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Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

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Spiritual Link

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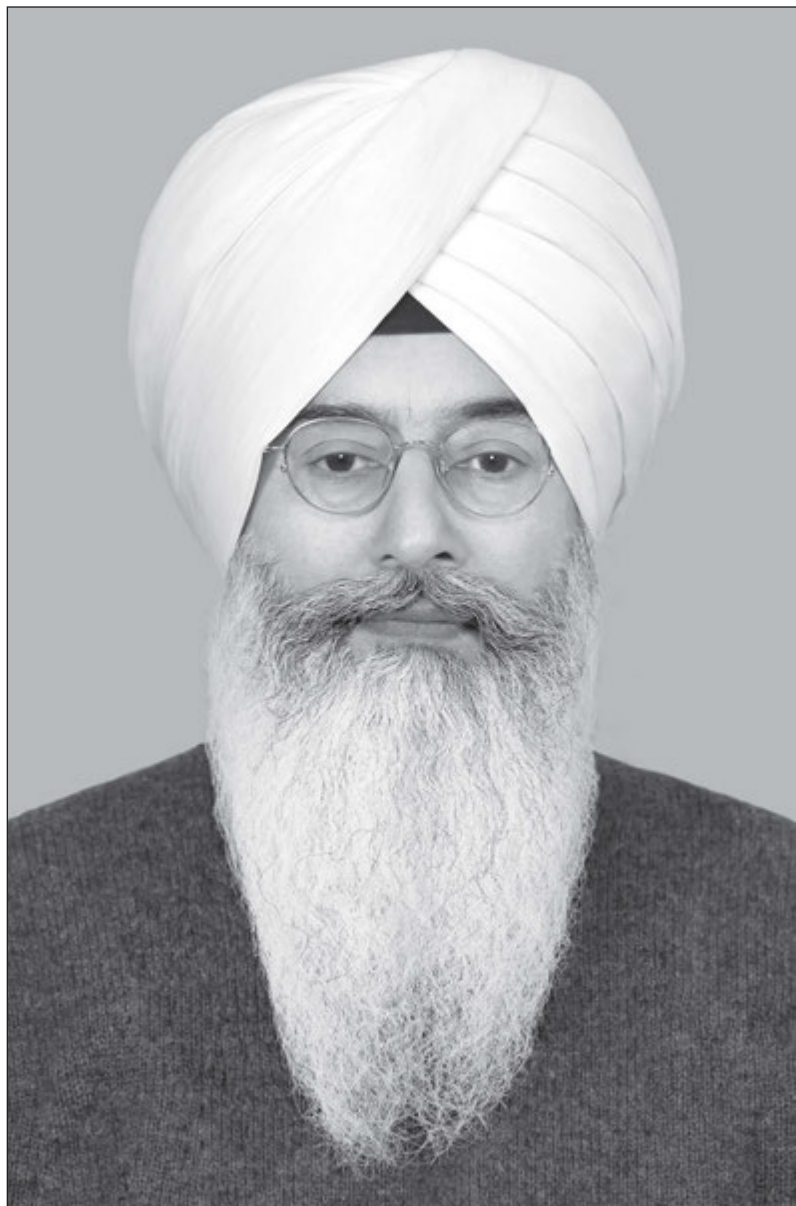
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Light into Light

*When I see him, I sing his praises,
and I, his humble servant, become patient.
Meeting the true guru divine,
I merge into the current of Sound.
Where the dazzling white light is seen,
there the unstruck sound of Shabd resounds.
One's light merges in the Light –
by the grace of the guru, I know this.
Jewels in the treasure chamber of the heart
glitter and flash like lightning.
The Lord is near, not far –
he permeates and pervades my soul.
Where the light of the undying sun shines,
the light of burning lamps seems as nothing –
by the grace of the guru I know this.
The servant Namdev is absorbed in the celestial Lord.*

Namdev in *Many Voices, One Song*



The Ringing Radiance

The path we follow is called Sant Mat – meaning the teaching of the saints. Some people refer to it as Surat Shabd Yoga: connecting the *surat*, the soul, to the audible life stream, the sound current – the power that sustains the creation. This power is an emanation from the supreme Creator and, in fact, is the Creator. It has been eloquently described as the ringing radiance. It also is, literally, our ride home. It is sound, light and power, immense and unimaginably beautiful. It is nothing other than love.

How do we know that this is true? We don't – not mentally with our limited human cognitive faculties. We cannot comprehend or imagine the size of an atom or, at the other end of the scale, the size of the universe. So, by what means can we begin to understand this ringing radiance, this boundless, impersonal love?

At least we can begin with the assumption that we have a soul. This thing we call the soul is itself an enigma. We cannot through rational thought or any science of the physical plane prove that the soul exists. We know that we have a body and a brain. We can fairly safely assume that we have a mind, because the dratted thing can get us into all sorts of trouble. And coupled to the mind is emotion, which gets us into even more trouble – and sometimes befuddles our thinking to the point of stupidity.

But still, somehow we feel ourselves connected to the underlying unity of the creation. We sense that there is something more. Humans seem to have some sort of built-in search engine that is continuously scanning to find the source and the meaning of our existence. In a sense, therefore, this enigmatic soul is the power source of the mind and the body.

And taking that to a logical conclusion, it too must have some way of replenishing its power. After all, electricity is generated by something: coal, water, nuclear, wind, sun or whatever. So from where does the soul draw its energy? It makes sense to assume that the soul draws its strength from the power which sustains the creation. If our convoluted and limited reasoning powers are anything to go by, this can be the only source that can power the soul.

Now, if this power of creation is so powerful (which of course it must be to have brought all of creation into being), why does it not just release us from our physical bodies and our minds and take us straight back home? Well, therein lies the catch. The mystics give a very simple analogy to explain it. They say that if a silk cloth lying on top of a thorn bush is pulled off too quickly it will be ripped to shreds. It has to be unpicked, thorn by thorn. Similarly, our soul is so interwoven with mind and matter that it cannot be simply ripped out of this dark lower end of creation. At our level our little lights are just too weak to withstand the power of the majestic sound current.

The mystics, when asked why we were put in this position, do not really give us a clear answer. Not because they don't want to, but because we would not understand it. The poem *The Robe of Glory* offers a kind of explanation. It tells of a prince who was sent by the king to a far-off land to fetch a pearl and bring it back to the king. The prince set forth, but then fell under the spell of that land and its ruler to such an extent that he forgot who he was and thought that he was one of the inhabitants of that place. But of course the king knew what was happening, and he sent a message to the prince to wake him up.

What is this pearl that the prince was sent to find? The mystics tell us that it is gnosis or self-knowledge. In one way this tale describes a little of what has befallen us. We had to come into the physical creation to gain a full understanding of who and what we are.

Hazur Charan Singh said in one of his discourses that man seeks the Lord because he is man's origin, and of the same substance. Maharaj Ji goes on to say that, having separated from the Lord, the soul has become entangled by maya or illusion in the snare of attachment, and has taken the company of the mind. Further, the mind itself has been enslaved by the senses and worldly desires. It thus gets still more entangled, and the soul has to bear the consequences of whatever thoughts and actions emanate from the mind, because the mind and soul are tied together. The soul has to suffer pain and remain imprisoned in the jail of the physical creation.

At our level we may not really understand this. However, one thing has now happened to us, we have received a spiritual email in a sense. The computer or cell phone went 'ping' and there it was. Suddenly thoughts that had been simmering and percolating for years, or lifetimes, come to the surface and something in us says: Where am I, what am I? I don't belong here. What is going on?

This is a watershed point in the journey of any soul. A kind of separation is taking place – a tiny crack has appeared in the unity of soul, mind and body. However, our little soul is still feeble. It has been asleep for so long that all its faculties are weak and it does not know how to use them. Many of us, when we awaken from a normal deep sleep, are slightly befuddled. It's exactly the same with the soul. The alarm has woken it up, but it needs help to get moving in the right direction. It needs a teacher, a Master, to help and guide it.

There is an old Eastern saying that when the disciple is ready the guru appears. Call this grace, providence, synchronicity – whatever you will. But how do we know that this Master who appears is the right one – or even a real Master? How do we know the Master is the embodiment of Shabd? We may want to believe that he is, but we do

not know for certain. Apart from a possible feeling of ‘rightness’, at first we have no way of knowing.

There is a way, however. We can initially make an assumption and say: What he says makes sense. I will follow the methodology and prove it for myself. This is where meditation comes in. The Master gives an initiation in which we learn a specific method of meditation. Gradually, through our meditation, we come to appreciate what has been given.

Those of us who have been initiated on to this path have chosen, or were chosen – it makes no difference – to accept the Master as the embodiment of the Shabd. It is quite strange to think of the Master as Shabd. He seems kind of solid when you look at him just as everything around us and even we ourselves look solid.

But we know that this is an illusion – not only because a mystic has told us this, but because science is revealing it to be so. We consist of a bunch of tiny atoms, electrons and other minute particles, whirling madly in the dance of life and by common consent creating the illusion of solidity. And all this is sustained by the creative power. Which brings us back to the audible life stream, the creator and sustainer of all creation. If this power is withdrawn, nothing can exist any longer.

We have been told that the soul has certain faculties, which are seeing and hearing, and both are required to access the audible life stream, this ringing radiance. The mind does hear echoes of the inner sound and see flashes of the light, but only the soul can experience the true beauty of the Shabd. In the physical universe we hear only the echoes, but we have to go within to know its full glory. The light and sound of Shabd are already within us. All we have to do is sit very, very still and wait and listen; then we will hear.

Part of the Sant Mat meditation is a practice called bhajan – listening to or for the sound current. The mystics say that this is what will ultimately take us back to our origin. Although we have heard that the sound and the light are always present, initially we may discern them only very faintly. As our concentration grows, these will become stronger and start pulling us within. Of course, the Master is managing this process to make sure that we can withstand the force of the power behind all creation. In fact, he may withhold some of our gains until we are strong enough to bear the real light and sound.

At the end of the day, this is really a simple path. There is soul, Master and Shabd. That is basically it. Everything else is just part of the process or even peripheral.

God? Good question. Not even the mystics try to explain what God is. All they say is he is indescribable, unknowable. And of course God cannot be irrelevant – after all, there is just the One! And if there is just one, then soul, the Master and Shabd are not separate entities. What is left then is nothing but oneness – a oneness of sound, light and love!



*Before the creation the Shabd was unmanifested and nameless....
Prior to its becoming manifest, there was no sun or no moon
or sky. The Shabd was formless. The Shabd, however, is
consciousness. All are under its control. Nothing can manifest
without its help. The Shabd is the life, the essence, the root and the
quintessence of every created thing.*

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

Divine Love

Love is a mighty power, a great and complete good; love alone lightens every burden, and makes the rough places smooth. It bears every hardship as though it were nothing, and renders all bitterness sweet and acceptable. ... Love aspires to high things and is held back by nothing base. Love longs to be free, a stranger to every worldly desire, lest its inner vision become dimmed, and lest worldly self-interest hinder it or ill-fortune cast it down.

Nothing is sweeter than love, nothing stronger, nothing higher, nothing wider, nothing more pleasant, nothing fuller or better in heaven or earth; for love is born of God, and can rest only in God, above all created things.

Love flies, runs, and leaps for joy; it is free and unrestrained. Love gives all for all, resting in One who is highest above all things, from whom every good flows and proceeds. Love does not regard the gifts, but turns to the Giver of all good gifts. Love knows no limits, but ardently transcends all bounds. Love feels no burden, takes no account of toil, attempts things beyond its strength; love sees nothing as impossible, for it feels able to achieve all things. Love therefore does great things; it is strange and effective; while he who lacks love faints and fails.

Love is watchful, and while resting, never sleeps; weary, it is never exhausted; imprisoned, it is never in bonds; alarmed, it is never afraid. Like a living flame and a burning torch it surges upwards and surely surmounts every obstacle. Whoever loves God knows well the sound of His voice. A loud cry in the ears of God is that burning love of the soul which exclaims, 'My God and my love, You are all mine, and I am Yours.'

Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*

Thermodynamics and Sant Mat

When perfect living Masters or enlightened beings say that a dark ignorance prevails in the world, they are deadly serious. More serious than we might ever guess.

Ignorance has many aspects to it – some more subtle than others. One is that you can easily go through your life so lost in your own self-created mental world, your thoughts and worries, that you miss all the good stuff around you. Albert Einstein was once asked what his most valuable asset was in achieving so much in science. His answer: curiosity. True curiosity is to take a holiday from one's own self-centred mental world and to discover the wonder that is this life.

The Lord has given us so much – and much that we just don't see. When you wake up in the morning and you open your eyes, does it ever occur to you that right through the night the sun has been working to keep the earth perfectly in its orbit? Do you give any thought to the fact that your body has been nourished and rested, and that millions of organisms in and outside of your body have worked right through the night to enable you even to awake again?

And then there is the whole ecosystem we live in, billions of souls that work without any thanks so that we can have food to eat, air to breathe, clean water to drink and a stable climate. When you start pondering this, it becomes quite clear that this human frame needs countless species of life to slave away tirelessly, simply so that it can exist. In his *Passion for Creation* Matthew Fox quotes the medieval mystic Meister Eckhart as saying: "If the only prayer you say in your entire life is thank you, that would be sufficient."

But gratitude is not the general attitude today. We want it all and we want it now. And if possible, we want it for free. Alas, however, in this world you get nothing for nothing. In the words of the cliché, there is

no such thing as a free lunch. Science explains this elegantly within a field known as thermodynamics. This is a mathematically rigorous field that is founded on three laws or observations of nature. The first of these states that in this life you have to act – you simply cannot sit still indefinitely and just be. Secondly, you cannot expect to get out even a tiny bit more than what you put in. The third law states that owing to the inherent chaos present in this universe, you will always get out less than what you put in.

These three laws can be summarized as follows: You have to play your part in this world, knowing full well that you will lose more than you gain. But what does thermodynamics really have to do with Sant Mat, you may wonder. The three laws just quoted do seem to have a lot to do with our everyday lives.

Spend some time at the Dera though, and you may find a very different perspective dawning – a rather thought-provoking perspective. The Dera is a colony in the north of India, which is the headquarters of the Sant Mat or Science of the Soul spiritual path. It is where the current living Master has his home, and it also houses several thousand initiates of this path.

In the light of the laws of thermodynamics, what is startling about the Dera is that here there *is* something like a free lunch – in fact, hundreds of thousands of free lunches every weekend. There is even free accommodation, free medical treatment and free teaching from a true spiritual Master.

What is consistent with thermodynamics is that in the Dera microcosm you do have to take part, even if just by doing your meditation. But you always get out more than what you put in. There the laws of thermodynamics seem to fail, and fail spectacularly!

How can this be? This is where a little healthy curiosity may come into play. How to solve this riddle? With a carefully conducted experiment, of course. The golden rule of scientific experimentation



Maharaj Sawan Singh

is that the validity of an experiment is directly proportional to the independence of the observer. Put simply, the observer should drop his own opinions and biases and look at the evidence afresh. What kind of experiment should one do then?

Well, the Masters of the Sant Mat spiritual path have always said that the Dera is built on seva and meditation. By definition, seva is selfless service. So, the experiment works like this: go to the Dera and do your meditation for at least two and a half hours every day, and then also engage in some kind of seva or selfless service. To help you to be as objective an observer as possible, it is also best to do your simran while doing your seva unless you are given a seva that requires full concentration, like editing books. Then, remember that this is to be selfless service. So no looking for any reward – that is cheating and will not reveal the key to the mystery.

But how to do selfless service? The Masters tell us that the mind is a powerful entity and will only do something if there is some reward attached. So seva becomes selfless only if done out of love for God, for the Master, a selfless love. And herein lies the key to the mystery.

Thermodynamics and its laws, as applied to modern society, assume that we act out of love for the self or the ego. But when you act out of love for your Master, the very feeling this brings is all the reward you ever want. And it is this selfless love that drives the Dera, that enables a few people to serve the multitudes day in and day out without ever getting tired of it. Doing some task out of love also becomes a huge amount of fun – because you're not worrying about being rewarded (or not) for your effort. What's more, whatever kind of work you do makes little difference – it is only the opportunity to serve others out of selfless love that counts.

The Dera is a very special place. It may be easier for us to experience this selfless seva there rather than elsewhere. Why? Because we are influenced by the company we keep. And the Master

himself has such a clear influence on the day-to-day running of the Dera that you can't help responding to the atmosphere of selfless and loving seva. So, spontaneously you act out of love for others, rather than out of love for yourself. For both the giver and receiver it's a win-win situation. And that's apart from the fun, much more fun than winning some game or succeeding in some business deal where your gain is another's loss.

Selfless love and devotion are the keys here. In *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. II, Great Master writes that "In spirituality the very first prerequisites are devotion and love." This love is very rare and precious and is the true prayer to the Lord. How to achieve this? Great Master tells us: by simran and contemplation.

Simran is the repetition of the five names given us at the time of initiation. Its practice enables us to replace the obsessive thoughts of the self with these words. And the only way to do this consistently is with love and devotion. But how to achieve this kind of simran? Maharaj Charan Singh explains:

Put your whole mind in these words. You will automatically feel the love and devotion. Let no other thought come in your mind. Let the whole of yourself, the whole of your mind, be in the simran. Love comes automatically.

Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. II

We don't need to spend our lives at the Dera to develop the kind of love and devotion that can lift us above our obsession with self, with the ego. We can do this with simran. With the simple repetition of our words we can free ourselves of the limitations imposed by ego, and we can discover the pleasure inherent in selfless service. We are also free then to look outward and see the wonders of the creation around us – and be grateful for it all.

The Fire of Separation

*Dadu is thirsty for love, O Lord, give me a drink.
Filling the cup, give it to me in person,
and bring the dead to life.*

Dadu, the Compassionate Mystic

This is the start of a poem by Dadu called “Results of True Love”. Let us look at some verses of the poem, in which Dadu tells of the state of the seeker who is thirsty for God. The seeker instinctively knows that God is pure love, and he craves that divine love which will bring him to life, bring him back from his state of ignorance about his true identity and his real home.

Many of us have known this thirst for divine love. Maybe in the beginning we knew only that we were lacking something. In our deepest being we felt dead and wanted to experience the love of God to bring us back to life. And we wanted this from him directly. We no longer wanted to hear about it from others who might in fact be just as lost and ignorant as we were.

This is the thirst that Dadu is talking about. But he knows that there’s a price to pay. And the price is pain. As Dadu puts it:

*One who is intoxicated with love and devotion,
whose body is writhing in pain,
whose mind is always in agony;
God dwells with him.*

It actually sounds quite frightening. We know we want to grow spiritually, but do we want this agony? Unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately, the choice is not ours to make – because by the time a soul

becomes thirsty for God, it has passed the point of no return. Its thirst has become so great that it will pay any price to get what it wants.

For a disciple to learn anything at all about divine love, it seems that separation from the Beloved has to come first. Maharaj Sawan Singh, the Great Master, who has a lot to say in *Philosophy of the Masters*, Vol. II about the pain of longing or *bireh*, puts it this way:

In order to meet the Beloved, intense longing comes first, in the same manner as flowers bud and bloom on a fruit tree before it can bear fruit. ... Similarly, where there is no bireh there can be no meeting with the Beloved.

Briefly, it seems this is what generally happens. The disciple is initiated by a Master, falls in love with him, and is then sent away from his presence. Or the Master removes himself physically from his disciple. The result of this separation is that a longing is created in the disciple to find his Master inside. And when he fails to see that form inside, he starts to feel a great restlessness and even anguish over his loss.

At an objective level we can see why separation from our Beloved and the longing it produces are so effective a device to spur a disciple to try to find his Master within. This longing can become something quite obsessive. From a worldly point of view it can even seem quite irrational. But it is certainly effective – because it blocks out a lot of distraction. As Great Master tells us:

Intense longing has a very deep influence because of its powerful current of energy. Once it is established, no other impressions can enter the mind.

Philosophy of the Masters, Vol. II

And Dadu tells us exactly the same – that in the grip of longing which results from separation, the mind forgets everything else and becomes still. In the words of Dadu:

*The mind becomes motionless in the wave of love
arising from the pang of separation.*

*It is dissolved in God's Name;
rarely does anybody understand, O Dadu.*

Well, that is certainly true. When we set foot on this path we understand very little. And we certainly do not understand that it's going to cost us everything – that we're going to lose our entire identity by dissolving in God's Name. Initially we may feel a bit uncertain about that. And then, suddenly, one day it dawns on us that that's all we want: to merge into the Shabd, or into the Beloved, more than we have ever wanted anything else in our entire existence. And that will be accomplished: through love. This merging becomes possible because the lover wants nothing but the Beloved. Only this intensity of love makes the two become one.

Dadu tells us that, in fact, God is as obsessed with love as the soul who's yearning for him:

*The lover is converted into the Beloved.
That indeed is called true love.
Of that Beloved, God himself becomes the lover, O Dadu.*

*God has become the anguished lover,
and the anguished lover has become God.
Such a deed has the torturous pang
of separation performed, O Dadu.*

This is something very powerful. We are so intent on how we feel in this striving for union that we forget that the pull comes from the Beloved also. In fact, he set up this whole process of drawing souls to him. He devised this whole terrible game of separation because he wanted to make us love him the way he loves us. This is the Lord's play. It is the way he has devised to unite souls with him in conscious oneness.

It is hard sometimes to understand that this whole path is designed around his great love for us – and that even though we may be more conscious of our pain than his love, still we are completely in his hand. We are living totally within his grace and care. Dadu says:

*When the true Lord stands over your head
for protection, no hot wind can affect you.
You live under the shade of the lotus feet;
a great grace has been bestowed upon you, O Dadu.*

*One sits fearlessly by repeating God's Name;
the Negative Power can never consume him.
When you ride the elephant, O Dadu,
then dogs bark in vain.*

What a lovely image! We are riding on an elephant and we do not need to concern ourselves with any yapping nuisances in our lives. We do not have to worry about a single thing. Great Master tells us in *The Dawn of Light*:

*Master is always with you and watching you and helping you
in every action. Go on increasing your love and faith in him by*

regularly attending to the spiritual exercises; he will himself look after our worldly affairs.

He will himself look after our worldly affairs. We don't realize how close a bond we have with him. But we will come to know it eventually, through our meditation.

There is a mysterious and wondrous process that is set in motion by our sitting down to meditate. We have no idea of what is going on, but through the devotion that we try to show through our faltering efforts, all kinds of obstacles are being removed – not by our efforts, but through his grace. Dadu tells us:

*By being dedicated to the Lord,
millions of obstacles are removed.
A tiny spark the size of a mustard seed,
burns a huge amount of wood, O Dadu.*

*Whenever love of God appears, O Dadu,
then all coverings of mind, body and heart
which separate the soul, are burnt up.*

Separation plays a part in this whole momentous process. The Masters tell us that through the fire of our longing, millions of karmas are burnt to ashes. We are the ones who may feel the longing. We may even sometimes feel we are burning with it. But this comes from him. In *Die to Live* we read:

The disciple only thinks that he loves the Master. Actually, it is the Master who creates that love in him. ... He makes us dance in his love and devotion, and we are just puppets.

And while this is certainly a dance of love, it's not entirely a dance of joy. True, along with the pain there is joy. The lover is enraptured by the beautiful form of his Master, and there is great joy in that. But then comes the separation, and for a long time the lover knows only sadness and the pain of separation. In *Die to Live* Maharaj Ji explains why this necessarily must be so:

In separation, the disciple will direct all his devotion and longing within to find the Master, and ultimately he will find the Comforter. ... When the Master leaves the disciples and they want to be with the Master, they have no option but to turn within to find him. The purpose of the physical presence of the Master is to create that love and devotion in us and ultimately to convert it into the real inner darshan, which is the end, which is the real love, the real devotion.

For so long the soul has struggled to find the route back to him. By living the path, and through our spiritual practice, we have tried long and hard to get ahead. But, thankfully, the whole long process doesn't depend just on our efforts. He is bringing us back to him. In *Die to Live* Maharaj Ji tells us:

Everything the Lord is doing himself. What are we doing? Leaving all these things to one's own effort, one could never go back to the Father. ... It is not the meditation which is taking us back to the Father. It is the Father himself, through the Master, who is taking us back to the Father.



The Technology Trap

Our world is changing at such a rapid rate that we cannot keep up with a changing value system. The rules we grew up with no longer apply. As people from different groups and nations become more and more integrated, the beauty and uniqueness of their respective cultures begin to unravel and disintegrate.

As our lifestyles keep changing, so do the rules that govern what is acceptable behaviour, and perhaps the icons we fashion ourselves on are not the ideal. What was unacceptable to society in one year is suddenly acceptable the next. The overriding principle appears to be satisfaction and a projection of the self, and the availability of the Internet has brought a world-wide audience for the ego to strut its stuff – irrespective of who gets hurt along the way.

No one can dispute the immense value of technology when correctly used, and the Internet has become an indispensable tool in many areas of our lives. But social networking sites have become electronic gossip sites often causing untold pain and embarrassment to the unsuspecting, as personal details are made public. As we circulate unkind and unnecessary chatter, we appear to be unaware of the repercussions of our electronic actions. Surely the Master's advice applies as much to electronic media as it does to verbal and physical actions – the effects of words we help circulate on the Web must be as binding as any other.

Marketers have excelled in their objectives. They dangle the carrot and we munch it and become ensnared. With their ability to feed the mind's curiosity, these sites become more deeply entrenched in our lives, till we believe we can't do without them. They become bricks in the fortress walls we erect around ourselves and from which we operate.

As these new ways of interacting become more prolific, it is our responsibility to determine what is right and what is wrong for us. We make the choices and we elect the lifestyle, but we should be sure we understand the consequences of our choices with regard to our spirituality.

It is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain a spiritual objective in this fast-changing electronic world, where virtually anything is acceptable and the mind is entertained, cajoled and delighted by an assortment of often irrelevant information and opinions.

How much more difficult is it to try and live by our principles and strive for spirituality in a world where so much of what we hold as sacred and important is eroded and our own conduct and moral values are challenged almost daily? How often do we stand back and question our involvement in our changing world and our electronic interactions? We should assess carefully what we allow ourselves to be caught up in. Often these amusements are quite irrelevant to our lives, and we don't realize that they may bind us even more tightly to this creation. At best, they waste time and scatter our attention.

Let us understand that our involvement in them is being directed by the mind and not from a spiritual perspective. The Master so often tells us to question why we do things. We should do so in our electronic life as well as in our real-time interactions and behaviour.



*The law of compensation, of giving and taking, is inescapable. ...
If we choose to ignore it, still the forces of action and reaction
will drive us. If, on the other hand, we become sensitive to their
workings, then we can work with this principle so that it takes
us where we want to go.*

Honest Living

The Way Out

To this confused and confusing world we all come, and from it we all go. We are born and we die, to be born again and again.

Endlessly this cycle repeats itself. Time and illusion keep it on course. They are responsible for keeping this perfect process of recycling going. But there is a way out of this maze of the world, this labyrinth of thoughts and thinking. A living spiritual Master is that way. He leads the world-weary soul out of this dense physical world of ignorance and unknowing back to its source, the source of all knowing and all love.

In this, our present world where we are looking for the truth, matter and coarseness have the upper hand. Dr Julian Johnson, author of *The Path of the Masters*, describes it as a place that is suffering from spiritual anemia – hence the overwhelming lack of interest in, and understanding of, the spiritual side of life.

Here everything is compounded. All and everything in creation is made up of different elements. And the material element always far outweighs the spiritual content of all things. We humans, too, are compounded. Our spirituality is mixed with pride, emotions, thoughts and opinions. Nothing is pure in this material world.

Seekers of the truth have to remember that when speaking of truth on this path, the Masters are referring to something that is pure. They refer to that pure, unchanging, unseen consciousness of spirit which is our essence. This purity is hidden deep down in our deepest being. And Masters also speak of that pure spirit as God, our source.

From the Master's wisdom we learn that this pure spirit or pure consciousness is the only everlasting reality. Everything else is destructible. Everything else comes and goes. This pure spirit is also

known as nam, shabd, sound current, kalma, holy ghost – it has many names. This Nam is the only thing that never ever changes. Therefore, saints call it real or true: the Truth.

Seekers look for purity in an impure world. It is for them that the saint, Dariya Sahib, writes: “The greatness of the world is incomprehensible, but it stands no comparison to the majesty of Nam.”

It is this majesty of Nam that makes everything possible. It is this that pulls the seeker to the path of devotion. And devotion, after all, is love in action. It is also this Nam that wondrously transforms the devoted seeker into a wise, sensitive and subtle being; a loving being who has become receptive to the Master’s teachings – to his wisdom and his love.

This is a delicate and humble state. And it is a truly rare state – most difficult to attain, for the path is slow and steep – and long. But the journey is a happy one, because after initiation the majesty of Nam starts revealing itself – subtly and so slowly – to the disciplined seeker. Imperceptibly things happen. We change. Transformation comes through the grace of the Master. Dariya says of such a Master, that he is “the manifest form of the Lord without parallel, being the manifestation of mercy and kindness of heart”. He also says:

*Along the streets, and in the market place of the world,
He moves with profound silence.
He uncovers the invaluable Divine Sound
sparingly and with discrimination.*

Dariya Sahib, Saint of Bihar

As Dr Johnson writes in *The Path of the Masters*: “Truth reveals itself only to those who seek and love it.” In other words, the glory of

Nam will make itself known only to the devotee, the persistent seeker of this pure consciousness, this divine spirit.

In this vast material world, which remains indifferent to matters of a spiritual nature, it is the rare seeker who asks the question: “What is this inexplicable spirit, this hidden power that is never seen but moves the entire creation, and is moving us and living in us as well?” We see the results of this mysterious power – scientists study and measure aspects of it – but the power itself remains a mystery. However, real seekers do have a desire, a deep need, to understand something about this mystery. We want more clarity, which we can perhaps use as we journey towards our source.

Also in *The Path of the Masters* Dr Johnson tells us that “the fundamental qualities of spirit are wisdom, power and love.” So wisdom, power and love make up the essential character of our soul. This tells us something of what we are in our deepest being. Hence the profound desire in every seeker’s heart for more wisdom and understanding, more of that positive spiritual power, and more love, while coming closer to the source, the living Master and the Lord.

All the Masters tell us that the spiritual path starts and ends with love. Dariya Sahib boldly says: “Without love there is no spiritual path.” And he imparts another truth: “The technique of love is truly the root of spirituality.” We are all of the same essence, he says, and that is love. But we may discern a difference. Some are drops of love while others are great waves of that love.

This true love is not easily given – it has to be developed by spiritual practice. Says Dariya Sahib:

*Cultivate the discipline of the Shabd. ...
So long as the technique of love is not gained,
whatever one talks of knowledge is in vain.*

We must work at the technique of love. We have to acquire it and make it our own. It is something so important that the seeker must obtain it and use it. However, practising the discipline of the sound current is both rewarding and demanding.

Every initiated seeker soon learns that the path is slow, long and steep, and this is simply because we are so impure. Attempting to free ourselves from the lower passions takes time, patience and courage. There are many ups and downs. But gradually and naturally these passions diminish as our conscious soul is slowly, very slowly, purified by the Master's loving Shabd.

During the steep climb towards the eye focus, the Masters remind us, as Dariya did, that though the greatness of the world is incomprehensible, it stands no comparison to the majesty of Nam. Instead of remembering that the path of the sound current is difficult and long, let us rather focus on what causes happiness or delight. We are journeying along with the Master towards our destination. Let us consciously enjoy what Hazur Maharaj Ji used to call 'the better pleasures'. In other words, the fruits of discipline, devotion and our meditation.

Dariya speaks of tranquillity as one of these better pleasures that come from our meditation. He says this tranquillity is the essence of truth. We do taste contentment and tranquillity as we go along the path of Sant Mat. This is a gift that we receive in greater or lesser measure from the teachings and from the practice of Shabd. Fear and worry, those tensions ever harassing the mind in this shifting world, soon start disappearing from the life of a disciplined seeker. As Dariya writes:

*The unwritten Nam is the pure cord.
Kal cannot play tricks with those
who are connected to it.*

The better pleasures which Maharaj Ji referred to are numerous. In time we learn that there is joy in a commitment to meditation. And we derive peace from the effort as well. We become aware of this in the increasing levels of serenity and contentment that we experience. And we also experience a higher level of joy as we become more and more free from the negative aspects of our relationships, from obsessions with worldly pleasures, objects and situations. We accept our karmas, our destiny, more easily. The ups and downs of this life become more and more insignificant. We can observe how life unfolds and we learn to let go, accepting more easily what the Master gives us. We do this through the grace of our Master and the majesty of his Nam.



Real happiness comes from within, when the soul is yearning towards its own source. The more it is nearer to the Father, the more happy it will be. ... Real happiness is only in the love and devotion of the Father and nowhere else. You can't find that happiness at all anywhere. So meditation gives you that bliss, that peace, that happiness, that contentment within you. ... Nobody can find happiness in the sensual pleasures – there's frustration after that. The real happiness is only in meditation, nowhere else.

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

Measuring Spiritual Progress

A disciple cannot really tell where he is on the mystic path, for there is no measuring scale by which spiritual progress can be gauged. Some souls may even be given mystical experiences because they are weak and need an inducement to generate faith, impetus and spiritual drive. Others may have great faith and conviction but also possess such curiosity that, if they were taken into the higher realms, they would want to explore so much that they would lose contact with the central current of the Word. They are therefore kept in darkness until their degree of purity is sufficient for them to be taken up beyond all potential distractions on the inner journey. Again, a Master knows that some of his disciples are humble enough to receive spiritual treasures, but he withholds inner experiences from others who would just waste what has been given through spiritual pride and a sense of superiority.

Nor can outer conduct be a sure guide to inner spirituality, for even old and seasoned disciples can still be a prey to some very obvious human weaknesses owing to the strong mental impressions of such tendencies from past lives. Spiritual advancement does not always entirely preclude human weakness. For as long as a soul remains in this world, there will always be some degree of struggle.

Again, if someone is in darkness, he cannot know how close he is to finding the inner light. Faced with such ignorance of himself and others, therefore, all that a disciple can do is work sincerely and devotedly, keeping himself in readiness for the coming of the spiritual form of his Master and the start of the journey through the inner mansions.

Gospel of Jesus

The Last Frailty

*O Kabir, be not proud of your body
It's just bones wrapped in skin.
Those who rode on stately horses
With a canopy of royalty over their head,
Now lie buried deep.*

Kabir, The Great Mystic

Pride in our body, pride in our accomplishments or possessions or anything else – Kabir and all the great saints have alerted their followers to the battle that needs to be won against the ego, humanity's last and greatest frailty. The saints tell us that this is what separates us from the Lord – it is the biggest threat to our spiritual growth and the main source of all our suffering.

The ego is no mean enemy. This final battle to conquer it will inevitably be a difficult one because it means we have to kill something of our own selves. To a large extent on this plane the ego is our own identity. It is who we believe ourselves to be, this body that we think we are. It is our sense of self, our self-image. It is our reference point on our journey through life. It is the ego that makes us see the world through the prism of our likes and dislikes, through our prejudices, narrow mindedness, bigotry and biases, as well as our preconceived notions and ideas.

The ego is our individuality. Being our identity, it sets us apart from other people's identities. It provides us with a sense of being separate from other people and from the world in general. It is a tiny fortress, and from the ramparts of this fortress we observe the world.

How did it come about that we became little islands of separate-ness? When the soul left the regions of pure spirit and entered the

realms of mind and matter, finally landing up on the physical plane, the soul or true self became identified with the mind, body and senses, and the ego was born.

When a child comes into this world he is born without any knowledge or consciousness of his own self. He is not aware of himself as such. First he becomes aware of what is happening on the outside. This is natural. All the senses – acting through the eyes, ears and the organs of taste and touch – draw his attention outward. This is how a child develops: first he becomes aware of another person, probably his mother, and then he becomes aware of himself as distinct from that other person. And this sense of separate identity will probably exist throughout all of his life.

When the passenger liner the *Titanic* went down in 1912, she was not sunk by the tip of an iceberg. She was sunk by the enormous mass of ice below the surface. We know that up to nine tenths of an iceberg is below the surface of the water. Similarly, a huge part of the ego lies submerged. There are thousands of ways in which the ego manifests in our daily life, and most of the time we are oblivious of it. We never sit back and observe its antics.

The scientists tell us that on average there are about 50,000 thoughts coursing through our minds each day – most of them about ourselves. Every moment of our lives we are keenly conscious of ourselves as individuals. We're proud of our intellect, our achievements in the academic, scientific, or corporate fields. We like to show off. Perhaps we want to buy a fancy car, not because we need it, but because it is a reflection of our prosperity. The same could apply to our clothes or furniture.

But how can we own anything in this world? How can anything be 'mine' when we don't even own our own bodies? Did we retain the body we had as an infant, as a child, as a teenager? These bodies have

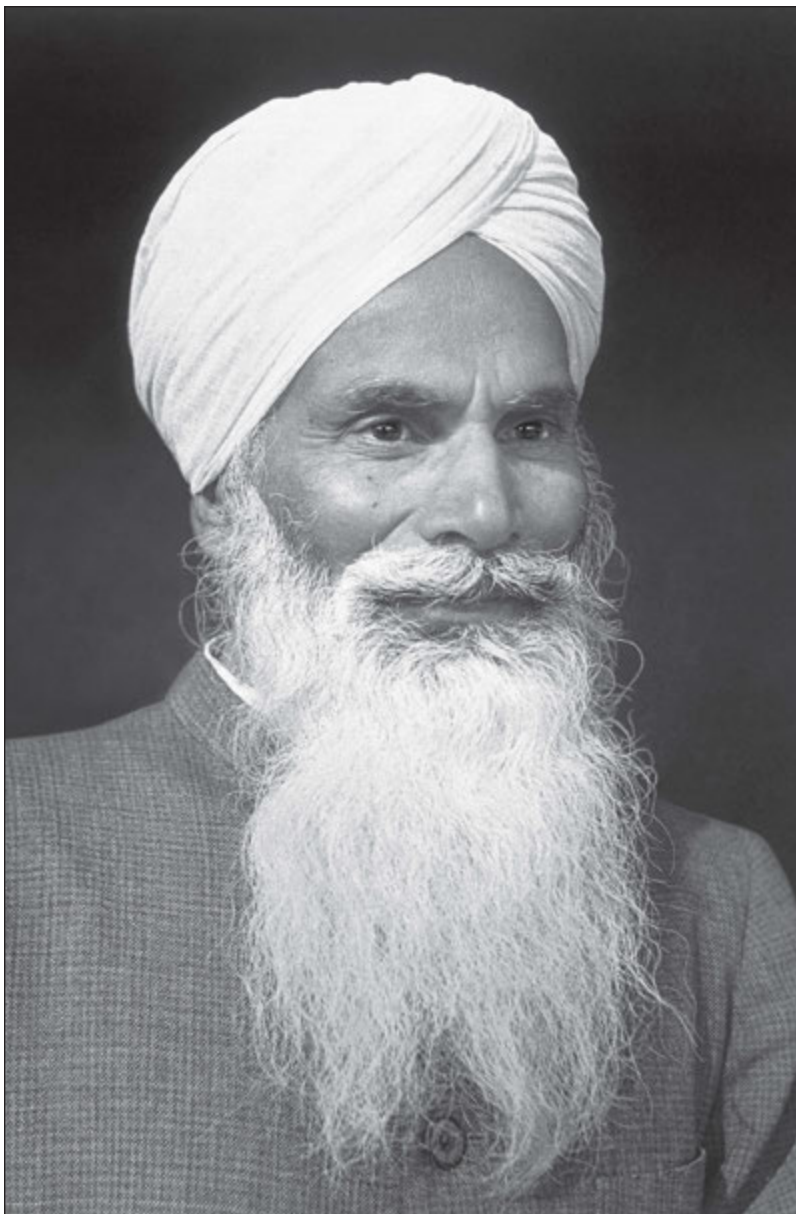
come and gone. Scientists tell us that our bodies do not have a single one of the molecules that they contained seven years ago. So every seven years one's body is completely rejuvenated. This means that if we reach the age of seventy, we've had ten different bodies!

How can we be proud of our looks, our intellect or our wealth? Our looks fade with age; we can lose our job and our wealth. Millions of jobs around the world may be lost as a result of a global economic crisis. What about our intellect? As we get older we become forgetful and our memory fades. We could suffer a stroke and have brain damage. We see the incidence of Alzheimer's disease on the increase. So these gifts which the Creator has given us can be taken away at a moment's notice. Nothing is permanently ours.

Because of the ego we tend to see the world through a series of filters: our upbringing, our parents, our education, our country, our beliefs and prejudices. It's like a person wearing a pair of yellow sunglasses. This colours everything that he sees. The ego creates its own world view and regards that view as infallible. People become trapped in a false identity. This identity seems real and they are unable to see its inconsistencies and shortcomings. So they create a mental fortress for the ego-self and they move their consciousness into it.

Once people are trapped in such a false identity and they accept it as real, they will be completely unable to see its inconsistencies and unwilling to admit its shortcomings. Nothing anyone can do or say will get them to come out of this mental box, however reasonable and sound the argument may be.

Much of the pain we feel on this plane is because of the ego. Many of the actions that add to our crippling burden of karma stem directly from our ego. We also suffer when the our ego feels hurt, threatened, humiliated or neglected. But because we have become so accustomed to being trapped in our mental box, we are scared to



Maharaj Jagat Singh

look beyond its boundaries. So we put up with the suffering. We know nothing else. We live in ignorance.

What is the message that the saints try to get across to us? It is that humanity is living in a state of ignorance. Their purpose is to reawaken people to their true identity as spiritual beings. We need a spiritual teacher because the only way to escape the ego's mental box is to establish contact with someone who is outside of that box. We cannot solve a problem with the same state of consciousness that created the problem. We cannot pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps. We need a spiritual teacher, a Master, a being who has no egotism. He may inhabit a physical body, but inwardly the Master is merged in the Lord. Being in touch with reality, he sees things for what they truly are. He is objective and, most importantly, his primary attribute is love.

It's here where our hope lies of finally winning the battle against the ego. Maharaj Charan Singh often spoke of love as losing one's identity and merging with another being. Through our meditation and our growing love for our Master, humility will come; surrender will come. Through our love for him we will want to surrender to him, eventually lose our identity and become him. In the process the ego, which has been standing between our souls and the Lord, will gradually become eroded.

In one of his poems Kabir says in words of great simplicity:

*As long as 'I', 'I', 'I',
I kept saying,
I could not recognize the Lord.
But now, O Lord, you alone exist;
I am not, I am not.*

Kabir, The Weaver of God's Name

Yes, We Do Have Time!

The animals met in assembly and began to complain that humans were always taking things away from them. “They take my milk,” said the cow. “They take my eggs,” said the hen. “They take my flesh for bacon,” said the pig. “They hunt me for my oil,” said the whale. Finally the snail spoke. “I have something they would certainly take away from me if they could – something they want more than anything else. I have time!”

Some of us are always keeping time, some finding time, some making and others spending time. Some are having a good time; some going through bad times, some remembering the good old times and some are looking forward to better times. We often hear expressions like: ‘time is money’, ‘time flies’. Time is a very confusing subject.

Let us explore what time is, how it influences us, how to rise above it, what the Masters say about time, and what is beyond time. Actually, we do have time. The concept of time management implies that we can indeed manage time. In reality however, we can’t. Time just is. Our actions existing within time are what we manage, not time itself.

We often spend too much time on things that do not really matter – surfing the internet, watching TV, socializing and so on. This sometimes results in our not having enough time to do our daily meditation. This does not quite make sense because we do have enough time to do it. As the Master has pointed out, we all have twenty-four hours in the day. We just don’t always use our time efficiently.

But what is time? We have created the concept of time to help us understand our existence. But time also becomes a chain that binds

us to the physical world. And time has certain unique characteristics: It is exact – every day has twenty-four hours, every hour has sixty minutes and every minute has sixty seconds. Time cannot be stored; it has to be used when it is there. Time is personal: you cannot give your time to anybody else – but you can waste your own or other people's time.

We all have the same amount of time, irrespective of race, gender, nationality. If we live to eighty years we have 29,200 days or 700,000 hours, or 42,000,000 minutes. One thing is certain though – we do not know the future and how much time we have before we die. The Master teaches us to live in the present moment and do our daily two and a half hours of meditation, which will help us to quieten the mind and therefore enable us to rise above time.

Mirdad, the spiritual teacher in *The Book of Mirdad*, says that time remembers everything:

Man invites his own calamities and then protests against the irksome guests, having forgotten how and when and where he penned and sent out the invitations. But time does not forget; and time delivers in due season each invitation to the right address.

What a beautiful description of karma. There is, however, a bigger plan, which Mirdad calls the Omniwill:

There are no accidents in Time and Space. But all things are ordered by the Omniwill, which neither errs in anything, nor overlooks a thing.

Time is limited. Our breaths are numbered. Time is precious, so we must give thought to how we use it. We need to develop an awareness of the Father by striving to remember him every minute of the day by doing our simran. We need to spend every bit of spare time in remembrance of the Lord.

To understand what time is, we must stop being time-bound and go beyond time. And how do we do that? By stilling the mind. Only by turning from an outward, time-ridden perspective to an inward timeless perspective can we start to realize what a treasure we have within us.

When we are privileged to come into the presence of a true Master it is easy to lose all perspective of time. Whenever we are focused or concentrated – for example when reading a book, looking at a beautiful sunset, meditating or having our Master’s darshan – we briefly move out of the clutches of time.

At the entrance to the overland track at Cradle Mountain in Tasmania there is a plaque on a rock erected in honour of the founder of that national park, and it reads as follows: “Here there is no time and nothing matters.” The meaning of this becomes clear to the bushwalker when, on the second day of a five-day walk among thousand-year old trees, he understands that one can go beyond time, beyond the mind. And then nothing or nobody on this worldly plane really matters. While at the Dera we also can have this experience of being outside of time, where worldly matters do not concern us.

Another observation from Mirdad: “Time is a wheel created by the senses.” And then he adds, “O monks, upon the rim of the Wheel of Time is the road of Life and Death.” This is a rather bleak picture that Mirdad is painting, a rather hopeless diagnosis of man’s destiny in time. He asks the question: “Shall man then never free himself of the vicious circle of Time?” But then he gives a very positive prediction:

Man shall [overcome time] because man is heir to God's holy freedom. The wheel of time rotates, but its axis is ever at rest. God is the axis of the wheel of time. Though all things rotate about Him in Time and Space, yet is He always timeless and spaceless and still. Though all things proceed from his Word, yet is His Word as timeless and spaceless as he.

What a wonderful argument why we should become still and quiet. And yes, we do have the time to do our meditation. The question now arises: How do we become still on our spiritual journey? By understanding time. Mirdad explains:

I say to you, slip from the rim of Time into the axis and spare yourselves the nausea of motion. Let Time revolve about you, but you revolve not with time.

So how to overcome time? The Masters teach us to stop doing and start being. We do this of course by meditation. We are so absorbed in our daily lives, that we do not realize how quickly life is passing. The call to leave it comes before we even think of preparing for what lies beyond.

While we are time-bound, we are limited. The Masters teach us to rise above time, above limits, because we are a spark of the divine. By becoming still and silent we find who we really are – the temple of the living God, made in the image of God. But we must move to the level of the spirit which is beyond time and space before we can understand God.

When we turn within under the guidance of a perfect living Master, we travel on the 'road less travelled', learn to become still, go beyond the mind, beyond time. Then we lose our identity – the drop

becomes the ocean – only then do we experience the joyous state of non-being.

More words from Mirdad:

God's Word is time untimed, and space unspaced. Was there a time when you were not with God? Is there a place where you are not in God?

In our own way we should budget this most precious thing, time. Those odd bits of time, slipping away here and there unnoticed, should be carefully used in doing simran and remembering the Lord. Yes, we do have the time to give two and a half hours to the Master every day – to obtain the only thing that will bring us happiness.

Sultan Bahu gives us a timely message:

*When the one Lord revealed himself to me,
I lost myself in Him. ...
And even the very limits of time and space
have all dropped from my consciousness.
My separate self has merged in the whole.*



Unless You Meditate Constantly

When a disciple of the Zen master Busan was leaving the monastery to re-enter the world, his master advised him as follows: “Remember, unless you meditate constantly, your light of truth will go out.” This is related by Paul Rep in his book *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones*.

In the higher schools of Zen Buddhist meditation they use the term *yoriki*, which roughly translates as ‘meditation energy’. It is a type of spiritual momentum and clarity that is built up through consistent and concentrated meditation. It is similar to the principle of inertia: if a body, say a vehicle, has come to rest, it takes tremendous energy to set it in motion again. Once it is rolling it is far easier to jog alongside and apply a firm and consistent pressure to keep it moving. As satsangis we want to avoid stop-start meditation which allows the consciousness to drop down into dullness and dormancy.

In the meditation state we awaken and develop a wonderful sense of lightness, detachment and presence. It is natural and automatic. When the turbulence of constant activity and thought subside, spirit rises of its own accord – that is its nature. Imperceptibly, magically, we become strangely unaffected by the pleasures and pains of our life situation. The thorns of our inevitable destiny still lie on our respective paths, but we barely feel them as we become almost weightless. We start to glide through life instead of hooking on to, and reacting to, every little thorn, allowing pinpricks to feel like dramatic sword thrusts. When our meditation slackens, our consciousness drops. When this happens, everything in creation hurts and stings.

Instead, we are to rest our consciousness in the deep and steady stream of consciousness that flows steadily and horizontally beneath the dramatic ups and downs of the rollercoaster ride we call life. This stream is pure love; it is our home in this world, and consistent

meditation keeps us connected to it. This is the only way, as the *Gita* puts it, 'to disconnect from union with sorrow'.

Now there is a why to all of our actions and a reason for all of our choices: do they keep me connected to the stream of love or do they disconnect me from it? Our actions become self-correcting when guided by this inner compass. Thus meditation becomes the axis around which our lives and all decisions revolve. However, if we try to fit meditation into our busy and scattered lives we will fail.

The mystic school of Sant Mat is rare among spiritual paths in its demand that aspirants meditate for two and a half hours a day. This is ingenious because, quite simply, if you commit yourself to this one vow, you will have to transform your whole life and all of your choices, in order to attain it. Your entire life is then spiritualized, elevated, and it becomes a twenty-four-hour yoga. We must each of us make meditation a living reality, a true guide and friend in both this world and the next. There is simply no other way to 'be in the world, but not of the world'.

How else are we to perform in this field of action and still keep our connection to the current emanating from the One? When our meditation energy drops, we feel orphaned and alone in this world, scattered and depressed. When we make the effort to attend to it, we once again take hold of our Father's hand and feel his living presence as we walk side by side through his creation, now seeing its true beauty and wonder, because we are, paradoxically, detached from it.

And this is how the mystics want us to be and how they extract the soul from the creation. Through meditation we rise and detach so that we may attach our souls to that timeless and eternal Light of Truth.



A New Look at Karma

The noted astrophysicist Stephen Hawking raises an intriguing question about our perception of reality. He writes:

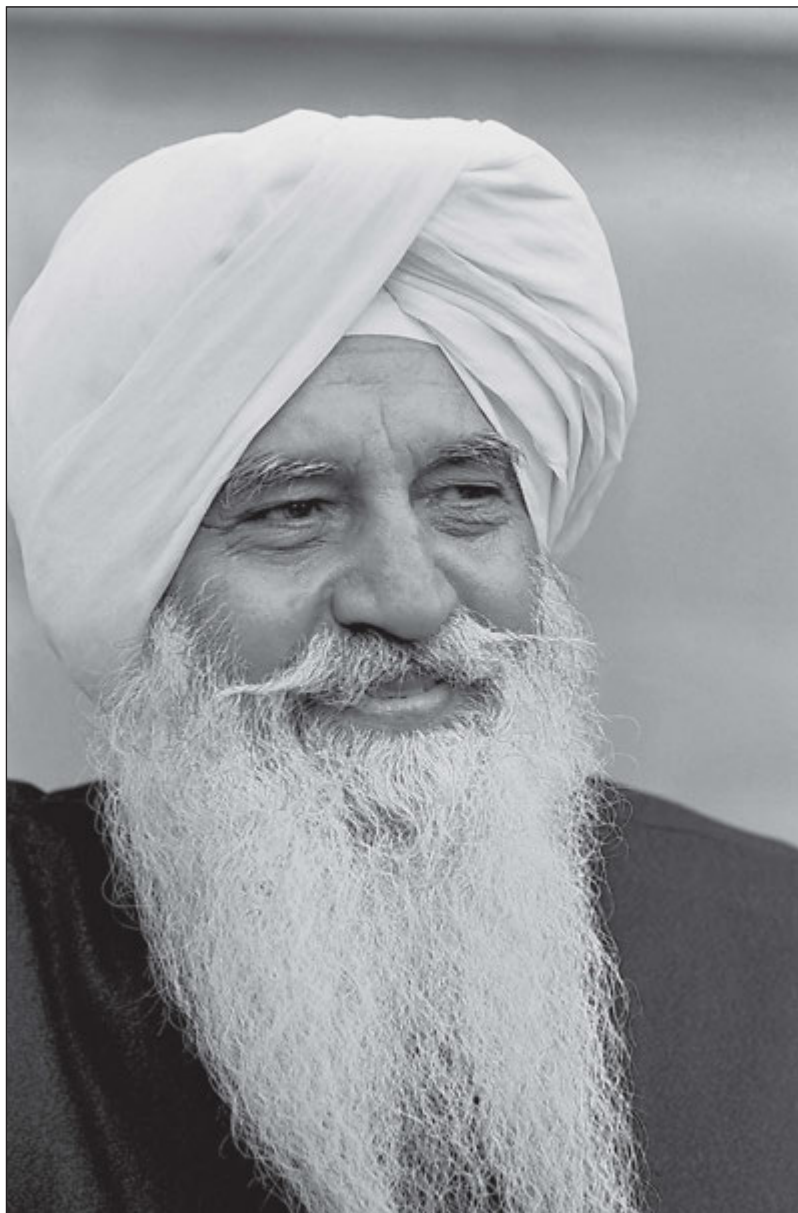
A few years ago the city council of Monza in Italy barred pet owners from keeping goldfish in curved bowls. The source of the statement partly explained the ruling by saying that it is cruel to keep a fish in a bowl with curved sides because, gazing out, the fish would have a distorted view of reality.

This report, as trivial as it is, raises some questions. How do we know WE have the true, undistorted picture of reality? Might not we ourselves also be inside some big goldfish bowl and have our vision distorted by some enormous lens? The goldfish's picture of reality is different from ours, but can we be sure it is less real?

The Grand Design

This observation also raises questions about life in general and about our modern society in particular. To some extent, as followers of a spiritually enlightened Master, we have had a few distortions of our own corrected during our years on the path. But even our understanding of reality is still no more than conceptual.

We are told that the world as we know it is an illusion, but are we really convinced of this? We see no evidence that it is illusionary; we only see much evidence of the world's physical 'reality'. In truth then, we are not much better off than the goldfish, except that the distortion we experience is caused by ignorance and a crooked mind,



Maharaj Charan Singh

not by a curved bowl. The lens of ignorance distorts much of how we understand life on this plane.

Let us dig a little deeper into the law of karma to try and understand more fully the profound and minutely detailed influence it exerts on our lives. In *The Path of the Masters* Julian Johnson tells us that karma is the law of nature, which requires that every doer shall receive the exact result or reward of his actions. It is nothing more or less than the well-known law of cause and effect.

This law is well understood and accepted in science. In physics it is known as the law of compensation or balance. In life, as we know, there are good and bad actions. Bad actions create bad karma and right actions create good karma. As stated in the Bible, “We reap what we sow”. To put it another way: the law simply means that every action is followed by an equal and opposite reaction.

In *The Path of the Masters* Johnson quotes from a famous essay written by Ralph Waldo Emerson called “The Law of Compensation”. In this essay Emerson challenges the reader to understand the biblical law that whatsoever a man sows he shall reap, because this applies to every aspect of life. The following extract from Emerson’s essay stresses the inevitability of the universal law of karma. He says:

Thus is the universe alive. All things are mortal. That soul that is within us ... is eternal, but it enacts itself in time and space. Justice is not postponed. A perfect equity adjusts its balance in all parts of life. ... Every secret is told, every crime is punished, every wrong is redressed, in silence and necessity.

In other words, a perfect equity maintains the karmic balance in every aspect of the creation. No animate or inanimate aspect of the creation is unaffected by this law. It is the Creator’s means for keeping everything in the creation in balance. This balance is as dependable

and as inevitable as a mathematical equation. It is such a simple equation, but its inevitability is untouchable and sacrosanct.

And yet so much of the world conveniently ignores this inevitability. Even in religions where this moral law of justice is recognized, its integral importance does not have the effect of regulating behaviour. Imagine for a moment how transformed any society would be if every individual in it believed and lived by the moral code of karma.

The law of karma applies to all people in the world, even though it is often not acknowledged. Balance must be established to create order, else all would be chaos. The social institution of law is an example. Law operates on the principle of fairness. It is there to ensure that any illegal acts committed are punished by means of an appropriate sentence or punishment. In almost every country, East and West, all miscreants are brought before some kind of court of law and are charged and convicted if found guilty. The sentence they receive is assessed by matching the severity of the sentence to the severity of the misdeed. This is what we call justice, and it basically attempts to impose the moral code of karma on society.

The message that the Masters teach us is this: We have to surrender our will, our ego, before we can become one with the Lord, and only then will we have a clear understanding of the profound influence of karma and its detailed complexity. But generally speaking, we are nowhere near this level of spiritual development. In *One Being One* the author gives a clear description of where most of us are at this time and why. He says:

In our present life, most of us don't achieve anything like the degree of purity required for 'dying while living'. Our minds are too involved with material existence to muster sufficient concentration to be able to pass through the inner door.

The majority of us may not reach that level during this present lifetime. We have been told that attaining this level of concentration, of focus, can take a lifetime. We read further in *One Being One* why this can take so long:

It entails dealing with all the stuff we have accumulated in our mind that prevents full concentration. The mind has to be purified of all material and outgoing inclinations, of all thoughts of self, of everything but the One Being. And achieving that is no joke.

We also read:

During the course of our lives we think and act and desire, mostly in an entirely scattered and unfocused kind of a way. All of this thinking and acting leaves impressions on our mind, and at the time of death, our head is still full of stuff related to ourselves and to our existence in this world. So what happens to us after death?

The answer to this question is disturbing, to say the least. We're told that we go to where our mind takes us. We may spend some time in some inner plane, depending on the purity of our mind, but sooner or later we can be pulled back to the world. And then, of course, when we do come back in our next life, all our previous accumulated karma prescribes in detail how this new life will unfold.

So the body we have and the being we are in this life are all exactly the way they need to be to enable us to go through the destiny allotted to us in this life. That means that our looks, our talents, our personalities, our circumstances – and every other aspect of our being down

to the tiniest detail – are exactly the way they have to be to meet the requirements of our destiny. Seen in this light, it is a rather shocking fact that we are exactly what we created ourselves to be – courtesy of our karma.

So the question arises: is there a way out of this endless cycle of birth and rebirth in which we appear to be so helplessly trapped? The mystics provide the solution. It is their purpose in the world to take their allotted souls out of this cycle of birth and death and enable them to return to their original home.

How indescribably fortunate we are. We have met a Master whose sole purpose it is to take us out of here, out of the endless cycle of birth and death, and back to our original home. To do this he has accepted us as disciples and guides us by imparting the teachings of the saints. These teachings have exposed us to a wealth of profound information about our existence, our origins and our purpose for living in the world.

We may well ask: Why me? What did I ever do to deserve this? Clearly, at this stage we will not receive answers to these questions. But to show our appreciation we can at least try to live in his will and do our meditation. And we can follow the way that he has advised us to live. This should become our prime focus. Nothing else is important.



The Ultimate Message

When St John became so old that he was not able to walk and was able to speak only with great difficulty, another follower of Christ took him to a gathering of children to deliver a sermon. He raised his head and said: “Little children, love one another.” Once again he said this and repeated it a third time, after which he was silent.

At that the people closest to him said, “Good man, haven’t you anything more important to say to these children?” To this he replied: “I give this advice over and over again because of all the qualities, that of love is the greatest need of mankind. If you would love each other and the current of love would fill your minds, you would possess all other good qualities. Love, and all these things shall be added unto you.”

Glimpses of the Great Master

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

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



The Conference of the Birds: Mantiq ut-Tayr: A Philosophical Religious Poem in Prose

BY FARID UD-DIN ATTAR

RENDERED INTO ENGLISH BY C.S. NOTT FROM THE
LITERAL FRENCH TRANSLATION BY GARCIN DE TASSY

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Mantiq ut-Tayr (“The Conference of the Birds”) by the 12th and 13th century Persian mystic poet Farid ud-Din Attar is an acknowledged spiritual and poetic masterpiece. The narrative is entertaining and simple at the surface, but profoundly meaningful on many other levels. It is at once an allegory, description of the spiritual journey, account of Sufi teachings, admonition to disciples, and collection of Sufi teaching stories. There are many English translations of the *Mantiq ut-Tayr*, but some offer only excerpts. C.S. Nott has given us a very accessible prose translation of the complete work.

Attar is considered to be one of the great Sufi poets, along with Rumi, Hafiz, Jami, Sa’di, and Sana’i. Little is actually known about his life. He died, purportedly past the age of 100, in 1221. He made his living as a druggist and perfumer (this is the meaning of “Attar”). He traveled widely in his youth, but settled in his hometown of Nishapur in Khorasan, now in Iran. He wrote over 45,000 couplets, with about thirty works surviving. *Mantiq ut-Tayr* is his best-known work, but others include *Tadhkirat al-Awliya* (Memoirs of the Saints), *Ilahi-Nama* (Book of God), *Musibat-Namah* (Book of Affliction), and his *Diwan*. He was killed during the Mogul invasion. As the story goes, his captors demanded a ransom of silver, and he infuriated them by saying he was worth only a ransom of straw.

In *Mantiq ut-Tayr* Attar tells the story of a group of birds, varieties of them representing the disciples and a Hoopoe representing their spiritual guide. The Hoopoe wants to lead them on a journey to the King of Birds,

the Simurgh. The birds need to overcome their fears and limited ideas before they agree to undertake the journey. Some are held back by the pleasures or riches of the world; some are simply content as they are; some desire Paradise (which is, as Attar points out, only a version of this world with every wish fulfilled); some think piety and purity suffice; some cannot leave their loved ones; some think the journey too dangerous. Some question why they should follow a Guide who is just a bird, like themselves.

The Hoopoe responds to each one. To one bird who would rather pursue Paradise, he says,

The palace of the King is far better than your paradise. You cannot do better than to strive to reach it. It is the habitation of the soul, it is eternity, it is the object of our real desires, the dwelling of the heart, the seat of truth. The Most High is a vast ocean; the paradise of earthly bliss is only a little drop; all that is not this ocean is distraction. When you can have the ocean, why will you seek a drop of evening dew?

Once they begin, all along the way they make one excuse after another about why they can go no further. To one who would put off the journey till a better time in the future, the Hoopoe says, "If he who sets out on this way will not engage himself wholly and completely, he will never be free from the sadness and melancholy which weigh him down." To one who is unaware of how his own vanity, resentment, and envy cripple him, the Hoopoe says, "There is a corner of your being full of dragons, and by negligence you are delivered up to them; and you pet them and cherish them night and day." Sometimes he urges the birds on with words that could sound harsh, such as: "He who is not engaged in the quest of the inner life ... does not even exist, he is a non-entity, a form without a soul."

At one point, the Hoopoe tells the birds, "Do not imagine the journey is short; and one must have the heart of a lion to follow this unusual road, for it is very long and the sea is deep. One plods along in a state of amazement, sometimes smiling sometimes weeping." However, he also tells them, "If you submit with grace, the beloved will give his life for you." He hints at the mysterious ways of love:

When love possesses a man it lifts his heart, it plunges him in blood, it throws him prostrate outside the curtain, it gives him no rest for a single instant; it kills him yet still demands the price of blood. He drinks the water of tears and eats the bread leavened with mourning; but be he more feeble than an ant, love will lend him strength.

The means and the end of the Path are both love. Speaking of the Simurgh, the Hoopoe says: “As for me, I should be happy to discover even a trace of him. That would indeed be something, but to live without him would be a reproach. A man must . . . lead his soul to the court of the King.” He describes the fervour of love for the Lord needed to attain the goal: “He who undertakes this journey should have a thousand hearts so that he can sacrifice one at every moment.” Attar includes the famous prayer of the 8th century Sufi saint, Rabi`a al-Basri, to convey the one-pointed devotion to the Lord necessary on the path of Love:

O God, you who know the secret of all things, bring to pass the worldly desires of my enemies, and grant my friends the eternity of the future life. But as for me, I am free of both. Even if I possessed this present world or the world of the future, I should esteem them little in comparison with being near to you. I need only you. If I should turn my eyes towards the two worlds, or desire anything but you, I should be no more than an unbeliever.

Ultimately, thirty birds travel through the Seven Valleys of the journey and in the end meet the Simurgh (which in Persian means “thirty birds”). On seeing the Simurgh, the birds realize their Oneness with him. Then the Hoopoe teaches:

Admire then the works of the Lord, though he himself considers them as nothing. And seeing that His Essence alone exists it is certain there is nothing but Him. His throne is on the waters and the world is in the air. But leave the waters and the air, for all is God; the throne and the world are only a talisman. God is all, and things have only a nominal value; the world visible and the world invisible are only Himself.

While Nott's prose translation is excellent in conveying the poem's deeper meanings, some readers may prefer a poetic translation. A wonderful one, also unabridged, is Peter Avery's *The Speech of the Birds: Concerning Migration to the Real: the Mantiq'u't-Tair* by Faridu'd-Din Attar. To quote just a few verses from that work:

*So what is all on? On nothing.
Nothing being nothing, all of this is nothing but nothing.
Think about the craft of this King
Who supports all this on nothing...
Look how this world and that world are He,
Not other than Him, and were there other, that also would be He.*



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