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# Spiritual Link

Science of the Soul Research Centre

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## **Spiritual Link**

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# Yours Affectionately

We all judge things from our past experience and in the light of inherited tendencies. That is what makes so much difference between man and man, that is, in the attitude towards life and its problems. Some people have a definite goal and a definite urge, and work towards it. Others are striving to find what they should work and live for.

Mind is a very important factor and a very powerful force too. Uncontrolled and undisciplined, it might lead us into trouble and spoil our prospects of a successful worldly or spiritual life. Controlled and disciplined, it leads us on to success and prosperity, worldly and spiritual. In this respect it is like fire: a good servant but a terrible master.

Life has a meaning and a purpose. The grand aim of human life is to foster, develop and guide those spiritual homing instincts and try to return to the spiritual home whence we came. It is only in human life that this is possible. This is the aim of evolving and perfecting that wonderful instrument, the brain, which has spiritual centres. These centres can be developed by proper means. All realizations come from within. The kingdom of God is also within. We must therefore go in, that is, turn all our attention and thoughts to the proper inner centre so that we might realize ourselves and then realize God.

Mind is a great obstacle and, as you have already said, fools us into believing that we are acting according to the Supreme Father's will, while all the time it is carrying on with its own egotistical desires and wishes. It is here that the Saints and Masters come in. They warn you of this danger and help you to make the mind a friend and cooperate with you in your best interest. The vision of the Saints is boundless. The supreme cosmic purpose is revealed to them. They can thus put us on the right road and lead us back to our Supreme Father.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Light on Sant Mat*



# The Road to Success

Business consultants have described four stages through which mastery over any specific task is achieved.

The first stage is called *unconscious incompetence*, where we do not know what we do not know; at this first stage, we are not even aware of our ignorance. For example, someone may not be aware of what a computer is (unconscious), and therefore they do not know how to use it (incompetence).

Similarly, many of us are unaware that we have a soul which has a natural longing to go back to its Creator. We go about life trying to find happiness in worldly possessions, in relationships or in popular acclaim. We may find some degree of happiness in these, but unfortunately it does not last long. We then shift our focus and endeavour to achieve something else – all along being unaware of the fact that the happiness we are seeking can only be found when our true being – our soul, merges into its source.

The second stage is called *conscious incompetence*. During the second stage, we read about spirituality or come to satsang and learn about our soul and its relationship with the Lord. We learn about the Master's role, and the technique which he advocates for us to be able to re-establish that relationship. We are aware of what we are missing but we cannot work towards it yet.

Then starts the practical or the third stage which is *conscious competence*. After initiation, we know how to meditate and we do it, but it is hard! The mind does not stay still, thoughts are recklessly shot in all directions and the body suffers from pain and stiffness throughout the sitting. We are thus extremely conscious of the fact that we are making an effort and it seems like a great ordeal, which sometimes makes us wish we had remained ignorant!

This is where most people will either give up in desperation, because they conclude that they just do not have it in them to succeed in the specific task at hand, or they may try their luck at something else.

When we are faced with challenging circumstances, quitting may seem like the easiest option. This is true for every aspect of life, whether it is our relationships or work. All of us have to face setbacks in life. When we fail

it does not mean that we are failures. People fail because they quit, not because they lack knowledge.

The key to success is very simple and can be summed up as: “Try a little more.” People succeed when they refuse to become discouraged by difficulties; they succeed when they refuse to quit.

If we do not give up and continue to persevere in our efforts, there will come a time when we become *unconsciously competent*. This is when one learns to do a task without effort, like driving a car without being conscious of the gears, the brakes or the accelerator; or creating documents on our computers without thinking about how to operate the programs.

As we keep putting in a conscious effort in our meditation, we will gain mastery over our mind and experience that ‘automatic’ simran that Hazur always used to talk about – simran which is done with ease, love, devotion and concentration.

*We have to get ourselves into that habit of meditation, of concentration. Daily, regularly and punctually, we have to go on doing it, and ultimately we succeed. Then we would not like to live with ourselves, we would not feel happy, we would not feel that the day has been rightly spent if we have not given time to meditation. We are creatures of habit, and when once we get into the habit of trying to meditate, then that very habit will help us in concentrating. But in order to achieve this, we must struggle with the mind.*

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



# Something To Think About

The whole creation is engaged in feverish and senseless pursuits. It suffers dismay and disappointment at every step. We shed plenty of tears for money, wife and children, and suffer agony and anguish through loss of them. But if we were to weep earnestly for God for only one day, we would surely attain Him. We pass our lives fruitlessly like a wageless labourer, who works hard the whole day and comes home empty-handed.

Sardar Bahadur Jagat Singh, *The Science of the Soul*

\* \* \*

In the family, the members meet as travellers in an inn, some coming and some going – in their own time. The meeting and parting is determined by the karma of individuals – one comes as father, another as mother, another as son or daughter, and near relatives. Karma determines friends and foes, and karma has cast the mould of life. Everybody is running his own race.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *Spiritual Gems*

\* \* \*

Disease comes to us as a result of our past actions and disappears when it has done its work. We ought not to be disheartened during such moments. Rather we should receive cheerfully what is sent to us by our Master. But never take it to mean that we should give up medical treatment. Effort on our part is necessary, but we should not be sorry if it is not fruitful. The will of the Master, not ours, must be done.

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *The Dawn of Light*



# Today Is the Best Day

*“What day is it?” asked Pooh.*

*“It’s today,” squeaked Piglet.*

*“My favourite day,” said Pooh.*

A A Milne, quoted in  
*Mindfulness A to Z: 108 Insights for Awakening Now*

As disciples, we seldom realize that every day is special because we have been gifted this wonderful human life after going through numerous cycles of birth and death. How many of us wake up in the morning with a smile and look forward to experiencing what the Lord has in store for us today? “Today is my favourite day,” as Pooh exclaims with gratitude and excitement.

Who knows what might happen tomorrow? Why worry today when we can celebrate the little things of life. If somebody gives us a surprise on our birthday, it brings us joy because it is something we didn’t expect. Similarly, if we wake up to each day as though it were a surprise from the Lord, we would look forward to it with the same anticipation. If we give him our time and attention, we will experience his love.

There is a story about a young boy called Jason who could never live in the moment. Whenever he was in school, he dreamed of being outside playing. When he was outside playing, he dreamed of his vacation. He constantly daydreamed, never taking the time to relish the special moments that filled his days. One day, while lying down on the grass, he fell into a deep slumber and started dreaming. He suddenly woke up to a voice calling out his name.

Upon opening his eyes, he saw that a sweet elderly woman was staring at him from above and smiling. She was holding a shimmering blue ball of thread. This attracted him. She said it was the magic thread of life. She told him that if he pulled at it a bit, hours would pass in seconds. If he pulled a little harder, days would pass in minutes. If he pulled it with all his might, months – even years – would pass by in days. This made Jason very excited and he asked the old woman if he could have it. She gave it to him and disappeared.

After a few days when Jason was bored and once again daydreaming in class, he remembered the magic blue thread. Since he always wished for something new, he started to pull at it a bit. In a few seconds he found himself at home. He was still curious about seeing something new so he pulled at it harder. In no time, he was in the middle of a holiday. He was still not satisfied so he pulled with all his might and found himself transformed into a man who had a wife and children who loved him dearly. He still dreamed of having better things and could not live in the moment so he pulled again. He then saw himself as an old man with hair as white as snow. His wife had grown old and his children had left him and were leading their own lives in a different country. For the first time, he realized that he had not taken time to embrace the wonders of life. He had never enjoyed reading to his children nor taken a stroll in the garden. Instead he kept wondering what was next and hurried through the hours, days and years of his life.

He became sad and went for a stroll in the woods where he used to go as a boy and fell into a deep slumber. When he opened his eyes, he saw the woman again who had gifted him the magic thread. She asked him if he had enjoyed her gift. He said he never enjoyed it as his whole life had passed by and he never got a chance to cherish any moment. She felt pity for him so she decided to grant him a last wish. He asked her to send him back to the time when he was a boy so he could live his life all over again. Something happened and he returned to his deep sleep. He then heard a voice calling out to him. He opened his eyes and saw his young mother. She said to him, "Jason, you sleep too much, your dreams will make you late for everything." Needless to say, he jumped out of bed and went on to live a full life, one rich with many delights, joys and triumphs. It all started when he stopped sacrificing the present for the future and began to live in each moment. It is said that "yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery, today is a gift. That is why it is called the present."

The gift of today is all about living in the moment. It leads to better feelings and optimism rather than dwelling in the past or worrying about tomorrow. The future is always uncertain and the past cannot be brought back, so we need to let it go. Master often explains that the purpose of life is to live in his will. By that he means that everything that is given to us is



all from the Lord, and he knows best what we need. Relishing the gift of simran and bhajan in the present is better than delaying it to the next day because we never know what will happen tomorrow. We often taste the experience of simran but we seldom savour it.

A poem called *Leisure* by W.H. Davies explains how important it is to be grateful for the present and take time to experience the beauty of life:

*What is this life if, full of care,  
We have no time to stand and stare?*

*No time to stand beneath the boughs,  
And stare as long as sheep or cows:*

*No time to see, when woods we pass,  
Where squirrels hide their nuts in grass:*

*No time to see, in broad daylight,  
Streams full of stars, like skies at night:*

*No time to turn at Beauty's glance,  
And watch her feet, how they can dance:*

*No time to wait till her mouth can  
Enrich that smile her eyes began?*

*A poor life this if, full of care,  
We have no time to stand and stare.*



# We Do Not Die Alone

A nurse at a Medical Centre in 2001 was doing her ward rounds. A dying patient asked her, “Will you stay with me?” She said she would after checking on the other patients. When she returned after checking on six other patients, she found the patient dead. Overcome with guilt and frustration, the nurse started the first Noda (No One Dies Alone) program in the United States, with hospital employees volunteering their time to be with dying patients. It is now a national movement in the United States and in countries such as Japan and Singapore.

The Noda program is a laudable initiative. Humans should be a source of strength and support to one another. But what can we do for ourselves so that we do not experience fear and loneliness at the time of our own death?

At numerous question-and-answer sessions, a common question is whether the Master appeared for loved ones who have passed away, and in some cases the question mentions that the departed was not a satsangi or had not done much meditation. The Master reassures us that the Lord is there for everyone; it depends on us whether we realize it.

The book *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol. III, contains several responses by Maharaj Charan Singh Ji to questions about facing death. He explains that it is not guaranteed that the Master always comes, but the soul is always taken care of. If you have already progressed sufficiently within, and you are not much attached to anybody in this creation, the presumption is that the Master will come. But if you are pulled too much towards the creation or worldly faces, the Master may or may not appear, because your mind at the time of death runs to your attachments. He further assures that the Shabd, or divine sound current, never forsakes the disciple. Once we are in touch with the Shabd within, no matter how little progress we may have made in our meditation, the Shabd never leaves us. Even if we have to come back to this creation as a human, even then the Shabd is always there with us and will lead us to a true Master. And again, Shabd will pull the soul back to the level of the Father. In fact, the Master explains that if you are in the habit of attending to meditation, then even if you are in a coma, you will be in touch with that sound.

*Whatever the state of mind  
That a man may focus upon  
At the end, when he leaves his body,  
To that state of mind he will go.*  
Bhagavad Gita

So the saints assure us that the soul is always taken care of and the Shabd, or divine sound current, never leaves us. Nevertheless, our realization of being taken care of at the time of death is actually a result of our own preparation for death during our lifetime. In the book *Living Meditation*, the author reminds us that during this very life, we must attend to daily meditation. Then and only then will we be able to take refuge at the eye centre at the time of death and peacefully and willingly accept what is happening to us. Meditation is the single most practical thing we can do to prepare ourselves for what we will experience when we leave the physical world at the time of death. For those who learn to die through the practice of meditation, death is not terrifying. Such disciples are receptive to the Master and remain conscious and confident during the experience, accepting it peacefully and without anxiety, regrets or fear.

We are reminded that this guarantee is not conditional upon simply being initiated but on practising our meditation diligently to experience that phenomenon before our time of death. If we are able to make a habit of keeping our attention in the remembrance of our Master in all situations, then, when death comes, our attention will only be on our Master. Experiencing this assurance before death is the greatest consolation and opportunity that we could be offered, but we have to go within to be convinced of it. Maharaj Sawan Singh tells us:

*If we think, we find that at death no one goes with us – even the body has to be left behind. Only the Master and sound current go with us and therefore they are our only relatives. The Master is within you and is looking after you. Go in and you will be convinced of it.*

*Spiritual Gems*

In the book *Concepts and Illusions*, the author reminds us that to dispel their fear, children turn on the light. To dispel the fear of death, we can

turn to the light within. As Christ said: “If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.”

There is a parable of a Japanese samurai warrior and his wife who were crossing over to an island on a small boat. Suddenly a fierce storm rocked their little boat, and they were in danger of drowning. The wife was terrified. She started trembling and crying, pleading with her husband to save them. He just sat there motionless.

Nervously, she called out to him, “Are you just going to let us drown? Won’t you do something?” The samurai silently pulled his sword from its sheath and held it menacingly against her throat. Seeing this, she started laughing. “Why are you laughing?” he asked. “This sword is razor-sharp. Just one movement and your throat will be slit.” To which she confidently replied, “The sword might be dangerous, but it is in your hands, and that is enough for me. I trust you completely, that’s why I’m not afraid.”

The samurai put the sword back in its sheath saying, “Here the sword (the storm) is in my Master's hands, that’s why I’m not afraid.” His faith did not waver. This shows us that if we have faith that the Master is with us in life as in death, we need not fear anything.

Keeping our attention in the eye focus at all times will prove invaluable at the time of death, but also while we are alive. Such is the power of meditation – for living, for dying, and for taking us on a journey beyond body and mind. Our meditation helps us realize that we never live alone nor die alone. We just have to let go and die daily to experience divine companionship in both life and death.

A disciple asked his Master: “Isn't the end-point of man's journey his union with God?” The Master replied, “The end-point of man's journey is not union with God because there has never been a separation. All that is needed is the flash of insight that makes one see it.”

*Your breath is like a drumbeat,  
constantly proclaiming the departure  
of the caravan of life.  
Radha Soami has docked his ship –  
come on board and cross the ocean free of charge.*

Soami Ji Maharaj, *Sar Bachan Poetry*



# Did You Know?

If you are always thinking about the world, then by spending only one or two hours a day in simran, you cannot possibly concentrate or withdraw your thoughts to the eye centre, because it needs a similar amount of time to withdraw it, as the time it has taken to scatter out. So, saints always advise that when we are mentally free, when we are walking about, when we have nothing to do, we can keep our attention in simran. We should get into the habit of simran to such an extent that even if we are talking to someone, it should automatically go on within us. The advantage is that we will be able to detach ourselves easily from the worldly things or the nine apertures of the body and come back to the eye centre, and can then easily attach ourselves to Shabd.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *The Master Answers*

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Black magic can't do anything to a satsangi. Black magic can't influence those who are devotees of the Father. It is people's own minds which are creating disharmony, not black magic.

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

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What is meant by being at the eye centre? It means you don't let your mind scatter into the world. You don't lose your balance. Your mind is absolutely still, and you're always contented and feel happiness, and radiate happiness. That will be the effect of stilling the mind: you're always happy, nothing bothers you.

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Die to Live*



# Captured in Blessings

Here are two, heartrending situations. Once, a poor farmer was about to commit suicide by jumping off a cliff. A mystic saw him and stopped him just in the nick of time. He asked the farmer why he would want to commit such an act, and the farmer replied that he was so poor that he felt he could not bear to continue living.

The second case is about a disciple who ran to his Master crying that he was in desperate need of help, or he would lose his sanity. He said that his whole family lived in a single room: wife, children and in-laws. Life felt congested. Their nerves were on edge; and they yelled and screamed at each other all the time. The room is not a home, the man cried – it is more like hell.

Both stories reveal circumstances which lead people to terrible extremes. We may feel that life is unbearable and even blame the Lord for our misery. Blinded by anger and emotion, we forget that we are connected to the Lord, because we have a soul, which is a particle of God and eternal, like him.

Blaming our karmas, the mind, the creation or even the Lord for our sufferings will not relieve our pain. The farmer who wanted to commit suicide because he was poor was saved by a mystic, who promised to help him. The story goes that the mystic told the farmer to wait, while he made an arrangement to get him as much money as he wanted. Soon, some disciples of the mystic arrived. One of the disciples had only one eye. The mystic asked him how much money he would pay to get one eye from the farmer. The disciple replied he would pay 500,000 rupees. The mystic asked another disciple with a bad arm how much he would pay to the farmer to replace his bad arm for the farmer's good one. The disciple replied that he would pay 200,000 rupees for the farmer's good arm. The mystic asked the farmer if 700,000 rupees would be sufficient, or if more body parts should be sold. Appalled, the farmer replied that he was not ready to sell any of his body parts for any price. The mystic then asked the farmer how he could possibly be poor if each of his body parts had such a high value. Realizing his mistake, the farmer fell at the feet of the mystic and thanked the Lord for the gift of a whole and healthy body.

In the second case of the disciple who was terribly disturbed about his whole family living in a single room, his Master had another solution for him. “Do you promise to do whatever I tell you?” the Master asked him. The man said, “I swear I shall do anything.” “Very well. How many animals do you have?” The man replied, “A cow, a goat and six chickens.” So the Master advised him to take all the animals into the room with him and then come back after one week. This disciple was horrified but promised to obey. So he took the animals in and a week later he came back, a pitiable figure, moaning, “I’m a nervous wreck. The dirt! The stench! The noise! We’re all on the verge of madness!” This time the Master said, “Ok, go back and put the animals out.” The man ran all the way home and came back the following day, his eyes sparkling with joy, saying, “How sweet life is! The animals are out, the home is a paradise – so quiet, clean, roomy and spacious!”

Both stories illustrate that even in life’s worse-case scenarios, we are surrounded by blessings in ways we do not realize. The farmer may have been poor, yet he was blessed with a healthy body. Through the mystic, he learned to appreciate that he would not trade a single eye or arm to eradicate his poverty. He would rather live life with his body intact. The second man learned that happiness is relative; the same space can be hell or paradise depending on how we adapt to our circumstances.

Happiness and suffering result from our involvement with the creation and its elements, like the mind and the body. However, in the Jap Ji Sahib Guru Nanak explains that the basis of all human existence is the soul and not the body. The Supreme Lord has sent souls to the world to merge back into the Supreme Lord.

The Lord has showered his grace upon all of us in more ways than we can absorb. Were it not for his grace, we would never even think of our separation from him, nor would we desire to return home. But for his grace, we would neither meet the Master nor follow the path. The Lord creates the desire within us to meet him and pulls us from within. With his grace, we develop faith in the Master. With his grace, we put forth the effort to practise meditation with love and devotion. And with his grace we reach back to his level and merge with him.

We need to recognize the blessings he surrounds us with. The Jap Ji Sahib explains that we should ask only that he allows us to submit to his divine will. Then the love of the Lord will capture our mind, and we will become conscious of the grace he constantly showers upon us – that we are indeed captured in blessings.



*Meditation is nothing but knocking at his door for his grace, for his blessings, for his mercy, for his forgiveness. That is the purpose of meditation. And if we are sincere, if we are successful in knocking, he doesn't withhold his grace. Because he is the one who has prompted us to knock at his door. He's pulling us towards him – that is why we are knocking at his door. If he initiates that longing and is provoking us to knock at his door, he won't withhold his grace to open the door and make us one with him – because he has started all this within us. So naturally he is also anxious that we should be receptive to his grace and that we should receive his grace.*

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Spiritual Perspectives*, Vol II





# Leave Your Desk Today

Leave your desk today.  
Escape the four gray walls  
of your dreary, little office of thought.

These piles of paperwork cluttering your mind  
will still be here on the day you leave this world.  
Will the earth stop spinning if you take a holiday?

Swing open the secret door that hides the realm within.  
Step onto the sunny shore of your own private paradise.  
A signpost in white sand reads, No Thinking Allowed.  
Only five holy names drift on the breeze  
from the ocean of peace inside.

You are here on that famous beach  
where every mystic sat and smiled,  
sipping the bliss of being,  
from the cup of an empty mind.

Become a mystic, too.  
Let your soul run into the waves.  
Become the ecstasy found from losing your self  
in the luminous Sound and Light of the Sea.

From your sunny beach beyond space and time  
look back for a moment at the life you lived  
in your dreary, little office of mind.  
See the tragic torment and tangle, the world  
of worry and want, all the troubles you left behind.

Realize this, dear friend:  
Thought is just an office where you go to get things done.  
It's not a place to keep your soul locked up for long.  
Go there only when you need to.

Then escape it soon, before you start believing,  
yet again, that little room is all there is of you.

Quick! Run back to the bliss of being!  
Dive into the dazzling Sea. Be the lucky one  
who went off on holiday and decided to stay on and on....



*The noise of the lover is only up to the time  
when he has not seen his Beloved.  
Once he sees the Beloved he becomes calm and quiet,  
just as the rivers are boisterous before they join the ocean,  
but, when they do so, they are becalmed forever.*

*Sheik Farid*



# Countering Disenchantment

After initiation, many of us begin our spiritual practice with eagerness and excitement. Surrounding ourselves with the comfort and familiarity of seva and people with similar values, we feel encouraged and emboldened to continue our practice as taught by the Master.

However, we may soon start to feel annoyed by the very aspects that once encouraged us, and angry at things that happen in our lives. Negative feelings like doubt and resentment all slowly chip away at the love and happiness we thought we had for the path. The feeling of disenchantment is something some seekers and disciples go through at some point on the path. The true test of faith is in how each disciple chooses to deal with these feelings of disenchantment, negativity and confusion.

Do we have the determination and courage to fight against the sway of the mind and its many tricks? The Master promised us union with the Lord, and dealing with everyday situations and struggles is part of the challenging journey towards this union.

Great Master explains in *Spiritual Gems* that “the Master aims at reforming his disciples and curing them of their bad habits and wicked deeds so that the spirit may shine in its purity. At first he points out mistakes in gentleness and with love. If this fails, then he adopts a less gentle course and if even that does not serve its purpose, then he applies drastic remedies. In short, he is bent on reforming.” He further says, “He does not rest until he has taken the spirit of his disciple to its source. Even if the pupil deserts him or becomes hostile toward him, or wishes to injure him, he does not slacken his efforts.”

With this understanding, to overcome these feelings of disenchantment and negativity, we must persevere with meditation regardless of what our mind is telling us. Great Master explains that if we persevere with our spiritual practice, we will eventually overcome our negative feelings. Such is the healing effect of the sound current.

The only thing we can do to provide shelter for our worn-out spirit is to anchor our self to the Shabd within. This will provide us with blessed relief from the ever-wandering mind that is prone to negative feelings and thoughts.

We must trust that the Master will do his duty of protecting us here and hereafter, and never doubt his mercy and grace.

Our duty is simply to sit in meditation, repeating the five holy names. Love and faith will develop slowly from continued practice of meditation and will seep into every part of our life. The love and faith that we once assumed was lost will return for they never really left us. The mind was simply distracted by other things.

As we keep our face towards the light, our difficulties and deficiencies will diminish with the help of the divine Shabd. No one can say just how long it will take for us to get home, but we definitely will reach there.

Thus, we must not lose heart with negative feelings such as disenchantment, anger, resentment and jealousy that assail us. We must simply fight courageously against the mind, as it is not stronger than the sound current, and the Master is always with us.



*A satsangi should face all situations with faith and courage and never lose heart, and above all never be lax in bhajan and simran. If there has been any laxity, the sooner it is made up the better. Regularity in meditation gives confidence and strength that are difficult to acquire in any other way. Then you would also realize how the Master is helping you and, in fact, molding you.*

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Quest for Light*



# Forgiveness

An Explanation by Maharaj Charan Singh

We are all knocking at the Lord's door to forgive us for all the sins we have committed, all the karmas we have committed, right from the beginning of the creation. Since we have been part of it, we have collected a lot of karmas. Unless we are forgiven for all that we have done, the soul can never go back to the Father.

Meditation is nothing but seeking his forgiveness, nothing else. "Whatever we have done or we are too weak to do every day, please forgive us." Meditation is nothing else. It is not vain words to say to him, but practically we pray to him for forgiveness by attending to meditation. It is the same as repentance. When we are sitting in meditation, we are actually repenting for what we have done in the past. We are repenting and seeking his forgiveness. We are sorry for what we have done in the past and now we are asking the Father to forgive us.

So repentance and forgiveness go together. Unless we repent, unless we realize what we have done, we will never ask for forgiveness. First, repentance comes within us – we realize we have done something wrong – then we go to another person to seek his forgiveness. So we do realize what we have done, that we have been doing something wrong in the past and now we seek the Father's forgiveness for what we have done, for what stands between us and the Father.

So as far as forgiveness in the world is concerned, if we do not forgive what other people do to us, we build karmic connections with them, and then we may have to come back to forgive them. They may have to come back to seek our forgiveness and we may have to come back to forgive them. We want to escape from all that. So we do not want justice at all, even if others have trespassed against our rights. We just want to forgive them so that we may not create any karmic link with them that might pull us back to this creation.

That is why we should also try to forgive whatever anybody has done against us – it is immaterial whether the person even asks us for forgiveness. We should not have any idea of revenge within us – that he has done this to me and if the opportunity comes, I will do it to him.

We should not have that attitude, even if he is arrogant enough not to ask for forgiveness. Even then I think we should forgive the person, because we have had enough and we do not want more of these karmic relationships.

So we should just forgive the person and call it quits. The Lord knows best how he is going to account for all that, but at least we should have no karmic relationship with that person. Whether you go to a court as the accused or the complainant, you still have to go to court. We don't want to go to the court of justice at all, even as a complainant. We want to escape from this court of justice, so we just forgive. If we go to the court, we are judged too. But we want to rise above all that.

So whatever we have done in the past, we can seek forgiveness by meditation. Whatever anybody has done to us now, we should always be anxious to forgive. We should just try to forgive them. We should not have anything weighing on our mind at all. Then we do not create any karmic relationship. That is why Christ said: You go and ask for his forgiveness while you are on the way, meaning while you are living and he is living.

So if he leaves – if he dies – then you have no one to ask for forgiveness. That is added to your karmas and you have to ask the Lord for forgiveness. But while you are both living, you can seek his forgiveness and you can forgive him also. So forgiveness is always best.

*Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III*



# The Only Wealth We Take with Us

A mystic was invited to the luxurious mansion of a wealthy merchant. The merchant boasted to the mystic about his accumulation of wealth and possessions, saying that he desired to be the richest man ever!

Upon leaving the merchant's home, the mystic gave him a copper coin with the following request, "Please keep this coin safe for me and return it to me in the next world when I ask for it." After the sage's departure, the rich merchant related the unusual request to his wife and showed her the copper coin. Perplexed with this mysterious gesture, the wealthy man's wife exclaimed, "Are you mad? How can a coin go to the next world? How can we carry it with us there? Go back and return it to the holy man."

Immediately the rich man took off in search of the mystic. When he found him, he returned the coin to him, "Sir, please take back your coin. We cannot take this to the next world. We cannot carry it there. That is not possible."

The wise sage smiled and said, "This coin is small and light. You say that it cannot go with you to the next world. Then pray tell me, how can the wealth you have accumulated go there with you? What good will all this wealth do for you after you die?"

The story above reminds us to reflect on our priorities. Are we attached to worldly objects? Are we possessed by our desires and ambitions? Can we take them with us?

Maharaj Charan Singh explains that when our soul came into the world, it took on the mind as its companion. The mind, being a slave of the senses, continually runs after sensual pleasures and worldly objects.

The Masters explain that unless we attach ourselves to the Shabd, we will remain lost in the cycle of birth and death because our worldly attachments and desires keep bringing us back into this endless cycle of existence.

However, when we attach the mind to something higher than worldly pleasures, it then releases its hold on these desires.

Maharaj Charan Singh Ji explains the process:

*By simran and dhyān, we are building a dam to keep the mind from running down to the senses again. But you cannot hold it permanently at the eye centre; when there is too much suppression, then the mind breaks all the rules and regulations.... But if after holding it here you attach it to the Shabd and Nam within and it starts tasting that nectar within, then the dam remains in place and the mind does not come down from the eye centre, because it has something better to hold on to than the senses now.*

*Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. II*

While living in this world there is no doubt that we all have certain karmic obligations, duties and responsibilities towards certain people. We cannot completely cut ourselves off from this world. As the Great Master put it, quoting a shabd:

*You may wander like a hermit, naked with matted hair,  
Carrying three staffs knotted together.  
You may read holy scriptures and visit holy places.  
But if your mind seeks the pleasures of the senses,  
All this is in vain.*

*With the Three Masters*

It is a deception to think that achieving our spiritual goal is possible by leaving our spouse, our children and the comforts of our homes and retreating to the forests or mountains. Running away from our obligations would not bring about the balance that we are seeking, as our mind will still be attached to our family, wealth, properties and desires.

But if instead we strive to attune ourselves to the divine melody within us, then the mind would be released from the shackles of worldly desires, attachments and possessions because, as Maharaj Charan Singh has told us, it now has something better to hold on to than the senses.

Whether we are obsessed with our relationships or with material objects, we should strive to live according to only our basic needs rather than our never-ending list of desires, which turns us into mindless victims of modern-day consumerism.

Returning to the story of the rich merchant, we understand that the only true wealth that we can take with us is our effort in meditation.



Hazur Maharaj Ji often quoted Saint Kabir: “After getting this wealth, we should keep it so close that even little fragments should not escape from you” because in the end, it is the only thing that we can take with us.



## SPIRITUALISTICKS®



# The Master Answers

## A selection of questions and answers with Maharaj Charan Singh

Q: *Master, are our failures also his grace?*

A: Yes, if we can learn from them. Our failures are actually a step towards our victory, if we can learn from them. If we don't try to learn from them, then they're just failures. If a child is always frightened of falling, he will never learn to walk. Those who take the risk of falling will ultimately learn how to walk and run, but those who are afraid of falling will never be able to learn to walk. So failures help us to learn to walk and run. Pitfalls will be there, failures will be there, but we should get up again and again and try to run.

*Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III*

Q: *Master, I'd like to know the best way to handle anger. Sometimes I suppress it and say simran. And other times I let it out and voice it, and then I say simran.*

A: Which way makes you feel better?

Q: *Letting it out and voicing it.*

A: When you voice it, is the other person receptive to your voice or does he voice it back? If he voices it back to you, then you again want to voice it back at him. Where does it lead? If there is one fool under a roof, it is better not to have two. We should try to digest our anger within because anger does not solve any problem. You can be firm in explaining your viewpoint and do it diplomatically rather than angrily. When we get angry, we harm ourselves more than the other person because the other person is not affected by our anger. Rather, he would think ill of us, what type of men we are. Neither is he improved by it. So we damage our own self. But these are general instincts of the body, so it does express itself sometimes here and there. As far as possible, one should try to avoid losing one's temper. Getting angry can become a habit. If we start expressing it because

we think that by voicing it we can get rid of it, rather it builds more and more. It's always better to rise above it.

*Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III*

Q: *Master, what is the role of humour in Sant Mat?*

A: Sant Mat should make us better humans rather than pull us down to the level of animals. You see, except for humans, nobody laughs. I don't think you have seen any bird laughing or any dog laughing or any animal laughing. They may smile, but the privilege of laughter is given only to humans. So if we want to remain human, humour has to be there, just to help us relax. But we have so much association with past species that we find it very hard to laugh. In spite of being humans, we are hardly human. You see, humour is something which another person also enjoys along with you. Humour is not taunting, humour is not hurting. Joking does not mean that you taunt another person or hurt another person or malign another person. That is not a joke at all; that is not humour. And also, you always give what you have. If you are happy within, you will radiate happiness wherever you go. If you are miserable within, you will share misery with others. If you go to a miserable person, he will make you miserable in a second. If you go to a happy person, he will make you happy in a second.

*Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III*

Q: *Why does the Master sometimes take away those whom we love the most?*

A: Well, brother, whether we love them or not, everybody has to go through his own destiny. When their end comes, they have to quit the stage. Everyone is always special to someone. Everyone is someone's loved one, but when their time comes, they have to go.

*Spiritual Perspectives, Vol. III*



# A Friend Like Him

Two friends were once camping in the woods. As they were having their morning coffee near their tent, they heard a rustling sound in the bushes. Suddenly, they saw a large, grizzly bear heading towards them at full speed. One man grabbed his running shoes and started to put them on. His friend asked him, “What are you doing? Do you think you can outrun the bear?” Without turning around, the man answered, “No. I just need to outrun you!”

It is said that success in life depends upon the friends we keep. Today, our lives are driven by social media where we seek constant validation from our many online friends. We comfort ourselves with the idea that the more friends we have, the more people we can rely on when things get tough. However, as we go through life's adversities, we often find that the friends or companions who we imagined would be by our side are nowhere to be found. We see how easily people 'unfriend' us. We eventually realize that we can never achieve the kind of security and comfort we seek from the world.

*The company and friendship of worldly people is transitory and evanescent. Some leave us when we face difficulties, while others desert us in the end. But the Master is the true protector and helper of the disciple. He is always with him at the time of need or difficulty. He does not leave him alone at the time of death or even later.*

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

Our relationship with the Master is not only the most intimate bond of trust, but also an unbreakable one that lasts through this life and beyond. Sadly, we are so blinded by our transitory attachment to near and dear ones that we fail to realize that it is only the Master who is our greatest benefactor and everlasting friend. He is here to extricate us from the cycle of transmigration and take us back to our true home. And yet, we do not take the time to establish our relationship with him.

What kind of relationship should we cultivate with the Master? As disciples, we tend to put the Master on a pedestal. By doing so, we distance ourselves from him and create a barrier, which is not conducive to an open and loving relationship. In fact, the Master wants us to be closer

to him, so much so that we walk beside him, side by side, as friends. He often quotes the unattributed verse:

*Don't walk behind me, I may not lead.*

*Don't walk in front of me, I may not follow.*

*Just walk beside me and be my friend.*

The Master does not expect us to literally walk beside him. If we could imagine walking together with a close friend, what would that entail? It would mean communicating, sharing our thoughts and problems. Our simran repeated with love and concentration is the only language we need to communicate with the Master. Repeating our simran regularly as promised at the time of initiation is the first step to strengthen our relationship with him. It is through this simran that we shift our attention from the worldly to the divine.

In addition to our daily meditation practice, we can try to consciously live in the Master's presence as we go about our daily lives. For example, before eating, we can take a moment to acknowledge his presence and give him our heartfelt thanks through our simran. At work, when we are at a business meeting or talking with our colleagues, we can visualize his form right beside us. When we walk anywhere alone or when we have fears or worries, we can imagine that the Master is lovingly holding our hand. We then discover that we are not alone. The Master guides and protects us every second of every day.

*Imagine that the Lord himself is at your side and see how lovingly and how humbly he is teaching you. If you become accustomed to having him at your side, and if he sees that you love him to be there and are always trying to please him, you will never be able, as we put it, to send him away, nor will he ever fail you. He will help you in all your trials and you will have him everywhere. Do you think it is a small thing to have such a Friend beside you?*

Saint Teresa of Avila, *The Way of Perfection*

Our Master's presence in our daily activities will change our relationship with him. He will stop being the Master who is far away from us in Dera and instead become our everyday companion and intimate friend.

The Master-disciple bond is eternal; it is something which cannot be compared with anything else in the world. In the movie Aladdin, there is a song called “Friend Like Me,” in which the genie tells Aladdin that he is a friend unlike any other. He ends the song with the words: “You ain't never had a friend like me!”

When we attend to our meditation diligently and practice the Master’s presence in our daily lives, we will finally understand that the Master is a friend unlike any other and that we ain’t never had a friend like him!



*The disciple should rely implicitly on the Master and should give himself up to him in the same way as one confides in a surgeon and entrusts his life into his hands. Similarly, one follows the instructions of a guide when one is lost in a jungle, is sick and tired, and cannot himself find the way. The Master’s task is not only to teach, but to help the disciple in overcoming his difficulties. He alone is a true friend who not only advises us regarding what to do in difficulties, but also helps us in removing them.*

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



# What is Our Purpose?

Everyday life consumes us so much that we often lose track of time. We can look back and recall how days added up to weeks and weeks multiplied into months and months grew into years. Such are life's vicissitudes, so powerfully magnetic that we lose sense of the arc of our journey. The here and now can consume us so intensely that broader questions of the what, where to and how questions escape our minds.

Every now and then a life altering event comes our way, often unexpectedly. It is usually powerful enough to shake us, causing us to slow down, giving a moment to pause and zoom out from our day-to-day rut to look at existence in a larger context. We were born, that is a start; there will be an end that is inescapable. When we are consumed by the day-to-day we think of our time left as a long road ahead of us. Looking back, our past seems like it has gone by in the blink of an eye. Was it not just yesterday that we were still in school? Yet, decades have passed since then.

It is important then for us to dwell on the questions what, where, how and when. The 'what' can be a relatively simple one to answer such that it appeals to our intellect. We did not choose to be born. We were rather brought into this world, neither did our parents who created us know us beforehand. Our coming into existence does not seem to be by our very own design but someone or something else's. So then just as everything in this world seems to have a purpose, logically we too must have a purpose as well.

For a moment, let's assume we know the purpose. Moving onto the next question, do our everyday life and everyday actions bring us closer or take us away from this purpose? Where are we headed? Does our everyday life need an adjustment, a fine tuning, to serve our purpose?

*We can ask the Lord who has sent us here when we go back to him. He knows best. We have to go to that level of consciousness where we can understand the purpose of creation.*

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

That brings us to the next question, the how. How can we adjust ourselves so life brings us closer to our purpose? And lastly, when along the way do we fulfil that purpose?

These questions are only pointers to reflect on. They may give us an intellectual lens through which to look at life more objectively. But we find that they lead us to a dead end.

Logically, to know our purpose in this creation, we need either the Creator or his representative to reveal its mysteries. A living Master is the teacher who can answer and bring light to the question of what's our purpose.

The Masters reveal that our purpose is to merge in the Lord – to realize that we are, in fact, already one with him. When we come into contact with a true Master, a cursory reflection on their teachings will tell us that our lives are not headed in the direction of our true purpose. Having mercy on us, the Master showers on us life's greatest gift – the gift of Nam, given at initiation. On top of it, the Master takes us under his tutelage and bears responsibility for us, helping us and guiding us along to our eventual destination.

*You see, nothing is put within us at the time of initiation which is not already there. Everything is there; we are just brought in touch with that sound. The soul is within, the sound is within. We learn the method and the technique of how to become one with that sound; with help and practice we become one with the sound. Nothing is added into us; everything is within us, even the Lord. He won't come from anywhere outside.*

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

The last question of when do we fulfil our purpose is then left to each one of us. Following the instructions of the Master, meditating every day and adhering to the vows taken at initiation, we steer ourselves in the direction of our purpose. Our sincere and relentless efforts will eventually bear fruit.





# Our True Friend

Hazur Maharaj Ji arrived in Detroit on May 26, 1970, continuing with his usual busy routine of satsang, darshan, interviews and initiation. One afternoon, an incident occurred that adds meaning to the oft-repeated statement that we must become like little children. The Master was with a group of children – babies of a few months up to children of ten years. The children beamed on seeing Maharaj Ji, and a few could not contain themselves and ran up to him. One four-year-old boy caught hold of the Master's two index fingers and stared up at him. The boy held on as the Master moved his hands about, playing with him. Finally Maharaj Ji laughingly asked, "Do you have any friends?" "No," he whispered, "Just one." "And who is that?" Maharaj Ji asked. And the little boy, angelically looking into the Master's face from a distance of about one foot and still hanging on to his fingers, withdrew his right hand and, pointing his finger right at the Master's nose, said, "You."

This brief dialogue deeply moved all the satsangis present, for in this world of changing relationships guided by selfishness, who else but the Master is our true friend?

*Heaven on Earth*



*None of our worldly relations are our true friends, for, at the time of our departure from this world they remain helpless spectators, whereas a true friend would be a constant companion and guide who would go with us and lead us towards our ultimate goal.*

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



# Attitude of Gratitude

*The following is an excerpt from the book Seva, published recently by RSSB.*

Someone once asked Hazur, “What should be our approach to meditation?” He responded: “Our approach to meditation should be that of gratitude. The Lord has given us the opportunity of this human form and then the environment in which to attend meditation. So we should always approach meditation with gratitude.”

At our level, we can barely appreciate the gift of meditation bestowed by a true Master.

*You will value the saints when you will go within and see for yourself what the Master does for the disciple, and how, through the maze of mind and matter, he lifts the soul.*

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *Spiritual Gems*

Meditation nourishes our soul's hunger for the divine, expands the boundaries of our consciousness, connects us with the primal power of the Shabd, and allows us to experience truth. Through meditation we realize that we are not separate from that ocean of infinite love, and we become filled with a deep longing to surrender it.

*Just as a man, weary with the day's work, resorts to his home to take rest, so we habituate our soul, on being tired with worldly work, to take rest in the holy sound. The attention has to be brought inside, and when it likes to rest there, like the wanderer coming home, it will find peace within.*

Maharaj Sawan Singh, *Spiritual Gems*

Meditation is our place of refuge, our source of contentment and bliss, our life support system. Out in the world there is noise, struggle and constant motion. Inside, there is spiritual oxygen; there is stillness, peace and rest; there is the Master waiting for us. We meditate because we need it. We meditate because our soul recognizes something that the mind, at this level, cannot – that the Shabd and the Master are our truest friends.

*Shabd and Nam are the only real, everlasting, and unfailing friends, and these we should try to cultivate. Shabd never deserts, nor does the Master.*

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Light on Sant Mat*

Meditation gives us inner strength and enables us to fulfil our worldly responsibilities with grace. Our attitude towards worldly relationships and life events changes, and we begin to see the Lord's hand in everything that happens. We learn to swim along with the waves, as Hazur would say, and begin to accept what comes to us lightly and cheerfully.

*Meditation gives mental strength and spiritual bliss, and enables us to face life with great hope and courage.*

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Quest for Light*

Baba Ji once said that the 'wage' of meditation is love. Meditation strengthens our faith in the Master and builds a bond of deep spiritual love. Physical seva may bring us close to the physical form of the Master, but through meditation we develop a truly intimate relationship with the inner Master – we develop a love and faith that is unshakable.

*By meditation you develop love that comes with experience, with conviction. Meditation takes our roots very deep in love; nobody can shake us then.*

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

Hazur says, "We have only one future: to go back to the Father. There's no other future." A deep peace comes with knowing that our destination is guaranteed, that we have been marked to return to the Father. And a deep sense of gratitude comes from knowing that meditation is our path to that future.

Meditating every day helps us build a routine in which spiritual aspiration is part of our daily life. Meditating every day gives us hope that there is a purpose to our life and we are working to fulfil it. Meditation is the compass that always points to our true north – our Master. Meditation is a daily reminder that we have not come here to engage with this world one more time; instead, we have come to say our final goodbye to this creation. Meditation gives meaning to our seva, meaning to our life.

*Through meditation we fulfil the very purpose of human life.*

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Die to Live*

Meditation is the way we express our love for the Master, the way we thank him for finding us and bringing us back to life, the way we try to please him, the way we beg his forgiveness for turning away from him so often, the way we ask to feel his presence, the way we cry for help, the way we show our obedience, the way we sing his praises.

The practice of meditation begins with seva of the mind – with obedience – but, over time, the joy takes over and we begin to meditate because we have fallen in love with meditation itself:

*When you fall in love with somebody, you automatically want to remain in the company of that person.... Similarly, when you fall in love with meditation and you feel peace and bliss within, then whatever little time you can manage, you would at once like to attend to meditation, because you want to be there in that peace, in that bliss. It will increase by itself. You don't have to put forth an effort then at all.*

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Die to Live*

If the Master were to tell us today that to attain liberation we need only do physical seva – if he were to take away the requirement to meditate – would we be happy? We would more likely feel bereft. A day without meditation would be a day without joy, a day without hope. A day without meditation would be a day without our most beautiful seva.

And in the quiet moments, when we feel overwhelmed by the enormity of the gift we've been given, all we can do is meditate. Because we know that the only way to express our gratitude for meditation is to attend to meditation.

*The best gift you can give to your Master is the gift of meditation. Nothing else matters.*

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Legacy of Love*



# Heart to Heart

Whenever I had asked the Indian satsangi students how they liked American food, they would remark it was very monotonous and dull, as we mostly use only salt and butter to flavour our food. But Maharaj Ji, when asked how he liked American food, lovingly and graciously answered: "It likes me."

*Legacy of Love*

\* \* \*

When Maharaj Sawan Singh became the Master, his entire life was dedicated to spirituality and seva of the sangat. His own comfort, well-being, convenience, and even health became secondary for him. Endowed with an extraordinary willpower, Hazur had a great capacity for hard work. He would endure any amount of physical discomfort and hardship while carrying out his duties. He would completely disregard extremes of weather – heat, cold, heavy rains; nothing could deter him from his mission of satsang, initiation and seva. He would stand in the summer sun – sometimes it is 120 degrees Fahrenheit in June – without an umbrella, for hours at a time, supervising the harvesting. Once when I put an umbrella over his head, he said, "No, son, I do not need it. Don't you see the sangat is doing seva in the sun?" With Hazur looking on, seva that would normally take two days to finish was done in half a day.

*Heaven on Earth*

\* \* \*

At one Satsang, someone asked Hazur Maharaj Ji, "Master, everybody wants you to look directly at them for Darshan. Is that necessary?"

Hazur answered, smilingly, "Master is looking at every single one of us on the inside all the time."

Maharaj Charan Singh, *Thus Saith the Master*



# BOOK REVIEW

## Sacred Nature: Restoring Our Ancient Bond with the Natural World

BY KAREN ARMSTRONG

PUBLISHER: NEW YORK: KNOFF, 2022. ISBN: 978-073-352824-38

In *Sacred Nature*, Karen Armstrong, a well-known historian of religion, explores the relationship between the divine, the human, and the natural world as it has been understood throughout human history. She highlights the ways that a reverence for the natural world, as well as an understanding of the interconnectedness of all things, have been central to spiritual life in many human cultures. She argues that the current imbalances and destructive behaviours that are causing the climate crisis reflect our disconnection from the roots of human spirituality.

Armstrong finds the historical record of human spirituality as it relates to nature and the world around us mostly in the sphere of myth:

*For most of human history there were two ways of thinking, speaking, and acquiring knowledge about the world: mythos and logos. Both were essential for comprehending reality; they were not in opposition to one another, but complementary modes of arriving at truth, and each had its special area of competence.*

Logos, meaning rational, logical thought, “corresponds to objective facts” and is “wholly pragmatic.” Mythos deals with the timeless and is concerned with meaning.

*Humans are meaning-seeking creatures. If our lives lack significance, we fall very easily into despair, and it was mythos that introduced people to deeper truths, making sense of their moribund and precarious lives by directing their attention to the eternal and universal.*

Today, we tend to dismiss myths as mere stories. To say “it’s just a myth” means that it is not true. Armstrong explains that a myth is not about an event that took place sometime, but about something that is occurring all the time. Its insights are intuitive, like art and poetry. It was mythic understanding that led the sixth-century Confucian sage Zhang Zai to write:

*Heaven is my father and earth is my mother  
and even such a small creature as I finds  
an intimate place in their midst.*

*Therefore that which fills the universe  
I regard as my body  
and that which directs the universe  
I consider as my nature.*

*All people are my brothers and sisters, and  
all the things in nature are my companions.*

It was mythos that led the ancient Greek philosophers to see the cosmos as a living being whose soul gave life and consciousness to all beings. Since the physical cosmos was the “body” of the cosmic soul, all living beings are like limbs of one body.

Armstrong points out that the power of myth is realized only when it is put into action. When enacted, it affects us emotionally and aesthetically, forcefully instigating us to change our behaviour. Spiritual practices turn an intuitive mythic understanding into a lived reality. Armstrong notes:

*In Japan, Zen Buddhists believe that a single Buddha-Nature exists in the things of nature and that it is inseparable from the human self. The aim of Zen is to cultivate awareness of its existence, making it a reality within oneself.*

Zen practice leads to a perception that does not depend on authoritative texts but on one’s own experience – a perception of “the Buddha-Nature in both the natural world and in human beings.”

Armstrong claims that nearly every religious tradition shares “this strong sense of the inherent sacrality” of the natural world and offers ways to engender a realization of this truth among its followers. She begins the book describing tribal cultures stretching back to prehistoric times, highlighting practices that show an awareness of and reverence for a divine presence or force that interpenetrates and enlivens the natural world. The thought processes in these indigenous cultures follow what anthropologist Lucien Levy-Bruhl called “participation” logic, as they “experience not just humans and animals but apparently ‘inanimate’ objects, such as stones and plants, as having a life of their own, each participating in the same mode of existence and influencing each other.”

Taking up religious and philosophical traditions, Armstrong explains that the rishis who composed the earliest Vedas perceived a “mysterious omnipresent power” underlying all that is, which they called “Rta.”

*Rta is best understood as “active, creative truth” or “the way things truly are.” Like qi or the Dao, Rta was not a god, but a sacred, impersonal, animating force. It was impossible to describe or define Rta, but it could be experienced as the subtle whole, which flowed from itself expansively, bringing about the cosmos, humans, and the gods themselves. The fact that from most of history people in different parts of the world developed such a remarkably similar conception of this sacred reality suggests that it may be an archetypal notion embedded in the human psyche.*

Moving to the Axial Age (roughly 900 BCE to 200 BCE), Armstrong considers elements of beliefs and practices in Confucianism, Daoism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Judaism, ancient Greek philosophy, and pagan religion. She notes that this period is called “axial” because “it was pivotal to the spiritual and intellectual development of our species.” Despite their vastly different conceptual structures and modes of expression, many of these traditions share common elements in the way they view the relationship between the divine, the human, and the natural world.

In Islam, somewhat later, Armstrong notes how the Qur’an describes nature as revealing God:

*Each verse of the Qur’an is called an ayah, a “sign” of God; but so is every phenomenon of nature. “Do you not see?” the Qur’an asks insistently, almost incredulously. “Have you not considered the extraordinary bounty of nature?”*

The Qur’an urges Muslims, Armstrong says, “to make themselves aware of the extraordinary ‘signs’ of God’s concern and compassion that are in evidence every day.”

In chapters on Sacrifice, Kenosis (emptying the self), Gratitude, Ahimsa (non-violence), and the Golden Rule, Armstrong considers human attitudes vital to spiritual development that also shape our relationship with the natural world. In each chapter she explores various religions’ attitudes toward nature through myth, ritual, and scripture. In the chapter on Gratitude, Armstrong cites the well-known prayer of St. Francis:



*Be praised, my Lord, through all your creatures,  
especially through my Lord, Brother Sun,  
who brings the day and you give light through him.  
And he is beautiful and radiant in all his splendour!*

As this prayer goes on to praise the Lord through his creatures – the moon, the wind, the water – Armstrong calls it “a beautiful meditation on the natural world.” Armstrong notes: “We may take the ‘Lord’ addressed throughout to be the transcendent force that imbues the whole natural order, which some traditions call ‘God’ but others know as the Dao, the Brahman, or Rta.”

A final chapter, “Concentric Circles,” discusses widening the “circle” of who and what is included in the “others” who, according to the Golden Rule, should be treated as we ourselves would like to be treated. In this chapter she tells how once the Buddha met with the Kalamans, a group who found his teaching difficult intellectually. So he taught them a simple meditative practice. They were to “empty their minds of ill will and envy” and then “direct feelings of loving kindness in all four directions.”

*Imbued with “abundant, exalted, measureless loving kindness,” they would break through the barriers that confined them to a limited, self-bound worldview and – even if just for a moment – experience an ekstasis that took them out of themselves.*

Even apart from spiritual growth, Armstrong argues, the goal of averting climate disaster demands a change in the way we think and feel about nature. “Recycling and political protests are not enough... It is crucial that we behave differently not just when we feel like it, but all the time.” We need to answer questions like – How do we understand nature? Is it a resource to be exploited? Is it a large, interdependent community in which humans only participate? Is it a living being?

*We must revive the reverence for the natural world that has always been essential to human nature. It is not a question of believing religious doctrines; it is about incorporating into our lives insights and practices that will not only help us to meet today’s serious challenges but change our hearts and minds.*



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