

August 2010

# Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

# contents

- 2 Rise, O Moon
- 4 The Precious Silk Pouch
- 10 In the World But Not of It
- 11 Thank You for the Music
- 17 Maharaj Charan Singh Explains
- 18 One Lifetime
- 24 The Meaning of Satsang
- 27 Satsang 'Corrupts' All
- 28 They Also Serve
- 34 Death Is a Friend
- 36 Learn to Juggle
- 40 Three Pieces of Advice
- 41 Straight or Crooked Thinking
- 46 Lost in Thought
- 47 The Attic of Our Mind
- 48 Book Review

## **Spiritual Link**

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

Copyright © 2010 Science of the Soul Research Centre®

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

**VOLUME 6 • ISSUE EIGHT • AUGUST 2010**

# Rise, O Moon

*Rise, O moon,  
and spread your light across the heavens;  
the stars remember you in silent prayers,  
their hearts glimmering with hope.*

*Now, like beggars,  
we roam the alleyways of earthly life,  
when once in our own Homeland,  
we were merchants of rubies.*

*O, may no one ever have to leave his own home,  
for one is not worth a piece of straw  
in this alien land!*

*They need not clap their hands  
to startle us out of this world, O Bahu;  
we are already disposed to fly back  
to our long-lost Home.*

*Sultan Bahu*



# The Precious Silk Pouch

The Buddha told a story about a young man who had a beautiful wife and son. Sadly, his wife fell ill and died, and the young man poured all his love into his little child, who became the sole source of his happiness. Once while he was away on business, bandits raided his village, burnt it to the ground and captured his little son.

When he returned and saw the devastation, he was beside himself with grief. He found the charred corpse of a small child and took it for the body of his son. He wept uncontrollably. At last he arranged a cremation ceremony, collected up the ashes and put them in a precious silk pouch. He always carried that bag of ashes with him and often he would sit alone and weep.

One day his son escaped from the bandits and found his way home. It was midnight when he arrived at his father's new house and knocked on the door.

The man lay in bed, sobbing, the bag of ashes by his side. "Who is it?" he asked. The child answered, "Daddy, it's me, it's your son. Open the door." In his anguish and confusion, all that the father could think was that some malicious boy was playing a cruel trick on him. "Go away," he shouted. "Leave me alone."

Again and again the boy knocked, but the father refused to let him in. Finally he turned and walked away.

We each have a precious silk pouch of ash that we cling to, created by our actions and thinking. Everything in our world is conditioned by what we know and what we believe and, like the man in the story, we cling to the myths we have created for ourselves.

We don't see our world for what it is; we don't see ourselves for what and who we are. Every day we carry our silk pouch with us, and our thinking and actions are filtered through the same old stained cloth.

We need to examine ourselves objectively. We need to question our actions, our thinking, our beliefs and our traditions. Many of our customs and traditions have little relevance in our lives today, but we can't let go of them.

Baba Ji so often tells us to question why we do things. Wrong convictions are the most devastating of all our delusions. Without thinking clearly we may take something to be the truth. Then it becomes engrained in our mind and we cling to our wrong convictions, finding endless reasons to justify them. Where there is an association of fear and evil in the belief, superstition is born. Superstition leads to compulsive behaviour – action without thought.

In Africa there is a broad belief that if you place the legs of your bed in five-litre tins, the Tokoloshe, an evil spirit, cannot visit you and torment you. Given that most Africans once lived in rural villages it may well be that the tins had some paraffin in the bottom to keep insects, scorpions or snakes from crawling onto the bed, but is there any relevance in this tradition in urban areas today?

Many superstitions developed as a means to control people. Often a religious order may have imposed its beliefs through fear, the threat of pending evil or the promise of burning in hell for eternity.

As satsangis we are immune to threats about heaven and hell. Because we don't have that concept in our belief system we are not affected by such threats. But it does affect many people who do believe in heaven and hell.

What is in our own belief system, our silk pouch? We each have to examine this for ourselves.

Kabir was a great mystic. He lived in the city of Banaras and spent his life in the service of the Lord. He defied religious practices and exposed the gullible beliefs of a society riddled with religious hypocrisy. He fought religious ideology that promised its followers happiness but which in reality subjected them to fear, fraud and misery.

Banaras is regarded as a holy city. It is said that if you die there you go straight to heaven. Even if you have lived the most evil and degraded life, it's a fast track to Nirvana! By contrast, it was believed if you died at Maghar, a village twelve miles from Banaras, you were reborn as a donkey – no matter how virtuous a life you had led.

At the end of his days Kabir decided to deliver his final blow at superstition and use his death to open the eyes of the spiritually blind. He packed his belongings and moved to Maghar. And this was where he died.

Let's take a closer look at ourselves. How often do we question the content of the e-mails we receive? Do they contain information, misinformation or disinformation? How many thousands of people actually believe an international company will share its fortune with them simply because they forward an e-mail? Is this any different from believing that if you die in Banaras you will go to heaven? In the twenty-first century we remain as gullible as the people during Kabir's time.

We too may be in the habit of paying outward respect to mystics while we continue to remain attached to worn-out dogmas and deluded thinking. We are deeply attached to our own convictions about this path and our Master, and we have an inherent image of what a Master should be and how he should act. Did Baba Ji shatter that image when he started playing soccer with us, or when he took part in a karaoke session at the Dera? Like Kabir's disciples, were we upset because his actions didn't fit our image?

It is these 'holy' images that he needs to break down. He is giving us the opportunity to be close to him on a personal level, to build our relationship with him and take that into our meditation, but we seem to be blinded by the shattering of our image. All we see is a soccer ball; we don't see the consciousness kicking it.

As Kahlil Gibran writes in *The Prophet*:

*When he speaks to you believe in him, though his voice may shatter your dreams as the north wind lays waste the garden. For even as love crowns you, so shall he crucify you. For even as he is for your growth, so is he for your pruning.*

The Master will shatter every binding image we cling to because we are unable to do it ourselves. He will take that silk pouch, turn it inside out and upside down and shake out the very last speck of ash. He wants us to open our consciousness, to move forward on our spiritual path and to let go of our antiquated thinking that binds us to false concepts and petty ideals.

Baba Ji has said that if we give him an empty mind he can fill it for us, but if we present him with a mind already filled with concepts and illusions he has to clean it out first.

We are pulled to this path by its teachings and we long for the love, freedom and bliss that it promises, but if we are not careful, our ignorance and misconceptions will spoil what the Master offers us. The more we take refuge behind our wrong views and convictions the less chance we have of transformation.

From *Living Meditation*:

*A misconception that is frequently encountered on the path concerns darshan of the physical form of the Master. When we have an opportunity to ask him a question in a meeting, we may prolong our question as much as possible, not because we want full clarification, but because we calculate that by looking at the physical form of the Master, for as long as we can, we are getting our karmas washed away.*



This is just another deception of the mind, and we'd do well to wake up from such delusions. Simply by looking at the Master, no karmas are cleared away. This is a typical example of wrong and misguided thinking.

Kabir wrote:

*You have forgotten yourself because of self-deception.  
... You have enslaved yourself  
To illusion and imagined shadow.*

*Kabir, The Great Mystic*

Isn't that exactly the effect of superstition and deluded thinking? Dying in Banaras; Tokoloshe under the bed; shadows and demons in our own minds to which we are enslaved. We can no longer recognize the truth if it stares us in the face or hammers on our door. Mental indulgence and wrong thinking are invisible chains that bind us to this world, and our silk pouch weighs down our soul just as surely as sandbags hold a balloon fast to the earth.

As we walk the spiritual path we come to understand more and more that our suffering is rooted in our distorted or unclear way of perceiving the world and, more importantly, how we perceive ourselves. How long will we tread the circling tracks of our minds around our little self and our deluded thinking? God's plan for us was not this changeless vain repetition.

Spirituality is an inner awakening, an awareness that starts with changes in our thinking. When we are able to recognize that our thinking is misguided, we begin to throw off our defensive shield and start working towards creating the clean mind and open consciousness the Master wants.

Again from *Living Meditation*:

*The battle is inside and it is inside that it has to be fought. In practical terms, it means to keep our attention as much as we can in simran at the eye centre. This is the way to develop clear thinking and to stop the delusion. It is also the way to empower the soul, and is the essence of the path of devotion.*

When the Buddha came to the end of the story, he said: “Sometime, somewhere, you take something to be the truth. But if you cling to it too strongly, then even when the truth comes in person and knocks on your door, you will not open it.”



*Happiness is our natural state. Happiness is the natural state of little children, to whom the kingdom of heaven belongs until they have been polluted and contaminated by the stupidity of society and culture. To acquire happiness you don't have to do anything, because happiness cannot be acquired. Does anybody know why? Because we have it already. How can you acquire what you already have? Then why don't you experience it? Because you've got to drop something. You've got to drop illusions. You don't have to add anything in order to be happy; you've got to drop something. Life is easy, life is delightful. It's only hard on your illusions, your ambitions, your greed, your cravings. Do you know where these things come from? From having identified with all kinds of labels.*

Anthony de Mello, *Awareness*

# In the World But Not of It

*I speak and yet I am silent;  
I have died, but am alive;  
I live among people,  
though in truth, I do not;  
I appear to enjoy,  
but in fact have renounced;  
I am in the world,  
and yet out of it;  
I have broken free of all bonds.  
I am not what I appear to be, O Tuka.  
You want to know?  
Ask the Lord what I really am.  
Tukaram, Saint of Maharashtra*



*Q: Master, is it possible to turn from rocky  
to completely fertile [ground] in one life?*

*A: He knows best. He can do anything.  
He can take you right from the barren ground  
to his own level.*

*The Lord can make a king of anyone.  
Maharaj Charan Singh, Light on Saint Matthew*

# Thank You for the Music

What a wonderful thing music is in our lives! ABBA certainly got it right when they wrote that line thanking someone for the gift of music. Try to imagine a world without music. Whether we participate passively or actively in it, wherever and however we experience it, it's there – a part of our lives. At whatever level we participate in it, music is a gift.

The giving of gifts may not be a uniquely human concept and activity, but human beings really like to give – mostly as an expression of love, affection or appreciation for someone or something else. To be on the receiving end of a gift conveys a message between two people, generally a message of love.

What about receiving? How should we respond when presented with a gift? Well, obviously with gratitude. Think how hurtful it is if the recipient clearly doesn't appreciate the gift, never uses it and doesn't even thank you for it.

Think of a little girl wanting a bicycle. She sees others riding a bike, but her dad says: "Wait until you are a little older." So she waits impatiently and then suddenly, one Christmas morning, wakes up to find a shiny new bike leaning under the Christmas tree with her name on it. And then, after all the pestering, she doesn't use it! She just takes it out every now and again.

When the ABBA boys, Benny Andersson and Björn Ulvaeus, expressed their appreciation for the gift of music, they were naturally writing about pop songs, music you can hear and sing along with. But we satsangis know of the ultimate music – and access to it is a gift from the ultimate giver. Any soul initiated by a perfect living Master has been given that shiny bicycle. Now what are we doing with the gift?

Souls initiated by a Master have been given the gift of Nam. It's not because of our scintillating personalities that we receive this gift. It's because our souls have cried for it – with or without us knowing. And now the Lord has heard and taken pity on us. It doesn't have anything much to do with us deserving it; it has everything to do with the Lord taking pity and calling souls home.

What we do know is that he sends the Master to collect those crying souls and give them the gift of initiation, at which time we are given access to the Shabd, the celestial music – the music to end all music!

Shabd is completely and utterly outside our ken, so the books and the Masters must be our source of information. They tell us that the Shabd is the quintessence of the Lord. He creates and sustains everything through this extraordinary current of power. It pervades everything, like radio waves, like the sun's rays. Shabd is everywhere and in everything, including us. We live and breathe because of Shabd's enlivening ability. It is our life.

And if the Shabd is also the Lord, then so are we. We have a drop of the Lord inside us, giving us life, controlling our lives every step of the way. One might sum it up by saying that the Shabd is God in action. Through Shabd he pervades, sustains, controls, guides and dissolves every aspect of his creation.

Shabd itself is of great significance to initiated souls. Firstly, it is a link, like a ladder between souls and God. Secondly, it can be heard and seen.

Think of the sun and its rays again. It's not too great an act of imagination to picture ourselves climbing up that ray to reach the sun. The Shabd comes from God. If we could climb up the Shabd, then we could reach God himself. Shabd is the royal road that leads to Sach Khand. The soul who finds itself on that road is indeed the luckiest of the lucky, for that soul has been given the key to the door leading out of the material creation.

The question is, if the Shabd is everywhere, including within us, and can be seen and heard and has the power to take us home, why are we all still here?

The answer appears to lie in the fact that the Shabd is present, but hidden; powerful, but subtle – too subtle for our gross physical senses to recognize. It cannot be heard by our outer ears, seen by our outer eyes, spoken by our physical mouth. Yet it can be seen, heard and spoken by our soul – by our innermost subtle spiritual being, by our own drop of Shabd. The Shabd is endowed with both sound and light, gloriously so, beyond our human imaginings.

Worldly music, wonderful and magnificent as it may be, is at best a very pale reflection of the true source of sound and light. The Great Master, says:

*On listening to the melody of a violin, one gets peace. It attracts our attention and makes us become absorbed in it. When a gross outer sound can produce such a condition, how powerful would the inner Shabd be?*

*Philosophy of the Masters, Volume IV*

Shabd is ringing inside all of us, but we are too coarse, too inflated with ego to be able to refine ourselves to approach it. The journey home is essentially a journey of the soul. Somehow or other we need to reconnect our little drop of God-essence to the Shabd so that we can make the journey.

Here we come to the crux of the matter. The route home is within us, but we cannot find it unaided. The soul knows there is a true home and it longs and cries for it. What can it do? Nothing! Alone it can do nothing. There has to be direct divine intervention in the life of that soul before it can hear the melody and catch hold of it. Because we cannot see or respond to God himself he sends his agent, the Master,

to perform the act of initiation that reconnects our soul to the Shabd. This is God's gift to us: the key to the door leading to Sach Khand.

The divine music is resounding within all of us at the tenth door, the eye focus. At that point mind and soul are knotted together. If we could free the soul from the mind, we could step through that door and hear the melody.

This is the extraordinary significance of the gift of initiation – of the gift of his music. How we must be loved to be given such a gift! How pitiful our plight must be to need saving.

Nothing of that magnitude could ever be achieved by unaided human effort. The whys and wherefores are completely and utterly beyond our comprehension. The selecting of souls is God's business. It is a mystery. It is a gift to our soul and we can take no credit for it.

We don't in truth identify with our souls. We see ourselves in terms of body and mind. But it is our soul that is the ultimate recipient of this gift. However, it is our body-and-mind persona that interacts with the Master and appears to receive the gift. And so we come back full circle – to being the recipient of a gift. Do we appreciate the gift, and are we using the gift to its fullest? Or are we like the little girl who finally gets the bicycle she had dreamed of and then never learns to ride?

Even with our limited capacity to understand it, we have been given something extraordinary here. It is our ticket home. It is also our Master's constant participation in our lives. It means our soul's weary sojourn in the material creation is finally coming to an end. It means we have access to beauty, peace and joy beyond our wildest imaginings. It means we are never ever alone, unloved or unprotected – never ever!

The implications are huge. How huge is our response? How deep, sincere, heartfelt and constant is our gratitude?

If we want to learn to be more grateful, how to go about it? Well, positive optimistic thoughts are a good beginning. Don't forget, everything comes with the Master's love and approval, with his direct permission. Nothing at all is arbitrary or 'hit and miss' in our lives. So, thank him for everything, constantly. Do as much simran during the day as possible. Work really hard at this, because it helps make us aware of his presence. And then how can we be anything other than grateful?

But, inevitably, it comes down to meditation. Let's meditate because our Master asks us to, because we want to express our gratitude for his gift, every day. If we have any kind of appreciation of the magnitude of this gift, then we must also realize it comes with a responsibility.

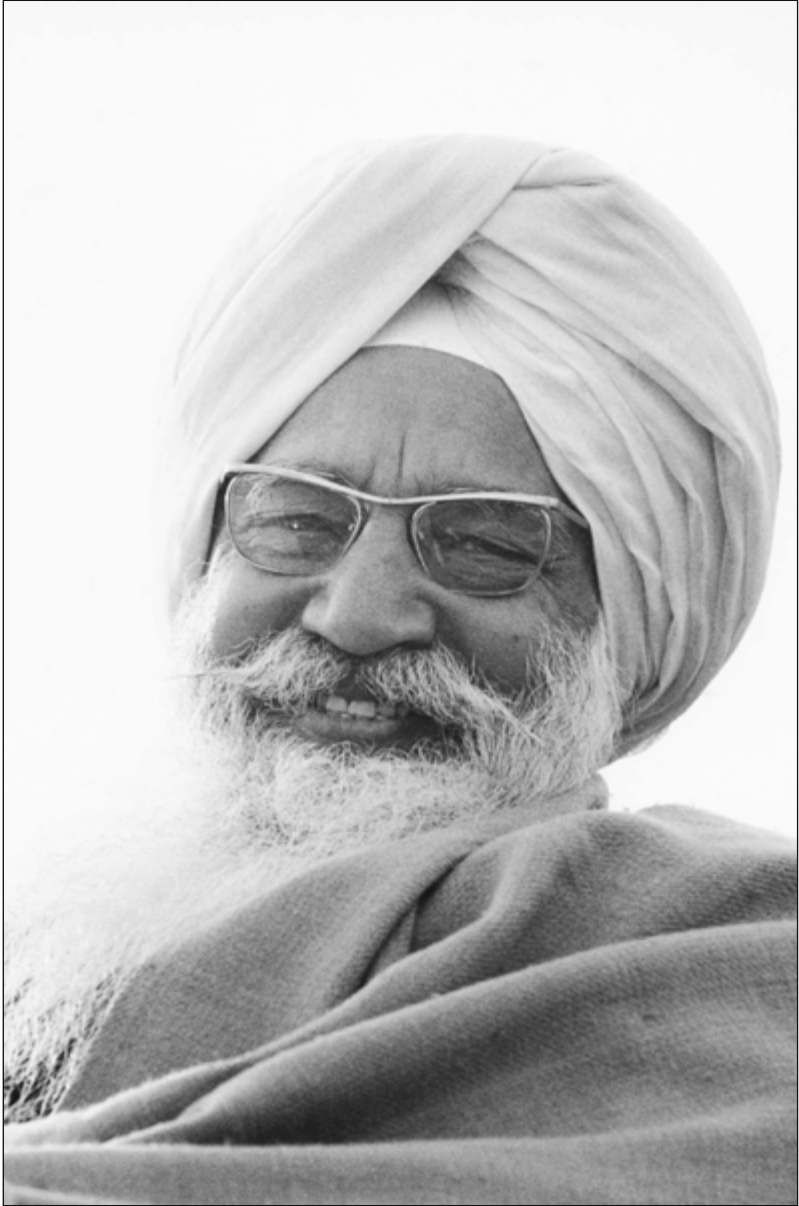
What's the good of having the bicycle and never learning to ride? Keeping it clean, knowing how it works, even sitting on the saddle and ringing the bell are inadequate responses. They suggest the giver made a mistake. But our heavenly Father does not make mistakes. He would not have initiated us if we could not reach the eye focus where this melody is resounding. So why not act with all possible determination and gratitude?

The Masters tell us that our efforts at meditation will not take us up – the grace of God will allow the Shabd to pull us. But we must use the gift and apply our very best efforts to this endeavour. We have been deemed fit to do the job, or pitiful enough to need saving. Either way we need to get on that bicycle and pedal away every day. We need to spend a minimum of two and a half hours meditating ... as if saying:

*Thank you for the music,  
for giving it to me!*







*Maharaj Charan Singh*

# Maharaj Charan Singh Explains

The previous Master used to love using the words of other mystics to explain Sant Mat. When we see that other saints have given the same teachings, he said, it reassures us of their indisputable truth. Here he is elaborating on verses from the Bible, from the Gospel of St Matthew.

*Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat. (Matthew 7:13)*

What he [Jesus] means to say is that the way back to the Father is very narrow and difficult; but the gate to destruction is wide and is always open. It is very easy to fall prey to temptation, to sensual pleasures, but very difficult to withdraw your consciousness back to the eye centre, and to knock at and open that door, and get admission into your house.

*Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. (Matthew 7:14)*

He says that the path is very narrow. It is extremely difficult to enter that path because the wind of karma and temptation is always blowing. ... So he says, the way leading to destruction is very, very wide and easy. But the way back to the Father, which gives us everlasting life, is most difficult for us to follow. However, the reward is great.

He says: "Few there be that find it." Do not think that everybody will be able to walk on this razor's edge, that everybody will be able to seek the Lord.

*Light on Saint Matthew*

# One Lifetime

When we apply for initiation we have to realize the importance of our commitment to this path. We have to understand that once we are initiated there is no going back. Literally.

Never again do we have to be reborn into this material world. There need be no returning to this plane of illusion. This can be our last life. This is it. We are at last homeward bound.

Having come to the top of the evolutionary ladder, we now have to step onto the ladder of Shabd and tread the spiritual path that will ultimately lead us to our divine home.

In *Message Divine* we read:

*Salvation and God-realization can be attained in this very life. That is why the saints impress upon us the need to have the direct experience of the Lord within ourselves through meditation.... We should work hard and within this very lifetime behold the ultimate Truth with our own eyes....*

*The precious opportunity of human life should not be wasted, as the waves of the ocean of time wait for no one.*

We all need to realize the value of this supreme gift and the responsibility initiation carries.

For satsangis the path to spiritual liberation starts the moment we sign the application for initiation. By signing this piece of paper we have taken our first step towards final liberation. But we mustn't think that that is all we have to do. It's not that we just have to apply for initiation, get initiated and wait for the magic to happen.

Initiation is reaching base camp. Now, with the help of meditation, we begin our ascent to the spiritual heights.

After initiation we have to accept that our lifestyle has to change in order to make meditation our primary focus. We have to put in tremendous effort to keep steadfast on the path. Nothing must stand in the way of our meditation.

As with any karma, we also have the ability to create the karma to meditate in the future. In the Tibetan Buddhist book *Rigpa Glimpses* we read:

*When you have explored the great mystical traditions, choose one Master and follow him or her. It's one thing to set out on the spiritual journey; it's quite another to find the patience and endurance, the wisdom, courage, and humility to follow it to the end.*

*You may have the karma to find a teacher, but you must then create the karma to follow your teacher. For very few of us know how to truly follow a Master, which is an art in itself. So however great the teaching or Master may be, what is essential is that you find in yourself the insight and skill to learn how to love and follow the Master and the teaching.*

We have to approach our initiation as a turning point in our lives, not only in our lifestyles. There has to be a complete U-turn in where our focus lies.

A few months ago Baba Ji told a questioner something to this effect: that he'd never said anything about four lifetimes – it's one lifetime. He said this regarding the undertaking given to us that once initiated by a perfect living Master, we are guaranteed not to have to return to this material plane more than four lifetimes.

This possibility of four lifetimes should not even be entertained by us. Do we really not mind being born again? Imagine having to go through all those years of punishing schooling!

We all know that we are going to die one day and we have had plenty of warnings that we need to prepare for that day, but we ignore the warnings.

There's a story about a lawyer who dies and gets to heaven. There he is led before the Lord, and the lawyer immediately complains that he was not given any warning of his impending death. "On earth," he said, "people are given lots of time to prepare for a judgment – they are given time to look at the fact and to prepare an argument."

The Lord told him, "I gave you plenty of warnings. I gave you grey hair, but you covered it up with hair dye. I gave you failing eyesight and you had laser surgery. I made your joints stiff and you had a hip replacement. I made you hard of hearing and you used a hearing aid. I gave you all these warnings, but you didn't prepare yourself. You have only yourself to blame."

Are we ignoring our warnings? Death is the only sure thing in life, and it is up to us to prepare ourselves.

By definition, life could be described as "the period between birth and death". That's all it is. Baba Ji says that life is an illusion that we have to take seriously. He also says that we can't be illiterate all our lives and expect to get a PhD when we die. Let's not ignore our warnings. We have to put in the effort and meditate, and then we will get our rewards when we die.

Unfortunately we often think that something as profound as God-realization is not possible for us, that we are too unimportant or weak for such a grand thing. Baba Ji says that only souls that have the capacity to attain God-realization within one lifetime are accepted for initiation. Why don't we believe him?

We read about the significance of initiation in *Adventure of Faith*, the life story of a Catholic nun who discovers the path of Surat Shabd Yoga and the need for a spiritual Master. She writes:

*Initiation means the beginning of the first stage of the path of the Masters, which is a preparatory phase. The inner ascent of the soul only begins – the Masters always stress this point – when we take our consciousness across the threshold of the transcendental world. After initiation, it is essential that Sant Mat be lived. Day by day, step by step, the path of the Masters has to be trodden untiringly.*

We need to appreciate what it is to be initiated by the Master. This is not some exclusive club, a gathering of vegetarian animal-lovers or moral policemen or health faddists who meditate in order to lower their blood pressure or calm themselves down.

Getting initiated by a perfect living Master means that after billions of years our souls will finally take their first step on the road to spiritual liberation. This is no small thing. This is what our soul has been yearning for, for aeons. It is now up to us to keep walking on this road, every morning putting in the effort of meditation and sticking to the principles given at the time of initiation.

When we apply for initiation the Master lights a flame of encouragement within us which needs constant fuel to stay alive. Initiation is the lighting of the spiritual lamp within and it is of prime importance to keep feeding the flame. We can do this by reading the Sant Mat books, going regularly to satsang and, most important of all, by doing our daily meditation.

And of course seeing the physical form of the Master is a wonderful way of feeding this flame.

The Master must be the central figure in our lives. We must realize that he wants us to gain God-realization more than we do. As we read in *Adventure of Faith*:

*When I considered how long God had been leading me towards initiation without my having any awareness of it, I could see how childish it would be to suddenly become impatient and try to hasten the process.*

*When, with God's help, I regained my faith and trust, he made me realize that it is he himself who wants the return of that soul, that tiny drop out of the limitless ocean of divine Being. Who is anyone to desire union with God? It is God who infuses the longing into the human heart – it is the working of his grace.*

The Sant Mat way of life must become second nature to us. If we love the Master, we need to imbibe his qualities and be a reflection of him.

In the Adi Granth it is written that we are the reason for our Guru's existence. If we truly are the reason for the Guru's existence, then it is up to us to make it worth his while. We have to make him pleased with us. We have to follow his teachings and get moving on this path with dedication and determination. Action is the bridge between our goals and their accomplishment.

So there is no getting around it. Once we are initiated there is no going back – only forward, with the help of meditation. The Masters always say that we must bring them our failures. Rather try and fail than not try at all.

As Winston Churchill said: "Success is the ability to go from failure to failure without losing your enthusiasm."

Let's never put ourselves down. Let's never criticize our own efforts. Every little bit is a step forward. Let's always think that we can achieve God-realization in this lifetime.



*As to rebirth after initiation and of the knowledge of previous births, please try to understand that when a soul is initiated – and if after that it keeps in faith and does not fall into bad habits and do foul deeds, but for certain reasons had not the opportunity of doing the spiritual exercises and progressing – it is, after death, stopped at the first or second stage, according to its karma and desires. There it takes to the spiritual practice and then in time it is taken upward. Rebirth in this world is only for those who have lost faith, do foul deeds and have very low desires.*

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *The Dawn of Light*



# The Meaning of Satsang

Everything starts with the Master's grace. And by his grace we have satsang. Satsang means the company or association of the Truth or God, without or within: being in his physical presence, or being at the eye centre during simran or bhajan. Therefore, when we do simran we are actually having satsang.

Whether we are aware of it or not, Baba Ji never misses any of our satsangs. The fact that we don't always see him and are not aware of his presence makes no difference – he is always there. Maharaj Charan Singh used to say: “How do you know I am not there, when I am not there?”

We know that the company we keep influences us, either for better or worse. Being in the Master's presence or in his company, either physically or at the eye centre, influences us strongly to become like him. This happens automatically, with no effort on our part, as when we put something into a warm oven, it will automatically begin warming. We cannot always be in the Master's physical presence, but we can be at the eye centre. We are free to go there every moment of the day and night, and in so doing, hasten that change within ourselves. We only need to sit for meditation, be present at the eye centre and start our simran. We need do nothing else. Baba Ji tells us that everything else will follow automatically, as a natural consequence of simran – our personal satsang.

Goswami Tulsidas says that the company of a saint is hard to obtain in this world even once, be it only for a moment or for an hour, and that there is no blessing in the world equal to that of meeting a saint. And Great Master tells us that satsang is so unique that even God is enamoured with it. What a privilege and blessing we have been given!

Constant simran is possible for us every moment of the day. Just do it, lovingly and with gratitude. Very few souls ever have this incredible privilege. And then when we sit for meditation, to hear the Shabd inside is the highest form of satsang. One should try to attend to both forms of satsang, outer and inner satsang, whenever possible.

Satsang is our defence against worldly influences. Great Master describes it as a fence around the crop of meditation. And Baba Ji says we should enjoy doing our simran, then it will become easy.

If we were to realize that our attempts to focus at the eye centre while doing simran actually bring us into his presence, we would enjoy it so much more, just as we enjoy being in his physical presence. Baba Ji says that 95 percent of spirituality is being constantly aware of the divine One within us. Is this not the same as having the blessing of his satsang constantly?

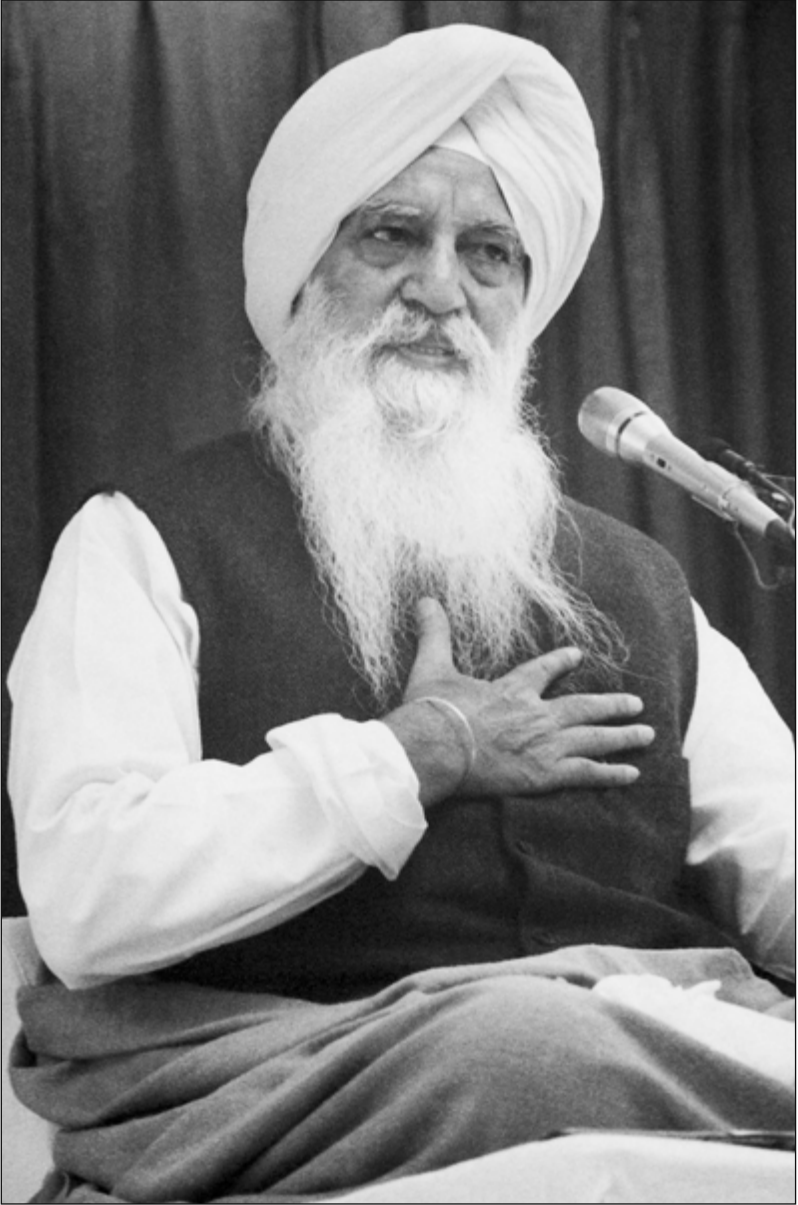
By granting us initiation and teaching us the method of simran and bhajan, the Master has given us the opportunity to be in his company every second of the day. Why not drop everything else and enjoy that constant remembrance – let him take care of our lives while we become absolutely carefree.

There is a beautiful story to illustrate the meaning of satsang. A perfect Master and a few of his disciples were walking towards a small village. The disciples asked their Master the purpose of this visit. He answered that he was going to give the people satsang. When they reached the village the Master did not stop; he kept on walking.

A disciple questioned the Master, saying that he thought the Master was going to give satsang.

The Master answered that he'd done just that. In other words, the inhabitants were blessed with inner satsang.

Let's not waste any more time. Let us be with him every second of the day – through constant, loving simran, done with deep gratitude.



*Maharaj Charan Singh*

# Satsang 'Corrupts' All

*Whosoever has come to satsang  
has been spoiled.  
He has been spoiled,  
even as oil has been corrupted  
by the fragrance of flowers.  
He has found the company of the wise  
and has lost his ignorance.  
With the contact of the philosopher's stone,  
iron has become debased;  
It has ceased to be iron and turned into gold.  
The river has lost its identity  
by merging into the ocean.  
By imbibing the scent of sandalwood,  
the tree has lost its quality.*

*Alas! Paltu has become a swan from a crow,  
And the crows grieve over the loss of one of them.  
For whosoever has come to satsang  
has become spoiled.*

*Saint Paltu*

# They Also Serve

Back in the seventeenth century, the English poet John Milton went blind when he was still relatively young. A deeply religious man, he wrote a sonnet – almost a prayer – regretting that his blindness had left him unable to serve his Maker through his poetry, as he would have wanted to. But the message came back to him that God did not need his words or his literary gift. A humbler kind of service was just as acceptable.

As Milton put it in his sonnet:

*But Patience, to prevent that murmur, soon replies,  
“God doth not need either man’s work or his own gifts:  
who best bear his mild yoke, they serve him best.  
His state is kingly: thousands at his bidding speed  
and post o’er land and ocean without rest;  
they also serve who only stand and wait.”*

And for us too, this is an important message. We don’t have to be talented or successful to serve our Maker. We can serve him best by accepting whatever circumstances he has given us and trying to serve him anyway, and then by learning the lessons that come from that acceptance and that service.

There are lots of lessons for us to learn on this path. Among the hardest is the fact that we’ve got no say at all over how we’re going to travel this path. It is all happening under the absolute control of our Master.

Baba Jaimal Singh wrote in one of his letters to Babu Sawan Singh, the disciple who would one day succeed him:

*So you should think that you are nothing. Only the Master is. And you should resign everything to the will of the Master... He will take you to Sach Khand after removing all sins and cancelling all karmas.... He will take you there when all your work is finished. Such is His will.*

*Spiritual Letters*

Acceptance, graceful acceptance of his will: That's one of our big lessons. All we have to do is keep working according to his instructions, keep trying to please him – even though the struggle is long and our efforts seem to be ineffectual.

Struggle seems to be built into the way our Master wants us to practise this path – especially the struggle to bring the mind under control. And it does seem that there's a purpose to this – that the struggle is good for us!

What did Great Master say about the up-and-down battle to subdue the mind?

*The rise and the fall are natural, and so is the struggle. For that which is achieved after struggle gives strength, self-reliance and incentive to go ahead.*

*Achievement thus obtained is lasting and can be reproduced at will.*

*Spiritual Gems*

In another of his letters in *Spiritual Gems* the Great Master wrote:

*Mind is not a thing that can be switched on and off at will. It cannot be taken away from its routine course in spite of one's best efforts in a day, a month or a year. It is a life-long struggle.*

Maybe we underestimate the magnitude of this task that we're trying to accomplish. If we think about it clearly, of course it's going to take a long time. Look at what we are. And look at what we want to become – insignificant little flawed creatures aspiring to become God-realized saints!

All told, it could take a long time for the results of our shaky meditation to become apparent to us. During our long stay in the creation we have become spiritually dense, unreceptive to any kind of finer spirituality, what to say of the Shabd itself. Through our practice we have to be changed into something finer that can resonate with the Shabd.

Our minds and even our bodies have to be prepared for it – slowly and steadily – as we keep up our efforts to meditate. Because the Shabd is powerful. This is something we most certainly tend to overlook when we keep begging our Master to give us light or sound before we're ready for it.

In *Light on Sant Mat* Maharaj Charan Singh gives this warning:

*In the beginning it is not always easy to stand the force of the Shabd or Sound, which is not always gentle or soothing, but may also be terrific in its strength. It is then that the difficulty comes.*

*The physical frame is attuned only by and by to enable it to stand the divine energy. In the course of time the Sound or Shabd brings about a quiet but useful change in the physical body and makes it more fit and adaptable to receive the divine message.*

And we imagine that we're ready for this? Is this what our ego believes? Humility is probably the main lesson we need to learn before we can become fit to merge into the Shabd.

Humility is almost certainly the scariest of all the lessons we have to learn – because of all that we might have to go through for this ego to be crushed. And we may need to be cut down to size, perhaps every single morning of our lives, till eventually the camel can pass through the eye of the needle.

In a poem by Paltu, entitled ‘The Path of Love’, we read:

*This is the abode of love, not the home of thy aunt.  
Only a severed head can gain admittance to it.*

Meaning of course that we have to be prepared to make the greatest sacrifice: not of our life as such, but of our ego, our will, our very identity.

This is something huge that’s expected of us: this crushing of the ego. But it is inescapable. In *Thus Saith the Master* Maharaj Charan Singh left no doubt about this:

*It is the ego which is separating the soul from the Father.  
Eliminate that ego and the soul is ready to merge into the Father.*

Every single thing that contributes to the ego, to building this image of ourselves as someone separate from our Beloved, will eventually have to be smashed. It may happen through difficult karmas, through poverty or sickness or dishonour. Or it may happen simply through old age, becoming helpless and dependent, stripped of all confidence and dignity. The process may well be uncomfortable, painful and relentless. It may involve a great deal of suffering.

In *The Book of Mirdad* we read about the pilgrim climbing the flint slope – a steep slope of broken flint, on which he is cut



to ribbons as he climbs to reach his goal. He struggles on, though, because he knows there's something worthwhile at the top of the mountain.

Our souls hunger for something sublime. But there's a price to pay for it. And our Master may well sit back and calmly watch it happening – everything according to his own sweet will.

There's an exquisitely beautiful little verse by Rumi:

*My heart is like a lute  
each chord crying with longing and pain.  
My Beloved is watching me  
wrapped in silence.*

*Rumi, Hidden Music –*

Translated by Maryam Mafi and Azima Melita Kolin

And in the meantime, what is happening? Our apparently useless efforts are stoking the fires of longing inside us. Any psychologist will tell you that it's a fact of human nature that the things we want most are the things that we can't easily get. It sets up a kind of an obsession in us. And from time immemorial the Masters have used this very human characteristic to goad their disciples to greater effort – by creating a yearning in the unsatisfied soul.

In *Philosophy of the Masters*, Volume II, the Great Master tells us that longing is created in the disciple when he is unable to get what he yearns for. When the mind finds little apparent progress despite its labour, he says, it grows restless and begins to feel a sense of separation from the Master.

And it's this longing that burns up worldly attachments and desires and eventually makes us fit to travel inwards to where the soul wants to go.

Let's remember the familiar words of Baba Ji Maharaj about the longing that arises in the heart of the disciple when he is unable to reach his Beloved:

*If there is true love for the Master and intense longing for darshan, it is more purifying than a hundred years of meditation.*

*Spiritual Letters*

Still, we do get distressed by what we see as our failure. But surely the Master is not upset by it. He knows how much, or how little, we can do. He knows our limitations better than we know them ourselves, and he doesn't need our success. He asks only that we make the effort. All we need do is try to please him, and then he, by his grace, will take us inside. Everything depends on his grace.



*With whose grace do we gain admission to the court of the Lord? Surely not by our own efforts. Alone we can do nothing. We can never, by ourselves, traverse the uncharted terrain of the inner path. We owe everything to the immeasurable grace of the Master. He showers his blessings on us by joining us with the Shabd and Nam, removing our doubts, and pulling us out of this quagmire of illusion. It is our Master who puts us on the right path and awakens in our mind abiding love and devotion for the Lord. Blessed with his infinite grace, through meditation, we seek, we find and we knock.*

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Die to Live*

# Death Is a Friend

“Death teaches us not to place our reliance on the flesh but on God. Therefore Death is a friend,” the Master said. “We should not grieve unduly about the passing of our loved ones. It is selfish to desire that they always remain near us for our pleasure and comfort. Rather, rejoice that they have been summoned to advance toward soul freedom in the new and better environment of the astral world.

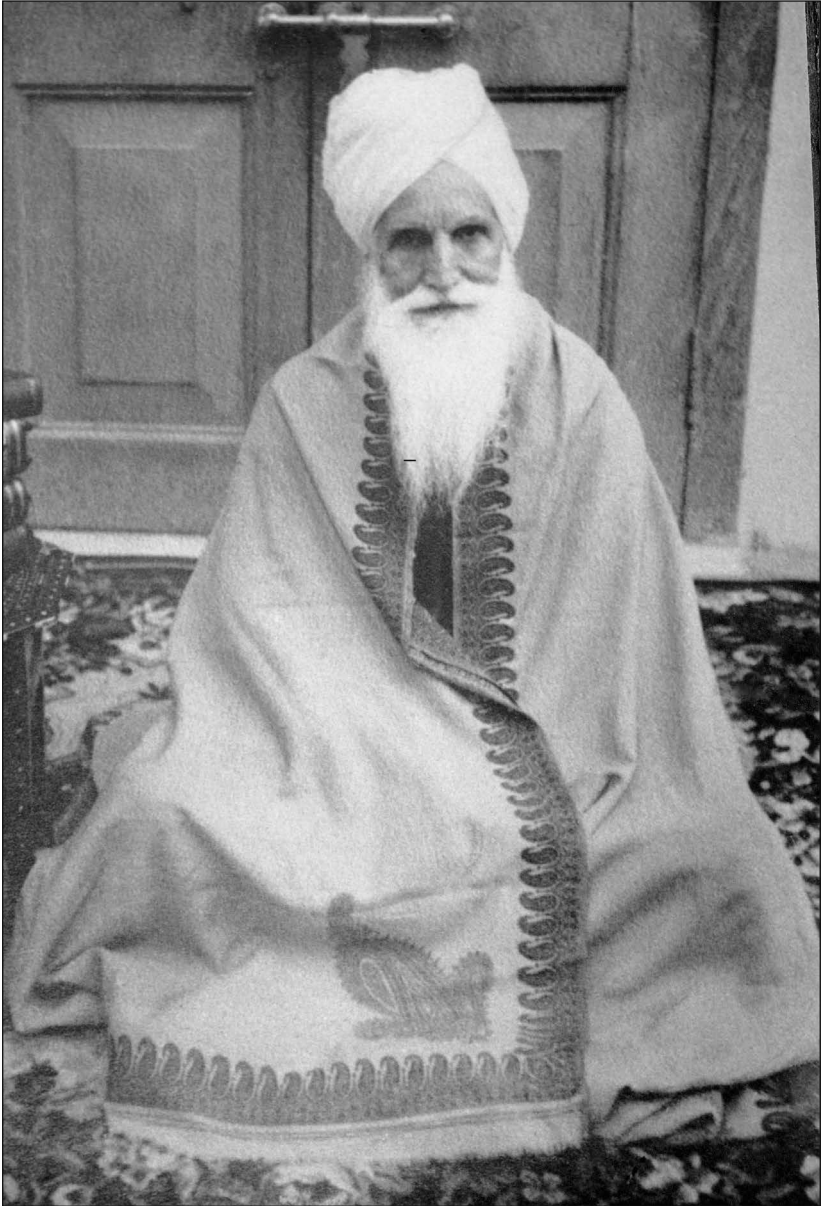
“The sorrow of separation causes most men to cry for a while; then they forget. But the wise feel impelled to seek their vanished dear ones in the heart of the Eternal. What devotees lose in finite life, they find again in the Infinite.”

Paramhansa Yogananda, *The Master Said*



*We have to leave this world one day, and if we are loving,  
obedient disciples and have made proper preparations in this lifetime,  
we do not have the transition which we call death.  
While others weep, the spiritually developed soul departs happy –  
happier than a bridegroom on his wedding day.*

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *Spiritual Gems*



*Maharaj Sawan Singh*

# Learn to Juggle

Some years back a newspaper columnist compared life to a game in which we are juggling five balls in the air. Let's apply his analogy to our own lives. Our five balls might be work, family, health, friends and of course Sant Mat. Keeping all of these balls in the air is the way we have to juggle our lives.

We will soon understand that some balls are more resilient than others. Work, for instance, is like a rubber ball. If we drop it, it can bounce back. But some other balls – family, health and friends – are not made of rubber and require far more care. If we drop one of these they could be irreparably scuffed, marked or damaged, and while they may be retrievable, getting them back into the ball game could take a significant amount of effort. It is important to understand this and strive to find the balance in our life that keeps all the balls in the air.

As satsangis we have three more balls competing for time and place in our juggling act. These are: meditation, satsang and seva. These three balls are extremely important. If we drop them, then like our life balls, we can retrieve them, but getting them back into our game can only be achieved through effort and loving obedience to our Master. We may find that as our juggling act speeds up, simran, bhajan and our Master get lost in our ball game, but they are always available to us.

We need a well-considered game plan to juggle. Balance and pace are important, and the first thing we learn is that each ball has a specific time and place in the rhythm of the act. Similarly, we learn that life itself has rhythm. It is not a race but a journey, to be savoured each step of the way. If we rush along focusing on the past and the future, life slips through our fingers. But by living one day at

a time, we live all the days of our life. As the saying goes, yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery and today is a gift – that’s why we can call it the present.

Similarly, Sant Mat is not a race. There is no “Trikuti Trophy” or “Dera Challenge Cup” to be won. It is a path on which we walk slowly, a personal journey. Each step within is an unfolding of immense beauty, which, like the opening of a flower, cannot be rushed.

The challenge we face is to maintain our rhythm and balance while keeping our juggling act going. If we are serious about Sant Mat and don’t see it merely as an insurance policy to take care of us when we die, it should be the main focus in our lives. Our confused sense of priorities causes us to live under extreme pressure, though, and lose our focus. While juggling the five life balls, so too must the four principles be integrated into our daily activities. Go about the business of life, and at the same time go about the business of Sant Mat.

We have a purpose in life: our spiritual goal. True spiritual fulfilment comes from exploiting our God-given potential. There is no greater gift than this, and the inspiration to keep juggling this ball comes from satsang, simran and bhajan. Focused meditation is its own inspiration.

Desire is our great motivation, and it is the Master who kindles the desire within us for spirituality. We are told that the greatest riches are waiting within for us to enjoy. Why then do so many of us chase the mediocre mainstream? As we strive for excellence in our life, so too should we strive for our own excellence along the path. We should never be satisfied with spiritual mediocrity, because that is when our juggling act gets confused and we drop the ball labelled Sant Mat. And this disrupts our entire juggling act.

We each know what is best for us and we should set our goals accordingly. We should never be afraid to follow what is in our heart. Our heart directs us, while the head confuses us. Our heart is a harp of many strings, which respond to the many emotions of our lives and also to the touch of the Master. His mystic teachings resonate in our hearts. It is his call to our soul that transforms our lives. The things closest to our heart must never be taken for granted. Rather we should cling to them as we would to life, for without them life is meaningless.

Divine love is the greatest gift of all. To know whether we really love the Master we need to ask ourselves whether we can do without our meditation, and whether we can live without him in our life. If the answer is 'no', then we already love him.

The promise he makes us is that if we do our meditation all impurities and worldly desires will leave us and there will be an unbroken flow of peace, light and love. But to achieve this we must be attuned to Shabd at all times, so that all our feeling, thinking and willing is focused in Sant Mat. Then our juggling act will be well balanced.

By receiving initiation we have turned around and we now have to learn to swim against the stream. Our lives must be different from the way we lived before. The juggling balls take on different roles of importance as we strive to find our own voice, our own rhythm. We need to listen to our heart and fight for what we believe to be true. Now is the time to take the decision that every day for the rest of our lives we will think and work for Sant Mat; that each day we will try to be a better satsangi than we were the day before.

We can learn to balance our juggling act. We can move with the rhythm of life while pursuing our dream. We can follow that dream.

Baba Ji has told us to be natural, to believe in ourselves and to be ourselves.

The Masters believe in us, otherwise they would not have initiated us. We need to be true to ourselves; to have faith in ourselves and in our ability to live a balanced life and to keep all our juggling balls in the air. For to really succeed, we have to be the very best we can possibly be.



*The way is not hard to a simple heart  
nor is there any hurdle to upright thoughts,  
nor any storm in the depth of an enlightened mind.  
When supported on all sides by the harmonious,  
then there is no discord within.*

*The likeness of that which is below,  
is that which is above.  
For everything is from above,  
and whatever is below exists only in the imagination  
of those who are without knowledge.*

*Grace has been revealed for your salvation:  
have faith, and live and be saved.*

*Hallelujah.*

*The Odes of Solomon*



# Three Pieces of Advice

A man once caught a bird. The bird said to him, “I am no use to you as a captive. But let me free, and I will tell you three valuable pieces of advice.”

The bird promised to give the first piece of advice while still in the man’s grasp, the second when he reached a branch, the third after he had gained the top of a mountain.

The man agreed, and asked for the first piece of advice. The bird said: “If you lose something, even if it be valued by you as much as life itself, do not regret it.”

Now the man let the bird go, and it hopped to a branch. It continued with the second piece of advice: “Never believe anything which is contrary to sense, without proof.”

Then the bird flew to the mountain top. From here it said: “O unfortunate one! Within me are two huge jewels, and if you had only killed me they would have been yours!”

The man was anguished at the thought of what he had lost, but he said: “At least now tell me the third piece of advice.”

The bird replied: “What a fool you are, asking for more advice when you have not given thought to the first two pieces! I told you not to worry about what had been lost, and not to believe in something contrary to sense. Now you are doing both. You are believing something ridiculous and grieve because you have lost something. I am not big enough to have inside me huge jewels. You are a fool. Therefore you [are not ready for enlightenment and] must stay within the usual restrictions imposed on man.”

Idries Shah, *Tales of the Dervishes*

# Straight or Crooked Thinking

An accountancy lecturer wrote a column in a monthly publication with the heading: ‘Straight or Crooked Thinking?’ His approach was to sketch a fairly simple and everyday problem based on the subject he was teaching and then, by applying his technical and common knowledge, come to the most logical and practical answer. Although some of the problems required technical application, skills and logic, his approach was always to “stand back and see the forest, and not to get lost in the trees”.

Every day as we walk along this path, are we conscious of the bigger truth or are we only conscious of the moment on this plane of consciousness? Are we applying straight or crooked thinking?

We say we believe in the truth of this path we follow, but do we really? To what extent do we get caught up in the day-to-day stresses of this world? Are we guided by our limited awareness and intellect or are we guided by what our Master says?

How often during our day do we stand back, aware that this life is but a brief one, a few very short moments in the expanse of time? Are we concerned about the fact that there are rich and poor people here, that some die young and some die old, that some are happy and some are sad, some live in the most fantastic surroundings and some live their lives in war and terror?

Let’s remember that the answers to these questions come as we advance on the path, and that in the bigger picture all souls go through all their karmas over many lives.

Do we look at the whole picture or do we become entangled in the moment? What are our priorities? Do we live our lives as part of a bigger existence, or do we live only as far as our intellect goes? Are we thinking straight or crooked?

Let's go back to basics. Nothing is new. We have heard this many times before – so much so that it could be that we have forgotten the depth of it. We might have forgotten what we are and what our purpose is.

In Sant Mat we often say that the purpose of human life is to return to God. Certainly, many of us have asked how, and many of the great philosophers have written books about it. If we believe that there must be something more than what we have on this question, something more than this existence of up and down, come and go, then it begins to make sense that the purpose of human life is to go back to the supreme Creator. The first step in undertaking this field of study is “knowing”, or at least believing, that there is something bigger out there. The logical question that follows is: How? How do we return to God?

This is where the essence of our path kicks in, which is to follow the instructions of a teacher who knows how to return to God. Through the ages there has always been a guide, teacher or Master on this earth. We are told that the Master is at the centre of the path and that man, on his own, cannot go back to God; he needs a teacher to guide him. This has always been so since the beginning of time.

Once a soul is initiated, the Master never leaves that soul. The disciple may not be aware that his Master is always with him, but he is.

Sant Mat is not a religion but a science. Hence, anybody from any religious background can follow this path. There are no payments to be made. There are no rituals or ceremonies, no special places of study. There is merely a practical arrangement to meet at a specific time and at a suitable place.

At the time of initiation, the Master's representative explains the process of meditation to the initiate, who is given the names that are

to be repeated during meditation – names that help to still the mind. We're also shown a technique to tune our attention to the Shabd.

Shabd is a word to describe the sound current or audible life stream. It is the sound of God. The whole creation reverberates with the sound of the presence of the creative life force. It is known by many names such as the Holy Ghost, the Word, Logos, Nam, and so on, but it still describes the same thing – the subtle sound of the Creator.

Through the technique of meditation this sound can be contacted at the eye centre where the consciousness collects. According to the teachings of the saints, it is through meditation that we contact the Shabd and merge back into it, thereby fulfilling the purpose of human life. Simple, isn't it? Straight thinking!

We are taught by our Master that we can only come into contact with Shabd when the mind is completely still. Meditation is the technique we are given to still the mind in order to reach this state of perfect concentration. We need to create the correct atmosphere for this work if we want to be successful in our undertaking. It is a lifelong study and we need to prepare ourselves correctly for it. So we need to get ourselves into the laboratory, or onto the playing field, and start practising.

Like an athlete who wants to win the marathon at the Olympic Games, we have to go to the correct field to practise. The athlete does not go to the swimming pool or the tennis court to practise for the marathon. He goes to the athletic field or onto the road. He doesn't buy himself a pair of underwater goggles or a racket – no, he gets himself a pair of running shoes, he puts these on and he slowly starts to train himself to run.

Similarly, we who have set ourselves the goal of contacting the supreme creative life force have to prepare ourselves for our task.

We have to go to our own athletic field, which is inside of ourselves: That is where God is. When we get initiated we are taught where we have to go and how to practise. We are shown how to sit and how to concentrate, and along the way we may attend the initiation of others to ensure that we remember what we have been taught.

Satsang, our literature and seva help us maintain our level of commitment towards our goal. We need to be reminded constantly of what we are, what we are doing here and what our main purpose in life is. And for this we need to think straight, not crooked.

At the time of initiation we agree to obey the four principles. For the rest of our life we must follow them vigilantly and without compromise if we want to be successful on this path. If we fall along the way, the Master will lovingly encourage us to stand up and try again. He will not leave us. We may not be aware of his presence, but he is there.

Meditation is the real task we undertake, and the Master places the highest priority on this practice. In almost all his answers we will find the advice: “Do your meditation.”

If we talk about straight thinking, this is where it applies the most. We need to have the right attitude, sit for our two and a half hours every day and never miss a day.

If we follow the techniques as taught to us by our perfect living Master we will advance spiritually and change our attitude, which in turn will bring a feeling of contentment that is very rewarding. We need to utilize our intellect to think about these things – we need to work it out for ourselves.

And we will get to a point where we will be able to distinguish between straight and crooked thinking. And when we think straight we will see how much sense it makes to make meditation our number one priority in life.

And with regard to meditation, we are repeatedly told that we should do our best under all circumstances, and then leave the results in the hands of the Master. As Great Master tells us in *Spiritual Gems*:

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

That's straight thinking.



*We generate thousands of thoughts every day. From the spiritual perspective this means that thousands of times a day our mind bypasses the eye centre as we run from one thought to another without rest or pause. No wonder we feel restless and anxious! How could it be otherwise, with all that activity going on within our head? When we indulge in wanton thinking, we waste many opportunities to centre ourselves through spiritual repetition (simran). We miss the benefit that is available to us – the well-being that comes from repeating the words the Master gave us at the time of our initiation, through which we create that much-needed focus at the eye centre.*

*Living Meditation*

# Lost in Thought

Most people spend their entire lives imprisoned within the confines of their own thoughts. They never go beyond a narrow, mind-made, personalized sense of self that is conditioned by the past.

In you, as in each human being, there is a dimension of consciousness far deeper than thought. It is the very essence of who you are. We may call it presence, awareness, the unconditioned consciousness. In the ancient teachings it is the Christ within, or your Buddha nature.

Finding that dimension frees you and the world from the suffering you inflict on yourself and others when the mind-made “little me” is all you know and runs your life. Love, joy, creative expansion and lasting inner peace cannot come into your life except through that unconditioned dimension of consciousness.

If you can recognize, even occasionally, the thoughts that go through your head as simply thoughts, if you can witness your own mental-emotional reactive patterns as they happen, then that dimension is already emerging in you as the awareness in which thoughts and emotions happen – the timeless inner space in which the content of your life unfolds.

The stream of thinking has enormous momentum that can easily drag you along with it. Every thought pretends that it matters so much. It wants to draw your attention in completely.

Here is a new spiritual practice for you: don't take your thoughts too seriously.

Eckhart Tolle, *Stillness Speaks*

# The Attic of Our Mind

For a satsangi, a spiritual “message” – for instance, the need to keep our minds uncluttered – can sometimes be found in the most unexpected places.

The following passage is from *The Science of Deduction*, by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. The great detective Sherlock Holmes is surprised at the unenthusiastic response of a man to information which he (Holmes) had felt was important.

“You appear to be astonished”, his informant said. ... “Now that I do know it I shall do my best to forget it.”

“To forget it!” exclaimed Holmes in disbelief.

“You see,” replied the man, “I consider that a man’s brain originally is like a little empty attic, and you have to stock it with such furniture as you choose. A fool takes in all the lumber of every sort that he comes across, so that the knowledge which might be useful to him gets crowded out, or at best is jumbled up with a lot of other things so that he has a difficulty in laying his hands upon it.

“Now, the skilful man is very careful indeed as to what he takes into his brain-attic. He will have nothing but the tools which may help him in doing his work and of these he has a large assortment, all in the most perfect order.

“It is a mistake to think that that little room has elastic walls and can distend to any extent. Depend upon it, there comes a time when, for every addition of knowledge, you forget something that you knew before.

“It is of the highest importance, therefore, not to have useless facts elbowing out the useful ones.”



# Book Review



## Jap Ji – A Perspective

BY DR T.R. SHANGARI

PUBLISHER: RADHA SOAMI SATSANG BEAS, 2009.

ISBN: 978-81-8256-869-3

*Jap Ji – A Perspective* presents a new English translation of the *Jap Ji* along with a very helpful commentary. The *Jap Ji* is a hymn by Guru Nanak that appears at the beginning of the *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, also known as the *Adi Granth*, the sacred book of the Sikhs. The 38 stanzas of the *Jap Ji* are the most revered and the most often recited part of the *Adi Granth*.

Compiled and edited by Guru Arjun Dev (1563–1606), the fifth guru in the line of Guru Nanak, the *Adi Granth* is a voluminous anthology of the writings of the Sikh Gurus and of thirty other mystics. By drawing on mystics from differing religious, social and cultural backgrounds, Guru Arjun conveyed a message of universal spirituality, boldly facing down sectarian and caste prejudices. As he declares in one of his poems,

*The noblest of all religions  
and purest of all actions  
is meditation on God's Name ...  
The holiest of all the holy places, O Nanak,  
is the heart in which God's Name abides.*

The *Jap Ji* is preceded by a verse known as the Mool (Root) Mantra:

*There is but one God;  
true is his Name.  
He is the Creator,  
without fear,  
without enmity  
and of timeless form.  
Unborn and self-existent,  
he is realized through the Guru's grace.*

It is said that the Mool Mantra embodies the heart of *Adi Granth* philosophy, that the *Jap Ji* is an elaboration on the Mool Mantra, and that the entire *Adi Granth* is an elaboration on the *Jap Ji*. Or, as T. R. Shangari, the author of this new translation and commentary, puts it: “it is . . . as if from this root mantra sprouted the sapling of the *Jap Ji* which finally grew into the mighty tree of a great teaching”.

The 38 stanzas of the *Jap Ji* revolve around the message of worship of the Name under the Guru’s guidance. Like the Mool Mantra, the *Jap Ji* puts great emphasis on the company of the true Guru. From Stanza 5:

*Through the Guru the eternal Sound is revealed;  
through the Guru divine knowledge is attained;  
through the Guru one remains absorbed in God.*

As Shangari describes it, the *Jap Ji* “outlines a process of spiritual enlightenment which culminates in total absorption of the self in God-consciousness”. Provoking the reader to realize spiritual knowledge and lasting bliss by meditating on the Name, it “puts forth . . . a perfect art of living based on a true Guru’s personal experience”. This “perfect art of living” demands, for example, high moral conduct as well as meditation: “The *Jap Ji* associates meditation with untainted moral conduct and, in turn, associates pure moral conduct with meditation. A spotless moral character helps immensely in meditating on the Name, and conversely, meditation on the Name is a means of attaining ethical attributes.”

*Jap Ji – A Perspective* begins with a 17-page introduction and then gives the English translation of the entire hymn. The translation is accompanied, on facing pages, by the original text of the *Jap Ji*. The latter is given in its original Gurmukhi script but also in Romanized transliteration for those readers who understand the Punjabi language but cannot read it in Gurmukhi.

The remainder of the book consists of a commentary on the *Jap Ji*. The author suggests that the stanzas follow a thematic sequence that gives inner structure to the hymn. Thus he presents Stanzas 2–4 together under the subtitle “Signs of His Grace”; Stanzas 5–7 under “The Fountainhead of Virtue”; Stanzas 8–11 as “Listening to the Name”; and so on.

The author often explains a line from the *Jap Ji* by quoting verses from other parts of the *Adi Granth* and from other well-known mystics. For example, commenting on lines from Stanza 2,

*By his will he merges some into himself,  
by his will he does away with others,*

he quotes Guru Arjun, “No one is foolish, no one wise – all that happens is by your will, O Lord.” In other words, it is not because of any person’s ignorance or wisdom that he is far from or near to the Lord. “If the Lord himself wants to have someone closer to him, he automatically moves closer to the Lord. However, the one he wills to be away from him remains distant, drifting in the cycle of transmigration.” Stanza 2 continues, “All are within the divine will, none outside it.” Again, the author quotes Guru Arjun:

*Neither effort nor service helps to meet the Lord;  
he comes to meet you of his own accord.  
The one who has my Lord’s grace  
is inspired to practise the Guru’s mantra.*

In Stanza 31 the *Jap Ji* tells of the unfathomable power of the Lord:

*God’s abode and his storehouses lie in all the worlds;  
whatever they contain was put there in one stroke.  
The Creator creates and watches over his creation.  
True he is, O Nanak, and true are his doings.*

As the author explains, according to this verse there is no question which came first, the chicken or the egg. Through the Word, the Lord created chicken, egg, man, woman, the processes for their procreation, and all else in one stroke. In support of this point he quotes Sant Dadu Dayal:

*The Word alone created all, so all powerful it is.  
Successive creation is done by one who lacks vitality.*

Shangari often gives more than one interpretation of a given line, illuminating how this rich text bears many layers of meaning. A simple example is in Stanza 1:

*The hunger of the hungry is not appeased  
even if they amass the wealth of all the worlds.*

He notes that, while the verse may mean that, no matter how many worldly goods a person gets, he will always come up with more greedy desires, another possible meaning is that “the hunger of the soul can be satiated only by spiritual food and not by material wealth”.

The author draws on elaborations of the *Jap Ji* by many respected Sikh writers. For a single couplet he may include interpretations from Bhai Gurdas, Bhai Vir Singh, Hazara Singh Sodhi and Sant Surain Singh.

*Jap Ji – A Perspective* offers a beautiful, lucid and thought-provoking perspective on one of the world’s most revered scriptures. For the reader who is encountering the text for the first time, it provides the background and context to understand it. For the reader who has long known and loved the *Jap Ji*, the commentary will add depth to his appreciation of it. For any sincere seeker after truth, this book is sure to whet the spiritual appetite. As the author states, “The *Jap Ji* is such a mine of treasures that the more we study it, the more colourful, priceless, precious and thought-provoking gems we discover. The *bani* [words of the Gurus] is like an ocean; the deeper we dive in, the more pearls we may find.”

*Jap Ji – A Perspective* is the first in a projected series of books on various sections of the *Adi Granth*. Shangari hopes that this book, as well as the others to follow, “will bring inspiration to the English language readers throughout the world, making the precious jewels contained in this unique and far-reaching scripture accessible to people who cannot read or understand its original Gurmukhi”.



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

