

August 2017

# Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre



# contents

- 4 By the Perfect Guru's Grace
- 6 Reflections on Silence
- 11 The Voice of God
- 13 Building Mud Platforms
- 18 This Human Life
- 23 This World of Illusion
- 25 The Inner Journey
- 30 Changing Our Spots
- 35 Bad Habits
- 39 Master and Disciple
- 44 Being Born Again
- 49 A Hasidic Tale
- 50 Book Review

## **Spiritual Link**

Science of the Soul Research Centre  
Guru Ravi Dass Marg, Pusa Road, New Delhi-110005, India  
Copyright © 2017 Science of the Soul Research Centre®

Articles and poems that appear without sources have been written by the contributors to this magazine.

**VOLUME 13 • ISSUE 8 • AUGUST 2017**

# By the Perfect Guru's Grace

*You are my father, you are my mother,  
you are my friend and you are my brother.*

*With you as my protector in all places,  
what fears and worries can I have?*

*By your grace I have recognized you;  
you are my shelter, you are my honour.*

*Other than you, no one exists –  
the whole creation is your theatre for the drama of life.*

*All living beings are created by you  
and tasks are assigned to them according to your will.*

*Everything happens as you will;  
nothing is in our power.*

*Through meditation on Nam I attained great bliss,  
and by singing the praises of God my mind was pacified.*

*By the perfect Guru's grace, celebrations are held  
as Nanak emerges victorious in the tough battlefield of life.*

Guru Arjan Dev  
*Voice of the Heart*



# Reflections on Silence

*There was no place, there was no time  
Only He dwelt within Himself;  
He alone, and One complete,  
just Him, no other, only ....ONE.*

So says the author of *One Being One*. And he continues: “Before the beginning there was stillness, silence, no time, no space, nothing.”

We live in an increasingly noisy world. It is hard to escape the noise of the world, what not to say of the voice in our heads. You have to go very far to find a quiet place, somewhere in the mountains or in the desert. Some place where you can't hear another human or a car – just natural sounds. And even then, somewhere high up, a plane may be passing. Not even the Dera is quiet. Those who have been there know that it is continuously busy and there is always background noise.

We have no control over the world around us. We cannot stop these noises, except maybe by getting into a sensory deprivation tank. So the only logical thing to do is to start within ourselves: see if we can reduce the chattering of our monkey minds, and so find a place of stillness, calmness and peace – a place full of nothing.

Joan Walsh Augland published a little book of poems in 1964 called *A Cup of Sun*. She wrote:

*Thoughts, rest your wings.  
Here is a hollow of silence,  
a nest of stillness,  
in which to hatch your dreams.*

Augland also wrote: “Day! Now thoughts begin – on dawn’s grey back old fears ride in.”

Isn’t that true? We wake up and thoughts begin: about things that happened yesterday, last week, years ago; thoughts about this day, fears, plans; thoughts about tomorrow, next week; our family, friends, things, places. Just buzz, buzz, buzz. Madness. How do we stop this and find our way back to the silence?

Well, the first thing to think about is stopping to think – or, more accurately, to be aware of our thinking and make a conscious decision to reduce the noise. It is good to stop thinking for a while if we can, for if we think all the time, it is much like talking all the time. If we talk all the time, we won’t hear the interesting things someone else may have to say and, likewise, if we think all the time, we may not have anything to think about except our own thoughts.

The philosopher Alan Watts writes:

*Now, you will find if you try, that it is a very difficult thing indeed to stop thinking. Stopping thinking doesn’t mean to stop using your eyes and your hands and all your senses. It means when you see a dog, you don’t say ‘dog’ to yourself – you just see what there is.*

*Taoism: Way Beyond Seeking*

A quiet state of mind does not happen without effort. It takes work and awareness – years and years, lifetimes, before we get it right. Simran and bhajan are of course the tools that the Masters give us to quieten the mind. They are very aware that the mind naturally wants to think and name things, wants to flit from this idea to that, from this face or image to that one. And repeating our simran is the way to still the chattering mind once and for all.

Thomas à Kempis writes in *Of The Imitation of Christ* that we can begin to cultivate silence by starting to talk less. He asks:

*Why are we so fond of speaking and conversing with one another, though we rarely return to our silence without some injury to our consciences? The reason why we enjoy talking is because we seek solace in chatting with one another, and desire to lighten our distracted hearts. Furthermore, we enjoy talking and thinking about things we most want and desire, or those we especially dislike.*

Human nature does not change. This was written more than 500 years ago. He goes on to say: “Set aside an opportune time for deep personal reflection and think often about God’s many benefits to you.” For us this is our time of meditation when we let go of the world and concentrate only on our simran and on our Master. But also it could be any other quiet time.

Further on he says: “If you abstain from unnecessary conversation and useless visiting, as well as from listening to idle news and gossip, you will find sufficient and suitable times for your meditations.”

None of us can say that we do not have sufficient and suitable time for meditation. Even in the busiest of lives, we can make time for our meditation – and then take that atmosphere of quietness and introspection into the rest of our day. It is all a question of attitude and whether we want it badly enough. The Masters have never said that we must lock ourselves up in monasteries and take a vow of silence, or go and live alone in a hut in some remote place. They tell us to go on with our lives, and within those lives make time for meditation and silence. And we can start by withdrawing from unnecessary talking and arguments.



The Japanese Zen Master Nan-in lived in the Meiji era. A professor came to visit him to talk about Zen. Nan-in, ever the good host, started pouring tea while the professor kept on talking. He filled the professor's cup and then kept on pouring. The professor looked at this spectacle and, when he could not hold himself in any more, said: "The cup is full. There is no space for more tea." "Yes," said Nan-in, "Just as this cup is full, so are you full of your own opinions and speculation. How can I show you Zen if you don't first empty your head?"

To still the mind is the job of a lifetime. The mind likes to run around all the time looking for things to nibble on. The early kabbalistic work *Sefer Yetzirah* describes our struggle to control the mind: "Close your mouth that you speak not, and your heart that you do not ponder; and if your heart be too busy, bring it back to its place, for therefore it is said: run and return."

The Masters tell us that simran and bhajan are the only ways to still the mind – they are our only way into silence. And it may not be a bad idea to build some quiet time into every day, and not only when we get up to meditate – a little quiet time now and then, sitting somewhere alone, without thinking, without 'looking'. And then, very likely, we will find the simran going on in the background without our even having to make an effort to remember the words. And in this silence we may begin to see a glimpse of who we really are. We may begin to become aware of everything around us, in the sense of an awareness of oneness, of godness, if you will.

There is a relevant story in the Vimilakirti Sutra from the early days of Buddhism. Vimilakirti was a family man, an ethical businessman and a God-realized soul. One day all the bodhisattvas, priests and nuns and other God-realized souls decided to gather to discuss mystical wisdom. They came together in Vimilakirti's bedroom.

Each one got a chance to expound on godly and mystical wisdom and each gave a brilliant verbal description of the absolute, the

indescribable and the unknowable. Each spoke better than the previous speaker and delved deeper and deeper into mystical wisdom. The penultimate speaker was Mansjuri, the Maha bodhisattva of wisdom. His speech was brilliant and inspiring, the absolute pronouncement on unity – the highest and purest mystical wisdom. When he had finished, all bowed before him. At last, all turned to Vimilakirti and asked him for the final word on mystical and godly wisdom. And then, says the Sutra, “His silence resounded like mighty thunder.”

It is in this thundering silence that we may begin to hear something else: the “still small voice” mentioned in the Bible. As we are now we cannot hear God. Our minds are too busy and too noisy – full of things and thoughts of self and others. There may be no place even for the Master if the cup is overflowing. Only when we start emptying the cup through meditation, can we make a place for him in our lives.

So, our bhajan is our nest of stillness, our hollow of silence. And into this the Shabd comes when it so wills. In fact, this silence is the Creator talking. His silent language is expressed as the unstruck music, the ringing radiance, the thundering silence. And in that silence we start to become one with him.

And so we come full circle. We started with him and in the end we have to come back to him.

The longer we are on this path, the more we realize that thinking will get us nowhere. We cannot think ourselves silent, we cannot think ourselves into unity! The only way is through concentration, or simran and awareness, or bhajan. So we sit in meditation and concentrate on the words to bring us to one-pointed concentration. And then we sit in awareness and wait for him to manifest in the silence. We listen without listening. We are aware. We become one.



# The Voice of God

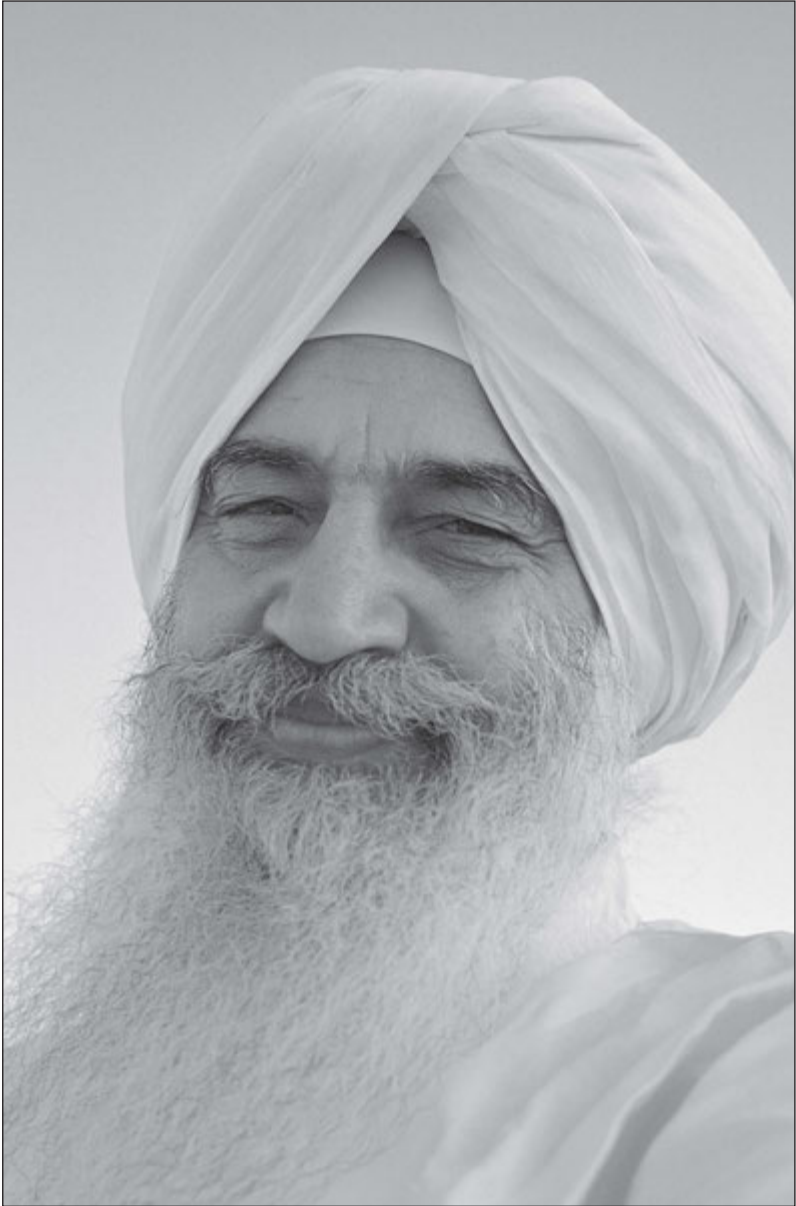
From our limited human viewpoint, one of the most significant characteristics of the Word of God must surely be that it can be heard within when a person practises the correct spiritual exercises or sometimes even spontaneously for brief periods when the mind is quiet and deeply concentrated. The Word is heard in the form of the most beautiful music. It is the primal and pristine music of creation's dawn, of the beginning of everything. It resounds unceasingly within every particle of the creation and within every soul.

It is awe-inspiring, breath-taking and blissful. And it automatically instils in its listeners a sense of true worship, something quite different and a million times deeper and more real than the feelings any ritual or ceremony can generate. This is the Voice of God, the divine Sound, the divine Music, the real Music of the Spheres which keeps the universe and all souls in existence. It is the Holy Ghost or the Holy Spirit. ...

The sights, sounds and phenomena of this world are of a limited duration. The Music of the Word, the divine Music, however, goes on and on, for as long as creation lasts. The music of the world is created by making sound vibrations in the air. The divine Music is created by God as His Primal Vibration by means of which He fashions and sustains His creation. External music is heard with the outer ears. The divine Music is heard with the 'ear' of the soul, the hearing faculty of the soul.

*The Gospel of Jesus*





*Maharaj Charan Singh*

# Building Mud Platforms

The Great Master often used to tell stories during his satsangs to convey a spiritual message. Back in the 1960s Maharaj Charan Singh collected ninety of these stories and published them as *Tales of the Mystic East*.

For us as disciples there is at least one that is worth remembering, especially when we do our meditation. It is called 'Guru Ram Das and the Mud Platforms', and it tells how the third Sikh Guru, Amar Das, was preparing to appoint his successor. Some of his disciples hoped he would appoint one of them, so he gave them a test. He told them each to collect some earth and build him a small mud platform.

This they did, but the Guru rejected every one as not good enough. Would they build them over? Again they built their platforms, time after time, and each time the Guru found some reason for them to break them down and build them again. Eventually some started thinking the Guru had gone senile and they stopped. A few kept building, but even they got tired of it and stopped – till there was only one disciple, Ram Das, still cheerfully tearing down his platform each time the Guru rejected it and building it again.

When he'd rebuilt his platform seventy times Guru Amar Das told him: "You may stop building now, Ram Das. I am very pleased with you, for you alone have given me implicit obedience and complete surrender to my will and wishes." And then the Guru appointed him to be his successor. To the others he said: "There was not one of you who cheerfully obeyed one of the first rules of being a true disciple – to give the Satguru your full love and devotion, to have utter faith in him and obey his wishes with a cheerful heart."

Many mornings when we get up from our meditation and we feel that yet again we have failed miserably, perhaps it might seem to us that we are building mud platforms. Our Master has given us a task to do, but no matter how hard we work, it's never good enough. We keep making an effort, but still the attention doesn't rise to sit firmly in the eye centre. Perhaps then we get discouraged.

And this may be the time for some clear thinking. Why does our Master ask us to meditate? Does he really need it? He can do anything he likes, with or without our efforts, but *we* are the ones who need our meditation.

When we meet a Master he will explain to us that our souls are yearning to return to the Creator, to their original home. He teaches us how to meditate, to find our way back – so that our souls can know that peace and bliss that they long for. But how realistic would it be to imagine that we could just fly home in the blink of an eye after so many millions of lives down here, collecting such mountains of karma? And while we are trying to work through those karmas we're being hampered by our own mind, which is working as an agent of the negative power to hold us back.

Every single one of us has no doubt felt despondent sometimes because we cannot see anything happening in our meditation. But it is a slow process. And we have absolutely no control over the time that it is taking for us to be transformed into beings worthy of returning to the Creator. And so we need patience.

Perhaps it is good for us to have to wait to experience the results of our steady practice. We might become over-confident if we were shown too soon what we were achieving. Or maybe we would want to spend all our time meditating instead of attending to our worldly responsibilities. But when he feels the time is right our Master will give us everything we've worked for. In the second volume of *Spiritual Perspectives* Maharaj Charan Singh tells us:

*It is all up to the Master. He deals with every soul individually. If it is in the interest of a soul to discharge certain obligations in this world, everything he has earned from attending to meditation is kept for him, and will be given at the proper time.*

The Master knows how much we want to please him when we struggle to get the mind under control. He is aware of us every moment. He knows our every thought, our every twinge of longing for him. And he most certainly knows how much we meditate – or don't meditate.

In time, however, we come to see for ourselves that our meditation is a daily necessity. Slowly we start to realize that we *are* reaping its benefits. We discover we don't cope so well without our meditation. Hazur Maharaj Ji has told us that if we meditate we can go through all the events of the day without losing our balance. Meditation gives us peace within, no matter what is happening, or not happening, when we do our practice. In his words:

*You feel the effect of meditation before you actually see any progress within. ... And there is some sort of contentment. Your attitude towards the events of the world is also changing. You are developing a detached outlook on everything by meditation, though you may not have experienced any progress within at all.*

*Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. II*

Regardless of a lack of visible progress, our meditation is preparing the way for us to end our long succession of lives in the creation. Till then we simply have to go through our karmas, good and bad. And even the bad karmas will never again be unbearable, as long as we do

our meditation. In *Spiritual Gems* Great Master says something quite startling. He calls meditation the antidote to karma. In his own words:

*The fate karma undoubtedly is strong. It has to be borne and there is no escape from it. But, through meditation, the will power becomes so strong that a person does not feel or mind either its favourable or adverse effects. If meditation has taken us above the point from where the fate karma works on us, we become indifferent to its effect. Therefore, meditation is the antidote to karma.*

Does this not tell us how lucky we are to be the followers of a living Master? We can now face whatever our future might be, in the full confidence that whatever happens, with his help we can get through it without losing our balance. Provided, of course, that we are doing our meditation. Not that he will change our destiny, but whatever comes, he will help us to adjust to it.

For many years we may get distressed because there are no visible results in our meditation. But some subtle changes do come. These are a very real result of our practice, and perhaps even more important than the visible results of meditation that we may crave. These show us that we *are* succeeding in our meditation, in the best possible way.

We will also notice that even though we may seldom see our Master, we have a desire to serve him, to become the kind of disciples he would like us to be. This becomes a priority in our lives. In other words, we develop devotion and love for him.

And we also begin to develop faith – in the Master and in his path. Faith is not a thing we can cultivate. Faith is his gift, to hold us steady and make us continue on our long journey to reach him within. And of course our faith in our Master is a direct result of loving him – with the love that he gives us as a reward for our efforts at meditation.



Then there is the lesson of humility. Nothing else can show us how helpless and inadequate we are to bring the mind under control. Meditation makes us realize that without help this wild mind will never be tamed. And let us talk about obedience. When we realize how dependent we are on our Master to guide us back home, what else should we do but obey him?

The truth is that we are in no position to judge our own progress. But every now and then we're given a standard against which we can measure ourselves. We've been given one in the Guru Ram Das story. The Guru gave his disciples a test and, with the exception of one, they all failed. Now let us look at ourselves. Let us see to what extent we are obeying the first rules of being a true disciple: to give the Satguru our full love and devotion, to have utter faith in him and obey his wishes with a cheerful heart.

We may think obedience is a simple thing, but it's huge. If we obey our Master out of love for him, look at where this will lead us – to becoming one with God himself! Maharaj Ji tells us in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II:

*It is said that God is love and love is God, because the characteristic of God is love. We become one with him. We don't exist anymore; only he exists. ... We want to do what pleases him and avoid doing what displeases him – that is love. It is just giving and giving. And when by giving we can become God, what else is left? If by giving yourself – as a drop you become the ocean – have you gained or lost? ... You have become one with the Father.*



# This Human Life

In Rumi's *Masnavi*, there is a story of a stickler for grammar who was being rowed across a river in a boat. Turning to the boatman with a self-satisfied air, he asked him:

“Have you ever studied grammar?”

“No,” replied the boatman.

“Then half your life has gone to waste,” the grammarian said.

The boatman thereupon felt very depressed, but he did not answer for the moment. Presently the wind tossed the boat into a whirlpool. The boatman shouted to the grammarian:

“Do you know how to swim?”

“No,” the grammarian replied, “my well-spoken, handsome fellow.”

“In that case, grammarian,” the boatman remarked, “the whole of your life has gone to waste, for the boat is sinking in these whirlpools.”

As short-lived as our lives may be, our being trapped in this human frame is not always a whole lot of fun. Life is very uncertain, and we face problems at every step. This body is like a vessel of clay, very easy to damage or destroy. But fragile as it is, this clay vessel has two things that the higher worlds cannot offer: first, a constant call from the Lord to advance spiritually; and second, the Lord, who has placed himself in this body with us. Yes, the all-powerful Creator is right inside our vessel of clay!

It is only while in the human form that a soul can progress to reach union with the Lord. In fact, the mystics explain that it can be done during this very life. What is more, we have no alternative. With the Lord's grace this will most certainly happen.

The fact is that the soul is very unhappy here. Maharaj Charan Singh tells us:

*The soul is a drop of the divine ocean and is always soaring towards its own origin. Soul is always anxious to go back to its own source. Love and devotion are in the soul. It is the mind which is keeping us attached to this creation, while the soul is becoming very unhappy in this creation. It's very unhappy. This is why we have the feeling of loneliness, no matter what we have in this creation. We always feel lonely.*

*Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. II*

The Lord is showering his grace on us, and he is anxious for us to be filled with his divine love. But it has become second nature for us to seek relief from our suffering by indulging in sense pleasures. It just happens so naturally. How fleeting and fragile this body and its existence are. As one of the Dera speakers of yesteryear always used to say: “Our ship of life is sinking and we are polishing the brass.”

But how to break from this deep attachment to life? How to awake from this deep sleep? How to remove the thick veil? How to turn our gaze inward and upward to the heavens from where nectar is showering down? How to reach the embrace of our Beloved?

Maharaj Ji was once asked, “Master, is it possible to break strong attachments without pain?” He responded:

*You can only break strong attachments by experiencing joy; joy from becoming one with the sound and light within. That bliss and peace which you get by attending to your meditation, that will break your strong attachments and strong bondages, so then the question of pain doesn't arise at all.*

*Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. II*

And the load of karma that we have accumulated over innumerable lives is very heavy indeed. Paying all of it would require suffering for hundreds of lives. In the same volume of *Spiritual Perspectives*, Maharaj Ji says:

*We can always burn our karmas. They can always be destroyed. That is the purpose of meditation; otherwise we would have taken hundreds of lives to fulfil those karmas. But by meditation it can be done in one, or two, or three lives – four at the most. The object of meditation is to destroy those karmas, to clear those karmas.*

Then Maharaj Ji adds that one little portion of Nam or Shabd burns thousand and millions of karmas. And this is all possible while we are still in this human body.

It is sometimes said that the path is much longer than it is hard. The Masters explain that it is through meditation that the battle is won, slowly and slowly. There is a story told about a mystic who knew he was soon to die and needed to choose a successor. One afternoon he invited a number of his most devoted followers to go for a walk with him in the forest. Somewhere along the way they took a wrong turn and soon found themselves lost. The forest was thick and dense, and darkness descended. As the evening drew on there seemed to be no way of finding their way home.

After travelling in darkness in the treacherous jungle for many hours they reached a fork in the road. The Master then turned to his two most devoted disciples and asked them which way they thought would lead back home. One of the disciples was a learned man who promptly started analyzing the shrub growth, position of the moon and so on. The other man answered without hesitation that it was irrelevant which route they took. He had completely submitted to his

Master and as far as he was concerned, wherever his Master was, that was home for him. Even just that split second of analysis from the learned disciple disqualified him from succeeding his Master. The one who had submitted completely was appointed as the next Master.

Very few disciples are capable of this kind of submission. For the rest of us this is simply impossible. We have to work to reach the eye centre. We have to work to go within – which will be a momentous occasion for which we have been waiting for innumerable ages. This will be the most profound moment in our entire existence, but it requires a high state of mental strength and purity.

In *Spiritual Gems* Great Master explains:

*Our chief aim should be to unite with our Creator and avoid lust, anger, avarice, attachment and pride as far as we can, as they are our enemies. At all times our hearts should be full of love for the Master and our own mind should be so fearless that it should not be ruffled if it were given the kingdom of the world nor if the kingdom of the world were taken from it. When the mind has become like that, the Master penetrates it with his real light.*

This is a very high state indeed, but one that the Master guarantees we will ultimately reach. Exactly how long this will take depends on us and on our meditation practice. This is the only way. As Maharaj Ji explains in *Spiritual Perspectives* Vol. II:

*There is one very special process. ... That is meditation. You see, meditation creates love. It strengthens love. It deepens love. It grows love. Ultimately, it illuminates you and it makes you God. That's all meditation.*

The objective is to reach the Radiant Form of the Master while in this human form, and then to progress onward. We have to persevere. This does not mean working really hard at meditation for a day or a week or even a year. As the saying goes: “Slow and steady wins the race.” This has become a lifelong fight between the higher and lower mind. We can never tire or give up trying to curb this lower mind and its tendencies. The truth is that we are far better and higher than all of this, and it is only a matter of time before victory will be ours.

There is a beautiful photo of Maharaj Ji at the Dera hanging in Hostel 6. He is preparing a rose to be photographed by delicately and lovingly arranging its petals. Maharaj Ji seems focused on bringing out the beauty of the rose. In the same way we need to work on our simran and meditation each and every day – turn our gaze inward and upward so that our Master may delicately open the petals of our heart and restore us to our pristine beauty. This is how the purpose of this life will be achieved.



*Do not lose heart. The battle has just begun, and fight courageously. Mind is not stronger than the Sound Current. The Master is with you. He is watching your every movement. He is prepared to fight your battles with you. Take him as your helper. Have faith in him. Fight the mind and you will succeed.*

*Spiritual Gems*

# This World of Illusion

Is it not strange that even though we know we will not be in the world permanently, we act as if we were to be here forever! Soami Ji tells us that we are so attached to the creation and love it so much that we have forgotten the Lord, forgotten our true home. We are trapped in this world of illusion and take everything that we see to be real.

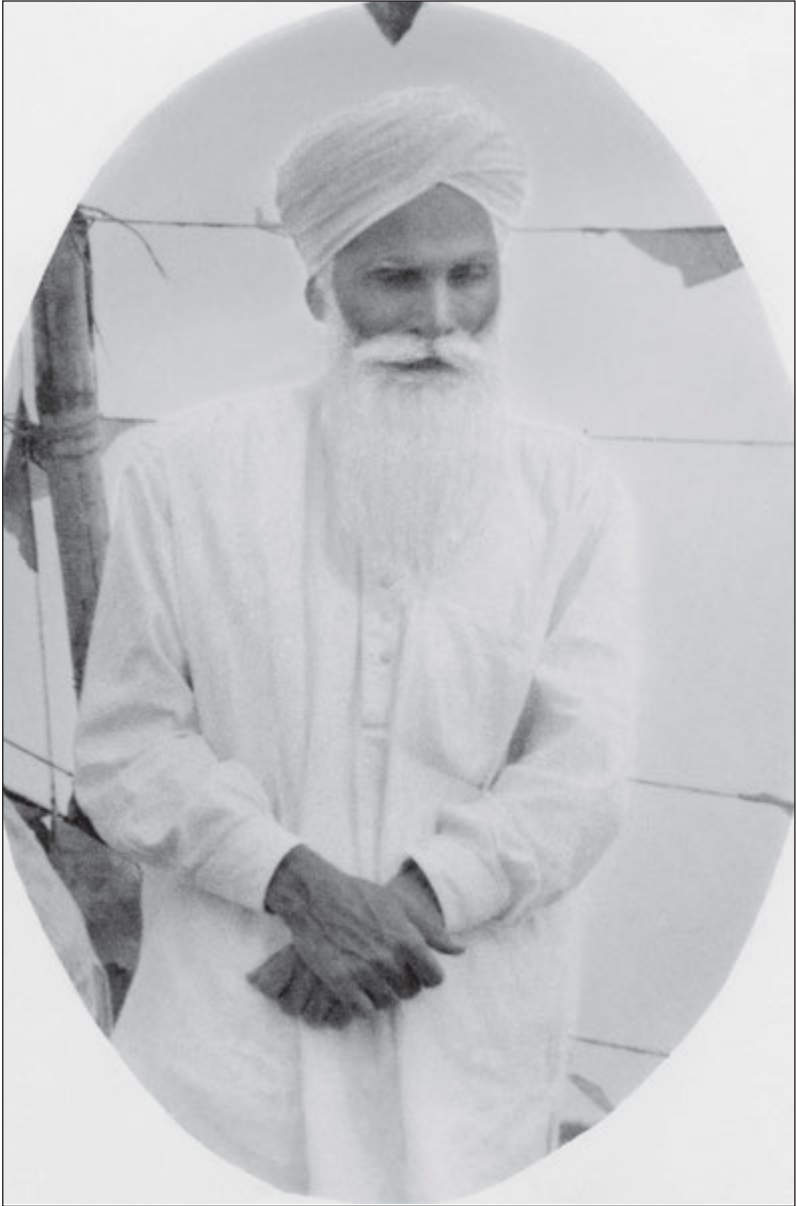
Not only mystics tell us that this is a world of illusion, scientists say the same thing. Science tells us that at the subatomic or quantum level, nothing of the material world is left intact. There are only energy fields with no solidity at all, nothing for the senses to see or touch. Our physical senses are too dull and too slow to sense, feel, see or experience in any manner these energy fields that are in fact vibrations taking place in a void.

All the suns, stars and galaxies in the whole cosmos are a quantum mirage, winking in and out of existence millions of times per second. The whole universe is like a blinking light. The illusion in which we exist isn't restricted to the material world. Our mental perceptions, emotions and attachments are part of the illusory realm of mind and matter.

Meditation is the means to realize the fleeting and impermanent nature of human life, of all our attachments and endeavours – even life itself. Meditation is the means to realize a higher, more permanent reality. Through meditation and with the help of a true Master, we can wake up from the dream-like existence that characterizes the lower planes of consciousness.

*Living Meditation*





*Maharaj Jagat Singh*



# The Inner Journey

The path of true spirituality is an inner path. This point cannot be stressed enough. No matter how much we do out in the world, it is not really helping us progress in our spiritual endeavours.

If our objective were to get another life in more fortunate circumstances than this one when next we reincarnate on planet earth, then good deeds and the service of suffering humanity would no doubt achieve that. But if our intention is to rise above the limitations of the flesh and ascend into the clear skies of true spirituality, then we need to consider our options more carefully.

It is logical that if the consequences of good actions are good karmas, then performing good works will not help us to escape the cycle of birth and death. The mystics say that the object of human life is not to achieve anything out here in the material world. Quite the contrary, in fact. We have been wandering around in the Lord's creation since the beginning, and throughout all this time we have been bound to the material world by our attachments and our karmas. Unless we address these issues, the question of our making significant spiritual progress simply does not arise.

Since this seems to be the natural inclination of mind and ego, how do we avoid developing attachments and creating karmas? The mystics say that we need to control our attention. By habit we are always directing our attention downwards and outwards into the world. We need to reverse this flow of our energy so that it flows inwards and upwards.

The mystics recommend that for this purpose we should adopt the practice of meditation. The meditation the mystics propose for us is a process designed to withdraw our attention entirely from the

physical world and focus it within, at the eye centre, which is the doorway to the inner realms.

This process, when successful, will stop the mind from wandering out in the world and will bring our attention inwards, so that we may consciously experience what is happening in the inner dimensions of being. Thus far, for the majority of us, this inner world is a complete and utter mystery. Even though we may completely accept every facet of the Master's teachings, this inner life is something that most of us have never actually experienced, and so it remains just a concept and a theory for us.

By virtue of our initiation we already understand all that we need to know in order to progress on the path towards our spiritual goal. Yet many of us complain that we seem to be making no headway. We give it our best shot, but still we seem to be no better off than before.

First of all, it should be pointed out that if we are indeed trying our best, it is not possible that no progress is being made. By living the Sant Mat lifestyle and trying our best to meditate every day, we are changing our consciousness in the most positive way, and though it may take a while to achieve measurable change, we are changing nonetheless. We should also understand that our old habits have a way of blocking us from understanding what life is all about.

We get so absorbed in the world around us: the world we see in our everyday activities, the world we read about in the news. It all seems so real and so compelling. But we should realize that this so-called reality is just the most superficial manifestation of the true reality.

Behind all of this that we see, how much is going on? We only see a fraction of what is actually happening. Do you imagine that in the news on TV you see the truth? When you read an article on Facebook or any other social media, can you believe what it says? At the most we may be getting honest reporting of the events out there, but

even that is an extremely optimistic view. Even if we look at our own circumstances, do we know what is going on at our work, or even in our own home?

If we consider ourselves, how many people really know us? For most of us there will be quite a few who think that they do, but in our hearts we know that there is no one who has any idea of our inner self, our secret self, as it were. At this level, there are no words to describe our condition. Just as we know that no one really knows us completely, just so we need to acknowledge that we also do not really know anyone else completely.

So people conduct their lives believing that they know who and what they are dealing with, and we can easily understand that this is really just an illusion – we know people only in the most superficial way. Similarly, the way the world works is a total mystery, even though we may think we understand it. How many hidden powers are at work behind the façade of what we see?

We walk about under the impression that we know what's going on, but we don't know. How many things happen in an unforeseen and inexplicable way? So we have to ask ourselves: do we really know or understand anything?

Our future is not determined by politicians or world leaders, nor by extremist terrorist groups, nor by religious leaders. We are in the divine plan. When devout Muslims say that they're going to do something, they always add "Insh'allah" – if God wills it – because that is closer to the truth than our own intentions.

We have often heard it said that the effort is in our hands, but results are in the Lord's. So it is not unrealistic to say that we have no idea of what tomorrow will bring. But if we accept that we are in his hands, and that nothing whatsoever can possibly happen that is outside of his will, then instead of feeling insecure, we can relax in

the knowledge that he is looking after us in the best possible way – so that we can progress inwards, towards the realization of our divine heritage. As Maharaj Jagat Singh remarked in *The Science of the Soul*:

*Life is not worth worrying over too much. It begins in folly and ends in smoke.*

On the level of our daily life we should constantly remind ourselves that we only need to put in our best effort, and the rest is up to our creator Father. To the extent that we put our best effort into our spiritual practice, we will raise our consciousness and our perspective on life until we start to realize that the things that matter are not out there, but in here.

So what will be the difference in our life if we put all of this into practice in our daily lives? There is an old Zen expression that covers this nicely: “Before enlightenment, chopping wood and carrying water. After enlightenment, chopping wood and carrying water.”

As far as the world is concerned, all that anyone is likely to notice is that you appear to be more quietly content than before, that you are someone that people can rely on, that you are kind and courteous, that you are, in general, what most people would call a ‘good person.’ Beyond that they have no idea, because the real sum and substance of your being is not in evidence in any way that they can see. Your world is within, your true joys and loves are within, and you do not look outwards to the world for your pleasure or direction.

These are the implications of following an inner path, of having embarked on an inner journey. No one is able to see the world that you are really living in. They can only see what you show. And how much can you show?

A person who experiences inner bliss is incapable of expressing it because it is beyond words, beyond all worldly expression. So when no-one is capable of knowing you as you are now, how much less so will they notice when your spiritual journey starts to take your consciousness within. Only the silent radiance of your inner condition will provide any clue, and it is probably only other spiritual seekers who will have any understanding of that at all.

So now is the time. There will never be a better one. We have come to the feet of a true Master who has given us the priceless gift of Nam and explained to us what we need to know in order to commence our journey out of this domain of mind and maya, and head for our true home of peace and bliss within.

Let us start taking this journey seriously. It is a journey within, which will take us out of this world of illusion and back to the one place where we truly belong.



*Don't tell your inner secret,  
Let people think you know nothing.  
Otherwise they'll chase you, then feel sad  
that you know something they don't.  
Whatever they're taught,  
they don't take in and digest.  
If they have no experience, says Tuka,  
it's a waste of your time and theirs.*

Tukaram

*Many Voices, One Song*

# Changing our Spots

There's a story told that we could all apply to ourselves: One day some disciples went to their Master and told him they were going on a pilgrimage, so that they could improve their devotion. "Okay," said the Master. "But please take this *karela* (a bitter cucumber-like vegetable) along with you, and whichever temple you visit, place it on the altar of the deity, take the blessings and bring it back to me."

So, not only the disciples but the *karela* also went on the pilgrimage, from temple to temple. And when they came back, the Master asked them to cook the *karela*, and serve it to him.

The disciples did what he asked. After his first bite, the Master commented: "Surprising! Even after the pilgrimage, the *karela* is still bitter. How come?" The disciples answered, "But that's the very nature of the *karela*, Master."

The Master said, "That's what I am saying. Unless you change your nature, a pilgrimage will not make any difference."

The story's message is clear. If we want to heighten our spirituality we have to work on ourselves. We have to disprove the proverb that a leopard cannot change its spots. We have to set about re-inventing ourselves, changing our spots, one by one.

As we are told, our only means for attaining spiritual perfection is concentrated meditation as taught by our living Master. Our first goal is to learn to 'die while living' – to pass consciously through the gates of death before the body actually dies. But to achieve that can take a lifetime, because it entails dealing with all the stuff we have accumulated in our mind that prevents concentration. The mind has to be purified of all material inclinations, of all thoughts of self, of everything but the One whom we are seeking. And that is not easy.

It is clear that changing our spots – removing our bad habits and character weaknesses – is a lifelong project.

Fortunately it is a project in which we are not alone. Every step along the path is supported by a highly experienced ‘project manager’, our Master. He is with us every inch of the way, guiding, protecting and moulding us into what we have to become in our quest for spiritual perfection.

We are told we are already one with the Divine, but to become fully convinced of this we need to conduct an experiment within the laboratory of the living body. We do this by entering the spiritual realms – something that can be attained only by concentrated focus at the eye centre. To help us we are also encouraged to repeat our simran at every possible opportunity throughout the day. This will lead to an ongoing awareness of his presence – a presence that can be felt or sensed.

One only has to go for a long walk on a beach or anywhere in quiet surroundings, and silently repeat our simran while we are walking. Our footsteps very quickly fade from our focus as the constant simran becomes more dominant in our minds. Then we may begin to sense his presence, to feel enveloped by his love.

There is nothing more profound and powerful on this plane than his love. It is this force, this Shabd, that governs everything and everyone in the creation. In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. I, Maharaj Charan Singh tells us there is love inside everyone because everyone has a soul. The soul, he says, is a spark of love. But this spark needs to become a fire, and the Masters’ purpose is to ignite this spark of love within each of their disciples to enable the spark to reconnect with its source.

While seeking to become more aware of his love, we can find a wealth of advice and encouragement if we explore the writings of Brother Lawrence, a simple monk who lived in France in the

seventeenth century. Brother Lawrence found great comfort and inspiration in nature and its seasonal contrasts and beauty. This affected him so deeply that he gained an awareness of the love of God and strove constantly to walk in his presence. He had a reputation for experiencing profound peace, and visitors came to seek spiritual guidance from him. The wisdom he passed on to them, in conversations and in letters, would later become the basis of his book *The Practice of the Presence of God*.

This humble monk appeared to have discovered a practical method for living in the presence of God every moment of his life. His experiences could provide some useful ideas on how we, too, can develop our own spiritual awareness. As he advised others:

*We must do our business faithfully; without trouble or disquiet, recalling our mind to God mildly, and with tranquillity, as often as we find it wandering from him. ... Let us think often that our only business in this life is to please God. Perhaps all besides is but folly and vanity.*

This is in line with what we are told about our own meditation. Our simran will come and go because of the distractions of the mind, but when this happens we need to gently bring it back into focus. Hazur often used the analogy of a silk scarf caught up in a thorn bush. If we yank at it impatiently, the scarf will rip, but if we disengage it thorn by thorn, the scarf can be removed undamaged. In the same way we can free ourselves from all worldly distractions if we gently and repeatedly re-engage with our simran.

We have often been told of the importance of thinking about the Master, of being constantly aware of him. Brother Lawrence also speaks in this vein: “In order to know God, we must often think of



him; and when we come to love him, we shall then also think of him often, for our heart will be with our treasure.”

Keeping the Lord in focus, being aware of him at all times, will either lead to feeling his presence and enhancing our love for him, or it will bring an all-important longing for his presence. This longing, in itself, will improve our focus during our meditation and pave the way for the realization of our true divine nature.

However, trying to be in the presence of God, while earning our living in the world is not easy. In fact, many may say it is well nigh impossible to maintain any kind of awareness of God or the Master while the tasks of our daily employment demand our attention. Brother Lawrence disagrees. He observes:

*The time of business does not differ with me from the time of prayer; and in the noise and clatter of my kitchen, while several persons are at the same time calling for different things, I possess God in as great tranquillity as if I were on my knees.*

For us too, with simran turning over in our subconscious, the workplace could become a tranquil refuge. Moreover, this could turn any wearisome chore into a pleasure. In the words of Brother Lawrence (which could be the words of our own Master):

*We ought not to be weary of doing little things for the love of God, who regards not the greatness of the work, but the love with which it is performed. This practice will eventually cause our efforts to become a pleasurable habit, which we can do without thinking.*

In another context Brother Lawrence also remarks that God is often nearer to us in sickness than in health. He adds:

*The greatest suffering will never appear intolerable when we see in them the hand of God who dispenses them. When we know that it is our loving Father who humiliates and distresses us, our sufferings will lose their bitterness and become even a matter of consolation.*

Brother Lawrence goes on to say: “Sufferings will be sweet and pleasant to us while we are with him; and the greatest pleasures will be, without him, a cruel punishment to us.”

Keeping the Lord in focus, being aware of him at all times, whether in our times of suffering or our times of joy, will lead to feeling his presence and enhancing our love for him. Moreover, it will intensify our longing for his presence. This longing, in itself, will improve our focus during our meditation and pave the way for the realization of our true divine nature. And it can arise from the simple practice of remembering him.

*If we shatter the chains of egotism, and melt into the ocean of humanity, we share its dignity. To feel that we are something is to set up a barrier between God and ourselves; to cease feeling that we are something is to become one with God. A drop in the ocean partakes of the greatness of its parent, although it is unconscious of it. But it is dried up as soon as it enters upon an existence independent of the ocean.*

Mahatma Gandhi as quoted in  
*Mahatma Gandhi - His Life and Times*

# Bad Habits

There is a tendency that many of us share and it is that, when faced with difficult circumstances, we respond by rushing out into the world, looking for solace. When events in life make us feel miserable and unhappy, we seem to have trained ourselves to respond by looking for solutions that may well take us further away from our goal and objective in life.

In this context, it may safely be said that the event itself is quite unimportant, compared to our reaction to it. It could be that we are feeling lonely, we could be stressed by events at work or at home, we could be suffering physical pain from illness or injury, or we could be disappointed in our relationships with others. The list is potentially endless. The important thing is how we react and why.

Whether we are aware of it or not, over time we have learned to react to certain events in the way we do. What we are trying to do is identify the things in our life that are hurting us and find ways to eliminate them. Our habits may well drive us into the world, looking for comfort, and our attention goes down and out and we act accordingly. And where our attention goes, our actions follow. This may have negative consequences: chief among these is that we incur still more karmas.

The general wisdom of our worldly peers seems to be that we should “eat, drink and be merry, for who knows what tomorrow will bring!” So there are many who might blindly rush out into the world, perhaps even engage in wanton debauchery, to distract themselves from the reality in which they find themselves. But we do not have to throw ourselves down into that pit. After all, who is accountable for the actions that we perform? Only we are.

We have to think about the consequences of our actions before we perform them. We should consider whether our actions will have a good and positive outcome or, at best, provide us with momentary solace. In the long term our actions might either make no impact or have a negative result. The traditional response to feeling miserable has frequently been to indulge in sense pleasures.

If we go down that road, however, will it provide us with anything resembling a solution to our misery or unhappiness? The more honestly we approach this issue, the more likely we are to realize that it is not possible to solve any problem in this way. It becomes increasingly obvious when we realize that the basis for our feeling miserable or unhappy has little to do with the apparent cause.

This may seem strange, but consider this: if you were able, at will, to be in your Master's presence inside, would you actually care about these situations that are making you feel bad? Probably not. If you could be in his presence at any moment, would you even care about anything out here?

This tells us about the true nature of this misery we sometimes feel. It is not because the circumstances in which we find ourselves are negative. They are just circumstances – they can always be translated into practical problems for which we can find practical solutions.

We react this way - we feel miserable and unhappy - because of another type of problem completely. We are unhappy because we are in a state of separation from our Beloved. Whether consciously or unconsciously, this is the root of our condition. This is the primal cause of our dissatisfaction with life. Our attempts to find solace in the world and in sense pleasures are doomed, because they are utterly unable to address the underlying cause of our condition.

By going out we can never properly address a situation that has arisen within. We need to redirect our attention to the reality that lies

within us. This is the only possible solution to the situation in which we all find ourselves.

So how do we do that? When a feeling of melancholia hits us, when unhappiness strikes, what do we do if we are to avoid going down the same old road that we have always taken, and which has never given us any lasting solution? We need to think of our Master. This is the first thing that we need to do. This establishes the correct focus. This brings our attention to the one hope of a solution. Our Master is the one being who has given us the method and the means to resolve this situation once and for all.

Having remembered our Master is the first step. Then we should do simran, because no matter where we are, no matter in what circumstances we find ourselves, we can always think of our Master and do simran.

If at all possible, it would be even better if we were able to retire from the world, go to our room, close the door and draw the curtains, and then sit and meditate – pouring all our emotions into it, directing that deep sense of separation into the contemplation of our Beloved. This is what will draw us closer and closer to him and bring a lasting solution to our worldly problem.

This practice, once established as a new habit, will ultimately put us beyond the range of the negativity that we now experience in the world. This is what will bring us into the presence of the Master within, which in itself is the ultimate panacea for all ills and the gateway to eternal peace, love and bliss.





*Maharaj Sawan Singh*

# Master and Disciple

As we travel down the path of Sant Mat, we begin to realize that it is something like a play – a play with two central characters and a host of people in supporting roles. The two central characters are, of course, Master and disciple, and each one has a specific role to play.

What is the nature of the role that Master plays? First, he must act as intermediary between the disciple and God. We cannot love or follow an abstraction, and so God sends the living Masters to interact with human beings – in particular with those souls he wishes to return to him. As Maharaj Charan Singh says in *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. I: “You see, Master is a medium between the soul and the Lord, and he is concerned with the soul – to help it to develop, to reach to the level of the Father”.

The Master’s real form is Shabd, God’s creative power, but we cannot respond directly to that either. So he must assume a human form and begin a process of interaction with every prospective disciple that includes the pivotal gift of initiation. From that very moment of initiation, Master and disciple are bound inextricably together, as the disciples work their way through what remains of their earthly life and even beyond till there is a final reunion with God.

The Master, in his Shabd form, is always with each of his disciples, overseeing their progress and accompanying them on their journey, physically here and now, and spiritually now and forever. Maharaj Charan Singh says:

*We definitely need initiation by a Master to put us on the path. Initiation is not a ritual; it is a guiding factor in our life. The Master is always there. He does not just forget about us*

*after initiation. He is always there to guide us and lead us . . .  
Ultimately the initiation and the Master and the audible life  
stream and devotion and the Lord and the soul become one.*

*Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. I*

Not only does our Master promise to be with us constantly on our physical and spiritual journey, not only will he take us to God, he also offers us his divine protection. According to the laws of reincarnation and karma we have accumulated an enormous warehouse full of karmic debts which must be repaid in full before we can be allowed to leave mind and maya and return home.

What a problem! What a devastating situation. It would seem hopeless. But it isn't. As Hazur Maharaj Ji explained:

*He gives protection to the soul. Master takes care of that soul so that it may not be condemned again to this creation. He has his own ways and means of protecting it. . . . For that, Master stands as a ransom to Kal. He takes charge of the soul and sees that all karmas of the soul are cleared, so that it can shine and go back to the Father.*

*Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. I*

God appointed the Master to fulfil these tasks, and he does so with loving patience and good humour. He is the greatest love and the greatest mystery in our lives.

Now, what is the disciple's role in the play? Our part seems to revolve around three main aspects, namely effort, attitude and faith. And although one can list them separately, in fact they are all part of one thing – discipleship. To be a good disciple, to play our part to the very best of our ability, we need to be putting in



maximum effort all the time, and we need to have absolute faith in our Master.

The Master does not want us to sit back and expect him to do all the work. He wants us to put in honest effort and make responsible choices that will lead us towards our goal of spiritual improvement. We must follow the Sant Mat way of life with as much energy, discipline and consistency as we possibly can.

Our Master is here in the flesh not just to initiate us and support us, but also to stand before us as an example of how we should live as human beings. He is the ultimate role model. Everything he does is about fulfilling his own Master's wishes and commands. He is the perfect embodiment of the word 'sevadar'. He is also the epitome of every good and noble characteristic. But this should not daunt us in trying to follow his example. To follow it on this level requires effort and attention.

One of our main problems is that we bring the same expectations to our spiritual work as we do to our normal daily endeavours. And so we are conditioned to pursue our spiritual goals with normal human expectations and emotional responses. Maharaj Charan Singh says:

*We should never sit in meditation with any excitement, with any expectation. ... If every day you sit with certain expectations – I am going to see this and I am going to see that – naturally you will be disappointed and you will not be able to concentrate at all. ... Try to concentrate as much as you can, and when it comes it just comes.*

*Spiritual Perspectives, Vol II*

'Try' is the crucial word. All the Master wants is that we keep on trying.

Everything about our worldly efforts has led us to believe that results and rewards are both natural and necessary. If we practise long and hard enough at any discipline we can see the progress, feel the results, and often get rewarded for the effort. The mind might ask: Why should meditation not be the same?

The answer may be twofold. First, how do we know we are not making progress and not being rewarded? And second, meditation is not a worldly activity – it is a spiritual activity, and we cannot judge a spiritual activity by worldly criteria.

There may be only two reasons that should prompt us to meditate: obedience and love. He asked, we promised. Now, out of love for him and a desire to please him through simple effort and obedience, we should meditate. Have we any idea of just what a privilege it is to even try to meditate? This is monumental. Maharaj Charan Singh says:

*If we really love him, we will want to do what he wants us to do. And he wants us to meditate; therefore, we should also try to meditate.*

*Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. II*

The Masters tell us that every effort at meditation counts and every effort pleases him. Whether we can see the results or not, whether we think it successful or not, we cannot judge. And surely we can all begin to see changes for the better within ourselves, even if it is only recognition of our own faults and weaknesses. This is his grace, his reward for our effort as we strive to follow his example.

A sister asked Maharaj Charan Singh: “If I sit in meditation without being able to concentrate at all, do I gain anything? Even if we don’t see the light in meditation, should we try to do it anyway?” He replied:

*Sister, whether you concentrate or not is immaterial, but you definitely should sit in meditation because we have to pass through so many phases before we are able to concentrate and enjoy that pull within, its bliss and peace within. You can't straightaway concentrate by simran, but if we don't start, then how will we ever concentrate? ... Our efforts should continue.*

*Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. II*

We don't know where we are on the path and we don't know what our Master is doing with our efforts. He knows best how to make those puny efforts grow. The results are his business, not ours. So let us leave that to him. We are not alone in our struggles. The trick is to stay positive and grateful, no matter how difficult the process, or how long or seemingly fruitless.

The Master promises to take his initiates home. Every day he is building our treasure in heaven, even if we cannot see it. He and his grace are always there. He plays his role perfectly. Let us also try to play our role to the very best of our ability.



*My only wish is that you try to contact the Radiant Form of the Master within you, so that you may become sure by actual experience of the great truth taught by the Master. This is the greatest service that a disciple can render to his Master.*

*Maharaj Jagat Singh, Science of the Soul*

# Being Born Again

How seriously are we taking this path? If we've been on the path for some years, can we look back and say in all honesty: "I have lived the Sant Mat way of life in every respect"? Probably most of us will have to admit that we have not.

We must ask ourselves whether we have become a bit lukewarm in our approach. Over the years have we become a bit lackadaisical, a bit casual, and a bit lazy in our spiritual practice? Perhaps we do it because we consider it our duty, but we do it without enthusiasm, without any passion. We cannot wait until the two and a half hours are up, so that we can get on with our daily activities. Have we become distracted by external affairs, by our family, by our business, by the attractions and distractions of the world around us?

When we were initiated, we entered into a contract and we made a commitment. In terms of that commitment, we undertook to pay the price. We agreed to begin our spiritual life in earnest. We agreed to change our lifestyle, our behaviour, irrespective of the obstacles which came our way. We undertook to change the direction of our life, to set a new course.

We should be aware that initiation is the most important event in our entire existence. In fact, at this level of consciousness we cannot fully appreciate the significance of this event. No matter what successes we have achieved in this life or our previous lives – whether in the scientific, academic or corporate world; no matter whether we have been kings or emperors in past lives ruling vast kingdoms; no matter how famous we may have been or how much wealth we may have accumulated, all these achievements pale into insignificance when compared to the gift of initiation.

Just consider for a moment how many life forms we have been through. We have been plants, insects, birds, animals, and now humans. We can't conceive of how long we have been here. And now we are finally on the path out of here. After countless lifetimes, we are on the threshold of departure from this physical environment. Initiation is the defining moment in our existence. The cycle of birth and death, with its untold misery, its suffering, its adversity, its tribulation, is now coming to an end.

Many satsangis regard the date of initiation as their real birthday and, in fact, this is true. Being born into the spirit entails a complete metamorphosis, a complete change in our lifestyle. It is indeed a new birth.

By implication, being born again means that something has to die. Something has to give way before a new entity can be born. So what has got to die? What has got to make way for the emergence of the new being?

For a moment let us take a step backwards and look at our lives up to now. What is our history – our autobiography? What form or shape did it take? Are we not an emotional bellows, sometimes on a high, the next day down in the dumps? One day it is calm, the next day a storm arises. There are moments of happiness, followed by periods of unhappiness; periods of success followed by periods of failure.

Except for God-realized souls, most of us live in the domain of the mind. We live in a dream world of our mental projections. The mind never leaves us alone. It is in constant motion. We would like to switch it off, but we just forget we have the key, the method to do so.

Let us look at how the mind entrapped us in its prison. Each of us was given a name by our parents. A name is just a label, but we have built a colossal edifice around this label. We all reflect our society. We repeat what we have been taught.

We are massively influenced by the customs, habits, traditions and practices of the society we live in. Society will tell us what to eat, what to wear, what car we should drive. Society will provide us with role models: become a film star, a celebrity, a brilliant scientist. And it sets our goals, such as: win the war, win the peace, get a man, get a home, get a better job; become beautiful, strong, or educated; strive for fame, for power, for wealth, for status. Such are the objectives that society sets before us. And millions will indeed strive for these, with the greatest dedication and courage.

And the tragedy is that we are not aware of this conditioning. We just let it happen. All these outside influences, negative or positive, shape who we think we are. But this is not our real self. This false self that has been created is a social byproduct. It is a product of living with others, and is in fact the ego.

It is of paramount importance for the spiritual seeker to know and observe how the ego operates in our daily life. Watch the ego, become a spectator. We will quickly realize that the ego, in collaboration with the intellect, is running our life. This is what has to die in order for us to be reborn. The false self has to die for the new self to take its place.

We may well ask ourselves: “How do I stop being who I am?” The solution is quite simple, but it is not easy to put into practice. First of all we must stop believing that we are who we have always thought we are. Because we are not that.

This ego will assert itself in hundreds of our daily actions. Every time we desire, or fear, or hate – every time we boast or indulge our vanity, every time we struggle to get something for ourselves, we are really asserting that “I am a separate, unique individual; I stand apart from everything else in this universe. I am an island in this sea of humanity.” This is the situation we have got ourselves into. And we don’t even realize it. What a delusion!

It is our ego that gives rise to our recurring suffering and misery. Once we get rid of this ego, which stands as a separating wall between us and the Lord, we go beyond the domain of matter and mind; we enter into the refulgence of the Lord. The drop merges into the ocean and becomes the ocean.

So the seeker may then say: “Okay, now I realize that I am not who I think I am. What is the next step?”

Mystics often use the analogy of becoming like a little child. We have to become humble. Young children have no hidden agendas, no prejudices. At their young age the ego has not yet become dominant. They tend to love unconditionally and act without guile.

How then do we become humble like a child? We cannot simply decide that from tomorrow I am going to be humble – just watch me! That is just the ego kicking in once again. What happens is that as we progress on the path, humility grows; it develops of its own accord. It comes naturally. And along with it comes a growing desire to surrender to our Master.

Deep down in every one of us there is a desire to put ourselves in the hands of the Master, but the mind holds us back. It fears letting go. But surrendering to the Master is the key to losing the ego, becoming one with his light.

A guru and his disciple were walking one night through a small village in India. Their conversation revolved around finding the real self. The disciple asked his guru: “Master, how can I find out who I really am?”

The guru thought for a moment and then said: “You see that street lamp ahead? Let’s approach it, and as we do, I want you to observe what happens to your shadow. Then, when you get to the light, stand directly under it.” The disciple did as he was told.

“Now,” explained the guru, “when you were some distance from the light, you cast a long shadow behind you. As you approached the light, the shadow gradually diminished, it decreased. Now that you are standing directly under the light, the shadow has disappeared. It has merged into the light.”

“Your shadow represented your false self. Your ego and the length of your shadow determined to what degree you were involved in the world. As you approached the light, the shadow decreased. That means your involvement, your attachment to the world, your bondage to the world lessened. When you reached the light, the shadow merged with the light.”

“To find the real self, you must detach yourself from the world. The light is your real self, your soul. Your ego, or false self, is indeed a shadow. It has never really existed. It is an illusion.”



*The only process of driving out ego from within us is to attach ourselves to that sound, attach ourselves to that light. Unless we are attached to that Shabd or Nam, we can never detach ourselves from this world, from nations, friends, relatives, possessions, gold, dollars. Only attachment can create detachment. When the mind is attached to something better than the senses, then we do not have ego in us. Ego is in us only as long as the love of the Lord is not in us. When the love of the Lord takes its place, there is no place left for ego.*

*Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. I*



# A Hasidic Tale

Late one evening a poor farmer on his way back from the market found himself without his prayer book. It distressed him that this day should pass without his having said his prayers.

So this is the prayer he made: "I have done something very foolish, Lord. I came away from home this morning without my prayer book, and my memory is such that I cannot recite a single prayer without it. So I shall recite the alphabet five times very slowly and you, to whom all prayers are known, can put the letters together to form the prayers I can't remember."

And the Lord said to his angels, "Of all the prayers I have heard today, this one was undoubtedly the best because it came from a heart that was simple and sincere."

Anthony de Mello, *The Prayer of the Frog*

## INFORMATION ON ARTICLE SUBMISSIONS

If you wish to submit an article for publication to *Spiritual Link*, please mail a printed, typed version by post to one of the following addresses. *Emailed submissions will not be accepted.*

Science of the Soul Study Center  
Attn: Spiritual Link Submissions  
4115 Gillespie St.  
Fayetteville, NC 28306-9053 USA

Science of the Soul Study Center  
Attn: Spiritual Link Submissions  
1 Mortimer Road  
Wynberg, Cape Town 7800, South Africa

Science of the Soul Study Center  
Attn: Spiritual Link Submissions  
Haynes Park, Church End Haynes  
Bedford MK45 3BL, United Kingdom

Radha Soami Satsang Beas  
Attn: Spiritual Link Submissions  
27th Floor, Tower B  
Billion Centre, 1 Wang Kwong Road  
Kowloon Bay, Hong Kong

• Articles should focus on the Sant Mat teachings and may also draw on the universal teachings of other mystics. • Articles should not be based on, or discuss, the personality of the Master or the writer. • Articles must be your own original work. If quotations from other sources are included, complete source references must be given. • Articles should be between 500 and 1500 words in length.

If accepted, your article will be edited according to the requirements of the magazine. You will be contacted only if your submission is accepted. Please include your name, age, postal address, and email address with your article.



## The Conference of the Birds

BY FARID UD-DIN ATTAR. TRANSLATED BY SHOLEH WOLPÉ

PUBLISHER: NEW YORK, NY: W.W. NORTON, 2017.

ISBN:978-0-393-29218-3

How do writers describe a mystical path that takes a lifetime? Dante, in the *Divine Comedy* recounted a journey down into the pits of hell, up a mountain of purgation, and finally ascending into the heavens. John Bunyan in *Pilgrim's Progress* saw religious life as a pilgrimage through many strange lands. The *Bhagavad Gita* takes place on a battlefield. In the 12<sup>th</sup> century Sufi classic *The Conference of the Birds*, Farid-Ud-Din Attar offers the imagery of a huge flock of birds invited by the Hoopoe bird, as *murshid* or spiritual guide, to journey back to God. The different species of birds represent the various personalities, whims, and quirks of human beings. Attar uses stories, humour, and drama to encourage his listeners forward on their spiritual path.

This new translation by an Iranian-American poet, Sholeh Wolpé, offers a fresh, and powerful and lean, version of Attar's most celebrated work. One of her reviewers describes this rendering of the text into English as having brought "beauty, elegance, and precision." Another calls it "as close to the original a reader can come in translation." There are many other English translations to choose from, some more lyrical, some rhyming, some prose. For her translation Wolpé chose a style she calls "poetic prose and contemporary verse," seeking to convey the "rhythm" of the original. The net effect is a version conveying Attar's meanings with hard-hitting clarity.

The birds offer complaints and justifications familiar to modern seekers. When first approached to return to God they give a long list of excuses as to why union with God is out of reach. Then, once they commit to seek their Beloved, they offer another elaborate set of reasons why the demands of a spiritual path are too great. For those who assumed the journey would not require too much time or effort, the Hoopoe corrects their mistaken view:

*Don't presume the road is short!  
Many oceans and deserts lie between the Beloved and us.  
Only the brave can be Wayfarers in the Path,  
For the journey is long and the waters deep.  
It's best to go on this journey weeping and laughing  
And riddled with amazement.  
If we discover even a trace of the Beloved,  
That will be something!...  
Since life without the Beloved isn't worth a dime  
Go ahead, be brave, discard your precious life.  
If you are willing to give up your precious existence,  
The Beloved will reward you with eternal existence.*

The Hoopoe bird offers encouragement and advises bravery. "Go on, be bold. Take the first step. Being a lover and being fearful don't mix."

One bird, full of self-pity, complains that his bad luck and resulting misery bar his progress. The Hoopoe answers:

*Mad, conceited bird, what you are soaked in  
From head to toe are just cravings...  
Life passes by, so go ahead,  
You pass it by too.  
Abandon it, don't look back.  
Nothing is permanent.  
Attach your heart to even one thing  
And you've stripped it of sweet life.*

Attar counsels that the material world will never satisfy; lavishing love and attention on it is a waste.

*How much oil have we poured on the sand!  
How many pearls have we hung from the throat of a pig!  
How many times have we set up a feast and left hungry!*

The answer to every bird's complaint, excuse, and protest is the Beloved. And the Beloved can be reached only within, in what Attar calls "the Cave of Oneness."

*Bravely smash your natural instincts  
And make the Cave of Oneness your home.  
Once you have settled in that cave,  
The Beloved of the World will visit you there.*

The master is the giver. If you are fortunate enough to have been called forward onto this journey back to God, then you have already received everything you need. And everything that happens to you is a precious gift from him.

*...it is because Solomon's gaze  
fell on me but for a moment.  
That bounty did not give me silver and gold,  
But in that one glance I found grace.*

*If you have the Beloved, you have all that you need.  
The seven seas will be but a bridge beneath your feet.*

On this journey we will learn humility. As Attar reminds us, not even an "eyelash of ego" can remain if we wish to be with the Beloved.

*Become nothing to become  
Absorbed in the Beloved's presence.  
If you remain full of yourself,  
How can there be room for the Beloved?  
Not until you vanish in annihilation's humility  
Will you be accepted in the court of the Eternal.*

The birds endure terrible trials on their way back to God. They lose all their feathers. They exhaust all their strength, courage, and determination,

and yet at the end of the journey they realize that they have not succeeded.  
They confess to God,

*Creator, I am a helpless weakling in your Path.  
I am like a lame ant in the deep of your well.  
I do not know where I come from,  
Where I stand, or who I am.  
Bodiless, luckless, useless,  
Destitute, distracted, and a coward...  
I am caught in the crack of the door...  
Open the door wider for helpless me;  
Show the way to this lost one.*

When they at last see the face of the Beloved, and hear his voice, this is what happens.

*That Grace took pity on me, and forgave me all I had committed and  
all that I had not...  
The Beloved says, "Enter, you are worthy of the Way."*

*"The valleys you traversed were in Me,  
The bravery you displayed was Mine.  
You were asleep in the valleys of my attributes...  
Become Me, to find yourselves once more."*



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

