

September 2016

# Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

# contents

- 4 The Master's Abode
- 6 Going for Gold
- 12 Generosity of Spirit
- 18 Sewing a Button
- 20 Still the Body
- 24 No Guarantees
- 25 The Road Less Travelled
- 32 The Best Seva
- 36 The Foundations of a Spiritual Life
- 41 The Right Type of Disciple
- 46 Hope
- 49 Atmosphere
- 50 Book Review

## **Spiritual Link**

Science of the Soul Research Centre  
Guru Ravi Dass Marg, Pusa Road, New Delhi-110005, India  
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**VOLUME 12 • ISSUE 9 • SEPTEMBER 2016**

# The Master's Abode

Oh come with me, says Kabir, to the country  
That lies beyond old age and death.  
That is the country where the Lord himself  
Attends upon you.

A native am I of that wondrous country  
Where flies the banner of the Almighty Lord,  
Where sorrow is unknown  
And where all days are filled with peace and bliss.

A native am I of that wondrous country  
Where eternal bliss reigns throughout the years,  
Where a stream of everlasting love  
Pours from the lotus blossom's heart,  
Where everlasting light never casts a shadow  
And delight never ends in despair...

How to describe the blissful life  
Beyond the domain of mind?  
One must experience it – it cannot be described.  
Therefore, says Kabir, live in this ocean  
Of never-ceasing dread  
As the lotus lives on the water's surface  
Floating unsullied above the mud  
In which its roots are bound.

*Kabir, the Great Mystic*



# Going for Gold

Every year, athletes around the world prepare themselves to compete in national and world championships, hoping against hope that if they can win a medal they will be chosen to compete in the Olympic games. Each one of these athletes has been training for years, perhaps most of their life, to reach this goal of competing in the Olympics. Just being allowed to compete and represent one's country is a huge honour, what to say of actually winning a medal. Going for gold is the goal of all Olympic contenders because a gold medal is the pinnacle of success. What is the Sant Mat equivalent of an Olympic gold medal?

It is to merge with the inner Master, the Shabd, and lose one's own identity. Abu'l-Hussain al-Nuri describes this state when he says in *Sufism, An Account of the Mystics of Islam*, "So passionate my love is, I do yearn to keep his memory constantly in mind; but O, the ecstasy with which I burn sears out my thoughts, and strikes my memory blind!"

Abu'l-Hussain al-Nuri says he wants to remember his Master constantly, but this ecstasy and elation absorbs his attention so completely that everything, including his sense of separation, disappears. He is so merged in the Master's love, so consumed by it, that his separate identity disappears. Then he says in the same poem: "And marvel upon marvel, ecstasy itself is swept away." Is there something beyond ecstasy? This is incomprehensible; the Masters say there is no language to describe these things. We have to experience them. To achieve this spiritual realization requires total commitment and sacrifice. Sultan Bahu says:

*Only when you sacrifice your life  
in your love for God  
will you deserve the name 'faqir,' O Bahu.*

Sacrificing our lives means that we don't simply live a life that is built around eating, drinking, watching TV until midnight, falling into bed exhausted, and sleeping until our alarm wakes us just in time to have breakfast and go to work. We don't live such a life because we are meditators. Meditation is our path to ecstasy. We go to bed early after a light meal and we rise before the world is awake to be with our Master in meditation. We do this because we love him. If we sacrifice the pennies of life for the gold the Master is offering us, then, as Sultan Bahu has said, we deserve to be called true devotees.

Athletes training for Olympic gold medals could perhaps teach us a thing or two about sacrificing for a goal. A good example is Gaby Douglas, a young American gymnast who won gymnastics' highest prize – a gold medal in the women's all-round competition in the 2012 summer Olympics in London. When asked how to be a champion, Gaby said, "How to be a champion – turn your dream into your goal, plant it deep in your heart, and for the next ten years eat, sleep, breathe, laugh, and cry without ever taking your eye off your goal even for a second."

Our Masters also tell us to keep our eye on the prize, to look constantly at our goal. Sardar Bahadur Jagat Singh says in *The Science of the Soul*:

*Throughout the day, no matter in what occupation you are engaged, the soul and the mind must constantly look up to him at the eye centre. All the twenty-four hours of the day, there*

*must be yearning to meet the Lord and a continuous pang of separation from him.*

And then he says almost exactly the same words as our young gymnast: “Every moment, whether eating, drinking, walking, awake or asleep you must have his Name on your lips and his form before your eyes.”

If we are seeking the Sant Mat equivalent of the Olympic gold medal – if we are going for gold, to meet the Master within – we have to eat, sleep, breathe, laugh, and cry without ever taking our eye off our goal even for a second. No matter what happens in our lives, every day without fail, whether we feel like it or not, we get up and meditate.

Our daily early-morning meditation is our equivalent to the physical training of the athlete. Just as it can be tedious for the athletes training day after day, year after year, it can also be hard for us to keep going with our meditation. The key to continuing is to remember what our goal is. We are fighting to go beyond mind and maya, to reach the inner Master who is not as far away as we might imagine.

In *Light on Sant Mat*, Maharaj Charan Singh says, “The Master is within us and so near, but the curtain of the mind stands in between.” The mind, Hazur is saying, is creating the illusion of separation. Just because we may not see him within doesn’t mean he is not there. Just as when the Master is visiting our country and we are waiting for him to enter the auditorium to give satsang, he may already be standing outside the door talking to some sevadars. The fact that we cannot see him doesn’t mean he is not there. If we are meditating day after day, the fact that we have not yet seen him within is not proof that he is not there. He is “within us and so near”; there is just a little curtain

of mind preventing us from seeing him. The mind is what stands between us and the inner Master. Hazur says in *Light on Sant Mat*:

*If we cleanse and vacate the chamber of the mind, and wait lovingly and expectantly for him, surely he will permit us to see him within. The best way to cleanse the mind is to vacate the nine doors of the body through repetition of the five Holy Names with love and devotion.*

All we need to do is just be there, do our simran with love and devotion, and wait in the darkness for our Master to show himself to us. Our seeing him within is in his hands and not ours. Our role is to put in the effort and wait for the results to come when he wills it. We just keep trying.

Every day is not the same. Some days we may not be able to sit for the full two and one-half hours or we fall asleep or we can't repeat even one round of simran before our attention scatters or we can't keep still – we change our posture every few minutes. Then we may feel like complete failures on the path.

Olympic-bound athletes probably feel the same way when they try out for the Olympic team but are not chosen. The ones who are truly motivated see this as a temporary setback, a motivator to try harder, and they go back to their training and work doggedly on – knowing that they will have another shot in four years. The ones who compete and fail and try again are the true champions of the Olympic story. So it is with us. Maharaj Charan Singh says in *Die to Live*:

*Great Master used to say, "If you can't bring your success to me, bring your failures." It means, assure me that you have at least been giving your time to meditation. Whether you have*

*achieved any results or not is a different question, but you bring me at least your failures, because that means you have been attempting to meditate, you have been doing your best.*

The word failure is meaningless when we are talking about meditation; as long as we keep trying, we are winners. This is where our path is much easier than that of the Olympic athlete in training. If athletes can see that their physical strength and skill in their sport is not increasing, they can predict that, most likely, they will not be able to win a gold medal. Not so with us! What we perceive about our progress is irrelevant. Our progress is in the Master's hands, not in ours. Hazur encourages us to look for other signs of progress when he says:

*Through meditation our own attitude changes towards everybody, and we feel that bliss and happiness within ourselves. That is the measurement we can make, by which we feel that we are progressing in meditation.*

*Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. II*

Changes in our attitude of mind; changes in the way we treat other people – becoming nicer, kinder human beings; changes in our ability to handle the stresses of living in this world – these are clear signs that our meditation is having an effect. And with a little introspection, we can see these changes in ourselves.

Doing meditation with the intent of becoming better human beings may not be enough of a motivator to keep us going day after day. Doing meditation because we want to please our Master is a much better reason – because we love him and we want to deepen our relationship with him.

Great Master says in *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. II:

*The best and the highest method of meeting God is to love the Master and to remain at his lotus feet. This is the first step of the ladder towards God-realization. Devotion to the Master is to love him. It is to live according to his orders and directions – physically as well as mentally. In other words, one should give away one’s heart to one’s Master. It is essential that we give our heart to our Master, for, when one gives away one’s heart, one automatically gives one’s whole body and puts one’s entire life in the hands of the Master.*

Master shows us through his perfect example how love drives effort. Look at how hard he works to help us achieve our goal: the gruelling schedule he keeps, running around the world giving satsangs in different cities, always doing his duty to the sangat. How then can we hold back from helping him to help us? Great Master says in *Spiritual Gems*, “The best service to the Master is to do devotional practice with love and faith as instructed; for, by doing so, you do the Master’s work. You help him in performing his duty of taking you to Sach Khand.”

Our Master is doing his duty. He was born for the precise purpose of meeting his marked souls and putting them on the path and then supporting them as they follow it. There is no other reason for a Master to be here. Similarly, the only reason we are here in this creation, in this physical body, is to meet our Master and after initiation to work with him to go back home.

If we want the gold, if we want to meet our Master within and feel the love and bliss that al-Nuri talks about, we have to be willing to fight the mind and turn our attention firmly to Master and meditation.



# Generosity of Spirit

A short movie is often shown at the Dera on the weekends in the *mand pandal* before the main satsang begins. It is the simple, touching story of a man who donates a kidney to one of his employees. The movie offers a profound example of what it means to be a good human being.

The plot is straightforward. The boss discovers that his clerk, the man who brings him tea, is in the hospital because of kidney failure. The clerk's wife and children are crying; there are no kidneys available for a life-saving transplant. The boss, who is a good and kind man, explains to his wife that he has decided to donate his own kidney. He goes to the doctor. He finds out that he is a good match, a compatible donor. And then he makes the decision to go forward, under one condition: that his employee is never to know who donated the kidney. The transplant goes smoothly. The employee and the employer have a full recovery. Even the boss's wife, who was initially worried, decides that she, too, will donate a kidney to save the life of a stranger.

The newly healthy employee then again brings tea to his employer. The boss invites him to sit down and tell him how he is getting along. The man replies that he has one great regret – he does not know who gave him his kidney. The boss just smiles and keeps his gift anonymous.

There are five virtues that this story illustrates that have the power to inspire us to become better human beings. These virtues are: humility, compassion, charity, untiring effort, and awareness of the presence of God. These five are not a definitive list, but they can provide a foundation for our lives, for our meditation practice, and for reaching our ultimate goal of God-realization.

Let's begin with humility. The most astonishing thing about the man who donated his kidney was his humility. He didn't want credit for his noble action. He didn't parade his generosity, his gift or his sacrifice. He just quietly gave what he could. He saw an opportunity to be of service, and he took it. He saved a man's life, but he did so with no egotism, no fanfare, wanting no attention for himself.

Today, and possibly in all times, the world teaches us to claim whatever we do, or know, or accomplish as our individual success. This claim can lead to a kind of "moral narcissism." The egotist hopes to make a parade of virtue. That is not the path of the saints. Maharaj Sawan Singh cautions us in *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. III:

*If we do not take a humble and meek attitude before doing a good deed, do not retain it while doing it and do not consider it a gift by the grace of the Lord and the Master after it is done, it is snatched from our hands by pride amidst our rejoicings. "The way to God is firstly humility, secondly humility, and thirdly humility. Again, unless humility precedes, accompanies and follows every good action we perform, pride wrests wholly from our hands any good work on which we are congratulating ourselves."*

There are many ways to learn humility: growing up in the school of hard knocks, being a parent, moving to a new place where we don't know how to find our way to the grocery stores, hospitals or recreational facilities. Then there are the indignities of aging, whereby we are rendered increasingly invisible and irrelevant. Life can teach us to be humble in many, many ways. But the best way to learn our own limitations and our own need for forgiveness and grace is to meditate! Meditation is the humbler of everyone who tries. If we desire to become better human beings, and increase our humility, meditation

will do it. As Maharaj Charan Singh says in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. III, “The more we meditate, the more we are driving out ego.”

An important virtue emerges as our humility increases. We begin to see that we are not the only ones in the world with problems to solve, with suffering to face, with responsibilities to fulfil or with significant challenges to overcome. When we stop focusing so much on our own needs, desires, and failings we become much more aware of others.

The second virtue is compassion. As we become more aware of others’ challenges and suffering, we naturally become more compassionate – we feel empathy for our brothers and sisters. The man who donated his kidney clearly saw the suffering of his employee. It mattered to him that the clerk’s children were about to lose their father and that his wife was about to lose her husband. Great Master gives a beautiful description of compassion in *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. III:

*Humanity simply means love for the Lord and his creation. Its other name is sympathy or compassion, fellow-feeling, or heart-felt attraction. Its proof is that one’s heart melts like wax on seeing the suffering of another. The other man’s suffering appears as his own. He heartens him, feels sympathy for and is attracted to him, and takes steps to remove his sufferings.*

As we become more humble, and our hearts become softer, then we become more generous, more giving. Maharaj Charan Singh in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. III, is very clear about compassion when he says:

*If we can do anything to help anybody, we should. That is our duty – we are meant to help each other. Humans are meant to help humans. Who else will help? Birds and plants won't come to help you – you have to help each other. We should be a source of strength to each other.... Your heart should be very, very soft to other people and you should be very compassionate, very kind.*

The third virtue is charity. Our hands open in offering towards our neighbours. The gift of a kidney that the boss in the film gave was the gift of life. Our charity and generosity is not limited to gifts like that of a kidney, which can be offered only rarely in life. We can demonstrate generosity every day. We learn to let go, to share, and to offer to others what has been given to us. We can offer a smile to a cashier at a store, a welcome to a friend, a word of encouragement to someone who is exhausted or an email to someone who feels isolated and lonely. The practice of generosity is important. It embodies the understanding that we are here to serve. Great Master states in *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. III:

*We are all children of the one Supreme Father. Everybody has a claim on what he (God) is bestowing. Share the gifts with the poor, the orphaned and the helpless. We are all partners. Bestowing gifts on others is possible only through the feeling of mercy. Mercy always resides in the heart of the charitable.*

Becoming humble, compassionate, and more generous sounds good. But how does this transformation actually happen in our lives? It should be obvious that it is not sufficient to merely think about becoming a better human being, to contemplate the possibility, to listen to satsangs

on the subject or to admire the concept. Becoming a more ethical, moral, and caring human being is all about action and effort.

The fourth virtue is untiring effort. We can understand that donating a kidney is a fine and noble ideal. But doing it requires intention, and the sacrifice of undergoing the surgery, and then experiencing pain during the recovery process. This work begins with good intentions, but must be followed through with action. Becoming a better human being involves a humbled mind, a softer heart, an open and generous hand and our shoulder to the wheel.

Becoming a better human being takes effort, practice, and persistence. It is our assignment every morning. It can be our aspiration in every interaction, in every service we perform. It all matters – whether it is the simplest act of recycling or the smallest kindness we extend to someone. Picking up a piece of trash on the sidewalk matters. Offering a compliment to a co-worker matters. Making a newcomer at satsang feel welcome matters. The Masters say we are only on this earth for two purposes: for God-realization and to help one another. And these two aspects of our lives are intertwined.

This brings us to the fifth virtue – awareness of the presence of God. A tender moment in the kidney transplant film occurs when the clerk, not knowing that he is in the presence of his life-giving donor, says, “I wish I could see the face of the person who gave me this kidney, for then I would be able to see the face of God.” One of the most extraordinary ways we can become better human beings is by showing through our behaviour that we are aware that we are always in the presence of God.

The Lord is present within us, closer than our own breathing. When can we experience this? We will know that we are living in the presence of the Master whenever we take refuge in him, whenever we remember him, whenever we seek his company. Of course, it's true

that we can turn in his direction only when he pulls us. But look at all the hundreds of ways he is pulling us: whenever we do our meditation, repeat our simran, attend satsang; whenever we recognize others as being God's children. And there is no better way to see generosity than in an enlightened human being – in a saint who personifies humility, compassion, charity, endless effort on behalf of the sangat, and who manifests an absolute focus on God.

Every initiate, every day, is invited to become aware that he or she is standing in the presence of the inner Master. We are not alone in this work of becoming a better human being or in our meditation. One day we might even discover that the path of God-realization and the path of becoming a better human being are intimately related.



*Masters have said, "One who obeys  
does what the Beloved orders,  
one who claims closeness  
does that which the Beloved prefers,  
but one who Loves  
loves everything that befalls him."*

Sheikh Abol-Hasan, *The Soul and A Loaf of Bread*,  
rendered by Vraje Abramian

# Sewing a Button

Simran is a bit like sewing on a button. It is a very humble, simple task, sewing a button onto a shirt. We thread a needle, then attach the button to the fabric with several repetitive stitches. One stitch won't accomplish the task. We have to pass the needle and thread many times through the holes of the button and the fabric before the button is sturdily attached. It's the repetition that holds the button fast.

Our simran is stitching our attention to the Shabd and to the Master. Needle in, needle out. By that repetition, we are attaching ourselves to the inner world, thus automatically detaching ourselves from the illusions of the outer world. Sewing on a button is not glamorous. But it works. And simran works too. But for it to work, we have to give it a chance – not just think about doing it, but actually do it. We need to make simran our friend. It focuses and quiets our mind so that we can attach ourselves to the Master and the Shabd.

The saints encourage us to repeat the names whenever our mind is free throughout the day. It's easy to forget that part. Meditation becomes much easier when we keep the mind disciplined by repeating simran as we go through our day. Maharaj Charan Singh says in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II:

*This constant simran helps our attitude towards meditation, helps to draw our mind towards meditation. That helps when we sit in meditation because we are developing a certain attitude towards Sant Mat, towards the teachings, towards the path. It helps a lot. It may be dry, but if you leave your mind alone, it will have other, worldly thoughts. It won't be still. It will always think something or other.... Why let it go so astray,*

*why not pull it back? We are helping it not to run very astray and wild. The more it runs astray and wild, the more difficult it becomes to pull it back. That is why, whenever we get time or we are mentally free, we do simran.*

Just like sewing on a button, every second of simran done day in and day out strengthens our bond with the Master and brings us closer to the Lord.



*The most outstanding wonder of God's creation is the human mind...*

*An old man describes an experience going on in his mind to his grandson:*

*"There's a terrible fight between two wolves going on in us all. One is evil – he is anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego. The other is good – he is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith. This same fight is going on inside you and inside every other person too."*

*The grandson thought about it and asked his grandfather, "Which wolf will win?"*

*The old man simply replied, "The one you feed."*

*The wolf we feed will determine if the good within us has triumphed.*

*Concepts & Illusions: A Perspective*

# Still the Body

A friend remarked that he can't sit still for too long because he has a lot of nervous energy, and he has to stay active. He said that once he went to a yoga-meditation retreat and really struggled. At the end of the first day, the man who was leading the meditation exercises came up to him and said, "You can do whatever you want. Just don't disturb the other people." Apparently he had been constantly drumming his fingers on the floor and moving about, unable to sit still.

Are we similar to this person? If we can keep our body still when we meditate, it will help us to still our mind. Stilling the body is no small feat. There is restlessness. We feel like we just have to move our legs; we can't sit still. Or we get an itch. All we can think about is scratching that itch. That itch becomes the centre of our universe. If only we could scratch it, we would be at peace – or at least that is what the mind would have us believe.

We might get a creeping sensation on our skin. Our mind conjures up the idea that some kind of insect is crawling on us. But, if we open our eyes and look, or we try to swipe it away with our hand, we find there is no insect there at all. It is just an illusion.

Then there is pain. Our limbs hurt. Our back hurts. Perhaps we worry that if we don't move, some kind of permanent physical damage will result. Or if we sit there and tough it out, our entire meditation becomes a battle with that pain and there is no peace or bliss.

Fortunately, for all these sensations of the body there is a simple solution – attention. The more attention we give to a physical sensation, the more it grows. When we give it no attention at all, eventually it disappears. Our attention is very powerful. Constantly, throughout our day, we receive a multitude of sensory inputs, but we

selectively pay attention to very few. The sensory inputs that we ignore are still present, but we don't feel them; we don't even recognize that they are there. Similarly, at the time of meditation when we put all our attention in simran and bhajan concentrated at the eye centre, then we are not aware of physical sensations; therefore, these bodily sensations don't trouble us. In *Spiritual Gems*, Maharaj Sawan Singh explains that this "strain or pain" is

*... the equilibrium of outward and inward tendencies of the mind. It is not the type of strain or pain that will leave any ill effects on the body. The best way to succeed in this state of equilibrium is to look into the focus and not to let the attention slip down. It is the attention that feels the strain or pain; and if, instead of giving attention to this part of the body, one ignores it and engages the attention in the focus, the strain or pain will disappear and the residual attention will have been pulled up a step. If you do not stick to the focus but let the attention slip down, the strain or pain will disappear also, but the attention is now outward and the game is lost.*

So until our attention improves, we will have to work hard at holding our focus in the eye centre and force our bodies to remain still. In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II, Maharaj Charan Singh tells us that even forced meditation brings about good meditation:

*When you are not in the habit of sitting at all, the first step is to force yourself at least to sit. To sit still is a great credit. When you learn to sit still, then you also have to learn to still your mind. The first problem is to still the body, as the body is always running out and doesn't want to sit in one place for even twenty*

*minutes. So first you get in the habit of stilling the body, and then you get into the habit of stilling the mind.*

Our body gets tired. We want to stop meditating and get up, leave the room, and get on with our day. Sheikh Farid, on the other hand, says that to meet the Beloved, “Yea, I’ll walk on my head if the feet tire, only if I were to meet with my love!”

The human body is the temple of God. Every temple must be built on a solid foundation. A solid foundation does not move. Initially, it might seem like an enormous effort to train the body to sit still. However, all of the effort will be rewarded by a profound state of consciousness. It might help before we start meditation to send a clear message to the body, “You will not move for the next two and one-half hours.” Or perhaps tell the body, “OK. You can move if you want. No problem. But each time you move you will sit for an extra ten to thirty minutes.” We are in charge, and we exercise our will over the body – not the other way around. Training the body is like training a child. Gently repeated instructions and encouragement every day, over and over, will gradually have their effect.

The posture that we adopt will potentially have an impact on our ability to meditate without moving. To take an extreme example, if we tried to meditate while standing on one leg, it would be difficult indeed to be still while maintaining such a posture. Our posture should facilitate the stillness of the body. After all, the stillness of the body is a means to an end. Eventually, of course, our attention will leave the body when our concentration is complete.

In answer to a question about posture, Hazur says in *Die to Live*, “Ultimately you forget in what posture you are sitting and whether you are even in the body. You have to forget your body.” And when asked about changing our posture if we get uncomfortable he replies:

*We should first find the posture which suits us. Then we should try to sit in that posture as long as we can. When it becomes very uncomfortable, very uneasy and you just can't sit still, then it is better to change than to fight with yourself.... But we should try to sit as much as we can in that particular posture without disturbing ourselves.*

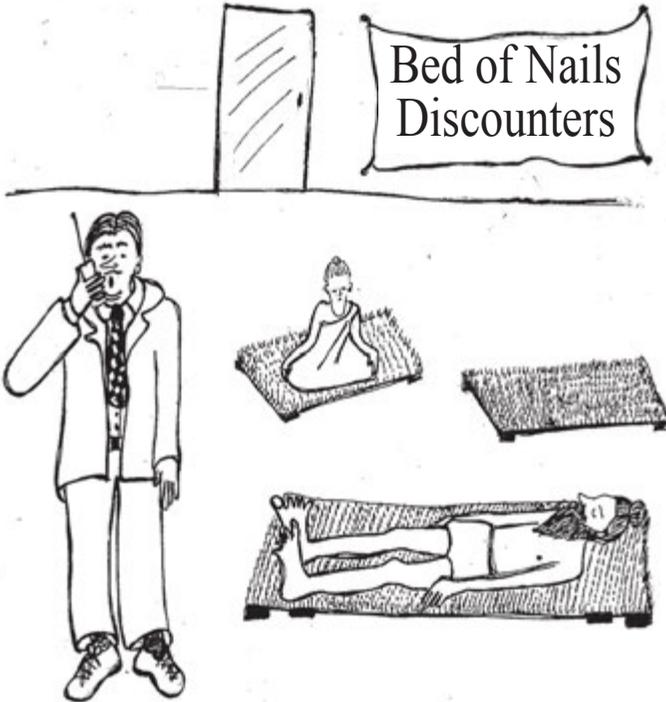
The Great Master has an entire chapter on posture in *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. I. He writes:

*If one does not remain steadfast in a particular posture but frequently changes his position, the mind currents do not become concentrated. It is therefore essential that the desired posture should be maintained.... Whatever posture a person may adopt for his spiritual practice, he must satisfy himself that it causes no restlessness and that he can easily forget the body.*

Keeping our body still when we meditate will help us to still our mind. When we put all our attention in simran and bhajan concentrated at the eye centre, then we are not aware of physical sensations and we can sit still. This practice takes time, but if we persevere we will achieve our goal of stilling the body and ultimately stilling the mind.



## No Guarantees



“That’s right, free delivery...yes, yes, we have extra, extra firm... aahh no, no sorry we don’t guarantee you will control your mind”

# The Road Less Travelled

There are a few lines in a poem by Robert Frost that read:

*Two roads diverged in a wood and I –  
I took the one less travelled by,  
And that has made all the difference.*

*The Road Not Taken and Other Poems*

These lines remind us that our life may be compared to a long road in which we come to a fork. One road at the fork – the worldly path – is the one that most people are taking. While that road appears to lead to happiness, it actually leads away from our true home down a path of adversity, anxiety, and misery. The other road – the path of the Masters – appears less travelled, one that fewer people would choose, but it takes us back home, safe from the dangers of the world into the embrace of our loving Father. As human beings, we have the power of discrimination; we have the choice to pick the road which leads us toward our home and being happy, or giving in to the temptations of the road that sidetracks us and diverts us from our journey home.

If we believe that we are spiritual beings going through a human experience, as the Master often says, then we have a responsibility to help free our soul. We may say that we are already free, but what is this freedom we speak of? The mind makes us dance to its tune. We know that indulging in the negative tendencies and falling prey to the senses leads to physical, mental, and spiritual harm; yet we do it anyway. If we want true freedom, ultimately, we have to choose between wanting the world and wanting to return to our spiritual home.

Kabir Sahib, in *Kabir, the Great Mystic* says:

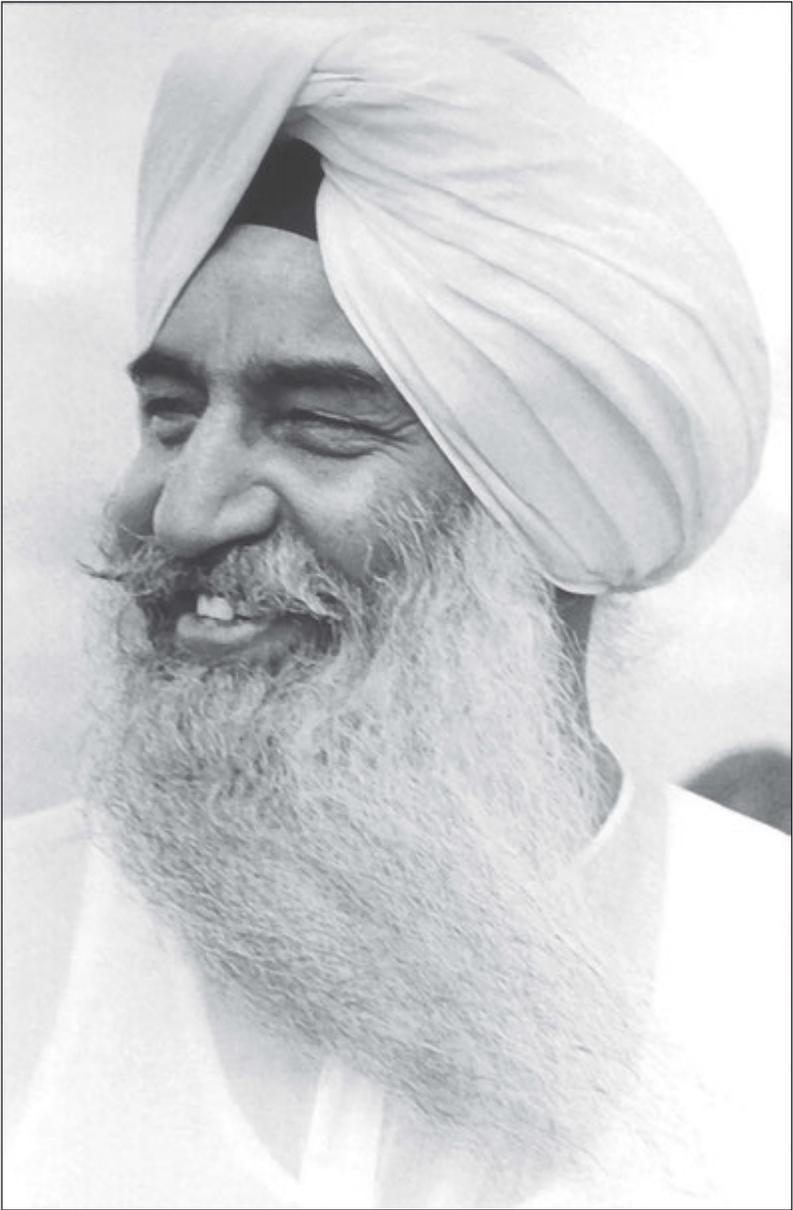
*I saw an ant carrying a grain of rice  
And then she spied a lentil along the way.  
She was puzzled how to carry both. Kabir says she cannot –  
She must take one and leave the other.  
A devotee must choose between the Lord and the world.*

We have to remind ourselves why we came to this path and make choices that take us closer to our spiritual goal. Once we have chosen to go back to the Lord, we begin to realize that we are not the body or the mind, but rather the soul. To free the soul, we have to start with controlling the mind. Maharaj Charan Singh in *Spiritual Discourses*, Vol. I, imparts this vital truth:

*Although the soul is a spark of the eternal flame, its vitality has been sapped. It has become weak and helpless. For many ages it has been a slave to the mind and the senses. Yet for its salvation, it has to face and fight the very masters under which it has served.*

The “masters,” which Hazur refers to in this book are: “the mind and its various tendencies, its ceaseless wandering from one thing to another and its limitless desires and cravings.”

On the path of Sant Mat we know that the way to fight the mind is to concentrate and focus our attention at the eye centre through simran. When someone asks Hazur how it helps if we’re faced with temptations and we repeat our simran, he answers in *Die to Live*, “Well, sister, what is simran? Simran is a means to concentration at the eye centre, and we are tempted by the senses only when our mind is scattered.”



We are the ones who have pampered the mind; we are the ones who will have to rein it in and reverse the direction of its attention. In *Living Meditation* we read:

*There is only one way to achieve concentration in meditation. We have to be ready to invert our outward and downward tendencies. We need to bring them inwards and upwards through constant simran, to the eye centre, the seat of the soul.*

Simran frees us from our obsessions, so that we can be empty of our self and become receptive to the healing power of the Shabd. Every time we sit for meditation, the mind rebels because it does not want to be still. But we have to persist. Every time the mind runs out, we have to grab hold of it and wrestle it back to the focus. We realize that to be free we really have no choice but to restrain the mind through simran.

It is true that all spiritual effort stems from divine grace, but we cannot depend upon grace alone. Saints remind us that this life will be over soon. How many times have we said, “Someday I will attend to my meditation”? We wait for the perfect opportunity that may never come.

In *Philosophy of the Masters*, Maharaj Sawan Singh says, “Have a peep inside yourself. What do you want to be? You ask for spiritual wealth with your tongue but wish for other things in your heart.” Sant Mat is a path of action and not of words – a path of transformation, not information. If we choose action, it must be reflected in our priorities. In *Living Meditation* the author says, “Our actions must reflect our spiritual desire. If the desire for communion with Shabd is not reflected in our actions, either we are confused or we do not want to evolve spiritually.”

Saints help us realize that just as worldly achievements require time, great effort, and patience, so does the path of God-realization. Nothing in life is free; everything has a price tag attached to it. Kabir Sahib, in *Kabir, the Great Mystic*, clearly points this out when he says: “Useless is all talk of spirituality. Action, however, is excellently fruitful.”

This path of love and devotion takes sacrifices on our part. The spiritual path may seem long and hard. We think that this world is so advanced, surely there must be an easier way – a shortcut? Quoting Soami Ji, Sardar Bahadur writes in *Discourses on Sant Mat*, Vol. II:

*If there were a substitute, I would tell you about the other way – to drop that and do this – but there is no substitute for meditation. You can make up for a deficiency in devotion only by devotion.*

So when we see that there is no shortcut – no satsang, no reading books, and no outer seva – that will make up for bhajan and simran, we realize we have no choice but to put in the effort.

We may wonder why we need a Master or teacher for God-realization. Can we not meet God on our own? We actually stand in need of a teacher from the moment we are born. How then can we conceive of travelling on this most complex path of spirituality without a guide? In *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. V, Great Master writes:

*Spirituality is a difficult path and cannot be trodden without the company of a Master.... There is danger at every step. He who wishes to know the reality or to get true knowledge and to meet the Lord should seek a perfect Master who knows the way.*

The Master is the conduit between the disciple and the Lord. He prepares the disciple's mind. With patience and love the Master watches over the disciple and defends him against the onslaught of the material world and the negative power. Bit by bit, the master-jeweller polishes the gem of the soul to bring forth its brilliance and sparkle. And as the polishing begins to take effect, we start to gradually see him as our friend, our parent, our hero. In *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. V, Great Master says:

*In outward form [the Master] is a human being. He is, however, a superman. He is beyond good and evil and is the most exalted of men.... He shows himself powerless, even though he is all-powerful.*

We can learn so much by observing how the Master conducts his life. He laughs, he plays pranks, he watches movies, he listens to music, and he even plays sports. He enjoys the creation but never gets entangled in it. Do we see the Master being overwhelmed by his life? None of us is busier, or has more responsibility, or more potential for stress than he. Yet he is in perfect balance. He never appears rushed or flustered, or scattered. When something has to be done, he does it because his mind is focused. Through meditation we too can learn to focus our mind.

Having received all gifts from the Lord, we can choose the attitude of gratitude. The path is in itself a gift. Without the path, imagine how we would deal with the concept of death or the meaning of life. What would be our anchor during times of adversity? How would we be able to maintain a balance in our life without satsang and seva? As difficult as meditation can be, can we imagine not having the option to meditate? And what about the most important gift – the Master himself? Can we envision our lives without the Master?

What wouldn't we give to be with our Master for a whole day or a week or a month? But we are told we get to be with him all the time when we go within. In essence, we have a choice of living the spiritual teachings or turning towards the world. When we choose to obey the Master, we are choosing spirituality. When we meditate, we go beyond concepts and touch reality. In this way, if we put our hand in Master's and walk the path with him, then we too will be able to say:

*Two roads diverged in a wood, and I –  
I took the one less travelled by,  
And that has made all the difference.*



*While the body we occupy at this point in time will die, our soul continues far beyond this life to reap the harvest of the choices we are making here and now. If we are clever and make wise choices today about what we think and do, it will be a lot easier to make positive choices tomorrow. That we have been put on the path of the Masters means the time has now come, in this very life, to become masters of ourselves. There will be no incarnation better than the one we are in now. It is now that we have the opportunity to realize who and what we are.*

*Living Meditation*

# The Best Seva

Maharaj Sawan Singh, in *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. IV, offers a touching description of the relationship we have with God:

*All living beings are of the same essence as the Lord. They are his children. Just as a child is a part of the flesh of the mother, it lives in her womb and is brought up there, similarly we are born in God, are brought up in him and are connected with him in the same way as a child is with the mother. In fact he is never separate from her.... A mother is never neglectful of her child. Because of her genuine love, she cannot be indifferent to him. We have an even stronger connection with the Lord.... The Lord is never unmindful of us even for a moment. He is always looking after us. We have never been separated from him. He is always with us and always pervades our entire being.*

We are part and parcel of the Lord, and yet sometimes we question whether or not we are getting enough of our Master's companionship. It is important to remind ourselves that some of the things we imagine about our relationship with the Lord and with the Master are pure fiction.

One of these imaginary concerns relates to physical darshan. We may believe that the more we can be in the Master's physical presence, the greater will be our spiritual progress. The logical conclusion to this concept is that people who live at the Dera or who see him frequently will not have to struggle as hard in meditation as we do. We may also think that those who get to visit yearly get all the spiritual advantages. And then it would follow that those who sit in the front rows receive

more from the Guru than those with seats in the back. But none of this is true. Physical distance does not affect our relationship with our Master, which is personal and internal.

Maharaj Charan Singh puts it plainly in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. III:

*Your Master is always within you. He is not anywhere outside at all. We should try to reach him, seek him who is our constant companion. He never leaves us, though we may leave him. So we should never feel disheartened at all. We are never alone – our Master is always with us.*

Seva is another fruitful playground for the mind and its delusions. Concerning seva and sevadars, we might assume that those whose seva brings them into personal contact with the Master are more blessed than those who work in a far distant field. Or that those who have been given some measure of authority, or responsibility, or leadership are more valued by the Master and are receiving more grace than those who merely quietly serve. Or that only a few lucky ones are given the chance to serve and to contribute to the sangat because seva is a precious and very limited commodity that is only distributed to select individuals. But the Masters proclaim that they have no favourites and that the grace of the Lord is present in the life of every disciple.

Maharaj Charan Singh has said that the value of seva is not ultimately related to the type or amount of seva given, but rather to what we put into it. In *Legacy of Love* he is quoted as saying, “The value of seva is not how much one offers, but in the feelings and love with which it is offered.” We might begin to get a glimpse of the wondrous power of this kind of love and feeling when we see

the manner in which the Masters themselves offer their service to the sangat.

The chief mischief of our fanciful imagined deprivation or distance from our Master is when it distracts us from our genuine good fortune: every initiate has already been given the best seva, and we are invited on a daily basis to enjoy a very personal relationship with our Master.

Every day each initiate is invited to spend two and one-half hours with his or her Master. In meditation, our Master is fully present. Even when we are unable to focus our entire attention on him, he is still completely available to us. Every day we are urged to sit in his presence and to relax into the most loving, important and purposeful relationship of our lives. Every day, 365 days each year, for our entire lifetime we are given the opportunity to turn our gaze away from the world and to look toward our Beloved. Most amazing of all, our Master accepts all the varieties of meditation we offer to him, including the scattered, meandering, distracted kind.

If we are initiated, then we have already been given the real prize, the choicest assignment, the ultimate promotion, the best possible meditation practice. We have been given the privilege of spending two and one-half hours daily of private inner time with our Master.

And what about all that happens outside in the world? We have to trust that the Lord gives each of us what is spiritually in our best interest. Sometimes that is physical darshan, sometimes not. Sometimes we get to do seva that we love. Other times our physical seva seems impossibly difficult. Sometimes the seva we enjoy is taken away from us and we are handed new assignments. Sometimes we get along wonderfully with our fellow sevadars. Other times we may feel alienated, frustrated, and alone. As happens in all circumstances in the

external world, our moods, our satisfaction, and our comprehension rises and falls, ebbs and flows. The struggle with the mind is constant.

But we have been given a refuge. We have been given a seva where we can take shelter from the unpredictable winds of the world. Every morning, and throughout the day, we are invited to turn inward to the source of our ultimate happiness, peace, and comfort.

If someone asks us, “What seva has the Master asked you to do?” We can smile and reply, “I have been given the highest form of service. I have been given the opportunity to meditate.”



*Seva is the needed medicine for the disease that sickens all of us: ego. If we become intensely absorbed in serving, we just may forget the self. When we begin to discard or disregard the self, the task we are doing begins to be seva. We might not even be conscious that this transformation is taking place because we are so absorbed in our service....*

*The master repeatedly explains that the purpose of seva is to support meditation. The highest seva is meditation itself.*

*Physical or outer seva helps to create the right frame of mind for attending to meditation. It is a means, not an end. There is no substitute for the inner service of meditation.*

*A Wake Up Call: Beyond Concepts and Illusions*

# The Foundations of a Spiritual Life

How we live our lives as we follow our spiritual path is very important. In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. III, someone asks Maharaj Charan Singh to talk about how we can build that atmosphere of the Dera when we are away from him. He responds by clearly explaining that the importance of Dera is not the buildings; it is the spiritual atmosphere that we find there and carry with us to support us in our spiritual life. He says:

*Brother, Baba Ji Maharaj [Baba Jaimal Singh] and Hazur Maharaj Ji [Maharaj Sawan Singh] have laid the foundation of the Dera on love, humility, seva and meditation. That is the foundation of this Dera. Everybody's equal here, irrespective of country, caste, creed or colour. And if we feel we have not been able to come to that level yet, we try to improve ourselves. That is the atmosphere of the Dera and that is the atmosphere which we take with ourselves wherever we may go. The Dera is not built of mortar and bricks. It is built on seva and love and devotion and humility and meditation. And we have to build our whole life on these principles. Only this foundation will take us back to the Father.*

Hazur is urging us to “build our whole life on these principles.” So, it's worth examining each of the elements that form the foundations of this life we are to lead as we pursue our spiritual goals – seva, humility, love and devotion, and meditation.

The pictorial book *Equilibrium of Love* highlights the value and importance of seva, by beginning with a quote from Mahatma Gandhi

who says: “The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.”

Seva may be defined as a way of expressing our devotion, done in a spirit of gratefulness and humility, with total disregard for gain or recognition.

Seva creates humility by giving us the opportunity to work shoulder to shoulder with others for a common purpose. Seva is not a transaction. We don't serve to get something in return. Seva is done in a spirit of sharing.

We can't judge seva by the standards used in the world where we measure everything and assign rewards and punishments based on performance. Seva is not so much what we do – the quantity or speed. It's in the love, devotion, and humility with which we do seva. In *Labour of Love*, there is a story which emphasizes the high value that Masters place on seva. When Maharaj Sawan Singh announced plans to build the satsang ghar, a wealthy contractor wanted to erect the whole building himself. Great Master refused the offer with these words:

*I want every satsangi (disciple), even the poorest of the poor, to be given the opportunity to offer something in seva, even if it is only half a rupee. I would also like all satsangis, rich and poor, young and old, to participate in the construction, even if they carry only a handful of sand or a few bricks. Their smallest efforts are precious to me. Every drop of perspiration shed by them is valuable for me. This is seva of love and devotion.*

Seva is a gift, a unique opportunity given to us by the Master to become part of something bigger than our limited selves. Seva is not just about getting certain work completed – otherwise Great

Master would have accepted the offer of the wealthy contractor. Seva is a powerful means of developing humility and helping us gain awareness of who we really are.

C. S. Lewis in his book *Mere Christianity* sheds light on this by discussing pride – the opposite of humility – by saying that “pride is the complete anti-God state of mind.”

Why is pride “the complete anti-God state of mind”? Because pride makes us feel that we are separate from the Father and also separate from and better than others. This feeling of separation is an illusion. Pride blinds us to the truth that we are all one. Humility gained through working shoulder to shoulder with others helps us gain awareness of this truth.

Every religious tradition places a high value on humility. In Christianity where prayer is usually done while kneeling, there is a saying that the door to the kingdom of God is exactly as high as you are when you walk on your knees.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, in *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. III, says, “The way to God is firstly humility, secondly humility and thirdly humility.”

Pride is based on a wrong understanding of who we really are. The irony is that we often identify with that which is finite, those things associated with the body – my house, my job, my sons, my wife, my wealth, my family. All of these are temporary; our true self is the eternal soul.

Samarth Ramdas says in *Many Voices, One Song* that “we do not achieve spirituality until we stop thinking of ourselves as just body.” Similarly, Maharaj Charan Singh says in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. III:

*This body is not yours. When you think it is yours, you want people to praise you, to give you glory. So ego comes into it. Think humbly: This body doesn't belong to me – even this*

*belongs to the Father, even this belongs to the Master. Do not use your body as your own. Use it as if it belongs to your Master.*

Humility is possible only when the ego is eliminated. Only through love and merging with the inner Shabd is this possible. Maharaj Charan Singh says in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. III:

*When our whole body is filled with love, the ego is gone and only humility and meekness remain. When that love and devotion is not in us, the whole body is full of ego. We have to detach ourselves from the world and attach ourselves to him. Only by the spiritual practice, only by that meditation, can we kill the ego.*

Sant Mat is a path of love. Love is the basis of our relationship with the Master. It's love that transforms us. Love is the beginning and end of this path. The saints tell us that love is God and God is love.

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

*Love is the richest of all treasures. Without it there is nothing and with it there is everything. He who does not have love in his heart is not entitled to call himself a human being.*

Mystics tell us that love is within every one of us. It's the essence of who we are. Sometimes our attitude and approach to life can block our receptivity. Wayne Dyer, author of *Staying on the Path* says: "Loving people live in a loving world. Hostile people live in a hostile world. Same world."

Love is a gift of the Lord who is himself all love. We can't earn it or deserve it. But we can try to make ourselves receptive to it. One way

of being more receptive is by practicing gratitude. Meister Eckhart is quoted by the author of *Practicing the Presence of the Living God*: “If the only prayer you ever say in your entire life is ‘thank you,’ it will be enough.” As satsangis, the way we say the “thank you prayer” is by attending to our meditation.

Meditation is both an expression of our gratitude and our core practice. If we just stopped with external seva or attendance at satsang, we’d be missing the main point.

Our main link to Master is through our meditation. Meditation is how we hold the hand of the Father as we go through life because the real Master is not the physical body. It’s our own limitation when we see him as only the physical body. We identify with our bodies and minds – both of which are limited. But Masters are not limited to the body and neither is our soul.

The Masters emphasize that meditation is essential for us to have our own direct experience of the Lord within. Spirituality is not about knowledge. Knowledge – gained by reading books or memorizing scriptures – will never be sufficient to transform us. Everything comes through meditation. Maharaj Jagat Singh says in *Discourses on Sant Mat*, Vol. II: “Out of the practice will come love. Out of love will come Shabd.” Our efforts in meditation will not be perfect, but Masters accept our imperfect efforts. They just ask that we be sincere.

The foundations of the spiritual path – seva, humility, love and devotion, and meditation – are essential principles that we have to build our whole life on. As Maharaj Charan Singh says, “Only this foundation will take us back to the Father.”



# The Right Type of Disciple

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote in his poem, *Psalm of Life*:

*Lives of great men all remind us  
We can make our lives sublime,  
And, departing, leave behind us  
Footprints on the sands of time.*

The Masters' lives are an example for us, their conduct a model for us to emulate, their discipline a shining beacon for us to strive toward, their commitment an inspiration for us to make our effort, their achievement a call for us to be sublime. Their lives remind us that we too can live our lives like them, put in the effort, follow the path, and be the right type of disciple. Eventually, we too become sublime.

Maharaj Charan Singh tells us in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II, who is a good disciple: "One who stands firm on the principles of Sant Mat and is attending to his meditation and living in the will of the Lord, naturally he is the right type of disciple." It's as simple as that. If we follow his definition, we can be the right type of disciple. Hazur is teaching us a course of action, not of mere learning; every word he uses – "stands firm," "is attending to," "living in the will" – is a call to action. The "right type of disciple" is one who actively follows the teachings and instructions of the Master, makes them central to his life, and puts them into practice every day.

The Lord has showered his grace on us in so many ways – giving the gift of the human form, creating the desire to seek him, bringing us into contact with the living Master, and then conferring the supreme gift of initiation on to the spiritual path. But we still have a million doubts and arguments. Our mind furiously seeks to justify

deviating from these principles by making one exception or another. We think: we can eat eggs in America because they are infertile; surely an occasional glass of wine will not cause me to lose control; why do we have to get married to live together? However, when we strip away all these questions, we realize that in order to make spiritual progress there is no other way except to keep the vows. As Hazur says in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II:

*We have to live absolutely within the four walls of the Sant Mat principles. Whether they mean anything to anybody or not is immaterial. If you really want to make spiritual progress, you have to live within these walls. There's no other way.*

In a practical sense, what does this mean for us? We have to become more aware and act on that awareness so that we comply with the vows. The guidelines are simple. If that slice of cake looks scrumptious but we do not know for sure if it contains eggs, we stay away! No alcohol, no mind-altering substances – we abstain! Honesty and purity in our conduct, control of our passions and desires – all might be a stricter standard than we have upheld prior to coming to the path. But at the grocery store, when the checkout clerk misses the package of bottled water in the bottom of the cart, and we realize it when we are out of the store, we don't say, "Well, I am sure I have overpaid at other times, so this is fine." We just go back and pay for it.

If these standards appear daunting, we only have to look at our Masters to see how they conduct themselves: in the midst of running their lives in this world, they have achieved the highest level possible on this spiritual journey. Their lives inspire us; they teach us how to live. With gentleness and compassion, with great patience and

a wonderful sense of humour, they tell us again and again to live a balanced life and focus on our meditation.

From meditation comes the strength to fulfil the other vows, which in turn strengthens our ability to sit. It is a gradual process, and with the Master's grace we are on a "virtuous spiral" heading to our true home. It sounds logical and it seems simple and straightforward to do; yet, sometimes we find ourselves caught in "the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak" syndrome, with our mind scattered into all the attractions of the world. We have to coax the mind to let go of this world and focus at the eye centre. But how do we do that?

Once a man visited a great mystic to find out how to be free of desires and attachments. The mystic jumped up, ran to a nearby pillar and held on to it, screaming, "Save me from this pillar! Save me from this pillar!" The man thought the mystic was mad, and said so, adding, "You are holding the pillar; the pillar is not holding you. You can simply let go." The mystic said quietly to the man, "If you can understand that, then you have your answer."

We can also use the psychology of the mind to turn it to our advantage. Since the mind constantly seeks pleasure, we can give it the greatest pleasure possible – the sweetness of the Shabd. This is possible only through our meditation and the grace of the Master. It is through meditation that the mind begins to release its hold on the world; then we can let go.

Another way to tame the mind is to become aware of the Master's presence. The Master is always at the eye centre watching over us. If we do our meditation with that feeling, thinking we are sitting in front of him, the task becomes easier.

And so we attend to our meditation, even when it is hard, even when it is dry. The Master tells us: just do it – so we should be the right type of disciple and just do it. The Master assures us there are no

failures on this path; every bit of effort is to our credit. To be successful in this meditation, we have to build an atmosphere of meditation throughout the day – do simran whenever we have a free moment. It is said of Maharaj Jagat Singh in *Heaven on Earth*, that prior to becoming the Master, while he was a college professor, “If he was ready to go to the college ten minutes early, he would utilize the time in meditation.” What a wonderful example for each of us!

We classify what life deals to us as “good” or “bad” depending on its alignment with our wishes. Instead, we should treat everything that comes our way as his gift. He is the fountainhead of mercy and knows what to give us, how to give it, and when to give it. He will always do it in a way that is beneficial for us, whether or not we realize it at the time. For it stands to reason that our perspective is a narrow one; we are not aware of the larger canvas on which events play out. He does not send things our way on a whim – we get what we deserve, and reap the consequences of the actions we have sown in the past. For our part, we have to act to the best of our ability and leave the results to the Lord – that is the meaning of “living in his will.” If we reflect on these concepts, we begin to realize the depth of Hazur’s teachings when he tells us in *Spiritual Discourses*, Vol. I:

*If we can take what comes to us as from him, then whatever it is, it becomes divine in itself; shame becomes honour, bitterness becomes sweet and darkness light. Everything takes its flavour from God and becomes divine. Everything that happens betrays the invisible hand of God. When a man’s mind works in this way, all things begin to taste divine.*

Children often grasp instinctively what adults find difficult to comprehend. A story is told of a little girl who was walking home from

school when she found herself in a storm with flashes of lightning and roaring thunder. Her mother, afraid for her daughter, hurried to bring her home. She saw her daughter happily walking along and at each flash of lightning the girl would stop, look up and smile. When she asked her daughter what she was doing, the child answered, “Smiling. God just keeps taking pictures of me.”

We too can cheerfully accept what comes our way – indeed delight in it. By doing this we become the “right type of disciple” and live in the will of the Lord – and then all things begin to taste divine.



*Eons after eons have passed since I saw you,  
my beloved lord.*

*Blessed is that land where you reside,  
my beloved friend, my lord.*

*I will sacrifice myself, my entire being to you,  
my Master, my friend, my lord.*

*A moment without you, and the age of darkness  
descends on me;*

*When will I meet you, my beloved lord, again?*

*My nights of agony are endless,  
sleep has forsaken me,  
without a glimpse of my Master's court.*

*I will sacrifice myself, my entire being,  
to reach the true court of my Master.*

Guru Arjun Dev, as quoted in, *Kabir, The Weaver of God's Name*

# Hope

Everything that happens to us brings us closer to our true purpose in life – to return to the Lord. To help us realize this purpose, the Lord sends a living Master to guide us home. Right from birth the hand of a living Master is with us. He showers us with his mercy and grace. Over time we come to appreciate that everything is grace, even the air we breathe.

Our karmas or past actions determine everything that happens to us – our past influences our present. Due to our karmas we may experience periods of darkness that overwhelm us. We might become confused or experience difficulty dealing with unexpected troubles, losses, or tragedy. Without hope, the aftermath of what we experience as negative events may stay with us for days, months, perhaps years, possibly causing despair and depression. Yet, moments of misery can serve as a catalyst to help us realize that all things happen for a reason – and are in our best interest. It is a balancing of our karmas. Nothing lasts forever, so it is important to keep a positive attitude and strive to maintain our balance as we experience the ups and downs of life.

The Master never gives us more than we can handle. He is our refuge; our meditation is our way of seeking sanctuary with him. Meditation allows us to tap into that deep inner stillness, which helps us to stay balanced as we seek meaning from our experiences, even while experiencing turmoil in our lives.

We are constantly reminded in satsang that if we do our meditation he will take care of everything. Knowing this gives us hope. An optimistic attitude can greatly reduce our reaction to events and give us strength as we work through our karmas.

If we had perfect sight, we would see things as they are – in complete balance. But if we are not spiritually advanced, we may tend to be shaken by things that happen to us. So the only thing we can do is to focus on our Master through meditation. We can keep in mind that, as we work through our karmas, he is with us as we are lightening our load and are preparing ourselves to meet the Lord. After all, he wants to erase everything that stands between us and him.

He knows everything we go through. When we experience suffering, we are better able to understand that others suffer too and that this is the human condition. This influences and shapes our mind toward right thinking and living. Suffering grounds us in the reality of the pain and pleasure of this world. He awakens in us compassion for the suffering of others. Adversity fortifies the mind and the soul to resist any inclination to complain and become disheartened. We should treat adversity as a gift from the Lord and accept it with grace and courage. Above all we should avoid bitterness and recrimination that arises from our suffering. If we become embittered by our pain, this is a potential cause of rebirth as it may lead us to actions that bring us back. Once we move beyond outward suffering, we start to realize that happiness lies within.

Truly brave is the person who forges ahead. The saints tell us that it takes courage to make the choices that are aligned with going home to the Lord. The basic question is always, “Am I managing my life, my home, my family and the friends that I surround myself with in a manner that will help me do my meditation?”

Worry can only sidetrack spiritual progress. So, let's not lose heart when things go wrong. Instead, stay hopeful. Concentrate on meditation. Perseverance and practice are essential. Understand and accept that everyone experiences tragedy that can rattle the spirit; let us cherish hope in our hearts, and have confidence that our Master will

accompany us home. When we have been stripped of illusion, we will see that he has been holding our hand all along.

In *Quest for Light*, Maharaj Charan Singh gives us a comforting message of courage:

*Please remember there is no place for any disappointment or dejection in Sant Mat. It is a path of joy and hope. When the Lord has chosen you for eternal liberation, then what other power can keep you back for long in this creation? It is only a question of time. All are struggling souls and are carrying their individual burden of karmas. It will take a lot of time and effort and perseverance to control the mind and throw off this burden. But it will definitely be done one day. The Master will see you back home. So give up all your worries and with love and devotion do your duty every day. Give time to bhajan and simran without caring as to how the mind behaves.... The Master is always with you and so is his love.*

As we go through this life, we can keep the Master foremost in our heart and mind. The things that will give us strength and sensitivity to appreciate his constant stream of grace are our daily meditation, a grateful heart, a positive attitude, and a capacity to hope. Life is short, really just a moment. Let's not delay.



# Atmosphere

*The masters teach us a way of living, a way of approaching our lives, which can turn all our time and all our actions into 'meditation.' If we attend to the meditation practice each day and then live a true Sant Mat way of life, we live in the atmosphere of meditation all day. As Maharaj Charan Singh said: "If you build that atmosphere of meditation and you live in that atmosphere ... then every breath is meditation."*

*A Wake Up Call: Beyond Concepts and Illusions*

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# Book Review



## What is God?

BY JACOB NEEDLEMAN

PUBLISHER: NEW YORK: TARCHER/PENGUIN, 2010.

ISBN: 978-1585-4282-72

Jacob Needleman, a professor of philosophy at San Francisco State University, is the author of more than a dozen books pondering the age-old question of man's relationship to the universe. In *What is God?* Needleman – who once considered himself an atheist – takes the reader through his own life-long journey to know what is true, what is real. At first he did not use the word “God” for that truth or reality, since God was a concept too burdened with superstitions and irrational beliefs. His quest was to know, to awaken to, reality without the trappings of religion.

This quest began for Needleman in childhood. In 1943, when he was nine, he was sitting silently with his father one night gazing at the night sky, when “suddenly, as if by magic, the black sky was instantly strewn with millions of stars. Millions of points of light.” He says it was like nothing he had ever seen before or since. It was “as though an entirely new instrument of seeing had all at once been switched on within me. Or, as it also seemed, as though the whole universe itself suddenly opened its arms to me.” The silence was broken when his father simply said, “That’s God.”

Needleman finds that it is in occasional lucid moments, moments of heightened awareness, that one glimpses something of ultimate reality, not as an idea, but as an experience. He believes that virtually everyone has these experiences, but instead of responding with a yearning for more, they let the experience be “covered over or ignored.”

Such moments may come in surprising ways. One such moment presented itself to Needleman when, as a college sophomore, he read page one of *Critique of Pure Reason* by Immanuel Kant. He read, “Human reason has this peculiar fate that in one species of its knowledge it is burdened by questions which, as prescribed by the very nature of reason itself, it is not able to ignore, but which, as transcending all its powers, it is

also not able to answer.” He immediately shut the book and almost wept. Needleman explains that, for Kant, reason is unable to show us reality as it is; rather, it “shapes the fundamental lineaments of reality in the process of perception.” Our minds, in essence, show us only appearances, shaped by our own way of thinking. Yet “the human mind, Reason, is driven, *called*, by its very nature” to ask the very questions it cannot answer. The result is a void, a crisis of uncertainty. Needleman felt that reading Kant had presented him not just with an intellectually intriguing problem of philosophy. Rather, it was a call; something was calling him.

Needleman answered that call by deep and intense study of Western philosophy and theology, as well as the Vedanta school of Hindu philosophy, Zen Buddhism and other Eastern traditions. Sensing that understanding the nature of the self was somehow inextricably linked to understanding ultimate reality, he wrote his philosophy dissertation on the topic “What is the self?” It was, however, an encounter with the Zen Buddhist D.T. Suzuki that conveyed an understanding no amount of study could bring him.

When Needleman met Suzuki, the foremost thing that struck him was his *presence*. “My mind went blank. The sight of him instantly went right through my armor.” Needleman asked the question he had prepared: “What is the self?” Suzuki smiled and asked, “Who is asking the question?” Needleman stammered, “I am asking it!” Suzuki simply said, “Show me this I.” After a long and awkward silence the interview ended, and Needleman left dissatisfied and disappointed. For the next several months he felt “totally adrift.” He worked hard at his academic studies, but they felt empty. “Underneath it all, nearly always, there was this faint bitter taste.” Then one night: “In the middle of a sound sleep, I sat bolt upright in bed. My God! This was what he was telling me! ... I was supposed to find this out for myself! It was not communicable in words, in thought! It was an event, not an idea!”

Needleman says that in moments of heightened awareness, we know that on the surface there is a self that is thinking and questioning, while at a deeper level there is another self that is “knowing and sensing and yearning within the depths of [one’s] embryonic and timeless selfhood.” He declares that if “we look within ourselves, we will discover that the

presence of a higher vibration within ourselves is already there, activating the impulse to think about the question of God.” He surmises that too often we are insensitive to this inner, “wordless vibration.”

If such experiences awakened Needleman to his quest, it was in Gurdjieff’s teachings that Needleman ultimately found a beacon to show him his way. Through Gurdjieff’s books he found a teaching, a disciplined practice, a community of fellow seekers, and his own “guide,” Jeanne de Salzmann, Gurdjieff’s chief pupil. Needleman remarks on “the absence of the idea of God” or even the mention of God in Gurdjieff’s work. When he first approached those teachings, he found this congenial, since, though a professor teaching about religions and religious thought, he himself disowned both God and religion. Later, however, when Needleman heard de Salzmann speak of the energy or vibration within as “what the religious call God,” in a flash he felt the two sides of himself unite.

De Salzmann often talked about “attention.” In meditative practice, Needleman came to see that attention – or, more exactly, the freedom to direct and harness the power of attention – is the “uniquely human capacity.” As he put it, “*I am my attention.*” When our attention is adrift on “our streams of automatic thought,” according to Needleman, “we are taken, our attention is taken, swallowed.... We constantly disappear into our emotional reactions.... We no longer exist as I, myself, here. We do not live our lives; we are lived and we may die without ever having awakened to what we really are – without having lived.” He gradually came to realize that this power of attention or inner consciousness “could open the door to the experience of God.” God could be experienced as ‘Divine Attention.’

*God, in this sense, may be understood to be, among many other things, pure conscious energy, so conscious that it loves and forgives and judges in one instantaneous, infinite act. Everywhere through the endless space of the universe there exists, shall we say, this Divine Attention which everything obeys without question.*

Needleman says that philosophers from Socrates to Kant never mentioned God in the context of their philosophies; yet, “attention was the mystery in broad daylight!”

According to de Salzmann, there is “an energy that comes from above,” and this body is “built to serve that energy, to be incarnated by that energy.” Needleman writes about his struggles and his intense yearning to realize this “higher attention” permeating the human body. It seemed not merely difficult, but impossible. “My own attention was something I could work with, I could intend something with it. But this other attention was only something I could allow to enter, something which I needed to receive.” Needleman slowly came to understand that the transformation of attention is possible only through disciplined spiritual practice or meditation.

Science, Needleman says, is strictly based upon empiricism, knowledge of what can be proven through the senses and by physical experimentation. But it overlooks a “massive, towering fact – namely, the existence of the discipline of inner experience, experience of the inner world that is as precise and undeniable as the facts brought to light by sensory experience of the external world.” Needleman calls science “external empiricism,” while the “spiritual philosophies of the world are rooted in disciplined work of inner empiricism.”

What then is the proof of God’s existence? Needleman states that the only real proof comes individually, through one’s own inner development. One must approach this development with the whole of oneself; not mind alone, but mind, heart and body must unite in the quest. “Human beings are gifted with the possibility, and maybe the necessity, the duty of bringing all these sources of knowing together.” Is there an *outward* proof for the existence of God? Needleman says there is – “the existence of people who are inhabited by and who manifest God.”

In the concluding chapter, “What the Religions Call God,” Needleman asks a question for our times: “To what extent is humanity’s entire concept of how God is supposed to act in the world of man a greatly imagined projection of how the higher Attention acts within the human body?” And he concludes the book asking, what is the meaning of life if we “live without the yearning for what the religions call God?”



