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Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

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Spiritual Link

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The Master

*Cool as sandalwood,
serene as the moon are saints;
Serene as the moon,
the feverish heat of the world do they cool.
Anyone who comes to them on fire
is soothed by the sweetness of their words.
Infinite is their patience,
boundless their love and compassion.
Kind, tender and merciful,
their sweet and loving words melt even stones.
The way they live, the way they smile,
lend fragrance to their wisdom.
The maladies – physical, mental and spiritual –
all three vanish when the eye beholds a saint.
Even the fire of hunger, O Paltu,
is quenched in no time.
Cool as sandalwood,
serene as the moon are saints.*

Sant Paltu, His Life and Teachings



Learning the Language of Love

When I was in university, I took a class in linguistics, the study of language. One day the professor asked, “What is the most important element that determines success in learning a foreign language?” This is a question we might ask ourselves also, since in our spiritual quest, we too are trying to learn a “foreign” language – the language of love. Actually, the language of love is not a foreign language; it is our mother tongue, but we have forgotten it, and instead we have become fluent in the language of the mind. In fact, we have forgotten the language of love so completely that the greatest struggle of our lives is the struggle to relearn it – to become fluent again.

Are there similarities between relearning the language of love and learning a foreign language?

In the linguistics class, we students offered several opinions about the most important factor in learning a foreign language: “Finding a good teacher,” one student suggested. “Living where the language is spoken – total immersion,” said another. “Being born with innate language skills,” the next one offered.

In reply, the professor said that a good teacher, although very important, is not the most important factor. Similarly, Baba Ji continually reminds us that having a spiritual Master will not do any good unless we follow the lessons he gives us. So merely having a good teacher is not sufficient.

The linguistics professor also agreed that living in a place where one can be immersed in the language we’re trying to learn does help us. Similarly, after a visit to Dera, many of us think that if we could just live there and spend time with our teacher in a place saturated in love, maybe then we could become proficient in this language. But

Baba Ji says that when the Master wants to bestow his love, he can give it as easily to someone five thousand miles away as to someone sitting right in front of him. So living in a place that is immersed in love may be a help, but it's not everything.

What about natural ability? It seems that some people are born with a facility for learning a language and others have little linguistic talent. Do some people have an instinct for love, a special talent for it, while others do not? Our Master says no, we all have the capacity for love. It is only that living in the land of the mind, we have lost touch with this pure instinct. It is not something we lack; it is something that is our very essence, but it is lying dormant in us, covered by layers of karmas. Master makes it very clear that he wouldn't have initiated us if he thought we couldn't do it. He says that, like any other teacher, he doesn't like failures. Remember that love is our native language. We all have this innate ability. The soul already speaks the language fluently; all we have to do is to uncover this ability. So while some people may find it easier to meditate because of impressions from past lives, no one whom Master has initiated is unable to learn the language of love. And our professor said that innate ability is also not the most important factor.

Since none of our first guesses were correct, another student asked, "How about practicing – regularly, persistently – is that the key?" Our professor indicated that we were getting warm. Learning takes practice. Just by listening to lectures or reading books, we will not learn. We learn by doing. We can't learn a foreign language if we don't participate in the learning, and we all know what that means. To learn the language of love, we must meditate. As Maharaj Charan Singh used to say, and Baba Ji repeats: "He has given us the hunger, he has given us the food. Now all we have to do is eat!" Baba Ji says that we even want the Master to move our jaw up and down – we don't want to chew the food ourselves!

And what makes us do the practice? This is the key, the most important element that will determine our success – it is motivation. Unless the student really wants to learn the language, he will not look for a good teacher, and he will not stay the course. Research shows that continuous and intense motivation is the crucial factor in success in language learning. Maharaj Sawan Singh says in *Philosophy of the Masters, Vol. V*:

When our soul grows weary in its search for the Lord, and is anxious to return to its home, when our eyes long to see the Lord and we hunger for him, then, in order to fulfil our intense desire, he incarnates as a perfect Master or Sat Guru.

Once our motivation is strong enough, we meet a Master and start our course. It is only when we have the motivation – the hunger, the desire – that our Master takes pity on us and initiates us. But once initiated, once we've registered for our course, we tend to forget this intense desire. One of our problems is that we are learning about something that we have forgotten so thoroughly that we don't know what it is anymore. What is this love we are talking about? In *Die to Live*, Maharaj Charan Singh was asked what love is. He replied:

Love is losing your own identity and becoming another person. That is love. There's no ego left. To become another being and to just lose your own identity; you don't exist; only the other being exists.

Then Hazur continues by saying that actually the motivation to love is love: "That craving to become another one and lose your own identity, to eliminate your ego and be in the will of another being, that

is love.” So the questioner asked Hazur about that ‘craving’: “Wanting to love the Master, is that beginning to love him?” Hazur answered:

I don't know what the difference is. How can you intellectually want to love?

Unless there is a feeling of love for the Master, the question of wanting to love doesn't arise.... You can say that you want to grow that love, but the seed is already there, otherwise you wouldn't be wanting to grow the seed. Without having a seed, you can't grow it.... So wanting to love can't come without love.

The questioner then asked: “Then we do have a tiny, little bit of love?” Hazur answered:

Yes, we have a little bit of love, no doubt. Otherwise, why should we think about the Father and meditate and try to conquer our senses if he has not given us that instinct of love.

When Maharaj Charan Singh says that we have the instinct to love, we should believe him. Baba Ji tells us to keep remembering why we asked for initiation, to not let the storms of karmas overwhelm us, causing us to doubt our love, our intention to meditate. If asked, we would probably say that the main thing we want to accomplish in life is to leave this world of suffering and unite with the divine, to still our crazy minds, to meet our beloved Master inside, to achieve perfect love and bliss. We just get distracted and waylaid by all the less important worldly objectives that demand our attention. All we need is the practice of focusing on our one spiritual goal.

We need to keep our motivation keen, to constantly remember the times when we felt that longing, that love, that presence of the Master.

If we just sit down and start the repetition without fanning the fires of our devotion, we are setting ourselves up to fail. We will mostly likely sit and diligently practice the exercises of the mind: worry, frustration, planning, and resentment.

There are different things that people do to remind them of their innate motivation. One woman sings the songs she sang in the presence of the Master to remind her of that great experience. Another man made a CD where he recorded his favourite questions and answers of Hazur's and the passages that inspired him. Someone else has a mental list of times when she felt Master's presence very powerfully. Whenever she loses focus, she goes through the list until she finds something that fans that spark of love. And when looking for inspiration, rather than cursorily reading a few pages of any Sant Mat book, we could pick up something that we know inspires us and read it a sentence at a time, pausing after each sentence until we remember the longing that we've forgotten we have. Whatever we do, we must ensure that the reminder does not become a mechanical ritual, but something that moves our hearts.

But we also must realize that emotional inspiration is not devotion. Someone asked Baba Ji what she could do about the fact that she often feels more devotion outside of meditation, because in meditation she is involved in the struggle with the mind, and for her the five names aren't associated so much with the Master. In response, Master asked: Who gave you those names? He said that meditation is all about building a relationship. The Master gave you the names, and what he wants from you is to give him back the names. This is what you do only to please him. He emphasized that we can't reach anywhere by our own efforts. We need to just let go. Our meditation is only a cry and a shout for the Master's help.

So while the physical Master speaks our worldly language, the language of feelings and thoughts, the inner Master understands only one language, a simple language composed of just five words – the five names through which we practice the language of love. It is when we give him back those five names, with all our longing and devotion and helplessness, that we learn the language of love.

The best news is that in one important aspect, learning the language of love is very different from learning a worldly language: we are not judged by our results. The Masters say that it doesn't matter whether we are good students or bad students – we are judged solely by attendance. He sees our efforts, however weak, however sporadic, and that's all he cares about. Were we present, or were we absent? He never asks us to do our meditation perfectly. All he says is *just do it*.



*This is the abode of love,
not the home of your aunt...
The warrior goes to the battlefield
and does not return alive.
It is only those of great valour, O Paltu,
who set foot in the realm of love.
This is the abode of love,
not the home of your aunt.
Sant Paltu, His Life and Teachings*

Born for This Tsunami

Every now and then, satsangi, and nonsatsangi alike say that they are angry at God because of all the suffering in the world. It's easy to relate to that assertion when everywhere we look, suffering is front-page news. Twenty-five hundred years ago the Buddha said, "All life is suffering." Things don't seem to have improved much or at all since then.

A few years ago when the tsunami struck in Indonesia, some of the poorest, most vulnerable people in the world were devastated by a huge wave that swept many to their deaths and left the rest wounded, bewildered, grieving and homeless, without food, drinking water, or medical attention.

A news magazine carried a striking photo of a sorrowful mother standing in front of her tsunami-devastated shack. The caption quoted her as saying, "My children were born for this tsunami." It sounded like she really had a higher understanding of this occurrence.

Maharaj Sawan Singh says in *Spiritual Gems*:

The karmic law is supreme on the material and the mind planes, and nothing happens of its own accord, spontaneously, so to say. The law governs the planes; therefore, no haphazard happening of events takes place anywhere, whether the events are of microscopic or astronomical dimensions. In peace and in cataclysms or catastrophes, only they suffer who are destined to suffer.

In *Tales of the Mystic East* it says, "The law of karma is inexorable and inviolable. None, not even incarnations of gods, can escape it." The net of our actions is not only vast, but the record of them goes

back forever, far longer than we can imagine. We are accountable for things that happened long ago. We are participants in a self-balancing karmic system that has no concern for our individual needs or desires. It looks only at our past actions and fits souls into its next upcoming melodrama as it sees fit. We may play the part of a victim or a hero, a sacrificial lamb or an emperor, but it is all out of our hands. Some time back, Baba Ji said that if we really knew what was going on here, we would never leave our meditation.

If we truly understood the law of karma, we would do whatever it takes to get ourselves out of here. We wouldn't worry about whose fault this is. We would take refuge with our Master and do whatever he tells us to do, and we wouldn't stop until our stay here, as prisoners in a dungeon, is over. We would think of nothing except working toward our escape. The only thing that matters is keeping our attention at the eye centre. Our simran and bhajan can take us to the point where the Shabd can lift us out of here. Maharaj Charan Singh often said, instead of cursing the darkness, we should light a candle.

Hafiz says:

*Dear world, I can offer
An intelligent explanation
For our suffering,
But I hope it really makes sense
To no one here,
And come morning,
You are again at God's door
With axe and pickets,
Eloquent petitions and complaints.
Think of suffering as being washed.*

The Gift, as rendered by Daniel Ladinsky

Harmony in Nature

Man is a limited being although he has the ability of becoming limitless. The degree to which this ability has been developed by anyone changes his outlook about nature. Therefore, there are different ways of looking at the same thing and interpreting the same phenomenon.

Take the instance of man: He is the product of his own activity in the past – his karma – which expresses itself as his hopes and desires, under whose influence he works now in this life. Nature has impressed the same karmic activity on his hands, feet, forehead, and so on....

The same applies to what controls weather. The Weather Bureau forecasts it from the observations of the atmospheric conditions. An astronomer sees it as the effect of planetary motions and the cosmic forces. An astrologer casts it from the position of planets and stars.

As all nature is one, the natural phenomena and the living forms are interrelated, and weather plays a very important part in the life of man and beast. When things go beyond the grasp of the intellect, man tries in faith to propitiate nature by singing hymns, performing *yags* (sacrifices), and so forth.

Saints see God in action throughout nature, and abide by his will. To them cosmic forces, karmic law, planetary motions, nature, weather, forms of life and their activity are outward expressions of God in action. They see harmony in them. In our ignorance, we see a little part of nature and think, "Nature is cruel." If we go within, we develop a wider outlook and begin to see harmony in nature, in place of discord.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *Spiritual Gems*

Uproot Here and Transplant There

It is said that even before coming in contact with Inayat Shah, Bulleh Shah used to perform some spiritual practice and had acquired certain miraculous powers. When Bulleh Shah, the seeker, passed near a small field of Inayat Shah, he saw trees full of fruit on both sides of the road. Inayat Shah himself was engaged in planting onion seedlings. It occurred to Bullah to test Inayat Shah's spiritual power, so – invoking the name of God – Bullah looked at the trees and caused the fruit to fall to the ground. Inayat Shah saw that the unripe fruit was falling from the trees for no reason.... He looked towards Bulleh Shah and said, "Well, young man, why have you brought down the unripe fruit from the trees?" This is exactly what Bulleh Shah wanted – to find an opportunity to talk to Inayat Shah. He went up to him and said, "Sir, I neither climbed up the trees, nor did I throw stones at the fruit, how could I tear it from the trees?" Inayat Shah cast a full glance at Bulleh Shah and said, "Oh, you are not only a thief, you are also being clever!" Inayat's glance was so penetrating that it touched Bullah's heart and he instantly fell at his feet. Inayat Shah asked his name and his purpose for coming. Bullah replied, "Sir, my name is Bullah and I wish to know how I can realize God." Inayat Shah said, "Why do you look down? Get up and look at me." ... He said, "O Bullah, what problem is there in finding God? One's attention only needs to be uprooted from here and planted there."

Bulleh Shah

What is it that is to be transplanted? The attention or consciousness.

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

I tell you, actually, that wave of the audible life stream or word or logos or whatever you want to call it – that is soul, and it is that which keeps us together. Without that, neither the body nor the mind can function, for it is the very life of the mind and the body.... It is the spirit, nam, shabd, soul, or whatever you may call it that keeps us alive.

When the consciousness or soul is on the physical plane, it works through the body and the five senses, of which the two main faculties are seeing and hearing. When the same consciousness works in spiritual planes, it again has two main faculties: it sees and it hears.

The spiritual path consists of making the consciousness, with its two faculties of seeing and hearing, work on the spiritual plane instead of the physical plane. We uproot it from here and transplant it there. The transference or transplanting of this awareness from the outside world to the world within us is called “going within.”

Often, disciples have misconceptions about the meaning of going within. They think it is a sort of journey to somewhere distant, that it is very difficult to go within, that it is altogether a complicated and unobtainable state. How many times do we hear disciples confess sadly, “I cannot go within. I have never been within.” All this is a misconception about the state of going within. Firstly, it is not a journey to somewhere beyond – we do not ‘go’ anywhere. It happens in the here and now, in our self. Secondly, it is not as difficult or complicated as we think. The method of going within was designed by the Creator, and therefore, was made accessible to all. Nothing can be more natural.

Try a little exercise: Look at an object in front of you. Is it difficult to see? No. You simply open your eyes and look and the awareness

perceives it. Now close your eyes and in the same way, with the same awareness or attention, *look*. What do you see? You see darkness behind the eyes. Is this difficult to do? No. It is as easy to look inside as it is to look outside. The second you look inside yourself, you have begun the inner journey. The rest of the journey is completed by continuing to hold the attention firmly at the eye centre. That is how natural it is to go within!

Maharaj Sawan Singh writes in *Spiritual Gems*, “The problem [of going within] is not complicated at all. The whole thing is just *attention*, and then unbroken attention, *at the eye centre*.”

The first inner experience we have is that the attention sees darkness behind the eyes. This darkness is real – it is something one can look at, in the same way that one can look at the dark sky at night. If one continues to look at the darkness within with unbroken attention, then points and flashes of light may appear.

If the method of meditation is so easy, why is it that we struggle so much to go within? The reason is that although meditation is not difficult, *we* are difficult. We are too complicated to practice something so simple. Our minds never stop whirling about, raising a thousand questions, arguments, debates, and analysis. Our attention currents are scattered far and wide into the world, and worldly learning has so overstimulated our mental faculties, that not for one minute can we hold the mind silent and collected.

Great Master writes in *Spiritual Gems*:

I wish that all of you who have received initiation may go inside the eye centre, become the dwellers of the beautiful mansions your Creator has made for you, and be masters of these in your own right. In a way it is not difficult. One has only to look

inside one's own self instead of looking out. Yet it is difficult in a way, on account of our having so little hold over our mind.

The Master gives all initiates the same method: to fix one's whole attention in the eye centre while repeating the holy names. Yet, some seem to have an easier time than others. We read accounts where after ten, twenty, thirty years of being initiated, meditation is still a struggle. Why? The method of meditation, we are told, will yield the desired results – it is only that our attention, while still agitated, will take a longer time to disentangle from worldly concerns and collect one-pointedly.

Yet in this struggle, even though we may not be aware of it, we have the hand of the Master at our back, and he has undertaken this struggle with us in order to disentangle us from the world. Since he is one with the Lord, he will not fail to bring about what he wants. He will transfer our attention from the outside to the inside. He will uproot our soul from this world and transplant it in its true home.

There are three factors that help this uprooting and transplanting: meditation, the grace of worldly suffering, and love for the Master.

Since from the moment we are born, we collect impressions of the physical world through our two major senses of seeing and hearing, it follows that whenever we think about anything, a picture of that thing comes before our mind's eye, and at the same time the mind's ear hears the words or names associated with that object.

Great Master writes in *Philosophy of the Masters, Vol. I*:

Our eyes are responsible for 83 percent of the impressions imprinted on our minds, our ears 14 percent, and the remaining 3 percent are formed by the remaining sense organs of the body put together.

The Masters say that it is a function of our attention that wherever it focuses, it is there that we become attached. If the attention is on the physical plane, it becomes deeply entangled there. If it becomes focused on the spiritual plane, it forms its attachment there. So herein lies the challenge. We have become so entangled in the world that no matter how hard we try, we cannot stop, by force of our will, from dwelling on the sights and sounds of this world. It is simply not possible for us to ‘turn off’ the attention without having something to be aware of. The only way to remove the attention from one thing is to transfer it to another thing. If we wish to detach our attention from this physical plane, we must attach it to the sights and sounds of the spiritual plane – to transplant it.

This is where a living Master becomes an absolute necessity. He not only gives us a form to see, but he gives us the five words of simran. So instead of contemplating on worldly words and sounds, we now have a real spiritual image and words to dwell on. The significance of this cannot be underestimated.

Great Master writes in *Spiritual Gems*:

*When you will go within, the whole thing will be clear to you...
This work is just the opposite of what we have been doing before...
It [the soul] had forgotten it altogether and had associated itself
with the mind, and was running wild in the downward and
outward direction. Now this course is to be reversed.*

If we are hoping, however, to uproot our attention from this plane by means of meditation alone, we will be disappointed. That would be like trying to uproot a giant oak tree with our bare hands. It makes sense that some other force may be needed to help. Master applies this force often in the form of worldly suffering. This is a very powerful

weapon for shaking our roots loose from this world, for cutting us free from our attachments here. However, when we are trying to uproot a giant oak from its roots, we cannot just pull the tree straight up from the ground. We have to apply a pushing, pulling, back-and-forth motion that will dislodge it from its grip in the earth. We can use a bulldozer, we can use shovels, we can line up all our friends on each side of the tree, but we cannot rip it straight out of the ground!

Spiritually speaking, the 'pull' of our transplanting from here to there is our response to Master's call of love and our meditation. Master makes this world a very unsatisfactory place for us to live in. This form of grace comes in many all too familiar ways: death, disease or poverty. He makes us somewhat miserable here because this is a means of helping us with detachment. He not only lets us become thoroughly aware of such obvious things as suffering and pain, poverty and strife; he also brings us to the realization that even so-called blessings in life – wealth, power, personal beauty, talents – are very temporary and unsatisfactory sources of happiness and ease.

Actually, we don't easily realize the extent of our attachment to the world. We have deep roots that reach back not only in this life but also to many previous lives. So it is great grace when we become uncomfortable in this world and begin to long for the peace and happiness of our true home.

The Great Master writes in *Philosophy of the Masters, Vol. II*: "The natural quality of love is remembrance with a concentrated mind." This constant remembrance of him and contemplation through meditation is a most potent force for transferring our attention from the material to the spiritual. The resulting love for the Master is the greatest and most beautiful means of uprooting us. We experience it not just as fleeting twinges of longing, but deep, painful yearning that never lets up. This constant remembrance is the aim of our meditation.

Where there is all-consuming love like this, transplanting happens automatically. We become absorbed in the Master, and the soul or consciousness becomes totally rooted in him and transformed into him. Nothing else remains to be done.

Such transformational love is not in our hands. Yet without it we cannot go back to him. So how are we to get this love? It is a gift that he gives when we please him, and we please him when we meditate. He will get us to meditate. He will loosen our roots of worldly attachment through suffering and disillusionment. He will pull us to where he is by the attraction of his love. In this way, his purpose will be accomplished. Like Inayat Shah, he will ‘uproot from here and transplant there.’

*In the story Bulleh Shah is simply referred to as ‘Bullah’ when ‘Shah’ is not used.



Brother, every satsangi has a personal relationship with his own master, and he's never far away from his master. Neither is the master away from the disciple. We should never feel our master is somewhere at a far distance. He is the one nearest to us. He's always with us....

Our relationship with the master is that of love and devotion, of meditation. It is not any worldly relationship; it's only a spiritual relationship. And the more we are filled with love and devotion for the master, the nearer we feel to him. The master is always near to us; it is we who are away from the master.

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

Attitude

*When the forgetful man gets up in the morning,
he reflects on what he is going to do,
whereas the intelligent man sees what God is doing with him.*

Ibn 'Ata' Illah, as quoted in *The Book of Wisdom*,
by V. Danner, W.M. Thackston, A. Schimmel

How will I approach this day? What is my attitude going to be? I have two choices. My actions and choices can be based on my will or on the Master's will. I know from experience that if I try to do things my way, this day will probably be rough to get through. While I am trying to control people and situations, I will be anxious and impatient, and if the results do not meet my expectations, I will be frustrated and even angry.

If, on the other hand, I try to align my will with the Master's will, it's more likely my day will be successful. I'll be better able to accept whatever happens, knowing that everything is as it should be. Because of my faith and trust in the Lord, I will be more flexible in my expectations of myself and others and in the day's unfolding events. It is not as likely that I will be disappointed and upset when things do not go my way.

Taking this approach, I will assuredly be more comfortable, calm, and serene throughout the day. With Master's guidance, my energy can flow into constructive actions and positive channels instead of being squandered in wilful pursuits.

Although crises happen in all of our lives – a terminal illness, a death in the family, or a financial problem – Master has repeatedly told us to be positive; whatever is going to happen is already destined to happen, so why worry? We are all dancing to the tune of our karmas – karmas of many past lives, not just one past life. We will have to reap the results of all our actions, good or bad. And our attitude can make all the difference.

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

If we go on adjusting to situations, we will be happy. We have to go through a combination of good and bad karmas during this span of life. So we have to go on adjusting to every situation....

If we try to swim against the waves, naturally we will be miserable. Instead of cursing the darkness, we must light the candle. Why should we curse our destiny or anything? We should try to light a candle. We must have a positive, objective approach to life.



Meditation is the only way to follow the path. And love will definitely push us and pull us towards our destination. That is very essential. But love without meditation is just emotion – sometimes you feel it, sometimes you don't feel it.... By meditation you develop love that comes with experience, with conviction. Meditation takes our roots very deep in love; nobody can shake us then.

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

Experience

The Great Master, Maharaj Sawan Singh, related this story regarding his own introduction to Sant Mat:

At last I asked for initiation, but requested that I might not be told to accept the name of “Radha Soami” as I had never heard of it prior to this. Baba Ji said to me, “Radha Soami implies the highest spiritual power. What objection have you to the name of ‘Radha Soami’?” I said, “It does not appeal to me.” Then he asked, “How many new names of the one God are mentioned in the ‘Jap Sahib’?” I replied, “Some twelve or fourteen hundred.” Then Baba Ji said, “If you do not object to those names, why do you object to the name of ‘Radha Soami’?” Thus, my doubts being resolved, I got initiation.

Spiritual Gems

When it comes to understanding the saints and their message, we have to put aside our own superficial concepts and predilections. The saints deal in truth, not philosophy. They deal in reality, not myth. They differentiate between the spoken or written words used to describe that truth and the actual experience of that truth. Words, after all, are mere vehicles to transmit concepts and may mean any number of things to different people. Words in and of themselves have no permanent validity, and even fundamentally benign concepts like that of God can be ‘spun’ in many different ways, many of them quite hurtful. History is rife with examples of this.

The present Master is constantly exhorting us to transform theory into practice and concepts into experience. Actually, the teachings of

Sant Mat cannot be contained in books or lectures. The real teachings come from within and cannot be reduced to words. They are experiential. One can read any number of books about riding a bicycle, but the actual skill can only be acquired by experience. One could spend a lifetime reading books about swimming, but you can only learn the skill by actually entering the water.

Truth cannot fully be communicated by words but is transmitted through another medium. Has anyone ever come to the spiritual path only because the Master made a good argument for it? No. We come to the path because of something ineffable that has been transmitted to us by the Master. There is something that makes us trust this mysterious and wonderful person. His power works from the inside out and is life-changing. It confers unshakeable certitude.

A seed grows into a sapling and then a mighty tree not because of the arguments of man, but because the latent potency inside it is activated when certain factors, such as heat and water and light, are present. Then the miracle of life can occur. Maharaj Charan Singh in *Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III*, says:

If you are in a jungle and somebody points out the direction of your house, it makes you happy. Now at least you know in which direction you have to go. You're not looking in the dark. You will get happiness when you reach your home, but just knowing the direction and the road which leads back to your house makes you happy. The nearer you are to your destination, the happier you become.

There is so much in this simple statement. Notice that Hazur doesn't use words like God or Radha Soami or heaven or Sach Khand but rather makes his point with simple concepts like home, being lost,

and finding happiness. This language speaks directly to the human heart with no overlay of theology or cosmology. Such a teaching can be understood by all and is utterly nonsectarian.

We have lost our way in a dark and threatening place. We don't know how to get back to our home. We come across a kind and trustworthy person who not only tells us the way back to our origin, but also volunteers to accompany us on the journey. When we come to the path we meet that benevolent guide and receive that roadmap leading to our real home. This fills us with tremendous relief and gratitude. But when we actually embark on this journey, we find that it isn't anything like we expected it to be. In fact, it isn't like any journey or any project we have undertaken before.

How can something that seemed so simple be so difficult? In this world, journeys and projects are unidirectional: You start at Point A and you go to Point B. Even climbing Mount Everest, as strenuous as that undoubtedly is, you begin at the bottom and end at the top. And when you get to the top of that mountain, you are still you. You go back down and pick up your life and go on as before.

The journey back to our real home isn't like that. This journey is *unlike anything we have ever experienced before*. This journey is omnidirectional. It is profoundly revolutionary. It involves a transformation so deep and so pervasive as to utterly confound our intellect.

If we read a book about swimming and then enter the river, we find that the actual experience isn't at all what we expected. We are caught in a current whose power overwhelms us. All our study never really prepared us for this awesome reality. We had thought that it was our own determination, grit, fortitude and wisdom that would see us through.

The surfers who ride the mighty thirty-foot waves on the north shore of Hawaii have immense awe and reverence for those waves. They never attempt to overpower them. That would be both the

height of folly and suicidal. Rather, they survive by constantly adjusting to every nuance of the wave's power as they ride upon it. Never for a second do they try to oppose it. It is by submitting to the wave, by becoming one with it, that they enjoy a sublime experience of freedom from earthly constraints.

This cannot be done with the intellect. The computing power of the human mind is unequal to this task. To ride those mighty waves requires a fluidity of effort that is born of innumerable hours of experience so intense that the required skills are seared into the being of the surf-rider and become automatic.

That audible life stream, sound current, Shabd-dhun (or whatever we choose to call it), is like a mighty wave that brings deliverance from the prison house of the material world. It comes to break the shackles that hold us here. And what is the strongest shackle? It is our own sense of "I-ness," our ego. If that shackle is broken, all bonds are broken. To defeat that obstacle, we have to set aside our own ideas and become attentive to the nuances of the mighty wave of Shabd. And in order to do that, we must first still our mind through the power of simran. This is like the surfer paddling to catch up to the current; and as our attention begins to come up to the eye centre, it as if we are beginning to feel the suction of the wave. As that pull increases, we are experiencing the beginnings of bhajan and submitting to that power. Just like the surfer, we must utterly forget ourselves in order to succeed. We no longer exist; only the wave of Shabd exists. And just as the intrepid big-wave riders do, it is by submitting to that wave, by losing ourselves in it, by becoming one with it that we will find ourselves travelling back to our home. Our goal is not to conquer but to be conquered, not to master but to be mastered. When we cease to exist, only he will exist. That is our destiny.



Repeat the Name Incessantly

How often do we think about what we think about? Thousands of thoughts cross our mind each day. Have these endless thoughts taken us any closer to the inner sky, to the peace and bliss that lies within each and every one of us?

Soami Ji, in his early discipleship, complained to his Master that his mind and soul were not stilled, nor had he succeeded in merging with Shabd. His Master urged him to be patient and to “repeat the name incessantly with your mind and hold the form of the Master in your heart” (*Sar Bachan Poetry*).

Repeating the names, simran, once or twice is already a challenge. Repeating simran incessantly goes against the very nature of the mind. Aristotle proclaimed there is nothing in the mind that is not first in the senses, meaning the mind does not move into action except when a choice needs to be made about how to satisfy a desire, which the mind experiences through the senses. The mind is easily addicted to the objects of the senses. Consequently, it can habitually entertain an endless parade of thoughts in the form of desires and schemes for their experience.

Our habit of thinking prevents us from experiencing our true potential. The mind has a limited view and, therefore, its image of itself is limited. It keeps us from experiencing the vast treasure that lies within, beyond thought. Our mind has become trapped in the illusions of time and space. If the mind could only see the true reality of its predicament, it would understand that an invisible and infinite consciousness exists that is distinct from the forms and pleasures of the perishable physical world.

The truth is, if we can rise above desire, we are liberated. All true spiritual teachers emphasize detaching the mind from the external world and from the pursuit of worldly objects by turning our attention within through full concentration.

This is why Soami Ji advises:

*Repeat the Name incessantly with your mind
and hold the form of the Master in your heart.
If you do this punctually, every day,
the evil tendencies of your mind will be quelled....
you will get attuned to the melody of Shabd.
Carry on this practice daily, without a break; ...
Your attachment to the world will disappear
and you will begin to enjoy inner communion.*

Sar Bachan Poetry

If we can substitute thinking with repetition of simran, we are assured that we will make spiritual progress. “Spiritual progress” is a disappearing act. It is a disappearing of our thinking selves, of the part of us that thinks it is separate, the part that thinks happiness lies in the material world and desires things of the world. Our thinking selves need to be eliminated so the vision of the pure light from within can manifest and we can begin to “enjoy inner communion” with the Lord forever.



*The most holy and powerful is your level of consciousness which
you achieve by doing that simran.*

Maharaj Charan Singh, Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. II

Just Be with Him

On this path, we meditate because we want to get to where our Master is, to be with him forever. The Master wants us to achieve this goal even more than we do. Hence, Maharaj Charan Singh says:

The Master is waiting for you at the eye focus and is anxious to receive you there in his arms; it is for you to rise up to the eyes.

The Dawn of Light

The image of the Master receiving us in his arms is an image of love. The Master loves us and, more than anything, he wants us to come to where he is inside. This is why he says over and over again, just meditate – just do your bhajan and simran.

Who among us who is initiated does not want to reach the eye centre to meet our Master and be received in his arms? Could there be anything more wonderful than that? And yet for many initiates, it is a struggle: a struggle with the mind to lead a life that supports our meditation, to give full time to our meditation, to think of the Master during the day; and in meditation a struggle to stay still, to repeat more than one round of simran before the mind skips out; to stay awake; to withstand the pain of our body being held in one position for two and one half hours. Meditation can be a struggle and the Masters know this, so they give us so much advice about how to deal with all of these struggles. The Sant Mat books are full of letters of advice about how to balance our time throughout the day, how to sit comfortably in meditation, how to deal with the sleep factor, how to persevere though dryness, and on and on. But one piece of advice that puts everything into perspective is encapsulated in these four words:

Just be with him. Words that Maharaj Charan Singh said to someone who was crying over how hard meditation is. *Just be with him.*

Our goal is to be with our Master at the eye centre, but we don't have to wait until we reach the eye centre to be with him because the Master is here with us right now.

Maharaj Sawan Singh says in *Spiritual Gems*:

As far as the Master is concerned, time and space make no difference to him, for the Master is not confined to physical form. The Master takes on this form for man's guidance, to talk to him, to sympathize with him, to make friends with him, to develop confidence and faith in him, to induce him to seek peace and happiness within himself, to show him the way to it, to teach him by becoming an example, to develop in him God-like attributes, and to pull him up out of his physical form to his astral form.

The physical form of the Master is the one who answers our questions, the one with whom we develop a worldly relationship and with whom we gradually fall in love. But it is the astral, the Radiant Form, that is with us always here as we go through our lives and even beyond death. In *Die to Live* Maharaj Charan Singh says:

The Master does not leave or forget the disciple after initiation. He is always with him, guiding and leading him. In his Radiant Form, he helps the disciple at every step, accompanying him throughout the spiritual journey. The Master not only guides and helps during the disciple's lifetime, but stays with him even at the time of his death, and afterwards.



It is this Radiant Form that we are talking about when we say, *just be with him* – not the outer Master, not the physical form, but the inner Master, the Shabd form. The primary way that we can be with him is in our meditation, just sitting and looking into the darkness, holding our attention there while repeating our simran – the five holy names that our Master gives us when we are initiated.

Maharaj Charan Singh continues:

When you close your eyes, you are here in the centre of the darkness in the forehead, and being there, you do the simran. You also feel that your Master is there and that you are there in the darkness and you are there doing simran in the presence of the Master, if you can't visualize his form. So be there and also feel your Master is there, and that will hold your attention there in the darkness.

Hazur says, *just be there in the darkness*, be there with your Master. If we love someone in this world, don't we want to be with him or her all the time? When we fall in love with the Master, we want to be with him more and more. Practically speaking, many can't be with the physical Master. The only way to truly be with him is in meditation. The more we meditate, the more we fall in love with him; the more we fall in love with him, the more we want to meditate.

In *Die to Live* Maharaj Charan Singh says:

When you fall in love with somebody, you automatically want to remain in the company of that person, but before falling in love, you don't plan to spend much time in the company of that person. Similarly, when you fall in love with meditation and you feel peace and bliss within, then whatever time you can manage,

you would at once like to attend to meditation, because you want to be there in that peace, in that bliss.

When we fall in love with meditation, he says, we want to meditate more. But for some of us, it may seem impossible to get to the stage where we have that amount of love for our meditation because it is such a struggle. The answer here is also, *just be with him*. Be with him when we sit for meditation; be with him when we are going through our daily lives. We are told over and over again that meditation is a way of life; it is not just sitting for two and one half hours a day, every day. We have to mould our whole lives around the path and not forget it for even a minute in the day. Correction: Ideally, we must not forget the Master for even a minute in the day. This path is about the Master. And the Master is a real person, whom many disciples have met. So during the day, if we remember the physical Master, it may be much easier to feel that closeness to him when we meditate. And of course, if we have already seen his Radiant Form, we are remembering that form all day long because that is our real Master. Inside he is ours; we don't have to share him with anyone.

But whether we can see the Radiant Form or we can merely think of the physical form, *just be with him*, remember him. How does Master want us to remember him during the day? Primarily by simran. Simran, when our minds are not occupied during the day, is remembering him.

Maharaj Jagat Singh says in *Science of the Soul*:

Throughout the day, no matter in what occupation you are engaged, the soul and the 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. Nay, every moment, whether eating, drinking, walking, awake or asleep, you must have his Name on your lips and his form before your eyes.

In the book about Maharaj Jagat Singh's life, *In the Footsteps of the Master*, we encounter the example of this perfect disciple who became a perfect Master:

Sardar Bahadur regarded his Satguru as the Lord himself and followed his orders implicitly. He was an example of a perfect disciple. When he went to Great Master's room for darshan, he would sit quietly in a corner and keep looking with unblinking eyes at Great Master's face. He never requested a private interview with the Master, never asked him a question, and never initiated conversation with him. Before Sardar Bahadur did anything, even rising from his seat to leave a room, he would momentarily close his eyes, first contemplating on his Master's form within.

This example of what it means to *just be* with the Master, silently, lovingly, with total concentration, is one for us to aspire to, although realistically we may not be able to achieve it right now. To remember the Master before we do anything, to remember him with every breath, is a goal to reach for. But we have to begin where we are, and if we are not remembering him at all during the day, then we start by trying to remember him in certain situations: while we are preparing or eating our meals, while we are walking to the car, while we are waiting for family or friends. There are many times during the day when we can practice the presence of our Master, when we can *just be with him*.

Being with our Master in silence and in love, is the first step to being received in his arms, to merging with him. When that is achieved, we will discover, as Sultan Bahu did, that:

*He now lives in me and I in him, O Bahu:
not only distance from him
but even nearness to him
have become irrelevant!*



The mature heart is not perfectionistic: it rests in compassion for our being instead of in ideals of the mind.... It does not seek to gain or attain in spiritual life, but only to love and be free.

Jack Kornfield, *Bringing Home the Dharma*

Marriage and Meditation

Maharaj Charan Singh says about marriage:

Sant Mat unites families, tries to create harmony in families. I always advocate that meditation makes one a better husband, better wife, a better son, a better father. If it does not, then it is we who have failed in our meditation. It should bring us together.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III

One way to a successful marriage is to marry a saint and obey him or her. Another reliable way is to become a saint yourself. Either way, you'll be happy and successful. However, if neither of these methods is available to you right now, join the rest of us! If we haven't married a saint and we are not one either, then our task is simple: use our meditation to help us become more saintly and better suited for our marriage.

The Master encourages us to meditate and become better human beings. There is a three-fold relationship: meditation, becoming a good human being, and our relationship in our marriage. In meditation as in marriage, there are two fundamental supports: devotion and discipline. Being devoted to our spouse prevents many conflicts from occurring because he or she tends to trust us and we listen to each other. Being disciplined helps us do all the work of marriage and family life. Devotion implies honesty and discipline implies constancy: being loving on Wednesday and lying on Thursday is a recipe for failure. Being truthful and reliable supports a successful marriage.

Devotion may be expressed by an occasional spoken endearment, an affectionate embrace, a word of encouragement, and behaving with

humility. If we are thinking negative thoughts about our spouse, it is our task to understand if there is any truth to these thoughts. Perhaps we are simply stressed out.

All of us are imperfect, and we don't want to be attacked for our mistakes. So we exercise discipline over our words and actions toward our spouse. Mutual respect is implicit in devotion; insults and ridicule have no place in a marriage. Since Masters teach that we are all drops of the same ocean, how can one of us look down on the other? It is helpful to be disciplined in what we say to our spouse and how we say it. If we can do that, it is more likely that our spouse will do the same.

As in meditation, hard times come to every marriage, and when those challenging days or months occur, successful marriage partners think carefully together. They share ideas and feelings. Although troubles may seem overwhelming, life goes on. We must be patient and trust the process of our struggling together. Relying on the Master's inner guidance through meditation, we can find our way through tough times.

Effective communication brings success in marriage. If we find fault with our spouse, it is best to clarify specifically what ideas or actions are troublesome. Do not attack his or her character! Remember how the Master may disagree with a questioning disciple, but he never attacks their character. He addresses particular thoughts and behaviors and he is unfailingly respectful and considerate when he does so. We can communicate calmly about what bothers us; meditation helps us do that.

All of us can express difficult emotions like anger and fear without attacking our spouse. As disciples of a Master, we want to be in charge of our feelings, and we don't want our anger (or guilt or disappointment or fear) to be in charge of us. Emotions are a powerful part of life and we must not avoid them, but, rather, share them in

a reasonable and appropriate way. Painful feelings are decreased if shared; happiness is increased if shared. The Masters have shared their compassion, tenderness, and honest feelings with disciples. If they can do that, why can't we? Masters are models for us!

Money and sex are major issues in almost every marriage. Modern culture blasts us with these images as if they were the ways to perfect happiness. We know they are not. Still, it's hard to find relief from these alluring images, which may appear better than our own actual life. It is easy to become obsessed with either subject, and such obsessions not only disturb our meditation but ruin many marriages. Every couple must find their own strategy and their own way of dealing with these issues. They are best resolved with love and respect; each of us can learn from the other. Each of us doesn't need to have our own way all the time. Each of us has something to teach and something to learn.

Being a good human being is always an essential guideline for our behavior within marriage as it is on the path. We sacrifice for our children, give them love and protection, and we receive their natural joyful openness. They deserve our best care. When they need us, we stand together with our spouse, providing help and discipline. We want to be role models of a good married couple so they may be confident in their own future marriages.

In an excerpt from a letter in *Treasure Beyond Measure*, Maharaj Charan Singh writes:

Happiness lies in adjusting and giving yourself to each other, and not in hurting each other. One has to eschew one's false pride and rise above embarrassment in order to come closer and closer and live in harmony and peace, and discharge one's responsibility to the children. It is for you to win each other's confidence and love, and make a happy home....



What a beautiful summary of what is needed for a successful marriage!

Every marital problem can be solved peacefully. For every criticism we give to our spouse, we need to give more encouragement and appreciation. The work of life, with its many demands, can wear us down. We need to support each other toward our common goal of spiritual growth. A kind touch, a word of encouragement, or a spontaneous gift can be powerfully positive.

When we marry, we have a chance to go through life with a loved one at our side, supporting us through all the troubled times. We have someone to share our celebrations and delights. The price is that we must deepen our capacity to love, and remember that we promised to love our spouse with his or her weaknesses as well as strengths. If we implement that powerful promise, we shall enjoy the harvest of a happy home. A happy home is interdependent with our meditation and becoming a good human being. Creating an open, honest, and respectful relationship brings the harmony necessary to support our meditation. Our meditation, in turn, allows us to strengthen our resolve for a happy marriage.



Destiny

The following is an excerpt of Maharaj Charan Singh's response to a question from *Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III*:

We have only one future: to go back to the Father. There's no other future....

If you leave the planning in better hands, you will live much better. If you keep the planning in your own hands, you will live miserably. If you leave him to plan your life and go on accepting what comes to you, you will be happy. Because planning is in his hands, and you just have to adjust to the events of life. You are just adjusting, going along with the waves. You can never change the events of life, no matter how much you plan, no matter how much you pray. But you can always adjust to the events of life....

Summer has to come, winter has to come. You can never change the course of the weather.... Nobody can change the events of life – we have to go through all that. So it's up to you to go through it miserably or happily. If you go on adjusting, you will go through life happily. If you want to fight with events, to change them, you will go through them miserably.

And then, the Lord makes much better plans than we do. We don't know what is good for us. He knows what is good for us.... So it's better to leave it to him to give us whatever he thinks is best for us. That is why Christ said: O ye of little faith (Matthew 6:25). You are praying to the Father, making long lists of demands and requests to him to give you this and this and this. That is just showing lack of faith in the Lord, that you believe he won't give you anything unless you ask him.

If a son is loving to his father, the father is always anxious to give to the son.... He's more anxious to give us what we need. We don't know what to ask him for, but he knows what to give us. We are asking for pebbles and stones – he wants to give us diamonds and rubies.... We are asking for solutions to our problems day and night from the Father. But he wants to give us something much higher – if we leave it to him.



*The purpose of my life has been achieved
through my Master.
My suffering has been replaced
by bliss within.*

*Master has given me the collyrium of knowledge.
Without the Name of the Lord
my life was without meaning.*

*Namdev has attained realization
through simran.
My soul is merged into him
who is the life of the universe.*

Saint Namdev

The Eternal Now

As the mystic lowered himself toward the soft mat that he had placed on the floor for his meditation, his arm brushed the bookcase. As he closed his eyes a glass vase tipped over and headed toward the stone floor. He sat in meditation, went within, met the Radiant Form of his Master, traversed the spiritual planes, and enjoyed the bliss within. As he opened his eyes, he lifted his hand and caught the falling vase.

This story illustrates that time, as we perceive it, is an illusion. From a higher perspective time does not exist. We, however, give time – past and future – far too much significance in our lives. Time can be described as an insignificant bouncing drop of water, yet may be perceived by us as a raging river to which we attach great importance. Time is part of the illusion of the material plane that keeps us prisoners here.

In the play of this life, past and future are part of the story. In playing our part well, we have to act responsibly and attend to plans for the future. The problem occurs when we become attached to our well-laid plans. As we race mentally between past and future, we miss out on the experience of the eternal now. If we become consciously present in the experience of the now, then we will find contentment in our lives. By living in the now we will be free of worry about the past and the future. Yesterday is but a dream, tomorrow might not come. All we have, in truth, is the eternal now.

Much like the squirrel in the wheel, Man who has set the wheel of Time a-turning is so enthralled and carried by the motion

that he no longer can believe himself to be the mover, nor can he 'find the time' to stay the whirl of Time.

The Book of Mirdad

At our level of consciousness, we imagine past and future as separate. We do not see the perfection of everything in this creation. The living Master sees everything as perfect and gazes upon the world with the love that he has realized. When we become present in the eternal now we will also see that duality is an illusion. By practicing meditation as taught to us by the Master, we will learn to focus all our energy within, at the third eye. Only through meditation will we come to know the real meaning of the eternal now.

This inner path will take us ever closer to the experience of the eternal now. That is why Master stresses that meditation is not just the hours that we spend sitting, but rather is an all-day practice. We will achieve the higher perspective that allows us to see the perfection of this creation when we transcend the illusion of duality; then the illusion of our separation from God will also be destroyed. The concept of ego will be dispelled, and we will become one with God. For the disciple this is the ultimate goal.

The more committed we are to our meditation the more our use of time will change; our relationship with this world will change. The mad rush will start to fall away and leave us free. We will find our feet in boots that make walking over thorns and brambles painless. We will witness the transformation that occurs when our time merges more and more into Master's time. We will more easily be able to maintain our balance in adversity and ecstasy alike. We will start moving closer and closer to the eye centre with our Master. He has promised this to us. He supports and aids us in moving further inward on our way home and toward the Master. In *The Book of Mirdad*, we read:

*Shall Man, then never free himself of the vicious circle of Time?
Man shall, because Man is heir to God's holy Freedom.
The wheel of time rotates, but its axis is ever at rest.
God is the axis of the wheel of Time. Though all things rotate
about Him in Time and Space, yet is He always timeless and
spaceless and still. Though all things proceed from His Word, yet
is His Word as timeless and spaceless as He.
In the axis all is peace. On the rim all is commotion. Where
would you rather be?
I say to you, slip from the rim of Time into the axis and spare
yourselves the nausea of motion. Let Time revolve about you;
but you revolve not with Time.*

Remarkably, we have been shown the way to enter this timeless and spaceless state of bliss, working toward our actual reunion with the Lord. This is our daily goal and our supreme goal. Through meditation, we transcend the plane of illusion. Then, the truth about the insignificance of time becomes self-evident. When we see our lives from a higher perspective, our attitude improves automatically. When, through meditation, we learn to concentrate within ourselves, we naturally reside in the eternal now.



Gratitude

As we travel through life, we experience both good and painful karmas. Perhaps there is nothing more powerful, nothing that will make us take our focus away from ourselves to the greatness of God during these times, than gratitude. Gratitude puts the Lord in every moment of our life, not just into the moments that we set aside for meditation or spiritual discipline. Gratitude means to live life as a gift. True gratitude embraces all of our life, not just the good, the joyful, the holy; but the painful, the sad, and the not so holy. It is the separation of joy and sorrow that artificially keeps us attached to the continual search for worldly happiness.

It may be helpful to understand that in all of our life, in every event, no matter how significant or difficult, the hand of God has been with us. Maharaj Charan Singh says in *Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III*:

You see, the Lord has given us so much in life, but we don't have that thankful heart. Instead of asking the Father to give us the boons in life, we should ask him to give us a heart which is full of gratitude.

Living gratefully requires practice. Initially, it takes concerted effort to acknowledge the past hurts and experiences of pain that have brought us to this moment in our lives. Going through our karmas is like pruning a rose bush. The bush is sometimes pruned drastically to allow the plant to concentrate its energy and produce flowers. Pruning in this sense, is not punishment, it is preparation.

Gratitude is a way to see our remembered experiences as opportunities for the ongoing conversion of our hearts. The open-heartedness of gratitude towards everything in our lives will provide us with the

energy that will help move us forward. It will help us see that all our problems in life are comparative.

There is a story of the old beggar who was walking barefoot across the hot sand cursing the Lord because he had no shoes, until he came across a man without legs and without feet, rolling through the hot summer sand so that he could go into the shade. This story is a perfect example of the comparative nature of our troubles. We don't realize how many blessings he has already showered upon us. Hazur says in *Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III*, "We have nothing else left to do but to kneel down and thank him for what he has showered on us."

Practicing gratitude helps turn our heart and our attention in his direction. Every moment of every day we have the opportunity to remain in the state of gratitude that says, "Thanks be to God." And we have the opportunity every morning to express our gratitude for the gifts that he has given us, through our meditation.



*Wisdom is pouring into you
from the beloved saint of God....
Although the house of your heart
is lit from inside, ...
Give thanks.*

Rumi, *The Rumi Collection*,
edited by Kabir Helminski





Book Review



The Mystic Heart of Judaism

BY MIRIAM BOKSER CARAVELLA

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In *The Mystic Heart of Judaism*, the author draws on her deep roots in Judaism to chronicle four millennia of Jewish life with a focus on the “primacy of the spiritual master as the teacher and transmitter of truth.” The author states that the purpose of this book is to “rediscover the spiritual masters of Jewish history whose teachings have brought inspiration and spiritual solace to generations of Jews.”

This historical survey begins with the patriarchs and prophets of the Bible and continues with the mystic masters recorded in the Dead Sea Scrolls, as well as the sages, rabbis, and messianic figures of antiquity. Moving into the medieval period, the author discusses philosophers, Jewish Sufis, and the pietists of Germany. The development of Kabbalah is discussed in detail, from its beginnings in twelfth-century Provence through its full flowering among sixteenth-century kabbalists gathered in Safed, a small mountaintop village in Palestine. The chronicle continues through several messianic figures of the fifteenth through seventeenth centuries and the rise of the movement of Hasidism in eighteenth-century Eastern Europe. Throughout this long history, the author “presents the living teachers and their living teachings, their inner spiritual life with the divine, their relationship of love with their disciples.”

Notwithstanding the vast diversities of this four-thousand year period of Jewish history, a unifying theme of revelation and concealment, of a creative tension between that which is revealed and that which is concealed, permeates manifestations of Jewish mysticism. The author states:

The Hebrew word olam, meaning “world,” is thought to derive from the same root as the word “to conceal” (le-ha’alim). Mystics are those who, while living in the olam, see through its illusion of substance to the eternal, divine reality it conceals.

This idea that tangible phenomena conceal a subtle but truer reality was carried over into the approach to scripture. For example, when the Bible says that Moses went up the mountain, this statement has both a physical or revealed meaning and a spiritual or hidden meaning. The thirteenth-century mystic Abraham Abulafia wrote:

The ascent to the mountain is an allusion to spiritual ascent – that is, to prophecy, for Moses ascended to the mountain, and he also ascended to the divine level. That ascent is combined with a revealed matter, and with a matter which is hidden; the revealed is the ascent of the mountain, and the hidden is the level of prophecy.

The ever-present theme of revelation and concealment takes dramatic form in the immensely complex symbolism used by the mystics of the Kabbalah to express their insights. The author describes the kabbalists’ expression of mystic insight as

an elaborate interlinking set of symbols and metaphors with layer upon layer of meaning. Symbolism became the means of conveying several levels of reality at once. Each symbol is like a hypertext link to a multi-faceted reality concealed within a simple word or phrase.

The author notes that this “theme of concealment and revelation may also be found in the belief that there are true spiritual masters present among humanity, but they are disguised as ordinary persons.”

His [the tsadik’s or spiritual master’s] consciousness was in the physical as well as the spiritual realms, and thus his true spiritual nature was concealed by his physical body. One of the Habad hasidim said that the tsadik was “infinite substance garbed in flesh and blood.” By attaching oneself to such a master, individuals could ascend to the heights of divine experience.

Hasidic masters went so far in hiding themselves that even Ba'al Shem Tov, the great spiritual teacher who founded the Kabbalah movement, "concealed himself as an uneducated ignoramus." For the author, the message of revelation and concealment holds out the promise

that all of us, who seem to be quite ordinary, are created in the image of God – that we, as we are, contain the potential for the greatest heights of spiritual achievement. Our soul is a spark, a particle of the divine essence, trapped in the physical world only temporarily, as we await liberation through the teachers he sends.

Other themes which the author finds running throughout the many-faceted history of Jewish mysticism include divine unity, divine language, and the mystic experience as inner journey. Divine unity is a foundational tenet of the Jewish religion. Abraham taught that there is one God. This is the central theme of the most important prayer in Judaism: "Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One" (Deuteronomy 6:4). For Jewish mystics the belief in one God has meant that there is a single spiritual reality that abides in and underlies everything. As Samuel ben Kalonymus of Germany wrote in the twelfth century:

*Everything is in You
and You are in everything
You fill everything and You encompass it all;
When everything was created,
You were in everything;
Before everything was created,
You were everything.*

A fascination with divine language runs throughout Jewish mysticism. God is said to have brought the creation into being by speaking. Jewish mystics came to see the divine language as "an unspoken ineffable essence."

From the very beginning, Jewish mystics were engaged in meditation on the "name" or "word" of God ... which gave them the experience of the ruah ha-kodesh (the holy spirit). They attest to being uplifted and enveloped by this power.

A variety of meditation practices developed using words, names or even unpronounceable combinations of letters.

Often the mystics would take particular names or passages from the Torah ... and deconstruct them, creating more and more complex “names” of God that have no literal meaning, which they would repeat numerous times. By repeating these meaningless syllables, the mind would no longer focus on meanings; it could attach itself to the letters of the words as abstract symbols and, they believed, rise above the intellectual activity of the mind.

Jewish mystics commonly described inner mystical experience through the use of metaphor. Perhaps the most common metaphor is that of the chariot (*merkavah*), based on the biblical account of Elijah ascending to the heavens in a fiery chariot and on the prophet Ezekiel's vision of a chariot ascending to the heavens with otherworldly lights, colours, and sounds. Many Jewish mystics described “travelling to spiritual realms in the chariot of the body, eventually reaching the throne region of God.” The author comments:

The experiences of these past mystics hint at a variety of practices through which they entered the hidden realms of spirituality. While their practices may have differed at different times and places, the record of their experiences points toward the universal reality they discovered beyond the physical olam – the ineffable revelation concealed within the realm of yesh [substance].

Summarizing this voluminous study of the vast depth and breadth of mystical experience within a single religion, the author offers her assessment of its import for readers of all backgrounds:

The reader is encouraged to continue searching for the truth that is concealed within the revealed – and ultimately to go beyond reading to first-hand experience of the divine.... The challenge of the search is to find what we are looking for: the experience of the eternal name or word of God, the ruah ha-kodesh. It is possible.

