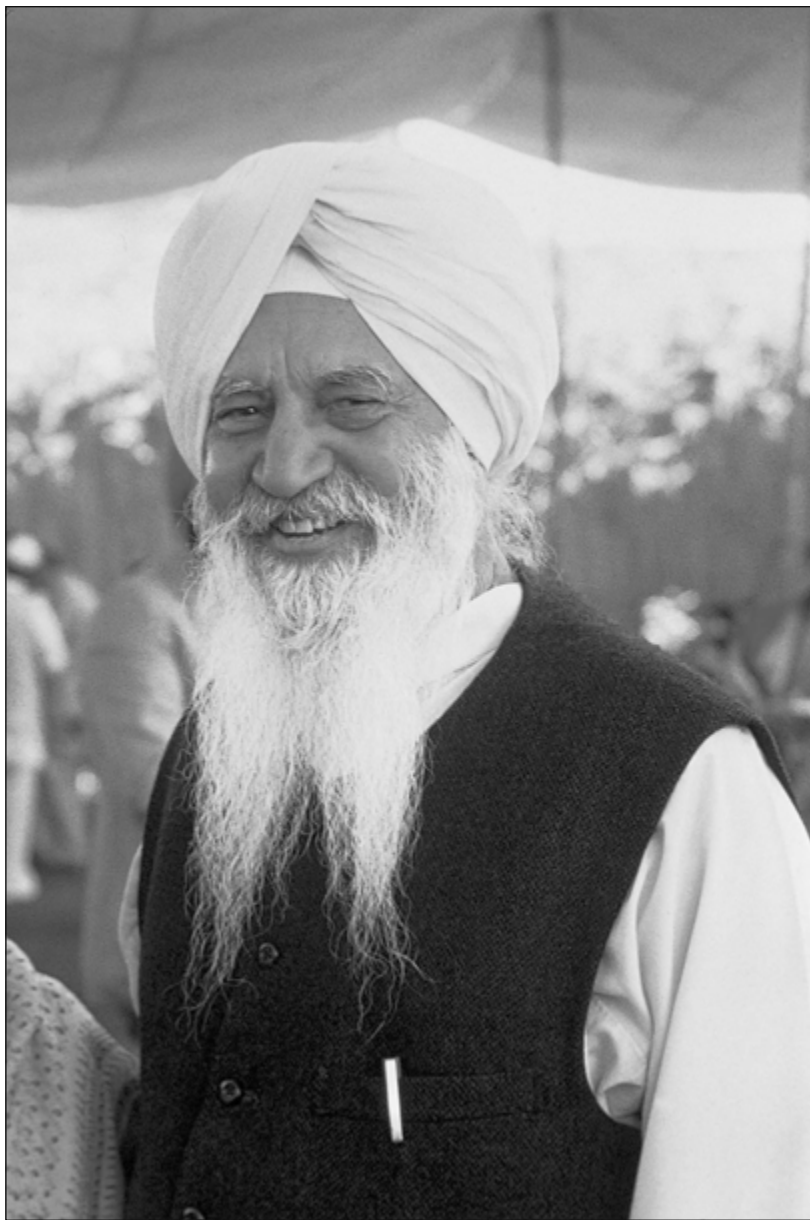
Maharaj Jagat Singh

*The good thoughts which God gives you in prayer are relics. Gather them carefully together in order to translate them into acts and you will gladden the heart of God.*

Saint Vincent de Paul

*You, as my disciples, are dearer to me than my own sons.*

Maharaj Sawan Singh



*Maharaj Charan Singh*

# Heart to Heart

In a question and answer session, the following exchange took place between Maharaj Charan Singh and a disciple:

Q: *Master, what is it about us that makes you sad?*

A: Your miserable faces, your woeful tales and horrible letters.

Naturally, such letters can never brighten you, they just depress you.

Q: *What makes you happy?*

A: You people make me happy – you people make me sad.

Q: *How do we make you happy?*

A: With your smiling faces.

*Legacy of Love*

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Maharaj Charan Singh explained the value of seva to a satsangi lady by giving the example of a satsangi with one leg who used to come during the bhandaras. “He used to come from the hills of Himachal, and was very poor. Just to save money to give in seva, he used to walk from his village in the hills to the Dera, with the help of his crutches, covering a distance of over 75 miles. Once he was brought to me during seva by Mr Bolakani. He offered one rupee in seva. Looking to his poverty, I asked the sevadars not to accept it, but he burst into tears, and I had to accept his offering.

How can you value this seva? Is it not worth much more than the hundreds and thousands that the rich give? The value of seva is not in how much one offers, but in the feelings and love with which it is offered.”

*Treasure Beyond Measure*





## **Hafiz of Shiraz: Thirty Poems: An Introduction to the Sufi Master**

TRANSLATED BY PETER AVERY AND JOHN HEATH-STUBBS

PUBLISHER: NEW YORK: HANDSEL BOOKS, 2003.

ISBN: 1-590510704

Hafiz, a fourteenth century Sufi, is considered by many to be the greatest Persian lyric poet who ever lived. But finding accessible translations of Hafiz's poetry can be challenging. His poetry is layered with imagery and symbolism from the medieval Persian and Islamic culture in which he lived. Allusions which would have been familiar to every reader in Hafiz's own time can be baffling to the modern reader.

Peter Avery, an eminent Persian scholar and Fellow at Cambridge University, and John Heath-Stubbs, a renowned British poet, combine their talents to bring us a delightful yet accessible collection of Hafiz's poems in *Hafiz of Shiraz: Thirty Poems: An Introduction to the Sufi Master*. The translators work hard to place the poems in the context of their times, including notes for each poem explaining cultural references and a 22-page introduction describing the social and political setting in Shiraz during the poet's lifetime. Their style avoids the overly ornate, Victorian language common to many earlier translators.

Hafiz's poems take the form of the *ghazal*, reminiscent of the sonnet. An example is Hafiz's famous poem urging the seeker to soak his prayer-mat in wine:

*Boy, bring the cup, and circulate the wine;  
How easy at first love seemed, but now the snags begin.*

*How many hearts lie bleeding, waiting for the wind-loosed musk  
Out of these tresses – the bright twist of black curls?*

*For what security have we here in this halting place,  
Where every moment the bell clangs, 'Strap up your packs'?*

*Stain your prayer-mat with wine if the Master tells you:  
That seasoned voyager knows the ways of the road.*

*But travelling light, what can these land-lubbers know of it –  
Black night, our fear of the waves, and the horrible whirlpool?*

*My self-willed love will sink my reputation:  
The truth leaks out; they make a ballad of it at their meetings.*

*If you seek his presence, Hafiz, do not let him alone:  
And when you meet his face, you can tell the world to go hang.*

The translators' notes explain that the "black tresses" in the third and fourth lines of the poem refer to the brilliant darkness within, from which the spiritual fragrance of the Beloved, the "musk" emanates.

In another *ghazal* Hafiz compares the soul to the falcon of a king or sultan. The falcon has lost its way and made its nest in a bad part of town. From the king's castle, it is being called home.

*O royal keen-eyed falcon, whose perch is on the Tree of Life,  
Why is this corner of affliction's town your nest?*

*They are whistling you home from the battlements of the Empyrean:  
What could you be doing here in this place of snares?*

As a warning to the reader to place no faith or reliance on the world, Hafiz alludes to a story about Jesus, whom Muslims revere as a prophet. In this story, Jesus has an encounter with "the world" which has taken the form of an old woman. He asks this old woman how many husbands she has had, and she answers that she has had countless husbands and she has brought to ruin and killed every one. Hafiz warns,

*Don't look to hold this tottering world to her bond:  
She is the withered hag of a thousand bridegrooms.*

Hafiz says that when we think of ourselves as mere physical beings, we place too low a value on ourselves. Do we know what we are?

*Are you less than a speck of dust? Rate yourself higher:  
Be a lover, and make the riding sun your conquest.*

Hafiz calls the soul “Joseph”, the youngest son of Jacob in the Qur`an and the Bible, who is always described as a paragon of spiritual purity, beautiful and luminous as the moon.

*But as for you, you are Joseph, you are the Moon of Caanan:  
The stewardship of Egypt is yours; so bid this prison good-bye.*

Joseph was sold into slavery in Egypt, then thrown into prison. Yet, with loving reliance on God's grace, he gained not only freedom but the stewardship of Egypt itself.

For us to break out of this world's prison, we have to see through its illusion. Therefore, Hafiz counsels, “Drink wine!” – a metaphor to losing ourselves in spiritual ecstasy through mystical practice.

*Drink wine, for he who has seen how the world's business ends  
Breaks through the turmoil unscathed,  
and lays hold on the cup for his prize.*

Wine is a particularly potent symbol of mystical experience for Muslim mystics. The drinking of wine is strictly prohibited by Islamic law. Using wine to symbolize divine intoxication, therefore, emphasizes the gulf between the external rituals that are the domain of the clerics and the internal experience that is the domain of the mystics. In fact, Hafiz's “stain your prayer-mat in wine” verse landed him in accusations of heresy, and he was called before the sultan to explain his meaning.

But, Hafiz says, love cannot be judged by reason:

*Bring wine, don't scare us with reason's prohibition:  
That magistrate has no jurisdiction here.*

Love is unfathomable, like an infinite ocean. We can't approach love with measured steps or with caution. There is really no choice but to lose ourselves in its sea.

*Knowing love's ocean is a shoreless sea,  
What help is there? – abandon life, and founder.*

Losing ourselves in love has only one purpose, and only one hope:

*I have tumbled like a fish into the ocean of love,  
That he might come with a hook to haul me out.*

There are many popular editions of Hafiz's poetry in English. Some best-selling versions are renderings broadly inspired by translations from Hafiz but lacking citations to specific poems. Readers who have enjoyed such modernized versions may find that Avery and Heath-Stubbs's translations add depth to their appreciation of this great Sufi poet.

Avery and Heath-Stubbs title this small volume "an introduction to the Sufi master." Those who enjoy it may also want to read their larger work *The Collected Lyrics of Hafiz of Shiraz* (Cambridge, UK: Archetype, 2007; ISBN 1-901383-09-1).



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