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Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

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Spiritual Link

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Removing the Rust of Karma

The escape from karma lies in the protection afforded by the saints....
The saints show us the way out.

They say: Let new actions be performed in the name of the Master, the individual working in the capacity of an agent only. The new actions, done in this spirit, will not be binding. The fate actions will have been undergone by the time the life comes to an end; the reserve actions saints partly take upon themselves and partly are undergone by the devotee, as the saints think proper.

Saints put the individual spirit in touch with the sound current, and as the spirit catches it and rises up, it throws off the influences of mind and matter, and gets stronger and stronger. The more the individual works on these lines, the easier the path for him. Otherwise the course becomes lengthy; but the saints are pledged to see him through, after they have initiated a soul. The practice of sound current cuts the rest of karma.

The current acts like a magnet on the spirit. It attracts the spirit to itself, and if the spirit were not covered by the rust of mind and matter, it would go up like a shot. The rust of attachments and impressions is removed by repetition (simran). The repetition of thoughts of the journey within replaces our everyday thoughts. Then the mind, instead of wandering outside, begins to take rest and peace within; and when it goes in, the spirit also goes with it; and when the spirit is in, the current in its turn pulls it up. Once Trikuti has been crossed (this will only be when all karmic accounts are settled), the soul never goes back into transmigration. It will go up to merge in its origin.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *Spiritual Gems*



We Get What We Deserve

From our Master, we get what we need, not what we think we want. These statements may sound similar, but are really very different. The truth is, we get what we need.

We are here on earth to live life as best we can, to interact with others and to settle our karmas. The trouble is that we all believe that we can plan how that is to be done. And much of the time, we also believe that we can predict the outcome.

Think of this when the unexpected happens; be conscious of the fact that Master is giving you exactly what you need, exactly when you need it. That should be very comforting, even though, at the time, you may not know why.

Maharaj Charan Singh put it more bluntly. He said: “You get what you *deserve*.” This could be quite worrying for some of us. But of course we should be thankful that it’s always tempered with the Master’s bountiful mercy. The words of Nam Dev, quoted in *Kabir, The Great Mystic*, express succinctly the daily ups and downs we must go through as we reap the consequences of our karmic account:

*One day He confers a caparisoned horse to ride,
While the next day the disciple
Has to trudge barefoot on the path.
Yet the devotee does not complain.
One day a beautiful bed is prepared,
And the next day the bare earth is denied.
Yet the devotee rejoices in all that.*

The law of karma is very simple. We reap what we have sown in the past, and that is what we deserve. Therefore, we should always act

with love and do only actions, of which we want to reap the results. If you sow wheat seeds, you get wheat. If you sow barley seeds, you get barley. And if you sow nettles, you get nettles. You wouldn't expect anything else. So why expect anything else of karma? We can't change what we have done in the past, and we have to pay off our debts. We can at least be happy that, with the Master's grace, we are able to pay them, welcoming each opportunity with a tranquil heart.

A memorable image can help us with this: whatever comes your way, be it welcome or unwelcome, wrap it in a pretty box and tie an imaginary label on it that says "From God, with love". Remember this when happy and welcome things happen to you but also remember to do it when unwanted things happen. By doing this we're a step closer to taking shelter in the Master – he is our refuge.

We learn from the teachings of the saints that, once we've received initiation, we may depend on the fact that whatever happens to us, there is a very good reason for it.

How can we even begin to know what we need? Much of the time, we don't even know what's going to happen to us tomorrow, or later today. So how can we build castles in the air a year ahead, or six months, or three months, or even a month ahead, basing our plans on what we think we will need? All of our life is, in fact, the adjustment of our karmic account.

Of course, to exist in this world, we have to try to plan, we shouldn't simply drift along. But what actually happens is beyond our control. The only thing that we can count on is that our Master is there with us. We should do our best, make provisional plans, try to prepare for what we think will happen, and then leave it to Master. This is explained beautifully in a letter from Maharaj Charan Singh in *Treasure Beyond Measure* :

You know that all our life is, in fact, the adjustment of our karmic account. It is difficult to say what is for our good. Better it is to leave everything in the hands of the Lord, and to be happy at what he does. Please do not feel perturbed at all. Turn to bhajan and simran, and you will be happy by abiding in the will of the Lord. View all your surroundings and relations as if this world was meant for adjustment of our accounts with them. Thank the Lord for what he has bestowed upon you, and keep your mind in bhajan and simran.

Our present lifespan on earth is so very short compared to infinity that whatever we plan for now is really totally insignificant. To think that we can influence the grand plan – into which everything (including ourselves) must fit – is patently ridiculous.

Only five hundred years ago there was no Sikhism; thirteen hundred years ago there was no Islam; just over two thousand years ago there was no Christianity; and three thousand years ago there was no Buddhism, yet all of these are now considered to be fundamental influences on man's conduct and destiny. Many wars have been fought over them. But even the great religions are just the blink of an eye in eternity. So how significant can a few days, weeks, months or even years in our own lives ever be? Clearly, in a personal way they can be significant. But only if they are used as our Master wants us to use them – in other words, in strengthening our connection to the force that drives everything, the Shabd.

Master asks us to do four things – all designed to make our journey back to our true home possible: to live a moral and upright life; not to eat meat, fish or eggs, or anything containing them; not to drink alcohol, take mind-altering drugs or use any tobacco products; and to meditate for at least two and a half hours every day.

This world won't change. Masters don't come here to change it. They come here to take us away. It all comes back to our meditation – our simran and bhajan – practical things that we can do to show that we are willing and trying hard, and that we want to work with him.

The soul has a deep need to return to its source and to merge with the Lord. Many of the problems of the present day are caused by this inner need, but there is little or no understanding as to what it is or what to do about it. People rebel against society and its norms; they fight wars over which is the right way to do this thing and that thing. Some people experiment with drugs in their desire for enhanced meaning of life – they know they're looking for something but they don't know what.

For a seeker, finding the path of Sant Mat means that now we don't have to go on searching, we don't have to experiment. The wonderful thing is that we have discovered what we really need to do, and a living Master has taught us how to do it. We are so fortunate! We have a living example to follow. On this path we don't need drug-induced experiences followed by misery; we don't need academic qualifications, or financial investment. All that we need to do is to follow those four simple rules.

Though Sant Mat is simple, we do need an iron will to keep to our promises. It is only by keeping to these promises that we will really understand that what we are offered is exactly what we need. The Master has said that he'll take many steps toward us for each faithful and obedient step we take toward him and will lovingly take us by the hand to lead us on.

Success in life lies in how we *respond* to what happens, not in what happens. What happens is entirely the result of what has happened before, but the quality of our response to it depends on something else – where our attention is. We can't change what has happened. That

is beyond our control. But we can change how we respond and this is very important.

Life on earth undergoes constant change, but we continue to need the same message, although it may be given in different ways. Each Master brings us what we need, in our particular time, in our particular circumstances. The basic message remains the same; it is only the way in which it is delivered that changes to suit the time and the needs of us all. Today we don't have to decipher ancient writings and argue over their translation and meaning. All we have to do is look to the living Master, attend to satsang and do our bhajan and simran. In *Sar Bachan Poetry*, we read Soami Ji's words of advice:

*I know, dear Soul, that you have been in distress,
In distress ever since you forgot Shabd,
And made friends with the mind.
Attend satsang, seek your true destination
And lose yourself in your Master's love.*

Maharaj Charan Singh gave exactly the same message for his disciples, expressed in the way that they needed to hear it:

Give up all feeling of depression and live a joyous life, fully relaxed and thanking the Lord for the great gift he has conferred on you. Keep your thoughts in simran and bhajan and see what happiness you will find within yourself. Do not worry about anything in this life, which is all an unpleasant dream. The real life lies beyond, where your Master awaits you.



Tune In and Listen

What a huge part music plays in our lives! There is music for every emotion and every occasion – celebrations, funerals, weddings and parties – and it is often played in the background of our everyday lives.

It seems that music is a universal language, expressing what words cannot. Although so many types of music are played throughout the world, people in all cultures are moved by music in similar ways, finding inspiration, release and comfort. John Denver, an American singer-songwriter, explains this when he says:

Music ... allows us to experience the same emotions. People everywhere are the same in heart and spirit. No matter what language we speak, what colour we are (no matter what our faith) music proves we are the same.

We find music present in all our places of worship, touching our hearts as it uplifts our spirits. However, Maharaj Jagat Singh says that “the outer music does not feed the soul, but only the mind.... Our aim should be to develop and be one with the heavenly music within.” The mystics tell us about another type of music – they say the whole universe came into being because of Sound and it is this divine melody that reverberates throughout creation. Shams-i-Tabriz says, “The universe was manifested out of the Divine Sound; from it came into being the Light.”

All life in the universe is continuously vibrating – every particle of the entire creation being constantly in motion. This is a scientific fact, and as light and sound are associated with movement, you could say that this sound sings within the entire creation. Saints tell us, based on

their own experience, that the divine song is resounding constantly inside every one of us and that contact with it brings deliverance to the soul. Just as it is impossible to describe true love, words can never describe the beauty and power of this music. In the *Song of Songs: the Soul and the Divine Beloved*, the author tells us:

No song is greater than the song of divine love. It is a melody in the soul and a sweetness of the spirit, a blissful intoxication and an ecstasy of mystic transcendence. It is the power that returns the soul to God, a healing balm that removes all sorrows. It is the one song that eclipses all other songs. Truly, divine love is the song of songs. The loves of this world pale to insignificance by comparison.

The poet John Milton suggests we should blame our own impotent ears if we cannot catch this song:

For how can we, whose spirits are warped earthward, and are defective in every heavenly element, be sensitive to that celestial sound? If our hearts were pure, our ears would resound and be filled with that supremely lovely music of the wheeling stars. Then indeed all things would seem to return to the age of gold. Then we should be immune to pain, and we should enjoy the blessing of a peace that the gods themselves might envy.

The saints confirm that a sound does indeed live within all creation but it is not the physical ears which are able to hear that spiritual sound, it is the listening power of the soul. The problem for us is that the soul is bound up with the mind, the mind is attached to the senses, and the senses are attached to the physical creation. Our

minds are so busy listening to the creation that we are not aware of the continual flow of this grand symphony.

This symphony, reverberating within us, is also referred to as ‘the audible life stream,’ heard with the ears of the soul. Our soul is a particle of that audible life stream and is filled with a longing to be part of it – but until we become dissatisfied with the outer music that fills our lives we do not seek the inner sound. As long as we are replete and satisfied with all the world has to offer, the inner path remains hidden. But there comes a point when nothing we find, that nothing we do, nothing we have brings satisfaction. We are filled with an inexplicable yearning, a craving for something we can’t even imagine. We are pining for that divine music that will soothe our soul permanently.

If we want to satisfy the soul’s yearning, we need to learn how to hear the call that is coming to it from its home. In *Spiritual Discourses*, Vol. II, the Master quotes a verse from Soami Ji, saying, “Attach yourself to the unending music of the Word. Other than the Word there is no way to break from this mortal clay pot.” Saints come into the creation to teach us the technique of attaching our consciousness to this “unending music” so that we can break free from the confines of the body. They tell us that although the music is continually sounding, unless we consciously connect with it we will not become free to experience that bliss within. In *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. IV, Maharaj Sawan Singh explains that this current runs through everything, everywhere:

The currents of the Lord pervade everywhere, like radio-waves. His divine music fills all space. Unless we are correctly tuned to it we cannot hear this music. As we grow more and more subtle, we begin to hear clearly its melodies. Shabd is a string which connects everyone and everything with the Lord.

In having this human form we have the capacity and the ability to connect with the Shabd. But even when we are ‘tuned in’ there are so many things that can prevent us from enjoying the spiritual uplift that could be ours. It’s not, as we may first think, physical worldly noise that deafens us, it’s the noise of our thoughts. Maharaj Sawan Singh tells us in *Spiritual Gems* how to quieten the mind in order to hear with the ears of the soul:

The aim of spiritual practice is firstly and primarily to make the mind still and motionless so that no thought of any kind may disturb it while it is listening to the Sound. As the vibrations of the mind are made quiet, the sound current will of itself become clearer and clearer without any need of putting pressure on the eyes, ears or brain. And for stilling the vibrations of the mind, all that is necessary is to repeat the five holy names with care and attention, so that the mind does not wander.

As we are often reminded in satsang, simran must be done with love to be effective. Repeating the names with a lack of attention will not be effective. Only devoted simran, simran repeated with love, can quieten the mind. Maharaj Sawan Singh in *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. IV, says:

*Through the True Word one realizes the truth.
Through the True Word one sings the praises of the Lord.*

The saints come to teach us how to hear the music of the True Word through the technique of meditation. Saints ‘sing’ their praises of the Lord - that is, they bestow the gift of Nam as described in the

poem above - and we love their singing. It captivates us, enthrals us and it enlivens us, far beyond any music of this world.

In the world, if we want to learn to sing, we go to a maestro, a master musician, to learn the art of song. We do whatever it is that they ask us to do. They subject us to boring scales and exercises, to repeating over and over the notes that will train our voices. We devote ourselves to our lessons because we want to sing as beautifully as they do. We cannot help ourselves – the song itself pulls us. Singing gives concentration, as all of the attention is absorbed and entwined with those beautiful sounds, and it is through that concentration that we find a kind of bliss. The difference between this and our concentration on the inner, spiritual sound is that when we reach that level where we merge into the Shabd, we are not playing it – it plays us.

The Lord is our father, and we are his children. Mothers and fathers sing lullabies to their children. Can we remember that feeling of being sung to by our mother or father? Hearing a parent singing to us gave us a feeling of being safe, and this enabled us, without fear or worry, to let go into sleep. Shabd is the melody that the Lord is singing to us, and he is always there by our side. The true form of the Master, which is the light and sound within, is with us every second of our lives, from our first breath to our last, and beyond. Once we get even a tiny taste of that, it is enough to sustain us for life; we then know that we are totally cared for and secure. What parent would let their child go uncomforted? He is always singing to us.

True is the Word

It is sweet Divine Sound.

Nanak sings the virtues of the True One,

And because of this singing he merges with the Lord.

Philosophy of the Masters, Vol. V

Sound and Light Within

Mystics tell us that when we begin the inner journey we will experience the various lights and sounds that mark the way. These lights and sounds are not physical. They exist in the inner regions and are manifestations of the light and music that issue from our own soul. ...

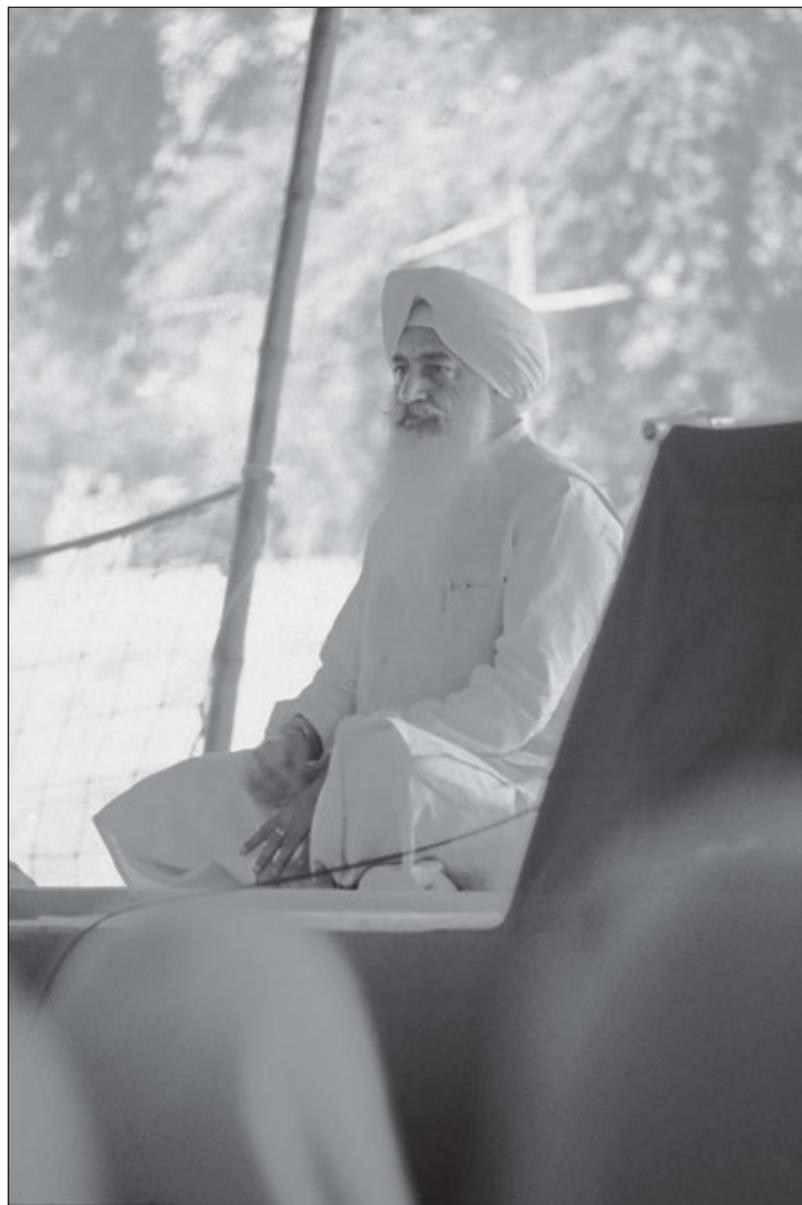
The lights and sounds we experience within help us on our spiritual journey. Like a magnet, Shabd pulls our soul upward toward the Lord. The sound emanating from the Shabd helps us find the direction to our true home; its light helps us stay on course and complete the journey. The soul's power of seeing the radiance of Shabd is called *nirat*, and its power of hearing its sound is called *surat*. ...

If we go out for a walk at night after dark and get lost, how can we find our way home? We can stand still for a while and listen for sounds coming from our house – the television for example. From the direction of the sound we can determine where our house is, but we need a light to illuminate the path so that we don't get scratched by thorns, fall into ditches, or experience other difficulties. Similarly, the light of the Shabd illuminates the path within.

Once the disciple connects his consciousness with the inner light, he need no longer dwell in darkness. The state of darkness is where the layers of karma covering our soul obscure its light; it is the level where death is an ever-lurking fear. The inner light shines upon the realized souls, illuminating the path to God-realization and to freedom from the cycle of birth, death and rebirth. ...

Within the light we will discover a sweet and captivating music. On seeing this light and hearing the celestial music, we will automatically lose our taste for the world and, instead, develop intense love for the Lord.

The Holy Name



An Unexpected Letter

Recently I heard from an old friend and here's the letter I wrote back to her:

My Dearest Friend,

What a wonderful surprise to hear from you after so many years – it must be at least twenty! It was compelling and, at the same time, awfully shocking to hear of the twists and turns that you've encountered along life's path. I think we always imagine people to be in the same or similar situations as those in which we last saw them. I cannot begin to imagine how you remained so strong throughout such ordeals. You're right of course – without our Master, how could any of us bear such things?

I agree wholeheartedly when you say that many of us take this path for granted, not understanding the amount of work ahead of us. I guess it's down to our inherent 'humanness' that when we get that very natural sense of releasing our burdens at initiation, we go on to imagine that our lives will become a breeze. We get that feeling of being safe in his hands and I suppose this can give us the notion that our karmas are over. Can you believe that I've even heard it said that it's the Master's duty to ensure we do our two and a half hours of meditation? Well I guess that's the power of the mind – it's no wonder that it's so often referred to as an enemy!

Your circumstances show how Master's grace is showered in abundance when we are sincere in our efforts as you, my dear sister, have clearly been. How else could we not only survive life's shocks but also go on to flourish and enjoy the security of his love? Keeping the promises made at initiation is a big responsibility. It's all too easy to forget that this

is a lifelong commitment, so it's thought-provoking to read that when things worsened for you, it spurred you on to meditate more. How you found and still find the time for so many hours each day is admirable. Do you ever sleep? No, seriously, reading your letter really does indicate to me that what we hear is true: if we can just put in that extra effort, we realize that he cares for us like little children. I remember reading somewhere that if we take one step towards the Master, he takes ten steps towards us. Your steadfastness in sticking to the promises and maintaining such sustained effort has been exemplary.

To be truthful, until I read your letter – which brought tears to my eyes – I thought life had thrown me a rotten deal. It's so easy to complain, and this seems to make us unable to see and appreciate the wonderful things we do have. When you wrote that after a time you even became thankful for your particular situation and (as seems to me) the scandalous things that were happening in your household, I was amazed that anyone could hold this attitude of loving endurance. As you say, the Master knows best and your comment that these things had clearly come to you as a result of a previous life, I think must surely be the truth, because the wonderful person I know you to be could never be deserving of such.

Your words have made me stand back and assess my own life and how I deal with personal difficulties. I, like so many, talk the teachings – but am I as diligent as I should be? Am I really living the teachings? Is my meditation my top priority each day? I find, since reading your letter, I'm scrutinizing my every move – I've even stopped myself mid-sentence when I've realized my words are unnecessary or not very kind. I've also made a promise to myself this morning, that from this day onwards I shall be sure to give my full time (and more if I can manage it) to my meditation each day. I realized that if you, in your seemingly impossible circumstances, can do it, then what excuse have I? After all, as we've been

told many times, meditation is at the heart of the Sant Mat teachings and is the highest service that we can offer our Master. I know as well as the next person that we must constantly put in the effort and, with his grace, it's our meditation which will rid us of the passions and our negative qualities. You have given me some much needed encouragement.

When I sat in my garden this morning, reflecting on your letter, I marvelled at how receptive you must have become to the Master's grace for, in circumstances that would have driven even the best of us to anger, you displayed only forgiveness. You have been such an example, my dear friend, showing that however difficult the struggle may seem, it's not impossible.

It's wonderful to know that you'll be able to visit in the spring, and for a few months too. I fully intend to save my news for when we meet, although not a lot has changed here, just a few grey hairs and a little plumpness! Let's hope we'll recognize each other! Mind you, all I need to do is look into your eyes; I know they won't have changed a bit.

I've copied and sent with this letter, a piece I found in *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. I, which I thought would be of interest – maybe you've even read it before, but when I came across it recently it made quite an impact on me.

Again thank you for getting in touch after all this time, I thought of you so often over the years, but never knew how to contact you. How he works his magic!

With affectionate Radha Soami greetings ...

Here's the excerpt from *Philosophy of the Masters*, that I mentioned in my letter.

The law of transmigration is irrevocable, and the results of good and bad actions are borne even by Brahma himself.

In the time of Kabir, the great sage, Ramanand, who was aware of all his previous lives, knew that since in a previous life he had impaled a rabbit on his spear and dragged it for some distance, he was to pay for that deed in his present life. It so happened that the same rabbit came back to this world as a human being and was a minister to the king at the time. Whenever Ramanand thought of the dire consequences of his previous action, he would tremble and become unhappy. One day Kabir asked Ramanand the reason for his anguish. Ramanand then spoke out his heart and related the whole story of the previous life, as well as the fact that he was to die by being impaled on the spear of the minister and dragged through the streets until the last breath of his life.

Kabir assured Ramanand that he would help him and then went to the house of the minister and remained waiting outside his gate. One day the minister asked Kabir the reason for his squatting there day after day, and Kabir narrated the whole story to him.

The minister was also an evolved soul and had knowledge of this incident in a previous life. He assured Kabir that although it was not possible for him to remit the punishment of death for Ramanand, he would not have him dragged. When Ramanand was told about this, he heaved a sigh of relief. History tells us that in due course the country was invaded by Sikandar Lodhi, and while Ramanand was sitting at his window, he was shot dead by the minister during the attack on the city.

The principle of the karmic law, or action and reaction, has been described in the Adi Granth in terms of pralabdh or fate karmas. It has been said that we are all helpless in the face of our fate karmas. Whatever a man does as a result of his pralabdh, he does under the influence of his fate karmas. Such is the irrevocable law of the negative power.

Relax and Let Go

When you try to feed a baby for the first time with a spoon, what happens? You really want him to eat the food because it will be good for him, but he doesn't know what you are doing. As the spoon comes towards him, he turns his head, dumping the apple sauce down his shirt and onto the floor. You try again, and this time he bends forward, spreading the spoonful onto his hair. He will not open his mouth even to taste it. You know he needs to eat, but you can't force him. So what do you do?

Maybe you start opening your own mouth, and making yummy sounds as you move forward with the spoon, or you try coaxing him with sweet words; perhaps you make it into a game, playing with him and trying to make his mouth open in a laugh.

Aren't we like that child, when the Master tries to coax us to take a little of what he's offering? He has prepared a delicious meal and filled our plate; he has even given us the hunger. All we have to do is try it. He coaxes and cajoles us; he plays and makes us laugh. He knows that if we just took a bite, it would be so good for us.

That contrary child, to top it all off, will put everything else in his mouth except for that spoon: his fingers, toys, bib – anything within his reach. Isn't that just like us? We are offered the delicious meal of heaven within us, yet we keep going out to taste everything else: watching television, browsing the internet, hanging out with friends. We are busy dining on the offerings of this world, while our Master keeps trying to get us to take a bite of the divine.

So what does he do? Well, he tries to reason with us. And he keeps it simple. To give us the support we need to take that bite, he gives us four simple instructions for living in this world. He has said that

the four vows are three *don'ts* and one *do* (the don'ts all supporting the do): *don't* eat meat; *don't* use drugs or alcohol or partake of any tobacco products; *don't* do anything immoral ... and *do* meditate.

It's the last one that we can find hard to swallow. We just don't want to take a bite of that delicious food he has prepared. How he is coaxing us, so that we will just take a bite! One of the ways Baba Ji does that is to give us simple, easy-to-remember one-liners about this vow.

He used to say: Just do it! But maybe we were all too lazy to just do it, so the past few years he has been saying: Just do nothing! Or: Just relax and let go! And that doesn't sound difficult at all. So, why don't we do it? Just do nothing, relax and let go?

I remember once reading the newspaper comic strip called *BC*, which is set in prehistoric times. A caveman is slouching against a rock. A second caveman walks by and asks: "What are you doing today?" The first replies: "Nothing." The second one says: "You did that yesterday!" The answer comes back: "Well, I wasn't finished ..."

That guy was so good at doing nothing that, when he wasn't finished, he continued to do it the next day. We've been told to perfect the art of doing nothing. Why is nothing so hard for us to do?

Mikhail Naimy describes our dilemma in *The Book of Mirdad*. In this passage, Mirdad is speaking to his disciples:

The Word is the ocean; you, the clouds. And is a cloud a cloud, save for the ocean it contains? Yet foolish, indeed, is the cloud that would waste away its life striving to pin itself in space so as to keep its shape and its identity for ever. What would it reap of its so foolish striving but disappointed hopes and bitter vanity? Except it lose itself, it cannot find itself. Except it die and vanish as a cloud, it cannot find the ocean in itself which is its only self.

A God-bearing cloud is Man. Save he be emptied of himself, he cannot find himself.

Mirdad describes the Word or Shabd as an ocean, while we are mere clouds, water condensed into a flimsy vapour. Without that ocean, we would not exist, for we are made of that same water, that Shabd. It is difficult for us to just do nothing, because we are so busy trying to prove we exist – as ego, as mind and body.

We waste our lives striving in vain to stop the inevitable destruction of our fragile form. If instead we can just let go of our attachment to that form, we will lose ourselves to find ourselves. That self that we must lose is the ego, and once it is gone we will find that only God remains.

When we cease our ego-driven struggles in this world, we finally see the truth of our non-existence, and realize God. We just have to relax and let go. Relaxing sounds easy, but we rarely achieve real relaxation, because we are so busy following the dictates of the mind. When we try to relax, we are continually interrupted by our mind's interest in whatever our senses perceive around us. In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II, we read that someone asked Maharaj Charan Singh, "Is it all right to be relaxed on the path? Is this a good path to be relaxed on?" He replied:

When are we tense? When our mind is scattered. And we are relaxed when our mind is concentrated at the eye centre – we are most relaxed at that time. If you see your blood pressure before you sit in meditation and then after you get up from meditation, you will know how relaxed it makes you. Why should we remain tense? We should always feel relaxed. But you can't have calculated relaxation, it has to come from within.

We can't feel relaxed when our mind is scattered. Getting our attention to the eye centre is the best means we have for relaxing. Maharaj Ji is saying that we can't just decide to be relaxed; it can't be contrived. It happens when we gather our attention at the eye centre, and it comes from within. Maharaj Ji adds: "So the purpose of meditation is to relax our mind, to create that bliss and peace within ourselves."

But when we sit down and shut our eyes, we may feel like our attention is not really there. Again a questioner asked Maharaj Charan Singh, "Master, when I try to concentrate in the darkness, my mind flits about. I'm wondering then if the attention can be in two places at once?"

Maharaj Ji replied, "Not only two places – the mind can run to a thousand places."

So here's the tricky part of doing nothing. As we know, the mind hates to stay still and do nothing. It runs out into the world, doing simran of anything and everything out there – until we can overpower it by doing simran of the Lord. However in *Die to Live*, Maharaj Ji says of simran: "Do we ever do it? We are only an instrument to do it. The Doer who's forcing us to do it is always there."

So we're not really doing it. We are just the instrument through which the Lord is playing simran, the way one might play a musical instrument. And it is the means used to collect our attention at the eye centre, so that we can relax and find peace and bliss. No wonder we are told to just do nothing, just relax and let go. We are doing nothing. *He* is doing it all, and we are just sitting and closing our eyes.

We just need to be like that caveman, sitting and doing nothing until we're done, day after day. And we'll know when we're done, because we will lose ourselves and discover the truth of the Shabd within us.

Even though we're essentially powerless, still we must make an effort. Any confusion that this apparent contradiction brings may be allayed by hearing the perspective of a twelfth-century Persian Sufi named Jilani when, in *The Sublime Revelation*, he says:

You cannot make something happen, but you must play your part. Exert yourself and help will come from your Lord. Get moving in this ocean in which you are immersed, then the wave will lift you up and roll you towards the shore. The prayer is from you and the response is from him. The effort is from you and the aid to success is from him. Be sincere in your quest and he will show you the entrance to his nearness. You will see the hand of his mercy reaching out toward you, and his kindness, his generosity and his love all yearning for you.

Translated by Muhtar Holland



Almost everyone can identify some parts of his or her life which need fixing, but somehow never get taken into the repair shop. So many pressing demands. So much to do each day, and so little time to do it in. So few opportunities to sit back, take a deep breath, and calmly resolve to make those changes that, deep down we know should be made. When you die, which would you rather have in good working order: what is within or what surrounds you outside?

Life is Fair

All Life Is Sacred

The Introduction to the vegetarian cookbook, *British Taste*, recently published by Science of the Soul, advises us that:

A vegetarian diet that holds all life to be sacred is a first step on our journey towards God-realization. With a commitment to being vegetarians – eating no animal products, including meat, fish, fowl, eggs and anything that contains their by-products – we are making a clear and significant statement that our priority is to honour God and his creation. We are saying that instead of living in a world of exploitation, we are living in a world of love.

A respect for life and the connection between spiritual growth and vegetarianism is not a new concept. If we look into the past, we find numerous well-known figures and schools of religious thought which embraced this way of life. Thousands of years ago Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and the early Greek philosophers – Pythagoras, Plato, Porphyry, Plotinus and others – all endorsed a non-meat diet. Expressing the choice in modern terms, the Introduction continues:

As vegetarians we are practising a lifestyle of compassion and kindness, not only in our personal life but also in relationship to the life of the planet. A vegetarian diet makes less of a negative impact on the resources and health of the earth and helps support the ethical treatment of animals. Positive moral choices have significance far beyond our own personal horizon.

Food is of vital importance to us – without it, we cannot live. It nurtures us, cheers us and, to tell the truth, engages much of our attention. Although we shouldn't become obsessive, what we eat and how it finds its way to our table deserves care simply because it supports the life of the body, and it is the life of our body that gives us the opportunity to find the life of the spirit. In a section, "Food for spiritual discipline" in *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. III, Maharaj Sawan Singh tells us:

In the first instance our conduct of life should be good. Wholesome (satvik) food should be prepared from vegetables and cereals purchased out of the hard-earned income acquired by honest means. The person preparing should have wholesome (satvik) ideas and he should repeat and remember God's name with a peaceful and tranquil mind while preparing the food. The effect of these measures is reflected in the food and in those who eat it. By taking such food there would be peace in their minds and they would readily engage in remembering the Lord.

The relationship between honest earnings and nurture is illustrated in a story which Great Master (Maharaj Sawan Singh) used to tell. It goes like this:

A rich and influential man named Malik once asked Guru Nanak to come to a sumptuous meal at his house. Guru Nanak refused Malik's invitation but accepted one from Lalo, a poor carpenter who could offer only a coarse and seemingly unappetising menu. When asked why he had chosen to eat at Lalo's table, Guru Nanak requested a piece of bread from each household. He squeezed each piece in turn. From Malik's there oozed blood. But from Lalo's came milk.

The inference we can draw from this story is that the money which bought Malik's good things was obtained at the expense of other beings – we don't know at whose expense or how, but we do know that there are plenty of examples of cruel or dishonest lifestyles around us today just as in the past. The reality is that only honesty, hard work and pure intentions will bring us the true sustenance we all crave.

There is a great deal more good advice in the passage quoted above. Maharaj Sawan Singh briefly touches upon the kind of vegetarian food that is good for meditators, advising that it should be *satvik* or calming. Anyone interested in learning more about the different qualities of various foods can read more in *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. III, where the nature of *satvik* food, *rajsik* food (heating, exciting) and *tamsik* (that which creates laziness) is explained.

Satvik attributes can be derived not just from the food itself but from the way in which the food is handled and prepared. As Great Master points out, it is so beneficial to carry out simran whilst preparing food. And why would we not want to celebrate this pleasant activity with the deeper pleasure of remembering our Master? The cookbook Introduction referred to above has something to say about this:

When life is full of responsibilities and too overwhelming, we need to find those activities that can give us a sense of peace and calm. There is something nurturing and satisfying about preparing a meal for loved ones. Even taking a little time to cook for ourselves can dissolve the stress of the day and give us a sense of well-being that is beyond the goodness of the food itself.

It's even better if we can continue this sense of calm into our mealtime. Food eaten in a rush or whilst watching unpleasant scenes on TV is not going to give good digestion! Family mealtimes

can naturally be a little harum-scarum, with children (and adults) hurrying to go on to other activities. So it's important for parents to keep their cool and to establish a few ground rules. Equally, if we eat alone, a bit of discipline (how many of us slouch on the sofa?) will pay dividends.

Some of us will remember the days when, as children, we were taught to say grace before meals. In schools, the simple lines repeated by many may have become an unconsidered gabble. Nevertheless, "For what we are about to receive, may the Lord make us truly thankful", together with countless other graces in as many languages, still remain a powerful statement. They are powerful because they express the connection between us, the food that sustains us, and God our maker. All life came from him – our life and the life of what we eat. Even the ability to be grateful is in his hands. So let us humbly remember him as we take the nurture he provides.



We are the creators of our destiny. Though it often seems as if pain and suffering are powerful foes that will not allow us to enter the Land of Bliss, we have been given a way to vanquish those enemies of happiness. Right living helps give us the strength to unsheathe the sword of spiritual realization. This weapon is invincible, be sure of that. Hold firmly to what is good and true. Discard the rest. As humans we have the option to choose, at every moment, which way to face: this way or that? Towards freedom or bondage? Spirit or the senses? Compassion or hardness of heart? Carefully decide the direction in which you wish to move. Then go forward – with joy.

Life is Fair

Food for Thought

TIME FOR SOMETHING SPECIAL...



MATAR PANIR?

'YUM, THANKS!'



CHEESEY CHIPS?

'YUM, THANKS!'



CAKE & CUSTARD

'YUM, THANKS!'

DIVINE AMBROSIA?



'THANKS, BUT I AM A
BIT BUSY TODAY!'

Truth in a Nutshell

No Room For Two

A certain man knocked at his friend's door; his friend asked:

“Who is there?”

He answered, “I.” “Begone”, said his friend, “tis too soon; at my table there is no place for the raw.”

He turned sadly away, and for a whole year the flames of separation consumed him.

Then he came back and again paced to and fro beside the house of his friend.

He knocked at the door with a hundred fears and reverences, lest any disrespectful word might escape from his lips. “Who is there?” cried his friend.

He answered: “Thou, O charmer of all hearts!”

“Now”, said the friend, “since thou art I, come in: there is no room for two I's in this house.

The double end of thread is not for the needle; in as much as thou art single, enter the needle.”

Rumi, Poet and Mystic, translated by Reynold A. Nicholson

You will get the feeling that you are nothing, when you merge in the love of the master. You are not mentally or symbolically to feel that you are nothing, or say, “I am nothing”, nor to feel that you are everything. You will just forget what you are. When you absolutely blend yourself into the love of another person, then you forget what you are. Then you know that you are nothing. Everything is ‘he’ or ‘she’. Similarly, we have to forget by meditation that we are anything and know that everything is the Master.

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

Forgiveness Works Both Ways

Forgiveness works in two directions. In our lifetime there will be occasions which call on us to forgive others for wrongs committed against us. Equally, there is a need for us to ask forgiveness of others and from the Lord for wrongs that we have perpetrated. In *Message Divine* we read, “One who cheerfully forgives the mistakes of others can also hope for the forgiveness of his own faults from the Lord.” Let’s take both these conditions – being forgiving and asking forgiveness – to see what we can learn.

I forgive you

“I forgive you” can be a hard thing to say – and is even harder to genuinely put into practice. Maharaj Sawan Singh says in *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. III: “*Kshama* or forgiveness means to forgive the faults of others, and to have no thought of it in the mind thereafter.” So to forgive means to let go of the memory of the hurt – not to hold on to any part of it but to be as if the hurt had never happened. Maharaj Charan Singh, writing in *Divine Light*, advises us, “Many things do happen in this world and we are naturally perturbed over the wrongs done to us. The best remedy to shake off brooding over them is to forgive and forget.”

This is easier to practise if our attitude to life is stoical rather than based on desire and expectation. Epictetus, the Greek philosopher who is known for his advice on cultivating a serene attitude towards things that are beyond our control, said:

*Seek not that the things which happen should happen as you wish;
but wish the things which happen to be as they are,
and you will have a tranquil flow of life.*

It is ultimately we who are the losers if we are unable to take this advice. “Forgive others” says Maxwell Maltz, the American writer of a celebrated self-help manual. “Do it not only for their sake, but for your own. If you don’t, you will feel within you a nauseating resentment, destroying you from within.” And Maharaj Charan Singh says in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. III: “If you’re angry with somebody, if you have a spirit of revenge against somebody, you can’t live with yourself at all. You’re unhappy with yourself. You don’t actually hurt the other person, you hurt yourself more.”

How can we best follow the advice to forgive and forget when we may have been badly hurt? Robert Muller, a twentieth-century peace activist, suggests a positive, proactive approach: “Be the first to forgive, to smile and take the first step, and you will see happiness bloom.... Do not wait for others to forgive, for by forgiving, you become the master of fate, the fashioner of life, the doer of miracles. To forgive is the highest, most beautiful form of love.” And Maharaj Charan Singh advises a two-pronged approach, starting with controlling our thoughts and emotions through reason. He writes in *Light on Sant Mat*: “Self-control is emphasized in all paths, in all spiritual disciplines and in all religions. This should first be practised by exercising your will and firmness of mind, and realizing the evils and disadvantages of getting angry.”

If we could take our understanding of Sant Mat to a logical conclusion we would realize the truth of what Maharaj Sawan Singh says in *The Dawn of Light*, difficult though that may be:

Whatever good or bad happens to you, through whatever person or object, directly proceeds from our loving Father. All persons and objects are but tools in his hand. If an evil befalls you, think it as his greatest mercy.

Achieving this level of faith, a faith which will make it possible to forgive and forget the worst of hurts, may be well nigh impossible if we rely solely on reason. As satsangis we have a much more powerful tool. Maharaj Charan Singh says in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. III:

You see, if you keep your mind in simran and try to attach yourself to the spirit within, you will rise above these little things which unnecessarily perturb you and make you angry.

Please forgive me

In the book *Living Meditation*, the writer points out that we have got things back to front: “We forgive ourselves for our lack of effort [in meditation] yet we put no bridles on our anger towards the world. It should be just the opposite. If we need to be angry, we should be angry towards our mind.” Similarly, we are very conscious of those people in need of our forgiveness but perhaps blind to the things we have done for which we should be truly sorry. Maharaj Charan Singh advises in *Quest for Light* that we be alert to others’ feelings and that if we have done wrong, we should be prompt in seeking forgiveness: “If anyone feels that he has hurt someone’s feelings, he should immediately make amends by admitting his fault and asking for forgiveness from the injured person. In this way the clouds of guilt and uneasiness are lifted and love comes in.”

Sometimes there is more at stake than simply feelings. Our unwise actions can wreak material damage and there is no doubt that when we do things that harm others, we harm ourselves by adding to the already heavy burden of karma that we bear. We need not imagine that we can avoid the repercussions. Maharaj Charan Singh tells us:

Forgiveness we should not expect merely for the asking. If that were all so simple, we would go on committing all the sins and go on asking for forgiveness side by side. No, we cannot deceive the Lord like that. If a man commits murder and then asks for forgiveness when he is going to be hanged, nobody is going to forgive him then. He must reap what he has sown and pay for what he has done. This is the law of this world. There is only one way to clear all our sins and that is to attach our mind and soul to the Shabd which is ringing within us. It alone has the power and the quality of clearing off all sins and karmas. Therein lies the real forgiveness.

Quest for Light

So we have to be prepared to face the consequences whatever they be, and then make our peace with God. Just as, in trying to forgive, it is meditation or simran that will help us, so Maharaj Ji tells us: “Bhajan is the real repentance and this alone will obtain forgiveness.” He further says, “When an action has been performed, a deed committed, the only way to clear the burden is through bhajan and simran. It is the voice of the Lord within which purifies us and forgives us for what we have done.”

Though we should recognize where we have gone wrong, there is no need to indulge in guilt: “The Master does not necessarily punish our every wrong”, says Maharaj Charan Singh in *Divine Light*. “If our repentance is genuine and sincere, and we take to meditation heartily and eagerly, then he pardons us.”

He describes for us a loving heavenly Father who welcomes the return of the prodigal soul with open arms: “The Lord’s gate is always open. He is love and grace itself. Start anew with love, earnestness and a strong resolve. The Master ... is all forgiveness.”

Getting a glimpse of the nature of his all-encompassing love and compassion should help to make us, in our small way, more tolerant and forgiving to our peers. Forgiveness works both ways.



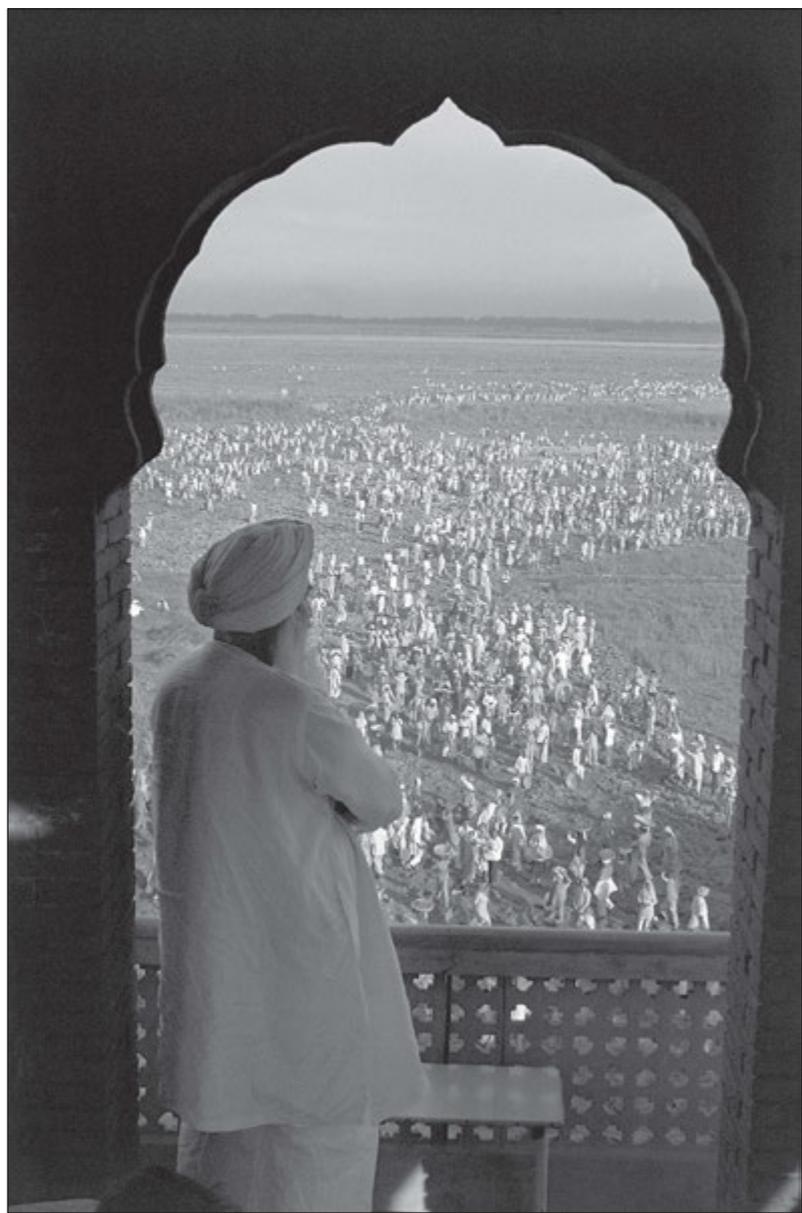
Two friends, Bold and Faithful, walking by the riverside, started a quarrel in which Faithful eventually lost his temper and struck out at Bold. They soon made it up again but Bold felt hurt and, as they sat resting, he wrote in the sand, "Today my good friend struck me."

Eventually the pair reached the bathing spot they had been looking for and went in for a dip. Unlucky Bold got into difficulties in the drifting water weed and could have drowned but for the resourceful Faithful who pulled him out. As he recovered from the near drowning, Bold scratched on a stone, "Today my good friend saved my life."

Faithful asked, "After I hurt you, you wrote in sand and now you write on a stone. Why is that?" Bold replied, "Because when someone hurts us it should be written in sand where the wind will blow all memory of that hurt away. Writing in sand does not last. But when someone does something good for us we should engrave it on stone and remember it forever."

Learn to write your hurts in the sand and to carve your blessings in stone.

Story by satsangi



Mirror Mirror

Some of us may know the fairy tale of Snow White. In this story Snow White's stepmother, the wicked queen, was jealous of her beauty and had a magic mirror into which she would look, asking, "Mirror mirror on the wall, who is the fairest of them all?" She expected the mirror to reply, "You are the fairest of them all."

Outside the world of fairy tales, we also use mirrors to check our reflection – we do it every day. Similarly, just as we look at our physical reflection, we use a certain amount of mental self-scrutiny – just like a mirror – to tell us how we are doing in life generally. The queen's use of the mirror was vain; she measured herself only on a scale of physical beauty. How about us? Do we see our internal or our external appearance? Do we see our strengths or our weaknesses? Are we kind or cruel to ourselves?

When treading the spiritual path, a little introspection of the right kind can be quite effective. Introspection can help identify mistaken attitudes and discern what is preventing us from reaching our destination. After all, we have been coming into this world of birth and death for countless lifetimes. How lucky we now are to have this human form and to possess the power of discrimination. Exercising our discrimination will strengthen that light which will eliminate the darkness of our weaknesses. In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II, Maharaj Charan Singh has given a wonderful example:

If this room is filled with darkness, you do not know how much that darkness covers up; but if a little ray of light comes in, you know instantly that this whole room is filled with small particles. Similarly, when we do not know about or are not on

the path, we are not aware of our bad points. Rather, we take pride in our habits. But when we are on the path, that ray of light comes within us. Then we analyze ourselves and find that we have many bad habits. In fact bad habits were there before but we are now in a position to analyze them, to realize them.

The light that Hazur refers to is the understanding we gain through satsang and the experience of meditation. He points out that it is not that when we get initiated we suddenly develop negative tendencies – rather, initiation makes us *aware* of our existing weaknesses. This realization is the key to transformation. Hazur continues:

The very realization that we are committing a sin and are the victim of this weakness, that very realization is a great step toward getting rid of that weakness. If we don't realize that we are committing sins, we will never be able to get rid of those sins at all. But when you know you're committing a sin and try to help yourself, the Lord's grace will also be there to help you.

This process of introspection, then, is an important element on the path towards self-realization and God-realization. When we decide to follow the path of the saints we are actually expressing the desire to merge into the Master. We certainly need to reflect a little so that we can realize what it is in our lives that we need to change. Most of us have fallen into bad habits, underlying all of which is a scattering of attention. This can make life painfully unsatisfactory. For instance, as the present Master sometimes points out, we are thinking of the world when we are sitting for our meditation and we are regretting our lost meditation when we are dealing with the world!

We go to the Master with the expectation that, like a therapist, he will use a healing technique to bring about our perfect balance and happiness. However, the purpose of the Master is to help us realize the truth for ourselves. We have to learn to be strict and self-regulating. In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II, Maharaj Charan Singh explained this to someone who asked if there was a danger of being too severe:

There is no danger of being hard on ourselves at all. We have been too soft with ourselves all through – that is why we are part of the creation. If we had been a little hard or strong with ourselves we would not be here today. We have been too soft. We always try to justify our weaknesses and then we become a slave of them. And then we find we are part of this creation. So we should try to be hard with ourselves.

When our attention is scattered, if we start by simply concentrating on one task at a time we will be on the way to success. The ethos of multitasking is not conducive to the spiritual path. Focusing on the present, with proper time set aside for work, rest and meditation will give us the ideal environment to help us concentrate. It is this that will eventually conquer our weaknesses. In *Spiritual Gems*, Maharaj Sawan Singh tells us that it can't be done in a hurry:

This detaching the attention from external connections is a slow affair. Habits become second nature. It takes time to form new habits. But slow and steady wins the race and practice makes perfect. Follow your mind for a minute and see what keeps it away from its headquarters. Avoid whatever interferes and accept what helps in reaching your objective.

The Master is pointing out that one of the most essential virtues is patience – together with faith in the Master. The habits of our mind are ingrained and to reverse this will take time. If we have been following the path for a few years and have not seen any change in our behaviour we should not be disheartened. We should rather keep on trying and leave the results in his hands, as Maharaj Jagat Singh advises in *Science of the Soul*:

If a human being takes his attention inward, probes inside and takes possession of the wealth which the almighty Lord has put there, then the five foes can be conquered. The sound current or audible life stream is inside and can be heard by anyone who turns his attention inward. If man inverts his hearing faculties, he can hear it.

So far we have been thinking about how a bit of introspection helps to get us started on the spiritual path. But there comes a time when we have to abandon self-scrutiny. We have to *forget* ourselves entirely. In the passage just quoted, Maharaj Jagat Singh tells us that the Shabd is inside us “and can be heard by anyone who turns his attention inward.” So why do we not automatically and easily realize the Shabd inside us? It is due to the fact that we have limited our understanding and willingly accept this limitation. We are slow to realize our divine heritage. We believe that we are human rather than spiritual beings. This is exactly what we have to forget. The story of the thirsty dog may help to throw some light on our situation:

A thirsty dog was overjoyed when it came to a river. At last it could quench its thirst. But each time the dog approached, it saw its own image reflected and went no further, thinking another dog was there in the water. Deceived and scared by its own image, the dog ran away

and was left thirsty. This happened again and again. Only when it was in utter desperation, left with no other choice, did it go ahead in spite of itself and at last drink its fill.

Our situation is just the same as the dog's. We live within the sphere of duality, our view of reality blocked by the self-image created by ego. The whole purpose of introspection, followed by self-forgetfulness, is to purify us and make us receptive to our Master's love. We have to go beyond our ego, gradually allowing the image of the Master to grow within ourselves, replacing self. In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II, Maharaj Charan Singh explains how we can do this:

Simran builds the image of the Master.... Simran doesn't let you waver from dhyān, from that particular spot, because simran helps you to concentrate there, where you want to be with your Master.

When we sit for meditation, that place behind the eyes is exactly where we should be. Then, through spiritual practice, we will come to see glimpses of the Radiant Form of the Master, manifesting from the Shabd within us. Our mistaken concept of duality – separation between us and Shabd – starts fading away.

When this happens, it's as if we are looking into the mirror of ourselves and seeing sparks of the divine power rather than the old illusions. It is this divinity that is within every one of us. We realize that we are nothing but Shabd.

Returning to the fairy tale, we might ask "Mirror mirror on the wall, who is within us all?"

And the answer will come, "Shabd is within us all."

I Will Lift up My Eyes

The Bible contains a group of spiritual hymns known as psalms which are ascribed to King David, a leader of the Jewish people in the tenth-century B.C.E. Some of these verses lend themselves to a mystical interpretation and can give wonderful encouragement to spiritual seekers. The verse below is Psalm 121.

*I will lift up my eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.
My help cometh from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.
He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber.
Behold he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.
The Lord is thy keeper: the Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand.
The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night.
The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul.
The Lord shall preserve thy going out and coming in from this time forth and even for evermore.*

A mystic interpretation suggests that we are being told to raise our consciousness to the third eye, the spiritual hills, and there we will find the help that will take us back to our true home. Behind and between the two eyes, we will find the Shabd, the Holy Name, resounding.

My help cometh from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

Contact with the Shabd will lead us to its source. Just as the psalmist says, we will find that our help is coming from the Lord, who created heaven and earth through the dynamic power of Shabd. In *Divine Light*, Maharaj Charan Singh quotes Guru Nanak who explains:

*The Word created the earth,
The Word created the sky,
Through the Word emanated light.
The entire world is sustained by the Word,
The Word, O Nanak,
Dwells in every being.*

Guru Nanak informs us that God sent out his Shabd to create the entire vast creation and that the creation is now sustained by this wonderful power which is resounding in every being.

As satsangis we know that we can follow this truth still further and say that our true friend or helper is our living Master. This is because the Shabd manifests as the living Master who comes to connect us to our home with the Lord. The Lord, the Shabd and the living Master are the same one power which helps and guides us. And the word 'help' here conveys the strongest possible meaning: if someone drowning cries out for help, when that help arrives it saves his or her life. We are drowning in the sea of *maya* or illusion and the Master saves us by pulling us out with the rope of Nam. The Master is our help, the Master is our lifeline, the Master is our everything.

He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber.

When the Master brings us onto the path, we can confidently feel that no harm can now ever come to us and that nothing can take us away from the path. The Master directs our karmas so everything that does happen to us takes us towards our home.

In the worldly sense, it doesn't mean that nothing unpleasant ever happens to us – but we can take comfort from the thought that everything we go through pays off our karmas. In fact we read that

the Master's great blessings are poverty, disease and dishonour. From the worldly point of view these are disastrous, but spiritually they are terrific blessings because they loosen our ties to the world and attach us to him.

The Master is always attentive to our needs, but our needs are not necessarily what we desire. Our need is that the reality within us, our soul, should be taken out of this dark dungeon of the body, within the prison of the world, and back to our true home in Sach Khand.

It is natural for us as humans to make efforts to make the best of our surroundings here, but Masters have always reminded us that the world is not our true home. We are on the march, with an unsleeping general who watches over our every footstep.

Behold he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.

The Lord is thy keeper: the Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand.

The psalmist tells us that the Lord is ever awake and alive, sustaining the entire creation. The Lord is our keeper, so close to us that he is like shade over our right hand – here with us all the time, even when our Master's physical form is far away. The psalms were written for people living in the Middle East, in a hot country where the sun could be fierce. So having shade on one's right hand conveys the coolness and tranquillity that guides the actions (undertaken by the right hand) of someone who takes the Master's protection.

The whole tone of this psalm is one of care and love. On reading it, a sense of gratitude wells up in us – gratitude to have been plucked from the world and brought into the atmosphere of satsang. How can we make the best use of our good fortune?

We may have heard the Master remind us that it is the Lord's grace that has given us human birth; it is the Lord's grace that brought us to

the path; it is the Lord's grace that granted us the boon of initiation – now we should take advantage of that by doing our meditation.

It is meditation that will transform us from a wayward and egotistical individual to a spiritual being. So, amidst the trials and tribulations of our self-inflicted karmas, we should keep on with our meditation.

The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night.

The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul.

Whilst we are protected from evil from without, the Master also works to ensure that we are protected from *ourselves*. The object of meditation is to become conscious of the Shabd which is resounding at the eye centre, but there is a fine distinction to be made in understanding how that is to be achieved. If we think that our own efforts will attach us to the Shabd, we will be sadly disappointed.

We might meditate for ten hours a day, every day, for thirty lifetimes, but as long as we are doing it out of ego, we will go nowhere. We have to make the effort, but our efforts at meditation should be done with submission, with the attitude that “I love my Master, he wants me to meditate for two and a half hours each day so that is why I'll do it. I want to please my Master.” The words of this psalm remind us of the total reliance that a true disciple places on his Master. This means that submission replaces the arrogant and mistaken idea that we have goals to set and mountains to climb *on our own*.

Of course we have to make the effort, but the inner door is locked and only the Master can open it. Our task is to keep trying to focus at the eye centre, trying to keep still and to let go. Like a beggar, we should always keep knocking on the door. Maharaj Sawan Singh explains, “Only he or she realizes the Sound on whom the Lord showers his grace.”

The Lord, as we've heard in the psalm, is closer to us than the shade of our right hand; he knows when we are thinking of him, when we are doing our simran in the day, when we are meditating. The power of the Lord is within each word of our simran, and every time we repeat the holy names we are realizing our spiritual nature.

As we persist, we begin to see a distinction – it's not our feeble efforts that are making us spiritual but, because we are making the effort, the Master is helping us reach our spiritual objective.

When the Master sees we are doing our best to try to keep within the principles, and faithfully doing our meditation, then he opens the inner door and we become conscious of the Shabd. When this happens, we are transformed; all doubts disappear and everything about us – body, mind and speech – becomes pure, or “preserved from all evil”.

The Lord shall preserve thy going out and coming in from this time forth and even for evermore.

Through the Master, the Lord helps us in the world as well as inside within the inner regions. Because the inner regions are so vast compared to this physical universe, without the Master as guide, it would be very easy for us to get lost or be led astray. But, once initiated, no evil can approach us if we focus on the five holy names. Without the Master guiding us, we could not even take one step inside, but by following our Master's instructions, our soul is strengthened and prepared for the inner journey.

Now that we have been initiated by a living Master, our coming and going, our dying and being reborn, is ending. He will take us to our home in Sach Khand where we will stay forever. Our karmic debts paid, our soul regains its original status of being a citizen in the country of the Lord.

This all comes to pass when we lift up our eyes to the inner hills – when by the grace of the Master, we ask to receive the help that the Lord has provided for us.



It is not difficult for the Master to take a soul upward, but premature uplifting causes harm. Just as fine silk cloth, when spread upon a thorny hedge, is torn to pieces if suddenly pulled away, so the soul, entangled in the thorns of karma, which penetrate every cell in the body, must be gradually purified by the Master's love. By his grace the soul is freed from these thorns and the karma is slowly sifted out from every cell in the body. You will get everything you wish – things more wonderful and remarkable than you ever dreamed of. He, who has to give you all, is sitting inside, in the third eye. He is simply waiting for the cleanliness of your mind and is watching your every action.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *Spiritual Gems*

Book Review



Christian Meditation: The Gethsemani Talks

BY JOHN MAIN

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In 1976 Benedictine monk John Main gave a series of three talks on meditation to the Trappist monks at Gethsemani Abbey in Kentucky. In his introduction to this volume Lawrence Freeman writes that these talks, reprinted many times since, have “transformed the understanding of prayer for countless people.” Indeed, according to Freeman, these talks “mark a historic moment in the spiritual history of our time.”

Main – known within the order as Dom John – begins his talks by explaining that he wishes to share with the monks “an understanding and an experience of prayer,” and not “a mere theory of prayer.” The prayer he discusses is one using repetition of a mantra. Main explains that while he once, like most Christians, believed that this type of prayer belonged solely to Eastern religious traditions, he later discovered that it also had deep roots in early Christian teachings.

In the first talk Dom John relates how, long before he became a Benedictine monk, he had first learned to meditate. He was serving in the British Colonial Service in Kuala Lumpur when he met an Indian swami and was “deeply impressed by his peacefulness and calm wisdom.” Dom John explains to the monks:

For the swami, the aim of meditation was the coming to awareness of the Spirit of the universe who dwells in our hearts, and he recited verses from the Upanishads: “He contains all things, all works and desires and all perfumes and tastes. And

*he enfolds the whole universe and, in silence, is loving to all.
This is the Spirit that is in my heart. This is Brahman.”*

Over the next eighteen months, Main practiced meditation under the swami's guidance. The swami told him, “all you have to do is to meditate,” meditation is “very simple,” it is saying the mantra “faithfully, lovingly and continually,” and “I really have nothing else to tell you.” All that mattered was practice – regular daily practice, morning and evening. Whenever Main asked theoretical questions or expressed impatience, “the swami would either ignore my crassness or else would reply with the words that really sum up his teaching and wisdom: ‘Say your mantra.’ In all those eighteen months, this was the essential core of everything he had to say: ‘Say your mantra.’”

When Main returned home to teach Law at Trinity College in Dublin, he realized that his daily meditation had become “the real axis on which my day was built.” The unexpected death of his nephew impelled him to think deeply about the real purpose of his life. “I was forcibly struck by the fact that the most important thing in my entire existence was my daily meditation.” This realization led him to become a monk.

Once admitted to the Benedictine order, Main adjusted to its traditions and let go of the mantra-based meditation practice in a spirit of obedience. But nearly a decade later he discovered that the third-century Christian saint John Cassian had taught the very same mantra-based meditation practice that Main had learned from the Indian swami. Cassian himself had learned it from Abba Isaac, one of the great spiritual teachers of the Desert Fathers.

Monks in the Christian tradition take a vow of poverty. Dom John said that the discipline of repeating a single word or a single phrase brings one to the real meaning of ‘spiritual poverty,’ a poverty far more profound than lack of wealth or property. As John Cassian explained the discipline, “The mind thus casts out and represses the rich and ample matter of all thoughts and restricts itself to the poverty of a single verse.” Dom John explains, “In the vision of prayer of John Cassian... we renounce thought, imagination, even self-consciousness itself.” The discipline of repeating the

mantra implies a genuine surrender. “Having surrendered everything we have, everything by which we exist or know that we exist, we stand before the Lord God in utter simplicity.”

In the second talk at the Gethsemani Abbey, Dom John explained that the first stage of meditation is when we say the mantra silently, the second stage is when we begin to hear the mantra repeating itself, and the third stage is when we listen to the mantra. Ultimately, this leads to a profound silence and an experience of the divine presence, which cannot be explained or taught, but which each person must experience for himself.

In meditation – which Dom John also termed “meditative prayer,” “contemplative prayer” or “Christian prayer” – we are not talking to God or forming holy ideas about God. “In meditation we are not thinking about God at all... In meditation we seek to do something immeasurably greater: we seek to be with God.” This requires stillness and concentration. “It is a process of learning to pay attention, to concentrate. We have to *attend* both in the English sense of the word of *paying attention* and in the French sense of *waiting*.”

For Dom John, meditation is a way of surrender, of annihilation of the self. It is “the way to experience the truth of the words of Jesus: “The man who would find his life, must first lose it.”

But to arrive at our selfhood – and it is to that invitation we respond when we meditate, or, putting it in the more felicitous and perhaps more accurate language of the East, to realise ourselves – we must pass into the radical experience of personal poverty with an unflinching self-surrender.

This process tests our faith to the utmost. According to Dom John, “Meditation is the prayer of faith precisely because we leave ourselves behind *before* the Other appears, and with no pre-packaged guarantee that he will appear. The essence of all poverty consists in this risk of annihilation.”

But through annihilation of self, we paradoxically discover who we are and what our real value is. Dom John quotes St. Augustine, “Man must first be restored to himself, that, making in himself as it were a stepping-

stone, he may rise thence and be borne up to God.” Dom John says, “In contemplative prayer we seek to become the person we are called to be, not by thinking about God but by being with Him. Simply to be with Him is to be drawn into being the person He calls us to be.”

In the third and final gathering, Dom John answers questions from the monks. When asked about how to deal with distractions that come up in meditation, he said that the purpose of the mantra is

simply to bring your mind to peace, silence and concentration... The essence, the art of saying the mantra is to say it, to sound it, to listen to it, and just to ignore the distractions. Give primacy to the mantra above all else. Gradually, as you persevere in saying the mantra, the distractions do become less and less of a reality.

When asked how we should prepare for meditation, he quoted John Cassian: “What we want to find ourselves like while we are praying, that we ought to prepare ourselves to be before the time of prayer.”

All in all, Main says meditation is a process in which we “come to terms with” the truths taught in religion. While we may know as a point of doctrine that we have a divine origin and that we are “temples of holiness,” in meditation we come to discover these truths in our own experience.

We have so often lived our lives on a merely propositional basis. The framework of our response to God has, as a result, been so incomplete, so narrowly rational: a mere compendium of creeds and formulas. But in meditative prayer we prepare for the full experience of the personal presence of Jesus within us, ... the personal presence of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.



