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Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

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Spiritual Link

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The Watchman

Paltu sleeps carefree –
the Lord himself is his watchman.
The Lord being his watchman,
Paltu enjoys blissful sleep.
Stretched full length, he sleeps relaxed;
at his sight, his enemies flee.
When the Lord stands guard,
who can harm a hair on his head?
Unconcerned am I – what is mine is his;
it's for him now to take care of me.
I have no further worries;
all my cares are now on his shoulders.
Not for a moment does he forget me –
he is in touch with me at all times.
One who has passed on his burden to the Lord
and cares not what others think,
Sleeps, O Paltu, carefree,
for the Lord himself is his watchman.

Sant Paltu, His Life and Teachings





Worry Not

It seems easy for us to focus on our families, our jobs, and our friends, but difficult to focus on the path without worrying about all of these attachments. Why do we worry about how to pay the rent, how to get our children or ourselves married, whether to buy a house or rent one, and so on? The possibilities of things to worry about are endless. Worrying is a trick of the mind. Maharaj Jagat Singh in *The Science of the Soul* says:

Did worry ever help to solve any problem? It is born of confused thinking. Form the habit of clear thinking always and laugh away your troubles and sorrows.... Your worrying shows that you have no faith in the goodness of God or even in God himself. Let him accomplish things in his own way rather than in the way that you desire. Try to adjust yourself to all that he does and you will never be unhappy.

The Master is saying some very logical things. Worry does not help to solve our problems. It scatters our attention in the world. Problems go around and around in our head without leading to any logical conclusions. But if we think things through logically – clearly – we will remember that it is the Master who is in charge. He wants us to go through certain karmas and we don't have any choice in the matter. Worrying is a waste of time.

Then in *The Science of the Soul*, the story is told of a lady who was worried about her son flying to Europe the next day. She approached the Master and expressed her feelings. The Master smiled and asked: "Well, what is there to worry about? Is it his flying or further studies

or tomorrow?” This is a humorous question that reflects the fact that we worry about everything. So in the story, the lady laughed and said it was the flying that was worrying her, and the Master suggested that she focus on the comforts and convenience of flying and not the dangers. If we focus on the positive as Maharaj Jagat Singh suggests here, it is much easier to go through life.

It is the same message over and over again. The Masters know that our lives are not easy. They know we have physical and emotional pain to deal with, but they encourage us to be positive, to look on the bright side, and if we do, we will feel better. See the cup as half full, not half empty; it is an attitude of mind. A positive attitude won't change the circumstances of our lives but will give us courage so that our challenges won't be so hard to go through.

Maharaj Jagat Singh continues in *The Science of the Soul*:

He [the disciple] has to be completely fearless and bold, for without his will nothing can or will happen. Worry can only deflect and debar spiritual progress. Not until he has cast off dread and apprehension, can he be firm in devotion and sustain it.

Worry stops us from progressing on the path. If our mind is focused on a problem, it cannot also be at the eye centre. Simran is what keeps us firmly in the present moment. If our mind is one-pointedly engaged in simran, it cannot think of anything else, so we can use simran as a sword to cut through our obsessive thinking.

The Sufi mystic Hafiz, in a poem called *Now is the Time*, says:

*What is in that sweet voice inside
That incites you to fear? ...*

*This is the time
For you to deeply compute the impossibility
That there is anything
But Grace.*

*Now is the season to know
That everything you do
Is sacred.*

The Gift,
rendered by Daniel Ladinsky

Hafiz is telling us that everything that we do is sacred; it is holy. Everything that we do matters. Everything that we do should take us closer to our goal. Master is waiting at the eye centre, but where are we?

A questioner once asked the Master about actively choosing the Shabd over the world – making a real commitment to the path – and said that she was afraid. He answered: why be afraid of something that will bring us more happiness and bliss than we can imagine? He suggested that the questioner just needed to let go and turn her worries and fears over to the Master. Another time, he talked about how when we are going to our worldly home, we look forward to reaching there and having a nice warm cup of tea. He said that we are eager to go home, and the warm feeling we have when we get there is magnified more than a billion times when we pass through the tenth door and go within. So what is there to worry about?



Get on the Train

Once we are initiated, it is the responsibility of the Master to get us back home – one way or another – but it is our responsibility to take his advice and follow his instructions.

At a Sunday satsang, the Master gave the vivid analogy of riding a train to a destination. Once we are on the train, it is the responsibility of the conductor to take us to our destination. But we have to get on the train, and doing our meditation is getting on the train. Getting initiated is merely getting a ticket. If we don't actually get on the train – do our meditation – we won't get to the destination. We need to get on board the train, and the Lord will do the rest.

But how many of us are left standing on the platform – initiated, but not doing our meditation? How many of us try to jump on to the train at the last minute, hanging onto the bar outside the door? Once the train picks up speed, we'll be blown away. Not prioritizing our meditation, or leaving it to the last minute, may mean not doing it all if we have a worldly emergency to attend to. Or maybe we can't decide whether to get on the train at all; we have one foot on the train and one foot on the platform as the train sets off. If we are not careful, we could be dragged along the platform and even along the tracks. Remember Maharaj Charan Singh's description of being pulled by a bulldozer – not a very pleasant trip. We have to get completely on the train.

The Master tells us it is imperative that we get on the train, take our seat in meditation, start our simran, and let go. Then the conductor will take over and get us to our destination. A person once told the Master that he gets on the train by doing his meditation, but his concentration was so poor that his focus was still off the train.

What should we do if we get on the train and sit down to do our simran but can't concentrate? Master's solution: sit down, start our simran, and let go – let go and leave the rest to him. Don't worry about whether we have concentration or don't have concentration, whether the meditation is good or is bad – just let go. Another person asked, "Let go of what?" The answer is to let go of thoughts, let go of the self, let go of the ego.

How do we let go? There is a story of a Moghul emperor who was very fond of pigeons and raised them on the roof of his palace. When he had to go off somewhere for a while, he released the pigeons, except for his two favourites. So he told a maiden to hold these two pigeons for him for a short time while he was gone. When he got back and went up to the roof, she was holding only one of the pigeons. When he asked her what happened to the other pigeon, she said it had flown away. "But how did you let it go?" he asked. "Like this!" she said, raising her arm and opening her hand, thus releasing the other pigeon, which flew away. That's how we let something go – just release it!

Perhaps the hardest thing in the world for us to do is to let go of the ego – with its way of perceiving, its way of thinking, its way of blocking us from our true self. There is a poem by the Chinese mystic, Chuang Tzu, which describes how it might be for a person to live in this world without ego. He describes a boatman who is trying to cross a river when another boat approaches and is about to collide with his. Just as nowadays when we're driving on the road and someone cuts us off or pulls some unsafe manoeuvre, in ancient China the same type of frustration and lack of restraint used to occur with boats on the river. The poem reads:

*If a man is crossing a river
And an empty boat collides with his own skiff,*

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*Even though he be a bad-tempered man
He will not become very angry.
But if he sees a man in the boat,
He will shout at him to steer clear.
If the shout is not heard, he will shout again,
And yet again and begin cursing.
And all because there is somebody in the boat.
Yet if the boat were empty,
He would not be shouting, and not angry.
If you can empty your own boat
Crossing the river of the world,
No one will oppose you,
No one will seek to harm you.*

Chuang Tzu, *The Way of Chuang Tzu*

It is all so clear. If there is no ego, there is nothing to react with. Nobody will react to us. And yet, to empty our self of ego is not so easy to accomplish. That's because it can't be accomplished by the 'I' itself, but by the Master.

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

Likewise so long as we lean on others, he lets us do so; but when after repeated disappointments we surrender to him completely, regarding him as our only sheet anchor, he comes to our succour instantly.

The Master has already told us to just get on the train, sit down, do our simran, and let go. He will do the rest. When we don't let go, is it because we think he cannot handle it? Is this why we keep holding on? The Lord will do for us whatever we let him do. We have become

so reliant on this mind of ours that it has convinced us that we *have to* rely on it – and rely on it alone. The Masters say there is another way of operating, another way of being. We have to take their advice in trying to cross this river of life, and we have to practise meditation as they have instructed so that there is a basis from which to contact the Shabd within.

Everything is contained in the entirety, the oneness, of the whole. In love we let go of self and become another being. We become one. In meditation we let go of self and become one with the Lord. Meditation is the height of love.

The key to letting go is with the true Master. Not only does he connect us with the Shabd that resounds within us, but he also guides and protects us at every step of the journey. Our destiny in this life and our inner spiritual destination are in his hands if only we will let him handle it. Soami Ji has said in *Sar Bachan Poetry* that “[the mind] doesn’t understand the severity of its own situation – how will it ever reach its destination?” The Master has said that he reaches out and takes hold of our hand. We need to hold on tightly and stay in his protection. Then it is easy to just let go. We’re on his train; let’s enjoy the ride.



You see, the Lord has given us so much in life.... Instead of asking the Father to give us the boons in life, we should ask him to give us that heart which is full of gratitude for what he has given us.... So we need a thankful heart.

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

Dialogue between the Soul and the Mind

In *Sar Bachan Poetry* Soami Ji offers us a unique and tender shabd, featuring an intimate dialogue between the soul and the mind.

The shabd begins by presenting a plea by the soul to the mind for help, to join her, so both can escape this darkness. Soul acknowledges the power and position of the mind:

O mind, listen to the one petition I place before you.

*Life after life, I have been your slave, and you my master.
You are called the Lord of the three worlds, ...*

*Gods, humans and yogis are under your control,
no one dares act in defiance of your commands.
You can trap anyone you want in this world
and set them free whenever you like.*

Soul is so humble, saying: You are so powerful. I have been your slave, and there was no hope for my escape from your trap. You have kept me tied up and bound to you for aeons. Soul then continues by trying to reason with the mind:

*Having heard all this praise about you,
I feel inclined to ask you:
Why do you languish in the vale of darkness,
this base realm, the world of matter?*

*One thing my Master has advised me:
Take your mind along as soon as possible.*

Soul recognizes that it cannot pull away if alone, that it is too tightly knotted to the mind, and that it needs the mind – a quiet and disciplined mind – to advance on this supreme journey homeward.

*So, I entreat you, my mind,
to soar with me to the heavens without delay.
Give up indulgence in passion
at the portals of the senses and decide
to extricate yourself from this entanglement now.
For me there is no companion like you,
for I belong to you and you are meant for me....*

This plea is significant as it emphasizes the spiritual bond – the potential friendship – between the mind and the soul. “I belong to you,” says the soul to the mind. “You are meant for me.” Rather than dwelling on the fact that the mind has enslaved her, the soul appeals to the mind on behalf of both of them to find higher ground, to rise together as companions and friends, above their present situation.

Now the soul reveals a secret from the Master, one that will benefit both of them. It is quite moving to read of the soul’s request for both of them to find their own homes:

*The Master has given out the secret
of how to take you with me on my return home.
But I am still in your power,
unable to reach the Shabd without your help.
If you do not follow my advice,*

*both of us will languish in the cycle of birth and death.
Please listen to my pleading, have pity on me,
and look for the melody of Shabd, which is close by.
Let us both rise to the higher regions within....
You stay there to rule the whole region,
while I move on to the court of Radha Soami.*

This is a very convincing argument. It appeals to the mind with logic, pathos and pleading. The Master has revealed a secret that will enable them both to go to their original homes – the secret is that mind must cooperate with soul. The soul cries: Have pity on me; I need your help! Let us both rise. Let us both go home, forever. We know that the mind has been labelled as our worst enemy. But here the soul pleads with the mind to cooperate. Soami Ji knows that ultimately cooperation between the mind and the soul is not only possible but absolutely necessary.

Now consider the mind's reply – it's surprisingly humble. The mind seems to have been affected by the soul's pleadings. This following communication could well have been spoken by any of us. It is so honest, so true to our situation in life.

*The mind spoke to the soul, saying:
I am unable to overcome my taste for sensual pleasures.
What can I do – how can I take your advice?
My enslavement to the senses is no small matter.
I have lost all strength, I have given up all effort,
I can no longer exert my will against them.
I really do want to give up the sense pleasures,
but when faced with them, I lose my resolve.*

*I severely repent, before and after,
but at the time I do not miss a chance to indulge.*

The mind continues:

*Ill at ease like a restive colt,
how can I ascend to the sky within, O beloved!*

Mind is affectionately calling the soul 'beloved'. It agrees with the soul, who says, "I belong to you and you are meant for me." Then the mind surprises us by saying to the soul that they both need help:

*I therefore suggest we beg for the Master's help.
Let us join together to seek refuge with him
and strengthen our faith by listening to his satsangs.
When the Master showers his grace on us,
he will keep me in check. I can never go up with my own
strength –
I must meet the Master,
the emancipator of prisoners.*

Happily, the mind has willingly become the ally of the soul; mind is eager to join with the soul and beg for the Master's grace. Mind too longs to meet the Master. This can be our winning attitude for simran and bhajan. We can envision our mind and soul joining together to seek refuge with the Master. This is the Master's secret of how to take the mind along with the soul on the journey home. With firm determination and Master's grace, we can succeed – quieting the mind, keeping it disciplined, keeping the simran going, and holding awareness at the eye focus.

This journey is difficult but not impossible. When we were initiated, we were given the power that we need for this task. And it is our task; no one else can do it for us, each must do it for oneself. We have the strength to do this – we have the capacity – right now in this life. The force of Shabd that is upholding us is upholding the entire creation – we can use that fuel for our journey, to soar to the heavens without delay. Great Master says in *Spiritual Gems*:

The preliminary stages in Sant Mat are difficult; but when they are traversed and the mind goes up, then meditation begins to yield pleasure, so much so that one is unable to give it up.

By the end of Soami Ji's poem, hearing this, the soul is overjoyed: "Come quickly and let the Master cut our bonds!" Both submitted themselves. They fill their cups to the brim; they drink nectar to their heart's content. Holding hands they rise up to the inner sky. Radha Soami showers his mercy upon them, manifesting his will, and overcoming the formidable mind.



When by the grace of the perfect Master one is put into touch with the magnetic Word, one's eyes are opened and blindness is cured. The inner light shines forth and the darkness of ignorance melts away.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Quest for Light*

Inner Cataract

Eureka! Do the happy dance! For the first time in half a century I can see. Not only can I see, but I can see better without glasses than I ever could with corrective lenses. Ever since I was five years old, I had to wear glasses. Not the chic, classy kind that made me look smart, but the heavy, strong convex lenses that made my eyes look like they were swimming in my head. The miracle of modern medicine, advanced technology, and a skilled surgeon removed the cataracts from my extremely myopic and stigmatic eyes and implanted toric lenses that have given me perfect vision. This dramatic physical change happened in less than twenty minutes; one could say instantaneously. It made me think about the veil that impedes our inner vision – our inner cataract. If only we could rid ourselves of this inner blindness so easily. What would it be like to have true inner vision? Would we see the Lord in everything and everyone? Would we see Master with us all the time? Maharaj Charan Singh, in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II, says:

How else can we see the Lord except through spiritual insight, through that inner eye, the single or third eye? That is spiritual insight, when we have opened that inner eye. It is only with the inner eye that we can see the Lord.

Just like the physical cataract that must be removed by an operation, the inner cataract must be removed before the gift of inner vision can be restored. The first step is just realizing that we are blind. Once the Lord's grace awakens us to our state, we start looking for relief. Then the second wave of grace washes us to the shore of a perfect living Master. When the Master grants us the precious gift of

initiation, he in effect pierces our third eye and starts breaking up that inner cataract by connecting us with the Shabd. The inner cataract took lifetime upon lifetime to develop. As our attachments and karmas grew, the inner cataract also became denser. The occlusion that keeps us from seeing the Radiant Form of the Master is made up of all our worldly desires and attachments. Maharaj Charan Singh further states in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II:

Because of the veil of ego and our attachment to the creation, there's the darkness, so we do not see that light. The moment we start concentrating, we start seeing that light, but since we don't stay there permanently – we are there and then come down – it looks like lots of flashes.

In this state, only the mercy and grace of the Master can lift this veil and give us the gift of his inner darshan. In order to get that grace, we need to do our part. We must attend to our meditation. Simran is the key to piercing the darkness. We sit in the darkness during meditation hoping for a glimmer of light, a flash of colour, the face of our Master. Although the light may not come – or if it comes, it may not stay – it is essential that we persevere with our simran, even if we spend a lifetime in the darkness. Maharaj Sawan Singh says in *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol.V:

When the seeing inner eye is opened or the Lord himself makes himself known, then one begins to feel the reflection of the Lord within him. The only object of simran [repetition] is to open the seeing inner eye so that we may be able to see the Lord everywhere and in the Master, where he is manifest. But this is possible only by the Lord's grace.

What pure joy it will be when the Radiant Form of the Master appears! Isn't this a primary goal to be reached – meeting the Master within? There is no way to know how thick the veil of darkness is that keeps our inner eye from opening. Both effort and grace will eventually result in the clearing of the inner cataract and the development of our inner vision – the *nirat* – the power to see within. It takes time and constant attention to our duty to the Master to eliminate the layers of darkness that blind us, and it also takes time to strengthen the *nirat*. In *The Science of the Soul*, Maharaj Jagat Singh eloquently explains:

The soul cannot ascend until the nirat or the power of seeing is developed within. The two faculties – one of hearing and the other of seeing – are utilized by the soul for its mystic transport. Some disciples devote their attention to hearing the sound but do not try to fix their nirat inside. This is a mistake, for unless the attention is fixed at the eye centre, the mind does not become motionless, and there is little pleasure in the practice.

When the nirat or the inner vision is fully developed, the sound that emanates from within it becomes increasingly distinct. The soul, however, must catch the finest note, by means of which it will ascend to higher regions.

Simran is essential to helping this process along – to withdrawing the consciousness from every cell in the body and focusing the attention at the eye centre. Each concentrated round of simran withdraws the scattered attention and stills the mind. And slowly, slowly, with dedicated practice, the attention becomes concentrated at the third eye, where the soul is knotted together with the mind.

The mind must be stilled. Unless we endeavour to sit in meditation, our attention will remain focused in the world, and we will remain inwardly blind. Maharaj Charan Singh states in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II:

We have to withdraw back our consciousness at this eye centre. Then we have a single eye. Now, in this world, we are seeing with two eyes. So we are a victim of duality. When we withdraw back behind these two eyes, we open that single eye – the third eye, as you call it – only then does our soul see that light. Actually, there is nothing but light here, but we don't concentrate to that point where we can see that light. When we withdraw our soul, our consciousness, back to the eye centre, then we see that light, then we hear that sound. So ultimately it is the same thing. The soul hears the sound, the soul sees the light, but they are just different aspects of the soul. You are one; the soul is one. The soul sees, the soul hears, inside.

Further, Hazur Maharaj Ji addresses the benefit of dhyān as a great help in achieving concentration at the eye centre:

With the help of simran we have to withdraw the consciousness to the eye centre. With the help of dhyān we have to hold our mind there because it is difficult to hold the mind in a vacuum.... Both faculties have to be occupied: the faculty to think and the faculty to contemplate – that is, to visualize ... if you can't contemplate on the form of the Master, you can feel you are doing simran in the presence of the Master.... That also helps you to hold your attention in that vacuum, in that darkness. In the beginning you have to imagine naturally. You

don't see the Master within. You have to try to visualize his face. You have to imagine, of course, that he is there and you are looking at him, and that will help you concentrate at the eye centre. And once you are concentrated there, then you will see that light. That veil of ignorance or darkness is eliminated from your way and you start seeing light. And when that develops into the Radiant Form of the Master within, at that higher stage, then of course you will be looking at the Master.

How many lifetimes have we wandered in darkness? To think that in this one lifetime – considering the aeons we have wandered in this creation – we can attain spiritual vision relatively instantaneously! He has given us the method, and now it is up to us to do our meditation with love and devotion to eliminate the blindness of duality. We can do it!



*Establish your base at the third eye
and have darshan of the inner Master.
Always listen to the voice of the Shabd Guru,
burn to ashes the low cravings of your mind
and merge into him.
This form of the Master is of unsurpassed beauty -
it will light up your inner being
like the radiant glow of the sun.*

Sar Bachan Poetry

Doing the Donkey-Work

It is the last few hours before sunrise. The alarm clock buzzes, or perhaps it is now our natural habit to wake then. Perhaps even it is the soul's whisper that stirs us. No matter. It is His will that we awaken.

A morning chill hangs in the air, while the bed is warm and comforting. A split second of hesitation, our eyes are heavy. The pillow smothers our good intentions; the blanket becomes too heavy to throw off. The mind says, just one minute more; its lure is to drag us down to deep slumber again.

The donkey-work begins.

The heart that brims with love for the Lord must learn to love the donkey-work. So we grab hold of the donkey's mane and with one determined effort we hoist ourselves out of our beds to a standing position, ready to approach our meditation. Through this gift of grace perhaps we remember what Rumi knew:

The breeze at dawn has secrets to tell you.

Don't go back to sleep.

You must ask for what you really want.

Don't go back to sleep.

People are going back and forth across the doorsill

where the two worlds touch.

The door is round and open.

Don't go back to sleep.

The Essential Rumi, rendered by Coleman Barks

There is a yearning which must gain strength now in this moment of perfect obedience. As we stumble to our seat, the hand at our back

is divine; its push is grace. Left to us, the Lord says, we would never sit, even for five minutes. That famously, stubborn donkey yields only to the hand of its master. So, we sit and begin our meditation.

Mere minutes pass and already the head bobs. Concentration rises to where it left off in our dreams, at the throat centre. Maharaj Charan Singh gives us guidance in *Quest for Light*:

So when sleep comes, please take advantage of the automatic withdrawal of the attention from the senses and try to concentrate it at the eye focus. Take care that you neither go to sleep nor get fully awake. If you succeed in this, you will find it of great help in meditation.

The mind rebels. So we keep our seat steadfastly as the donkey bucks and threatens to bolt. We hold fast and persist as we're told we must. Sometimes there is nothing more difficult than to continue, for it takes strength, the strength to endure and keep going. And so we remain in our meditation, stay alert and vigilant, and repeat and repeat and repeat. We sometimes become so adept at this repeating that we find we can automatically repeat our simran and still carry on a separate line of thinking. As Hazur Maharaj Ji tells us in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II:

Your mind should merge in those words. Your mind should become part and parcel of that simran. It is not that the words you repeat are different than your mind. Your mind should become part and parcel of that simran. It should merge in those words – only then does concentration come. If you are repeating those words in your mind and thinking about all the activities



and problems of the world, concentration will not be there. The mind must merge into the words. You should be in the words.

Be in those words, and with a firm hand bring the donkey to a standstill. Endure through all the tears and fears and fidgets. And then wait some more, for the road on which the donkey travels is the journey of a lifetime. It is no easy thing, this love journey. How difficult is it? Ask one who knows. Maharaj Charan Singh, in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II, says:

I don't think there is anything more difficult than meditation. Meditation is the most difficult. It looks so simple, and yet it is so difficult to attend to it. Sant Mat is very simple, but difficult to practise.... When we put it into practice, many obstacles come in the way. To live that way is a great problem. It's a constant struggle to live the teachings.

Do it anyway. There will be signposts to spur us on. The Master explains:

Almost every satsangi gets some glimpses here and there, just to keep us on the path, so that we may continue in that faith, continue on that path. But we have to earn those experiences by our regular meditation.

Daily we must attend to the difficult donkey-work. It's no cup of tea at our auntie's house; that we already know. But, as Maharaj Charan Singh says in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II:

We are all struggling souls, but those who have struggled enough and have reached beyond the realm of struggle, they're the real disciples.

In the last few hours before sunrise, the Master's disciples must do the donkey-work of love.



We must learn how to let His will prevail. We must understand that our faith is not only our concern but also His; that more important than our will to believe is His will that we believe. It is not easy to attain faith. A decision of the will, the desire to believe, will not secure it. All the days of our lives we must continue to deepen our sense of mystery in order to be worthy of attaining faith. Callousness to the mystery is our greatest obstacle.

A.J. Heschel, *God in Search of Man*

Love and devotion will come gradually and slowly as meditation will develop. We start on a very low level by simply loving the Master as someone who knows more than we do and who has given us the gift of Nam. This gratitude in itself is a form of love. If you do your duty daily, meditation will produce increasing love and devotion.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Quest for Light*

Cool as Sandalwood, Serene as the Moon

Life in this world of constant activity and change can be challenging and demands on our time and energy may leave us feeling quite overwhelmed. Our mind constantly is preoccupied with our worldly life. When the present Master is asked about hell, he reminds us that hell is a mind on fire, indicating that we are experiencing a type of hell created by the worries and cares that will not give us a single minute of peace. Until we come across a living Master, we cannot imagine that there is another way to live. However, in his company, we see how calm, peaceful, good-humoured, kind, and compassionate he is and we want to be like him.

The eighteenth-century Indian saint, Paltu, says:

*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,
lends 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

Just reading Paltu's words can send a ripple of coolness through our feverish minds. But when we meet such a Master, the impact is so much more. In this saint – this kind, tender, compassionate being – we find a role model, a goal to aspire to. We too want to become cool as sandalwood, serene as the moon in the midst of the turmoil of this world.

In reality, what the Master offers is much more than to be able to handle the stresses of the world with serenity. The Master comes to remind us of who we are and the real reason why we are here in this world. We once knew who we were, but we have been in this creation since the beginning of time, involved in the all-engrossing experience of birth and death in every life form imaginable, and we have forgotten who we are: we are spiritual beings going through a human existence. So Maharaj Jagat Singh in *The Science of the Soul* advises:

When good luck brings you in contact with a true Master, offer all your love to him. Give up attachment to the world and the worldly objects, and discard the path of mind and senses.

He tells us to offer all our love to the Master. We need to live in the world, discharging our worldly duties, turn our face to the Master, and remember the Master with our simran. We need to learn how to be

in the world but not of it. Above all, we need to work at our meditation, try to reach the eye centre, and go within. Maharaj Jagat Singh continues in the same book:

Take the Master with you and enter inside. He will attach you to Shabd. Identify yourself with it and become one with it. By and by, you will be able to withdraw your consciousness.... Do not lose heart, but be patient. In due course, you will be able to concentrate your attention at the eye centre. Enter within and give up all thoughts of the external world. You will achieve everything.

It is interesting that Maharaj Jagat Singh says: “Take the Master with you”, as if we might think we are able to go within by ourselves. We should never think we are alone on this path. We are never alone. The true Master is Shabd; he is within us in the form of sound and light and, as Shabd, he is also in every cell of our body. He is closer to us than hands and feet, closer to us than breathing. He is in us and we are in him. The fact that we cannot see him is our great misfortune. Only our meditation will open our inner eye and show us the truth. Until we experience the truth, we can *think* of Master as being constantly with us, constantly helping us. And through our meditation, with his grace and mercy, we will realize this truth when we meet his Radiant Form within.

Maharaj Jagat Singh continues:

First comes the Jyoti – the Celestial Flame – out of which emanates divine melody. Concentrate your attention on it and, focusing your subtle mind on the vision, penetrate it. Continue this practice every day, giving up love for the world and

increasing it for Nam [Shabd]. Desire for Nam grows only by virtue of constant contact with the Master within.

Isn't it true that if we love someone, we want to be with them all the time? In our worldly relationships we have surely felt this – with our spouse, children, and other relatives. This is why a living Master is so important. How can we fall in love with the Shabd, which we cannot see, we cannot talk to, we cannot interact with? The body Master gives us this opportunity. His personality is so magnetic that we love to be with him. Remember the characteristics of the Master that Paltu speaks of: cool, serene, patient, compassionate, tender, merciful, and full of sweet loving words that melt even stones. No wonder we want to be in the physical presence of the Master wherever he is in the world; being with his physical form and having the opportunity to ask him questions is part of building that relationship.

Loving the outer form of the Master is good, but our goal is to fall in love with the inner Master – the Shabd. The present Master has said that the purpose of meditation is to build a relationship with the inner Master, so we can do simran like one half of a conversation with him. Talking with him in this way, we are continuously cementing our relationship with him. Our relationship with the Master, our love for him has to become so strong that it will pull our attention inwards and upwards away from the world, away from the lure of the senses. The more we meditate, the more we build the relationship; the more we meditate, the more love we feel; the more love we feel, the closer we are to becoming one with the inner Master and imbibing his qualities.

Love is crucial. We can't follow the path without it. Intellectual conviction that this path leads us to our source will only take us so far. When life throws troubles in our way, the intellect just lets us down. When tragedy strikes, we might rail against the Master and say, "How

could you let this happen?” But when we love the Master, we also trust him and when we trust him, we accept that he will never do anything that is not in our best interest.

The more we turn towards the Master, the easier it is to follow the path. Turning towards him allows us to give up worrying about what is happening in our lives. He is in charge and he has told us that if we do our meditation, he will take care of everything else. When we live like this – putting our full trust in him and our full effort in the path – we can live cool as sandalwood and serene as the moon. We can become like our Master.



He [Paltu] says that the lovers of the Lord find the Lord everywhere, in everyone.

The Lord is in everyone. He is in the guru, he is in the disciple.

He is the Creator, he is in the creation. He's in the patient, he's in the doctor...

He is to be worshipped, and he is the one who makes us worthy of his worship...

The lover sees none but the Lord in this creation.

He doesn't see anything else at all... What else is there to talk about?

Maharaj Charan Singh, Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III

I Find You

*I find you in the middle of the roses
when no one's talking.*

*I find you in that little bird perched
above, singing his heart out, just because.*

*I find you in the ocean's rolling waters
making the lovely sound that quiets my heart.*

*I find you in the want to's
not the have to's.*

*I find you sometimes when I am not even looking –
you just come.*

*Quietly you sit by me, and though my
mind roars, and my heart weeps,
you comfort me.*

*I find you, when I'm not afraid to look,
and then I find you
everywhere.*

Original Poem by a Satsangi

Oh Heart

*Oh heart, why art thou a captive in the earth that is passing away?
Fly forth from this enclosure, since thou art a bird of a spiritual world.*

Rumi, *Divan-e-Shams-e Tabrizi*

In this couplet Rumi gives us the message that is at the core of the teachings of all true saints: Soul, you are in a terrible prison. Escape and return to your true home.

Rumi suggests a poignant picture of a caged bird. Take a great wild bird the size of an eagle and lock it up in a cage. What is its condition? It huddles there cramped in a space too small to allow it to spread its wings, sitting amidst its own droppings and depending for its sustenance on scraps of stale food pushed through the bars. Soon the mighty eagle, the very symbol of freedom, begins to decline; it loses its beautiful feathers and becomes scruffy and bald. The bird's eyes begin to grow dim and it pines away, remembering the blue skies that used to be its home. Its plight is dreadful.

Our plight is somewhat like that of the bird. Our souls are incarcerated in the gloomy dungeon of this material plane. We, who once traversed the brilliant inner skies, are helpless prisoners in a foreign land. We have become trapped in the merciless cycle of cause and effect, and are chained to the floor of our existence by the actions of our past lives. We are pushed around from body to body, from cage to cage, in the cycle of transmigration. Not only is our consciousness trapped in the worlds below the eye focus, but we believe that this material world is real.

Fortunately, saints are filled with compassion when they see our terrible condition, and they too descend to this dungeon of a world to give us this message: “Fly forth from this enclosure, since thou art a bird of the spiritual world.”

This one line is so profound. Rumi is telling us who we really are. We are birds of a spiritual world, not birds of the material world. He continues:

*Thou art a darling bosom-friend, thou art always behind the
secret veil:*

*Why dost thou make thy dwelling-place in this perishable
abode?*

God is an ocean of spiritual light and sound and love. Mystics explain the relationship of God to his creation as that of an ocean to its drops. Is the ocean one body of water, or is it made up of millions of separate little drops? Souls who are conscious only of the ocean and nothing else, who have no sense of any separate identity, are one with the ocean. They are one with God. Those souls who have the consciousness that they are individual drops and have a sense of separate identity, or ego, are of the creation. But this sense of separation is an illusion.

We are told by the Masters that when we change the level of our consciousness from self-consciousness to God-consciousness, we will realize that we are one with the ocean, one with God. He has never left us and we have never really been without him. As Rumi says, he is “always behind the secret veil.” This reflects the true and abiding nature of our relationship with the Lord. But, unfortunately, we are often content to remain standing on the sandy shores of our life looking out at the ocean.

How does piercing through the veil begin? How does remembering that we are really “birds of a spiritual world” start? It begins by going beyond thinking to experiencing. Maharaj Charan Singh says in *Divine Light*:

God gave us intellect to carry on the works of this world of phenomena. Beyond that our wisdom cannot reach.... One who relies on reason alone cannot attain true knowledge [knowledge of the Lord]. Reasoning is the function of our physical brain....

God and things spiritual can be realized only by the direct perception of the soul, through contact with Shabd. The soul can perceive clearly without going through the process of reasoning. Our mind is too feeble and limited to comprehend the unlimited and incomprehensible One.

Rumi gives us further clues in his poem:

*Every morning a voice comes to thee from heaven:
'When thou lay'st the dust of the way, thou win'st thy way
to the goal.'*

In a marvellous way Rumi condenses the whole method of traveling on the inner path. “Every morning a voice comes to thee from heaven.” This voice is the sound current or the voice of God emanating from the ocean of Godhood, which is calling us back home. Of course this Shabd resounds within us all twenty-four hours – it is our very life – but we do not experience this. How might we experience this current so that we become attached to it and let it pull us back to our destination, where we will merge once more into the ocean of our origin? “When thou lay'st the dust of the way, thou win'st thy way to

the goal.” The whole secret of the path lies in stilling the mind or laying the dust of the way. When there is not one speck of dust, not one twitching of thought, the soul or the consciousness will automatically rise up, and we will be immersed in God’s sound and light. The prison door or tenth gate will open, and we will pass through the secret veil of illusion into the realms of super-consciousness.

Guru Ram Das, as quoted in *Jap Ji: A Perspective*, says:

*Every moment the mind rushes about in delusion
and does not, even for an instant, stay in its home.
When the Guru applies the goad of Shabd on its head,
it comes back to inhabit its own mansion.*

Guru Ram Das says that the powerful mind, which is always running after material objects, beauty, and sensual pleasures, can be subdued through the “goad of Shabd on its head”. This suggests that we can convert the mind that we use to operate in the illusory world into a mind that pulls us inward and upward, towards the unlimited and incomprehensible.

Rumi continues in the *Divan-e-Shams-e Tabrizi*:

*In memory of the banquet of union, in yearning for his
beauty,
They are fallen bewildered by the wine thou knowest.
How sweet, in the hope of him, on the threshold of his abode,
For the sake of seeing his face, to bring night round to day!*

This is the entire reason for our being. To remember what we have forgotten, that union with him. We are bringing to our consciousness that sweet hope of living on the “threshold of his abode” for the “sake

of seeing his face”. We sit in our meditation day after day, year after year, bringing night round to day for this purpose. Every meditation brings us closer to piercing the secret veil that stands between us and him. Every meditation brings us closer to being freed from the cages that have been created throughout our many lifetimes. The Master keeps encouraging us to do this and to awaken and experience God first hand, to fly forth from the enclosure of this material world to our true home in the spiritual world, and to become “his darling bosom-friend”.



Any moment when we think about the Father, when we think about the Master, when we think about the Lord, that is a blessed moment. That makes it worth living in this creation. All others are useless moments. Whatever time we devote to our meditation, whatever thoughts we devote to the Father, they are blessed moments; that is the blessed time.... So that moment becomes blessed, that time becomes blessed, those things become blessed which remind you of the Lord and of your love and devotion for the Father.

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

Chaldean Oracles

This is an original translation of a fragmentary collection of second-century poetry. The Oracles combine Chaldean (Babylonian) wisdom with Plato's teachings.

*For there is a certain thing that can be grasped
But you must grasp with the bloom of your spiritual awareness
For if you should incline your mind and try to grasp It
as if grasping a specific thing, you would not grasp It.
For It is the power behind strength, surrounded by light,
flashing with spiritual rays.
Therefore, it is not by asserting yourself that you should try to
grasp the Formless, but passively, through self-surrender,
through the upward-moving flame of the receptive mind
which can measure and count everything but It.
You must not strain to grasp It,
but by keeping the pure eye of the soul turned inward,
extend the empty mind towards the Formless,
so that you can grasp the Formless.
For It is beyond your mind.*

Chaldean Oracles, as translated by D. Markus



Doers of the Word

We may meditate to quiet our mind, to please our Master, or for any other number of personal reasons; but ultimately, we meditate to hear and merge with the Shabd and return to our true home. In a number of his recent satsangs, the Master has said that we should become “doers of the Word”. What does he mean by this? Why does he refer us to this instruction from Christ’s teachings? “But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves” (James 1:22). The Shabd – the Word – purifies us, and once we begin our Shabd practice, we become true doers of the Word.

Shabd is our salvation. Shabd is our way home. But are we choosing salvation? As disciples, we have a choice of what to focus our attention on. Since we are part and parcel of the physical world, often our focus is here in the physical world. But by keeping our focus in the physical world, we stay trapped in the cycle of birth and death. We are pulled by the temptations of the world, we are comfortable in its playground, so saints plead with us to change our focus. They remind us that our real essence is spiritual not physical. This physical existence is very short.

Our primary relationship is with the Lord. It is at the core of who we really are. When the Master suggests that we become doers of the Word, we have an opportunity to pay close attention to his statement and act upon it. It is much like when the Master tells us that it is his divine order that we meditate. This isn’t a mere suggestion; it is a command. How do we become doers of the Word? It is not difficult to find the answer. Do our meditation. Two and one-half hours every day can be a precious time for us to connect with the Lord, where he is, where the Word is.

In James 1:23-25 of the King James Version of the Bible, it is written:

For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass:

For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.

But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.

What prevents us from taking action, from being a doer of the Word? Since our previous birth, we have existed in this physical world. Our very existence begins with our loud reaction to the trauma of taking a physical body. Our first sounds are of crying and wailing. What an introduction to the human condition! Much later, we may realize this is a common and perhaps even reasonable reaction to being thrust into the physical world. So over time, we have learned to use this way of communicating and reacting when things don't go our way. Yet the Master tells us don't react. Don't let our ego get the best of us. Don't focus on the world as being about "me, me, me". We have the option to ignore whatever causes our reaction. In fact, before reacting, he says, pause and begin doing some simran. This may bring us some peace and allow us to return to the state of balance necessary to be aware of the Shabd, the Word, within us.

Maharaj Sawan Singh says in *Dawn of Light*, "Whatever good or bad happens to you, through whatever person or object, directly proceeds from our loving Father." He is encouraging us to understand that reacting to life and its situations does not help us, because whatever happens comes from him. Our over-reactions to events

in our life may actually be taking us in the opposite direction from where we want to go.

Maharaj Charan Singh speaks a great deal about bringing peace into our lives. In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. I, he says:

What is peace? When we have no desires. When we have no anxiety. As long as your mind is creating desires and you are trying to satisfy those desires, you can never be at peace. Only when you become desireless can you be at peace. And you can become desireless only if you get something better than the sensual pleasures, because the mind is always wanting something.... As long as the tendency of the mind is downward from here toward the senses, howsoever much we may indulge in those senses, we will never be at peace. But when we are able to withdraw ourselves from the senses to the eye centre and become one with that audible life stream or that Shabd, with that divine light within, then automatically your mind will be at peace.

As disciples of Sant Mat, we seek peace and the Shabd. We must do our best to constantly stay on our path and to trust in the words of our Master. Our Master is always helping us and encouraging us to resist reacting and to return our attention to that which will bring us permanent happiness and peace. He has told us what will bring us real happiness.

We must become doers: doers of our meditation, doers of becoming good human beings, doers of the Word. As Maharaj Sawan Singh says in *Spiritual Gems*: “This done, all is done.”



Vacuum Your Rug

What does Sant Mat have to do with vacuuming a rug? Everything, as it turns out.

In recent years, Baba Ji has been asking us to examine why we do what we do. He has told us to ask ourselves whether our actions lead us closer to our goal of God-realization or farther away. This is where vacuuming comes in.

In a book called “*Winning the Clutter War*”, the author talks about the difference between task-orientation and goal-orientation. To be task-oriented means to see what we are doing in isolation, not connected to a larger whole, not attached to a goal. To be goal-oriented, on the other hand, means to see the big picture, how everything is interconnected.

Talking about housekeeping and keeping one’s home orderly and clean, the author explains:

People who say, “I’ve got all day to vacuum the rug” are indicating that they are going through the motions of housekeeping and doing the job just to get it done, not because it is an important part of a larger picture. As long as we look at housekeeping as a group of isolated tasks lined up in order to be done, we can put them off because there is no reason to do them except to get them off the list.

The solution is goal-orientation rather than task-orientation. We should never lose sight of our overall goal, which in this case is a beautiful and orderly house. When we see our work in terms of this goal, individual tasks become a means to an end.

In Sant Mat terms, when we see doing our simran and bhajan as a task, something that we have to do sometime, but not something critically important that takes us closer to our goal, we can happily procrastinate – secure in the “knowledge” that it is okay to forget about it now as long as we do it later. But if we see it as a means to our goal of making our Master happy, of moving towards God-realization, it becomes a priority and something that we enjoy doing. The author continues:

A person who is task-oriented can wait all day to vacuum the rug, as long as it gets vacuumed that day. A person who is goal-oriented, however, won't wait all day since her goal is to maintain a nice-looking house at all times....

Are we goal-oriented on our spiritual path? Do we look at every aspect of our vows as a means to the end of God-realization? Or are we so crushed by the rationalizations of our mind that we can only see our devotion as a chore. Do we view our meditation as a child too fond of play who views his or her homework as something to be done under duress? Echoing the Masters whom we follow, the author explains that:

The mind is the key to what we do. Sometimes we slip into a pattern of thinking that hinders us from making progress, and we never realize that while our wills are saying “Go, go,” our minds are saying, “No, no.” So we end up failing because we are harboring pet ideas that are keeping us from going forward. We have to be willing to make some changes in the way we think if we are ever going to make permanent changes in our houses.

The author says that we have to be willing to make changes in the way we think if we want our physical house to be clean. We have to vacuum the rug. The Masters say we have to change the way we think if we want to cleanse our spiritual heart.

In *Spiritual Discourses* Vol. II, Maharaj Charan Singh, talking about Tulsi Sahib's shabd "Cleanse the Chamber of your Heart", says:

The fact is that each one of us would like the Lord to make his abode in our heart – but have we ever considered whether this heart, where we would like the Lord to live, is fit for Him? Even a dog, when it wants to sit down, first prepares the ground with its tail as it turns around. And when we want to sit on the ground, we first sweep it, then wash it, then spread a rug or a carpet, and put out upholstered chairs and cushions. Only then do we consider the place to be fit for us.

Is our heart fit for the Lord to enter it or is it, as Hazur goes on to say, full of the love of the world and attachments to our families? Expounding on Tulsi Sahib's second line, "From your attention discard all that is other so He may be seated there," Hazur says, "Until you rid yourself of your love and attachment for everything other than him, your heart will never be fit for the Supreme Being."

Hazur Maharaj Ji is telling us that we have to focus only on the Lord and develop our love and devotion only for him because part-time devotion or putting off our spiritual practice to a more convenient time will never take us to our goal. We have to keep our mind in simran and bhajan twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

In every aspect of our path, we must become goal-oriented, not task-oriented. We must vacuum our rug now, not later today, not tomorrow. We want to make our heart clean and beautiful now, so that the Lord will come and take residence within it.

Faithful Lover

In moving words from the poem, “Faithful Lover,” by Hafiz, the message is tender and wise, for his words speak of a dynamic, spiritual maturity awaiting each of us. He says:

*Hafiz,
Is it true that our destiny
Is to turn into Light
Itself?”*

And I replied,

*Dear moon,
Now that your love is maturing,
We need to sit together
Close like this more often*

*So I might instruct you
How to become
Who you
Are!*

The Gift,
rendered by Daniel Ladinsky

Like Hafiz, our own Master encourages us to “sit together” more often and devote more time to meditation. In fact, Baba Ji has alluded to the fact that if we want to make real spiritual progress, two and one-half hours of meditation daily is just the beginning. Along the same line Maharaj Charan Singh in *Die to Live* tells us:

Meditation is a way of life. You do not merely close yourself in a room for a few hours, then forget about your meditation for the rest of the day. It must take on a practical form, reflecting in every daily action and in your whole routine. That itself is an effect of meditation.... You are building that atmosphere every moment for your daily meditation. Everything you do must consciously prepare you for the next meditation. So meditation becomes a way of life, as we live in the atmosphere we build with meditation.

With each effort we put forth in meditation, we attempt to become intimately closer to our Beloved. Whether we are conscious of it or not, we are making progress and experiencing far more growth than the mind can fathom. However, our progress has little to do with our own effort but much to do with our Master's divine grace. He pulled us to the path and he will deliver us to our true home, to be united with the Creator. The more we meditate, the more we become receptive to his grace; by his grace we make more progress, and the more progress we make, the more spiritually mature we become.

Time and time again, the Master shows us the power of his grace. We begin to realize what is really important, what the purpose of our human birth is – to know our true self, the soul, and to merge into the Creator.

In response to a question about clearing away things in life that are unnecessary, Maharaj Charan Singh says:

It's a matter of changing the attitude of your mind. You have to do your worldly work; you have to discharge your responsibilities, your obligations. But your attitude of mind can be one pointed, focused within.... You have to discharge them [responsibilities]. But an actor is conscious that he's acting.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III

With this advice, Hazur Maharaj Ji reminds us that we are all actors on a stage and this world is not real. Therefore, even when performing our worldly responsibilities we should proceed with an attitude of being in his presence. The Lord likes us to remember him in all we do – not just during the time of our meditation. He wants our one-pointed focus to be on him.

Saints teach us that without the Shabd, the real essence of the Master, nothing in creation has light or life of its own. Just as without sunlight the moon is an inert black orb, incapable of being seen, so too is our mind and body lifeless and dark without the Shabd. Without the Shabd – without the living force of the soul – we would be inert.

Without the soul, there could be no life, for the soul is a drop of the divine life force or the Shabd. But without a true Master, we would remain trapped here in darkness for all time, with no hope for rescue of our souls.

Our souls are one with the Shabd, and saints tells us our own light is astonishing. But we just cannot see it. The Master, it seems, through our meditation, is now removing all the coverings over the soul and prying us loose from these false blinders so that we can come to know our real identity.

We can appreciate Hafiz telling the moon, “Now that your love is maturing we need to sit together close like this more often, so I might instruct you how to become who you are!”

Meditation helps to strengthen our faith in and commitment to Master and the rewards are most astounding. He teaches us something no one else can teach us. He instructs us how to become who we really are and to attain our destiny by becoming one with him, “light itself”.



Book Review

God in Search of Man

by Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel

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An inspiration for generations of scholars and spiritual seekers through his writings, teaching, and personal example, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907–1972) was considered the greatest Jewish theologian of the 20th century. Born in Poland into a family descended from famed Hasidic rabbis and mystics, he earned a doctorate in philosophy in Berlin. Facing persecution from the Nazis, he fled to the United States, where he became a professor of Jewish ethics and mysticism, teaching at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America for nearly thirty years.

In *God in Search of Man* Heschel discusses the nature of God as a spiritual essence – “the Ineffable” – who challenges man to respond to him through awareness, devotion, and action. A scholar in both Jewish texts and traditions and in contemporary philosophy, Heschel weaves together an appreciation of the traditional forms of the Jewish religion with an entirely revolutionary way of discussing its basic beliefs and assumptions. His style is inspirational and passionate.

The book is divided into three parts: God, Revelation, and Response. In the first part, Heschel begins with a discussion of religion and how in its present form it is unable to help us discover God:

Religion declined not because it was refuted, but because it became irrelevant, dull, oppressive, insipid. When faith is completely replaced by creed, worship by discipline, love by habit ... its message becomes meaningless.

Religion for Heschel is about responding to God here and now. Indeed, he writes that God reaches out to humans and waits for them to seek him. He is there even for those who are not aware of him: “It is an exceptional act of divine grace that those who do not care for Him should suddenly discover that they are near Him.”

For Heschel, awe, wonder, and radical amazement are the ingredients lacking in the modern response to God. He says, "Wonder rather than doubt is the root of all knowledge." For him the entire universe is a touchstone for awe of God:

Everything holds the great secret. For it is the inescapable situation of all being to be involved in the infinite mystery. We may continue to disregard the mystery, but we can neither deny nor escape it. The world is something we apprehend but cannot comprehend.

The world can only be understood in relation to God. If we have the ears to hear, all creation sings God's praises.

"Lift up your eyes on high and see who created these." [Bible, Isaiah 40:26] There is a higher form of seeing. We must learn how to lift up our eyes on high in order to see that the world is more a question than an answer. The world's beauty and power are as naught compared to Him. The grandeur of nature is only the beginning. Beyond the grandeur is God.

Heschel uses many biblical passages and mysteries to portray the ineffability of God. He takes up passages from Psalms 19:2-5:

"The heavens declare the glory of God." How do they declare it? How do they reveal it? "Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge." Speech? Knowledge? What is the language, what are the words in which the heavens express the glory? "There is no speech, there are no words, neither is their voice heard." And yet, "Their radiation [radiance] goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world." The song of the heavens is Ineffable. The glory is concealed, yet there are moments in which it is revealed, particularly to the prophets.... The glory, then, is not a physical phenomenon.... The glory is neither an aesthetic nor a physical category.... It is, as we said, a living presence or the effulgence of a living presence.

Heschel writes that the ineffable is where our search must begin. Once we sense the ineffable, we search for how to respond to it. “By the ineffable we mean that aspect of reality which by its very nature lies beyond our comprehension.” The grandeur of the universe reveals to us, to our awe and amazement, a meaning greater than man.

Awe, then, is more than a feeling. It is an answer of the heart and mind to the presence of mystery in all things, an intuition for a meaning that is beyond the mystery, an awareness of the transcendent worth of the universe.

In discussing the danger of conceptual thinking about the mystery, he says:

The encounter with reality does not take place on the level of concepts through the channels of logical categories; concepts are second thoughts. All conceptualization is symbolization, an act of accommodation of reality to the human mind. The living encounter with reality takes place on a level that precedes conceptualization.... We have an awareness that is deeper than our concepts; we possess insights that are not accessible to the power of expression.

Our natural response to the mystery, then, will be faith. He says that to have faith is to rise to a higher level of thinking. In faith we share in divine wisdom. There are no adequate words or concepts to describe God or the mystery of existence. Silence is preferable to speech. All language is inaccurate.

Heschel moves into his main theme: that God is not inaccessible, though he is concealed within the mystery of life. He placed his own spirit within man, as the Bible says: “It is the spirit in a man, the breath of the Almighty, that makes him understand” (Job 32: 8). We may often think that God doesn’t answer, and thus we do not see what he is doing for us. He is always present; he is pure presence. We do often hear him but we don’t pay attention.

Again and again His call goes out to the soul: “Open to Me, my sister, my love, my dove” [Bible, Song of Songs 5:2] but the call is

usually lost in the confusion of the heart, in the ambiguity of the world.... Without God's aid, man cannot find Him. Without man's seeking, His aid is not granted.

In the second part of the book, Revelation, Heschel describes the revelation of the Torah (Bible) to Moses at Sinai as the earthshaking event when “the voice of God overwhelmed us.”

Now, to be perceived by man the word of God must be conveyed by a voice; yet to be divine it must be conveyed by something far greater than a voice.... The word of God is the power of creation. He said, Let there be, and it was.... The spirit of His creative power brought a material world into being; the spirit of His revealing power brought the Bible into being.

The revelation at Sinai is the phenomenon of God reaching out to man – descending to the human level. Moses was not seeking mystic experience, but rather was being sought after, “an act in God's search of man.”

The third part of the book, Response, concerns how we can respond to God's call. Heschel says we respond through our deeds. At the time of revelation we made a commitment to fulfil His commands even before we heard them. The people of Israel agreed: “All that the Lord has spoken, we shall do and we shall hear” (Exodus 24:7). This is “the precedence of faith over knowledge.” To act according to God's will is the basis for morality and ethics.

The problem of the soul is how to live nobly in an animal environment; how to persuade and train the tongue and the senses to behave in agreement with the insights of the soul. The integrity of life is not exclusively a thing of the heart.... Man is body and soul, and his goal is so to live that both “his heart and his flesh should sing to the living God.”



Book reviews express the opinions of the reviewers and not of the publisher.

