

# Spiritual Link



August 2018

**VOLUME 14 • ISSUE 8**

# contents

3	I Cannot Be Patient Any Longer
4	The Master
9	Know Your Goal
10	The Turning Point
16	Hopelessness or Helplessness?
21	Seek Ye First the Kingdom of God
24	Side by Side
29	Divine Music
30	The Yellow-Eyed Hawk
34	On Processes
37	A Very Rare Opportunity
42	Buddha's Quest for Enlightenment
46	Book Review

# I Cannot Be Patient Any Longer

*O my Lord, I cannot be patient any longer;  
Soothe me with your vision.*

*I am dying to see your form,  
I am as uneasy as a fish out of water.  
Please let me know how I can obtain you.*

*As a chakor bird waits for the full moon  
And a daughter waits  
For an invitation from her parents,  
As a hungry child awaits its mother,  
So am I eagerly waiting day and night  
To see your beautiful face.*

*I am suffering so much in my desire to meet you  
That not a wink of sleep do I get,  
And tears flow continuously from my eyes.  
Fulfil your promise and meet me, O Lord.*

*O breath of my life,  
Please remove the curtain  
And grant me your true vision.*

*Tukaram, The Ceaseless Song of Devotion*



# The Master

Everyone is searching for something better. Mostly this search expresses itself as a search for happiness. But is it really happiness we seek, or is it something deeper, and more meaningful? Time eventually teaches us that what we're seeking is the home where we originally came from, and a blissful reunion with God himself.

For some the search is long and painful, and they explore and then discard many different paths. Others seem to stumble upon answers very soon after they start their search. This affirms an old Indian saying: "When the chela (disciple) is ready, the guru appears".

The teachers of this and other similar paths have said that in this age of constant flux and uncertainty, when life is short and our perceptions limited, the path of the sound current or Shabd is the quickest way for the soul to progress on its spiritual journey towards God-realization. But it is a difficult journey with many pitfalls, and therefore it should be undertaken only with the help of an experienced guide or teacher.

It is clear that we need a teacher for everything we want to learn. We have parents, school teachers, music teachers, sport coaches – the list goes on – so if you have chosen to follow a path of reuniting the soul with its source, with the ultimate reality, how could you imagine that you would not need a Master?

True living Masters, throughout the ages have come to tell us that we are so much more than just a body and a mind. In *The Dawn of Light* Maharaj Sawan Singh explains that our search should lead us to the realization of our divine origin:

*For ages the mystics and great sages of India and Persia have been practising and teaching the method of the inner Sound Current, which leads to the union of the soul with the Lord. These Saints comprise a spiritual tradition, which continues even today in the form of perfect living Masters.*

Sant Mat is a spiritual discipline designed to enable the soul to consciously transcend the physical body and to experience directly the truth and the reality of the Supreme Being – and not only experience it, but become it. Maharaj Sawan Singh, the Great Master, further says that it is a scientific method by which seekers may achieve genuine self-realization and God-realization.

The Masters give the seeker the method by which to meditate. They also describe the type of experiences that will be encountered along the way. At a certain point, they say, you will meet the Radiant Form of the teacher who initiated you – and from there on the Master will accompany you for the rest of your journey.

But how does one find such a teacher? He might just appear in our lives, or we might have to really search far and wide. We do not even know our own true essence, so how can we recognize a true Master? Soami Ji says: “There are many gurus in the world, but a true and perfect Guru is rare!” This is even truer today when we have access to so much more information and disinformation. It is easy for pretenders to pass themselves off as gurus.

True Masters do not stand out. They look like ordinary human beings just like us. With our limited vision and intellect we can only see very superficially – mostly we just look at outward signs. We may meet the Friend (as Rumi calls him) and not even recognize him. Baba Gurinder Singh, the current Beas Master, challenges us when he says: “How do you know I am who you say I am?” He himself makes no claims to being any different from the rest of humanity.

Maharaj Sawan Singh wrote:

*To know a Master or to understand his real significance or reality is, in fact, very difficult. To do this, discerning eyes like his own are necessary. Only a God-man can know a God-man. How can a person who is confined in the case of a body realize the Lord's glory? Unless we are as great as he is, we cannot understand Him.*

*Philosophy of the Masters, Vol. V*

There is no clear answer to the question of how to recognize a true Master. (One criterion, however, is that they do not accept money from their disciples for initiation.) You have to use great discernment and take your time to search and research.

The relationship between Master and disciple is very personal and starts even before the disciple receives initiation. The Sant Mat Masters say that it is necessary for both the teacher and the student to be alive at the same time. This sounds self-evident, but if one thinks about it, in many traditions followers accept long-dead teachers as their Master.

So great stress is placed on the necessity of a living Master. This relationship will continue even after the death of the Master, for it is only the physical body that has perished. The Master in Shabd form continues to guide the disciples he has initiated.

This is why we need a Master. They are not only self-realized but also God-realized human beings – in other words, they have united with the source of life and love that we call God. We can relate to the Master on a physical level. We can ask him questions and get answers. But the relationship is much more than that.

In *Philosophy of the Masters, Vol. V*, Maharaj Sawan Singh says:

*The inner secrets cannot be expressed in words, either spoken or written. They can be explained only by the perfect Master of the time. He accompanies a disciple on his spiritual ascent and takes him across all the difficult stages of the journey.*

And also:

*The secrets of spirituality, or of the practical means by which the soul can become united with the Lord, are given out by a living Master only.*

Once a follower is initiated, the bond between disciple and Master becomes a life-long journey of love, friendship and guidance. He has compassion for all our suffering in this world, yet the Master is not there to improve our physical conditions. From a spiritual point of view, whether you are wealthy or poor, happy or unhappy, healthy or unhealthy, is of no consequence. The Master's primary duty is to assist the soul in its journey through the inner regions.

Maharaj Sawan Singh in *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol.V, poses this question:

*When we have not seen the Lord or enjoyed his company, how can we love? Without love and devotion, we cannot reach the True Region.*

However, the initiate also has certain obligations. Firstly, we have to follow a lacto-vegetarian diet. This diet minimizes harm to other creatures. Secondly, we have to abstain from alcohol and recreational drugs, because they dull the senses and prevent concentration. Thirdly, we are required to live a moral and ethical

life. We should at all times examine our behaviour to determine whether we are living up to the highest possible standards.

The first three requirements are necessary to set the stage for the fourth requirement, namely meditation. By diligently applying these standards and making them part of our lives, they become so ingrained in us that we comply with them automatically. That then leaves us free to concentrate on the meditation, which is our real job in this life. Our meditation is knocking at the inner door that will lead to the road that we will follow home. The Masters say that they are anxiously waiting for us on the other side of that door.

The real journey starts when we have torn away the veil of illusion and see the creation and ourselves as we really are. Then we will see that we are not just this pot of clay, as Kabir puts it, i.e. made of dust that will eventually return to earth, but beings of pure light and sound.

So how do we know that all of this is true? We don't. The only way to find out is to follow the path to the end; to conduct the experiment exactly as prescribed by our teacher.

The Master's relationship with us is like that of a friend or a brother, a father, or mother, and so forth. But it is very important that we understand that although his body is exactly the same as ours, subject to all the human afflictions, his real form is Shabd. And that is what we too will one day experience – a state beyond both body and mind.

It is impossible to really describe a Master and what his role in our life is. We can only see a fraction of a fraction of a fraction. One can keep on quoting from various sources about the Master – but these are just words and actually mean nothing without inner knowledge to back them up. And that is what each of us must find for ourselves.



# Know Your Goal

Where is my life going? Why do I wake up in the mornings? What is the purpose of all the seemingly senseless actions I perform every day, each one requiring precious energy, each one absorbing my attention, each one pulling me in a different direction?

How much easier the journey across the ocean of life when we have a clear sense of the port which we are making for. In the light of that single goal a thousand small actions and adjustments are made with clarity and meaning.

The winds of change and ceaseless action constantly beset us from every angle. Like the master mariner who always holds the final port of call before him, we learn to adjust the sails of our lives accordingly. ... Even a head-on gale is met by tacking from side to side, but always forward in the direction of the goal. There is no confusion, no complaining that life is unpredictable or unfair, just a steady flow of appropriate and meaningful action.

Conversely, in an aimless life no wind is the right wind. Enormous energy is dissipated in arbitrary and repetitive doing. There is no joy independent of circumstances, no actions wholly appropriate to conditions, no meaning, just reacting....

We are shaped by the vision of what we might become. And when that overarching goal is the Ocean of Love itself our lives begin to reflect and tell the story of love. Dimly through the mists of consciousness and mental heaviness, the compass needle of the soul starts to feel the invisible pull of the great magnet which is the God of Love. ... One day in the great evolutionary journey of the soul a voice from the deep rises up into consciousness and says 'I want God, I want to Know.'

# The Turning Point

From the very dawn of creation and through the ages, the pattern of our existence has been to move, interminably, from one life form to another – hopefully progressing upward, but probably also moving down the scale sometimes. We revolve endlessly on the wheel of transmigration – unless and until we have the great good fortune to be chosen by the Creator to return to him; to be initiated on to his path of God-realization. And this marks the turning point in our soul's entire existence.

In *Quest for Light* Maharaj Charan Singh tells us:

*According to one's good or bad actions in this life one passes at death into the body of a higher or lower being. If one loves the world and the things of this world, he will come back to the earth and be reborn into any of the species to which his mental inclinations have led him. And if one loves to go to higher spheres, that attachment shall draw him to those regions. Even the power of becoming divine is given to man. This limited individual soul has unlimited capacities and does not rise to higher regions simply because it does not make use of these capacities. ... Life does not begin at birth and end with death. We are an expression of infinite life, which had no beginning and shall never come to an end.*

We are expressions of infinite life. And our souls need not be limited at all. They have unlimited capacities. Initiation provides the opportunity to start developing those infinite capacities.

And the two absolute essentials for this? We have to be born as human beings, and we have to come in touch with a living Master and receive initiation from him. But not only do we need to have evolved to the point of a human birth for this. We need to have been marked by the Creator to return to him. Without that marking we might be told about a Master, we might even sit next to him on a train or a plane, but we wouldn't recognize him for what he is. We have to be singled out of the many millions and trillions of souls to be drawn back to him. And for this we must be in the human form.

Maharaj Sawan Singh tells us in one of his letters:

*God made man in his own image. ... It is only in human form that man is endowed with superior faculties and is better off than the lower creation. ... It is only man – and not even gods and angels – who has been endowed by the Almighty with faculties, by developing which he can attain to the highest spiritual region, provided he is initiated by a perfect Master and works hard to elevate his soul to the higher regions.*

*Spiritual Gems*

To be born as a human being is an immense privilege. And then, to rise to a level where we at last are able to meet a Master – to be initiated by him and to be taught how to eventually achieve this high goal of God-realization – is a privilege afforded to very few. If we do not take advantage of it we will have wasted this precious opportunity.

What is our situation here? Much of our lives are spent in hard work, perhaps struggling to support ourselves and our families. We are full of all kinds of worries and fears, maybe having to deal with poverty or injury or ill health. Instead of soaring like the eagles we've

been like chickens scratching around in the dirt. And for most of this time we have had no inkling of our divine origin, of our own spiritual nature and potential. In one of his letters Great Master uses a lovely simile to describe what we've sunk to:

*Man is much like a covered lantern. There is light in him. There is the spark of pure existence, knowledge and bliss in him; but the envelopes of mind and matter dim his light and he gropes in darkness. Real existence has degenerated and appears in him as reason, intellect and instinct. Bliss has degenerated into fleeting experiences of pleasure and pain.*

*Spiritual Gems*

Not a very happy scenario. And to think there was a time when we were actually part of the Creator, sharing his light and love and his total perfection. In that same letter Great Master tells us:

*The Creator is existence, knowledge and bliss – or power, wisdom and love. An atom or spark of this essence of existence is the soul, which, encased in its covering of mind and matter, forms the individual man. If the coverings were removed from the individual, the soul would be naked and would be qualified to know its Creator. The individual will know itself – attain self-realization – and will, in turn, be able to know its Creator.*

That's the goal we have ahead of us: in time to know our Creator; even to become one with him. But now that we have been initiated by a true Master, it is time for some hard work on our part. And that work is meditation. The Masters tells us that the whole purpose of initiation is meditation, and with the help and guidance of our

Master, to eventually achieve this final goal – a goal so high that nothing else matches it.

In *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. II, Maharaj Charan Singh tells us:

*When the soul is initiated it has to become God, to go to that level. Every soul potentially is God, but it has to become God.*

This is momentous. When we're initiated we don't have the slightest understanding of what has happened to us, but when we begin to practise meditation, the process of self- and God-realization begins – irreversibly.

This is where our commitment and effort comes in – our meditation and our obedience to our Master. We can either submit ourselves to our Master's will and wishes and do what he has asked of us, or else we can get distracted or become lazy and drag our feet. But if we commit ourselves to his path, our obedience to his wishes is how we earn his grace, so that in the shortest possible time he can make us fit for our grand destiny.

Absolute obedience to a Master's wishes – that's one of the most important requirements for us as disciples. If we consider that most of us don't know what we're doing and exactly where we're going, then we should know that we're completely dependent on our Master's guidance. We need to do exactly whatever he tells us to do. He is the one who is steering this ship. He will take us back to our home. All we have to do is obey him in everything.

Scrupulously living according to his instructions in itself will bring about a slow transformation in us – slowly, slowly make us fit for God-realization. And this transformation will proceed according to plan – his plan – as long as we obey him and live according to the principles he has given us.

The time will come when we will be reabsorbed into that ocean of love and bliss and ultimate oneness. We will get back there because that is the Lord's will, and that is also our Master's will. In *Spiritual Letters* Baba Jaimal Singh said something quite incredible – that our return home is inevitable:

*Whatever is to be done has already been done, and that is what will happen – man does not do anything by himself. Believe implicitly, my son, the Satguru has told us that man does nothing – only the means for doing appears to come through him. ...  
Whatever is to happen has already happened.*

We often complain that the path is long and difficult. But the Masters have made it as easy as possible for us. In fact, we should be infinitely grateful that we're living in the middle of the Iron Age, when the whole world seems to be going mad – when wars, bloodshed, crime, greed, corruption, widespread poverty and general misery are rife. In this dark age the Master is intent on getting his marked souls out of here as quickly as possible, and he asks so little of us in return. Think of how many hard tests and trials seekers in earlier times had to endure in order to get initiation. Now all that is required is that we live according to four not-too-demanding principles, and especially that we should meditate. Nothing else.

All we have to do is just sit. Every day, just sit. It's the Master who is taking his disciples up. We can't do this by ourselves, not even with a million years of meditation. We are entirely dependent on the Master's grace and the grace of the Supreme Lord who wants us to come back to him. As Maharaj Charan Singh told us:

*Everything happens by grace. Without his grace nothing can happen. Unless he wishes, nobody can reach him. We are all blind, groping in the dark. He is the only one who can show us the light out of this darkness. And he has his own ways and means to show that light to us. ... We think that we worship him, that we love him. But he is the one who is pulling us from within, who creates that desire in us to worship him and creates that longing for him. He is the one who is pulling us from the back. We are only an instrument, so to say.*

*Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. II*

It may be that when we listen to a beautiful piano concerto by one of the great composers, it fills us with joy. But it's not the piano that's making the music – it's the musician. The piano is only the instrument. And now we're just the instruments, and it is our Master, or the Lord himself, who is playing his glorious Shabd music through us, to draw us back to him.



*The beginning and end of all things is Shabd. All gross matter, the sky and so forth, subtle matter, sound, form, taste and scent are all Shabd. Whatever is manifested from Shabd cannot be anything but Shabd. Shabd is our creator. Shabd is our sustainer. We are of Shabd and Shabd is ours.*

*Maharaj Sawan Singh, Philosophy of the Masters, Vol. IV*

## Hopelessness or Helplessness?

When we first come to the path, it is often after a fairly long period of seeking. So when we discover the path and the Master, it's normally with a sense of euphoria, because, after all the seeking we've done and all the disappointment that we've experienced, it's sometimes hard to believe that suddenly, here before us, is the answer to all our questions and the solution to all our problems. We just know that our search is over, and that here we finally have arrived at the feet of a genuine Master who can guide us to that secret destination that only a true heart knows.

After initiation, even though at a very profound level we are already convinced, we continue to read many books to satisfy our intellect. And there is nothing wrong with this, however, once we have been initiated, the time for study and research is over. Now it is time to put the teachings into practice. But when we try this, when we apply ourselves to meditation, many of us find it extremely tough going. All sorts of temptations and issues present themselves before us that pull our attention in every direction.

Many of us remain distinctly unhappy with our meditation and the lack of results that we can perceive coming our way. What this really means is that we are not getting the results that we expected. We thought that the result of our efforts at meditation would be the sights and sounds of the inner regions, and we expected to get this within a reasonable time. We feel disappointed when this doesn't happen, and our situation seems to be entirely hopeless. But actually, what we're experiencing is not hopelessness, but helplessness.

There's a huge difference between the two. Hopelessness implies that there is no prospect whatsoever of success in our ventures,

whereas helplessness suggests that we alone cannot do it, but with appropriate help, we could achieve our objectives fully. So if we have reached that stage of realizing our own helplessness, we should try to understand it and embrace it, because the realization of helplessness is a powerful incentive for us to do what we need to do; namely, to turn to our Master and submit to his will.

After all, if we realize that we are helpless to achieve our objectives on our own, what do we lose by submitting ourselves, our will, our efforts, to the Lord's will? We asked for initiation in the first place because we believed that the Master was the answer to all our prayers, to all those nameless yearnings within us that reached out into the darkness of our unknowing in search of meaning and truth and help. So there will never be a better time than now to turn inwards, and to surrender to the benevolent, divine power that dwells there.

Under the momentum of our past actions we are propelled into this life, into this body, with this destiny. And we are thrust into these circumstances with no instruction manual, and seemingly with no help whatsoever. When we arrive here we have no idea where we've come from, and even less where we're going.

We become totally lost in the material creation from the moment we are born. We are absolutely inundated with sensations, so much so that we lose all awareness of anything else. As we grow up and experience more of the world, we find ourselves led completely astray by all the many temptations that the world has to offer.

We come to believe that the physical world and our physical body are all that there is. Our whole value system revolves around this underlying belief, and so we proceed to get ourselves hopelessly entangled in the web of action and reaction. As we have now come to learn, every action invokes a reaction, and we are the ones, having performed the actions, who are now responsible for the reactions.

Unfortunately, in the course of just one lifetime, we incur so many karmic debts that it is utterly impossible to account for them all, so the balance remains in abeyance, debited to our account, as it were, pending our settlement. So we keep coming and going in the wheel of transmigration.

We also encounter another problem: we become attached to the faces, places and things of this world. Each of these attachments is like a rope tying us down. So our many karmic debts and attachments bind us totally to this world, and we have no way of escaping them. It is in this situation that we find ourselves when we first encounter our beloved Master. He was the one who educated us as to our actual situation in the grand scheme of things. Furthermore, he told us that there is actually only one cure for all the ills of the world, and that is Shabd or Nam.

This Nam is the dynamic aspect of the Lord himself. It is by means of this power that the Lord created the universe and sustains it even now. Our Master tells us that it is by means of this power alone that the soul can find its way back to its true home.

Without our Master's help we would just remain in the same state of ignorance in which we have always been. We cannot even imagine for how many lives we have been coming and going in this world, in all the various life forms. If we could ever manage escape from here by ourselves, surely in all those many lives we would have done so? We are incapable of realizing our full spiritual potential alone. But (fortunately) the Lord marked us for initiation by a true Master who has undertaken to see us all the way to Sach Khand, the ultimate spiritual region, where we will merge once more into the Lord himself, thus completing our spiritual journey and life's highest purpose.

So now we say that we have initiation from a true Master, and that he will see us to the end of our journey. No doubt this is true

– but is that all there is to it? Not at all! Although clearly the Master plays a critical role, nevertheless we too have a role to play, and it is incumbent upon us to play our part well. The Masters tell us that we get to our goal by devotion to the True One, which really translates to scrupulously following our Master's instructions.

So, having received initiation, our focus now needs to be on putting his instructions into practice. This comes in two parts. One is to implement the lifestyle that he recommends. By doing this, we minimize the amount of karmas that we accumulate in the course of our life, and cultivate an appropriate mindset for the implementation of the second part, which is meditation. There is nothing more important to our quest than this. Meditation is the be-all and end-all of Sant Mat.

It is true that many of us struggle with this. We put in the effort, but we encounter huge problems and frustrations as we go into battle with the mind, because the mind is going to fight us every step of the way. But we have no choice. We need to persevere and continue to give it our best.

The Masters emphasize that we cannot conquer the mind by discipline or suppression. In fact, that approach actually has the potential to make things much worse. When the mind is suppressed, eventually it finds a way to express itself, and then it does so with explosive force. The mind is like the snake which, contained in a basket, does not lose its nature, if it finds its way out, it will not fail to strike at the first living thing it sees. The only way to win this battle is by redirecting our attention in a positive direction.

Great Master says:

*If, during our lifetime, entry has been made into the eye centre and the Sound Current has been grasped, life has been usefully spent. If this has not been done, even though all else has been*

*done – and most successfully – then life has been wasted. This done, all is done; this not done, all else done is as if nothing is done. Such is the finding of Sant Mat and it is a fact. It is not an arbitrary mandate.*

*Spiritual Gems*

The more we consider what the Guru has to say, the more we realize how incredibly fortunate we are. The whole world is totally bound up in the web of ignorance and illusion, trapped by the bondage of karmas and attachments, not realizing that these are the source and root of all suffering and misery. It is only those who have received the precious gift of Nam and are living their lives accordingly who can rise above all this and realize the higher truth that the Master has been telling us about.

As long as we continue to believe that this world is going to give us lasting happiness, we will continue to be bound here. But if we listen to what the Master has been telling us, if we redirect our attention to higher things and put his teachings into practice, then our soul will rise up to experience the inner regions and be free from all restraints, ultimately merging into the divine Ocean.

We seem to be living in a spiritual wasteland in which mind and senses dominate. Everything seems to conspire against us in our quest for liberation. The general trend everywhere is downward. We may ask, what hope is there in such a world, what chance of us succeeding in such a negative environment?

But regardless of circumstances, regardless of public opinion and despite all the opposition and difficulties that we may encounter, there is one simple rule to be followed. Abandon all else and cling to the feet of your Master. *By this means alone shall the soul find its way home again!*



# Seek Ye First the Kingdom of God

How much do we really need? Truth to tell, our basic needs are quite small: some kind of shelter, a few clothes to wear, and enough to eat and drink to keep our bodies going. But how much do we want? – Ah, that's a different matter altogether! Our wants are virtually endless.

In the Gospel according to St Matthew we read that our first priority should be to seek the Lord – we should not become absorbed in concerns such as what we are going to eat or drink or wear. In fact, we should be unconcerned with all these external things. If we are absorbed in the spiritual world, our other needs will be met.

The Masters assure us that our Father knows what we need and makes provision for it. They remind us that if the Lord has the power to give, then he also has the power to know what to give, and we do not have to remind him. If the Lord is who we think he is, then it follows that he must know everything. And if he can supply all our needs, then our priority should be to “seek the kingdom of God.”

In *Light on St Matthew* Maharaj Charan Singh says that the human form was not given to us to worry about our petty little worldly wants. He says it has a far better purpose, and that is God-realization. This does not mean that we do not have to pay any attention to our external life. It does not mean, for example, that we should not try to find a job if we need one. It just means that it should not become our main focus.

In this world we have to make a living. We cannot escape the duties of the world. We cannot be fatalists and decide to make no effort at all. We must act, but then we also have to use our intellect to

judge just how much effort we are going to put into this external life and how much into the inner life.

*Seek ye first the kingdom of God*, the Bible tells us. And in all spiritual scripture we are advised to turn away from the world and towards God. What does this mean for us in this day and age? If we examine our lives we will immediately see that most of our waking hours and energy are spent on the external world. So it becomes essential for us to be constantly reminded that we are expending most of our energy on a fairly useless endeavour, because all of what we achieve here in the outer world will crumble into dust.

Just how much of our time do we spend, for example, on eating and dressing? And ultimately we have to work to earn money to satisfy these needs. We have been endowed with intelligence so that we may take care of these needs, but all too often it seems that we have made this the primary reason for our existence. Where will this get us? And if we do manage to accumulate a great deal of worldly wealth, we may become arrogant enough to believe that we can actually own something forever.

We take pride in wealth that we will ultimately leave in our wills to the next custodian. While it is essential to have some money and to earn it honestly, even after all that labour it never really becomes ours. Once again we are reminded in the Gospel according to St Matthew:

*Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:  
But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:  
For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*

Matthew 6: 19–21

We are advised then to seek and build the kind of treasure that can be ours eternally, and this treasure is the kingdom of God. This is our privilege and our reason for taking the human form. This is the only treasure worthy of the soul. Is it worth worrying about anything else at all? Great Master tells us:

*Your worries and cares are Master's worries and cares. Leave them to him to deal with. Having become carefree, your business is to cultivate his love.*

*Spiritual Gems*

If we can hand over all our concerns to the Master, we can become carefree. The only thing left is to nurture our love for him. Mirdad tells us that “we live that we may learn to love, and love that we may learn to live – this is the only lesson required of man”.

Once we have been accepted by a Master and are under his care, we have no reason to worry about anything. He will help us get through life and he will see that we fulfil our divine destiny of returning to our soul's real home. All that we need to do is love him and serve him and do our meditation. In a letter to Babu Sawan Singh (who would become the Great Master) Baba Jaimal Singh gave this assurance:

*You need not worry. One day you will be taken to Sach Khand, after merging in the Dhun. Believe this firmly in your mind. He himself is assisting you in all worldly duties. Everything will be all right. You will get whatever you want. Everything follows Bhajan. Where there is Bhajan everything else will come automatically.*

*Spiritual Letters*



## Side by Side

Not too long ago at the Dera the Master was discussing the relationship between the disciple and the Guru. He referred to the tendency of disciples to put the Master on a pedestal, and he made it clear that this is not the kind of relationship we should be cultivating. The Master can't work with us successfully, he said, if he is higher than us and out of reach. This creates a barrier between him and his disciples, and is not conducive to an open and loving relationship. He commented that to successfully work with the Master we need to walk with him side by side, as friends.

Although we know that our Master is so much more than a mere human being, we need to relate and interact with him as we would with other people and not put him on a pedestal, above us and out of reach. He is our role model, and he is living proof that we too have the capacity to reach the spiritual goals he has attained.

We also need to understand that regarding the Master as our friend is not disrespectful. His spiritual or Shabd form is beyond our capacity to fully comprehend, so we need someone at our level to help and guide us.

It's interesting that when reading the writings of many mystics, particularly the Sufi mystics such as Shams of Tabriz, Rumi and Hafiz, we often find them referring to their Master as 'the Friend'. It is likely that every one of us has found enough discontent and dissatisfaction during our lives at this level of existence to long for our release from it. Thanks to our 'Friend', our Master, we have now begun to see through the illusion of this world that we once believed was our only reality, our 'home'.

This discontented, restless state opens us up to change – but in most cases we are not conscious of what we are looking for. How many of us can honestly say we were searching for a friend in the form of the true Master of our time? Many of us were not even aware of the existence of such Masters. And yet, when we became aware of our Master's existence, our attraction to him was often immediate – and in most cases somewhat irrational, or at the very least, confusing. But this messy existence, this endless source of suffering and discontent is, in fact, the perfect background from which souls can be collected and brought to the feet of the Friend, the Master.

Let us start by looking at the gist of what we were told about the Guru–disciple relationship. The Master does not expect us to walk beside him literally. The point is that we should not distance ourselves from him by putting him on a pedestal. He clearly wants us to be closer to him. After all, how many times do we have to be told that ‘he is closer to us than our very breath’? But unless we tune in to him he will remain at a distance – at least from our perspective.

So how do we tune in to him? We must include our Master more in our lives. If we could imagine walking together with a close friend, what would that entail? It would mean communicating: talking, taking the friend into our confidence, sharing our thoughts and concerns with him.

But our first reaction to that idea might be: “But we don’t need to voice these things. The universal consciousness knows everything.” Even before we could voice them, he would know them – so putting these thoughts into words might be superfluous, even ludicrous. Because the Master is all-knowing he doesn’t need our words – he doesn’t even need to hear our current thoughts, as he is aware of every one of them and more, even those thoughts which are not yet in the foreground of our consciousness.

The Master has provided us with a complete vocabulary for communicating with him, and that is our simran. These five precious words, repeated with focused concentration, constitute all the communication we need with our Master.

The purpose of simran is to still the mind and reach the eye centre. With the use of focused simran we bypass the limitations of our vocabulary; we eventually negate the stranglehold of the mind and, via the third eye, step straight into universal consciousness, the Shabd and, most importantly, the presence of our Master in his radiant splendour.

This simran is the only communication the Master requires of us. This is where working side by side with our Master is most beneficial, as every step we have to take in our journey needs to be with him – aware of every moment at his side – using our simran to maintain a constant connection with him.

Simran is incredibly powerful – we are told this continually in the teachings. So if the use of simran will shield us from the shenanigans of the mind and the ego, then we need to embrace this power and begin depending on it more seriously and use it at every opportunity. As soon as we engage in focused simran, we are immediately side by side with our Master.

The Masters tell us that because of the pivotal role of simran in our meditation, its practice should become our most important focus, in addition to bhajan or listening to the Sound.

There are many considerations which we have to be aware of to ensure that our meditation is fruitful and enjoyable. The mind's shrewd scheming will readily sabotage our efforts if we do not raise our level of awareness. In order to do this, we need to think clearly – we need to be aware of all the possible perversions which can distract us, and be on our guard against them.

We are often reminded of the importance of constantly evaluating every aspect of our behaviour. Self-analysis or introspection is essential if we are to avoid accumulating more karma. We are advised not to react to situations, but rather to respond only after thinking about possible consequences. This process sounds cumbersome, but we only need to choose between what is helpful on the path and that which is detrimental. It is as easy as that. In other words we need to evaluate all our actions and attitudes in terms of what will bring us closer to 'the Friend' and what will take us farther from him.

We have to learn to be more discerning, and once this becomes entrenched in our behaviour, we will have achieved the automatic and unconscious skill of discrimination. We are constantly required to make decisions, to discriminate between spiritually favourable or unfavourable actions.

In *The Path of the Masters* Julian Johnson strongly emphasizes the importance of including the Master in everything we do; that is, recognizing his presence so as to increase our awareness of the importance of our relationship with him. This awareness will also help us reinforce the understanding that he is the real doer.

The Master's love for us is indisputable – but do we reciprocate his love? We are told it's not up to us to love our Master – love is a gift from him and is therefore dependent on his grace. Only our honest effort at doing our meditation and living in his will can make this possible.

So we need to conduct some very thorough introspection. Do we have what it takes to be a friend to our Master? When we are being his friend he will more easily achieve his sole purpose for us, and that is to deliver us back to our original home in Sach Khand. But

this cannot happen without us playing our part: following the vows, living in his will and attending to our meditation.

Mastering our repetition is the start of our spiritual journey and paves the way for our final revelation: that we are him and he is us – we are one. That is our final milestone and marks our return to our original home with the Father.

We have been assured by the Masters that they see us only as our true essence, namely our pure spiritual nature or soul. They are not concerned with our imperfections. So once the Master has initiated a seeker, he is already a totally trusting and non-judgemental friend. In fact, all of the above-listed qualities are already fully manifested in a true living Master – it only remains for us to ensure that we demonstrate them in our relationship with him.



*Wherever you may find yourself,  
do simran – no other practice exists.  
This I know for sure:  
the One who helps devotees will set me free.  
He ignores our weaknesses, strengths and status,  
he always runs to our help.  
Don't allow a moment to pass, says Sena,  
without remembering and repeating  
the Name of the Supreme Being.*

Sena Nhavi

as included in *Many Voices, One Song*

# Divine Music

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 creation and within every soul. It is awe-inspiring, breathtaking 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 Holy Spirit. ...

In life, our highest or most inspired moments are often those of complete absorption in something. Depending on the person, it may be beautiful music, the pageants and wonders of the natural world or some other experience of the five senses. ...

The sights, sounds and phenomena of this world are of limited duration. The music of the Word, the divine Music, however, goes on and on, for as long as creation lasts. The music of this 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.

John Davidson, *The Gospel of Jesus*

# The Yellow-Eyed Hawk

*Observe how the whole world is going adrift  
in this ocean of existence.  
Seeing the world in such a plight,  
I have cautioned you time and time again  
that you have suffered the pain of birth and death,  
even the tortures of hell,  
in all the four ages....  
Through virtue and vice  
you have endured great adversities,  
But you never sought refuge  
at the feet of a true Guru.*

*Sar Bachan Poetry*

In no uncertain terms Soami Ji tells us in this poem that the world is in a mess. For many ages souls have been suffering in the cycle of birth and death because they did not seek the refuge of a Guru. But now our opportunity has come, and we can't afford to miss it.

*Now that you have been blessed with a human form,  
devote yourself to bhakti and burn away your karmas.  
Your negligence will not be forgiven this time ...  
Be on your guard against the mind  
and serve your Master.  
Radha Soami has revealed to you the sublime mystery.*

*Sar Bachan Poetry*

We have been given the huge privilege of the human form. In this life we need to devote ourselves to shedding our load of karmas. We have to subdue the mind and step out of the world. Now that we have been told the truth of the sublime mystery, we have to give up our apathy. We have been given the key to enable us to get out of the cycle of birth and death, and to connect with the all-powerful, universal consciousness called Shabd. When we understand this, it is pure idiocy not to serve our Master by living in his will.

But all too often the mind does get its way with us and apathy starts to creep in. We sometimes need a wake-up call. The following story is told by the American spiritual teacher Richard Slavin, known as Radhanath Swami:

*I remember once I was sitting here on the banks of the river Ganga, and up above me I looked into a cloudless sky. And soaring, was a hawk. ... It circled lower and lower and lower – until it was just a few metres above my head. And I looked up at this hawk and saw its yellow eyes intensely gazing into the river, looking for something. ... Suddenly, the hawk dove head first, right into the River Ganga. Then there was a skirmish with lots of splashing. A few seconds later it came out with a flapping fish in its claws. ...*

*That fish was just swimming along like any other day with its friends and family, looking for food, having fun, swishing around. It didn't expect anything dramatic to happen. But suddenly that fish was ripped right out of its reality, away from everything it identified with. It was about to die.*

Isn't that situation potentially everyone's situation? We just go about our lives like any other day when the hawk, our fate or destiny, strikes. There's a death in the family, there's a traumatic experience,

disease – and in a flash our calm, comfortable existence is turned on its head.

Radhanath also comments that we can't be complacent. And we have to take the opportunities that come to us in our spiritual life very seriously. The greatest enemy of the seeker after truth, he says, is procrastination. Catastrophe can strike at any moment, and the older we get, the greater the likelihood that a visit from the yellow-eyed hawk is imminent.

He offers a practical suggestion for how to soften the impact of adversity: 'dive deeper'. If the fish had not been swimming so close to the surface of the river, it would not so easily have been singled out by the hawk. So he is saying that we need to dive deeper into our spiritual practices, as this will prepare us for our reunion with the Lord. Our departing will then become an occasion for celebration.

In *The Path of the Masters* Julian Johnson tells us:

*To every disciple of a living Master, death is an occasion of rejoicing, for the liberated spirit simply steps out of the body as one would put off an old garment. Death utterly vanishes. It is finally conquered during the normal course of his development when the disciple learns to leave his body voluntarily to travel abroad in the higher regions. Thus, by entering the regions of so-called death while in full consciousness, with great joy, the fear of death disappears.*

Johnson describes the means the Master provides for us to minimize the impact of the action of the yellow-eyed hawk – a method which will enable us to experience dying while still living. This is possible by following the meditation techniques, our simran and bhajan, taught to us during our initiation. The object of this meditation

is to bring our consciousness up from the soles of our feet to the eye centre and to hold our attention there. At this point our awareness will have withdrawn from the body, and we will be able to attach ourselves to the Shabd, the Sound Current. Once we are consciously attached to Shabd we are detached permanently from the lower senses.

This journey to the eye centre can be a long, tedious process while we wrestle with the mind and try to achieve that all-important stillness at the eye centre. Becoming more aware of our rich spiritual legacy, of the immense power of simran and bhajan, of the access we have to the Lord, is the kind of depth we need to aspire to in our spiritual practice.

Stillness at the eye centre can be achieved only when we are living in the will of the Lord. Once we have attained this state of obedience, faith and devotion, we will have little interest in the physical world and so will be equipped to accept, and be totally unaffected by, all the 'slings and arrows' of our karma. In fact, we could even be grateful for every hardship we have to endure, and regard it as a gift from the Lord.

We are all living our lives according to a script, written by ourselves and meticulously recorded in our karmic accounts. Each of our scripts is unique, and everyone must follow their own course. The events outlined in the script are seldom predictable and normally take us by surprise. We are like the free-swimming fish, enjoying life with its friends and family in one moment and thrashing about in the claws of the yellow-eyed hawk in the next. Our destiny dictates the events of our lives down to the tiniest detail. But as disciples of a true Master, the control of our fate lies entirely in the hands of the Master, who will manage our soul's return to the Father.



## On Processes

When one commits to achieving something, whether it be building a model aeroplane or earning a degree in quantum mechanics, or even running a marathon, one invariably invokes some sort of process.

When one thinks about one's goal or objective, it is plain that it is not going to be achieved just by thinking about it or wanting it. We have to *do* things in order for this objective to come about.

Take running a marathon: If you have not run for more than ten meters at a time, then you cannot expect that you'll survive 42 kilometers tomorrow! If you start as a couch potato, it seems impossible, given your current limitations, but in fact it is most definitely possible for anyone who has no physical disabilities and is reasonably healthy.

How, you might ask? It might seem like an insurmountable problem, but if you get yourself a qualified coach, he will give you a training schedule, and he will also give you guidelines on what would be a suitable diet and lifestyle. If you're serious, you would now have all the ingredients, but the most important part lies still ahead: TRAINING!

When you first start out you can run maybe a kilometre or two, by the end of which you are exhausted. After some weeks, perhaps you'll be able to manage five. Then, after a month or so, maybe eight or ten. In this fashion one progresses. Slowly and slowly one builds oneself up. All this while there is a sense of step-by-step achievement. One feels the progress and one starts to believe that one day a marathon will be possible.

If on the other hand, at the outset one says, "Why should I train, I want to do a marathon now," what will be the result? Only

disappointment and probably injuries and pain.

At least this way one will have learned a valuable lesson; namely that if one has set oneself an objective, there are several steps that need to be taken to achieve that objective – it cannot just happen of its own accord. Both effort and patience are required.

If one puts in effort, one may have unrealistically high expectations of results, because of one's inexperience and impatience to achieve the goal. But everything has its preordained pace; things happen at a rate that is dictated by so many different factors. If we do not accept this and attempt to force the pace, inevitably there are going to be negative consequences. In the case of our marathon example, one will tend to develop injuries that not only force one to slow down, they may actually set us back considerably and delay our progress.

Naturally one can easily see that this also applies to the pursuit of spirituality. We start off from the position of being decidedly flawed human beings, with our attention focused entirely on the material world, addicted to the pleasures of the senses and tightly attached to the objects of our pleasure. From this starting point, do we imagine that we can achieve our objective overnight?

As we understand it, our goal is to reorient our attention from being predominantly downwards and outwards to directing it inwards. In addition, we need to still the mind. Just these two tasks alone are monumental. Furthermore, we have to focus our attention at the eye centre, to the exclusion of all else, until we penetrate the veils that stand between us and the inner world. Only then can we gain access to the Radiant Form of our Master. Only then do we come into contact, by his grace, with the true Shabd or Nam, which will pull us up, cleansing us of the effects of all our accumulated karmas and making us fit to pass beyond the realm of mind and maya and enter the realm of pure spirit.

So when we are feeling impatient and frustrated, we should stop and think: what a journey we have embarked upon! We find ourselves at some point on that journey – we have to come to terms with the place we're at, and then move ahead. This is the only way. A more hurried approach would be to deny the facts. When we buy our ticket to India, are we immediately at the Dera? No: We have to get visas, make arrangements to get to the airport, and so many other things. All of this takes time and effort, and then after some time we find ourselves at the Dera.

In like fashion, we have initiated the process of going home. Our journey has begun. We have a perfect guide, and we just need to follow him. It's as simple as that. We just follow him, and we will arrive at our destination. The important thing to remember is that it is happening. We are undergoing the process, and the process has to run its course. The result is not in question – we will get there, with the help and abundant grace of our beloved Master.



## Grace & Effort

## A Very Rare Opportunity

There is a classic story recorded in an ancient text of the teachings of Buddha. While addressing a group of monks he said: “Suppose that this great earth were totally covered with water and a man were to toss a yoke with a single hole into the water. . . . And suppose a blind sea turtle were there. It would come to the surface only once every 100 years. Now what do you suppose the chances would be that a blind turtle, coming to the surface every 100 years, would stick his neck into the yoke with a single hole?” And the monks answered, “It would be very unusual, Sir . . .” And the Buddha said: “Just so, it is very, very rare that one attains the human state.”

Bearing in mind how extremely rare our human existence is, we should ask whether there is a purpose behind it or is it simply a random event. Questions like these have been asked throughout the ages, but only mystics give a logical explanation of the purpose of human life. They have called human beings the top of creation. That is because only human beings can worship the Lord. Mystics say that it is for this purpose alone that we are in this human body.

But the downside is that we have forgotten our true purpose. This is because the mind has a natural tendency to look for peace and happiness in the attractions of this world. Mystics tell us that our mind and ego have drawn a veil between us and the Supreme Being. However, they say, this veil can be lifted, and it can be done with the power of Nam; then we will find eternal bliss.

But life is short. Consider the following scenario: On a Saturday afternoon a couple is relaxing in the lounge. The wife gets up and says,

“I am going to the bathroom.” The husband continues watching TV or reading the newspaper, but after a while he realizes that his wife has been gone for perhaps half an hour. He goes to the bathroom and finds her lying dead on the floor.

This can happen to any one of us. Events like these do happen, and they demonstrate that time is a priceless commodity. The sand in the hourglass of our lives started running out the moment we were born, and it keeps running with every breath we take. There are no guarantees for any of us that we will reach old age or even get another human life.

Namdev gives this reminder in one of his poems:

*You won't always get a life like this –  
you've come as a human being now  
because of your good deeds before.  
Second by second you're growing,  
but moment by moment you're going.  
You've been given a priceless jewel,  
cherish it or lose it. ...  
so build a boat of true Sound  
and cross to the far shore  
of the ocean of existence.*

*Many Voices, One Song*

In this world peace and happiness appear to be elusive. Many people think these can be attained by amassing wealth, but when they achieve that they realize that they have been chasing a pot of gold at the end of a rainbow. Others indulge in wine, women and song, without any thought of an afterlife or any desire to improve themselves or raise their consciousness. True enough, there are people on whom the Lord appears to bestow worldly gifts lavishly;

but even those people are, at times, overwhelmed by a sense of loneliness, of living an aimless life. Others are born in poverty, some even with physical and other handicaps, without any prospect of ever being able to live a normal life.

If we reflect on what is keeping us in this cycle of birth and death, then we begin to realize what mystics are saying, that our karmas, together with our attachments and desires, are the reason we are stuck in this seemingly endless wheel of transmigration.

Human beings have an overwhelming and enduring need to love and be loved, and it is this need which draws us to a living Master, by whose grace and mercy we eventually become able to live up to our full potential, to finally merge in God's ocean of love. But how to attain this? In the Gospel according to St Matthew we read:

*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.*

*This is the first and great commandment.*

*And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.*

*On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.*

Matthew 22: 37-40

In *Light on St Matthew* Maharaj Charan Singh tells us that to love God fully, we need to overcome the negative tendencies of the mind. Unless the mind is cleansed it will not become fit to love the Lord – because the mind cannot love both the world and the Lord at the same time.

Those on whom the Lord wishes to shower his grace and mercy are granted the gift of the human form. And then he draws the

attention of the marked ones to himself – those souls whom he, in his grace, wishes to call back home by joining them with Shabd and Nam.

Mystics, past and present, are emphatic in their assertion that devotion to Nam is the only means of redemption and no other form of worship can take us to the court of the Lord. Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, a twentieth-century Tibetan Buddhist, says:

*Ask yourself how many of the billions of the inhabitants of the planet have any idea of how rare it is to have been born as a human being. How many of those who understand the rarity of human birth ever think of even using that chance to practise the Dharma?*

*How many of those who think of practice actually do practise? How many of those who start really continue? How many of those who practise, continue and attain ultimate realization?*

Rinpoche (which means “precious one”) also says:

*As long as you fail to recognize the true value of human existence, you will just fritter your life away in futile activity and distraction.*

*When life comes all too soon to its inevitable end, you will not have achieved anything worthwhile at all.*

*But once you really see the unique opportunity that human life can bring, you will definitely direct all your energy into reaping its true worth.*

Kamala Masters, *The Preciousness of Our Human Life*

This should make us reflect on whether the way we live our lives is in line with such a precious opportunity. Mystics know us, they know of our tendency to procrastinate – we tend to put off doing what we don’t enjoy. Our intentions remain feeble; we don’t act, so

nothing happens. We look at watches and calendars, but our lives are measured in breaths, and we must make use of every precious breath to obtain our life's purpose while we can – while in this human body – because as Namdev reminded us: “Second by second you're growing, but moment by moment you're going.”

It is therefore important to create a continuous awareness of how precious this opportunity is. There will be failures, but with the grace of the Lord there will be progress, even if we are unable to see it at this stage.



*Even the gods in the heavens want a human birth.  
We are lucky to have been given this human body  
So that we can be his devotees.  
We should take advantage of this life  
To reach the highest spiritual region.  
We will take the ladder to the heavens  
And climb it step by step.*

Tukaram, *The Ceaseless Song of Devotion*

# Buddha's Quest for Enlightenment

If we look at the trials and tribulations that the Buddha went through on his search for enlightenment, it is interesting to learn what such a great soul had to endure on his spiritual journey and what experiences he went through – because we have to tread a similar path. So as we follow the story of the Buddha, we may see some parallels in our own lives.

The Buddha started life as a member of the Shakya clan, which lived in northern India bordering on the present-day kingdom of Nepal. He is thought to have lived from 563 to 483 BCE. He was born in the era of Zoroaster in Persia and Lao Tzu in China. So during that particular period in history there was a spiritual awakening in many parts of the world.

Initially known as Prince Siddhartha, he was being groomed to take over the leadership of his clan. The prince gave up the trappings of royalty to search for an end to suffering. This search eventually brought him to the famous *bodhi* tree, where he received enlightenment at the age of thirty-five. This awakening earned him the name of Shakyamuni, a title which means 'Sage of the Shakyas'. He spent the remaining forty-five years of his life teaching the path that leads from suffering and dissatisfaction to genuine spiritual fulfilment.

What motivates a person to follow a spiritual path? What brought us to this path? No matter where you happen to be on this planet, whether you belong to a tribe in a remote part of the Amazon jungle or whether you happen to live amid the hectic pace of a modern city, if you are destined to come on to this path, the Master will use whatever means necessary to draw you into his fold. Just as

an iron filing is drawn to the magnet, so the magnetism of the Master will draw his disciples to him.

In the final analysis what brings us to the path is the grace of the Master. If you are one of his marked sheep he will draw you into his fold. If you are accepted for initiation it is due to his grace. It is all his grace.

So what prompted the prince to seek spiritual enlightenment? He had all the trappings of royalty and wanted for nothing. His father, the king, was grooming him to take over leadership of the clan. And he was hoping that the prince would never want to leave. When the prince reached the age of twenty-nine the king decided that the time had come for his son to view the kingdom that he would one day rule. So he arranged the removal of all unpleasant sights in the area that the prince would visit.

Together with his charioteer, the prince set out, and everything went well; he was greeted with affection and great joy by his subjects. But then they came across a person obviously in great pain. The prince asked his charioteer the meaning of this. It was explained to him that sooner or later nearly everyone experiences disease and discomfort. The next two occasions he entered the city, he came across old age and death, and the prince was devastated. He wondered how people could possibly live with the knowledge that old age, disease and death were their inevitable fate.

He pondered deeply on what he had seen. He could not accept that these three woes were the be-all and end-all of life. It made no sense. Finally on his fourth excursion he came across a homeless wanderer. Despite his appearance, the wanderer possessed an aura of calmness and determination. The prince asked who he was and the man replied: "I am one who has given up the household life to search for a way out of the suffering of this world."

The prince then realized what he had to do. He saw that humanity could not escape the three woes as long as it lived within the domain of the senses. So he made it his goal to find a way to transcend the senses, to find the meaning of man's existence.

His father was enraged by the prince's decision and forbade him to leave the palace. But the prince managed to escape, leaving behind his wife, a young child and a life of luxury. This became known as the Great Renunciation.

What do the mystics mean by renunciation – a word that is often misunderstood? On our spiritual quest, we don't have to leave our loved ones, give up all our possessions, and go and live in a cave somewhere. What we have to give up is attachment, which is the real cause of our suffering and dissatisfaction. We can enjoy something without it becoming an obstacle on our spiritual quest.

When the prince started on his spiritual quest, he heard of a forest in the kingdom of Magadha where ascetics lived. These ascetics believed that by enduring pain and hardship they could, through the force of will power or concentration of the mind, control the senses. The prince adopted these measures: he subjected his body to the elements day and night, and he hardly ate. These austerities reduced him to a skeletal state. But he was no nearer his goal. The austerities taught the prince a lesson: he had to avoid extremes to succeed – he would have to adopt the Middle Way. Even today Buddhism is widely known as the Middle Way. And this is an important lesson for us. We have to maintain a balance in our lives.

Then the prince went through a period of his life which every spiritual seeker has to contend with. In Buddhist terminology, the prince was tempted by Mara the Tempter. Mara the Tempter embodies the evil that plagues the mind and leads to all the problems that are associated with living in the body.

What is it that we have to overcome? What is the root cause of

our problem? We suffer from two maladies: ignorance and amnesia – ignorance of who we really are and amnesia as to how this came about. When we entered this physical realm, the true self, our true being, became identified with the body, the mind and the senses, and an ego was created. All our problems can be attributed to our identifying with this ego. The Masters tell us unequivocally that this is the major obstacle to overcome on our spiritual quest.

At one point in his life after attaining enlightenment, the Buddha was asked by one of his followers: “Who are you? Are you a prophet, are you an angel, are you God?” The Buddha replied: “I am one who has awakened.”

When we look at the question of suffering, it is difficult to understand the reason for all the misery that is apparent on earth. It can only be understood in the context of the soul which is deathless, timeless and limitless. When we experience that paradigm shift to a higher level of consciousness, then we will realize that there is a divine plan. We see that everything going on around us is for a specific purpose.

We don't have to give up house, home and family on this path. What we have to give up is our attachment to these things. We don't have to subject the body to austerities in pursuit of our spiritual quest. The body is the temple of the Shabd. We have to respect it. It is our shrine of worship and a priceless gift.

All spiritual seekers are essentially following the same path. We are here on the same mission: to go beyond association with the body and the senses. We may call it liberation, salvation or enlightenment. But the ultimate goal is union with the divine. That is our objective. We are going to the region of light. We are going home.



# Book Review



## A Testament of Devotion

BY THOMAS R. KELLY

PUBLISHER: NEW YORK: HARPER/COLLINS, 1996.

ISBN 978-00606-43614

Thomas R. Kelly (1893–1941) was a devout member of the Society of Friends, commonly known as the Quakers. The central principle of Quakerism is that each individual must seek and be guided by the divine light within. Kelly served as a Quaker missionary, a college professor, and a writer. After his death Douglas Steere collected five essays by Kelly and published them under the title *A Testament of Devotion*. The book includes “A Biographical Memoir” of Kelly by Steere. This book has been continuously in print ever since it was first published in 1941 and is considered a classic of Quaker spirituality and mysticism.

The essays were written in the last few years of the author’s life. He had experienced a nervous breakdown, the effect of which was like a dark night of the soul, and he emerged from this with an intense and unshakeable love of and sense of unity with God. Kelly writes with intensity in a style sometimes like a sermon, and often poetic. Almost every paragraph is packed with religious imagery, and almost every page needs to be read and re-read slowly to be properly understood.

In the first essay, “The Light Within,” Kelly urges the reader to “secret habits of unceasing orientation of the deeps of our being about the Inward Light.” With this orientation, we stay attuned to the divine throughout the busy day. He quotes Meister Eckhart: “As thou art in church or cell, that same frame of mind carry out into the world,

into its turmoil and its fitfulness.” Kelly uses a number of analogies to convey his idea of what this inner light is:

*Deep within us all there is an amazing inner sanctuary of the soul, a holy place, a Divine Centre, a speaking Voice, to which we may continuously return. Eternity is at our hearts. . . . It is a Light Within which illuminates the face of God. . . . It is the Shekinah of the soul, the Presence in the midst. Here is the slumbering Christ, stirring to be awakened, to become the soul we clothe in earthly form and action. And He is within us all.*

This “Divine Centre” is present within everyone. With rightly focused, devoted attention we may experience it. Yet he also explains that if we seek the divine within it is only because God is seeking us:

*In this humanistic age we suppose man is the initiator and God is the responder. But the Living Christ within us is the initiator and we are the responders. God the Lover, the accuser, the revealer of light and darkness presses within us.*

Quoting the Bible, Kelly notes that it is God who says, “Behold, I stand at the door.” The response of the soul to the Light Within is natural. Kelly says, “The basic response of the soul to the Light is internal adoration and joy, thanksgiving and worship, self-surrender and listening.”

In his second essay, “Holy Obedience,” Kelly refers to an inner “Shepherd.” He directs the reader to “the life of absolute and complete and holy obedience to the voice of the Shepherd.” Humility, suffering, and simplicity are all natural outcomes of obedience. Obedience, he says, may be intentional, arising from awareness of the divine within, or it may emerge from mystical experience:

*It is an overwhelming experience to fall into the hands of the living God, to be invaded to the depths of one's being by His presence, to be, without warning, wholly uprooted from all earth-born securities and assurances. . . . Then is the soul swept into a Loving Centre of ineffable sweetness, where calm and unspeakable peace and ravishing joy steal over one. . . . One emerges from such soul-shaking, Love-invaded times into more normal states of consciousness. But one knows ever after that the eternal Lover of the world, the Hound of heaven, is utterly, utterly real, and that life must henceforth be forever determined by that Real.*

The third essay, “The Blessed Community,” focuses on the “Fellowship” of those who share a belief in the inner guidance of God within. The spiritual friendship and communion enjoyed by those who are attuned to the divine light within themselves – or are earnestly seeking it – is a source of great joy and spiritual vitality. In the early seventeenth century when the early Friends (or Quakers) began to meet, this “Fellowship” was evident. However, it was not unique in human history:

*Every period of profound re-discovery of God's joyous immediacy is a period of emergence of this amazing group inter-knittedness of God-enthralled men and women who know one another in Him. It appeared in vivid form among the early Friends.*

Kelly says this is “the holy matrix of ‘the communion of the saints.’” While he extols the fellowship of the Society of Friends with its clear focus on turning within, Kelly asserts in no uncertain terms that the “spiritual fellowship” he is praising is incomplete until we treat all persons, without exception, as part of it: “For until the life of men

in time is, in every relation, shot through with Eternity, the Blessed Community is not complete.”

In the fourth essay, “The Eternal Now and Social Concern,” Kelly states that the eternal can connect with time in a way that enables life to be lived on two levels, the “here” and the “beyond,” or “the eternal now and the temporal now.” Kelly thinks that people sometimes focus too much on the temporal but with serious commitment can shift their emphasis to the eternal. This shift in focus changes the entire quality of life:

*The possibility of the experience of Divine presence, as a repeatedly realized and present fact, and its transforming and transfiguring effect upon all life – this is the central message of Friends. Once we discover this glorious secret, this new dimension of life, we no longer live merely in time but we live also in the eternal.*

Quakers are known for taking positive action in the “temporal now,” through social concerns such as peace, non-violence, and fair treatment of all, following the guidance of the inner Voice.

*Social concern is the dynamic Life of God at work in the world, made special and emphatic and unique, particularized in each individual or group who is sensitive and tender in the leading-strings of love. A concern is God-initiated, often surprising, always holy, for the Life of God is breaking through into the world. Its execution is in peace and power and astounding faith and joy, for in unhurried serenity the Eternal is at work in the midst of time, triumphantly bringing all things to Himself.*

In the fifth and final essay, “The Simplification of Life,” Kelly

addresses the stress and complexity of modern life. Describing the busyness of modern life, he says many of us feel “bowed down with burdens, crushed under committees, strained, breathless, and hurried, panting through a never-ending program of appointments.” He claims that the apparent complexity and unease of our lives is not due to external circumstances but to a lack of inner integration. “We Western peoples are apt to think our great problems are external, environmental. We are not skilled in the inner life, where the real roots of our problem lie.” Kelly suggests that basis of Quakerism is in this: “If the Society of Friends has anything to say, it lies in this region primarily. Life is meant to be lived from a Centre, a divine Centre. In that ‘divine Centre’ within us we will find ‘the willing-up whispers of divine guidance and love and presence, more precious than heaven or earth.’” The final paragraph of this essay summarizes its key points:

*Life from the Centre is a life of unhurried peace and power. It is simple. It is serene. It is amazing. It is triumphant. It is radiant. It takes no time, but it occupies all our time. And it makes our life programs new and overcoming. We need not get frantic. He is at the helm. And when our little day is done we lie down quietly in peace, for all is well.*



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

