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Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

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Spiritual Link

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He Waits

In the silence
my Lord cries out to me.
In the silence
he is waiting for me.
The restless beat of my heart
tells me that he waits.
In restless procrastination
I pile action upon action;
he waits.
All day I am busy
with task upon task;
he waits.
From thing to thing,
action to action,
thought to thought
I fly;
still he waits.
And while I wait
in the silence
I am impatient!
“Where is he?”
Do I not know
in the silence
he waits for me?

Ruth Harring, *Voice of the Voiceless*



Transformation

In 1870 when Baba Jaimal Singh first visited the piece of land that became the Dera, it was completely uninhabited. The terrain was deeply rutted with ravines and the banks of the river Beas rose up quite close to where the International Guest House (Hostel 6) now stands. The area was a lonely, deserted, barren and forbidding wasteland, covered in thorny acacias, spiny shrubs and a few tall trees. It was inhabited by snakes, scorpions, jackals and vultures. There were crocodiles in the Beas River, and the entire area was rumoured to be haunted by ghosts and evil spirits and therefore deemed unsafe to travel through.

Yet it was there, according to Daryai Lal Kapur in *Heaven on Earth*, that Baba Jaimal Singh chose to build his meditation retreat. Today, 140 years later, the landscape has undergone an incredible transformation. What was once an uninhabited land is now a busy and productive colony.

The transformation that occurred in Beas has everything to do with the Masters, the successive teachers who have resided there. The promise to each initiate is to change them from a wilderness into a rose garden; to take their hearts and minds and souls from this barren and inhospitable place to Sach Khand, a realm of abundance, safety and healing. In other words, the physical Dera itself is an intriguing metaphor for what happens to us within as individuals on the path.

Some part of us probably finds both this world and our own particular personalities an inhospitable realm: lonely, dangerous, unstable. No matter who we are, what wealth, or talent or worldly power we have been given, the soil under everyone's feet is always shifting. At any given moment, the ground we are walking on can

collapse: either we or our loved ones can be swept away by a raging river – literally or emotionally – in any number of unexpected losses. Death, disease, poverty and the changing fortunes of the world are legendary. There is no lasting or safe shelter in this world. The river keeps changing its course and dangers are everywhere. Even in the bright sunlight of the day we can feel uncertain, unsafe and vulnerable.

Then into our threatening and uncertain lives comes a spiritual Master. It is here, in the midst of the wilderness of our hearts and minds, that he takes up residence and promises us that in this unlikely setting, at the eye centre of a typically confused human being, he will show us that there is beauty, joy and a lasting peace and contentment. Here, in this very life, he assures us, we can realize our full potential as spiritual beings. We have a Master now, and our soul will find its true and eternal and joy-filled home.

How does this transformation take place? The Master tells us that it has to do with grace, Shabd and meditation. There are some hints we can find in the transformation at the Dera. The massive ravines that once cut through the land were filled slowly with great human effort. When *mitti* (dirt carrying) seva was done in past years, everyone would be given a reed basket and a cloth doughnut, to help balance the load on their heads. A shovelful or two of dirt would be deposited in the basket, and people would then carry that load across a broad field, and deposit that small amount of dirt in a deep ravine, over and over and over again. How many millions of baskets did it take to fill one ravine, let alone all of the ravines?

Could it be that every round of simran is a little like one of those baskets full of dirt? It doesn't seem to accomplish much, and at times, even carrying that one basket is an effort. We trudge back and forth in the same way with every repetition of the five holy names. Looking out over our own lives and its acres of deep ravines and



karmas, one can understand why we don't quite grasp how this effort will ever result in even one hole being filled, let alone how this broken earth will ever become a shady, tree-filled garden. But we do the simran and meditation and seva and the heavy lifting of our lives because the Master asks us to. And when we can remember to look up, we can see him watching our efforts, blessing our efforts, encouraging us in this work he has given us to do.

When we were told at initiation that the path of Sant Mat is the work of a lifetime, some of us didn't quite understand that this meant that this is not a transformation that will occur overnight. But the promise that eventually our spiritual lives will be fruitful and abundant is a promise that the saints make and keep.

When we feel separate from God, it is tempting to think that this path is about some future transformation, some delayed fulfilment: a conceptual and postponed reward. But slowly, constantly, just as it happens at the physical Dera, old walls are being taken down, new habitations are going up, new seeds are being planted. For us, old habits are dying, new and more spacious ways of being are developed. Even when we don't understand, even when we resist, this miraculous transformation is going on. The Master keeps us in the fold, and keeps watch over us, patiently explaining that we will do our meditation, that we will go through our karmas, and that someday we will be with him forever.

That is the transformation of Sant Mat. Our own inner, barren, lonely and inhospitable wilderness will eventually change into a way of holiness. Slowly, we realize that everything that happens to us is meant to move us closer to what is ultimately true. Eventually we put our trust in our teacher's vision of what our own personal wilderness is capable of becoming. He says that someday we will be a rose garden – even though it might look and feel to us that we are still a piece of broken ground. He

says that someday the separation we feel between ourselves and God will be healed. Someday we will know with every ounce of our being another reality, other than the wilderness of this world.

In his presence we can sometimes catch a glimpse of the joy and peace, right here, right now. Sometimes we can sense the power of his promise. This work of changing distracted initiates into focused disciples is ongoing, in every part of the world. The transformation of the physical outer Dera is astonishing, but apparently not nearly as wonderful as the inner transformation of the Masters' initiates. The centre of our spiritual activity knows no boundaries, no limitations of time or space. If we are initiates, our rough places are going to be made smooth, no matter where we live. We can never distance ourselves from his love, his protection and his determination to take us home. We may not be able to imagine how we might ever become worthy of the presence and the company of a saint. But it is in just such a territory that the Master has taken up residence. And if he is optimistic about our eventual rehabilitation and our transformation into loving disciples, who are we to question his methods?

Rumi describes what happens in *this* garden. Today. Now.

*What was said to the rose that made it open
was said to me here in my chest.*

*What was told to the cypress that made it strong
and straight, what was whispered to the jasmine*

*so it is what it is, whatever made sugarcane
sweet; whatever was said to the inhabitants ...*

that is being said to me now. I blush. Whatever put eloquence

*in language, that's happening here. The great
warehouse doors open; I fill with gratitude.*

*Rumi: The Book of Love: Poems of Ecstasy and Longing,
translated by Coleman Barks*

But what if we are still impatient, discouraged or frustrated? Still skeptical that we can ever throw in enough simran to fill in the deep ravines in our being? There is a simple answer.

The Masters tell us to let go. Let the Master gardener do his work. Welcome his presence. The Master is saying to the soul:

*Have patience, keep the company of the Saints
and I shall purify you through my grace.
I shall not rest, till I show you that form –
why are you in such a hurry?
I carry your burdens in my own heart
so that you may be free of worries
and nurture your love in my heart.
Give up your misgivings, be steadfast in your love –
a love tempered with faith.
I shall myself help you put in the effort,
I shall myself take you to your ultimate home.
Listen to what Radha Soami has to say:
all will be worked out
as and when the supreme will ordains it.*

Sar Bachan Poetry, Bachan 33



Lasting Happiness



The saints are always telling us that the happiness we are looking for can only be found inside ourselves. But often it seems very hard to find it there. We want happiness from the world around us. Most of us live with a continual sense of expectation – hoping that this or that situation will improve, that people will change and that we will be able to feel better about life. It is as though we are holding our breath waiting for a happiness that never really comes. So, are we really looking in the right direction? We are never satisfied. Yet we cannot stop ourselves, we cannot help ourselves – or can we?

Masters live in the here and now. They are living the best of realities – always in touch with the spirit, which is the force behind everything that happens. In pain and difficulties, in pleasure and joy, they are always in contact with life's inner mystery. They radiate

powerful currents of love and positivity, affecting everyone who comes in contact with them. Naturally we are attracted to them. Who would not love a person with these qualities? They awaken in us a sense that there is far more to life than what we are usually experiencing. They create in us a longing for a higher state of consciousness and they pull us towards experiencing that reality.

Can our love for a Master give us lasting happiness? We all know that we will have to change if we want to experience what they are experiencing. We cannot carry on forever being obsessed by the trivial goings-on of the world around us. Maharaj Charan Singh used to say that we do not have to leave the world; we just have to forget it!

We need to shift our focus to the power behind the scenes, the current of life behind our eye centre. Whenever we hold our attention at the third eye we feel a difference. When we still our thoughts and are absorbed in the Master, we feel tremendously happy. So why should we be sad? Obviously we can't blame the world for our unhappy condition and put the burden of improvement on the Master. When we make the effort to tune in to his presence within, we feel tremendous relief. We feel released from all our desires and problems. As soon as we feel the flow of grace, we realize that it was always there, that it is a guiding force with nothing but our well-being at heart.

It is easy to confuse the Master's outward presence with salvation, thinking he will do it all for us. The face of the Master is indescribable – it spontaneously evokes all the best emotions in our hearts. It is very sweet. But it is not really ours to keep! His real face is found within the brightness of our own beings. It is a hard fact to accept that the real Master only exists inside ourselves, in the core of the Shabd; for us there is no other Master.

Our love today may not appear to be very strong – but doubtless much deeper currents of love run below the surface of our beings. The

Master will see us through this experience of life and help us succeed in our search for the divine. Love beyond imagination and the brightness and wonder of the Creator – these are within our reach. If we can just follow his advice and look inward, then we will know this happiness for ourselves. Trying to make contact within is the only way to help ourselves.

In the beautiful words of Maharaj Charan Singh:

*Real prayer is not by the lips, not by set words.
It comes from the heart, and the heart knows the eloquence of
silence. The real prayer is surrender to his will.*

Legacy of Love

Lasting happiness begins when we struggle to direct our love towards him in meditation.



*O you, alone in the sky like the Sun. Come.
Without your face the garden and the leaves are all yellow. Come.
Without you, the universe is dust and powder. Come.*

Rumi, Thief of Sleep, translated by Shahram Shiva

A Story of Love

In a remote village in Vietnam during the years of war, numerous mortar rounds landed on an orphanage run by a missionary group. The missionaries and one or two children were killed instantly, and several more children were wounded, including an eight-year-old girl.

People from the village requested medical help from a neighbouring town that had radio contact with the nearby American forces. Finally an American doctor and nurse arrived in a jeep, carrying only their medical kits. They established that the girl was the most critically injured and that without quick action she would die of shock and loss of blood. A transfusion was imperative and a donor with a matching blood type was required. A quick test showed that neither American had the correct type, but several of the uninjured orphans did.

The doctor spoke some rudimentary Vietnamese and the nurse, a smattering of high-school French. Using that combination, together with much impromptu sign language, they tried to explain to their frightened young audience that unless they could replace some of the girl's lost blood, she would certainly die. They then asked if anyone would be willing to give blood to help her.

Their request was met with wide-eyed silence. After several long moments, a small hand slowly and waveringly went up, dropped back down, and went up again. "Oh, thank you," the nurse said in French. "What is your name?" "Heng," came the reply.

Heng was quickly laid on a pallet, his arm swabbed with alcohol, and a needle inserted in his vein. Through this ordeal, Heng lay stiff and silent. After a moment, he let out a shuddering sob, quickly covering his face with his free hand.

“Is it hurting, Heng?” the doctor asked. Heng shook his head but after a few moments another sob escaped, and once more he tried to cover up his crying. Again the doctor asked him if the needle hurt, and again Heng shook his head. But now his occasional sobs gave way to steady silent crying, with his eyes tightly shut and his fist in his mouth to stifle his sobs.

The medical team was concerned. Something was obviously very wrong. At this point, a Vietnamese nurse arrived to help. Seeing the little one’s distress, she spoke to him rapidly in his language, listened to his reply and answered him in a soothing voice.

After a moment, the patient stopped crying and looked at the Vietnamese nurse. When she nodded, a look of relief spread over his face.

Glancing up, the nurse said quietly to the Americans, “He thought he was dying. He misunderstood you. He thought you had asked him to give all his blood so the little girl could live.”

“But why then would he be willing to help?” asked the American nurse.

The Vietnamese nurse repeated the question to the little boy, who answered simply, “She is my friend!”

Friendship means when you have a clean, clear understanding with someone – he accepts you for what you are, and you accept him for what he is.... He wants to help you. You want to help him. That is friendship. It is very rare.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Legacy of Love*



Making Right Choices

This is a popular story you may have heard. It's about a builder who was down on his luck and out of work. When his wealthy friend, a developer, heard of the builder's plight, he paid him a visit. After a few minutes the developer said to his friend, "I have this choice plot of land. I want you to build me a beautiful house on this lot. Here's \$200,000 to complete the job. You choose the design, buy the materials and supervise the work. I trust completely that you will do an excellent job. Do this for me and I will reward you well."

The next day the builder set out to start the project. He looked at a good set of construction plans but found that he could save some money by buying a slightly inferior and outdated set of drawings. So he bought the cheaper ones.

When the time came to buy the concrete he found that he could buy slightly watered down concrete that would not be as sturdy. But he was able to save \$5,000 and he pocketed the money for himself.

Then rather than buying grade A lumber for the framing, he bought the cheaper, warped lumber. He figured: "This lumber will be covered by the walls and no one will see it." So he saved and pocketed some more of the money. And so, in this manner, he kept cutting corners on the construction to enrich himself.

When the builder was done, the house looked quite appealing on the outside, but he knew that there were a lot of serious defects built into it. The builder had managed to divert \$40,000 for himself out of the job.

After the construction was complete, his friend the developer, the person who supplied the money and trusted him, returned to inspect the job and to take delivery of the house.

When the developer arrived, he didn't step a foot inside the house. Rather he admired it from the outside. He then turned to his friend the builder, the one who had done the slipshod work, and said, "Here are the keys to the house. Because you are such a good friend I'm giving it to you for your own home."

We make decisions in this life all the time. Whether in the light of day or behind closed doors, the decisions we make are always between the Lord and us. We build our own house, and then we have to live in it. When we cut corners we are the ones to suffer, but when we make right choices we are the ones who ultimately gain.

Maharaj Charan Singh used to tell us that Sant Mat is an attitude of mind to be developed, and a way of life to be lived. Continually we are faced with little moral dilemmas: Do we turn to the positive or to the negative? Do we take a step toward our goal or away from it? We mould our lives positively by making right decisions. At each decision point we can do one of two things: We can follow the lower nature of the mind, which leads us more deeply into this world, or we can respond to the higher nature of our mind, which takes us closer to our destination.

In the story, the builder made major decisions that affected the integrity of his finished product. He skimmed on the quality of his materials and, in the end, became the owner of the defective house. The consequences of his actions are clear.

In our lives we are constantly facing decisions big and small – mostly small. But these things combine to form the pattern of our lives. Each little decision is woven into the tapestry of our being. Over time, these choices add up, just like when we throw the change from our pocket into a jar at the end of the day. A few coins, day by day, eventually can become enough to buy a new suit of clothes. The decisions that we make are the coinage of our day. And, as time goes by, they add up. What do these choices look like? Perhaps it is deciding

whether to watch a little more TV, or shut it off and get to bed, so that we can wake up refreshed for meditation. Perhaps we have to choose not to yield to a temptation (the avoidance of a negative action). Or perhaps it is to do a little bit of simran when our mind is free for a moment (the assertion of a positive action).

As we strive to develop a Master-oriented attitude of mind and to live life rightly, these little moment-by-moment decisions count for a lot. Our work on this path seems not to be so much about some epic battle played out on the stage of life but rather a series of small struggles between the higher and lower nature of our mind.

There's an old saying that says: If we don't know where we're headed, any road will take us there.

Master has described the direction to our home and instructed us on how to get there. It is for us to align our daily activities in a manner consistent with our goals. He has given us a chance to stop our aimless wandering. Every day when we open our eyes, God has given us another golden opportunity to live life rightly and make the best choices. May our decisions large and small take us nearer to our destination.



Meditation

Meditation has never been an easy thing for anyone before reaching the state of perfect concentration. How can we rise to spiritual heights within just for the asking? It is something we have to earn. The progress is slow, very slow, because of the burden we carry. For how long have you been in this creation collecting all sorts of karmas? How can you now expect miracles to happen within months or even years? It is a lifelong struggle.

It is not proper for a beggar to shout and cry at the door of the millionaire. That shouting will not open the door. It is humility, submission and meekness which will help and move the heart of the Lord. We cannot demand anything from him. We can only beg. Therefore do not unnecessarily get so excited and upset. Nothing will be gained by that. Relax and calmly give your time to meditation every day. Instead of blaming the path or the Master, see within yourself where the weakness lies. Have you given regular time to meditation? Have you vacated the body of all consciousness and brought it to the eye centre? Have you tried to live the Sant Mat way of life, detaching yourself gradually from the world and attaching your thoughts to the Lord within? Have you kept the names with you most of the time? In other words, have you followed the instructions given to you at the time of initiation? If we have not done our part, we cannot complain about the shortcomings of Sant Mat.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Quest for Light*



What Matters

The work we have to do in this lifetime is the greatest challenge we have ever faced. Each of us in our own specifically designed mind-made world can hold on to only so many things, and these things are constantly competing for our attention. Each thought is saying, “I matter the most.” The question becomes: Which objects and thoughts do I need the most at this moment, what do I need to focus on next, what problem am I going to give my attention to? The demands that are placed upon us by our family, work, our own internal desires and fears, and the flood of things that our attention is being drawn to by advertising, friends, books, the Internet and movies, all cause our mind to become scattered, and we move through life in a state of emotional turmoil because so much seems to matter to us.

If I am sick and in pain, it matters. If I fall in or out of love, it matters. If I lose my job, it matters. If someone attacks my thoughts or feelings, it matters. If I do not get what I want, it matters. Giving our attention to all these things that matter causes stress, diminishes our health and often makes us feel miserable. These things all matter to us and become a priority because we have expectations and are attached to an outcome. These attachments and expectations come from the aspect of our mind most commonly called ego.

Dr. Julian Johnson writes in *The Path of the Masters*:

The normal ego is all right, but when it begins to swell up out of all proportion, then it takes on the nature of a disease. So vanity is an overgrown ego.... That faculty, which is quite necessary for the preservation of the individual in this life and for the proper placement of that person in relation to all others, becomes so

overgrown that the normal self becomes for him the centre of the universe.

Our egos are dysfunctional and our true self, our soul, has identified with this dysfunctional ego to the extent that we have become egomaniacs. From a spiritual perspective, it is a sickness or certainly and impediment to spiritual progress.

Our dysfunctional egos are vulnerable and insecure, but powerful, and they are constantly forcing us to pay attention to what they want. To make things worse, what matters to us at every moment constantly keeps changing. Karmas from past lives, which the ego labels as good or bad, are constantly arising. If we find out that we have a life-threatening illness, that becomes a priority and becomes what matters to us in our mind. And the ego reacts. The ego puts great value on this new challenge. This is easy to comprehend, but what is insane is that this dysfunctional ego will also automatically overreact in the same way to even the most mundane things that flow into its domain throughout the day.

This dysfunctional ego is only a small illusory spot in relation to our entire spiritual being.

In an evening meeting at Dera, a brother told Baba Ji: “I have such a big ego. Everything is me, me, me. I have little compassion and think I am so important. How can I ever make progress on this path with such a big ego?”

Baba Ji started to laugh. He looked directly at this man and told him that he was wrong, that his ego was actually very, very small; it was nothing.

The reason the Master can say that the ego is miniscule is because he is looking at who we really are, the soul. He is not looking at our ego, he is not judging our ego. To him it is a nothing, a tiny

illusory spot. He is looking at what we cannot see, and that is our soul. And that is what he loves. Master often says that he wouldn't have initiated us if we couldn't do the work in one lifetime. So our lives can be transformed if only we prioritize and let go of all these things that we think matter so much and concentrate on the big thing, the thing that the Master tells us matters the most: meditation.



The first essential thing, therefore, is to enter this laboratory within ourselves, by bringing our scattered attention inside of the eye focus. This is a slow process. But we are not justified in saying that we cannot do it, or that it is impossible, or that it is useless.... It is our job and we must do it; and we must do it now, in this very lifetime.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *Spiritual Gems*

Learning to Stay

In meditation we discover our inherent restlessness. Sometimes we get up and leave. Sometimes we sit there but our bodies wiggle and squirm and our minds go far away. This can be so uncomfortable that we feel it's impossible to stay. This feeling can teach us not just about ourselves but also about what it is to be human. All of us derive security and comfort from the imaginary world of memories and fantasies and plans. We really don't want to stay with the nakedness of our present experience. It goes against the grain to stay present. These are the times when only gentleness and a sense of humour can give us the strength to settle down.

The pith instruction is, stay ... stay ... just stay. Learning to stay with oneself in meditation is like training a dog. If we train a dog by beating it, we'll end up with an obedient but very inflexible and rather terrified dog. The dog may obey when we say: "Stay!" "Come!" "Roll over!" and "Sit up!" but he will also be neurotic and confused. By contrast, training with kindness results in someone who is flexible and confident, who doesn't become upset when situations are unpredictable and insecure.

So whenever we wander off, we gently encourage ourselves to "stay" and settle down. Are we experiencing restlessness? Stay! Discursive mind? Stay! Are fear and loathing out of control? Stay! Aching knees and throbbing back? Stay! What's for lunch? Stay! What am I doing here? Stay! I can't stand this another minute! Stay! That is how to cultivate steadfastness.

Pema Chodron, excerpted from *The Places that Scare You: A Guide to Fearlessness in Difficult Times*

Love Is a Verb

I heard it said once that love is a verb – something you do. That certainly applies to our spiritual practice. We may not have much say about whether we are feeling loving at any given time, but we can always choose to practise love.

A question in *Die to Live* addresses this:

I think it's possible to be loving or to act loving without feeling loving. And sometimes I'm not sure where it's coming from, whether it's a real loving feeling or not.

Maharaj Charan Singh answers:

At least behave in a loving way, and then you may also feel the love within. If you try to develop the habit of acting lovingly, then you may also begin to have a genuine loving feeling for others. At least start by behaving like that.

Let's take a couple of mundane examples. Perhaps a husband and wife have an arrangement where she cooks and he cleans up the kitchen. Now some nights, he probably doesn't feel like cleaning. He may not be feeling any love for his wife in that moment, and yet he can choose to take the loving action to clean the kitchen anyway. Similarly, some nights she probably doesn't feel like cooking. She may not even be hungry herself. Yet she can choose to take the loving action of fixing the meal.

Some mornings we don't feel like meditating. We may not be feeling any love for the Master. But we get up and meditate anyway. That is an act of devotion, a loving act.

On the other hand, suppose the husband comes home and his wife is feeling a lot of love for him. She is acting very loving and telling him how much she loves him. After a while of enjoying this he asks her, “Where’s dinner?” She says, “Oh, I didn’t make dinner. I just couldn’t today.” Or maybe, “I was in the kitchen for two and one half hours, but I fell asleep.” Or, “I was in the kitchen, but I was talking on the phone the whole time. I had a lot to say.”

We may feel loving toward the Master, but what will we tell him when he asks, “Where’s the meditation?” Just having loving feelings toward the Master and not taking loving action is not what he wants. That’s not devotion. We need to let our actions reflect our love. We need to make the loving effort.

The Great Master, Maharaj Sawan Singh, wrote that a primary factor in success in controlling the mind and senses is the effort of the disciple. We don’t need heroic effort, but that effort does need to be continual and relentless. It will build in intensity as we become more devoted. We have no idea how much effort our spiritual journey will take. But the rewards are unimaginable. As Great Master says:

But those of you who remain faithful and go on working to the best of your ability must one day realize how great is the work you have done and how great is the reward which awaits you.

Spiritual Gems

In answering questions about how hard the path could be, the Master often repeated what may have been one of the greatest understatements of all time when he answered – it is worth the effort. The Great Master sums it up in *Spiritual Gems*: “When this is the only way, and we are to go this way, then why not go now?”



The Miracle of Simran

How is it that simran is a miracle? First of all, it is miraculous enough that we have met a living Master and have been initiated. Even more miraculous is that we have been given these names that are super-charged with the Master's divine energy. But the height of the miracle is that we sometimes actually remember to repeat these names.

Without his grace we would never even finish the round of simran we are on, much less start anew even while our mind tries to hijack us into some worldly thought and carry us away with it, again and again. If we knew just how miraculous the repetition of even one round of simran is, we would say each name with deep reverence, overflowing gratitude, focused determination and exuberant joy. With that attitude the simran would change the very foundation of our being. And isn't that what spirituality is about – changing the very foundation of our being from our worldly focus to a spiritual focus?

We can't do simran without it changing us – even our sense of identity. We may want to repeat those names and have our ego, our sense of self, stay the same, but that's impossible. We will, of necessity, lose our sense of self if we keep on repeating the names. Simran is the solvent that dissolves our ego.

We can't just say the names; we have to let go of ourselves as we do the repetition. We have to let the names dissolve us. Baba Ji says that we should just sit still, repeat the names and let ourselves go. Is it this letting ourselves go that we have such a hard time with? If we say the names without letting go of ourselves, it's like trying to drive our car by pushing our foot on the accelerator with our other foot firmly planted on the brake. The car goes nowhere.

We are somewhat like a caterpillar that sees butterflies and knows deep inside that being a caterpillar is not its true state. Biologists tell us that a caterpillar must first enter a cocoon and dissolve into proto-plasmic goo, losing all traces of being a caterpillar, before it begins to transform into a butterfly. So how does our transformation begin?

After initiation, our simran practice is what begins our transformation. Simran, along with keeping the four vows, is the solvent that dissolves our ego, our identity, so we can be transformed by him. We are no more able to know what our transformation will be like than a caterpillar can really know what it will be like to become a butterfly. We must experience it.

There is a story of a child that illustrates the idea of the individual transforming and merging into the ocean of God's love. The child, who was made of salt and very much wanted to know where he had come from. So he set out on a long journey and travelled to many lands in pursuit of this. Finally he came to the shore of the great ocean. "How marvellous," he cried, and stuck one foot in the water. The ocean beckoned him in further saying, "If you wish to know who you are, do not be afraid." The salt child walked further and further into the water dissolving with each step, and at the end exclaimed, "Ah, now I know who I am." The experience of transformation made the child realize who he really was.

As satsangis, we too want to lose the illusion of our separateness and merge into the ocean of Oneness. We experience this as a waking up. Our previous separateness seems like a dream from which we have awakened.

We need to wake up. There is urgency to our need to wake up. We don't have any time to waste. The Master has given us only just enough time on the earth to fulfil our spiritual purpose here. The sand in our

hourglass is trickling away and we don't know how much time is left. We have no idea how urgent our situation is. We are lost in darkness and in imminent peril of rebirth. We have forgotten who we are and forgotten our true home. Each round of simran brings us closer to remembering our true self and our true home.

In our possession is a miracle, the miracle of simran, which could be described as a continuous filling of the heart and mind with beautiful, grateful and loving awareness of the Master. It's up to us to take full advantage of this miracle, and cultivate it for all its glorious promise. As Baba Ji frequently reminds us, the ball is in our court.



No one should give the answer that it is impossible for a man occupied with worldly cares ... to pray always. Everywhere, wherever you may find yourself, you can set up an altar to God in your mind by means of prayer. And so it is fitting to pray at your trade, on a journey, standing at the counter or sitting at your handicraft.... By the power of the invocation of the name of God ... [one] would come to know from experience that frequency of prayer, this sole means of salvation is a possibility for the will of man.

Saint John Chrysostom, as quoted in *The Way of the Pilgrim and the Pilgrim Continues His Way*

Life's True Purpose

Whether we are aware of it or not, there is one thing, one thing alone, that we crave to feel, to know and to love with every particle of our beings. And that is the divine reality, whom many call God – the deep root of our souls. Seeking after and realizing this fundamental truth is the real purpose of our existence here on earth. Rumi says:

*There is one thing which you must never forget...
All human beings come into the world for a particular mission
and that mission is our singular purpose. If we do not enact it,
we have done nothing... Remember the deep root of your being,
the presence of your Lord. Give your life to the one who already
owns your breath and your moments.*

Rumi, as quoted in Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee, *Love Is a Fire*

“Remember the deep root of your being,” says Rumi. Remember, that one reality. For, if we have done nothing in our life towards that end, then we have done nothing at all that is worth anything in this world of illusion.

At the level of ordinary human consciousness, we know that God is beyond anything that our limited senses and intellect can grasp. Yet mystics tell us that that one power, God, exists as the constant life-support and consciousness of creation – the essential nature of everything in existence.

Mystics also tell us that it is reasonable to assume that if such a reality does exist, there must be a means by which we can know it. Such a means, they say, does not involve the intellect or the five

physical senses – because God is not merely a physical or mental being. Rather, it involves turning our attention within, so that we can transcend the mind and senses and turn our soul to what is subtle, spiritual and essential.

Spiritual essence manifests within the soul in the form of sound and light. It is something that the subtle faculties of the soul can both see and hear within. We are speaking of the creative stream of the life current that is known in various religions.

This Truth, this essence of God, can be experienced only in the human form through the guidance of a God-realized living Master. By means of the subtle vehicle of the sound current, the Master takes his disciples into realms of consciousness deep within the soul, where they can gain true knowledge of the one eternal Lord. In the following, Guru Arjun Dev gives us a hint of his own experience:

*In the society of the Holy, I saw the Lord within myself
And I loved the sweet Name of the Lord ...
And my mind is held, and I hear the Celestial Music,
Of which I cannot tell, so wondrous is its ecstasy.*

Guru Arjun Dev, *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, translated by Gopal Singh

We often find that we forget that which is so very close to us, that which is within. That which is part of the appearance of things and temporary, we love. We live in the changing world of appearances and believe the illusion to be solid and real. It never occurs to us that the real unchanging essence of things is something infinitely deeper, infinitely truer. We forget the certainty of our own death and become imprisoned and obsessed by our desires and passions. We pass our lives in such a state until, finally, we are fortunate enough to meet a

perfect liberator, a living Master. In the following, Maharaj Sawan Singh describes the unique reality of such a Master:

The Master is not a creature of this world and is not in the bondage of this body.... The living Master is one with the Lord. He is the true manifestation of the Lord in this world. He has been given the duty of working for the salvation of its creatures. He is the manifestation of the Shabd. He is the source of love.... Only man can guide man. This is the law of nature. The Master assumes human form according to this law, so that he may persuade people and unite them with the Lord through his own strength.

Philosophy of the Masters, Vol.V

Relying upon the grace and strength of the Master, the disciple steadily grows in conscious awareness of the Lord's presence within the soul. The more that spiritual awareness expands, the more the disciple begins to see the ego for the true emptiness that it is. A profound change in understanding begins to take place. This includes a shift in the disciple's identity, a shift that takes him from believing the self to be the separate ego-self to knowing that his true nature is that of divine spirit. The soul discovers that there actually is no such thing as a separate self. There is only God.

The Persian mystic Aziz Nasafi, as quoted in the book *What is Life?* says:

The spiritual world is one single spirit who stands like unto a light behind the bodily world and who, when any single creature comes into being, shines through it as through a window.

According to the kind and size of the window, less or more light enters the world.

For us, it is the perfect Master who shines in the world as the great beacon light of the spirit. For us, he is a wondrous window, a link into a world otherwise unknown and unexplored by most of us. Sitting in the Master's physical presence is a great privilege that brings with it a deeper, truer awareness of what it is that we are longing for. The Lord is manifested to our consciousness through the Master. Beauty, purity, love, power and truth are his true qualities. When we love him, we not only love his personality and his physical form, but we love something far subtler and much greater. What we love in the Master is his true essence. Kabir says:

*I fell in love with Him,
His love like sugar dissolved
To fill my soul, my heart;
My body's every pore cries 'Beloved, Beloved' –
Mouth is required no more.*

Kabir, The Weaver of God's Name

The disciple, finding himself held in the Master's love, experiences a communion with him that reaches previously unknown depths. This brings remembrance and soul recognition. The disciple has been touched by the truth. As Great Master tells us, it is a communion in the deepest intimacy, from soul to soul. He writes:

The currents of love emanating from the heart of a devotee strike against the heart of the Master, draw power from it, and return to the heart of the disciple with a double force. In this

manner the spiritual powers of the Master enter the heart of the disciple and it appears to him that the Master has become one with him, and he himself feels one with the Master. Once the disciple is in communion with the Guru, all the gates of bliss and happiness are open to him.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *Philosophy of the Masters, Vol. II*

The power of love that is incarnated in the Master automatically awakens love for the Lord in the disciple's heart. Gradually, through association, there is created in the disciple a clear awareness of, and deep attachment to, the presence of God in his Master. As a result, the disciple falls helplessly in love with the Master.

At the same time, the Master never ceases to urge his disciples to turn their love and longing within, to seek within their souls the divine melody that is the real Master. For he is truly present within us in his Shabd form. This is the purpose of meditation – to know who the Master really is and, thereby, to know the Lord.

Meditation, as taught by the Masters, is a means of moving our consciousness into the Truth, the Shabd, the Essence. They tell us that we must return our attention to its source if we are to find true fulfilment and happiness. Nothing in the world of appearances can fill the emptiness within our hearts and satisfy our deep longing for wholeness. Only surrender, love and devotion to that infinite power can bring satisfaction. We want the real thing, says the Master in so many words. We want the actual.

There is nothing more beautiful, more profound or more precious and holy than meditation because we can never be closer to him than we are then. We meditate simply because we want to be with our Master. We want to be with him wholly, completely and with every

particle of our being. There is nothing else in life that can satisfy such longing.

Through the practice of meditation, we awaken gradually to the finer reality of the Shabd Master. What we perceive in the physical Master as his innermost reality, we also perceive in meditation as the substance of our very own souls. We become aware that the real Master also lives within us.

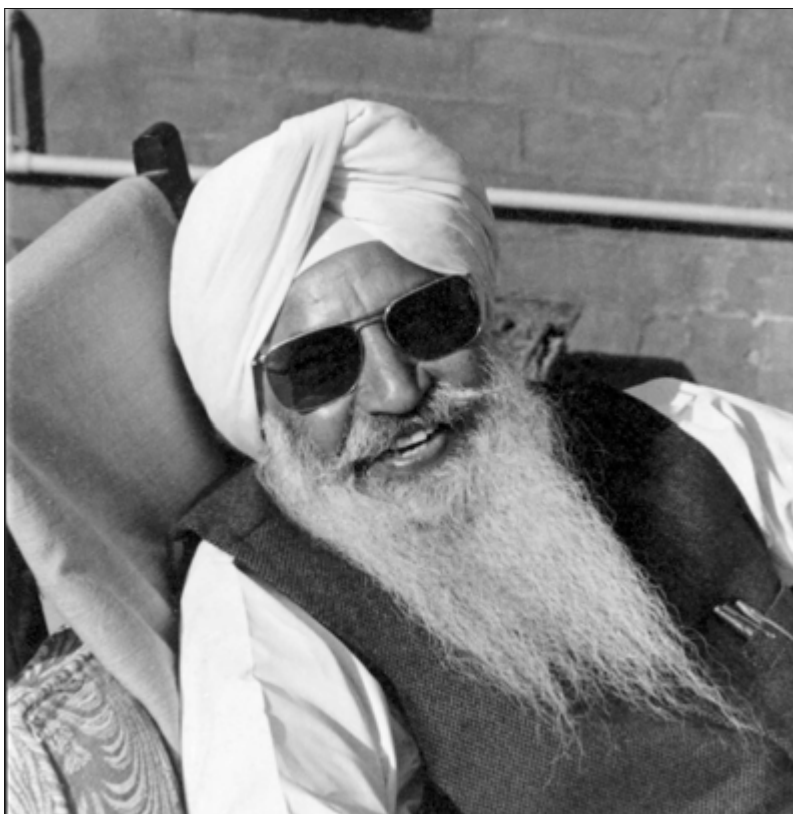
There is no thought or process of reasoning that can lead to the understanding of God or the inner Master. Realization is achieved as a result of direct inner communion with him. The key to inner communion with the Lord and the inner Master is complete surrender in his love. The key to surrender in his love is meditation. For he is not separate from us. He is our deepest innermost self.

On the spiritual path there is room only for one, not for two. And that one must be the real thing; it must be true. Anything that is not true, such as the ego – that I-ness or individuality – can never become part of the Shabd, the one. His truth always exists within us, but there is a veil of I-ness between his reality and our awareness. Therefore, he remains unknown to us – intimately close, yet so very far away. And so, if we are to truly know him, our soul, our true essence, must merge into Shabd, the true essence of the Master. Great Master says: “As long as there is ‘I’, then he does not reveal himself; but when ‘I’ is gone, then only he remains” (*The Dawn of Light*).

In other words, when the “I” is eliminated, the illusion of ego will vanish. When this occurs, “he” replaces “I” as the authentic, real self. Rather than ego, we find certain knowledge of the Master’s presence.

Spiritual progress is a matter of a deeper, more intimate, more loving communion with the inner Master. When the Master’s love captures the soul and takes it over, our entire awareness is

automatically placed in him. Nothing else can exist in such a state. There is nothing left to want. There is no where else to go. And so in this way, we remember the deep root of our being. We fulfil the true purpose of life.



Living or Reacting?

Baba Ji once told us that we are not living. Our whole life is just reacting to our needs and our desires. But when we get into stillness, we are just *being*. What does the Master mean by reacting? And what would it be like to be living as he defines it?

With our minds in control, we are either immersed in the past or considering the future. When something in the present occurs, we have a learned and automatic response to it. We are reacting as our mind dictates. The soul's response is repressed and unnoticed. Our true self hardly participates in the life we are leading. Perhaps this is what Baba Ji meant when he told us we are not living.

Really living would be a condition in which our true self, our soul, in conscious union with its Creator, is actively participating in the flow of life. It would no longer be a silent prisoner of a mind automatically steering our consciousness; the soul would be free to guide our awareness in an objective reality.

We would experience life as it is, not as we think it is. Our reactions would not come from the mind, trained as it is in a particular manner. Rather, we would not react. Our thoughts and actions would be guided by the soul with its wellspring of compassion and love. Since the soul is in harmony with its Maker, living by its guidance would put us in harmony with everyone and everything. The gift of the present moment, in all its fullness and beauty, would be ours continuously and we would be enveloped in his love.



Be Nothing, Do Nothing

The Master has been suggesting that we learn to be nothing and do nothing. However, clearly there are some things the Master wants us to be, and some things he wants us to do. He wants us to be good disciples, good family members and good employees. And he also certainly wants us to do our duties to our families, our employers, our friends and our communities. Most importantly, he wants us to do our meditation. So when he says we should learn to be nothing and to do nothing, what could he mean?

This concept may hold the essence of this path: complete surrender to the Master and the Lord. For that is the road we must follow in our return to the Father, in the process of God-realization. But why is this the essence of the path? Because in our present state we are separated from God – or at least we believe we are. Our mind thinks it is a separate entity from everything around it. And it processes everything it sees and does through the filter of ego. This is “my car” and “my job” and “my country”. And the mind thinks that the Lord is a separate entity out there somewhere when, the saints assure us, God is within us and we are made of nothing but him.

We live in a dream world of separateness, centred on our ego. The saint’s job is to wake us up from this dream so we can see that all is God and give ourselves up to him and his will. Some saints speak of this as our waking up from our current sleep state of belief that we are separate. Others speak of this as an annihilation of the ego. As quoted in the book *Sultan Bahu*, the great Persian mystic Maulana Rum says about this state:

*From all the six volumes of the Masnavi
only one voice comes.
Its essence is
Dive into the ocean of annihilation.*

This passage tells us that the goal of our life is to “dive into the ocean of annihilation,” throwing ourselves fully into the love of the Master and the Lord, so that we lose our individual identity. We cease to exist as separate entities.

This giving up of our identity, learning to be nothing, begins with the three vows we follow before initiation: following the vegetarian diet, avoiding alcohol and drugs, and leading a clean moral life. These are the first acts of surrender we undertake as disciples-to-be.

Meditation, we learn after initiation, is an ongoing exercise in surrender. It’s the key process in our life as a disciple that allows us to practice surrendering and that eventually changes us so that true surrender, surrender to the Shabd is possible. While our meditation may be feeble and seem useless, it is essential because it is an act of submission. Meditation is our prayer to the Father for forgiveness and grace. Without it, and the other actions we take in his name, we are not soft, we are not pliable, and the divine potter cannot reshape us in his image. In a recent *Spiritual Link* article (May 2009), the author wrote, “... the whole secret is to make yourself ready. God does the rest”. Our attempts to meditate and to live the teachings are a part of what make us ready.

When we try to meditate and fail to achieve anything, we think there is a problem. We can become disappointed. It’s important to remember that spiritual practice is not like operating a vending machine, where we put in a dollar, and out comes a soda. In a

vending machine there is a direct connection between the dollar in and the soda out. In spiritual practice, there is also input (meditation) and output (advancement within), but no apparent linkage between the two.

And when we accept that our efforts at meditation are not directly linked to results, that acceptance may be a part of our learning to surrender to the Master. It is a part of our learning to be and do nothing. The Great Master, Maharaj Sawan Singh, writes very beautifully about this process:

Your duty is to sit within and knock at the door, and the door will open. The Power within does not err. It will open the door when it finds that the time has come. Increase your love and devotion, and entrust yourself entirely to its care. The Power within is not ignorant of what you are doing. It is with you and constantly watches you and guides you. When your love for that Power exceeds your love for yourself and the I-ness has been replaced by Thou-ness, the form of the Guru will make its appearance visible within.

Spiritual Gems

Here is how Baba Jaimal Singh, in *Spiritual Letters*, describes the state of surrender:

So long as the disciple does not take out the self by surrendering his all to the Satguru and removing himself from everything, he will not be liberated. So surrender your self 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

the Satguru's instructions. He will take you with him when he considers you fit.

In another letter, Baba Jaimal Singh writes directly about doing nothing:

Entrust everything to him and do all your worldly work, and also keep doing your bhajan and simran. But know in your heart that "I am not the doer. I do not exist at all."

We began with the present Master's advice that we learn to be nothing and do nothing. Isn't he saying exactly what Baba Jaimal Singh is also saying above? In the state described, the disciple has learned to "be nothing." He simply has ceased to exist and only the Master and Shabd remain. And he has learned to "do nothing," since he knows (because he can see it happening) that the Shabd does everything, and he does nothing.

So in his statement that we have to learn to be nothing and do nothing, Baba Ji has laid before us the greatest goal a human being can strive for: to dive into that ocean of love and lose ourselves in it – to surrender completely to our Master.

How do we do this? In the following two short passages Maharaj Charan Singh gives us the answer to this question. That answer, of course, has to do with meditation. "The main thing is meditation; and satsang, because it strengthens meditation; and seva, because it leads to meditation" (*Spiritual Heritage*). "From meditation, love will come, submission will come, humility will come. Everything will come" (*Die to Live*).



Love and Reason

The human intellect and the knowledge acquired through it cannot take us beyond the limits of space and time. Love, on the other hand, can transcend all these limits and take us to the imperceptible, incomprehensible and indescribable region where the Lord abides....

Sultan Bahu says all those who have not learned the lesson of love wander about in delusion, bereft of the experience of reality:

*They have read thousands of books,
they have come to be known as great scholars.
But the one word, 'love', they could not grasp –
so helplessly they wander in delusion.
A lover, with but one glance of love,
can carry millions to their deliverance.
But a million glances cast by a scholar
will not ferry a soul across to salvation.
Vast is the gulf between love and intellect.
Those who have not purchased love
in the market place of this life, O Bahu,
will always be losers in this world and the next.*

Bait 33



Polishing the Mirror

In *Love's Alchemy, Poems from the Sufi Tradition*, a mystic writes:

*The first step in love
is losing your head.*

*After the petty ego,
you then give up your life
and bear the calamity.*

*With this behind you, proceed:
Polish the ego's rust
from the mirror
of your self.*

The first step ... is losing your head. In meditation we do our best to enter a space of silence where the continuous noise in our head ceases and all the petty concerns of the self are kept at bay. During the day we strive to keep constant vigilance over our minds while doing simran. Meditation, vigilance and simran lead to the silencing of the domineering automatic machine of the mind that sustains our ego.

The saints describe the ego as an illness, a serious affliction that has created the long-enforced notion that there is an “I”, a self that exists apart from the Lord. The idea of “me” and “mine” is based on a false concept. In truth, the Lord sustains our every breath and everything belongs to him, including our souls.

In *Quest for Light* Maharaj Charan Singh writes:

The very ego that we want to crush is the only barrier between us and the Lord. The moment you lose your identity and merge yourself into him, he appears before you. Ego is our only enemy, which attaches us to this world, and the whole struggle is to eliminate it from within ourselves.

After the petty ego, you then give up your life ... Once we have conquered the mind that has its home in Trikuti, we are able to know the will of the Lord. At that stage we willingly give our lives to him, knowing him to be in charge and accepting everything in life with equanimity.

... you then give up your life and bear the calamity. Giving up our life is surrendering to the One who knows what is best for us – better than we know ourselves. It is relinquishing the illusion of control over our life and accepting events as they unfold.

Baba Ji has told us we must learn to let go. He said the hardest thing for us is to let go. He asked: What is so difficult? Someone is willing to take over all our burdens, and we refuse to let him. It's like the person on the train with a suitcase on his head. Everyone tells him to put it down and he says, "No, it's mine!"

When we trust in God enough to let go of our imagined control over life, we begin to polish the ego's rust from the mirror of our self. The saints tell us that human beings are made in the image of God. We are of the same essence. Our souls reflect the same attributes as their Maker. But a growth of dirt and corrosion has covered them. The ego, our notion of self-importance and our conviction that we are separate and independent of our Maker, has encased the pure and shining mirror of the soul. How is the mirror to reflect the love and compassion, the beauty and joy of its Creator when the mind is completely dominant, supporting the ego at all costs?

Polishing the mirror is taking control over the mind with its negative tendencies and its habit of seeking pleasure from the senses. It is ceasing to indulge the mind which is like a bottomless well. To gain control over one's thoughts, simran is an invaluable tool.

In addition to controlling our thoughts through simran, we must be careful what we expose our mind to, through books, movies, discussions.

The American philosopher Henry David Thoreau writes in *Life Without Principle*:

*We should treat our minds, that is ourselves, as innocent and ingenious children, whose guardians we are ... and be careful what objects and what subjects we thrust on their attention.
Read not the Times. Read the Eternities.*

As guardians of our minds, we keep our attention in repetition, and in the awareness of the Master's presence. In remembrance of his pure, radiant and loving presence, the ego retreats and we let go the notion of control. As the fabricated self is scoured from our mind, we expose mirror of our soul. The clear light of Shabd then fills our consciousness and is reflected back into the world.



The Difference

Maharaj Sawan Singh says: “It is the business and duty of every disciple to make the mind motionless and reach the eye centre. The duty of the Master is to help and guide on the path” (*Spiritual Gems*). The Master has said many times that the seemingly daunting task of making the mind motionless, while not easy, is attainable in this lifetime.

The Master is waiting for us, yet we are very much like children taking a family vacation. Initially, it looks like everyone is ready to depart. Then there is constant interruption, as each family member runs back into the house to get one more “essential” thing to take on the journey. What can a father do? He’s honking the horn for the family to come and hoping that they are ready and will jump in the car with him so the journey can begin. Much in the same way, the Master is sounding the horn of Shabd, inviting us to come with him on the journey to the eye centre.

We are reminded that reaching the eye centre can only be obtained through stillness. Stillness of the mind is strongly supported by stillness of the body. Initially, stillness may seem passive, but eventually we find it requires great effort. This effort makes the difference. Effort is the cornerstone of accomplishing any task and is active in its nature. Stillness of the mind and the body comes from the way we live, the way we speak, the way we think, the way we adhere to the principles of the path and, most certainly, on the way we focus on our meditation. Maharaj Charan Singh says in *Die to Live*:

One has to change one's entire way of life and one's attitude toward life. To follow Sant Mat requires a complete transformation, so it's not easy. One has to sacrifice a lot in life.

We cannot give up; we have the capacity to reach our goal. This transformation is a slow process and stillness can only be accomplished through relentless effort. The way to stillness begins with repetition of simran and is supported by the myriad of decisions that we are confronted with on a daily basis. If we are honest with ourselves, can we say that we have made each decision in support of our meditation? For example, on the one hand, the mind may tell us that we can't sit for two and a half hours in meditation; on the other hand, the Master says we can. Who is right? Success in reaching two and a half hours won't happen by wishing it. It is a pragmatic decision. If we want to succeed, we can figure out a way to increase our time in meditation until we reach our goal. Master has said there is always something more we can do. The way to get there is through our effort. Maharaj Sawan Singh in *Spiritual Gems* says:

I am well aware that you have struggles. You have some things within yourself to overcome and some things outside of yourself which must be surmounted. But you can do it.... And often when you find the difficulties greatest and the hour darkest, the light will appear and you will see that you are free. Let nothing discourage you ... he has chosen you to get Nam and go with the Master to Sach Khand, your true abode. You must reach there. Nothing can prevent you. But you can hasten the progress or retard it, as you like.

So our actions must reflect our spiritual desire. The stillness required to reach our goal will come as a result of our immense effort. The Master is waiting for us to come inside and begin the journey with him. This is a worthy lifetime pursuit. As Maharaj Sawan Singh says in *Spiritual Gems*: “It is our job and we must do it; and we must do it now in this very lifetime.”



Be still and know that I am God

Bible, Psalms 46:10

*If you take one step to take refuge in the Master,
The Master meets you on the way
By taking hundreds of steps.
If you remember the Master just once,
The Master remembers you again and again.
Even if your devotion is small
As a fragment of a cowrie shell,
The Master showers all benefits on you.*

Bhai Gurdas, as quoted in *Living Meditation*

Beloved

Beloved

*no fear if you break my heart a thousand times
but do not abandon me in contempt because
of what I have here become
for in this garden every flower has its roots in dirt....*

*I assumed you outside of myself
beyond the reaches of my imagination
Now that you have dropped the veil I realize
You are the one
I left behind with my first step.*

*This Heavenly Wine: Poems from the Divan-e Jami,
renditions by Vraje Abramian*



*Taking the all-important first step with a sincere heart can be a
sort of enlightenment. It presages an evolutionary adventure,
and offers inner peace.*

Michael Murphy and George Leonard, The Life We Are Given

Book Review



Buddhism: Path to Nirvana

By K. N. UPADHYAYA

PUBLISHER: RADHA SOAMI SATSANG BEAS, BEAS, INDIA. 2010.

ISBN: 978-81-8256-920-1

In *Buddhism: Path to Nirvana*, K. N. Upadhyaya brings to the study of Buddhism his knowledge of Eastern philosophy and the ancient languages of Sanskrit and Pali, as well as the teachings of modern adepts in Surat Shabd Yoga. Posing a universal need in humans to “unravel the mystery of the world and realize the objective of human life,” the author writes: “To do so, it is very helpful to know what the great sages, saints and Enlightened Ones, whether of the East or West, have said regarding these matters, especially regarding the ultimate Truth and the way to realize it.”

A former professor and chair of the Department of Philosophy at the University of Hawaii and a specialist in the philosophies of India, Upadhyaya explains the spiritual precepts of Buddhism with frequent reference to the most ancient texts of Buddhism, including both the Sanskrit and Pali Canons. He also provides numerous quotations from Buddhist spiritual teachers from medieval to modern times.

He begins with the Buddha’s life story, because this story “encapsulates the whole of Buddhist understanding.”

While what is fact and what is legend in the story of the Buddha’s life will never be known, the Buddhist path does not depend on the historical accuracy of the story. The truths found in the story may not be historical, but they serve as metaphors, and through the account of the Buddha’s life and experiences, fundamental truths are illustrated.

The Buddha’s early life, one of privilege, was fundamentally changed

when he encountered sickness, old age and death. He left his home and set out to attain enlightenment. After practicing rigorous austerities and penances for six years, he turned from these extreme practices to what later would be called “the middle path.”

Buddha’s pragmatic approach to teaching was characterized by his refusal to respond to metaphysical questions and his focus on teaching according to his followers’ spiritual capacities.

The Buddha’s teachings were transmitted orally for five centuries before the earliest Buddhist scriptures were written in the first century CE. Today there are three main traditions of Buddhism: Theravada, practiced primarily in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia; Mahayana, followed widely in Tibet and East Asia; and Vajrayana, thriving most actively in Tibet and Japan.

The Buddha himself clearly stated that the path he was teaching was not something new, or something he had invented. Rather, it was “an ancient path, an ancient way travelled by Enlightened Ones of former times.” With utmost simplicity, the Buddha expressed the most fundamental principles underlying the spiritual path as “four noble truths”: 1) life in the world is full of suffering; 2) there is a cause of this suffering; 3) it is possible to bring an end to suffering; and 4) there is a path that leads to the cessation of suffering.

The chapter entitled “Human Life” examines the Buddhist teaching that a human life is difficult to obtain and a precious opportunity, since “all is within the human body.” The chapter entitled “A World of Impermanence” stresses the perishable nature of the world and everything in it. As the Buddha warned his disciples, “What is impermanent is not worth delighting in, not worth approval and not worth clinging to.”

When it comes to subtle Buddhist teachings which many readers might find hard to grasp, the author gives clear explanations. For example, he spells out various implications of the doctrine of the “triple body” of the Buddha, the doctrine that all Buddhas (perfectly enlightened beings) have three bodies: the physical body (Nirmanakaya); the blissful

or glorious body that exists in heavenly realms (Sambhogakaya); and the Dharma-body or truth body that is one with absolute reality (Dharmakaya). The author writes:

Since all the Buddhas who come to this world are emanations from the Dharmakāya, the real spiritual body or truth body that is eternally one and the same, it is only the physical forms of the Buddhas that are subject to birth and death, while, in essence, they are undying and immortal.

In the Buddha's words, "He who sees the Dhamma [ultimate reality] sees me." The Buddhas and the truth they teach come from the same source. Upadhyaya states, "The truth they embody is one and eternal, and their teachings are eternal, and for all."

Discussing the Buddhist concept of the non-self, he says, "According to Buddhism, what generally is considered the self is actually a conglomeration of constantly changing physical and mental constituents (*skandhas*).” Similarly, all phenomena are non-self.

Many people interpret the Buddha's teachings to mean that there is no soul and no God. The author offers a different perspective on this question. His close analysis of Buddha's words in the Sanskrit and Pali canons, as well as of the writings of various Buddhist spiritual teachers, is set in the context of what was meant in Buddha's time by the words now translated as self, soul and God. Here, as throughout the book, the author stresses that confusion over the words used to describe spiritual experience can only be resolved by having those spiritual experiences oneself. He ends with the assertion, "The Buddha therefore placed strong emphasis on direct personal experiment and the inner verification of what is truly real."

The chapter on "The Enlightened One" brings in quotes from many Buddhist sources on the necessity of having a living spiritual teacher. Both the teacher's responsibility and the disciple's attitude and duty are discussed. Taking refuge in the living teacher is like taking refuge in the Buddha himself, for, as Patrul Rimpoche says:

The spiritual teacher is like the Buddha Himself. He brings us the transmission of the Buddhas of the past, embodies for us the Buddhas of the present and, through his teaching, is the source of the Buddhas of the future.

The chapter on “The Eternal Path” offers insights on the practice of the path, including the work of controlling the mind, the importance of reverence for life, vegetarianism, detachment, and the practice of meditation, including dying while living. As Marpa, an eleventh century Tibetan lama, said, “I might die an ordinary death, but I need not worry; familiarity has given me perfect confidence.”

The chapter on “Inner Experience of Sound and Light” presents Buddhist teachings on the reality that is experienced through meditation practice. The Buddha himself described his experience of a “splendorous light” and “resonant sound”:

All the universes were illuminated by a splendorous light.... They became resonant, greatly resonant and resonant all around, and a divine sound resounded, resounded majestically and resounded all around.

Zen master Soyen Shaku writes:

There is but one reality and we can call it by any name.... You may call it God or reason or life or suchness or love ... but Buddhism has called it ‘Sound’ ... and declares that all things are of one Sound in which every discordant note is eternally synthesized.

The practitioner must undergo training to know this reality. Junjiro Takakusu says, “We can say without hesitation that [Zen] requires training to hear a voice in silence.” How difficult is it to achieve? In the reassuring words of Soyen Shaku, “Do not think that this is too hidden and esoteric: only train yourself in meditation ... and you come to realize the truth of my statement.”

