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A SPIRITUAL QUARTERLY

SPIRITUALITY & HEALTH

A spiritual figure with arms outstretched, surrounded by a shower of golden stars, emerging from a large, glowing red apple. The figure is blue and translucent, with a bright light emanating from its chest. The background is a deep blue with a gradient of light. The apple is large and red, with a golden glow around it. The figure's arms are outstretched, and the stars are falling from its chest area.

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INSPIRING ACTS • SCIENCE AND SPIRITUALITY • TRANSFORMING ANGER...

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Editors

Harbans Singh, Dr. D K Mehta and Dr. Bobby Sura

Editorial Consultants

Bhupinder Anand, Surjit Dhami, Ricky Bhatia, George Khambe, Baljit Singh, Dr. Rekha Bassi, Ruby Rehal, Mandeep Kundi, Gurdeep Bhanga, Nisha Kalra-Tutt and Kel Kalyan.

Subscriptions and Distribution

Dr. Pavan Chera

International Contact

Raul Kamal

Design

Kamaldip Bains, Suman, Vishu Singh, Simarjit Syan, Suman, Swanti Matharu, Mansha Chowdhry and Sundeep Dass

Publisher

SNM UK (Centre for Oneness)
Great Western Street, Potters Lane
Wednesbury, West Midlands
WS10 0AS, UK

Email

universaltarget@nirankari.org

Universal Target is a spiritual journal promoting unity in diversity and peaceful co-existence. It is founded on the belief that all human beings share a common source and spiritual heritage, irrespective of the differences of culture and world traditions. The journal draws upon the shared and accumulated wisdom of our common heritage, to encourage harmony through self-realisation. Universal Target endorses the maxim of His Holiness Nirankari Baba, 'Know One, Believe in One, Become One'.

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The Crucial Debate

The West, especially Europe, seems to be embroiled in an on-going debate about the utility of religion in modern society. Intellectuals, the scientific-minded and the like, seem to be vying against religion, preferring to shut it out of their lives completely.

Religion-bashing has not only become a fashion, but appears to be the favourite pastime of the vociferous, tiny minority that is bent on dictating and imposing its views on the silent majority. But looking at the horrendous, religion-inspired conflicts, of the past and the present, can you really blame them for taking a poor view of religion?

Considering that more blood has been shed in the name of religion than any other cause in the annals of history, it would be extremely difficult to condemn them, however misconceived they might be. This is because, buried under the unbearable weight of rites and rituals, religion has veered off its intended course.

It was meant to heal wounds, bridge distances and bring mankind together. More importantly, it was to solve conflicts, not create them. Instead, it took a diametrically opposite direction, begetting hatred, bigotry and dogmatic narrow-mindedness.

As a result, the soul of religion has been rendered lifeless. Unless it is, therefore, drastically spiritualised and re-invigorated, religion will continue to fail to fulfil its true purpose intended by its great teachers and founders. For them, religion was a spiritualising and humanising vehicle, one aspect of which could not exist without the

other. They had to have a symbiotic relationship. What was true then is true now.

Spirituality on its own may not be enough to produce a vibrantly healthy society, just as materialism, on its own, is inadequate to bring about happiness. Likewise, humanism, devoid of the unifying spiritual entity, would be ineffectual in producing the desired goal. We need a balanced combination of all three – spiritual and material wealth, complemented by a generous helping of humanism.

Humanism, based upon reason, empathy and a concern for human beings, does not recognise the need for the supernatural. However, it reminds us that its morals and ethics can be instrumental in seeking happiness in this world. Practitioners of humanism heavily rely on rationalism to find their way in life.

Unfortunately, we are not all endowed with the same intelligence, level of thinking or education. And all of us are far from being equipped to satisfy the demands of this type of humanistic endeavour. On its own, such an approach remains the preserve of the elite few, and thereby fails to offer a universal prescription for our needs.

All of us are spiritual beings, wrapped up in matter. No being is complete



without its spiritual nature. For in addition to food, water and air, we require spiritual sustenance.

Though spirituality, on its own, may not be the answer, it is an essential ingredient of life, which mankind can only ignore at its peril.

In order to be spiritual, one has to be connected, not with nature or any other material phenomenon, but with the beginning-less, primordial and all-pervasive spirit. We are told by those who mastered the art of spiritual living, that this connection is effected by means of self-awakening.

A self-awakened person is conscious of the ultimate reality and lives his life as a spiritual being. He is adorned with the qualities of humanism, and the ability to harness materialism for the good of society at large, including himself. Such is his religion. If there is only one universal reality - i.e. the truth, then surely there can only be one universal religion, which unites and advocates love for all. This, if accepted, may be the right response to the crucial debate. ■

Harbans Singh

LIVING A SELF-AWAKENED LIFE



Just as the sun has been present across the millennia, saints and sages have also been there in every age to rescue the waning humanity and to bolster human values. They enjoined one and all to forge links with the One God, who is the ultimate reality, the cause, and the very foundation of the whole universe.

This is only possible when we tackle our doubts and delusions, and eradicate the darkness of the mind. For where ignorance is the cause, there ignorance is the effect. The mind cannot be appeased and purified as long as the delusions exist. What they signify is ignorance, and where ignorance is, there can be no truth. Without the truth, there can be no truthful living.

Truth cannot be known by mere recitation of Scriptures. Such recitation is akin to the actions of a road-side beggar, who, with a begging bowl in his hand, begs in the name of God. Whilst he utters the name of God, his eyes are focused on whether or not a passer-by is going to put some coins in his bowl. God's name may be on his tongue, but his mind is elsewhere.

A person can be said to be united with God, who, with the aid of Knowledge (spiritual awakening), feels God's presence at every moment, everywhere, and all the time. Such a united person is always self-awakened, with God's pervasiveness firmly entrenched in his mind, resulting in an overwhelming urge for the well-being of mankind.

When our feelings for others are so inspired by love and compassion, the mind is beautified, the spirit elevated and the physical body, adorned. The mind is like a container. Whatever we put into it, is of the utmost importance. For example, a container may hold rubbish, which even animals and insects find ways to access. It has little value compared to a container of precious things, which becomes valuable because of the importance of its contents.

Similarly, although saints are no different in appearance, they stand out from the crowd. They may well be perishable like others, but the fact that they contain the benefit of illumination, through spiritual awakening, they become important and valuable. Their feelings become pristine, brought on by imbibing the truth in their mind.

Real beauty lies in the mind, not in physical cleansing. Until the mind is embellished with divine virtues, there can be no cleansing. Human beings may well look impressive in their outward worship, but God knows the true state of their minds.

Saints have always acted as a mirror to people at large. They have never hesitated throughout the ages. They have stressed on the fact that the very edifice of humanity is based on



the truth. The Sufis also concentrated on the real truth. They questioned the utility of doing the rosary, uttering God's name without knowing him, and worshipping mechanically at the holy shrines. The Sufi Bulleh Shah went as far as branding people who worshipped God without knowing him, as the deluded. They placed the mirror before people not just to make them aware of the Lord, but also to live in His awareness.

The consequence of not living a self-awakened life leads to no gain, but results in utter defeat, where the battles of here and hereafter are completely lost.

Hence, there is a need to show people that the welfare of all lies in spiritual illumination. Those who do heed the advice of saints are the real gainers. They are the winners of both battles. They are divine blessings for the earth. As worthy human beings, they serve as living examples of love, compassion, goodness and universal fraternity. These are the very feelings that would disappear without such saints.

We should, therefore, pray for more saints and seers to be on this earth. They strive to bring out the innate beauty in human beings, who are fortunate enough to be touched by them. If such a beauty were to be seen in every house, street, ward, town and state, this world would truly become a paradise.

Whether we experience heaven or hell on earth, is entirely dependent on our attitude or behaviour. Where

members of a family harbour ill feelings towards each other, it can be likened to a hell.

For the world to become celestial, we have to be answerable and responsible, bearing in mind that the beauty is the end product of our positive conduct and behaviour. If we look at the earth from a spacecraft, we see a beautiful landscape gifted to us by the Almighty. Even from closer quarters the world is no less beautiful. The oceans, rivers, springs, vegetation and snow-crowned

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mountains make our world lively and colourful. Man's contribution is no less significant. He has constructed striking edifices and glorious monuments, all of which may well add to the grandeur of our cities, but to add to the spiritual splendour, the purity of the mind is paramount. However pleasing nature might be, it would be of little avail, if people were to behave like beasts, and indulge in exploiting, abusing, hurting and killing.

If we have been graced with a status higher than other creatures, we must avoid stooping so low as to colour our lives with anti-human tendencies of greed, arrogance, envy and anger. We must value our human birth. We must adorn our lives with grace and charm, and spread it everywhere. In so doing, every moment of our

lives will become momentous. And this process will make the earth a pleasant place to be.

So let us pray that every human values their life, and accords due importance to the Almighty Lord, by being awake and spiritually enlightened. If we fail to value the present, we shall lose it forever, and repenting afterwards will be of no use. Like the arrival of the rain after the crop has failed, the damage will have been done.

We have to ensure that being born as humans, we leave as humans. This is where the saints and seers come in. They play a huge role in ennobling and salvaging mankind. They take it as their bounden duty to uplift their fellow-beings, regardless of who they are.

Saints and seers continue to do this relentlessly, irrespective of the odds, and notwithstanding whether people heed them or not. Therefore, if we really want to make this world a better place, we will have to make the effort to listen to them, to heed them and to follow their counsel to adorn our lives here and hereafter. In so doing, we will be making the earth more heavenly. ■

An English language adaptation of HH Nirankari Baba's timeless message, by Dr. DK Mehta.





RANDOM ACTS OF *KINDNESS*

Surely being kind to others is natural to all humankind - isn't it? Well, yes, it is easy for those of us who come from safe and loving homes where kindness and care are modelled from an early age. Who, having been filled to brimming with kind words and actions, would not wish to have it flow freely to all others that they meet? A child shares its sweets with others, an adult gives time to patiently listen to others, or pays a compliment or lends a hand - naturally - don't they?



Kindness, at its best is given freely, unconditionally, no account taken for the cost, no reward expected for the gift. That is the ideal.

How, then, to practise kindness when it has not been shown right from the start? How to give from an empty, depleted place? How can we learn it? Wait! Why should we learn it - why should we be kind? What's in it for us? Ironically, just operating from the stance of, 'what's in it for us' creates the biggest obstacle to receiving what's in it for us. For it is only when acts of kindness are freely given that the enormous rewards are felt. And they are? They are a sense of purpose, raised self-esteem and respect, improved self-image, a stepping out of ego, not to mention that warm, fluffy glow that comes from selfless little acts.

So, how can we learn it if we didn't have it from the caregivers we were with from the start? Okay. So even if we didn't learn it from those caregivers, we're going to have experienced kindness from time to time, been shown it by some peers, some adults, seen it on films, read about it in books - we have received it sometime, somewhere from someone. Now...remember how good that felt? What if you knew that giving away that kindness you'd received - or 'paying it forward', as Dr David R

Hamilton prefers to say - could feel just as good?

Dr. Hamilton in his book, 'The Contagious Power of Thinking', suggests in the chapter, 'One kind act inspires another', that acts of kindness can travel quickly through our social networks and are never a stand-alone act. Dr Hamilton believes and has provided scientific evidence that kindness is literally contagious. It has also been proved that being kind is good for our health.

Dr Hamilton explains that acts of kindness find their way into the chemistry and structure of the brain. He goes on to say that when we change ourselves in any way we change our brain and if we make

Charity of spirit and kind compassion need to be shown towards ourselves first if we are intending to give it away to others without regret or depletion.

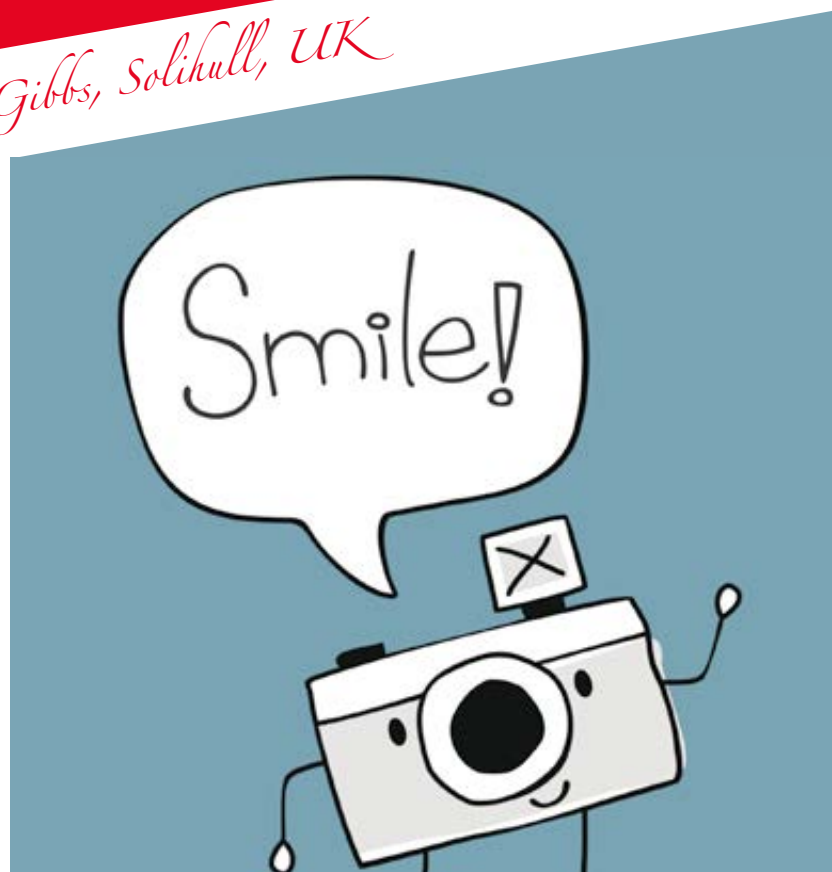
room for more kindness in our lives then there will be structural and chemical changes in our brains; kindness circuits will be established. He further explains that the hormone oxytocin is produced in vast amounts when we connect with others, it is often called a molecule of kindness or the 'cuddle chemical'. The more oxytocin in the brain, the more

Caroline Gibbs, Solihull, UK

trusting we become, barriers come down, we become less shy, more outgoing and confident, and thus are able to make more connections. (Extracted from *Why Kindness is Good for You* by Dr David R Hamilton, Hay House Books.)

Karen Armstrong in her best selling book, 'Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life', talks in the Sixth Step 'Action' of being able to create spots of time for others, "...little nameless, unremembered, acts of kindness and love", that Wordsworth claimed in another poem, "form the best portion of a good man's life". She suggests that we act in this manner, building to several times a day, in accordance with the positive version of The Golden Rule: 'Treat others as you would wish to be treated yourself'. These seemingly insignificant 'spots of time' may be forgotten by us almost immediately but may mean a great deal to the recipient.

The Dalai Lama speaking on kindness and compassion has said, "When we are motivated by compassion and wisdom, the results of our actions benefit everyone, not just our individual selves or some immediate convenience." Interestingly, there is sometimes confusion about Jesus' suggestion that, in regard to kindness, we love our neighbour as ourselves. There seems to be much evidence that people do not always look after themselves in loving and caring ways and one could be forgiven for not wanting to be their neighbour! However, the point Jesus may have been making and that is picked up by



Karen Armstrong in the Third Step, 'Compassion for Yourself', is that charity of spirit and kind compassion need to be shown towards ourselves first if we are intending to give it away to others without regret or depletion.

So, if you're wanting to make a start, begin small and build up. Open a door, allow a driver out of a side road, pop some coins in a charity tin, say good morning, good afternoon. Pass any unused money off vouchers to a family in the queue at the till, pay a compliment, praise a child, thank a friend. And smile - always smile - you never know when it might make someone's day.

Don't worry if they don't appear to smile back. They already have. Dr Hamilton's thorough research has

shown that due to the power of reciprocity, mirror neurones, brain receptors and the like, a human automatically smiles back even if it isn't seen by the human eye. So, smile, smile, smile! You won't know what the impact of the act might be but you'll feel great anyway!

Karen Armstrong then goes on to remind us to comply with the original version of The Golden Rule on a daily basis too: "Do not treat others as you would not like them to treat you." Resist that triumphant sarcastic remark, retain those critical thoughts, refrain from telling them how it is. Close, shut, zip! Just smile that saintly smile. ■

Optimism and Health

Dr. S Puri, Chicago, USA

It has been well documented that there is a direct correlation between mental and physical health. Those who maintain a positive outlook in life, tend to be healthier and happier. This fact is known as dispositional optimism.

Studies have shown that optimism promotes health by countering stress-induced increases in inflammation and boosting adjuvant effects of acute stress. Inflammation tends to be the root cause of many of the ailments that we face today. Eliminating or limiting the inflammatory response in certain situations will directly influence our overall health.

Conclusion: optimism is good and pessimism is bad. But we already knew that, right? So then how do we control a mind which is constantly running and can so easily be 'tricked' into negative thoughts?

The answer is contemplation. A sound body, mind and soul can be attained with it. It helps all three to relax and allows for our body and soul to become one. The beauty of contemplation or remembrance (simran) is that it enables us to exit our daily routine and enter into the present.

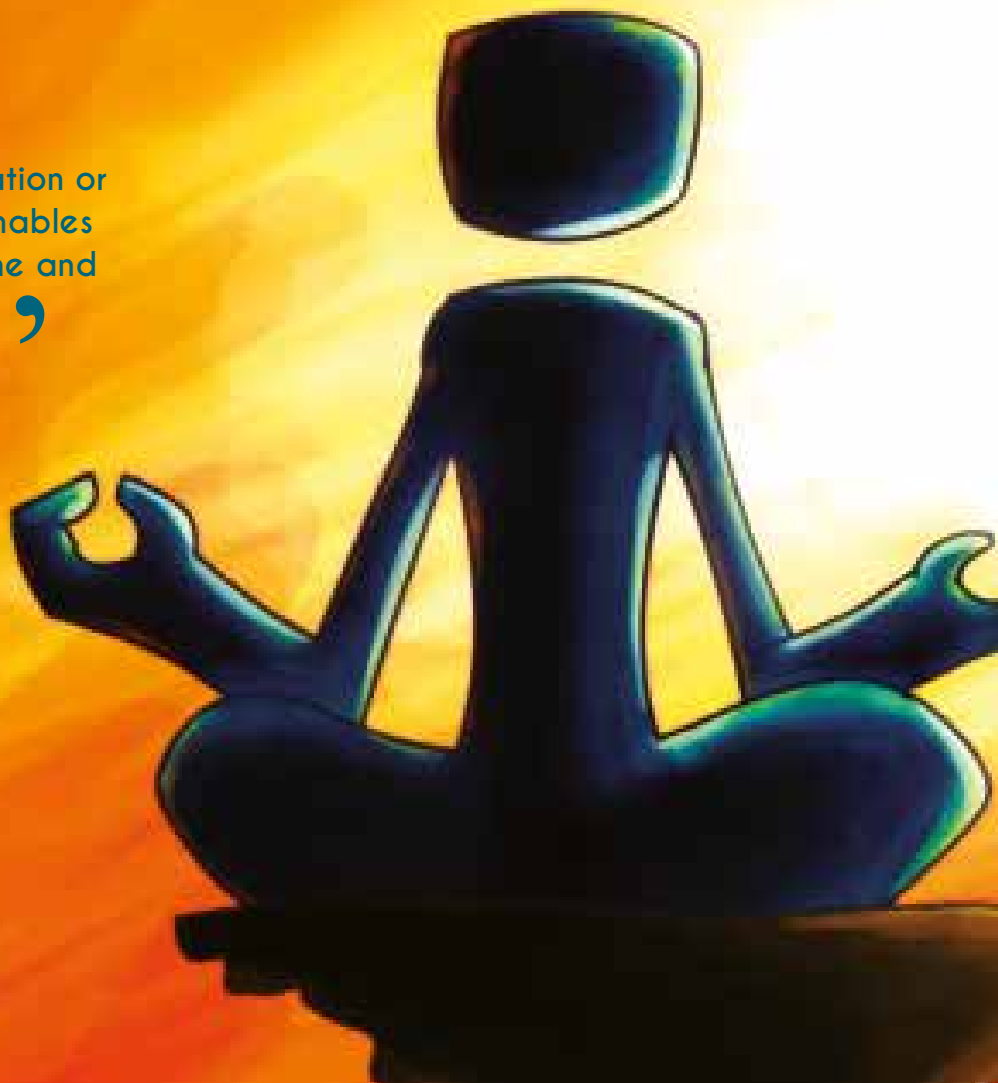
The mantra is needed to serve as a vehicle to be able to connect with peace and to overcome the fickleness of the mind. According to ancient wisdom, it is the best instrument to tame the unruly mind.

Experts tell us that our mind does not require much focus when doing routine actions such as cooking, cleaning, driving or jogging. We

do these actions so frequently that we are able to multitask while doing them, thus not requiring much input or 'guidance from the mind'.

However, when performing complicated tasks, we need to focus and keep our eye on the goal. Focusing helps us to do just that. We are able to stay focused not only while remembering, but also during our normal daily activities. We must learn to control our thoughts and concentrate on positive energy. When we are able to do this, it is at that moment that we can become truly peaceful. ■

“The beauty of contemplation or remembrance is that it enables us to exit our daily routine and enter into the present.”



Inner Peace

Tom Wyre, Staffordshire's Poet Laureate, UK

I was lost, clinging to a thread,
Frozen between gnashing rocks,
Between Scylla and Charybdis,
Between doubt and dread.
I was lost with eyes entrapped in my web of tears.
Lost in the maze of yesteryear.
I was lost in my shadow's gloom,
Lost in my heart's moat and castellated tomb.
I was lost with my view blinded by apathy,
Lost in loneliness that never strayed.
I was lost filled with empty ways.
For the first time, I am awake.
I am now found within myself.
Tranquillity walks my path's soliloquy.
My thought with today, not yesterday's tomorrow.

Inner sense.
Daybreak upon my soul,
To enlighten my window within.
Inner peace. ■

Chaining our EGO

Dr. Tina Mohindra, Oxford, UK

Ego can cloud our understanding and prevent us from seeing clearly. It tends to colour our thinking. As a result we assign qualities like 'beautiful' and 'ugly' to people and objects without realising that they may well be our own subjective perceptions.



As the saying goes, 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder'. It follows that there is no person or object which may be regarded as universally beautiful. So much so that even our perceptions can be transient and change. For instance, an enemy today can be a friend tomorrow, and a friend or a dear one can become an enemy in no time.

Every second, our body undergoes countless transformations. As a consequence our mind becomes a theatre of innumerable emotional experiences. The forces of attraction and repulsion therein give rise to intense conflicts and fan our ego.

According to the psychologist, Han F. de Wit, the ego is an affective reaction to our field of experience, and a mental withdrawal based on fear. The dread of suffering and the fear of the world manifest themselves in anxiety. As a result, we subconsciously hide ourselves in our own ego to feel protected. By so doing, paradoxically we achieve the opposite. For the ego-grabbing self-importance is the best magnet for attracting suffering.

Imagine if someone punches you, your irritation may last forever. However, the pain of the punch itself soon fades away. It is the ego, which is hurt more so than the body. Where the ego has been shackled, the physical suffering only lasts as long as the pain. Where the ego is intact,

the pain and suffering could probably go on forever.

Some people fallaciously believe that if they eliminate the 'ego', they will cease to exist as an individual. This is because, on a daily basis, we experience the 'self' through its own vulnerability. A scowl leads to negativity and a smile leads to pleasure. The 'self' is always waiting to be satisfied or dissatisfied.

"...the ego is an affective reaction to our field of experience, and a mental withdrawal based on fear."

But what gives the 'self' a personal identity? Is it our flesh and bones, history, heritage or our position in society? Ultimately, the name represents the self, but the self is not the name. I am TINA. The individual letters making up my name – T.I.N.A. – do not mean anything to me, but collectively they have meaning for me. My name, therefore, is a mere label. To find out as to what is lurking behind the illusion of the self that defines our being, requires an introspective investigation.

Firstly, we need to identify and accept the presence of the ego within us. For if we really feel that we are great, we have to recognise the contributing factors, which make us feel this way. For example, if

you were a good singer, how many things were necessary to make you so? To sing, you must be alive, and this certainly is not in your hands. Secondly, if you were gifted with a good voice, again, this is not your doing, but it is a gift. You receive training from your teachers. You are gifted with tolerance from your family and friends, who patiently listen, encourage and support you. You are what you are because of the contributions of others, for which you should be eternally grateful. The adoption of this attitude helps you to rein in your ego.

We must, therefore, understand that there is not a single thing that we can do or create on our own. We are not what we think we are. Our egoistic self is not the same as the real, innate self. The former is mutable and the latter, immutable and immortal.

We have to undergo a guided journey to discover our real being, which has its emanation in the truth – the Almighty God. The failure to do so leaves us in a flux. For 'we are already on the said journey, but we do not realise it' (HH Nirankari Baba).

When we succeed in shedding our sense of 'I' ness, and chaining our ego, we will have discovered our true self. This is the journey we should be on. ■

The predominant emotion or feeling that all human beings need to have and display, is love. We are all born out of love and our purpose here is to be in love and to spread our love to all those around us. No other emotion or feeling can achieve what love can. If you asked your loved one to do something for you, it is likely to be done in no time at all. This is because it is extremely difficult to refuse or resist the pull of love.

However, if you were to ask for the same thing differently, without any love, for example, "I want you to do this for me right now!", then the response would be rather different. Thus the same request can bring about wholly different outcomes, dependent on whether love is in the picture.

The opposite of love is not necessarily hate, as it is often perceived. The opposite of love, in my view, is fear. Man is governed predominantly by two emotions - love or fear. If you are not acting from love, it invariably follows that you are acting out of fear.

Why is fear such a predominant emotion in our lives? From morning to night, we are scared, anxious and worried about countless things. Fear and all the other negative emotions usually associated with fear - greed, guilt, anger, envy, pride and lust - all seem to come unannounced, without having to put in any effort.

But love, it seems, needs a lot of

hard work. And who in this world likes to do hard work, when an easier option is available? We tend to choose the path of least resistance, even if this poses problems for us, in the longer run.

Fear arises because we lack knowledge or insight. If we knew, we would make the necessary changes in our lives, go into 'acceptance mode' and dilute or dissolve the fear. But not knowing is what we find distressing.

What people don't realize is that nature has kept us in the dark, about our future, for a specific reason. While we cannot begin to fathom the divine nature, it can be safely said that if a human being were to be given his entire life's plan in his hands, if he could see each and every event or situation that he would have to face in the future, it would be too overwhelming for him, too stressful for him, too much of a load for him to carry around. If we knew about one or two events, we might be able to accept. But if a thousand untoward things or events were shown to us at one shot, it would be a rare human being who could take that kind of load on his shoulders and still carry on living, doing his duties, with a smiling face and a good disposition.

Everything in existence has a purpose and nothing in Nature goes to waste. Everything is as it should be. But because human beings are blessed with a mind, with intelligence, with imagination, with the power to think, plan, rationalize, the power to

assess and take suitable action, we get highly worked up, about an imagined future, which is always filled with more negative events than positive ones, as a result of a mind governed by anticipatory anxiety and fear. Very few dream of perfect health or long lives, or being well provided for and well taken care of, in the future. Most of us are invariably thinking about disease, death, poverty, poor relationships and abandonment, in our old age. And all this gives rise to fear and stress. And we tend to act from this fear and try and manipulate and control everyone and everything, in order to secure our present and our future. Since events and people are not always in our control, we fail and that adds to our stress and fear, leading to helplessness and despondency.

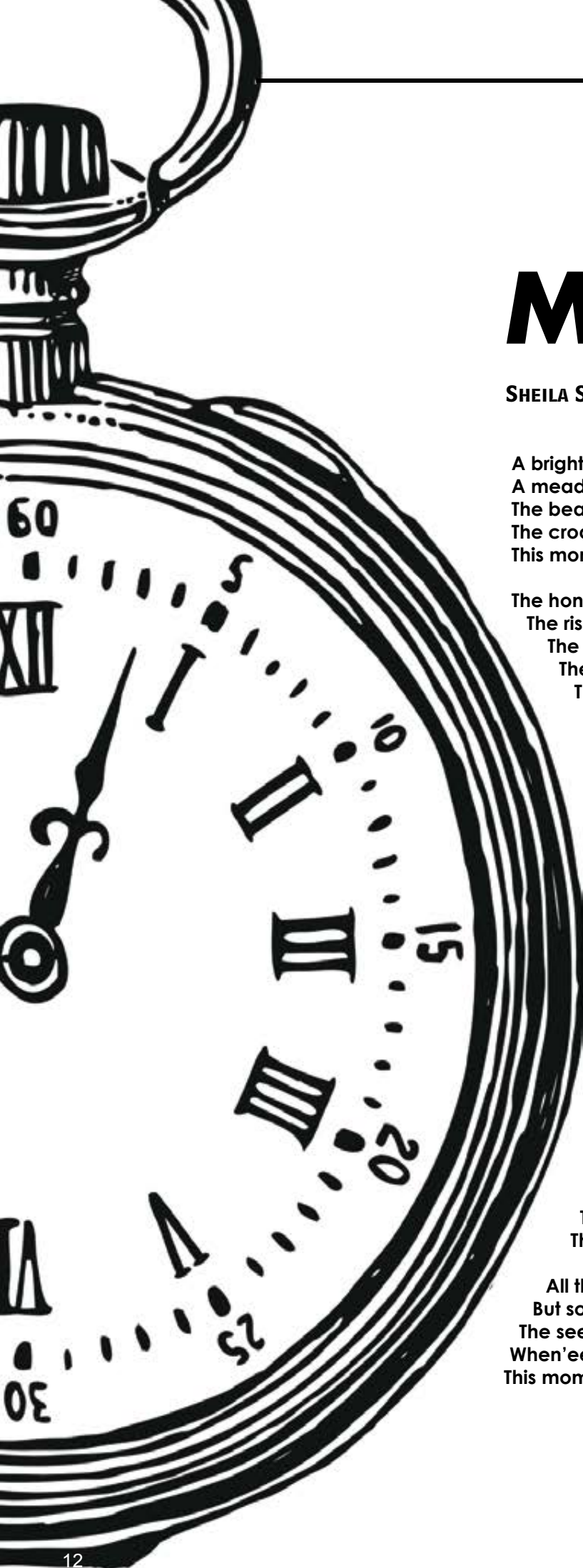
What is the way out of all this fear and distress? The only antidote for fear is faith and trust, in some higher power, some higher process, where the blueprint of our lives is already written and is unfolding, a day at a time. From our birth, we have been provided for and have arrived so far, reasonably intact and alive. Keeping trust in the same process that has brought us so far, is the only way to get rid of the sick feeling deep inside, and to live the rest of our lives with joy, peace, harmony and love.

We may not know what the future holds for us, but we do know the future is in the hands of the Lord. Let us, therefore, shift our gear, from fear to love, from anxiety to trust, and from worry to faith. Let us try and live one moment at a time. ■

The Journey from Fear to Love

Harpreet Randhawa, Regina, Sk., Canada

"Man is governed predominantly by two emotions - love or fear. If you are not acting from love, it invariably follows that you are acting out of fear."



This Moment

SHEILA SEARLE, STUDLEY, WARWICKSHIRE, UK

A bright yellow bicycle new and gleaming
A meadow of wild flowers, sunlight streaming
The beauty of the stars in darkness' embrace
The croaking of frogs in a damp green place
This moment

The honey dew moon the night breezes blowing
The rising sun with rosy sky glowing
The laughter of children blessed with God's grace
The deep etched lines on an old woman's face
This moment

The smile from a stranger, warm and sincere
An old friend's hand when trouble is near
The power of choice, the freedom of giving
The strength in an honest life worth living
This moment

The wind in my hair, the rain on the pane
The lessons I learn from loss and from gain
The diamonds of frost on winter grasses
The stillness that comes as thunderstorm passes
This moment

The scent of incense, temple bells ringing
The peace of prayer and the joy of singing
The cry of a gull over wild roaring sea
The uncomplicatedness of simplicity
This moment

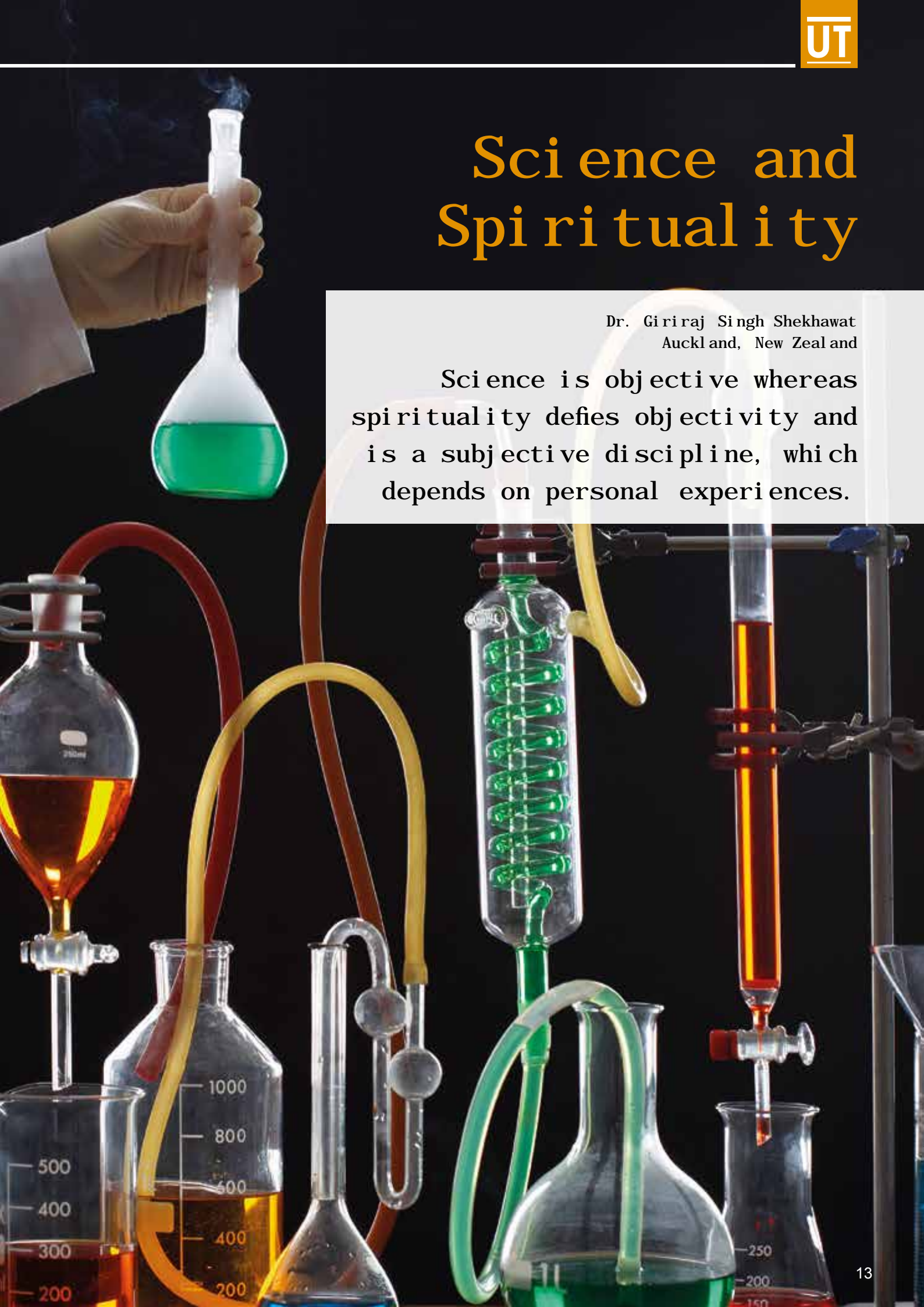
The wisdom from suffering, relief from tears
The power of love to disperse all fears
The inspiration of Prophet's words
The truth in the Old Wives Tales I have heard
This moment

All that glitters is not gold
But some things dear in my heart I hold
The seeds of joy and peace abide
When'er I value the good that hides within
This moment ■

Science and Spirituality

Dr. Giriraj Singh Shekhawat
Auckland, New Zealand

Science is objective whereas spirituality defies objectivity and is a subjective discipline, which depends on personal experiences.



Science can be measured, documented, observed, quantified and critiqued. Spirituality, on the other hand, is still a grey area. It is not as objective as science. Many aspects of it are not as measurable and as well quantified as science. In fact, compared to science, it is poorly defined.

For questions such as - What is the soul? Where exactly does it reside in the human body? Does it have a gender, shape, size, and colour? – Still require convincing answers.

Spirituality starts, where the boundaries of science come to an end.

This reminds me of a situation where I felt similar emotions and hardships as a professional audiologist. I deal with people with various forms of hearing disorders. A couple of years ago, I had my very first encounter with a patient with tinnitus, a medical condition where the sufferer has the perception of ringing, buzzing and hissing sounds in the absence of an external source¹. This means that there is no actual sound in the environment but nevertheless the sufferer can hear it in their head². It affects millions of people world-wide³ and can have devastating impact on the sufferer's quality of life.^{4,5}

As yet unfortunately, it has no cure⁶. When I saw my very first patient with tinnitus, I realized very quickly that it can be a very challenging condition, not only for the sufferer, but also for the clinician who is trying to manage it. I felt out of place to manage such patients and hence decided to get some help from an expert in the area. I got in touch with an eminent researcher from the University of Auckland, New Zealand, and later decided to do my doctoral research under his supervision about tinnitus management.

I recently submitted my doctoral thesis. The very first question which I asked myself was, did I come up with a cure for tinnitus? The answer was 'no', but now I understand tinnitus much better. After my PhD, I feel much more confident to handle patients with this condition.

Did this happen overnight for me? Again, the answer is 'no'. It was a journey of a couple of years of hard work - learning, research and appropriate guidance from my supervisor. Correct guidance was the key for me. Prior to starting my PhD, I remember working hard on my own, by doing research on the internet and using trial and error methods to manage tinnitus, but it did not help me beyond a certain point. I was lacking the expert guidance of someone who was well qualified and competent in this area. My supervisor acted as a catalyst to facilitate my learning and understanding of tinnitus. Every research article now makes totally different sense, as compared to what it used to.

So what has changed? The problem is the same, the complex disorder is the same, but I guess now I have a different insight into the same condition.

Similarly, spirituality may be a seemingly complicated subject for millions of people in this world. It may not make any sense to many people due to its subtle and complex nature. Some people try to resolve the mystery on their own with limited success.

However, I feel that it is relatively simpler and easier to understand it through the right mentor, who understands it fully. Scriptures document such people as Masters, Satgurus or Saints. The Satguru is a teacher, who can help to simplify the complex, understand it and apply it. He guides you in the right direction and bestows you with the insight to look at the same thing differently. He is one, who can provide satisfying answers to complex questions. As he is enlightened himself, he also has the potential to enlighten others.

the scientific mind cannot explain certain things because they are meant to be experienced, not explained.

So based on my personal experience, and having had the divine knowledge revealed to me by the Nirankari Baba, I can now confidently say that I know

the answers to such questions such as 'Who am I', and 'What is God'. I have learned that God is not far away, but closer than anything we can imagine.

This does not mean, however, that I have reached my destination, but that I have realised that spirituality is not as complicated as it appears to be. I now feel that it is more a journey, rather than a destination. In fact, spirituality starts, where the boundaries of science come to an end.

Sometimes the scientific mind cannot explain certain things because they are meant to be experienced, not explained. When the spiritual mentor opens our eyes, we are then able to see the eternal truth for ourselves. This eternal truth, the ever-lasting reality, may well have many explanations, but in essence it is always one and the only one.

Hence, what we need to do is connect with the omnipotent, colourless and the formless (Nirankar). For, it alone, as the reservoir of peace and stillness, can bring about the transformation within us as noble human beings. If we want our outlook to change, if we want our attributes to be positive, and if we want our lives to be meaningful, then we have to march on the path of spirituality. Our questions will have been answered. ■

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Arti Nehru, California, USA

A Spiritual Check-Up

When we want to know the state of our physical well-being, we may well get a health check-up. This entails a physical examination of our body - blood test, blood pressure, screening, weight and height. But in the case of a spiritual check-up, what do we do?

There was a swami (a holy person), who was known for having conquered his anger. One day, whilst he was sitting by a dwindling fire, a gentleman, who was cold and dank, approached him. He asked if the swami could rekindle the fire to keep both of them warm. The swami told him that there were no more embers left to ignite. The gentleman noticed a couple of sparks and asked again. He got the same reply. After some time, as he wondered aloud, whilst repositioning some of the logs to reignite the fire, he asked the swami the third time. This time, the swami raised his voice in anger and said, "Look! Haven't I already told you that the fire has gone out?" The gentleman took a step back and quietly submitted, "I was mistaken."

Yes, I can see the fire is dead, but I can also see the blazing flames rising within you!"

The story illustrates the disillusioned nature of man, who believes he has conquered his vices, but when put to the test his true colors come to the fore. Perhaps some of the checking mechanisms are:

1. *to ask myself as to how often I lose my cool*
2. *consider how easily I get upset when things don't go my way*
3. *reflect on how much time I spend worrying and complaining, and*
4. *review the extent to which I count my blessings.*

I believe spirituality benefits us, and taking time out to really connect with God pays dividends. For the deeper we travel on this inward journey, the greater peace and happiness we find. And as long as we are connected and are growing in this domain, material and temporal circumstances are less likely to shake us. Our faith encourages us to approach life with positive enthusiasm and calm acceptance, rather than the propensity for disturbance.

Being curious as to why millions are drawn to the popular practice of yoga, I recently started taking classes. Yoga is said to be great for stress relief, relaxation and health benefits. What I have learned is that spirituality is at the root of this 'remedy'. Yogic

union is the means to achieve a peaceful state of mind. It has been defined as the 'union with the divine'.

The Bhagavad Gita elaborates on this thought, *"The man who sees me in everything and everything within me will not be lost to me, nor will I ever be lost to him. He who is rooted in oneness realizes that I am in every being; wherever he goes, he remains in me. When he sees all beings as equal in suffering or in joy because they are like himself, that man has grown perfect in yoga."*

In other words, connecting with the higher power within us, helps us to maintain a state of calm, no matter what is happening on the outside. It helps us to understand the concept of oneness – the idea that at our core, we are all one. The supreme One manifests in every being and everything equally. When we start seeing God in everything, we put a stop to fighting and go with the flow of every moment. As a result, an alignment within our mind, body, and soul occurs, leading to peace and harmony.

A Chinese proverb reminds us, *"If there is light in the soul, there will be beauty in the person. If there is beauty in the person, there will be harmony in the house. If there is harmony in the house, there will be order in the nation. If there is order in the nation, there will be peace in the world."*

This peace can only come from looking inwardly, through the connection with the higher power, the stable entity within us all. The by-products of such a spiritual connection are self-awareness, love, patience, tolerance and peace.

Just as we go to a doctor's clinic for a physical check-up, we should likewise seek the company of a holy being for a spiritual check-up. This strengthens our spiritual foundation.

For us to acquire value in our lives, we must discover the value of God. Although this discovery is made within, it does require the assistance of an adept, who has perfect spiritual health. ■

"If there is light in the soul, there will be beauty in the person. If there is beauty in the person, there will be harmony in the house. If there is harmony in the house, there will be order in the nation. If there is order in the nation, there will be peace in the world."





simplify

Julie Horsley, Solihull, UK

So much of modern life breaks things down into component parts
Integrated lives rather than fragmented existences create a balance

Mind, body and soul aligned, the three dimensions benevolent in support of one another

Pulled off course we sometimes lose focus

Life well rounded is supple though, it flexes, finds direction

Inner balance, rhythm, harmony and complementary contrasts

Feelings, emotions and passions provide the compass bearings that guide us

Yet too the magnetic energy that drives us fuels our thoughts and actions. ■

STRONG-POWER LIFE?

Dr. Sumeet Bassan, West Midlands, UK

Spirituality, throughout the ages, has focused on the essential nature of the soul, the very energy that gives life to our physical form. Such a soul is connected to every other soul. The sea of souls, much like the droplets of water seen as the ocean, is indeed the 'super-soul' that I refer to as God.

The physical being - body and mind - is the vessel in which cognition takes place. This substance that makes up the human body, like the rest of creation, is not eternal. It is temporal. So what matters, is not the material but that which is non-material – something that is always true, in a never-ending *formless form*.

Thus we should ask ourselves: should the emphasis, in the words of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, be on the spiritual or the physical? Are we indeed spiritual beings having a physical experience, or are we physical beings that need to be spiritual?

The physical form and the spirit are both important. Although detaching ourselves from the physical form and attaching ourselves to the non-physical, is seen as a fundamental philosophy of spirituality, it does not mean that our human body is of no value. The cognition to lead to self-realisation, the physical form – the vehicle granted to us through human birth - is imperative. After all, it is only by taking the form of this human body, regarded as the most superior form on this earth, can we have the ability to connect to the formless God (Nirankar).

This aim of self-realisation and being spiritual is not the final destination, but the beginning of a new journey. Those walking the path of spirituality, recognise that their faith and belief does not necessarily alter their physical experience on Earth, nor does it arrest the normal process of aging. They acknowledge that life continues to be a series of events, which carry the potential for sorrow and joy, pleasure and pain. The ups and downs of physical existence, still remain.

However, what is different is the manner in which the realised person copes with adverse situations. Spirituality, the faith in the higher universal force, allows us to detach ourselves from our pride and ego, and all that is untrue. It allows us to deal with life's circumstances without anger and resentment, and rather with acceptance and compassion. It carries the heavy burden, the baggage we don't want, but can't help holding on to, and leaves us with a feeling of contentment and happiness. It takes down the barriers with which we see different colours, religions and nationalities, and shows us a mirror in which we can see our real selves. It helps us to surrender and become peaceful.

Max Lucado describes it as a spiritual heart – God's heart that beats within the soul, replacing the temporal and the corporeal. If a stethoscope were to be placed on the chest, it is the heart of God that would be heard. How effective is this change of heart?

The change of heart or our real health is most important. This is why it is said that health is wealth. When health deteriorates, we question all our achievements and all that we hold as being valuable. Many medical studies have been done on the major causes of illness and death, such as heart conditions, diabetes, cancer, immuno-deficient conditions and mental illness. Although the causes of these conditions are often manifold, there is one factor that is common in all - stress.

When you feel part of a greater whole, you realize that you aren't responsible for everything that happens in life.

Stress, mild or otherwise, affects both the body and mind, and is something we deal with on a daily basis. This can be triggered by trivial, everyday situations, ranging from running late for work to major life incidents such as the inevitable loss of a loved one.

Psychologically, we have all experienced how we feel under stress. It tends to hang over us, and if we allow it, it can affect every other aspect of our day. It affects our decisions, our reactions and our peaceful well-being. It can cause insomnia, anxiety and hostility. Studies have shown that it also increases our chance of suffering from depression and other mental illnesses.

Physiologically, stress has been proven to increase blood pressure, resulting in a higher chance of heart disease and stroke. Studies have proven that stress reduces the efficacy of our immune system and functioning of our organs, lowering our resistance to diseases. Research has also shown that regular spiritual practitioners manage pain better and even live longer.

Not managing stress positively, can erode our focus and lead us to neglect ourselves. It has been proven that stress can even make us dependent on alcohol, smoking or other stimulants. It affects our social harmony too.

When it comes to the acceptance of the will of God, the physical ailments may still remain, but our mental state – an important source of strength – can help us to fight the feelings of helplessness and restore meaning and order in our lives. It provides a sense of purpose and a rationale for living.

In a poll of those who were dying, it was cited that spirituality provided a lot of comfort due to the belief that they would be in the 'lap of God', and that death would not be the end, but a mere passage. Spiritual commitment has also been shown to aid recovery from illness and surgery with higher levels of self-esteem, less anxiety and fewer health worries.

In general, people who do not worry, have better health outcomes. When you feel part of a greater whole, you realize that you aren't responsible for

This aim of self-realisation and being spiritual is not the final destination, but the beginning of a new journey.

everything that happens in life. You can share the burden of tough times as well as show gratitude to the joy of life's blessings with those around you.

So although we may not be able to eradicate stressful situations we can equip ourselves to manage them positively. The impact of spirituality on your mind, your body and your soul can have a positive outcome on life.

This is so because we do not live in isolation. We may be surrounded by our family, our colleagues, and our friends. We may also come across strangers, in the daily course of life. Whether these encounters are positive or negative, they all have an impact on our life. They may be the cause of a stressful situation or the giver of joy and peacefulness.

If you are involved in a disagreement, you may feel enraged or angry which in turn increases your stress levels. If you meet eyes with a happy passer-by, he may share a smile with you, making you happy and more positive too. Your sense of wellness, or illness, can be impacted by what is going on around you, and the company you keep.

Likewise, your actions and your co-existence with them have an effect on all. You have that ability to make someone smile or cry, and to make someone more peaceful or more stressed. You have the ability to show love or hate. Your actions impact not just your own body, mind and soul, but also those of others.

With the benefit of self-realisation comes the understanding that we are all droplets of the same ocean. We have all come from the Almighty, the source of all life. And we shall all eventually return to it.

Hence, our physical time on earth is so invaluable that it should be firmly anchored in the spiritual, and not wasted merely on material pursuits. ■



For the good of all

For the good of all
and when I hear Your call let me not slip
on the slippery slope
and fall to deaf ears which will only give way to years upon years
and centuries upon centuries to wait for an escape
through a window of opportunity.

The design and evolution of solar systems abound
the revolutions and histories
and imaginations all around are temporary and fleeting
including the fossils that have been found
are imaginary into believing that they hold the key
to set free
the one true meaning of how I came here and where I will be.

But the righteous and noble hand of the Giver of good deeds
so splendid in spirits
and free of all impurities lends all but a canvas
on which I must paint
ever so carefully
that portrait of a saint with every action
and the good and ill will of mine sketching as a stroke of the brush
and moving under the pressure of time.

For the good of all
and when I hear Your call let me heed to Your order on the map of time
so that I may never again fall on the slippery slope
and wander
from sunset or sunrise. ■

Raman Chauhan, Victoria, British Columbia, Canada



inspiring acts

Sangeeta Tutt, Walsall, UK

Just as teachers inspire their students, parents hope to inspire their children. Outside our family and professional roles, inspiration is a welcome guest that can gently push us towards our hidden potential.

We tend to be impressed by acts that we think are beyond our capabilities or imagination. Take Fauja Singh, the world's oldest marathon runner for example. He was born with a defect that prevented him from walking until the age of five. But at the grand age of 100, he took part in the London marathon! Or look at Britain's youngest degree student, a 14 year old Wajih Ahmed, who is no less phenomenal.

We are inspired by acts that are within our reach and capability. The acts that impress us are the ones that we like to exhibit for they give us the courage and confidence to do the same.

Although we're all connected, each one of us is on an individual journey. Some of us make efforts to keep the company of those who motivate us, and some live their lives in a natural flow, happy to learn from whatever comes their way. We may extend this process to two broad classes of people - those who reach out to increase their potential, and others

who let life take it's own course.

I noticed him directing others, one at a time, disentangling the mess.

In a recent trip to India, I sat stuck in a huge traffic jam on the way back from the Bazaar. The cross-road lacked traffic lights, and was even without a roundabout. It had turned into a multi-way junction of madness! Cars, autos, rickshaws, trucks, scooters and animals were facing each other head on, chaotically trying to make their own way out in total disregard of the traffic rules. The horns honked wildly and the bells rang violently, determined to get to the other side of the junction any which way. The lack of patience, cries of bells and the roar of horns told me that I was going to be stuck there for hours. No one was willing to give way.

Some minutes later, a polite man approached a bus driver and asked him as to which direction he was moving. Then he spoke to the other drivers, rickshaws and cyclists around our car. Without causing any annoyance, the stranger managed to persuade others to move back slightly, or to stay put, whilst he guided us through the middle of the chaos, onto our destination. Looking through the back window, I noticed him directing others, one at a time, disentangling the mess.

I asked our driver if the stranger was a non-uniformed police man or traffic controller. He smiled and said, 'no'. I then asked the driver whether he knew him. The driver did not. So who was he? The driver explained that he was just another driver stuck in the jam, who took the initiative to help solve the situation.

The stranger made efforts to assist others, knowing that it would benefit him too. Out of all of those drivers and cyclists thinking about themselves and focussed on their own path, the stranger stood out. I was impressed and moved by his act. Thinking outside of the box and putting others before you, could equally benefit you in the long run. In England, where the roads are dotted with traffic lights, cameras and islands, I couldn't imagine such a situation. However, if there were a situation where I needed to think about others first, I hope that I would be genuinely able to assist, without any desire for praise. I'd hope to be a solution to a problem, rather than adding to it.

If we were all to think in this simple way, rather than be guided by selfishness, many a chaotic situation could be prevented.

The acts that impress us are the ones that we like to exhibit for they give us the courage and confidence to do the same.■



Nirankari Friends

Dr. Regina Clarke, USA

I have always observed that attendance in a church, in a synagogue, in a retreat, at a sangat, or any other spiritual congregation, is not automatically a sign of compassion and awareness. People are people wherever one finds them, in any nation or community, and their degree of godliness and heart is not determined by what they attend, or how often, but by what they do for themselves, for humanity, and for this planet.

We meet people, who inspire us and those who do not. But the fact is, as the 13th-century poet Rumi said, and so many others before and since, we are always meeting ourselves wherever we go. Everyone we meet is a teacher sent to us by the Universe, by our common Source.

I am a practicing Christian and believe in the Christos energy, and the consciousness evolution happening on this planet, described in part by healers and thinkers. I am also forever affected and shaped by the experiences in every realm I touch, and that touches me. Thus, in this short piece, I thank

Universal Target Journal for giving me the opportunity to describe the phenomenal experience I have had with some Nirankaris over the last thirty years.

I want to describe those who have brought me not only friendship and happiness, but awareness and revelation that has fed my soul because of who they are. I am better for the experience of knowing them.

It goes without saying that the several times I have met with Baba Hardev Singh Ji Maharaj (the Nirankari Baba) and Mataji, and with his father before him, the precious Baba Gurbachan

Singh Ji, the experiences have been extraordinary and an immense privilege. The work done now by the Nirankari Baba and Mata Ji is evident for all to see. His heart and hers, are as wide, and wider than time and space.

It is the Nirankaris (those who subscribe to the teachings of the Nirankari Baba) I have met, who have absorbed that very same beauty of spirit of which I speak now. To them I owe a debt not only of gratitude, but of joy.

Most of all, I must describe one, who remained and remains a link

across the years, finding me no matter where I moved, which I did often, offering a loyalty of mutual friendship and communication. This was and is Joginder Singh, the former editor of the Sant Nirankari Journal, whose outlook of absolute trust and integrity was a beacon for many, not just me. How, I never really figured out — especially in the days before computers, for we first became associated in the late 70s — he would find my newest address and send a request for an article for the journal! From India! Sometimes even my best friend didn't know where I was, yet Joginder Singh would manage to find me. His writing and gentle, elegant, intellectual, and absolute purity of intent resonated with how I saw the world.

India is far away. I have never been there. He and I have met only by correspondence and much later, via email and Skype, yet I consider him one of the most valued friendships I have had on this earth. It is possible I have never encountered someone so free of judgment of others, so invested in receiving the truth of the people he meets and deals with, instead of the facade. I would say, if someone asked me, that this good man lives without ego, without pretense, without a need for hierarchy or rank or privilege, but instead, with above all else, an open heart. From the late 70s until now we have sustained a wonderful contact. How I treasured in the early years seeing a letter in my mailbox with the stamps from India on the envelope - a far away place brought close.

Joginder Singh would ask me for articles, for the Journal, in general, and sometimes on specific themes, or to celebrate occasions. It was always an honor to get his requests, and a delight to write for Sant Nirankari. This association continued through my many moves for both work and personal reasons, from the Northeast U.S. to California, to Texas, to the U.K., and now back in the U.S. It has been a joyful voyage of friendship. He has sent me so many books from the Sant Nirankari Mandal or of his own writing, most recently the blessing of 'This or That'. I feel as if in talking or writing to him or hearing and seeing his replies that I have had time with a very special person, and consider this a gift of God.

*In living an authentic life,
we have to speak the truth.
It is in encounters with true
friends we learn and grow
and challenge what is old
and does not serve us.*

I will skip around a bit, because there are people met recently I feel the impulse to mention next. These are Sunil and Lakshmi Sethi and Vikas Vick. I met them in the U.K. in March of 2011. I will never forget this young man sitting down beside me at a long table at the Bhawan (Centre for Oneness) and handing me a book, a present, 'Tuesdays with Morrie' - a beautiful American tale of compassion and humor - and telling me he has long been interested in talking with me. Through him I met his lovely wife Lakshmi, and then one of the most direct and honest people ever, a guy named Vikas. These people welcomed me so completely, and took me to places I will never forget - Vikas as the undaunted driver throughout (to me being able to drive on the left side of the road seemed a miracle and he did it perfectly!), to a blue lagoon, to the ocean in Swanage in Dorset, and not the least, welcomed me into their home in Swindon even though I had to bring my eclectic parrot Harry with me in his portable cage! I have many pictures of those times, and value them so much, words are difficult. They had no agenda in meeting me, were not interested in persuading me to any point of view, or wanted anything but the joy of all of us being able to spend time together. The three of them are among the most open and welcoming of people. There are others I met in the UK who are very special. It was a joy to have those memories.

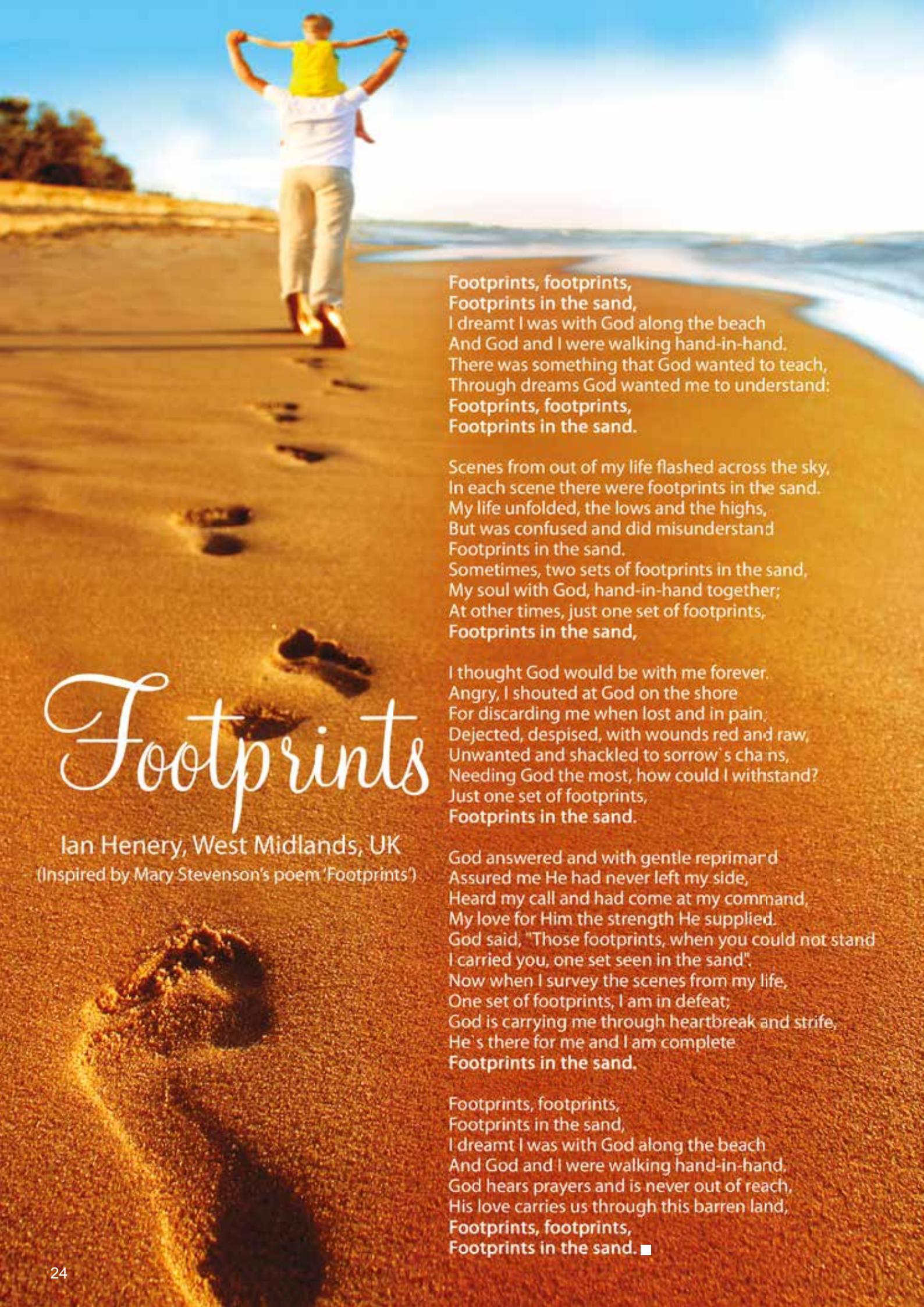
Now let me return a brief moment to northern California in 1988, where for a time I attended Sangat, but since they were not usually held in English, I did not continue, after a while. I refer to someone I knew at the time as Mr. Vijh. We would meet at his home for Sangat. Once, I even had the happiness of meeting Baba Ji and Mata Ji there on a hot summer's day, and Mr. Vijh made it possible for

me to talk with them while they had their lunch in a room Mr. Vijh had set aside. Someday I will write about that meeting, in that cool, shaded room that Mr. Vijh gave to us, for it is one of the turning points in my life. So I will never forget this gracious northern California man and his wife and daughters who all greeted me as if I were a part of their family. Now he is Dev Raj Vijh, but what I remember from back then is how he would always use English if I was at Sangat so I could understand the lesson. He was such a blessing to everyone who crossed his path then, and I know, to everyone who crosses his path now.

Finally, there is one who rounds out my journey in the Nirankari world in a deep and lasting way - Aruna Yadav. She arrived in the U.K. from Vishakhapatnam in the state of Andhra Pradesh in India the day before I was leaving to return to America in August of 2011. We had corresponded for over two years prior, thanks to the introduction by Joginder Singh Ji. For us to actually meet in person was simply beyond words, and Vikas ji arranged that I could greet her at the airport itself by driving me and Sunil and Lakshmi there in the nick of time. Such a surprise for Aruna ji! I was able to meet her dear husband Chandra, as well. Aruna is someone whose correspondence has fed my mind as well as my spirit, and I have told her that in cosmic terms we must be related, just born on different continents and a few decades apart.

Life presents us with many events and our path can change on a dime. Our work for God and in God is to know this and yet always know, too, that we are always, always, and always made of pure joy in God's divine image.

In living an authentic life, we have to speak the truth. It is in encounters with true friends we learn and grow and challenge what is old and does not serve us. It is also how we measure our vibration, the frequency with which we exist on this precious earth, by the friends we keep. For the friends I have kept, described herein, I have only gratitude. ■



Footprints, footprints,
Footprints in the sand,
I dreamt I was with God along the beach
And God and I were walking hand-in-hand.
There was something that God wanted to teach,
Through dreams God wanted me to understand:
Footprints, footprints,
Footprints in the sand.

Scenes from out of my life flashed across the sky,
In each scene there were footprints in the sand.
My life unfolded, the lows and the highs,
But was confused and did misunderstand
Footprints in the sand.
Sometimes, two sets of footprints in the sand,
My soul with God, hand-in-hand together;
At other times, just one set of footprints,
Footprints in the sand,

I thought God would be with me forever.
Angry, I shouted at God on the shore
For discarding me when lost and in pain;
Dejected, despised, with wounds red and raw,
Unwanted and shackled to sorrow's chains,
Needing God the most, how could I withstand?
Just one set of footprints,
Footprints in the sand.

God answered and with gentle reprimand
Assured me He had never left my side,
Heard my call and had come at my command,
My love for Him the strength He supplied.
God said, "Those footprints, when you could not stand
I carried you, one set seen in the sand".
Now when I survey the scenes from my life,
One set of footprints, I am in defeat;
God is carrying me through heartbreak and strife,
He's there for me and I am complete
Footprints in the sand.

Footprints, footprints,
Footprints in the sand,
I dreamt I was with God along the beach
And God and I were walking hand-in-hand.
God hears prayers and is never out of reach,
His love carries us through this barren land,
Footprints, footprints,
Footprints in the sand. ■

Footprints

Ian Henery, West Midlands, UK

(Inspired by Mary Stevenson's poem 'Footprints')



There's no-thing that can stop a person
From seeking to know one's higher self.
There's no-thing in this world, better
Than keeping one's spiritual wealth.

I do not claim to be a saint,
And I do not claim to be off the rails
The middle path seems best for me
It's the way that never fails.

I like myself enough, to move on
When we share ourselves with others
Not all are ready, truth be told,
And not all are genuine lovers.

Still, there's hope for the seeking soul
The soul doesn't need to wait
It trusts in spirit enough, not to say,
I give up, it's too late.

We have a chance, to follow our hearts
To become an asset to each other
But a heart, unformed leads to plunder
I say this as a brother.

**Don't sell your emotions.
Don't sell your soul.**

Anyone who has value, will one-day,
Surely make you whole. ■

Don't SELL



Sunny Mehta,
Wolverhampton, UK

Science & Spirituality

.....
George Khambe, Iwer, UK

Natural Processes

Have you ever wondered why things in nature unfold the way they do? Often we might just state this as being a property of 'time', but time as an entity represents vastly different things to different people. To most of us it might represent the innate process of 'evolution'; to the distraught it may be the 'healer'; whilst for the entrepreneur famously, 'time is money'! Such subjective perspectives have inadvertently become ground rules for our global society, yet time as a concept in itself is significantly more complex to grasp and something that the thinkers and philosophers of both past and present continue to grapple with. Is time an absolute property of our universe? Why does it appear to move forwards? When did the clock actually start ticking? We need to consider these questions along with the other more obvious ones if we really want to understand the nature of the world around us...

In the simplest sense we might consider 'time as the measure of movement', from which the Aristotelian view would imply that things would simply not exist without it. In this view the existence of any object requires a point in time where it is created, and creation necessitates a process of change from one embryonic state to another more evolved state. Such change requires a transition or 'motion' in our thoughts, feelings, or actions, and this process of evolution ultimately requires time.

Time then, is critical to our existence. In fact, the universe as we see it today would not exist, but if somehow it did come into being, it would be completely static – a mere snapshot of some state, only to disappear as quickly as it had appeared since there would be no means for defining the lifetime of the snapshot. Nobody would know that the universe had existed because there would be

no time for our thoughts on such matter to exist, let alone develop. Without thoughts there would be no consciousness present in the universe, and one could argue whether human beings would really be human beings at all. Events would just coalesce to an indistinguishable clump and even that wouldn't exist because there'd be no time or concept by which to define it. Of course this sorry state of affairs has more subtlety than presented here, but whichever way you look at it, the consequences of a universe without time, leads us into an almost unimaginable predicament.

It comes as no surprise that many branches of Science have therefore revealed a different side to this situation based

on their line of inquiry. Einstein's theories of Relativity have shown us that time and space are inextricably linked as something coined 'Space-Time' with quite unusual outcomes in respect of how our physical universe behaves. Thermodynamics provides explanations for the nature and flow of energy in our Universe, whilst also causing some complications for the Cosmological model of creation, which suggests that time has arisen as a consequence of the Big-Bang, and had no meaning prior to this point. As you would expect, newer elaborations in Quantum Physics provide another lens, which raises yet more questions whilst attempting to provide answers to others. For this conversation I would like consider one aspect that is often taken for granted but has particular significance for all of us: the direction of time.

As human beings we experience what appears to be a very natural and fundamental property of time - its direction, or the 'arrow of time' as it popularly known. One would find many a science-fiction fanatic talking eccentrically about time travel, teleportation, and other ways to warp time. Indeed, there are interpretations of the New Age Science, which would not rule out the possibility that we can move back and forth in time. Without indulging in these arguments, let us instead consider the more established conclusions of Thermodynamics, which concerns itself with flow of energy in particular systems, more strictly the concept of 'entropy'.

There are a number of representations of the arrow of time as defined by branches of Science, but Thermodynamics is one that helps us to more readily answer the question as to why some processes are more natural than others. For example why is it that a glass cup may shatter into pieces after having fallen from a tabletop, but the reverse would be seemingly impossible? What would we conclude if our grandparents got younger and fitter whilst we grew up? Such a world would be far from normal.

Luckily this experienced reality arises from the predictions of Thermodynamics and the second law which (putting subtleties aside) tells us that for anything to happen, energy must flow or change from an initially higher state of concentration

(statistical 'order') to a lower state of concentration (statistical 'disorder') until we reach a balanced or 'equilibrium' state. A conclusion we might draw from such work is that there is an underlying direction to natural processes and events that take place in the universe, aligned to the experience of forward evolution in time, and we as human beings are also included in this.

Considering this, it seems the conclusions of modern day Science are not too dissimilar to the outlooks espoused by philosophically and spiritually inspired people. We just need to be willing to open our minds to the spirit of what they are saying.

'Everything flows and nothing stays'
Heraclitus (c.540 – c.480 BC).

My belief is that we as human beings must also appreciate and apply this natural order of flow, to ourselves. Often we find that we are 'stuck in a situation' and cannot find a way forward, which in itself becomes a problem for us at all levels - emotionally, physically and spiritually. If the entire Universe is in a state of flow then for us to work against that would surely result in complications, in some way or form. Our personal journey at each of these levels of existence must have the right focus, otherwise we might be likened to a ship that sails into a headwind and against the current. Not only must we

learn to flow, but flow in the right direction.

Consider two separate points in space. They represent two distinct entities that are in no way related to each other apart from their general shape. But suppose we draw a line from one to the other. The separate points have now become connected and together (along with many other similar points). They represent a line, but nothing more. Now suppose that an arrowhead is placed one end. Instantaneously each of the individual points which make up the line, including the line itself, has gained perspective. Mathematically it represents a 'vector'. The vector is distinguishable from all others not simply because of its length or weight, but because of what it fundamentally represents – both magnitude and direction – a guide to all those who accept it.

This very trivial example is analogous in some small way to our own lives. It seems that we first considered ourselves as distinct and separate to everything else. Our subtle ego drives us to 'look after number one', whilst ignoring the relevance of other entities in our lives. Coming into the presence

of a Spiritually Enlightened Sage, a Satguru, however, changes all of that. In an elevated state of Awareness, we realise that we are indeed all intimately connected to each other and with this vast universe, through a unifying field, which we may refer to as a Formless Presence - Nirankar. Now though, we must take that extra leap and realise our role in this connectivity. Until then, we are without real purpose in our lives and in search of meaning.

Do not take this point lightly. By observing our environment, it's plain to see that there are vastly different attitudes to be found in society at large. There are attitudes which lead people to dwell in the past, which obstructs the process of moving forwards. Such people stagnate in their lives, because they are either too depressed, disheartened, or just resting on their laurels. Other approaches to life are confused, and fail to provide any answers regarding what to do. People who indulge in such ambivalence realise the necessity of moving forward in some direction but they fail to progress, perhaps as a consequence of their lack of clarity, too much fear or lack of strength to make the first move. At the other end of the spectrum we encounter individuals who are unable to devote to one path, always heading off in random directions but never being able to commit long enough to see things through. These, I believe, are states that each of us will be familiar with, given we may have passed through them at one stage or other.

Recognising these difficulties to be part and parcel of life, I believe the aspirational state is one of Enlightenment. This may be defined as being completely identified with our true self, from which arises wisdom of purpose. With such focus one is able to filter from his past that which is relevant and meaningful, with the resolve to look forward as to what indeed can be achieved.

To make the most of life we must maximise the experience – that means both enjoying our time but also remaining aware of our purpose. It is a journey that unfolds for all of us, in time... ■



Prayers to You

**Dr. Bobby Sura,
Solihull, UK**



A rich man sat cross-legged on the floor, muttering words under his breath. His eyes were closed, palms touching and fingers, outstretched. Whilst in his meditative state, the Almighty Lord tuned into his words and focused on his underlying sentiments. The man asked for a great many things – prosperity, ownership and land that stretched far and wide. The Lord sat and pondered, aware that the man already had more than his small hands could hold or carry. Nevertheless, in a gesture of good will, the Lord channeled strength and energy in the man's direction:

'My son, take motivation from me to work hard, and reap all the rewards that you so keenly desire. More importantly, may your heart grow so that it is large enough to contain your dreams. May your wishes be fulfilled'.

Walking along a busy shopping lane, as the street lamps began to flicker and glow, a young lady paused to look around. She gazed longingly at the families, couples and friends who seemed to skip and laugh around her. The sparkle in their eyes conveyed a security and joy, which she had never known. People

had approached her, with offers of friendship over the years, but she had nervously kept her distance. Having lived through a violent marriage and insecurity, lack of acceptance had overwhelmed her sense of self. Deep within she longed for rest from fear and emotional loneliness, and the Lord had heard every unspoken word:

'My daughter, take courage from me, with which to open up to the love and kindness that still exists in the world. May you attract sincere company, and rediscover the trust you have lost in humankind. May happiness and peace shower upon you'.

A teenager sat expressionless in his class, staring blankly at the board before him. The symbols etched upon it once captivated his imagination, but they no longer held rhyme or reason. He now searched for answers to more pressing questions within himself. Prior to the sudden loss of his father, he had been an exemplary student – bright and ambitious. As a tear welled up in his eye and rolled down his delicate cheek, the Lord understood the message it carried. With a loving sigh and compassionate eye, the Lord whispered:

'Oh little child of mine, take solace and hope from me, so that grief does not overwhelm you. I cannot yet explain to you the reasons for life and death, or the comings and goings of sorrow. Do not be blinded to the possibilities still left around you. May your sadness never stifle your hope and potential'.

A convicted man ran his pen over the last date in his calendar. Waiting patiently for the warden to open the door to his cell for the final time, his mind transported him to places he had been to before, where he had caused great pain and suffering

without reservation or thought. Much older now, and softer of spirit, his heart wept and his soul begged with sincerity for the repentance of his sins. If only he could see, he would have noticed the Lord standing beside him, with open arms and a forgiving smile:

'My once misguided son, take new life from me for your remaining years. Use this gift well, for your past is a heavy burden on your soul. May you use your time wisely, to give back all the happiness that you once took away from the world'.

A little girl lay in bed, looking out of her window at the stars and skies that stretched out upon the vast canvass above. Though she knew not of the unending magnitude of the cosmos, she intuitively felt part of something much bigger than her imagination could comprehend. As she nodded off to sleep, the Lord took from her tiny hand a crumpled piece of paper. Reading the words, untidy and unformed in places, he wondered how someone so small could have so many needs. But, it soon became apparent the girl had not made a single wish for herself. She had asked for her friends, her brothers and sisters. She had asked for her parents and neighbors. She had wished for meals for the starving, blankets for the cold and homes for those who had nowhere to lay their head at night. And the Lord smiled, as he had never smiled before;

'My child – my sweet, sweet child, rarely do I hear such selfless prayers. Your heart is so pure and open, that I readily take residence within it. Yours is the prayer that shines upon the world tonight, sprinkling seeds of faith and hope. May these seeds take root within the hearts and minds of men, so that giving becomes more natural than taking, and a sharing spirit governs all that passes on Earth'. ■

Quality of Life



Meenakshi Kanda, Yorkshire, UK

There are differing views on 'quality of life'. For some, it amounts to the accumulation of material things, and for others, it is the acquisition of some specific assets. However, is there any place for spirituality? If so, where does it fit in?

There is a common notion that material wealth is the harbinger of joy in life. However, this notion has proved to be misconceived, time and time again. Yet, ironically mankind clings to it relentlessly.

Many of us will have experienced the agonising feeling of having lost something of value. The feeling of hurt, pain and negativity lingers on. The joy of amassing more and more wealth ceases to be conducive to the quality of life and leaves a huge void. Its duration is at best, short term and fleeting. To perpetuate this happiness, we have to look to spirituality.

Through his work on the betterment of man, the Nirankari Baba has

repeatedly stressed upon the importance of paying attention to the wise words of the enlightened spiritual personages, who imbibed good values and mores into their lives. Focussing on them enhances the quality of life.

Is there any place for spirituality? Where does it fit in?

Regardless of who we are, we all have an opportunity to make the most of our lives. We have an open access to the teachings of the past and present grand teachers. They tell us that it is not about the number of years in our life, but the life in our years that matters.

Spirituality is all about being able to distinguish between the perishable and the imperishable, and the attachment to the immortal spirit (Nirankar) within and without. For the

air we breathe, the water we drink and the land we inhabit are essential elements for the quality of life, but more importantly they are reflections of the majesty of our Creator. They are to be utilized in a detached manner.

Those who form a direct relationship with Nirankar acknowledge that both the material and the spiritual make up the enduring quality of life. Without this relationship, we can easily become victims to vices that have agelessly bedevilled the human race. With this relationship, however, we can assail the travails of life with grace. Then the cherished virtues like love, respect, humility and humanity effortlessly become our habits.

The upshot is that we cannot do without material things, and that spiritual advancement is equally, if not more so, needed to sustain human happiness and a qualitative, peaceful co-existence. ■



Spiritual Well Being

Akanksha Mehla, Toronto, Canada

The phrase 'the whole is greater than the sum of its parts' is the premise of health and wellness. Shamans, sages and healers of all cultures agree that a human 'whole' may be subdivided into four parts; the mind, body, spirit and emotions. Today we have become so focused on the body and its physical aspects that our mental and spiritual wellbeing has taken a back seat.

Often when going through a less than favorable situation we victimize ourselves. It seems this is more likely, when we see ourselves to be human beings having some spiritual experiences as we move through life. In this state of awareness, we may feel negatively in situations that are not our first preference – perhaps as far as feeling punished or abandoned. Yet simply by reversing our thought process and seeing ourselves as spiritual beings having a human experience, we realize the world is fleeting in nature, and become more open to the spectrum of experiences – the seemingly good, bad and ugly.

Spiritual wellbeing plays an integral role in health at all levels – cognitive, emotional and physical. Scientists are beginning to see that spirituality is as important for health, as nutrition and exercise. But what does it mean to be spiritual?

Deconstructing the word, we see 'spirit' embedded within it. Interestingly, we each have spirit embedded within us! Thus to be spiritual means to be of the spirit – to be your true self. But how do you be YOU?

We know that a healthy lifestyle requires the intake of certain macronutrients, vitamins and minerals, which ensure proper growth of our bodies. These nutrients power and energize the cells of our bodies, so that they can carry out their necessary functions, within the organs and tissues where they reside.

This is where spirituality, in its full essence, comes into play. Spirituality helps us experience the self. Having developed a connection with the self, a natural resonance with our surroundings come about. We feel at ease, and at one. Furthermore, through contemplation upon the self, and the oneness of the universe, deep calm sets in. Biologically, it has been linked to the release of endorphins within the body, which are natural pain killers and mood enhancers. These have the effect of reducing stress, anxiety and discomfort. Cognitively, spiritual reflection engenders a hopeful and optimistic belief system, which has the capability of healing not just our physical ailments, but also our social and emotional ones. Hope and faith combine to cleanse the mind of all negativity, and allows us to radiate positivity.

We know that a healthy lifestyle requires the intake of certain macronutrients, vitamins and minerals, which ensure proper growth of our bodies. These nutrients power and energize the cells of our bodies, so that they can carry out their necessary functions, within the organs and tissues where they reside. But what about the soul? What can we do to feed the soul? Just as an individual with a vitamin deficiency is given supplements, the soul must also be given supplements - vitamin M, and vitamin P among others; M for mindfulness and meditation and P for positivity. Just as exercising and maintaining a healthy diet allows us to be physically fit, spirituality allows us to maintain a relationship with the self, which helps us to keep our soul fit.

With a growing population of 7 billion, isn't it ironic that loneliness is on the increase?

By awakening to the true nature of the self we free ourselves from the bondages of the fears and anxiety that plague us. We are able to discover an inner peace independent of worldly circumstance. By doing so, we become less selfish, less needy of others' approval, and less focused on collecting worldly possessions. Instead we become happier, healthier and more loving people all of which resonates in our divine aura.

Unfortunately seldom are these traits displayed regularly. Science classifies us as a mammalian species putting us in the same category as lions and bears, and rightly so because in our Darwinian society it seems humanity and altruism has faded away.

The virus affecting the world is indifference – just how numb we are becoming to the suffering of others. The only cure lies in nurturing unconditional, selfless love. With a growing population of 7 billion, isn't it ironic that loneliness is on the increase? At times like this, basic human values such as patience, compassion and humility act as fruit and vegetables for a healthy soul. By embodying these traits we are able to build harmonious relations with all and begin to bridge the divisions that are derailing our social order.

Compassion is a message people of all traditions thirst deeply to hear and in our cruel, competitive world it is easy to lose sight of such a message. We forget that we must work very hard to treat each other with respect, love, and patience. In a world where the loudest voice seems to win, and competition heats the surroundings, we long for a breeze of hope and love. We'll have to turn to Spirituality if we want the hydration that will keep us fresh, awake and alert. It is Spirituality that provides us with a clear medium to develop our mindfulness and presence, by forging a connection with the whole. ■



TRANSFORMING ANGER!

Nitya Tarneja, Rochester, New York



I was on house arrest. No, literally. I couldn't leave my apartment even if I wanted to. With over a foot of snow that had fallen in the last 8 hours and extreme temperatures, I had no choice but to entertain myself with the few options that I had.

I was killing time going through TED talks, a set of conferences led by ordinary people like you and me, but with a passion for something. That passion can be anything: a certain technology, a scientific discovery or simply an idea. Hence, it flaunts the tagline "...ideas worth spreading." I browsed through several categories hoping that something would catch my attention. Come on TED, humor me already, was what I was thinking to myself. I finally saw a thumbnail and found myself drawn to it's title: "Fighting with non-violence" by Scilla Elworthy. Intrigued, I settled for this, and sat back to watch the video.

When I think of non-violence, I automatically tag Gandhi and Nelson Mandela to the idea. And this particular conference didn't fail to mention the two either. As a society, we've idolized these figures so much that it no longer interests or excites us. However, what drew me to her argument were the issues that are still deep-rooted within me. And it's a safe assumption that those issues impact the majority of the human population. She talked about fear, anger, oppression, peace and courage.

what we once regarded as safe places, no longer hold their sense of security. What does that tell us about the state of the society that we live in?

She opened the discussion by simply asking, how would we react to violence? Would we fight back? Would we give in? Then she continued by saying that force against force doesn't work. Although we may not personally face violence in our day-to-day lives, there are many people who are still dealing with the monstrosities of ethnic, political and economic conflicts. The

disagreements eventually boil over, such that bloodshed and violence seem inevitable. Examples include Tunisia, Egypt, and most recently, Ukraine, Syria and Iraq. We forget the fact that violence makes us all that much poorer, and weaker;

"Mankind must put an end to war before war puts an end to mankind."
- John F. Kennedy

Worldly affairs that continue to be broadcast by the hour don't seem to phase us anymore. Why? Because the frequency of such events is so high, that we simply can't keep up with it anymore. Our brains can't process shock after shock, and our familiarity with these situations creates a new norm. How many incidents in the past two years have we seen regarding open shootings in public places? It's countless! Malls, schools and places of worship: what we once regarded as safe places, no longer hold their sense of security. What does that tell us about the state of the society that we live in?

"Anger is a killing thing: it kills the man who angers, for each rage leaves him less than he had been before - it takes something from him."
- Louis L'Amour

What is the root cause of such violence? One can never figure out what drives another to do such deeds. Anger and jealousy tend to be a common source. One of the statements made by Scilla during her TED talk caught my attention, *"Wherever there's fear, there's anger. And anger is like gasoline. You spread it around and somebody lights a match and you've got an inferno."* But there is an alternative – Scilla describes it well – why not redirect anger towards a more positive outcome? Since anger is like an engine that drives behavior, can't we transform it? Can't we use it's power to move forward? This is what touched me the most about the talk. I never thought of anger as a motivator for something positive. Yet all great social reformers were angry and upset about what they saw happening

in the world, and this was the catalyst for their inspirational intervention. And yes, they managed to convert that anger, into a force for good.

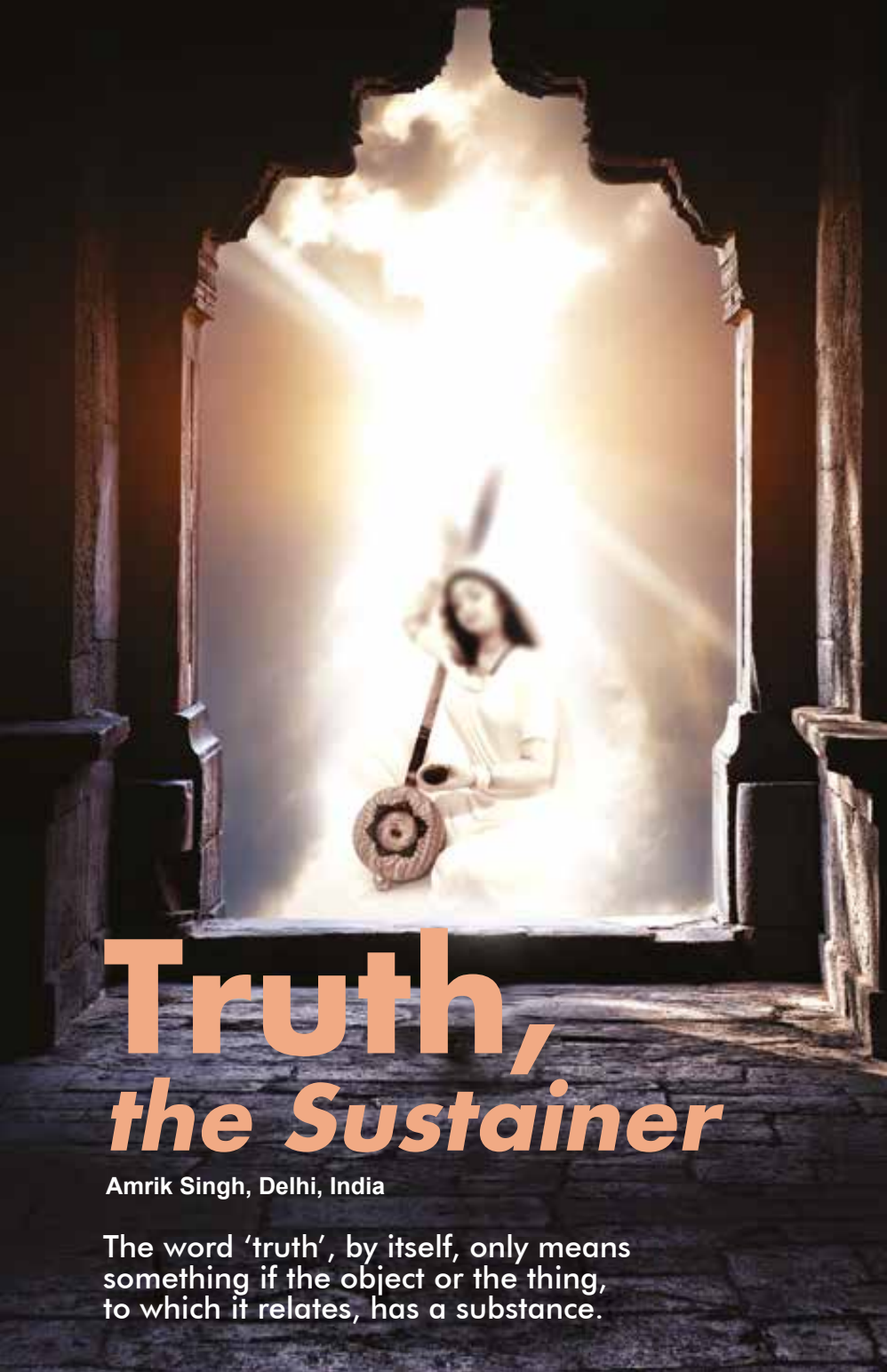
"Non-violence means avoiding not only external physical violence but also internal violence of spirit. You not only refuse to shoot a man, but you refuse to hate him."
- Martin Luther King, Jr.

We can relate these ideas to our everyday life. We get angry about the littlest of situations and tend to hold grudges. Someone says something we don't like and we get offended. Something doesn't line up to our expectations and we get angry. Our peers find success and we become jealous. This anger and jealousy that we nurture within ourselves only leads to ruined relationships and unnecessary internal burden.

Since anger is like an engine that drives behavior, can't we transform it? Can't we use it's power to move forward?

During the conference, Scilla talked about overcoming some of this anger. She said that once we try to bring a change within us, we have taken a step in the right direction. But this step demands we develop self-knowledge. What makes me tick? What am I going to stand up for? What do I really value, want and need? These are pragmatic questions, and relate squarely to the path of spiritual enquiry and personal growth.

Lao Tzu tells us that knowing others is knowledge, but knowing the self is true wisdom. He goes on to say that mastering others is strength, but mastering the self is true power. It seems to me that the key to harnessing our passion to make a better world, starts with keeping the spiritual connection alive. ■



Truth, the Sustainer

Amrik Singh, Delhi, India

The word 'truth', by itself, only means something if the object or the thing, to which it relates, has a substance.

For example, an artificial apple, made of clay, is inedible. Likewise, replica jewellery cannot replace the jewellery made of real gold. One should be able to see, taste, appreciate or experience the thing for it to have concrete meaning.

For instance, the mere menu or the word pudding will not be enough for us to appreciate what the pudding is like. We would have to see it and taste it. The mere name of an object cannot give us the experience of either its taste or utility, or its actuality.

Spirituality is no different. For uttering the name of God, even if a thousand

times a day, for year on end, would not make it possible for the seeker to see God.

In this regard, a celebrated luminary and princess, Meera Bai, renowned for her closeness to God, and perceiving the Almighty all around her, reminds us that she did not acquire the ultimate treasure of life through mere recitation or praise of God, but through the grace of her true teacher, the accomplished spiritual guide of the day - Sage Ravidass.

Hence, mere words cannot serve any purpose. What is needed is the real object, not just the abstract or

the make-believe one. The same principle applies to the Truth, which may not be seen, but can be realized with the 'third eye', gifted by the spiritual teacher.

Those blessed with the third eye go for higher values of life, founded on the Truth. They are characterized as imbibing the Truth, speaking the Truth and walking the Truth. Such people of pure thoughts are the wise ones. They are an asset for their family, their neighbour, their locality, and ultimately their City and State.

They often form the fabric of a new social order and an ideal society.

The wise, in the form of the great Gurus and Masters, familiarize us with the source of all creation, subtle or gross, known as the Formless One. It is the Entity that is, was and will always be.

Such an Entity is beyond time and space; it is unchangeable; it is all-pervasive, omnipresent, and omnipotent. It has no form, shape or feature; it is at once both transcendental and immanent. It is of triune nature - the Creator, Sustainer and the Destroyer. Everything that happens only happens because of it. It is unique, and has no parallel. It is the unvanquishable Truth.

Unlike the false material world that comes and goes, the Truth last forever. It fills our lives with bliss, peace and liberation. So much so that it lifts man's fear of death and makes him immortal.

It must be born in mind that everything we see in this world is transient. The whole universe is ephemeral and in continuous flux, whereas God is the opposite – eternal and the beginningless Entity. The true teacher's divine knowledge enables us to discern the difference between the two. ■

Those blessed with the third eye go for higher values of life, founded on the truth.

Switch off to switch on

Dina Sabnani, Hong Kong

With everything at our disposal in this day and age, I wonder if our life is any better or more complicated than before. This reminds me of my grandparent's sentiments:

"Child, when I was your age, we didn't have any TV or radio at home. We used to go outside, play with our friends and make up our own games. You children now-a-days really don't know what it is like to have fun!" (Of course we would roll our eyes up and walk away). "We used to take bicycle rides with friends and generally spend a lot more time outdoors, rather than being cooped up with fancy gadgets, cell phones and laptops".

Parents and grandparents aside, during my childhood, I also did not have any gadgets like a computer, cell phone, game boy or play station. But I remember having so much fun going to the garden, playing with real friends in person, going to the beach, having family picnics and pot-luck dinners. Now I look at my nieces and nephews in awe. By the age of 10-13, they have cell phones, laptops, cameras, games machines – just about anything they can plug in and watch! And that's what they do!! Everyone is so 'switched on' including us, that we've almost forgotten what life is like without these 'things'.

It is not just the matter of knowing who we are, but who we can be to others.

I know many who are sadly over-worked, under-paid and over-stressed. We've come to a point where these gadgets have become a form of escapism. Our calendars are chock-a-block with social events. At home, we find ourselves taking a little 'me time', on one machine or another. Next day we start the same cycle all over again.

We need to take some space to actually enjoy life, to appreciate life, and to stop and smell the roses.



We have to find the time to really get to know ourselves. We have to ask ourselves, who are we, what do we want, and what is it that makes us tick? It is not just the matter of knowing who we are, but who we can be to others.

Do we honestly give ourselves time to be ourselves? I hear people say that they can't find any time; they are busy with so many obligations. The truth of the matter is that we need to make time for ourselves. Just as we find time to go out, see friends, attend parties and honor our obligations, we can also find time to be ourselves. It might only be a single day, but we should switch off and then switch on.

Actually, I wonder if we've become accustomed to avoiding our own company, because we have become strangers to ourselves. We can only get past this problem, if we carve out some time to be on our own - without any external distraction.

If we take a blank piece of paper and write on it: "Who am I?" And then see what comes up. Then write: "Who do I want to be?" And reflect and write in the present tense. Be as creative as possible, whilst painting the picture of 'who you want to be'. It may be hard to do so in the beginning, but after a while you will see what makes you, 'you'.

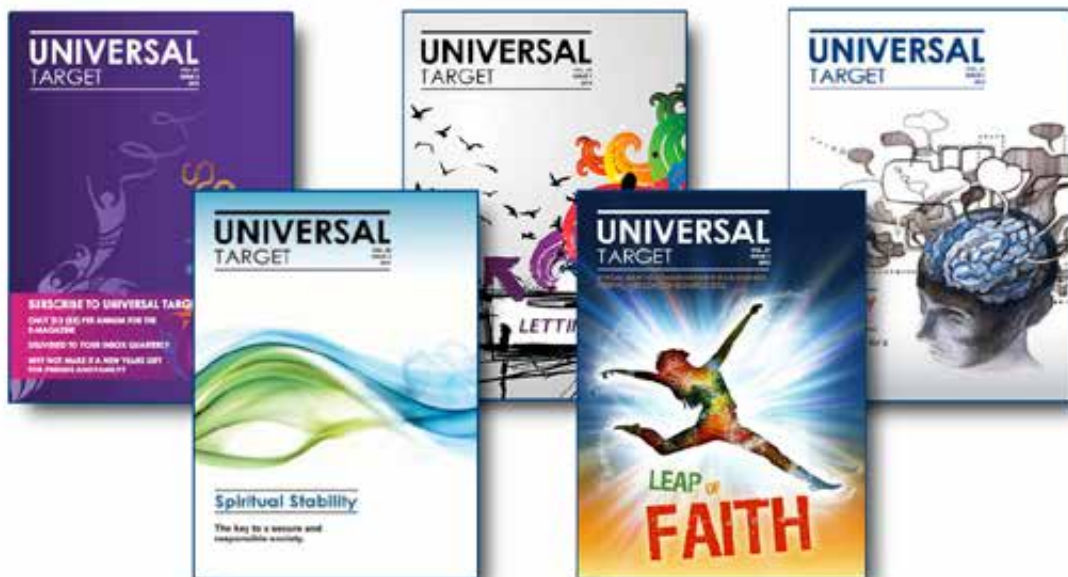
Sometimes we truly need to 'switch off' to be able to get 'switched back on'. Why not try it! ■

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