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SCIENCE AND SPIRITUALITY  
CONTENTMENT  
HOPE AND POSITIVITY  
ENLIGHTENMENT



BEING  
AUTHENTIC

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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, Ruby Reehal and Rekha Bassi

## International Contact

Raul Kamal

## Design

Kamaldip Bains, Vishu Singh, Simarjeet Syan and Swanti Matharu

## Front cover illustration:

Suman

## Publisher

SNM UK  
Great Western Street, Potters Lane  
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WS10 0AS, UK

## Email

universaltarget@nirankari.org

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# *socialmasks*

Ours is an incredibly competitive, ruthlessly harsh and a make-believe world in which we have to live, work and have our being. More so than ever before, people tend to feel obliged, for various reasons, to don masks and pretend to be someone they are not.

With new discoveries, more knowledge and exponential material progress, society everywhere seems to be becoming increasingly global, on the one hand, and extremely complex on the other. To cope with the changes, people find it more natural and convenient to shelter behind masks, than to search for, and rely on, their own inner strength.

In an alter-egoist society, it seems easier to go with the flow of others, rather than to hold your own and risk being ridiculed, rejected and even ostracised.

Therefore, donning masks is so contagious that there is a real danger of creating a society of false people with unreal lives, in which it is well near impossible to tell who is being true and authentic and who, not. Unless we develop devices or acquire means of reading other people's minds, it is difficult to say who is deceiving and who is not; who to trust, and who not to trust.

People put on masks to hide their weaknesses, their vulnerabilities, and sometimes to impress others. They enhance their confidence, energising them to negotiate their way round society, and make it easier to face the world. They help manage fear, and avoid or lessen pain. They can be quite addictive too, making it enormously difficult, if not impossible, to escape their iron grip.

So much so that the masking becomes a habit and the habit becomes a characteristic, which in turn becomes one's alter-ego. The real self is lost to an unreal world, based on assumed personalities. Relationships may be struck, friendships cultivated, and trust won on the premises of false pretences. Thus giving rise to deception, lies and trickery, causing much misery, pain and suffering to the poor victims.

Moreover, this pseudo personality can, it is said, psychologically damage

and adversely affect the psyche. When this gets out of hand, it can have a viral impact on the whole of society, weakening its foundations and endangering its very existence. This course of society has to be averted by promoting positive measures and adopting moral values and norms to encourage people to be accepted for who they are, rather than who they pretend to be.

This process involves a whole host of positive human attributes including sympathy, empathy, kindness and understanding; and it requires compassion, recognition and respect for the dignity of the weak and the vulnerable. It demands the inculcation of noble human qualities, giving strength of character, courage, confidence, self-esteem and the spirit of truth.

This is not to say that the masks should be banned altogether, and not allowed. There may be a case for a limited and temporary use of masks on occasions for the good of others. However, in such instances, care has to be taken not to mislead, deceive or cause any harm or damage to any person or their feelings. For instance, one may be justified to employ a mask to avoid causing pain and suffering to the loved ones. Barring such exceptional benign occasions, the use of social masks, for selfish or other unjustified reasons, ought to be avoided for the sake of a healthy society.

To secure a healthy society, we may profitably turn to the counsel given by our saints and sages. They have been exhorting mankind to shun the unreal and embrace the enduring real. Through their practical lives, they show how to be humane, tolerant, patient and kind. They tell us that we may deceive one another, but that it is impossible to hide our flaws from our self, and the greater Self.

All the above mentioned qualities have

their source in the greater Self, of which we are all part. It is imperative to seek and attune to it. For this, we again look to the advice of saints and sages and make room in our hearts and minds for the quotation from the Nirankari Baba's Timeless Message in the ensuing pages:

“...the only way out from this predicament is to heed and act upon the counsel of the saints, and thereby liberate yourself.” ■

Harbans Singh

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# Timeless Message: ***Path to Liberation***

**Dr. D K Mehta**

*This is an abridged adaptation of an address delivered by the Nirankari Baba in Surat, Gujarat.*



**The path is quite simple. *Enlightened by the truth, we are to set ourselves free. For this, we must heed the priceless words of the saints and sages. They remind us of our precious human birth, which must be lived in the full spirit of humanity. They tell us that our Scriptures, regardless of where they come from, are all gifts for mankind as a whole.***

The need to emphasise and re-emphasise this point arises due to man's stubbornness and arrogance, which has made him insensitive to his innate human nature. Had humankind learned this earlier, it would not have been reiterated in subsequent ages.

Man takes birth and lives his life, but sadly wanders off his path, to remain in deep slumber. There has always been a dire need for saints and seers for this very reason.

To awaken him from such a profound sleep, to help him cross the sea of life, to enable him to reach his destination, to redeem his soul, and to end his coming and going, man has to

become a human being in deeds, not just in name only.

There has been no shortage of discoverers and inventors like Einstein and Graham Bell, who discovered the laws of nature. They brought them to the fore to help make our lives more comfortable. When we look back, we always feel a great need for such people. Their lessons are still taught in schools and colleges.

We are to walk the path that can salvage us today. Today is our present, not what happened yesterday or years ago. The sun's rays warming us are those that we

are getting today, not the ones that warmed the earth years ago. The same goes for the air we breathe. Hence, it is the present – the here and now – that matters; it will assist us to achieve our objective.

Many years ago, the present for Saint Kabir was there and then. During his life, he became enlightened and redeemed himself. He removed others' superstitions and redeemed them too. We must do the same today.

*Wake up, O'traveller, morning has broken*

*Night's gone by, why are you still asleep?*

The fact that you have been blessed with human life, you can take it as the morn. It is a golden opportunity that other creatures do not get, but you do to liberate yourself. If you still remain ignorant and never find the light, how unfortunate would that be? How ironic it would be to take human birth, but fail to reach the potential of being

# *...it is said that even an age is not enough to love, and yet people find the time to hate.*

human. How ominous that besotted by vices, trapped in superstitions and obsessed by 'me, mine, thee and thine' man may never free himself. How sad to end the journey, having followed only shadows, worked for material gains, indulged in violence and sacrificed freedom.

Saints want everyone to be blessed. They inspire all to achieve what they are here for by awakening one and all.

Is there anything one can do while asleep? Children study, at home or at school, whilst awake, never when asleep. Likewise, we need to be awake if we are to reach our destination, and in the process salvage ourselves. In so doing, we not only take care of our 'here and now', but also our hereafter. By making the present important, we also help to secure our future. So whilst living here, we are to do so with the spirit of love and togetherness. We are to rise above our differences and be united as one.

It is not enough to be able to breathe, exist and subsist; as humans we have to be humane and divine beings. Those who do not imbibe love, saintly wisdom and the truth, are lifeless corpses. They are the walking-talking-living dead, who have scant regard for the pain and suffering of others.

We are to live in divine love. This should be the only way of life. After all, it is said that even an age is not enough to love, and yet people find the time to hate. Not only do they embrace hatred themselves, they also sow its seeds in others. Sadly, they do not spare even children; they teach them to steal, loot, kill and maim. They indoctrinate intolerance in them. They teach them to scorn

and differentiate on the basis of their race, colour, creed, religion, economic and class consciousness. By so doing, they not only harm themselves, but also poison the minds of future generations.

and strengthens the whole country.

Unhappily, the floods of destruction continue while man descends even deeper into the dark recesses. Consequently loss, harm and destruction follow unabated.

When man follows a way of life prescribed by saints and seers, he not only becomes content and at peace with himself, but he also makes the world around him peaceful.

He rises above superstition, culture, religion, differences of race, colour and class. He adopts saintly wisdom and translates it into his practical life. Such a life becomes felicitous and praise-worthy. So much so that he becomes angel like, and reaches the greatest of heights.

Wherever the saints live, they rejoice in the same benign thoughts. They want the whole world to live in

harmony. However, their thinking may run counter to others smouldering in the fire of hatred and wanting to see all burning in the same fire, sparing no one.

Today, as a result, man is neither at peace with himself, nor does he want others to be at peace. Embroiled in his narrow-mindedness and a plethora of vices, he seems to be bent on turning this earth into a real hell. He wants to be worthy of a place in paradise, and yet his actions are far from conducive to it.

Therefore, the only way out from this predicament is to heed and act upon the counsel of the saints, and thereby liberate your self. ■

## *loving is living; if you cease to love, you cease to live.*

Saints always find a way out to put a stop to this malaise of moral, ethical and spiritual poisoning from one generation to another. This malaise is fatally destructive; it has no merit whatsoever. It changes the whole environment for the worse.

As Love is God, it is this attribute that we must acquire and imbibe. Those who do exactly that are regarded in the spiritual realm as being truly alive. For loving is living; if you cease to love, you cease to live.

It is this selfless pure love that should adorn our homes and the environment around us.

It will strengthen our relationships and render our homes heavenly. It uplifts the locality, solidifies society at large

# Science & Spirituality

## SEEING AND BELIEVING

Jagjit Khambe, Iver, UK

**Experimental science has enjoyed considerable success, having adopted the premise that any credible theory must be testable and concur with observations. In fact, much of the technology we use today is based on science borne out of iterative experiments and their observations. Perhaps it's not so surprising then that we seem to have an innate aptitude for believing only those things that we can see for ourselves, and find more difficult, if not impossible, to have faith in that which we cannot. Faith in an all-pervading power or God, therefore, pushes us to the extreme boundaries of belief, and has prompted endless discussion between Scientists and the Mystics, and their aspiring followers.**

Personally, I have no issue with the foundations of experimental science. However, I do raise a concern that what we often 'see' can only be a representation of the best picture we have formulated in time, with every potential for it to change as new layers of our understanding are unveiled. Building a view of the world on only what you have seen (or on extrapolations thereof), seems to me to be somewhat naïve and limiting, yet it is an approach that many of us are willing to accept whilst science continues to provide us with explanations that readily conform with our physical perceptions of reality and provides us with the technology to unlock the potential of the universe right before our eyes.

However, history tells us that there inevitably comes a time when we are forced to question our models of reality when things don't quite add up. My hypothesis is that this is a recurring cycle, in which case, can we really believe what we see? More importantly, should we be more cautious before dispelling that which cannot be 'observed' at present?

I invite you to ponder this further and to begin our journey I would ask you

to imagine a world without mirrors, or more precisely, without reflection.

What sort of world would that be? No doubt we would still have the ability to observe each other and the things around us. We could continue with our normal chores and daily routines in more or less the same way - or could we? Obviously there are some clear difficulties when you consider the need for rear-view mirrors whilst driving (perhaps this is a distinction between a 'good' and 'bad' driving ability) or putting your make-up on, but let us consider these as technicalities that could otherwise be resolved through some other method. What I am more concerned about are the transformations in psychological and mental attitude that might take place, for without mirrors, we would never have the privilege of seeing our own face and would have to rely purely on the descriptions provided by others. The implications are interesting to say the least.

There is a school of thought that suggests that confidence (or self-belief) is partly dependent on how good you feel about yourself and can have profound influence on the quality of one's life. In the western

world high regard is attached to appearances so it is natural for people to be concerned about the way they look. Often that concern can extend beyond normality and lead to a lack of confidence or even paranoia in some extreme cases. It would therefore be important that in our world without reflection the descriptions provided by our companions are reasonably accurate. Of course there is a case to argue the opposite also, but in either scenario a wildly false description could leave you either as an emotional wreck, or an overconfident failure.

If the implications of removing physical reflection could be such then imagine the implications of an absence of more-deeper mental and emotional reflection. I would take this further to what some might call spiritual introspection or consciousness – a journey which prompts us to become more aware of our spiritual being. And yet strangely enough, how many of us take the time to really truly introspect? Perhaps the rather patronising view of society in general towards believers in a 'God' of some sort is not so unexpected then. In today's world there is almost an instinctive assumption that you must be either



part of a cult or emotionally abnormal to be a dedicated follower of some God, let alone have a personal relationship with him. Yet many others have pondered this to such degree that they have been inspired to ask questions as to what is in

actual fact our true reality:

"We are not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience."

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

Moving onto a slightly different line of inquiry let us consider a trivial mathematic equation, say '2+2=4'. That might seem easy enough but what if we removed the equality sign? We would then have two separate parts, namely '2+2' and '4'. These would still be seen to exist as real entities and would remain logically equal, but the equation itself would not hold true without the punctuation – it is almost as if the humble equality sign provides insight or some necessary assurance as to the balance of both sides, and by removing it the integrity of the equation is destroyed. In a similar way you might say that the separate entities of our spiritual and material lives do exist by themselves, but we require some insight to bring them together as a balancing equation. Just as the physical mirror reflects our physical representation so perhaps spiritual realisation provides insight into our spiritual self, and the ability to preserve the balance of the equation. Again the question arises as to how one might perceive their spiritual self:

"...You cannot see me with these human eyes of yours; therefore, I vouchsafe to you the divine eye. With this you behold My divine power of Yoga."

Bhagavada-Gita (Ch.11.8)

For the spiritualist, this is the basis of divine knowledge, or Brahm Gian. Brahm, or 'Nirankar' (the Formless), the almighty, all-pervading power, is considered to be subtly inherent within (and beyond) our physical environment; and Brahm Gian is a means to providing the spiritual capacity with which to appreciate this:

"The eye with which God sees me is the eye with which I see him; my eye and his eye are one. If God were not, I would not be; if I were not, then he would not be."

Meister Eckhart (1260-1328)

"Whatever is, is in God, and without God nothing can be, or be conceived."

Spinoza

to physically observe something with our eyes that does not necessarily mean there is an 'absence of something' altogether. But I don't



So where does Science come back into this picture, for it has certainly been able to make great strides without the need for submitting to questions around the existence of God? One reason for this is probably that traditional (experimental) science is largely concerned with 'observables', and thus far, any approximation we make in the science of observables at the macro level is fairly consistent with our experience of the world around us. However as we begin to dig deeper into the picture beyond the microscopic and venture towards the quantum world then our simplistic approximations begin to unravel. Suddenly we begin to enter a place where it becomes increasingly difficult if not impossible to visualise the order of reality, and it is even debatable as to whether one could in fact be able to 'see' the whole picture.

The spiritualists would highlight that they have, albeit somewhat simplistically, claimed this for some time. Although we may not be able

think Science has ever claimed that to be the case either, rather Science exercises some patience in raising any claim until it uncovers a new understanding through whatever means is appropriate. Often that means a refinement in our models, but sometimes it just necessitates an advancement in our experimental and measurement technology. In my mind, the question always arises as to how we, as human beings, can also be considered as the 'detectors' where technology still falls short. Indeed, quantum mechanics and other related theories do prompt us to think more deeply about the peculiarities of conscious observers in all of this.

Another area of discussion is that of cause and effect, with the rather simple example being cited of the wind, which cannot be 'seen' but its presence is recognised very easily by its effects on the environment. Our existence on this planet and in this universe is also claimed to be just 'too perfect' to have been the result of



an accident. It doesn't matter what perspective you look at the world from (chemical, biological or physical), it's obvious that nature operates as a remarkably perfect and efficient system.

Consider for example the birth of our universe. It is generally believed that our universe was the result of an enormous cosmic explosion – the 'Big Bang'. The explosion caused the whole universe to expand from an infinitesimally small, but dense, clump of mass. Even today the universe is expanding and the question is raised as to whether there may come a point one-day when it stops expanding and starts to contract, in which case all matter could potentially disappear?! That being said, if the initial explosion had been too small, the expansion would have been unstable and far too slow for the world to evolve. If the explosion had been too large, the expansion would have been so rapid that the universe would have expanded and then immediately contracted to nothing. In other words, we still would not have emerged. However, the 'bang' was absolutely perfect! Consider also the chemical composition of the human body. It has been calculated that the ratios of carbon and other elements in biological and physical systems need to be in an extremely precise balance for our Universe to exist, and if these differed by say even 0.00000005 then many things would

cease to exist, including human beings – yet this balance does exist today. These 'Goldilocks' theorems (i.e. everything is 'just right') may not be sufficient evidence to convince the sceptics for the existence of an Almighty creator, but they are certainly remarkable to say the least, and do prompt us to think a little more deeply.

"God has put a secret art into the forces of nature so as to enable it to fashion itself out of chaos into a perfect world system."  
Immanuel Kant

I admit that this short collection of thoughts is not enough to build a case in the face of the serious sceptics, but that is not my intention. Rather I implore both the Scientist and the Mystic to open their minds to broader possibilities and to understand whether their worlds can find some common ground. With the advance of all the new weird and wonderful fields of research and the new wave of discoveries I am of the firm opinion that a deeper appreciation will need to come. For now, I am content to say that if technology is the detector of the scientist, then perhaps the conscious being is the detector of the spiritualist.

There are surely more surprises to come. ■

# contentment

Shobita Chandra, Chicago, USA

*The word contentment scares me. It appears to be foreign. How can I feel so whole, so at ease, that I don't need anyone or anything else?*

Over the years, I think I've been using the concept incorrectly. I would lie on the beach with friends, look around and say: I feel content with life right now. Then I would eat a delicious meal and say, I'm content. Yet thirty minutes after the thought on the beach, one of my friends would make a negative comment and throw off my mood. Then three hours after that enjoyable meal, I would again become hungry and yearn for something else to eat. When I look back, I can pinpoint exactly where my problem lay: I associated contentment with a fleeting emotion.

being that exists above the realm of the worldly or material world.

When I look around and encounter people of various backgrounds, I realize that regardless of the person's race, ethnicity, religion or societal affiliations, the basic goal of human life is happiness. Whether it is the smallest of goals or the largest, the end result is almost always the desire of bliss. I spend time with family to be happy. I get an education to get a career that will bring me material comfort and happiness. I work out because it releases endorphins

to find the hidden lesson.

For about two years, I'd been driving a 1998 Volkswagen Passat and for some reason, I absolutely adored it. I loved to open the sunroof, roll down the windows, turn up the music and just drive. The car was pretty worn down: the radio volume didn't work well, so sometimes it was really loud and other times, really soft. The undercarriage of the car fell off at some point last year. The AC was kind of moody and so windows were usually the way to go. Regardless, I loved that car. It got me from point A



I was under the misconception that happiness due to a worldly event or physical experience was equivalent to the unyielding state of mind that contentment brings. Yet if that was the case, contentment would be a transient state dependent on a temporary situation. That concept sounds a bit like trying to find balance by standing on a plastic beach ball covered in oil: impossible! For one millisecond I'm at ease and the next, I'm tumbling down to the ground. That cannot be contentment. Contentment has to be more, much more. To me, it's this enchanting, peaceful sense of

and creates a pleasant mood. My world, interactions, relationships and everyday actions are driven by this concept of happiness. So if everything I do is geared toward attaining a permanent state of happiness, or contentment, then why am I still unhappy? The simplest answer: I'm looking for a rose in a field of daisies. Contentment cannot be achieved through worldly relationships or materialistic possessions. How do I know this? Sometimes life gives you experiences that force you to laugh at yourself and then you have to pick up the pieces

to point B and it was fun to drive.

Whenever my brother offered to get me a new car, I would refuse and say I was content with this one. About a month ago, my dad and brother decided the car was no longer reliable or safe to drive and so they bought me a new car. For the first two weeks, I was intrigued by the new car and its features. Eventually, I stopped thinking about it and just drove. One day, I had to drive the '98 Passat because my dad was driving the new car. As I took my first turn, I began to notice the brakes weren't as strong as I remembered

# *“Contentment is a state of mind, awareness that all is truly well. Outside chaos may ensue, but within, I will feel at ease.”*

and the drive wasn't as smooth. The radio had stopped working altogether and I had to actually pick up my cell phone to answer a call. The car itself didn't change, but my awareness of what I have available did. I laughed as I found myself comparing the two cars. I didn't experience that same enjoyment driving the '98 Passat as I used to. In that moment, a life lesson hit me: it is impossible to find contentment in materialistic possessions. I had heard stories about the desire for bigger and better things; but I always believed I was above the power of illusion.

Today the new car is enjoyable, tomorrow it will not be. If I don't have the means to purchase another one will I lose my sense of happiness? Again, if something as transient as worldly belongings determine my state of contentment, I will forever be balancing on an unstable platform.

Lesson learned. So if not things, maybe I can find steady happiness through my career. I absolutely love being in the medical field and I embrace the moments when I can help another person improve their quality of life.

There once was a fisherman who felt a similar passion toward fishing. One day, a visiting businessman notices that the fisherman caught several fish and began to pack up. The businessman approaches the fisherman and asks why he stops at merely three fish. The fisherman says that these fish meet the needs of his family. Surprised, the businessman questioned what he does with the remainder of his day. With a smile, the fisherman exclaims that he plays with his kids, takes a nap, spends time with his friends playing cards, and sings and plays guitar for his wife. The businessman decides to offer his unsolicited advice and says why don't you fish more and sell them in the market, then take your proceeds and buy a bigger boat. Then you can go to the bank and

raise capital to buy more boats and hire employees; you will be a rich man!

The fisherman questions what happens after you earn all that money? The businessman states that he would retire and move to this village, spend time with his family and friends, fish, and enjoy life. The fisherman laughs and states: I'm already living your dream.

The moment I lose my passion for helping others merely for the sake of helping others, I may too fall into this trap of greed. My patients will then turn into means to attain revenue and I will lose my sense of happiness in my career. Quite obviously, a career or hobby cannot be a direct avenue to contentment. Society demands that we aim high, expand our wealth and thus we often fall into this trap of becoming engrossed in 'more'. Yet to what end result? If I can attain that peace, serenity, bliss right from the start, as that fisherman did, why not take a detour from society's route and do so?

I've noticed that many people attempt to utilize this third course to achieve a state of happiness: relationships. Again, I find myself standing on this slippery beach ball trying to become balanced. No one else is responsible for your happiness, and to be frank, no one else will be fully interested in it. So why should I expect anyone else to? If happiness is my goal in life, my primary objective, why entrust it in someone else's hands? As a human being, I will have expectations from the other person, yet that person does not necessarily have to live up to them. So if I depend on someone else to bring a smile on my face, I'll often find myself with a frown. Society teaches us to search for an answer when we are confused.

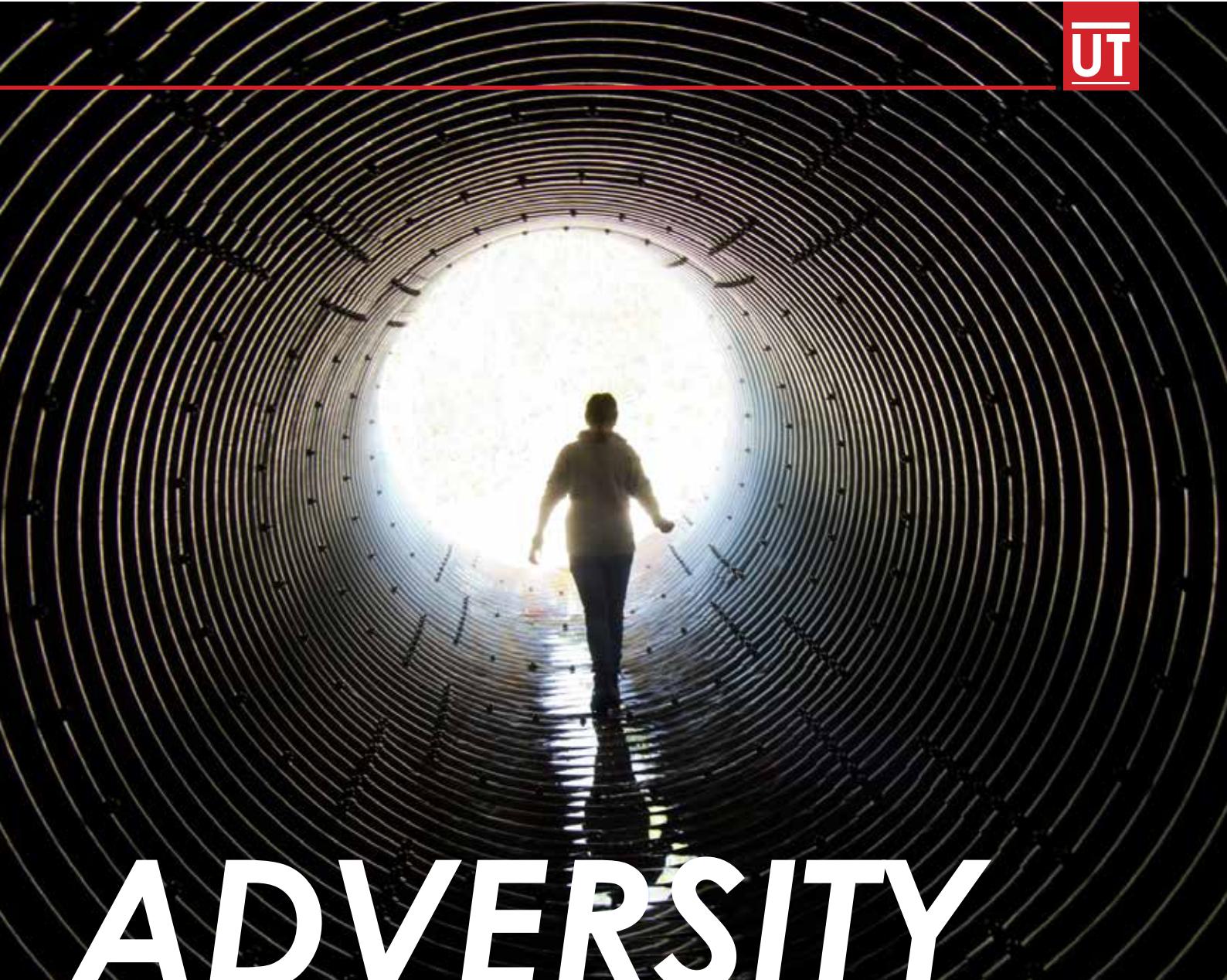
When I don't know how to treat a patient, I may go online and research medical journals and then find a medication in a pharmacology textbook that can be applied in this

case. Yet this time, my question is finding contentment whilst living in an unstable world. So why not stop and look within? Whilst everything around me may be temporary and transient, there is a place within me that is permanent. I wouldn't tie my dog to a cart that can be moved; I would tie it to a poll stuck in the concrete floor. So why should I attach my sense of self contentment to the ever moving, ever changing material world, when I can stabilize it to the one that is forever: the Formless One.

I must step off that beach ball that has been dipped in oil and hit my feet against the level earth beneath it. Finding balance on the actual ground is much easier than upon a slippery object that may move or become displaced. Society will always attempt to convince me that happiness is to be found in the world, but if I turn inward and acknowledge that contentment within, then only will I attain the vision to see and experience it elsewhere.

I've come to a place in my life where I'm tired of living with these shackles of right and wrong, of societal norms and regulations. I wish to free myself of these burdens I carry around. If I break free from these shackles and instead work on attaining contentment from the inside-out, I will then bring that peace to the world around me. Yet if I continue to entertain the idea that this material world will bring me unwavering happiness, not only will I continue to lose my balance and fall, I may transfer that destruction to others.

Contentment is a state of mind, awareness that all is truly well. Outside chaos may ensue, but within, I will feel at ease. For my balance is sourced from the source Himself. Then I have nothing to fear. ■



# ADVERSITY

MEENAKSHI KANDA, BRADFORD, UK

*“There is light at the  
end of the tunnel...”*

*every grey cloud has a silver lining...*

*don’t lose your faith now. ,,*

---

*Ever heard these phrases when you’re going through hardships in life? I have, and often when I hear these words I think ‘really?’, ‘do they even understand the extent of my misfortune?’*

---

Well the fact is that every living human being has experienced periods of adversity, and the challenge lies in knowing which coping mechanisms may we use to return to the state of happiness.

When we go through hard times, naturally we ask the question 'if God exists then why does he make me endure this pain?' It seems like a perfectly plausible question, given the likely difficult circumstances that lead us to ask it! So where does God and faith come into this? A well-known American academic, John Bytheway, once wrote:

**"If our testimonies are strong on this point and if we feel the absolute assurance that God loves us, we will change our questions. We won't ask, 'Why did this happen?' or 'Why doesn't God care about me?' Instead, our questions will become, 'What can I learn from this experience?' or 'How does the Lord want me to handle this?'"**

Often adverse times put us in negative states of mind so consequently we start to question our 'faith' in God. However, if we try to think from a positive frame of mind, when we are facing difficulties, we often remember God. Yes, it's true that we may be questioning why he would allow this to happen to us, however, the fact is that he makes us question life and more importantly question who is really in control of it.

In that one time period, he shifts our focus and energy solely to Him. So could this be why God brings adversity into our lives? Does he want us to speak to Him and question his purpose? These thoughts are echoed by philosopher, Charles C. West, who said,

**"We turn to God for help when our foundations are shaking, only to learn that it is God who is shaking them."**

Looking into my own life, my darkest times of despair were the times in which I spoke to God, because I wanted to know that there was someone who cares enough to hold my hand through the turbulence. Without adversity, the relationship I initiated with God would not have flourished, as I would never have questioned his purpose in my life. I now know that He doesn't want to see me in despair, but rather He sends me challenges to test my faith in His love and care.

If we take the example of a person who has become complacent in his job as a sales clerk, he feels he has learnt everything there is to know about his job and lacks motivation to move to the next ranking within his role, his manager may offer an incentive to motivate him to 'keep moving' toward his goal of success. Similarly, sometimes we can become complacent in our relationship with God and we feel we have learnt all we need to know to live a life according to his wishes. However, adversity comes as an incentive to encourage us to keep moving forward in our quest for spiritual enlightenment. It is these golden opportunities that we regularly see as burdens and misfortunes that allow us to let God into our lives and show us his unconditional love and care.

When we become open to his love, we begin to understand that in life's many turbulent times, we are not in control, God is the controller. We exist to learn and every student needs a teacher who can guide them through challenging circumstances. But a student who does not believe in their teacher, and lacks faith, will not succeed in class, he will not ask for guidance but instead will blame the teacher for many of his own wrongdoings and more damagingly, will carry on doing this throughout life, consequently leading a negative life. It is the same as not having faith in God after being introduced to him. We will continue to blame him for any mishaps in our life, rather than realising that these mishaps are a lesson from him for personal growth. If we have faith that God is our father and that he will only give us difficult times to make us appreciate the overwhelming 'good' that we have in our lives, then we can live a more content, blissful life. The Avtar Bani,

verse 59, ever reminds us:

**"Avtar Says, he is ever grateful to God under all circumstances"**

A spiritual teacher shows us that to live a content life, we must be thankful to our ultimate father (God), irrespective of the state we find ourselves in at any one time. We have all witnessed that adversity is inevitable, but if we can learn to accept that it is a blessing in disguise and thank God for bringing us closer to him through these times, we can be more positive in our approach to life!

John Aughey, a famous author, once said,

**"God brings men into deep waters, not to drown them, but to cleanse them"**

Let us be open to his love through times of adversity so we can appreciate the beautiful life he has bestowed upon us. ■



# WHAT IS IT TO BE Authentic

NIGE RYAN, BIRMINGHAM, UK

Like most people I like to think that I am an authentic person. That is to say that what I portray to the world through my behaviour and communication is an authentic representation of the person I really am. But of course authentic is just a word, and when I consider applying it to myself I realise that being authentic is not as straightforward as it first seems. What is it to be authentic? Who decides? How do I know?

If an antiques expert describes a 16th Century Ming dynasty vase as authentic it's pretty clear what he means; he has authenticated it, it is genuine, the real deal. But how does this apply to a human being?

If I am abducted from my bed tonight by aliens and whisked across the galaxy to be put on display in their equivalent of a zoo they could quite rightly label me as 'an authentic human being from planet Earth'. In this respect I am the real deal.

But of course when we describe an individual as authentic we don't mean their genetic make-up. Instead such terms as original, genuine, sincere, honest, or true might come to mind, but these are just more words. Words are metaphors; they are surface level communication outwardly representing our inner feelings, thoughts and perceptions according to our subjective experiences. Their meaning is unique to the individual that reads, hears or speaks them. So surely 'being authentic' has a different meaning, and more importantly is a different experience, for each of us.

And to complicate the subject further we could also consider the issue of perspective. Authentic compared with what? Authentic by whose standards?

So if there is no specific definition of an authentic person or authentic behaviour how can we ever hope to be authentic? In an attempt to answer this question I would like to suggest that we use our ability to focus inwardly in order to improve our relationship with our self and perhaps understand our own authenticity and how it relates to our own wellbeing a little better. Maybe the only person we can be authentic to is our own self. We alone know our own true nature and we alone know whether or not we are sincere to it.

The language of words is a wonderful human quality - it provides us with such riches as poetry, songs, historical stories and meaningful human communication. But it is important that we do not neglect our instinctive feelings and sensations; those that do not manifest in words. When seeking our own authenticity we may be better to by-pass our surface level awareness and know it on a deeper level; to experience it as a state – a feeling of comfort, harmony, peace of mind, contentment, or whatever that feeling is for each of us.

To know such feelings is to experience congruence between our inner self – our soul, spirit, heart, humanity, essence - and our outward interaction with, and experience of, the world. There are times in our lives when there is a marked difference between our true self and our outward behaviour. For many, their behaviour is anything but indicative of their true self, and they live in a state of anxious distress because of it.

For us to know harmony we need to know our true self. My concern is that because of the rigours of modern daily life we spend so much time functioning on a superficial level, disconnected from what we may think of as our spiritual self. We may find that our sense of identity becomes distorted, blurred and poorly defined, in which case we cannot be sure of being authentic.

It is this 'sense of self identity' on a deep personal level that I believe we should contemplate on, at least for a few minutes, every day. By spending time in contemplation, meditation or self-reflection we can connect with our true self and be free of the masks that we wear for others, and sometimes wear to deceive our own self. Such masks contribute to an obscured outward view of the world, so I would also suggest that we really cannot expect to see others clearly if we do not first know our own true self.

A nice meal in the company of friends or family and a visit to a show, are excellent, important and valuable ways to spend time. But they should be balanced with our need to feed our soul and to spend time with our self on a deep spiritual level. With practise, and as we become better connected, perhaps we will embrace our true self at all times and in all circumstances. In which case we will truly be 'authentic'. ■



## **Positive thinking is an attribute which has great healing power. Statistics show that patients who have undergone major surgery recover better if they are optimists. This provides us with evidence that mind over matter can cause drastic changes in one's life.**

Research has shown that positivity does not just work by quelling stress, but it also has a positive, biological effect. When one feels safe and secure and believes that things will turn out fine, it seems to help the body maintain and repair itself.

Conversely, it is well accepted that illness can be brought on by negative thoughts and anxiety. Negative thoughts often manifest as stress, which can trigger physiological pathways such as the 'fight-or-flight' response, which evolved from a instinctual need to protect ourselves from danger. However, if the negative biological response continues long-term and in situations that are actually not life-threatening, it can increase the risk of such conditions as diabetes and dementia.

It is true that some people are born optimists. However, whatever your natural disposition, you can train yourself to think more positively. Mahatma Gandhi once said:

"Man often becomes what he believes himself to be. If I keep on saying to myself that I cannot do a certain thing, it is possible that I may end by really becoming incapable

of doing it. On the contrary, if I have the belief that I can do it, I shall surely acquire the capacity to do it even if I may not have it at the beginning."

So how can a pessimist become an optimist? And, how does one achieve this happiness?

Happiness, and positivity, manifests in saints, in whose presence love and harmony become viral. They have love for the truth and humanity. They want every pore of theirs to be immersed in it. They wish to drink this potion of truth always. Such people are free from the stresses of the world. Their misconceptions are removed as they live in the light, unaffected by darkness.

To achieve true happiness and to spread positivity to those around you, you need to realize the truth and become an enlightened soul. When in the company of the enlightened, it is evident that the attendees have an abundance of positivity. Such an enlightened company is the mind-purifying and cleansing agent.

When realizing the truth and surrounding oneself

# POSITIVITY AND ENLIGHTENMENT

DR. TINA MOHINDRA, OXFORD, UK

with enlightened ones, all material negativity pales into insignificance. Company of the enlightened, helps one to be positive, and to adopt new thinking and habits.

Simple and basic acts can bring positivity into one's life, but ultimately positivity and happiness are not just selfish acts, they are much more. It is often how we treat others, and how others treat us, which leads to positivity. For instance, starting the day with a simple smile can make others feel more positive. This, in turn, can affect us positively.

On a more conscious level, we also need to be able to identify our strengths to start to train ourselves to be optimists. The psychologist, Dr Tim Sharp says, 'We all need to work on and/or manage our weaknesses and limitations, but there's no doubt those who spend more time building on what they're already good at tend to be happier, healthier and more successful.'

Negative talk should be turned into optimism. Real optimism is an active search for, and focus on, positive things, but it should also be grounded in realism. Flexible thinking should focus on positives as often as possible and also focus on challenges when necessary, in a constructive way.

When you cannot do anything to change a problem situation, work towards acceptance. Use thoughts like, "I don't really need it." Priorities may need to be changed to fit the reality of the situation. Instead of dwelling on sorrows, practice thankfulness for your friends, pleasures, strengths, and other blessings. When comparing oneself to other people negatively, one should emphasize that no matter what trait you consider, you can always find people who are either more fortunate or less fortunate than you.

One should find the good part of failures, problems, actions, experiences, or situations. You can find good in almost anything. Failure should be viewed as a learning experience teaching you what doesn't work, so you can succeed in later attempts. If you have trouble with your child, take pride in setting limits to teach your child, in supporting, and in forgiving your child.

Like other bad habits, negative thinking can be very difficult to change. You can only change it by practice, practice, and more practice. The more you flood your mind with positive thought alternatives by reading and practicing them, the more your thoughts and feelings will change for the better. Many people witness the power of positive thinking when they practice and repeat affirmations for spiritual growth such as, "I will face each new day with peace and love in my heart." It may take months of daily effort changing your habits of negative thinking before you notice much change in your feelings.

There is a saying that we cannot change the direction of the wind, but we can adjust the sail. In the same way, if there is negativity surrounding us, there is often little we can do to change the person who is showing hatred, upset and negativity. However, by adjusting ourselves, our thoughts, our speech in a positive manner, we can bring positivity to the lives of others .

Grit is laid down to prevent snow from settling and turning into ice to prevent accidents and destruction. In a similar way, if we do not feed our soul with positivity and love, we will be heading towards disasters (of the soul) and away from our prime goal of supreme consciousness. The supreme consciousness pervades and permeates all:

You are in every particle  
Your signature on every leaf  
Here, there and everywhere  
Your face is all that I see  
(Avtar Bani). ■

# *Hope*

Dina Sabnani,  
Hong Kong

Hope is to want or expect something - to have a wish to get or do something or for something to happen or be true, especially something that seems possible or likely.

Everyone is searching for this hope. Always, constantly searching for an elusive 'something' to make their lives complete. Some think it is wealth; some, a life partner; some, career satisfaction; and for others it is happiness. Truthfully, we are all searching for one thing - hope.

*Hope is what keeps us going. Hope is what drives us.*

Hope is why people are driven to different religions. Sitting in holy congregation (Satsang) watching people, all I feel is a sense of this hope. It is the spiritually enlightened we come to listen to and learn from. It is always to seek, to share and to believe. Faith is a by-product of hope.

We want so desperately to believe that there is a reason for our being here. Some are told what to believe and who to believe in, and they are happy doing so. Some search and find a Guru, God, belief system and they stay on that path.

Then there are others, who are constantly seeking. They go from one practice to another, one belief to another and one creed to another. They do not know what it is they are looking for, and therefore continue until they believe that they have found it. Some remain in the search forever.

What I believe is that you have to seek within. The truth is within. Though so many of us have so many layers piled on top that we have to keep peeling them away and dig deep to find it. And then re-connect. I don't say 'connect' because we're never ever not connected. We just need to re-member who we are, and re-connect to the source within. I am not saying we do not need guides, spiritual leaders or God. The source within is the GOD we seek to connect with externally.

For some it is easier to see this, feel this and experience this. For some, they know the theory yet need to put it into practice. Again it boils down to choices we make every single moment of our lives. If we live on autopilot, we then are not conscious co-creators of our lives. But if we start being aware of what it is we think about, how we are shaping our own lives, we can then start becoming conscious co-creators of our experience of life. We may not have a say in the situations we find ourselves in, but we do have a choice in how we choose to deal with it.

These are choices that need to be made all the time consciously and consistently. Then and only then do they become a habit. Then, and only then, will the awareness and awakening come to us.

That's where work comes in - in the form of self-development.

How do we go about being more aware? It's actually not that hard – you have to just start paying attention – real attention to what you are thinking about. If the thoughts in your head do not serve you or are of a negative nature then simply stop thinking about them. Literally say 'stop' in your mind and bring your focus on something that brings you joy or is of a positive nature. It may sound silly but it's necessary until we cultivate the habit of choosing positive thoughts.

Basic Laws of the Universe state that what we think about – we bring about. So take a look at your life as it is right now. What are you attracting to yourself? Are you happy in what is going on with you and around you? If not, think hard and really be honest with yourself about what it is you have been thinking about. If you cannot remember then that awareness NEEDS to come into play. Watch your thoughts and change them as and when necessary. Keep choosing to focus on things that make you FEEL good. If you are in a 'feel good' state of mind – you will naturally only attract good. Feeling good is being connected within. When you re-connect you will start being more aware.

Develop this awareness so we can awaken to the source within. Re-connect to the Creator and then 'hope' is not something elusive as we once thought. Hope then becomes faith. Once we have faith we learn to surrender. In our surrender we achieve a life that is blissful.

NOW - Not tomorrow or next week or in the future – now is the time to wake up and stay awake. Dreaming while being awake is what manifests into your present.

Seek and ye shall find. Ask and ye shall receive. Knock and the doors of heaven shall open unto you.....

Heaven is truly a state of mind. Not someone else's but your OWN.

Stay blessed. ■

# AS I GOT OLDER

Brendan Hawthorne, Wednesbury, UK



When I was young  
I wanted to see everything  
witness it  
Know what it was  
Explore it  
Get excited by it  
And as I got older  
I wanted to understand it  
Sense it  
Taste it  
Experience it  
Question it  
And as I got older  
I wanted to own it  
Show it  
Make others aware of it  
Control it  
Command it  
And as I got older  
I became wary of it  
Suspicious of its nature  
Tired of it  
Wise to it  
And now I am older  
I want to forget it  
Have nothing more to do with it  
Stop carrying it  
Erase it from memory  
So that  
I can see it all  
Again  
One day  
Once more ■

# Lines in your mind

K K Kohli, Wolverhampton, UK

Do you draw lines in your mind?

Maybe you draw them in water,  
in the sea, a river or a puddle,  
Instantly disappear as you draw.

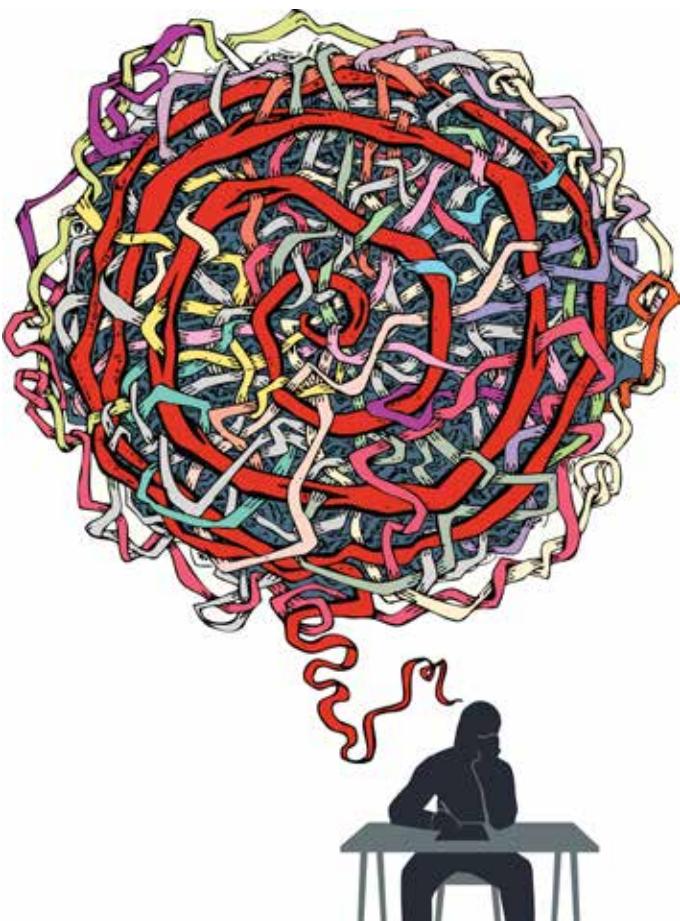
Water is life, water is forgetting,  
Forgiving and living; it runs through,  
Like a flow yet has an ability to change.  
Memories and thoughts flow and vanish,

Freeing you of burdens and heavy loads.

Do you draw lines in your mind?  
Yes, I draw lines in the air, anywhere,  
Invisible to the eye, invisible to the mind,

There is no cargo to hold or bear  
I feel free and happy; I am in peace,  
no fear, no guilt, no greed or attachment.  
I have an intention to give out pure love

That is already living inside of me. I write  
these lines to mark my inward journey ■





# the mask

**Julie Horsley, Solihull, UK**

Hidden identity  
A protective shell  
Concealing reality  
What lies does it tell?  
  
What truth is beneath  
That external core?  
Vulnerable entity  
Not pushed to the fore  
  
The mask is a buffer  
From life's ups and downs  
It's covered in smiles  
When inside there are frowns  
  
Let the mask slip  
Is that weakness or strength?  
Do you want people close  
Or at arm's length?  
  
When we are born  
We are mask-less it's true  
Then the mask starts to grow  
Into multiples too  
  
Can any of us really  
Reveal who we are  
Do we feel life is safe?  
Have we yet come that far?  
  
This world's full of pressure  
To be something we are not  
Is the mask now essential  
Or have we just lost the plot?  
  
There are not many people  
Without masks you see  
But somewhere behind  
There lies the real me! ■

## HAPPINESS & CONTENTMENT

*Serena Nagha, London, UK*

Oh Lover of the Lord! I urge you to find  
A state of being that resides in mankind  
To be stationary on this spinning Earth  
And abandon illusions; value your worth

A starving soul, for happiness I yearned  
But the search left me so bitter and burned  
Wishing away Summers and Winters alike  
Toiling like a jewel miner, at every strike

Led me further and further until the day  
Happiness arrived but soon went away  
How cruel and temporary, this emotion  
Even after countless hours of devotion

Happiness fled when reality beamed  
And nothing was quite as it seemed  
Bliss broke when struggles were born  
Blackest of nights made way for dawn

Tranquillity came over; life had decided  
Acceptance and satisfaction had collided  
A state of being was not subject to change  
The birth of contentment had been arranged

So abandon the extremes; yearn to be stable  
Be content with the purpose; not with the label  
Because in this world consumed by degradation  
The act of kindness requires contemplation

Why crumble and fade for the sake of delusion?  
Contentment is constant; happiness, an illusion  
To change, I faded and extinguished my light  
I ignored the Changeless who ignited my fight

So when love is forced to say goodbye  
And dreams are sent away to die  
I pray you will remember this answer  
So even in thunder you remain a dancer

Because it was in being content  
That I was one with the dark  
It was immersed in contentment  
And the stars found their spark! ■

# Quality of Life

*Gurdip Roopra, Birmingham, UK*

We need a world where equality's rife  
Which is the key for quality of life?  
To live with love respect and care  
Never to fight over what we share

.....

Love begins where co-existence starts  
Bridging the gap between distant hearts  
Our similarities are different; differences are the same  
We all have desires burning like a flame  
No two snowflakes are ever the same  
But all are one when they melt into rain

.....

We need a world where quality is rife  
This is the key for the quality of life  
To live with love respect and care  
Never to fight over what we share

.....

Rich finds may bring us pleasure but,  
Enriched minds are an absolute treasure  
To get lost in wealth is truly tragic  
To have family and health is really magic  
Value is more important, not the price  
It's nice to be important, but more important to be nice

.....

We need a world where equality is rife  
This is the key for quality of life  
To live with love respect and care  
Never to fight over what we share ■

God, our minds are scenes of battles and strife;  
Please, Lord, nourish us with the Bread of Life  
So we can see through the dark shades of pain,  
Never from acting out your will, refrain.  
Actions are guided by our own desire,  
But from trusting you, may we never tire.

Breathe through us the love Jesus brought from you,  
Guide us, the righteous cause let us pursue.  
Let us be born in fellowship and grace,  
Lead us through life, every inch, pace by pace.  
Sometimes we doubt, we despair and we lack,  
Renew faith so the world we can fight back



God's  
*love*

Logic may struggle to accept your being,  
But our eyes can't deny what they're seeing!  
Your work on earth at times seems strange to us  
With death and destruction - why? "Just because".  
Colour our perception, Lord, with your will,  
So we may love you and our hearts be filled. ■

*Ian Henery, Walsall, UK*

Ian Henery is a practising lawyer and  
also the poet laureate of Walsall.



# LETTING GO

Harsha Ramachandani,  
Sydney, Australia

We live in a world where we are constantly striving to achieve, to possess, and to own. So the concept of 'letting go' seems a little contradictory to what mankind has established to be the purpose of life. And as we continue to acquire, it never seems enough. The irony sets in as we try to fill a void with more and more material things, only to never really feel satisfied or content. It has come to the point where this insatiable obsession has created a society of hoarders. And recently, there have emerged countless television shows that are dedicated to this phenomenon - to broadcast it, explain it, and come to a reasonable solution.

Now, we may sit in our spotless uncluttered homes watching these shows, feeling sorry for people who can't seem to let go of the excess of tangible things; but what about the countless intangible things cluttering our minds? How often do we spend precious time worrying or obsessing about failed friendships and relationships, our insecurities and regrets, shattered expectations or lost opportunities? How often do we replay unkind words that were said to us over and over in our minds? All of these actions may be intangible

but they are no less examples of hoarding. Instead of letting go, we repeatedly make the active choice of desperately holding on to these thoughts and emotions of regret or envy, none of which serve any constructive purpose. Eckhart Tolle, world-famous spiritual author, said: "**Worry pretends to be necessary but serves no useful purpose.**"

So why do we do hold on?

We share this world with billions and billions of people, and it is easy to feel lost and insignificant in the

ever-increasing crowd. So, in our own way, we strive to be unique and form an identity that we feel is our own. More often than not, we use our insecurities, past experiences or current circumstances to define us as individuals to the point where it becomes part of our identity. We may identify ourselves as the victim of a failed relationship, a failed pregnancy, a serious illness, or even unemployment. It is almost as if the identity itself is powerful and we are nothing without it. We get so attached to that identity that losing it

seems akin to becoming faceless in a crowd. And the thought of losing what feels uniquely our own is so terrifying that we refuse to let go, and we cling on to what we have clung on to for years.

The unfortunate result of holding on to our circumstances, insecurities and regrets is that it not only creates stress in our minds and subsequently our bodies, but it also alienates us from ourselves and from each other. We essentially shut ourselves out from our family and friends: from people who we think do not understand us; from people who we think are above or beneath us. We get so caught up in our individual bubbles that we create invisible and impenetrable barriers, which we essentially hold in place ourselves. And suddenly, humanity and compassion and all that this world needs to become one, is a struggle to achieve.

What inevitably sets us free is the realization that 'who we are' is NOT 'what happens to us'. They are completely separate. 'What happens to us' changes as we ride the highs and lows of life – births and deaths, success and failure. But who we are innately does not change. And consciously separating ourselves from 'what happens to us' allows us to recognize and celebrate this fact. Alan Watts, a western philosopher who was strongly influenced by eastern Buddhist teachings said:

**"Waking up to who you are requires letting go of who you imagine yourself to be."**

In a recent episode of the Ellen DeGeneres Show, the affable talk show host interviewed a 105-year old woman and asked her about her secret to longevity and positivity. The jolly old woman replied, "If something happens, and I can't do anything about it, I don't let it bother me." It was heart-warming to listen to such simple words to live by, such a fantastic example of letting go, and the freedom and positivity that it can bring.

Just as we embrace spring-cleaning of our homes and garages, and relish the feeling of weightlessness that comes with giving away or donating items that no longer serve us, letting go of emotional attachment to our circumstances can feel very similar. It is often said that we wait until it is too late to let things go. If whatever is troubling you now will seem trivial and not really matter in the future - five, ten, even twenty years down the line - let it go.

A way to exercise letting go may be to have a change in perception. In a situation where you feel you have been wronged, instead of laying all of the blame on the other person, if we learned to give them the benefit of our doubt, it would save us immense heartache and enable peace in our minds. Similarly, if we give every life situation the same consideration and see each moment as a blessing, nothing would ever seem dismal or hopeless. This conscious alteration of perception has to be an ongoing activity, because how long our inner peace lasts depends on how long we are willing to practice letting go. Feeling angry or hurt with someone or a situation hurts us more than it hurts the person or situation. We are only able to give love to others if we love ourselves, and loving ourselves requires letting go of sources of stress and negativity. Let us be kind and compassionate to ourselves, and let go.

His Holiness Nirankari Baba, who leads the Sant Nirankari Mission purely by example, talks frequently about forgiveness in his discourses. Forgiveness is the supreme form of letting go. For forgiveness to work, it has to be felt fully and with every inch of our being. This is an area in which I find myself most lacking in. And it seems as though in order to get me to work on forgiveness, life continues to present me with situations where I am forced to practice it. While it may be difficult to start the process of forgiving, the emotional strength it takes

to subside one's ego is nothing compared to the bliss felt by an open and forgiving heart.

Yoga is an activity that encourages the practice of humility and forgiveness, and letting go. If you have practised yoga before, even for a short period, you may have noticed a positive change in yourself during the class. Yoga helps to bring you to the present moment by gently encouraging you to empty your mind of everything, happy or sad, good or bad. Anything from your past and all your worries and anxieties about the future are humbly asked (by you) to stay away while you concentrate on the here and now, as you breathe and be thankful. As you go through the physical motions of the yoga postures, you are constantly reminded by the instructor that it is not your ability to match the pose that is important, but the act of letting go and allowing yourself to go as far into the pose as you physically can. You are asked to forgive yourself and accept that your body may not have the skeleton required to hold a certain pose to its extremity. And through this forgiveness, not only does your body let go of the toxins it is holding on to, but your mind becomes so focussed on breathing and being present that nothing else seems worthy enough to occupy it. Words fall short of being able to describe the feeling of contentment and peace that is experienced when the mind lets go of all that is irrelevant. This doesn't even have to be during a yoga class. As long as the same mindset of letting go is put into place in all aspects of life, we stand to be better human beings.

May we be blessed with the acceptance of all that life has to offer, the realisation that we need not hold on to things that do not serve us, and the compassion and forgiveness to offer to others and ourselves. ■

# THE TREE OF



# life

Dave Dhanoa, Toronto, Canada

Over the past sometime, I have been grappling with the ins and outs of destiny and free will, really trying to understand. I mean really understand it, but this is the biggest paradox in spiritual science I have found.

The Scriptures talk about both: nothing can happen without God's will and also that everything is in our hands. HH Nirankari Baba explains this point stating that 'God is a Supreme Energy and within this Energy's will, so to speak, is the freedom of action'. This means that we reap what we sow, but at the same time, the energy behind all our actions is this Supreme Force. So at the end of the day, it is all God!

What was bothering me was a feeling of helplessness, a feeling of almost defeat, and I didn't like that. Then I got my answer from one of Professor Rajan Sachdeva's articles, which relates to a story once told by HH Baba Avtar Singh Ji.

Once, a hungry, thirsty and ever so tired person in the desert suddenly begins to receive all that he desires, whilst sitting under the mythological tree of life (Kalapa Viriksha). Not knowing where everything comes from, he becomes suspicious and entertains negative thoughts. He feels it could be a ghost. Then fulfilling his desire, the ghost appears. He fears that the ghost might eat him. The ghost does eat him!

**'God is a Supreme Energy and within this Energy's will, so to speak, is the freedom of action'.**

Baba Avtar Singh explained that the supreme formless power is like the tree of life; it is an energy field of Infinite Potentiality, which can give you whatever you desire. So always think positive and be positive, and say positive things.

This blew me away. I waited for a few weeks to see if anyone else read the article because I honestly wanted to see if anyone else noticed what I did. When I saw there had been no responses posted, in the advent of Professor Sachdeva's article, I felt compelled to write on the topic myself. If whatever we think or say will come true, from today onwards, then watch your thoughts and what you say and change your life.

So let us become more positive by watching our thoughts and what we say, as this leads to action. Just remember that we are under this Infinite Formless Energy (the real tree of life) and that we can get whatever we want if we so desire. ■

# *Faith*

| Tina Virdee, Bradford, UK |

Every single dollar bill circulated in the United States bears the logo 'In God we trust'. When I heard this, it led me to think about my faith and the trust I place in God.

Having been born into the Nirankari Mission of Universal Brotherhood and adhering to its principles and values has provided me with a solid foundation upon which to build my faith. For me, faith is something that develops and changes with the tide of the journey we are on.

As a human I make mistakes all the time, but as a person on the path of self-realisation, I am learning to find lessons, in every error I make.

As a human I doubt, falter and stumble, but as a Nirankari, I have been taught that it is Nirankar who leads the way, who carries us through and gives us the strength to switch on the light that will banish the darkness.

As a Nirankari, I know that when I feel I have come to the very edge, I will be taught how to fly. Like the eagle that doesn't shy away from the storm but rides the storm, flying above it until it ebbs away.

Martin Luther King once said, "Faith is taking the first step, even when you don't see the whole staircase."

It is about trusting in our Spiritual Mentor, placing faith in the vision that he has shared with us, and walking on the path that he has illumined for us. When we have this conviction, we come to realise that what will be, will be - in this mindset, we are not disturbed by events and circumstances, but rather come to accept them. The following story, elaborates upon this point:

After September 11th one company invited the remaining personnel of other companies, who had been decimated by the attack on the Twin Towers, to share their available office space. At a morning meeting the head of

security told stories of why these people were alive and how they had been lucky enough to avoid the tragic events of that day..... They were all little stories, but with big meanings.

The head of the company got in late that day because his son had started nursery. Another fellow was alive because it was his turn to bring the doughnuts. One woman was late because her alarm clock didn't go off on time. One was late as she was stuck on the motorway due to a traffic accident. One of them missed the bus.

One had spilt food on her clothes and had to take time to change them. One's car wouldn't start. One went back to answer the telephone. One had a child that dawdled and didn't get ready as soon as he should have. One couldn't get a taxi.

The one that struck me the most was a man who had put on a new pair of shoes that morning, took the various means to get to work but before he got there, he developed a blister on his foot. He stopped at a chemist to buy a plaster. That simple act is the reason he is alive today.

Little things that made a big difference.... Now when I am stuck in traffic, miss a lift, turn back to answer a ringing telephone - all the little things that annoy me, I think to myself, this is exactly where God wants me to be at this very moment.

Next time your morning seems to be going wrong, the children are slow getting dressed, you can't seem to find the car keys and you hit every single red traffic light on the way into work, don't get mad or frustrated; remember that God is at work watching over you. Know that at that moment in time you are exactly where God wants you to be. ■

The  
company  
we  
keep

RAUL KAMAL, LONDON, UK

## *My marriage has shown me how easy it is to be influenced by the company we keep. After less than a year of married life, I found myself touched by my wife's positive traits and comportment.*

This is just one instance which highlights that subconsciously, for better or for worse, whether you like it or not, you will influence and be influenced by the company you keep.

In fact, whether we realise it or not, we are often judged by the company we keep too. I recall an incident during my college days which epitomised this.

During a lunch break one day, a friend of mine began talking to a female student in our cafeteria. Over time, their friendship blossomed; they became partners and many years later, husband and wife.

Reminiscing about the past, and on a humorous note, my friend cited his charming personality and his dashing good looks as the reason why his wife first spoke to him in college.

His wife said it was quite the contrary. She said she had noticed a few weeks ago how the whole group had interacted with each other so well, sharing food in the cafeteria and spending time to help each other with their studies.

She continued by saying that she knew that my friend was a good human being by the friends he had and how we behaved towards each other.

The analogy of dust aptly describes this. For dust when blown by the wind, elevates to great heights. When mixed with water, however, it becomes mud.

Similarly, we can rise to great heights, in whatever we wish to achieve, if we keep the company of those who also aspire to reach the same heights. Keeping the company of narrow-minded individuals may,

however, invoke us to think like them too. Benjamin Franklin emphasises this,

"If you sit down with dogs, you will rise with fleas."

There is a fable about twin parrots, separated at birth. One was raised in a monastery by monks, who only spoke of righteous living. The other lived with a hunter, who often used vile language.

One day the parrot that lived with the hunter escaped and by chance, found his way to the monastery.

precious few individuals, who are strong-willed enough not to be influenced by negative traits. Instead, they attempt to spread positive values to even those who are riddled with faults.

I compare such beings to finely cut and polished 'diamonds'. They are a rare breed and yet by keeping their company and imbibing their qualities, we can increase our own value.

Regardless of what is thrown in their direction, wherever they may find themselves, and whatever

### *"... It is better to be alone than in bad company"*

The monks were surprised to see that the visitor was identical in appearance to the parrot that lived with them. Yet when they both spoke, their difference was apparent. The monastery parrot spoke gently with kind words and the hunter's parrot screeched abusive words at all the passers-by. George Washington also alludes to this,

"It is better to be alone than in bad company."

There is an exception to this rule, however. There are always some

challenges they meet, they deal with every situation calmly. Their impeccable behaviour is an example for us all.

So be careful of the company you keep, as it can shape your thoughts, words and actions and even inspire you to be like those who ooze goodness even in the most testing of times. Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra cements this,

"Tell me what company you keep and I'll tell you what you are." ■

*"...be careful of the company you keep, as it can shape your thoughts, words and actions and even inspire you to be like those who ooze goodness even in the most testing of times."*



If I could describe life using just one word, it would probably be rollercoaster. Each and every one of our lives is a journey. Some days we are at the peak of our success and on other days we are trapped in the troughs of failure. Some continue to experience these ups and down without ever reflecting on what they are experiencing.

Throughout our lifetime many of us will go to college, obtain degrees, meet our spouse, have kids, and buy a house. In this way we trap ourselves in our day to day routine completely forgetting that there is more to life than simply existing. With our days filled with mundane obligations it is easy to forget to enjoy life. As crazy as it seems many of us do not allow ourselves the opportunity to laugh as much as we should and partake in the simple things we enjoy doing.

I am sure everyone will agree that life brings challenges, but let us step back for a moment and ask the deeper question, which is "why". Why is life so difficult? Regardless of the perks that we may be born with such as fame, fortune, and intelligence nothing provides us with an easy button to existence. Despite the difficulties that one may have to face, how you meet your challenges is what makes all the difference.

Many of us are so blessed to have been given the grace to be able to fulfill our destinies in some way, shape or form, so why not step out of our comfort zone of eat, sleep, repeat and try something new? We are not anointed to be someone else; we are anointed to be ourselves. All we need to do is break out of our shell of obligations and increase our self-awareness. Once we increase our self-awareness we automatically begin to see worth and value in everything around us, including ourselves and slowly begin to enter lasting periods of elation.

From a spiritual perspective increasing self-awareness allows one to discover their spiritual self, as well as to build a connection with the Divine Source. Often we become so caught up in the specifics that we disregard the greater whole. Connection with the divine energy however allows us to witness its vastness. In this way man becomes enlightened and reforms by rising

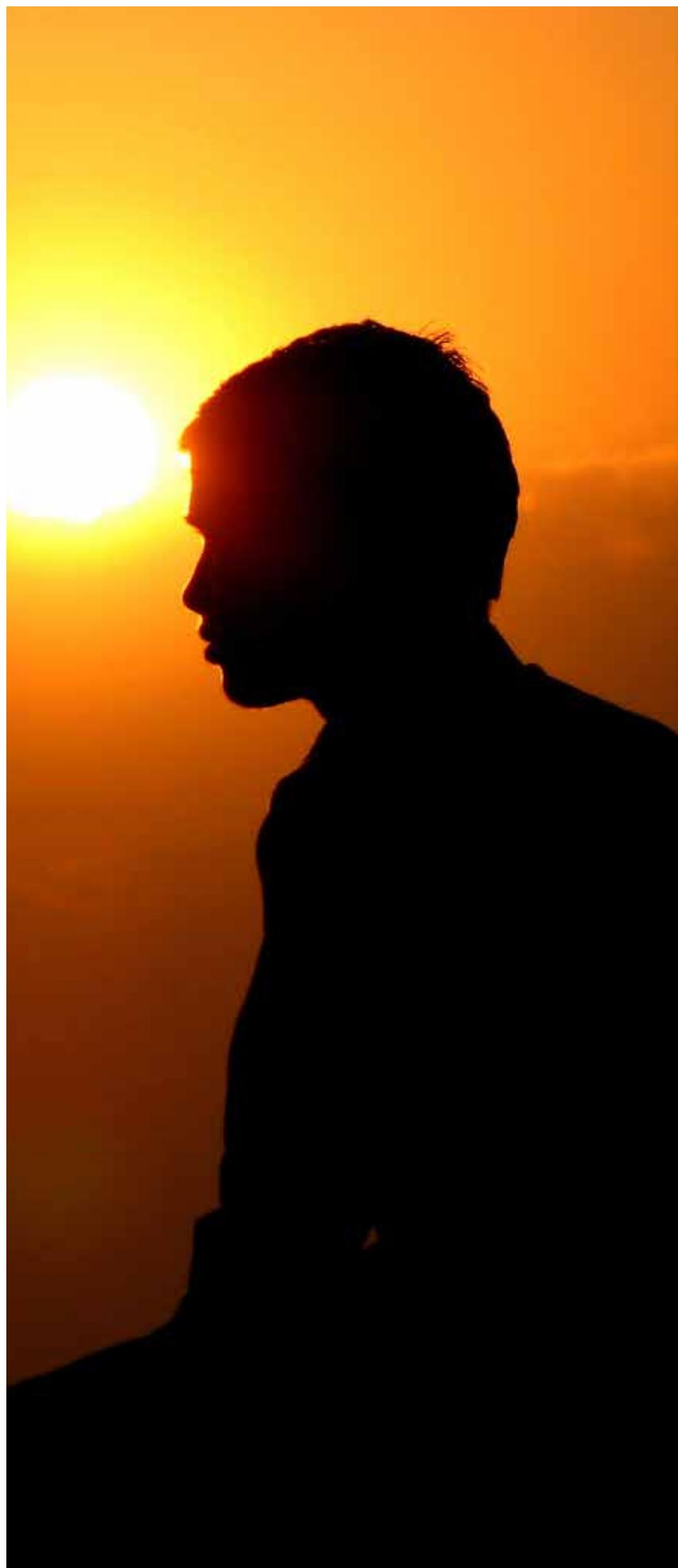
above his animal nature and becomes an embodiment of the Eternal Truth in every aspect of life. By obtaining enlightenment one also learns to stop blaming God. The problems we see are man-made, be they global or personal, there is only one solution which is to be the change you hope for. This begins by becoming proactive first through our thoughts, for if we nourish our thoughts with light and positivity then they will grow into an extraordinary world of reality.

The bitter truth is that inside all of us lies an underlying selfish gene, which can be fuelled for the right reasons - to surrender, to love others, to show acceptance towards good and bad.

This paradoxical idea is like no other. As humans, we can't help but look for situations that benefit us. After all, if you are happy then you will make people around you happy. If you show love, compassion and humility towards others, setting a positive friendly ambience then undoubtedly others will do the same. There is a proverb which reads,

"Your own soul is nourished when you are kind. When you're good to others, your own soul is being strengthened. Your own life is being enriched." So be selfish, nourish your soul, after all you're directly benefitting yourself and helping others too"!

By enhancing one's sense of self-awareness, one is enabled to place societal norms and expectations in their proper perspective, and avoid habitual, conditioned responses. In a state of awareness, one becomes able to prioritise more lasting values, which are sometimes termed divine values, because they have stood the test of time. By focussing one's attention to the Formless One, an individual begins their journey to inner happiness. Self-awareness allows us to realize that inner happiness transcends material circumstance, and rather depends on our mind. The most vital thing is to recognize how important this kind of happiness really is. ■



# Three Stages of Enlightenment

Dan Slebodnik, Washington DC, USA

01

Our gift of enlightenment is the ultimate experience – i.e. meeting God! This knowing happens, in the company of a true Spiritual Master. If a human being is a true seeker, then the Nirankari Baba lovingly and gracefully gives this gift. We are in a state of bliss and nothing can distract us from the love we have experienced. Yet time passes and we drift into the nether - reaches of the physical world - Maya. Soon we feel apart from the True Master, and we are in conflict within our being.

What went wrong? We had met God, so why are we experiencing a reversal of enlightenment? The key lies in taking all the necessary steps to keep our precious gift. The Sant Nirankari Mission has a famous slogan printed on bumper stickers, bookmarkers or banners stating - Know One, Believe in One, and Become One. This statement is not just a catchy slogan or sound bite; it is the “Three Stages of Enlightenment”!

“Know One, Believe in One, and Become One.”

The first stage is to know the One. It is through this introduction that we first meet God. The Nirankari Baba introduces us to God, otherwise we may never meet God. We can compare this event to meeting a human being. We don't know someone until we are introduced. After the introductions, we have a choice to either get to know the person or not. We can say hello and goodbye all in one statement or we can stay and begin a relationship.

Getting to know a person takes time that is far beyond the introduction; it is an investment of time to know a person. Much time is required to understand the ins and outs of a person. When we have learned all there is to know about a person, then trust is developed. Another word for trust is belief. A belief that a person's word is their bond, something that is not common in today's world. So

too it is with God, as we must build a relationship that reveals God's true nature. We study Scriptures, attend sangats and keep the company of enlightened beings. We see God working in our life and the lives of others who are enlightened. In time we clearly see God's love and commitment to us. Then we “Believe the One!”

Once you are in a state of belief, then you are well on your way to becoming one with God. We again can compare this stage to a human relationship, where two people trust each other so much they begin to think alike. A husband and wife is a good example, who after many years of trust know what the other is thinking. They are so much in sync, that their thinking is aligned. The loving couple want to be near each other and long for each other when apart. They are becoming one. This type of relationship is also demonstrated in parents and children, friendships, teacher and student, etc.

Excitingly enough, this type of relationship is even greater between a human and God. This almighty creator who is the source of power and love connects with the creation - you! Not just connecting, but becoming one with you. This is the ultimate event in your enlightenment, merging with Nirankar while you are in human form. Now you have just completed the three stages of enlightenment, there will never be a reversal of God-Knowledge and returning to the physical world - Maya. Salvation is in order, and you have made it.

However, an important point the Nirankari Baba makes frequently is that we can achieve ‘Self-Realization through God-Realization’. This event has everything to do with becoming one with God. If we are to fully experience who and what we really are, then we need to fully experience God. This is a dual process, where

02

03

# Test of Faith

Rajvir L. Raheja, Seattle, USA

one realization allows the other. It's rather like the drop of water realising itself, after it has experienced the ocean! So what did we learn from our relationship with God? We know God has our backs, as God will always forgive, guide, protect and bless us. Our relationship with God has helped us realize our full faith is in God and not Maya. We no longer have to chase the Maya for our power and strength, because it all lies in God.

The second point of God-Realization is that it is not all about you individually, but is all about us - every human being. It is all about the oneness of Nirankar who is ever pervading in all. The attention and blessings that God has given you is intended to be given to all of humanity. We must connect into the oneness of God's realm, where we will discover there is only God and all else is illusion. It is through this oneness that we fully realize ourselves. Finally Self-Realization occurs, which is based on fully understanding the oneness of all.

If we can treat every human being as we want to be treated, and if we can see God in every person, living creature, the earth and the universe and act accordingly, then we have come to know our self. Then a constant force of positive feeling and emotion will vibrate from you as you have patience, kindness, love and respect for all of humanity and creation. There is even no consideration of turning back, as you have successfully stepped through each stage of enlightenment. Your everyday life soars high into the heavens and you take others with you. Day and night you live in oneness and your light shines bright. You are a spiritual success thanks to the grace and love of the Nirankari Baba. ■



*Adversity is the true test of our faith. God brings different types of experiences and circumstances into our life so that we may learn valuable lessons from them. The most important thing adversity can do for us is to bring us to a higher level of thinking and understanding as we pass through each test of faith (lesson). These lessons have the ability to change our perception of the world around us and strengthen our relationship with God. However, we must be willing to acknowledge that the adversity we are going through will bring something positive into our life. When we are faced with adversity, there are two very clear choices. First, do we become negative, hostile, question God's will, and even forsake God's company. Or the other choice we have is to remain positive, calm, loving, compassionate, and continue to remember God. The Bible says, "If thou faint in the day of adversity thy strength is small" (Proverbs 24:10). What good is our faith if it is never tested or has never stood the true test of a storm?*

The easiest thing in the world is to live life without any challenges but the most remarkable thing in the world is to live with the challenges, the ups and downs without breaking your spirit.

The most remarkable people in the world are those who have experienced the test of faith over and over again in different forms but have remained constant in their faith. Spiritual growth begins the moment we go from one test of faith to the next unchanged in our state of mind and being.

Even a kite rises higher against the wind and not with it - I believe this to be true even for human beings and spiritual growth. Just like a tree that is deeply rooted can sustain a storm so is the life of a true devotee. Our roots must be planted so firmly that we remain positive and unshaken by adversity.

We learn some of life's most important lessons through difficult experiences and times. Herodotus, a Greek philosopher, said, "Adversity has the effect of drawing out strength and qualities of a person that would have lain dormant in its absence." What is meant by this quote is, when we are able to respond positively to adversity, characteristics of strength and courage come to the surface and be with us. It is only then we are able to remain like the lotus flower, which is considered one of the most beautiful flowers in the world. It is not considered beautiful because of its colors but rather its quality to bloom beautifully in the muddy water beneath it. Can we

still bloom beautifully despite the muddy challenges of life? HH Nirankari Baba has often said devotees should live like flowers and spread fragrance even in adverse situations and the fragrance of spirituality must remain present always.

In the end, for spiritual growth to occur our faith must be tested over and over again as we move from one phase of life into the next. A student can only move from one grade onto the next as he or she successfully completes the tests administered by the teacher. This is important to determine what the student has learned, where there is need for improvement, and sometimes to make the student reflect on his or her own learning.

In the same way, our faith must be tested for spiritual growth to occur. If we pass these tests of faith (adversity) they will bring us to a place of higher understanding and awareness and lead us in self-reflection of where improvement on our part is needed. His Holiness has often emphasized the importance of saints and prophets and their teachings of truth and humanity. However, when we look at the world in turmoil this message has been lost and forgotten in times of adversity. From a humanitarian point of view, human values decline when the message of love and oneness is forgotten. Rather, His Holiness continues to remind us of these valuable teachings so that we may live in peace and harmony within and with others even during adverse times. ■

# Overcoming Adversity

Kiren Tura Chitkara, Canberra, Australia

**Adversity is often seen as that unwelcome guest who frequents our lives, more often than we would like. This guest can come in many shapes and forms and often brings along with it distress, affliction, hardship and unfortunate incidents. Sometimes it can be relentless in its visits, yet at other times it is almost as if it gives us some sort of silent signal or warning before its arrival – the calm before the storm. No matter how often it visits or who it visits, the central question we ultimately have to deal with is, how do we respond to it? Or to put it another way, how *should* we respond to it?**

The ideal scenario would be to accept the adverse situation, remain strong, define what the factual problem is (different to the emotional problem) and create a strategy to deal with it. In the process of doing so we would learn valuable life lessons and ultimately grow to become stronger individuals as a result of the experience.

Well, this is all very well and good if one is in a position to think rationally and logically, but the trouble with adversity is that it usually comes with

baggage. And a lot of it. Adverse situations can come in the form of financial hardships, disagreements in the workplace, relationship problems, health worries, internal fears or any other circumstance that is enough to disturb our inner peace to the extent that we begin to experience negative reactions such as fear, stress, or panic.

In such instances it can become very difficult to keep a cool, logical mindset that is required to overcome problems with grace and poise. More

often than not, we find ourselves in a situation where our behaviours in response to adversity are the complete opposite of the ideal. So what can we do about improving upon this?

One of the key lessons in managing adversity is to accept that it is a fact of life. No one is exempt from having to face difficulties – bad things simply happen to everyone at some point in their lives. Therefore rather than allowing oneself to become trapped in a whirlwind of negative

reactions, it is far better to accept and understand the fact that if difficult times come, they will also pass; just as the good times cannot last forever, neither will the bad times - life is not simply "picking on you".

Once we are in a position to realise this central fact we are able to move ourselves into that logical mindset where we can develop a mental strategy to help us get through these difficult times. On this point, Chuang Tzu once wrote that:

"The true person sees what the eye sees, and does not add to it something that is not there."

Once we can move away from our perceptions being coloured by our emotions, being managed by our desires and being fragmented by our wandering attention then we will be in a position to actually see the world clearly and accurately and get down to the business of dealing with our problems.

People deal with issues in different ways, however a common facet among successful individuals is that they ensure that they keep their internal and external resources strong. Internal resources are our emotions; our understanding; our thought processes; our discipline; our faith. External resources are those support systems that we build up around us as we move through our life journey: our family; our friends; our trusted network of contacts. If we can keep these two categories in our life stable and strong, then we stand ourselves in good stead for dealing with difficulties when they arise.

Although external resources are important, one can argue that it is our internal resources that are vital to managing adversity. If we concentrate on keeping ourselves strong emotionally and mentally, then we should not be affected by difficulties to the same extent as if our emotional or mental state is weak. One can compare this quite directly to physical health: if our physical health is good, we will not fall prey to disease, however if our immunity is weak, then we are vulnerable. The same principle applies to our mental well-being. Buddha summed up the importance of one's mental state well

when he said:

"We are what we think.

All that we are arises with our thoughts.

With our thoughts we make the world...

It is good to control them,

And to master them brings happiness."

If Buddha's concept is followed, then mastering our thoughts will ultimately bring us into a state of happiness. This in itself is an interesting premise – was Buddha suggesting that we would be happy if we simply master our mind? Or is it that in the process of mastering our mind we are actually able to change our perceptions and this is what makes the vital difference in our state of being? I would argue that it is the latter. By realising that even difficult situations, if managed well, can bring about ultimate success and happiness to us can make our outlook towards adversity change. This is extremely well illustrated by an individual who has been one of the most successful entrepreneurs of our time: the founder of Apple and the pioneer of the computer revolution, Steve Jobs. Set out below is an excerpt from his Commencement Address at Stanford University which he delivered on 12 June 2005. It illustrates some important life lessons for him which all arose from adverse situations:

"Woz and I started Apple in my parents garage when I was 20. We worked hard, and in 10 years Apple had grown from just the two of us in a garage into a \$2 billion company with over 4000 employees. We had just released our finest creation — the Macintosh — a year earlier, and I had just turned 30. And then I got fired. How can you get fired from a company you started? ...

I really didn't know what to do for a few months. I was a very public failure, and I even thought about running away from the valley. But something slowly began to dawn on me — I still loved what I did. I had been rejected, but I was still in love. And so I decided to start over. I didn't see it then, but it turned out that getting fired from Apple was

the best thing that could have ever happened to me. The heaviness of being successful was replaced by the lightness of being a beginner again, less sure about everything. It freed me to enter one of the most creative periods of my life.

During the next five years, I started a company named NeXT, another company named Pixar ... (which) ... went on to create the world's first computer animated feature film, Toy Story, and is now the most successful animation studio in the world. In a remarkable turn of events, Apple bought NeXT, I returned to Apple, and the technology we developed at NeXT is at the heart of Apple's current renaissance.

I'm pretty sure none of this would have happened if I hadn't been fired from Apple. It was awful tasting medicine, but I guess the patient needed it. Sometimes life hits you in the head with a brick. Don't lose faith. I'm convinced that the only thing that kept me going was that I loved what I did. You've got to find what you love."

I think this short excerpt provides an excellent example of how, if we remain resilient in the face of adversity we can see that there is in fact light at the end of the tunnel, and that light may be far brighter than we could ever have imagined. It is an interesting concept, because resilience in itself is something that needs to be built up over time. You cannot develop your resilience in one shot. It is like a muscle – to develop strong muscles you need to frequently exercise, you need to expose those muscles to resistance and in doing so you will build up their strength. Our characters are the same, the more we are exposed to difficulties, the more resilience we build up, and the more we ultimately grow as individuals. Viewing things from this perspective, one may be able to perceive adversity not as that once terribly unwelcome guest but to a passing acquaintance that can open the door to a better future for us.

Steve also made another important point in his speech that in times of difficulty it is important not to lose faith. Faith can provide us with a form of courage, and in times of need, courage is a very important player on

the road to success. Confucius once said that:

**"The gem cannot be polished without friction, nor man perfected without trials."**

However if we give up and let go of our faith when these trials come then we run the risk of being that gem that could have shone so bright but fell short of being polished to its full glory due to fear of pain. Seneca, a Roman Stoic philosopher once observed that

**"It is not because things are difficult that we do not dare,**

**It is because we do not dare that they are difficult."**

Sometimes it can take all our energy to gather up the courage to even dare to act in accordance with a well thought out strategy for facing adverse situations but as Marcus Aurelius, the Roman Emperor once stated:

**"Nothing happens to any man which he is not formed by nature to bear."**

And if we have already been created by God to deal with the events that could come into our life, then we should have very little to lose in doing our best to face those hurdles, no matter how hard they may seem at the time. All that is required of us is clear thinking and honest action and the rest as they say, is out of our control. And if it is out of our control, then why should we worry or fret? As put so eloquently by George Herbert in his poem "The Temper":

**"Whether I fly with angels, fall with dust,**

**Thy hands made both and I am there:**

**Thy power and love, my love and trust,**

**Make one place everywhere."**

No matter what difficulties come into our life, no matter how adverse the situation, as long as we keep our faith, accept the situation for what it is, and act diligently and thoughtfully in our response we should be satisfied that we have done our best. The rest we can leave to a force greater than ourselves. ■

## VISIT THE PAST TO UNDERSTAND THE PRESENT

VISHU JHAMAT, WALSALL, UK

The most common cure for a sore throat, in 16th Century England, was to swallow a whole frog, alive. Hence the term 'you sound as if you have a frog in your throat!' Nausea was cured by swallowing live spiders covered in butter. Today's medical experts provide cures that are much less sickly. However, it is interesting to learn that most of what we know has evolved over time; it is what our ancestors initially thought to be true.

The rate of change in the world has been phenomenal. Only 100 years ago, when the Wright brothers, Orville and Wilbur, built the airplane, the first ever mechanical, human flight took place; it was capable of making a controlled, powered and sustained, heavier than air human flight. It would be a mere 60 years later, when NASA put a human being on the moon. Only 20 years ago, NASA sent an unmanned craft and vehicle to the Martian surface.

In the same 100 years, mankind has suffered two major world wars and a stream of national, international discords and battles, culminating in the loss of over 160 million lives, civilian and military personnel. In 1900, the world population was approximately 1.8 billion. In 100 years, the human population has increased by 3 and a half times.

The world is not only changing rapidly, it is also growing at an alarming rate, never before seen in history. The change is intense. Like a global village, 7 billion people are all interconnected with the world-wide net in a collaborative manner. So much so that even one post on Facebook or Twitter can set off a chain reaction. Often only ever witnessed at a molecular level, it can result in mass riots on demand, a spiral of protests, and demonstrations at any given location at any given time.

So in this ever connected, ever online,



wired world, where our every thought, feeling and emotion is discussed and shared in an open virtual world, how can an individual be himself? How can he prove to be useful to others? Paradoxically, it is about losing myself to find a connection with others. In order to find myself, I need to find someone who has found himself first, and for that, I need a guide.

At a time when some of the most influential spiritual guides and saints lived, the population on this planet was relatively so much less. During the times of Lord Buddha, the world population was approx. 65 million - less than the entire UK population today. During the times of Lord Jesus Christ, the world population was about 200 million, about the population of Nigeria today. During the time of the Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him), the world population was approx. 500 million. During the times of the 10 Gurus of Sikhism, the population of the world was approx. 600 million. Today, the population of the world is 10 times that of the 1500's - over 7 billion.

Never in history has there been this many people on earth. Finding a guide may seem like looking for a needle in a haystack!

So in the search for more fulfilment and enrichment, mankind has taken historical wisdom, modern-day technology and a pinch of contemporary cultural context, to creating a menu of delights. This is to find some experience of wellbeing and self-fulfilment. In an attempt to understand age old scripts, we have applied modern context. Much of the works of Shakespeare have become anachronistic - adapted to our age. Romeo and Juliet is set in hip modern day Verona, and the Comedy of Errors is set

- in 1980's Dinkapur, India, in the film Angoor. To understand our current existence, we look back to try and understand why we have opposable thumbs. Today, we apply our current context to understand the experience behind the essence of historical writings.

History is replete with stories of seekers, who searched for the divine.

The Buddha, Siddhartha, went from teacher to teacher to find such a divine Being. Today he is revered around the world as the enlightened one.

When a wise young man, aged but 12 years, meets Guru Nanak, he asks the divine guide to rid him of the shackles of birth and death. Nanak, after hearing such a mature request from someone so young, names the boy 'the old one', and initiates him on the path of divinity. This tradition of seeking and finding, in the context of this modern age of technology, would be a lot easier if one could simply Google, 'Enlighten Me'.

- It seems that science and technology have taken its own approach to the seeker - revealer relationship. The search for the divine may be what led scientists to build the Large Hadron Collider (LHC), in the hope of finding the Higgs Boson particle, the cause of the effect that we call 'mass'. It is commonly known as the God Particle. Saints and prophets have been at hand to provide answers to the question of where this divine spark, is; they also answer the questions as to the meaning of life. Finding the God Particle may do little, beyond raising a whole new set of questions.

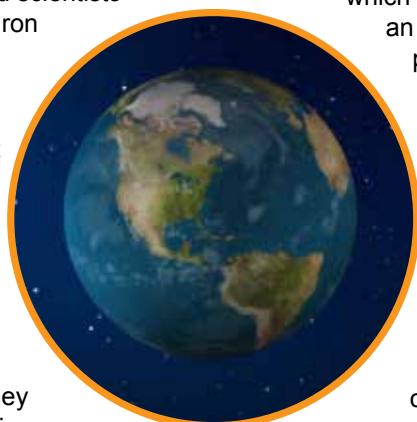
- The Spiritual Guide answers the seeker's questions to such an extent that no unanswered questions remain.
- So what happens when we take the historical texts and scripts and misinterpret them? Do we end up with a basket of dismembered ears when we ask 'friends, countrymen, lend me your ears', or choke on the proverbial frog trying to cure a sore throat?

Do we see the act and not the message when we read about the life of the Buddha, resorting to sitting under a tree in the hope that I too will find enlightenment? If the act itself was enough, then all the ritual we follow in religion, the symbolic gestures, the direction, attitude and mode of our prayers, the foods and offerings, the ceremonies and sermons, would be enough to find the 'spirit' behind the act. If the ritual is not preceded by the spirit, becoming spiritual does not seem like a target we can reach.

The Nirankari Baba once told a mass gathering: 'religious acts without essence, are like a sweet without sweetness or salt without saltiness'. Spirituality is a reflection of compassion, tolerance, humility and love. There essence is a prerequisite to enjoying the sweetness in all our ceremonies.

It is finding the divine within that leads us to finding ourselves, and this journey we are on, paradoxically, is one in which we are searching to become that which we already are. In an ever expanding

populus, with time always moving in one direction, an amassed wealth of knowledge and scripture at the touch of our fingertips, in amidst all this chaos, there is clarity that can be revealed, that puts all our historical learning into context, cutting through the ritual, to reveal the spirit in its simplest, unadulterated form. ■



*Which one should we choose: material or spiritual wealth? The most important aspect of life is the ability to differentiate between creation and the creator. The former is the material and the latter, spiritual; there are manifested truths on the one side, and the absolute truth, on the other.*

# Material or Spiritual Wealth?

Sunny Nirala, London, UK

What is required is the special equi-vision, which creates the ideal that helps us to understand and appreciate the rich tapestry of life. This is achieved through what is called the Gnosis (the Knowledge of God).

The Gnosis helps us to live in the material world, and keeps us connected to the realm of spirit. For such a connection, there is no compulsion to forsake society, for we can experience it in our own hearth and home. However, for those that have done so, such as a hermit living in a forest, it may well bring them physiological and psychological benefits – i.e. uncontaminated air to breathe, fresh fruit to eat and lack of human conflict due to social isolation. However, I believe that to gain peace of mind, it is not necessary to enact this kind of reclusive lifestyle.

In spite of the many challenges - familial, social and cultural, our interactive experiences help to shape our character and make us better human beings.

Throughout the ages, man's struggle with life has kept him busy and in the dark, devoid of the laws of the universe. In many traditions man creates myths, based on a small element of truth, which over time wanes and distorts. No way does this help man to find himself; in fact it confines him further to the world of the senses.

In his hierarchy of needs, Maslow

talks about 5 such needs. The primary concern is physiological - food, water, shelter and warmth. The remaining four, consist of safety, love, self-esteem and self-actualization.

Arguably, man has struggled to consistently rise beyond the physiological needs, and there is widespread neglect of the more emotional and spiritual aspects of living. This limitation leads to a whole host of vices to form in his mind – i.e. greed, anger, lust, attachment and ego. These are the very vices that fuel his downfall. The third stage of love is rarely experienced. No wonder there is discord everywhere.

Both the Holy Quran (3:14 Asad) and the Bhagavad Gita (16:12) allude to man's wanton accumulation of worldly pleasures, which keep him restless and away from the reservoir of peace – God.

Why indeed are people besotted by material desires and possessions?

I had the chance to spend some time in the Middle East last year. This is an area which is known for its extensive wealth – oil and gas wealth. It is a place where prestigious and luxurious cars are mixed with the biggest of properties. With all these material bounties, one wonders not about spiritual growth.

What we must realize is that we are all creatures part form and part formless. We are part of the creator and part of the creation. We are part

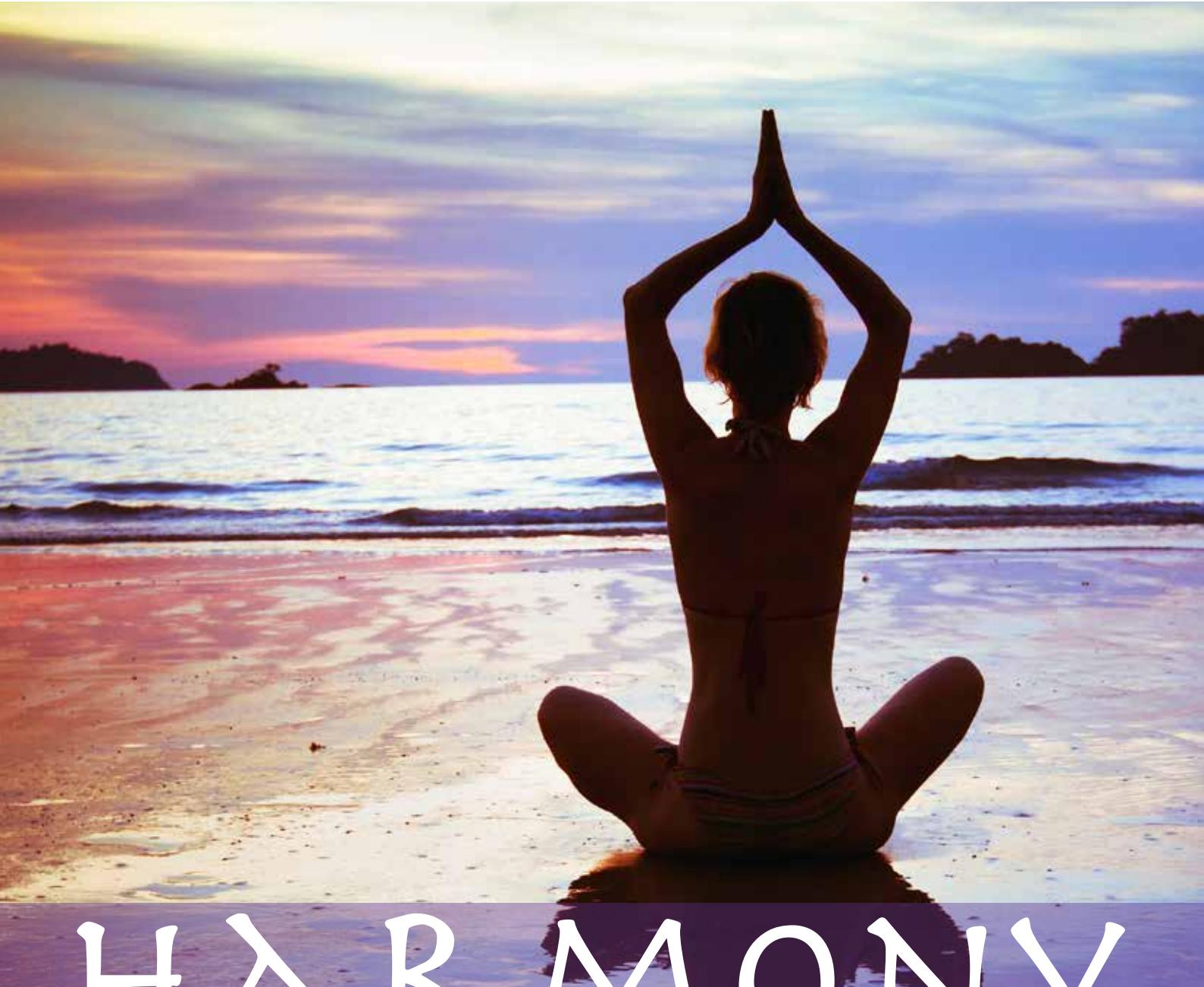
of the life giving force as well as the elements. We exist simultaneously within two worlds - the material plane i.e. that which has manifested into physical reality, and the spiritual plane i.e. that which is colourless and formless.

If one is fortunate enough to attain the Knowledge of God, then one can have all the tools and abilities to experience this nectar of life. One develops the ability to take decisions in life to support both experiences - the material as well as the spiritual. Only by satisfying both of the worlds can one truly become fulfilled. Yet, if one focuses on one more than the other, then an imbalance can cause one to lose focus and be out of touch with himself.

If we take a glass of water and put it into the stream, that water will continuously remain fresh, as it will be moving. If we take that same glass and place it under a tree and leave it, that water will become stale. Similarly, if we do not make that conscious decision to become part of the ocean and keep flowing, we too can become stale.

So which one do we opt for, the material or the spiritual? Without the material, one cannot live in this world, and without the spiritual, one cannot transcend this world. The fact is that we have to realize our spiritual self to balance the two worlds in our lives to reside in a peaceful world - a world of truth, virtue and beauty and a world of health, prosperity and harmony. ■





# HARMONY

DESPITE THE SPITE – HARMONY BLOSSOMS

SURJIT DHAMI, STAFFORDSHIRE, UK

In the *world of madness* I need someone to translate *disharmony to harmony*. Although we speak the same language, we still fail to understand each other. It seems as if we spend more time trying to be *understood than to understand*. For me this is sheer madness.

Being harmonious is realising that there is one common flow in everything. It is this flow that animates elements and planets in their glorious splendour. This flow crowns the animal kingdom and the realm of plants in majestic balance. It leaves man as the sole creature, who is unable to live with his environment and ultimately with his own conscience. After having their fill, whilst other creatures rest in the shade, man is still running around frantically night and day trying to bloat his ego.

In this age of explosive globalisation, kindness and compassion are the first things that are ditched. With instant technological communication at our finger tips, many still feel out of touch with themselves. Although the internet enables us to access millions of pages of information and knowledge, sadly all this knowledge does nothing to eliminate ignorance which fuels the fire of hatred. We never witness the branches of a tree fighting amongst themselves. This is because the branches can see that they are part of the same tree. Similarly, disputes only occur because man does not see the Power that holds creation in place.

As the world population surges, people are geographically pushed closer and closer together, but the hearts and minds are moving further and further apart. We now live in a global village but still carry tribal mentalities. Today's state of affairs is reflected in the words of Confucius:

Ignorance is the night of the mind, but a night without moon and star.

There is enough moonlight on a clear night for a traveller to see the difference between the road and the pavement, but in pitch darkness only darkness can be found. There are tremendous unthinkable tensions between countries, communities and cultures rooted in historical wars and feuds lasting generations. This is the pitch darkness engulfing humanity, where man cannot even recognise man. Any existing relationship

of coexistence and co-operation evaporates at the first sign of distrust and discord.

## Separate ourselves from that which separates us from others.

As long as our relationship is defined and determined by our differences we will empower those who sow hatred rather than harmony; those who promote conflict, not peace; and those who bring suffering, not hope.

But if we define our relationship based on our mutual bond, not by our borders or ethnicity; by our mutual understanding and respect, and hold tolerance and dignity of all human beings as paramount, then it can be said there is real progress. We move forward only if we move together. We can only move together if we follow what the Nirankari Baba says, that is we should

"Separate ourselves from that which separates us from others."

This does not mean that you forego that which makes you different. Instead, we must first embrace that which has made us the same! We are all human beings made of the same elements and we are all intrinsically linked to one another. This relationship happens only when a real sustained effort is made to listen to each other, and to learn from each other, to seek a 'common ground'.

## Those who remain true to their own humanity are like roses living amongst thorns. They still give fragrance not only to the admiring passers-by, but also to the very thorns that spike them.

The understanding that we share is not European, American or African, but human. This mutual link is more powerful than any other

material force or personal ambition. It is to realise that the power of love is greater than the love for power.

With harmony comes an undeniable sense of freedom, which is deeply rooted in the fabric of human nature. But the manner in which man seeks that freedom and happiness often becomes the cause of self-inflicting plight. Therefore, as Martin Luther King aptly says:

"Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred."

Those who are in harmony, experience freedom and they can set others free. Where there is harmony there is appreciation, joy, a feeling of liberty and sense of satisfaction. Where there is discord there is a feeling of distress and disturbance. Human beings are strangled by wanton selfish desire and crippled by pernicious bigotry.

Although we share the same water from the same rivers, food from the same earth and breathe the same air, we struggle to share thoughts and words in harmony. We often quickly detest anyone who challenges us, never thinking that it is these precise moments that allow us to surpass our self-imposed limits. Man dwells in huge mansions, yet expects his Maker to dwell in his small mind.

Sallust, a Roman historian on this very point states:

Harmony makes small things grow, but the lack of it makes great things decay.

Harmony is the seed of happiness which yields the fruit of peace. Those who attain this are revered throughout the annals of history. Those who caused great devastation and discord are now only remembered as demonic monsters. Those who remain true to their own humanity are like roses living amongst thorns. They still give fragrance not only to the admiring passers-by, but also to the very thorns that spike them. Despite the spite, true harmony blossoms. ■

# Where does the gold lie?

Avneesh Arora, London, UK

**It appears I have a short attention span. So short, in fact, that I even got swung off-track just then, midway through writing the word 'short' (the second 'short' that is).**

I didn't envisage tumbling off my train of thoughts this early, I've had a bowl of 'ready-brek' this morning, and thus I should be running tip-top-optimal. However, there are sirens within my mind which seem to regularly taunt me into the ritual of distraction; more precisely, the ritual of 'Googling' things. What happened to the cast of Ghostbusters? Where's Carlton from The Fresh Prince...? How on earth do I privatise my Facebook settings!? However pertinent, frivolous or trivial, I seem to have no rule over these (jittery) neurons of mine.

Though, these clumsy interjections have made lucid one thing - the mind; it doesn't just sit obediently, perched upon the tops of our heads; it wanders and gallops like it has a mind of its own.

"Mind: a beautiful servant, a dangerous master."

Our greatest weakness, and paradoxically, our greatest comfort can be found within the confines of one's mind. From our very first moments, a human being's life is a constant orbit of tests and emotions. It's one fiddly drama, or rather, a battle of choices and of mind-sets. But in order to triumph, it takes good choices and resilience.

And the engine of that resilience lies within the art; the practice of positive thinking.

The space between our ears is the manager of our active state. It works synergistically with the central nervous system and helps elicit better comprehension to life; permitting further communication with all it observes externally. Plainly, it's the internal hard-drive within us, but it is our choice to what we download; what we watch, what we write.

"A man is but the product of his thoughts. What he thinks, he becomes."

– Mahatma Ghandi.

Our very existence is evidence of our innate creativity. At every breath we are co-creating our realities. Our thinking truly does change our futures, not in any supernatural way, but tangibly; they are documented at some level in

our brain-chemistry. I haven't been under the microscope to see it; clearly I'm no neurologist, and my understanding of the scientific world is rather pocket-sized. However, I can claim one vintage verification: you smile. I smile back. Simple.

There is a consensus among the forums of science and spirituality that a simple bead of positive-thought can ameliorate you and the world around you. In stark contrast, we also know that if negativity is accrued and allowed to fester, it can generate a toxic atmosphere. For instance, one dispassionate member of a team could sabotage a potential victory, one flippant criticism or remark can sully a friendship for life.

"If you realised how powerful your thoughts are, you would never think a negative thought."  
– Peace Pilgrim

The descent of a mind is the beginning of a perilous path; the start of negativity's hopeless embrace. A mere criticism or a pithy bout of gossip; the impact may seem innocuous at first, but if only our infant eyes could see its destructive trail.

"You are one thing only. You are a Divine Being. An all-powerful Creator. You are a Deity in jeans and a t-shirt, and within you dwells the infinite wisdom of the ages and the sacred creative force of All that is, will be and ever was."

– Anthon St. Maarten

Such sentiments like the above are also clearly propounded within the Holy Scripture of The

## *“Mind: a beautiful servant, a dangerous master.”*

Bhagavad Gita. It is espoused that the infinite power of God is within each of us, without bounds. But I’m certain that initially, a logical, secular mind could find this a rather tricky pill of information to swallow. I mean originally, my mind was blown. And it’s quite possible; some head-scratching ensued soon after.

Amidst our current social era, we seem to append a great deal of value upon haste and immediacy. Thus, a slow and ripening spiritual quest would seem as something too protracted or abstract. However, if we were able to establish agreement upon an opening tenet, that a simple positive thought is actually a foremost step upon the road to spirituality; perhaps then an attitudinal shift would occur for such discussions to flourish.

The voyage of spirituality is said to be like climbing a mountain; then being positive resembles taking that gorgeous gulp of oxygen right before the inaugural step upward. In essence, a positive mental attitude is a prerequisite to any divine endeavour. Just as an earnest smile is the route to love, in the tenderness of that positive exchange, individually, I feel a deep pre-existing connection to all. My silly sense of self seems to evaporate and melt away.

The Nirankari Baba has devoted his entire existence to this template of true spiritual living. The authenticity of his life is a donation to all of mankind; a humble instruction to us, that, being spiritual is actually practical. For it is not to be deemed as a lofty scribble in the literature of old or encircled by abstract philosophy; but to be sung in practice, in action, in a single smile. The very moment this is forgotten, we become the architect of our own downfalls and further fuel the newspaper-ink, already eager to beleaguer the status of our world. The very moment we choose to broadcast and transmit negativity, a wider spiritual malady occurs and the handshake of man is broken.

So where does the gold lie? It lies in the strides taken in the armour of positivity. We all find things daunting: results day, the mortgage payments, raising children, falling hopelessly in love – it’s all tricky business. But electing the positive zig-zags within our mind is the refusal to panic and the subsiding of fear. For then we can begin to transcend our physical and psychological paradigm, climbing to a state full of spiritual ascendancy – that’s when you’ll beam like the sun!

Really, it would be ever so nice, between the womb and the tomb, to serve humankind, one evolved mind at a time. ■



# REAL

## *Eyes to Realise*

Shivaji Rane, Glasgow, UK

**I**llusions are often witnessed where, by arrangement of images, use of colours and the impact of light can result in a wide range of misleading visual effects. One assumes that what one sees is what is there. Eyes can only interpret what they see and often relay straight lines as curved objects at a great distance. The images do not appear to the eye as they are shown but as altered forms.

Mirages are another form of illusion in which a heated surface expands the air around it and causes the light to distort and creates a new image. Our eyes are essentially hollow spheres with a hole in the front which correspond to a black spot called the pupil. In order to see an object light must first come from the object or bounce off the surface of that object and then enter our eyes. The way we see things depend on the light that our eyes reflect from the object - The eyes focus the light and turn it into tiny electrical impulses that are sent along the optic nerve to the brain and it is in the visual cortex of the brain that we actually see things.

Beauty outside catches the eyes but the real beauty that lies within captures the heart. All that glitters is not gold. Appearances are often deceiving (Aesop 620-560 BC). Furthermore, the information that comes through our five senses

first of all passes through our assumptions, beliefs, opinions and prejudices. The pre-conditioned state of mind influences what we see. So we see things as we are and not as they are. People often judge others' background long before they have started to speak to them.

As a kid, I remembered how good I felt when I smelled petrol as though it was perfume until I understood it was harmful. How often do we have second thoughts when trying herbal medicines, just because they do not taste as great as sugar coated ones, and that we do not know their therapeutic benefits? A tortoise has a rough outer shell when touched, but concealed within is a body of soft tissue. We often misjudge what we see because we merely skim the surface, but fail to see the essence behind.

It is purposeful living that matters. Everyone looks for a fulfilling life. It is not a destination. It's an experience of immersing oneself in truth, else it could be termed as fool-filling for all the materialistic achievements do not bear any importance. If we are full of desires then we are a fool for desires since the key to happiness is to have the least desires. Desires often point to the future making us lose sight of the present moment which is always whole and complete.

A preacher reciting from the Scriptures in a busy London street was asked: are you on commission? He laughed "Ha ha ha. Commission? I say come-in-son". He sat down to explain that many flock to the city of London year after year. One of its other attractions is the London eye, from the top of which one can see the city of London. One wonders if there exists an eye, through which the whole of the global, human city can be witnessed. The answer is a resounding, 'yes'. It is very much possible.

One only has to seek the shelter of a spiritual mentor, who can grant divine sight – the real eyes which differentiate the eternal from the temporal. The master lifts the veil of ignorance and shows the colours in true light. He doesn't beat around the bush. He doesn't talk about properties of water or where it will be available. He grants the glass of water and the thirst is instantly quenched. It's the world that offers them in adulterated form whether it's the drink, food or gold. Until awareness dawns one lives in ignorance, in illusion. The first step is to let go of all that is known and be open to listening and reflecting on the wisdom. It's this real-eye-sation that brings clarity to the purpose of one's journey from human being to being human.



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*The Avtar Bani has eloquently mentioned  
– The disciple sees and hears through the  
vision and wisdom granted by the spiritual  
master. And in so doing, brings humane  
values in his life and those he connects with.■*



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