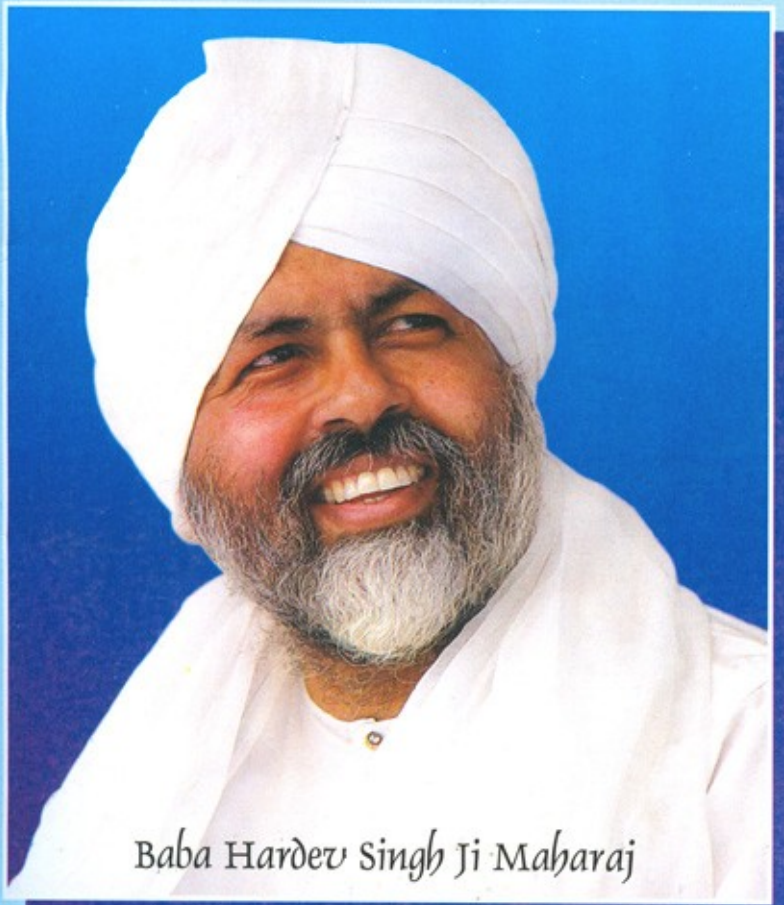


The Essence

Reflections of Holy Discourses



Baba Hardev Singh Ji Maharaj

Gurpreet Bhatia

The Essence

Reflection
on the discourses of
His Holiness
Baba Hardev Singh Ji Maharaj

Gurpreet Bhatia (UK)

Sant Nirankari Mandal
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I wish to acknowledge the valuable contributions and continual guidance of Dr Bobby Sura of Birmingham and Kiren Tura of Oxford. I would also like to thank the towers of encouragement in my life whose dedication and practice of worship to this formless Nirankar has been inspiring. My father, Upashak Ji, a remarkable, untiring devotee; my dear wife Vishavpreet Ji, whose unflagging support was vital to this production and Sister Bindia Chhabra Ji, whose constant guidance enabled me to bring into fruition this humble work. I bow before you all.

- Gurpreet Bhatia

Beloved Baba Ji, you're my life's
inspiration.

May your wisdom continue to
touch the depth
of every heart.

- Gurpreet Bhatia

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Submission

To a devotee, the True Master (Satguru) is not only the spiritual mentor but also a benevolent guide in daily life. He shows us the path to righteousness and makes our lives happy.

The devotee, therefore, looks forward to meeting the True Master and listen to his words of wisdom with keen interest. No doubt, the essence of what he ordains is that we remain concentrated on the Formless One - God and associate this subtle supreme energy with all our actions. We human beings are, however, too weak to adopt this art all the time. We are, knowingly or unknowingly, swayed by the allure of the material world and drawn away from the path of Eternal Truth. That is why the True Master has to repeat his message again and again to help us remain steadfast in our faith and devotion.

This book in your benign hands is a collection of the words of wisdom from His Holiness Baba Hardev Singh Ji Maharaj. The young author Rev. Gurpreet Bhatia who is a practicing solicitor, has compiled excerpts from various discourses by His Holiness, without adding any personal comments. He has very aptly categorized the Satguru's words into topics for the ease of the reader. He has also very rightly titled the book as 'The Essence'; he seeks to capture and convey the essence of the True Master's message for the guidance of the world in general and his devotees in particular.

Let me congratulate Rev. Gurpreet Bhatia on behalf of the Publications Department and on my own behalf on his very successful attempt and pray to His Holiness so that he continues to serve in future also. I am grateful to the Honourable Members of the Screening Committee in the UK - Rev. Harbans Singh, Daljit Mehta, Surjeet Dhami and Bhupinder Singh Anand – Member in Charge Publications – UK, as well as Rev. K.R. Chadha, Secretary, Sant Nirankari Mandal and Head of the Foreign Department, for giving the book its final shape and encouraging the author as well as the department to publish it. It is hoped that our esteemed readers in India and abroad will receive the book with the same spirit of love and devotion with which it has been produced.

Kirpa Sagar
Member Incharge Publications

Delhi,
September 29, 2008

INTRODUCTION

The Spiritual Master, His Holiness Nirankari Baba Hardev Singh Ji, is the head of the international movement called the Sant Nirankari Mission, which is dedicated to the betterment of mankind through *Brahm Gyan*, the realisation of God.

His Holiness often refers to God as *Nirankar*, the Formless. He inspires seekers to develop an intimate relationship with this eternal, all pervading power, by bestowing on them the realisation of God, which is an essential precondition to understanding, and pursuing, the purpose of life.

His Holiness offers a spiritual solution to the dilemmas of the modern world. Wherever he goes, He speaks of nothing but spirituality - which has a positive impact on our everyday life - bringing man closer to man. He advocates that there is in essence only one religion, and that is the religion of humanity.

This book draws from the allegories and 'words of wisdom' expressed by His Holiness, which are addressed to the world populace. He extemporarily expounds in the Holy Congregations on issues of concern to humanity at large, to help alleviate the suffering of the world.

His Holiness's harmonious words, penetrating the heart of every listener, have become an enormous source of inspiration for millions of people across the globe. Imagine, if you will, being in the company of this Divine Master, absorbing His Word as if it were addressed to you personally. In so doing, you'll find yourself embarked on a journey of self-discovery.

A Brief History

The Mission began in 1929 in Peshawar, India. Baba Boota Singh Ji, the founder, raised the voice of Truth, inspiring a small group of seekers. Accompanied by his most devoted disciple, Avtar Singh Ji, they worked virtuously together night and day to share their *Divine Experience* with as many people as possible.

Prior to shedding his mortal coil in 1943, Baba Boota Singh Ji bequeathed the sacred mantle of his mission on Baba Avtar Singh Ji. Such was the extra-ordinary personality of Baba Avtar Ji that His words had awe-inspiring impact upon listeners. His teachings were encapsuled, during his lifetime, in the form of Scripture entitled 'Sampuran Avtar Bani'. The writings, in verse, crystallized the essence of spiritual life.

In 1962, Baba Avtar Singh Ji took the remarkable decision of proclaiming Baba Gurbachan Singh Ji as his successor, and he himself reverted to the life of a disciple. Baba Gurbachan Singh Ji, already an exemplary devotee, carried the Mission's message abroad for the first time, establishing centres in almost every continent.

He set up the social welfare agenda, the '*Sewadal*' - the Mission's Voluntary Corps, a whole manner of community support duties, relief work, and charitable activities.

Baba Gurbachan Singh Ji's contribution to the *noble cause* of spreading the Truth was beyond measure.

Before his departure from this world, Baba Gurbachan Singh Ji handed over the spiritual mentorship to Baba Hardev Singh Ji. This divine personality is working tirelessly to inspire people to realise the purpose of life, guiding them towards forming an enduring relationship with God.

Today, the Sant Nirankari Mission is a global spiritual movement, having centres all over the world. This eternal mission continues to grow.

Baba Hardev Singh Ji

His Holiness Baba Hardev Singh Ji, the Spiritual Master, was born on 23 February 1954 to Rajmata Kulwant Kaur Ji and Baba Gurbachan Singh Ji. During his youth, he was renowned for his humility, reticence and eagerness to serve others, but today he is the guiding light for millions. His belief in action – saying less and doing more, laid the foundation for his exemplary life today. He was graced with God realisation by his father, who himself was a Great Guide and a giant in the realm of spirituality. He always acknowledges in a most humble manner that his efforts, to create a better world, are insignificant when compared to the wonderful contributions of the preceding Guides of this Mission - Baba Boota Singh Ji, Baba Avtar Singh Ji and of course Baba Gurbachan Singh Ji.

Baba Ji has always been observed as a caring, compassionate and loving person, who strikes a personal relationship with his devotees, sometimes without even having to exchange words. His amazingly graceful smile and glances are taken as blessings by devotees and seekers alike. His family members and relatives would affectionately testify as to how they have been honoured with the perfect dual relationship of a Guru and a familial person. He himself regards the whole Congregation as his very own family from whom he has received love and care since he was a child.

His Holiness Baba Ji gives his blessings in the form of regular discourses which have become a foremost need not only for those who profess to follow him, but also those seeking guidance on the spiritual path of the Divine.

These pearls of thoughts have been gathered from a tour of His Holiness in the United Kingdom, Canada and United States in the summer of 2006. They have been mostly interpreted from His Holiness's Hindi discourses. There may well be aspects of this translation that falls short of all that His Holiness intended to convey. I also believe the words of a Spiritual Master are received and understood in direct proportion to one's stage of development. In this regard, I am just an infant. Nevertheless, it has been my prime aim to retain the essence of His Holiness' words, which have inspired the name of this humble book – *The Essence*.

Travelling with His Holiness has enabled me to gain much insight into his life, ways and feelings towards humankind. I have found that whilst the life of a common person is normally governed by time, the life of His Holiness is governed by the

philosophy of giving. He thinks not of himself but of others in everything he does, be it through Satsangs, counselling people on their personal problems, giving direction to youth for academic achievements, being a pillar of support for those in ill health or giving that loveable smile to those who come in contact with him, and the list goes on and on. I hasten to add that the love that he offers to every person irrespective of their position is like an ocean fulfilling the dreams of a stream, which is flowing towards it. His magnificent aura changes the environment that he touches, and his vibrations create harmony, which all genuine seekers of God earnestly desire. The most important feature is, he has time to give, whereas any ordinary individual struggles to find time for himself. His hectic schedules and movement across the globe to touch so many individual hearts, is evidence of his commitment to share his message of peace and love and to spread it to every corner of the world.

When His Holiness speaks, one discerns a fathomless humility in his approach. Yet, he has a majestic aura and deep compassion in his heart for all humanity. One can imagine the pain His Holiness feels when he sees division and separation around the world. There is immense joy and relief when His Holiness speaks of the way in which bridges can be built so that more and more people can stand connected to one another.

At this stage I do not think there is any need for me to say much more, other than to take you on the journey with His Holiness. I ask for your forgiveness for any errors I may have made in relaying the words of my Guru. The *Sadh Sangat* has the power to forgive. It is this power that I rely upon, and sincerely hope that any person in search of the real purpose of existence will find this book fulfilling.

-Gurpreet Bhatia

London,
July 5, 2008

THE JOY

My Travels

"...In the course of my travels I have had the opportunity to see a great deal of India and many parts of the world. The cities may change from one country to the other, but I see the same devotion and spirit of selfless service within every devotee that I meet. I get to spend some time with visitors and well wishers, who also express their hope to spread values of humanity everywhere. These are the issues, which concern right-minded people in all places, as they undertake the journey of life."

"Sitting before you, I have seen the happiness on your faces whenever we get to meet. Whilst you express yourselves by dancing and singing, I express myself through words. However, the joy that you feel and express is the exact same feeling that I have within me, when I talk to you."

Sadh Sangat

"...This Sadh Sangat (gathering of devotees) is my family, which has given me so much love over the years. Newton is quoted to have said that he was able to see further because he had stood on the shoulders of giants. Like him, I too can say that having been seated on the shoulders of the Great Masters of this Mission and the Sadh Sangat, I have been able to serve you in whatever little way I could. In fact, I have not been able to achieve anything by my own efforts, as it is all the grace of God Almighty."

Happiness and Love

"...When I see devotees happy, I always wish that these smiles and joyous sentiments have a lasting presence. As long as these happy feelings are there, we can celebrate birthdays everyday, and at any time. I often pray for everyone to live in this way and enjoy a blissful life. As love overflows, this enjoyment may be expressed in tears of joy.

"Even in remote areas of India, I find devotees waiting for hours at the roadside for my car and my entourage to pass by. Although I may see devotees for only a few moments as the carcade stops briefly, the happiness on their faces and the love that wells up through their tears, is very touching. I constantly feel the love extended to me, and I pray, that I, too, may be able to give devotees a similar degree of love and happiness."

Good Wishes

"...I am thankful for the good wishes that I receive. Some times, devotees send me cards containing messages of love. Some cards, I have noticed, have drawings and writings from children. When these cards arrive during school exams, I often wonder how these children find time to write to me, when they have so many other tasks to complete. I have no words to express my gratitude. I am truly thankful for their good wishes. I pray that the love that we have in this Sadh Sangat, maintained by young and old alike, may continue to expand and spread everywhere."

Pertinent Thoughts

".....I often say that it is the power of *Nirankar*, the Formless God Almighty, and this *Sadh*

Sangat that does everything. It is because of this power that I am able to visit places and experience so much love. This love, in turn, gives me strength to continue to spread the message of Truth. I always pray for my every breath to be dedicated to the betterment of humanity, and wish for greater strength to remove the darkness in the world through the Revelation of Knowledge.

"Someone once asked me, looking back at my life, as to whether my thoughts changed from what they were before. I replied, whatever they were before, they are the same today. As the English saying goes:

'I will not permit any man to degrade and narrow my soul, by making me hate him.'

Likewise, I do not know how to hate, and this is my belief. It is my aim for all to have this wealth of love, and for all to work to distribute it at every opportunity. It is my desire to reciprocate the love that you give me, so that we may always enjoy its exchange."

At this stage I do not think there is any need for me to say much more, other than to take you on the journey with His Holiness. I ask for your forgiveness for any errors I may have made in relaying the words of my Guru. The *Sadh Sangat* has the power to forgive. It is this power that I rely upon, and sincerely hope that any person in search of the real purpose of existence will find this book fulfilling.

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RELIGION

What is Religion?

To be a religious person, I believe, one must have the feelings of love and compassion embedded within one's heart. Without these qualities would not be possible to be religious. It is like taking away the foundation of a building, which, without it, would simply collapse. The fundamental requirement of being religious is to bring about these virtues into our day-to-day lives. If we think by harbouring feelings of hatred or by promoting acts of violence, we can become religious, we are sadly mistaken. The edifice of religion cannot stand on the foundations of a weakened or fractured structure.

Today, some religious people would claim that visiting holy places, undertaking religious rites, or observing certain ceremonies alone, can be regarded as being *religious*.

But, does the performance of rituals actually amount to being religious? or, is it not the case that spirituality within us has been missing, and that today we are simply walking around as empty shells? If there is no true devotion within us, how can we claim to be religious? Where do we stand, devoid of love and compassion?

We fall short, if the intention behind our worship is not pure. Can our claims of being religious be justified without love and purity?

The reality of the situation is aptly conveyed in the following thought: *I did not know how to worship until I knew how to love*'.

So love is an essential pre-condition of being religious.

Our Forgotten Values

If we look at religion today, it is sad to see how intolerance is being fed daily into many an innocent mind by the very people who claim to be religious. The role of religion is to bring about unity. But, looking at society and religious institutions today, the prime aim of creating unity, seems to have been forgotten. In fact, quite the opposite is true with the result that people stand more divided than ever before.

The role of religion within society is to unite. I have always expressed this belief, which is aptly echoed by one of the Mission's maxims: *Religion unites; it never divides*. Then how can we practice the religion of unity? Answer: It is, in fact through, the raising awareness of the one God, that exists all around and within us at all times.

Let's take a close look at this maxim: *Religion unites; it never divides*. I have had the opportunity to travel extensively, particularly in India, where I spend most of my time. There, I try to travel by road to reach rural areas in order to experience the feelings of the devotees. It allows me to witness and share their love. These devotees may be living without basic resources, such as water and electricity, but there is so much warmth and love in their eyes. They may not have worldly possessions and material things, but, I found, they are rich with love. I often note that the devotees from various regions within India, all honour the principle that, religion unites, it never divides. They practice it in their lives, and they spread the

message in their local languages and dialects to their neighbours. What enables them to practice this message of unity is the fact they understand the meaning of religion, which, for them, serves as a uniting force.

Wherever I go in the world, irrespective of the huge amount of diversity I see, oneness of all these faiths is experienced through this understanding of religion. People are able to join together as one family, having found love within themselves and for each other. Their different languages and cultures do not prevent this unity from taking place, for their feelings are above words, and that they realize they are the creation of the same one *Source*.

The vision is to establish love within, for all people, and not to limit it to individual communities. Once this love has identified itself and the awareness created to *love all of humanity*, then our prayer is for *all* humanity, not just for Americans, Canadians, British or any other section of humanity. In so many religious institutions we hear prayers said for the whole world, but in practice this love is restricted to people of the same language, race and culture. On the other hand, it is refreshing to see those truly praying for all, and living for all. Such love cannot come about without an acceptance of the fact that we are one global family. Such an acceptance cannot occur without knowing God, who is the creator of all. When we identify with our common source, we see all as part of God. We see all people as children of God, and hence, universal brotherhood becomes possible. It is in this spirit of unity with each other, that prayers for one and all become possible.

Religion teaches love

I constantly pray for the cessation of hatred we see around us. Religion does not teach people to fight. I am often reminded of the words of a poet that I used to read at school - *religion does not teach people to hate*. But I think looking at modern society the reverse seems to be true - that *religion does not teach us to love*. Unfortunately, this is how this poem is being interpreted today. The reality of this poem has been forgotten, because people have lost the understanding of Reality. When we learn the truth, all the barriers in one's mind fall apart. We begin to focus on love, which is one of the basic teachings of all religions. With such a state of mind, people can develop a singular approach to work for the benefit of all humanity.

True worship

True devotees pay heed to the words of the great scriptures. The words contained in them are intended for human beings. They have not been written for the benefit of animals, or inanimate objects. No. They have been written for humans. But the way many people worship today is to have a desire to listen to the message of the great Masters, but not to put into practice what they tell us to do. People readily agree to praise and recite the words of their respective spiritual teacher (i.e. *guru, pir, avatar, prophet* or *saint*), but not give these words a place in their heart. The direction of the devotees, however, is to celebrate the lives of the great spiritual Masters who set foot on this earth: go to places where they lived; speak about them and their great achievements, and always strive to live the spiritual words of these spiritual masters in their lives. This is true religion and worship.

LOVE

Love is God

Although we have learned to live in the world, we have not learnt to love. My message for everybody is to learn to love each other. From our childhood we have continued to hear the words, *Love is God*. Love is indeed of the utmost importance in life. If you stop loving, you stop living. Love is an essential ingredient in the life of a devotee.

The Commodity of Love

We see so many products readily available in the world. If something is not available in a country or region, it can be imported from another nation. But as regards the merchandise of love, I find it is diminishing day by day and hatred is taking up its space. Take a look at the world scenario today. There is senseless killing; it is all out of hatred for others. So few seem to be espousing love, and if there was love, man would not be acting this way. Rather, he is so full of hatred and intolerance, and he seems to have lost his capacity to love. Love is the one commodity which grows the more you share it with others. When one talks about other precious commodities of the world such as minerals, metals and natural resources, their stocks deplete the more they are used. Whereas, the more love we give and share, the more it grows.

A Heart filled with Love

I regard devotion to be an affair of the heart and soul, and not that of the mind. A person, whose heart is full of love, is usually free of ego. However, a man whose head is full of ill thoughts, his heart is normally devoid of love. When we deal with our secular affairs, we must resort to our mind. In the case of spirituality, we have to resort to the heart, not the mind. Innocent nature is characteristic of a true devotee's way of life. The devotee only loves to love, whilst others love to hate. The former never let go of their attachment to love, and pray for the betterment of mankind. They never harbour feelings of prejudice or hatred towards people whose appearances and languages differ. They always foster love for one another.

A heart may beat biologically, but if it is hard as a rock and is drained of love, what purpose does its beat serve? If indeed there is no compassion, no love or impartiality within the heart, then it is worse than a piece of rock. Whatever is in our heart, it does not take long for it to come out. The words once spoken cannot easily be retracted.

Non-violence and Love

I often remind myself that love is the heart of non-violence. There is no love where violence exists. For this reason this sentiment of love must be lived more so in today's prevailing social climate. Hatred is all afflictive, so why not imbibe love? We cannot carry the burden of hatred, so why not elect love, which gives joy? Hatred hurts both the person who hates, and the person who is hated.

Those who embrace true love are connected with Nirankar-God in a unique way. There are those who profess love and apparently pray for the benefit of all, but in their mind, they are praying for others' downfall. True love is different, because it evokes good feelings and sense of unity.

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GOD

Description of God

There is only one God, though known by many different names. Regardless of names, the entity is one. The reason why God has so many names is because of his countless attributes. He has been described as all pervading, omni-potent and that which exists in all places. God has no beginning, no end, and is everywhere.

God is unaffected by the changes of the world; he is completely stable. He exists in a state of equipoise. His praises are untold; he can never be fully scribed. That is to say, if all the water in the world were to become ink, all the forests were to become pens, and the world was turned into paper, the praises of God even then could not be adequately written.

A devotee always feels that even a lifetime is not enough to praise God. He regards himself as one, collecting grains of sand at the seaside, and sees God as the vast ocean. However much he says or writes about his love or divine experience, he still feels his endeavours are worth no more than a few grains of sand on the shore. So much more is left unsaid.

The Eternal and Immeasurable

All that is created has an age and a life of its own. Scientists have assessed the age of the earth, calculated the age of trees, and measured the age of mountains. But God cannot be measured. He was never born, and never dies. How then can we calculate his age? All things made by God definitely take birth and perish. In fact, God is, God was, and God will always be. This is the eternal nature of God, which must be realized during the journey of every individual's life.

There is only *ONE* God. When we talk to others, it appears as if everybody seems to accept this concept. Deep down, however, people do not truly believe that there is one God. They renege on their belief by saying that their God differs from yours. Sadly this has become the vision of so many religious people. *If we say that God is one, we must believe this to be true, and also realise Him.*

God has different names due to different languages, but as I have said before, the *Entity* is only one. For example, in India, there are different names for God in various different regions of the country, simply due to different languages. Hence, God is addressed in a variety of different names. This does not mean that His essence has changed in any way. I would humbly say that it's the Knowledge of God - Realisation of the Truth, which removes all misconceptions, allowing God to be seen and faith to be established. If God is truly seen and believed to be one, then there would be no argument of names, as the true nature of God would have been fully understood.

This attainment is the ultimate truth, which does not change by the constraints of time or place. Wherever one goes, whichever direction one faces, wherever one is born, the truth remains constant. Whether you live in the mountains, dwell in the deserts, inhabit islands or mainlands, this God always remains uniform. For a self-realised person, this becomes his genuine belief and experience. Without the benefit of this realisation, one would certainly have misconceptions. In ignorance, these misconceptions can lead to one's 'demise.'

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THE KNOWLEDGE

Value of Knowledge

When one acquires the Knowledge (*Brahm Gyan*), I repeatedly remind everyone to value it. It should not be ward robed, like a piece of clothing that we own, but worn on every occasion. Clothes, kept in wardrobes, can easily be forgotten and even discarded without use. When we fail to give priority to this Knowledge, it is as if the sun is shining, but the curtains are drawn in our homes. What I mean to say by this is that the Knowledge has been given with the sure expectation that it will be put to good use in one's life. One should, therefore, live life in accordance with the said Knowledge, for it to be of any real purpose.

This God Formless *Nirankar* is constantly around us at all times and we must be continually aware of this. Living with awareness of God around us will ratify our belief and allow remembrance to be integrated into our daily lives. I always believe that this is an extremely valuable device, which has been thought of as very difficult to attain and utilize. Millions of people are born on this earth. They live their lives and then perish, but not everyone benefits from this magnificent Knowledge. Those who realise it extol its value.

If we unfold the pages of history, we find that the awareness of this *truth* was not effortlessly shared with others by enlightened beings. Seekers were required to undertake much penance to become worthy recipients of this truth, or to earn their right to acquire the said truth through other means. There was a lot of trial and testing before it was dispensed. Today's seekers, however, do not have to undergo such tests and penance to be eligible for this insight. It is solely God's grace that has allowed this to happen. Nevertheless, the appreciation and value of this knowledge should always exist, even though it has been made so easily available.

Connection with God

Reflecting on this valuable subject, it must be born in mind that this insight is a priceless aid, which a devotee should always use, and remember at all times. It should be remembered that God is all around us, like an ocean is for a fish. For the fish, the ocean is both the mainstay and its life giver. In the same way, I often submit that a devotee should have a similar longing for God. Man lives within God, eats and dresses within him, works and plays within him, and in fact commits all acts within him, in his presence. One should remember this God with every breath as it has been enjoined in all the great Scriptures. People who wrote these holy words were also aware of their worldly responsibilities such as work, family life and so on. But, they still lodged in Scriptures the requirement to remember God at every moment. Devotees sense this to be possible, when their inner-self lives in awareness of the existence of God, the Formless *Nirankar*. In such a state of awareness, one is quite able to remember God, and at the same time carefully attend to one's duties.

Knowledge admits Prayer

The Realisation of God, the Formless *Nirankar*, admits true prayer into our lives. Living with awareness of this strengthens our belief and allows remembrance (*Simran*) to prevail. I always feel that such awareness is a valuable tool. It has been considered very difficult to live in perpetual remembrance, as this is a state of being not at all easy to achieve. The first step is

Knowledge of the reality of God – only then can constant and unwavering awareness be established. The reason why I advance the view that one is required to pray frequently and with every breath is because, in essence, we do not know when we shall take our last breath. Because there is no certainty, it is always said in humility that one should relentlessly remember God as much as possible.

By the same token, and as a result of this new found approach to the world, the devotee prays for all of humanity. Today the pattern of behaviour in terms of worship, as I have observed, is that people pray for the benefit of the entire human race. However, in actual fact, they do not even take a single step towards matching their deeds with words of their prayers. When deeds are missing, prayers are empty. Prayers must be accompanied by action for them to be truly worthy and sincere.

The Great Masters have taught us that we should be praying for the advantage of the *whole of society*, not separate groups, certain communities, or particular sections of people. But today, I see world at large to have defined the words of the Masters in very different terms. We say prayers for the welfare of all, but in reality they're directed at a few. We essentially utter prayers, but do not practise them. We pray for all yet our actions are to the contrary. This results in the unnecessary barriers, separating man from man, and fostering violence across the globe.

Divine Insight

The object of our existence is to find out why we are here. There is a defined purpose and we must identify with the truth. One must become responsive to this reality and not be resigned to only chasing shadows in life. If an insect were resting on a light bulb, one would notice its shadow projected on the wall. If we were inclined to remove the insect, it would be of no use for the fly swatter to swat the shadow on the wall. The insect is actually on the bulb and that is from where it would have to be removed. Similarly, the ignorance of the mind can only be dispelled by divine enlightenment, which is also one's true purpose.



DEVOTEES

Identifying a Devotee

A devotee is not recognized by his outward attire or general appearance, but by the strength of his good deeds. Until devotion for God enters his heart, a person cannot become a devotee. He must have certain qualities in his life. Such inspired individuals always remember to stand within, yet aloof from the world, keeping their exemplary character. People of the world and devotees have different outlooks on life. Although devotees are no different from the people of the world, their inner constitution and loving nature stand out. Devotees, just like other people, have family needs. They also have to organize their time, work commitments, and undertake responsibilities. Yet, the devotees' outlook and thinking differ. They have rare attributes in abundance, which others do not have. Devotees live with the spirit of sacrifice, humility and tolerance. The more they practice these virtues, the more polished and purer they become.

The Way of a Devotee

This God, the Formless *Nirankar*, is free, not attached to anything. He exists in immutable peace and in absolute composure, unaffected at all times. The *believers* praise this truth; they stand by their faith, come what may. In fact, although a worshipper does not have enough time to praise this *Nirankar*, he never gets tired of singing His praises. As *Nirankar* is so great and invincibly eternal, the devotee resigns to the fact that He is totally beyond praise.

The devotee always lives his life with complete submission to *Nirankar*. True God, *Nirankar*, is a reservoir of peace in which the devotee is required to 'merge' in order to benefit from his bliss. In other words, one may well consider oneself alive, but without utter submission to and love of God, one is, in actual fact, dead. A physician, for example, only checks the person's pulse if he is alive and well. In the case of a dead person, the physician does not do so. In devotion, a person who has not loved is regarded as being dead. If one ceases to love, one ceases to live. One needs to have their pulse checked regularly for a spiritually healthy life.

Three Pillars of Devotion

There are three important pillars in a devotee's life.

1. One must undertake Selfless Service (Seva) for the whole world.
2. One must be aware of God's omnipresence (Simran).
3. One must worship amongst fellow enlightened beings (Sadh Sangat).

People who imbibe such qualities seek the perpetual support and the continual presence of God.

Devotees have an unrelenting desire to focus their lives on these three pillars. They spend their time praying to this Formless *Nirankar* in the following way:

“Lord! Living in this world, I know I can be easily lead astray. But, having realized you, I now constantly remind myself, that you are, in fact, the Doer.”

In this way, the heart and mind of the devotee link with God and spontaneous prayers take place. He further implores:

“May I practice spiritual values and allow the glow of devotion to illumine within me, with this Divine Knowledge.”

The devotee always admits that there is nothing bigger or better than the Almighty Creator. He acknowledges that everyone resides in God and that God is in everything. A true seeker remains connected to this Formless *Nirankar*, giving respect to everyone developing divine qualities and constantly living in awareness. Of God, saying:

**“Tuhi Nirankar,
Mein Teri Sharan Haan,
Mainu Baksh Lau.”**

(You are the Formless; I am in your shelter, Please forgive me)

This mantra is powerful, in that it opens the devotee to receive more of this wonderful illumination. Through these words, further clarity and purpose is achieved in life. The thought of such a devotee is for others to gain the same insight that he has had himself. Friends and colleagues alike should also access this sublime state of being so they too may complete their life’s journey in bliss and joy.

The devotee’s outlook changes, as he begins to think beyond himself and his own personal needs. A universal union establishes, and he begins to pray and wish well for all of humanity. The devotee cannot bear to see his fellow beings living in darkness (of ignorance) and wishes salvation for all. The devotee recalls that at one time, he too, was part of the wider community of people who lived in ignorance. Having received the Knowledge of God, the devotee passes this message on to others, with passion and unbridled enthusiasm.

The Desire of the Devotee

There are many desires that man accumulates in life. In order to fulfill those desires, much work has to be done. The life of a devotee is no different to the uninitiated, in his similar desire to achieve and prosper. He, like any other, also hopes to establish a good home, have a fulfilling job, educate his children and enjoy a decent standard of living. In the light of the Knowledge of God, the devotee progresses in an honest and sincere fashion.

However, the devotee is not bound by these desires. Whether he fulfils these wishes or otherwise, the devotee does not lose sight of his most important goal – his purpose in life. To meet fellow devotees in regular congregations is at the forefront of their minds. They do not allow lesser goals to create a distance between themselves and the *Sadh Sangat*, ultimately leading to distancing from God, the Formless *Nirankar*. Living with enthusiasm, the devotee keeps the Guru's guidance always in his heart. This desire is ever so pure, and sacred, it stands above all other desires.



PERSONAL GROWTH

Strengthening the Self

When I ponder over the subject of personal growth, I always have to look inwardly. Personal growth has to be accompanied by a resolute determination to strengthen and improve oneself. It is not about looking at others with what they do or do not do; it's about self-reflection and developing character of saintly qualities i.e. love, humility, tolerance, respect....

I often say, if anyone were to test or measure their own spiritual strength, they should consider the number of times they get disturbed in a day. We should always strive to strengthen our tolerance and resolve. Consider mother earth for example. You can walk on it, dig into it and take from it. It still remains tolerant, generous and forgiving. This should be the characteristic of a human being.

Humility - Strength or Weakness?

The subject of humility is an important matter in the realm of spirituality. In humility, I find strength. Humility is like the tree, which stoops low because it is laden with fruit. The tree gives freely to others, without discrimination. It matters not if people throw stones at the tree - the branches will always bow down to present their fruit and goodness. This I compare to the life of a humble person, who, regardless of the circumstances, makes offerings of love and compassion to others. I believe that living in this state is a source of formidable strength, not weakness.

The materialistic people tend to see humility as a weakness. The general ethos is that one should continue the path of ego, whilst holding the head high, and regarding others as inferior. Such a proud and arrogant person considers himself to be the tallest amongst all. How can he find the courage to bow before others?

In contrast, a person who expresses devotion to God lives in humility. This is not his weakness, but strength and key factor in his life. It is not easy to subscribe humility into one's life. If it were easy, then nobody would turn away from it. The fact that people shy away from this humble approach, confirms that this characteristic is not easy to adopt. To bow before others, and accepting that they may be wrong, is a great strength. Bowing down, in fact, signals one's courage and devotional strength. Developing humility takes you to the heights of devotion, and changes the purpose and direction on the map of life.

A Desire to Learn

Those who feel the beauty of devotional joy, express their sentiments and resolve by having a firm relationship with the *Sadh Sangat*. I have met many devotees, who travel for miles across rough and treacherous mountainous terrains, on foot to attend the *Sadh Sangat*. I do not often get the opportunity to visit such devotees, but their satisfaction lies in the meeting of their fellow devotees, who are also aligned to this one God. It's clear that such a spirit is inspiring, because of the priority given to the awareness of Nirankar. Such devotees, with little or no resources, together with their children, walk to the *Sadh Sangats* for many miles.

Why do they demonstrate such spirit and passion to attend *Sadh Sangats*, in the face of adversity? It is clearly because of their dialogue with the truth, and the savouring of 'divine nectar' with their fellow devotees.

The Message

The Mission's message can be disseminated through various media. In some places, I see it's delivered through performing arts. The contribution by the youth in this regard is wonderful. They have an ability to portray unity in diversity through their plays and sketches. It is an illustration of their happiness and love, and more to the point, their acceptance of the message of truth. This contribution provides a firm basis to build brotherhood amongst men. The thread of love, which binds everybody together, should never be cut. If it's cut accidentally, it should be repaired immediately by tying a knot. Even if a knot has been created in the thread, the greater objective has been achieved - we remain joined together. They who understand this point will always attempt to repair breaks in the thread of love quickly. They will not delay the process, as they are aware of the impact it has.

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PRIORITIES IN LIFE

Real meaning

What does a person think about his priorities in life? Today's man rarely thinks about the real meaning of his existence. Instead he relies on objects, which do not stand by him and eventually whither away. Considering the way of the world, it seems that the whole approach of man to life has become very materialistic. His primary concern may be to live in a nice village. This grows to an attraction towards the glitz of city life. It further becomes a need to live in an attractive house and have decent attire to wear. Perhaps it grows further still to a desire to acquire status and position in society. This pursuit of having and owning more and more becomes synonymous with productive life. However, a proper and worthy life is one in which priority is given to the real purpose of existence. Until a person's thoughts are focused on the higher purpose, life cannot be as productive. Without this thought, man fails to achieve the objective of his existence and so leads a meaningless life.

At the dawn of the new millennium, when the clocks were to change and all focus was on the hands of time, it occurred to me that no age is good or bad, better or worse. Time, when the walls of division fall, is golden. All times places and cities are equally worthy of praise, if the residents within are living purposeful lives.

Love of God

There are so many who claim to love God. How do you know if this claim is sincere, and that this love is true? Is it because a person performs certain rituals or reads Scriptures day in and day out? Or is it because a person recites certain mantras and visits the birthplaces of Saints and Sages? Today, a person who goes on a pilgrimage is considered to be a lover of God. This in itself, I would say, is not sufficient evidence. The real test for the love of God is the degree to which we love his children. This is the real proof, which must be demonstrated in our lives. Without this, our claims would be simply hollow.

God is said to be love, and love is said to be God. This love must exist in our lives; it must manifest in our prayers for the welfare of all. Where there is love, there is no room for hatred. It is sad that more people are becoming filled with hatred, and as a result much damage is being done. Destructive feelings expressed in any part of the globe, when looked at broadly, affect the rest of the world. Love is for the betterment of mankind. Where love reigns, there is peace and calmness. Where there is peace and calmness, we can all live happily. To achieve happiness, we have to be one with God Almighty, and to have love in our hearts. In this state, it becomes easier to share happiness with others.

Harbouring Hatred

If you harbour hatred within your heart, but praise God in volumes, it will not really help you. Love must prevail. This point is explained by the following example:

A mother, watching her daughter playing outside, notices her being pushed to the floor by a stranger, who warmly greets the mother with a smile, and compliments her by saying she is a virtuous and a wonderful person. Would any of these compliments have any positive impact on the mother? No. In fact, she would be displeased to the extent that she would even tell the person to get out of her sight.

On the other hand, a mother watches a stranger showing love to her child and giving her a sweet. The mother acknowledges the love and sends out positive vibes, even if the stranger walks off without saying a word. Similar is the case with the children of God: It's not words of worship or rituals that please God, but rather one's conduct towards His children i.e. fellow beings. Love pleases God; it works to bind people together.

Words for Salvation

Valuable are the spoken words which lead to the path of salvation. It matters not where they are said or who said them. The value lies in listening to such words, which bestow bliss, strengthen our devotion and deliver salvation. The foundation of these words is the Knowledge of God. Words that lead us to salvation are always based upon the truth, irrespective of whether they come from a child or an adult. I place the highest value to words spoken in the *Sangat*. I have a yearning to hear the words of truth from those who are immersed in devotion.

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ONENESS

Know one, Believe in One and Become One

We must all serve humanity at large, regardless of the manifold differences of nationality, class, colour, creed, religion or language. We should never succumb to prejudices. We should simply love all people and regard them as members of a single human family.

We are all One

Our physical bodies are basically made up of five elements, over and above which is the soul. This soul is an integral part of the over soul - God, which is our true identity. This identity must be realised. The most rudimentary message that I advocate is that when such an awareness of the *real self* takes place, we cannot help but see ourselves in others. When this vision is experienced, there can be no hatred or discrimination. The rays of the sun cannot be separated from the sun itself. If the sun is free of class, colour and nationality, how can the rays be identified with such constraints? Just as the sun is universal, so too are its rays. In the same way, the soul and over soul are the Universal Truth. They are above any geographical or man-made divisions.

To explain this matter further, I am reminded of the example of the moon in the night sky, which gives wonderful coolness to the whole world. If one observes thousands of vessels containing water, the reflection of the moon is in every one of them. If we focus on them one by one, we may count thousands of reflections of the moon, but that does not mean that there are thousands of moons. The common reflection is from one moon, seen in all the vessels. So in the same way there is only one God, reflected in innumerable vessels of creation. Knowing this is all-important. Where there is ignorance, it becomes easier to live under the misconception that there are many moons. One view is that there are many moons in one vessel, another that the moon in one vessel is different to the one in the other. Similarly, the ignorance of the oneness of God leads human beings to live in divisions. Although people proclaim that there is one God, when it comes to their faith, they regard their own God to be different to that of the others. I can only state that when the realisation of God occurs, then enlightenment dawns upon the aspirant. It is only then we believe in the oneness of God. This binds man to man and a sense of unity in diversity prevails.

God is One

All the great philosophers, since time immemorial, have unanimously declared that 'God is one'. If this is the case, how can Allah be any different to Ram? Without this impartial insight there arises different views on religion. Discrimination over the various names of God, leads to the discrimination of the Masters, who selflessly inspired world religions. Furthermore, this causes discrimination amongst human beings. Why is this? It is because of man's ignorance of the *One* God. In knowing this one God, we can believe in one and become one. Without such a foundation, there can be only distances between man and man. Just as water is one and the same, irrespective of different names in different languages, God is also one, regardless of the many different names used.

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UNITY IN DIVERSITY

Diversity is Beauty

God has created such a beautiful, diverse world. In India, for example, there are innumerable spoken languages, from the southern, to the most northern tip of India. Beyond India, take into account the diversity in just languages alone, and other aspects of life, different cultures, food, music and different types of attire. The sense of diversity grows even further. Consider, for example, the diverse geographical landscapes like deserts, rivers, oceans and green forests. There is diversity in nature too.

One can also observe how estranged people have become with this diversity contrary to the universal message of the great teachers, who urge us to celebrate and appreciate diversity. This is eloquently expressed in the following words:

Look at the diversity and see the beauty.

How would we feel if there was just sand or water all around? Is it not refreshing to see mountains, meadows, trees and flowers? Don't we enjoy and marvel at the different species of animals and aquatic life. We, as human beings, have our own unique features too. For example, our hair, our eyes, our stature and appearance are all different. It's a pity to see that people fail to derive pleasure from it but become intolerant towards these differences instead. They hate and fear each other because of these differences.

I would like to urge people to see the beauty within the diversity of our planet, a world in which *unity in diversity* should become a way of life.

A Common Thread

There is one common thread that unites us all in the thread of humanity. We are like beads held together by this thread. If the thread is broken, then the beads fall apart and scatter. So, we have to keep the thread intact and bind together in a sense of unity and love.

Unity Not Uniformity

The message of the Great Masters has always been clear in definition, to create unity of mankind. If one analyses the achievements of those who follow these great Masters, it may appear that their intention is to bring about uniformity across the world and not unity at all. Instead of appreciating beauty in diversity, a culture of uniformity seems to be becoming the norm. For example, the commonly delivered thought, is that if one wears a turban, he is part of a particular society; if black, he's part of another group etc. We are, in fact, all human beings, created by one God. Yet the main thought and principle that seems to govern society is to stay bound to 'our own' community. There does not seem to be a principle of acceptance of others, and hence there is no integration or focus on unity, with rather more of an obsession for uniformity.

In this vast and diverse world, how is it possible to create unity on the basis of uniformity? One must develop the requisite love and cultivate enough respect to accept others *as they are*. As we are all different in outlook, tastes and appearance, we can only become united based on the principle of *unity in diversity*. Living in diversity one can achieve a thriving, and tolerant multicultural, multi-faith society in which all can co-exist in peace and harmony.

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PLANET EARTH

One World

God created one world for us all to live in together. There is a great expanse in the universe. If God had wanted to create different worlds for Christians, Hindus, Arabs or Americans, he could have done. But it was not.. One world was created for everybody to co-exist peacefully. However different we may be in terms of race and culture, our world is still one. We were all born on this same earth, and I feel we must reflect more upon the beauty of its diversity, and invite its positive vibes into our lives. Diversity must be appreciated, and not become a cause to harm others.

Diversity is an amazing example of the world's beauty, just as the flowers beautifully arranged in a garden. I have had the opportunity to visit beautiful gardens in Canada. I saw how all these flowers were coexisting in harmony. I compared their existence to the people of the world. People find it difficult to live in harmony. It is the difference in colour, shape and size of the flowers, that adds value to the garden. In modern times, such diversity is not recognised as beauty; it has been used to belittle and dislike others.

When I talk of peaceful co-existence, what I mean is that we are all co-existing. But are we doing so peacefully? If people do not have peace within themselves, how can they peacefully co-exist with others? Everybody needs peace. It can only come about from the awareness of this vast reservoir of love, which lives within and all around us – this is God.

Uniting People

I believe that this human family can only unite through building bridges, as opposed to constructing walls. Bridges have the capacity to link people together but walls sadly divide. I often think of the Berlin Wall in Germany, which I had the opportunity to visit. There was a poignant message inscribed on it which went deep into my heart:

Our world is too small for walls.

Walls of hatred have been created to divide this human family. Such differences are first created in the mind, which requires a change of direction.

I feel, even before the Berlin wall was built, it must have been created in somebody's mind. The design and construction took a physical shape afterwards. Similarly, when the wall was destroyed, its dismantling must have been conceived in somebody's mind. Therefore to tackle the human thought process, the mindset has to change. Once a person has gained awareness of the truth, he regards the whole of humanity as his own. This is an inner state within which a person ceases to see outward differences, but begins to see all as one. Rabindranath Tagore once spoke of walls that a person builds around himself, which eventually obscure and imprison the very person that builds them. Let us demolish the man-made walls and enjoy the sense of liberation that results from it.

Our job, therefore, is to pull down these barriers between human beings. The wall of hatred and fear that once stood in Berlin was pulled down with celebration. It was accepted and welcomed by all right-thinking people - all those who see mankind as brothers and sisters. This was a symbolic act. In fact, there are so many similar walls within our hearts and minds,

which separate us from others. They too can be pulled down. When this happens we can get close to each other and become one in heart and mind.

Building Humanity

When we wish to construct a building it demands great effort. The contractors must purchase bricks, mortar and a variety of materials in order to complete the project. It may take many years to lay the foundation stone and realise the final design of a building. To destroy it, however, takes mere seconds. When I see the work of the Great Masters, I notice that they made many a sacrifice to establish and build the edifice of humane principles throughout the ages. However, we see man affected by his ignorance, destroying said constructions in an instant. Unfortunately, he spares not a moment's thought to the labours of great people who spent lifetimes designing and establishing these values and beliefs.

Fruit of the World

In our society, there seems to be a down turn in human values. It begs transformation beginning with our children, who are being inadequately directed by the elder generations. Instead of leading them towards righteousness, one sees quite the opposite. The innocence we used to see within children is now becoming a rarity. For there to be a bright future for the children of this world, a positive environment needs to be created for them to develop and attain good human values. If we plant a fruit-bearing tree, we cannot really enjoy it unless we care to maintain it first. The tree that is looked after begins to bear fruit. We need to give such attention to our youth. We must consider what values are suitable for them to inherit.

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LIFESTYLE

Family Relationships

From a very young age, I have had the benefit of attending the gatherings of people devoted to God and I have gained much from such divine company – that is the *Satsang*. The skills I have gained from the *Satsang* can be used in any difficult situation. I have always found the spiritual teachings helpful to resolve problems. For example, tolerance makes it quite possible to pass through family disagreements without any problems. If we cultivate such attitudes in ourselves, we are able to rise above petty matters and resolve differing opinions more easily. Such qualities can render debate irrelevant. This wonderful counsel only stems from the counsel of the *Satsang*, and not any other forum.

Another virtue expressed in the *Satsang* is that of sweet and loving dialogue. If one speaks sweetly, there can be a quick resolution to life's trials and all tribulations. By adopting broadmindedness, we can also solve most problems with relative ease. Such qualities must be instilled in our lives if we are to achieve inner peace. With these virtues, we can create peace within our local environment too. Adopting these simple qualities, I can assure you, peace can prevail within and around you.

Marriages

In recent years, I have presided over wedding ceremonies that came to be known as 'mass marriages'. These ceremonies are basically multiple marriages performed together, consisting of many couples, before the assembly of devotees. Hundreds of couples sit in one place and tie the knot. Mass marriages now take place in numerous cities throughout India, and to some extent, abroad too. The devotee-participants all feel enriched, as I do, by the experience. The marriages are very simple. The Bride and Groom garland each other to express consent to marriage, after which the marriage vows are recited to them. On such occasions, I am able to share and enjoy the happiness of the couples and their families. So many couples marrying together promotes simplicity of the proceedings.

When the marriage vows are read to any couple, I consider them to be a compact revision of the lessons learnt in the *Satsang*. The wonderful vows are accepted by the parties, who covenant to accept their binding nature at the commencement of their new life as husband and wife. The uniting nature in marriage is, in fact, characteristic of the marriage of the soul with the super soul.

The vows in question advise as to how we are to uphold the path of humanity, which is our foremost religion. The vow-inspired couples consent to living together with love and respect and to serving the whole world as one single family. I feel that if we make these teachings the foundation of our lives, and keep in mind the guidance of the *Sadh Sangat* (company of enlightened beings), peace automatically ensues. What is more, elders become honoured, together as well as the family of the *Sadh Sangat*.

Responsibility

I pray for the couples to honour their responsibilities by imbibing the Mission's teachings in their daily lives, for the more they embrace the virtues of love, tolerance and contentment, the more they grow. This growth is of the utmost importance, for it helps to strengthen our personal relationships. When it takes place between a husband and wife, an ideal platform is created upon which they can develop their communal responsibilities. Our task is not to be a burden on society. On the contrary, we must all make a positive contribution. We must all face up to our responsibilities, undertake the right action, and be constantly aware of this God, the Formless *Nirankar*.

A Responsible worldly life

When it comes to considering financial matters, our first and foremost responsibility is the care of our families and their needs. Charity must begin at home. We must all work hard to secure our daily bread, but at the same time, live with the awareness of the Knowledge of God at work, at home, in the street, or anywhere else we happen to be. If this Knowledge is set firmly in our minds, our lives change for the better. So, how does one learn to live in awareness? I often say that man's heart must be attached to his Guru and God, whilst his hands are directed to work. In this way both living in truth, and leading a responsible worldly life are fulfilled. In working, our 'oneness' stems from the fact that we see all humans as our own, thus dispelling the constraints of duality. With 'awareness', love flows from every act and decent human values are observed. The mind set is able to expand to the point of seeing our neighbour as part of our own family.

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VOLUNTARY AND CHARITABLE WORK

Voluntary Service

The Mission has a voluntary service wing called the *Sevadal*. Made up of volunteers, both men and women, who selflessly serves in event management, in acts of charity, and in the performance of all the necessary duties appertaining to the *Satsang and the needs of the Sadth Sangat*. The members hail from various backgrounds, ranging from high-ranking government officials to people of business, trade, professionals and non professionals who all work in harmony. I have observed the spirit of service and the charitable living in these volunteers on my travels around the world. They possess humility in abundance, which is reflected in their exemplary love and devotional service to others.

The volunteers are committed to serving the Mission but they also play an effective role within the wider society. The Mission undertakes much social work with the aid of this core group of volunteers. Their services are called upon in times of natural calamities and human suffering. For example, the volunteers actively participate in flood-stricken areas, quake zones, and also help local authorities to administer and manage human tragedy, when and wherever it may arrive.

An example of such work is their service after the 2005 Tsunami, when these volunteers arrived in the Andaman and Nikobar Islands to lend support to the devastated community. The Mission's *Satsang Bhawan* (worship hall) in Port Blair was used to house the affected people. The *Sevadal* volunteers showed so much commitment that the authorities applauded their dedication.

Nobody was willing to remove dead livestock and decomposing corpses, causing diseases in the area. The volunteers – the *Sevadal*, took this important task on. They were said to be fearless, exhibiting an amazing spirit. The authorities recognized their work and publicly appreciated it.

Co-ordination

The *Sevadal* volunteers all act in discipline. They are coordinated in their efforts and never disorganized in their approach. Their spirit of working together as one unit is commendable, for they lose their sense of individuality and only focus their attention on producing results as a team. When I watch a parade, I observe that it is only because of the measures of control, which allow such discipline to be retained. To see people marching together in complete harmony, as one team, is truly inspiring. However, if there were no unison then it would cease to be as effective or as pleasing to the eye. With co-ordination even the most difficult of tasks becomes simple. Imagine a heavy load. A man on his own may not be able to lift it, but if people got together as a team, it can easily be lifted. This is the spirit I ask the volunteers to maintain.

To conclude, I would say that I stand firm on the belief that the whole world is ours and that nobody is alien. Our origins are all from the same one source. This ethos is reflected through the work of all these volunteers in a practical way. When they commit themselves to selfless service, they do not look at who the person is before providing their service. The issues of background, religion, class or culture are unimportant, because the *Sevadal* volunteers perceive and maintain this unique sense of unity. For a devotee who lives in such awareness, this concept is endemic in his life; selfless service of humanity forms part and parcel of his worship. In essence this life can be likened like a game of tennis - you must serve well to win, but it begins with 'love all'.

Community Welfare

I compare the world today to a torn garment of clothing. If we wanted to repair the fabric we would not go about the task with a broken needle and misplaced threads. It would only get worse and not be patched up. If one used a needle of the correct size and dimension and the right thread, the garment could be stitched together. The job of the devotees is to heal the wounds of the whole community with the right tools, which are love, dedication and kindness. Without the use of these means, there can be no progress and this noble cause cannot be achieved.

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HUMANITY TODAY

Direction taken by Man

When you consider man's direction, we can see that he is able to put up huge buildings, develop the world's transport systems and maximize scarce resources. Can this be defined as real progress?

He is the same today as he has been throughout the ages. He has not really changed at all. He was ready to kill his fellow man in pre-historic times; he is ready to do so today. In modern times, it can be said man has graduated, obtained degrees, written many books, and reached intellectual heights. Can we truly describe such a man as intelligent, particularly, if born as a human, he does not live as one? Wise men tell us that regardless of whatever else we learn, a few words of love is a sign of real wisdom. I would even suggest that your intelligence becomes burdensome if you do not open the heart to Holy Scriptures, which have the potential to change your world.

Men have travelled far and wide, but they have failed to learn what is worth learning in their lives. Where is our humanity going? Today we can see man's attempt to destroy his own fellow beings. Man has lost his awareness of the truth. God made him in his own image, but due to ignorance and selfishness he has lost his wisdom. He can only be likened to bestial beings. I can tell you that no spiritual Master ever taught hatred as import of hatred or love as being meaningless. If this were the case, what would happen in our society today? We bow our heads at the places the great Masters visited and preached. We speak with reverence of their great messages,. But how can their messages be manifest into our lives?

Protecting Yourself

There is senseless violence taking place and nefarious acts are engulfing the world. Most of the barriers splitting the human family today are man-made. The reasons for division are also man-made - they not created by God.

Hence, one should shield oneself from such negativity by keeping the candle of devotion alight. We know that a gust of wind can increase the risk of a candle being blown out. However, if one cups the candle with one's hands, the gust of wind no longer affects it. Similarly, remembrance of God serves as the protecting hands. This is the reason why I repeatedly urge you to keep this Formless God in mind.

Actual Progress

There is no doubt that man has made significant progress in the fields of science, medicine, and technology. We can travel longer distances in shorter times. We can communicate more readily and easily. Wherever we may be, we can stay in touch with friends and colleagues, and pass each other instant messages through the use of electronic devices. Likewise there is extraordinary development and progress in many other areas of life too.

However, when it comes to the most simplistic things in life, the question arises as to how far man has really progressed.

I frequently say that although man is born as a human being, he has not learned to be humane. As a result of this, humans lack the basic qualities of decency and compassion. I sometimes wonder why the qualities one finds in animals far outweigh those of the human being. For instance, we place locks on our doors and fit burglar alarms to our vehicles. This is not because we fear animals, it is because we are fearful of the behaviour of fellow human beings. The real achievement for mankind would be to establish a society in which everybody loves each other.

I can see today that people have been misguided and misled into misconstrued thinking, which is proving to be disastrous for mankind. When we turn on the television, we see mostly violence and bloodshed everywhere. I always entreat that we should learn to love one another, instead of being instrumental in creating disharmony and hatred.

I also see people using forceful and aggressive means to create change in others, but it is love that has the tremendous power to bring about change. Why not disseminate love and see how this changes the people around us.

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UNIVERSAL BROTHERHOOD

Establishing Brotherhood

I believe it is possible for the whole human family to congregate together and share with each other the experience of the universal truth. This hope becomes closer to reality when we generate happiness and joy in the world. Such occasions occur in a small way, as part of the Mission's gatherings, or *Satsangs*. In these gatherings, people from all walks of life, regardless of their culture or religion, sit together and praise the Almighty Lord. In such gatherings, we all strengthen the spiritual aspect of our lives. This in turn establishes brotherhood, the positive energies of which naturally remove and overcome divisiveness.

Our Efforts

The efforts of the Mission's members are laudable, in trying to create a society, which brings harmony to the world. One candle lit in the distance, even if glowing on its own, can give direction to someone who has lost the way. The candle also has the potential to light other candles that are unlit. However, if the candle is blown out then it cannot help anybody at all. What has value is whether a candle is lit or not. We see that there is much darkness in the world, but if we all work together to remove the darkness, a brighter world can be secured. Like that small, solitary candle in the distance, we can achieve something, regardless of how limited or insignificant our efforts may seem. We should always try, and should always facilitate our light to shine.

I often think about the fable of the forest bird that carried small droplets of water in its beak and feathers, attempting to extinguish a forest fire. In this account, an onlooker saw the movements of the bird and laughed at the insignificance of its efforts. What impact could these small droplets have upon the vast fire? The bird responded: 'when history is written, I wish to be remembered as one of those who attempted to put out the fire, not one who created it'. This should also be the way a devotee thinks about the efforts he makes to ward off speedily growing hatred in the world.

INTROSPECTION

Right Direction

If travelling on a yacht one raises the sails. One notices that the sails always influence the direction the yacht sails in. If the wind is blowing in one particular direction and we appeal to the wind to change its direction, it may not happen. It is simpler and easier to adjust our own sails, in order to move in the direction we wish to go.

I offer the following thought for the life of a true devotee:

The wisdom of the Knowledge of God allows the devotee to appreciate that he should adjust his sails to move in the right direction. This allows him to live in equilibrium and offer support to other human beings, easing pain in their lives. Such a devotee will have the capacity to lift those who have fallen, and wipe away the tears of those who are down.

Becoming a Lighthouse

The path of devotion is not an easy path to walk upon. For those who live in enlightenment, it is their duty to become lighthouses for the rest of the world. However, this is only possible if there is adequate growth of love and humility within our lives. This nurtures spiritual values in such a way that one becomes a towering light. Like a lighthouse directs a ship in stormy waters, I wish for devotees to let their light shine. May they give those in need of guidance an opportunity to attain the awareness of truth and help to complete their life's journey safely. In this lies bliss.

To act as a lighthouse would be a massive support for the people of this world. If this path were easy to pursue, then the Great Masters would not have had to repeat their message over and over again. Perhaps their message of love would have been said once, and then they may have focused upon something else. But this is not so. The Masters, throughout the ages, have had to recurrently repeat their message.

We are all aware that if something is not easy to achieve, one is required to work harder at it to make progress. The view that should be taken is that as you commence this task, you should have the spirit to work hard to complete it. It is quite like an athlete who has a desire to win a marathon. He is required to get up in the morning in order to train, measure regularly what he has achieved, and decide how much further he has to go. If he were to simply refer to the success of previous medal winners, or perhaps just to review the rules and regulations for participation, this would not assist in increasing his own stamina or general state of health. In order to prepare for the marathon, it is obvious that the stamina of previous winners bears no relation to the athlete's own prowess. The athlete himself must increase his level of stamina, through hard work and practice. This will enable him to improve, complete and perhaps even win the race which he is to run. When we reflect on the greatness of past sages and comment upon their achievements, their practices may show the way, but cannot help us in the task at hand. The energy that is required in devotion to God is that of unwavering tolerance, humility and love. This spiritual stamina needs to be developed through exercising the personal relationship between the devotees and God.

Simple Living, High Thinking

Elevated attitudes can be gained by mixing with those who have a relationship with God. Such people live a life of simplicity. By bonding with them, one too becomes motivated towards a life of higher thinking and simple living. In managing such a lifestyle one can be rewarded with peace and happiness. We observe tall buildings touching the skies, which have equally deep foundations. The devotee is representative of such formation, possessing a deep sense of being with cutting edge thoughts, as well as taking pleasure from a life of profound humility bound with simplicity. These attributes will equip him to meet challenges and scale spiritual heights.

Our Outlook

When we look around this world, we see countries having their borders clearly defined by the extent to their frontiers. One observer sees these borders as a meeting point between the countries, and another sees it as a dividing line. I expect the devotees to uphold a positive outlook. Their preserve is not to see division, but to bring people together and to be always on the lookout for the means to achieve this goal. There is no talk of division, but simply talk of human unity.

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BEHAVIOUR PATTERN

Human Nature

When I consider the nature of man today, I observe that to be gentle one has to be strong. Cruelty is evidence of a weakness in character, not strength. Cruel people are indeed considered to be very weak. Those who live in humility are strong beings, as they remain unaffected and in a state of equipoise, no matter how others behave with them.

The devotees are so humble, they desire to bow before others, and touch their feet. This is a common practice within the *Satsang*. The devotees know that this is not common behaviour in the world, but they engage in its practice without feeling awkward. If devotees meet each other in the street or in a shopping centre, they still bow to each other because of the fundamental principles that they have a belief in. To bow as I have previously mentioned is not a weakness. In fact, when we are humble this shows how strong we truly are. It is regretted that in the wider world, humility and bowing is considered to be a constraint and a weakness.

Animals and Humans

Man was made in the image of God and the objective of human life is to return to God's nature. Humans drift away from godliness, becoming unholy in character. Their behaviour towards others in this state of mind is often worse than that of animals.

Once I had the occasion to visit a wild life sanctuary near Bangalore, in India. In the early hours of the morning we began to travel across the sanctuary, in a jeep, escorted by a guide, and with police escort. During the course of the journey, we had a punctured tyre and found the spare to be flat as well. Under the circumstances, provisions were made to transfer to the police vehicle. Some of the staff had to stay behind because of the lack of space. One of the escorting police officers remarked on the safety issues for the group left behind without sufficient security and guidance, waiting for a recovery vehicle. However, what the sanctuary ranger said impressed me deeply. He said to the officer: 'Relax, there is little danger from wild animals with four legs; the danger is posed by two legged animals in the cities'. He continued, 'I have not seen any animal attacking anybody without reason, but I can give many examples of humans hunting and killing without any cause or reason'.

Indeed, this is the state of the world today. The human being has become far worse than the wild animal. Man has reached the moon, but he has not learned how to live and walk upon the earth. Humanity is fading away and religion is failing. Religion can only be resuscitated with love. If love lives, religion too can live and prosper.

Animals and Man – the difference

The whole of the animal kingdom eats, drinks, sleeps and procreates, as do humans. So many emotions and instincts, such as those of fear and protection, are similar. So what is the difference that sets man apart? It is wisdom and the potential to attain the Knowledge, which is different. It is a soul of good fortune that is granted human life, but that soul has to achieve its

higher purpose in this world.

When one analyses the qualities of animals, one finds they are far greater than humans in many respects. If we compare the teeth of the human and those of an elephant, which set has the most value? Horses run at such pace and speed, but how fast can man move on his feet? Look at the smallest of creatures that have such beautiful colours and patterns on their bodies. These are the designs that man has taken inspiration from, in order to create the fashionable fabrics we see today. Man flies with the support of metal planes, but learned how to do so from birds that have wings. In so many aspects, the birds and animals teach us how to live. However, the real difference is that man has the intellect and wisdom, which he can use to achieve the highest aim of life.

Freedom is desired by all and is one such aim. When one considers the Indian nation, its inhabitants rejoiced in freedom, when Independence was finally granted. In the same way, every human soul is in search of this independence as it has been in bondage for ages. Freedom is possible in human life - it is here that one has a real chance to seek redemption. It is through the realisation of God, that this higher purpose will be achieved.

Time

Time is very precious and the time we all have is diminishing by the day. I believe that what you plan to achieve tomorrow, you should achieve today, and what was to be achieved today, should be done now. You do not know what the next moment holds. It is for this very reason that you should practice awareness of this Formless God at all times, because you do not know what is round the corner. You should give greatest value to time and not waste it away.

I heard about a young man and his father who were travelling home in their car. The car stopped at a set of traffic lights, which turned red. When the signal turned green, the car remained stationary. The father looked over and saw his teenage son, slumped over at the wheel and realised that he had passed away. Therefore, who can be sure what the next moment has in store? This is why the time we all have must be used constructively. So if one has used his time principally to achieve his life's purpose then he can celebrate the rest of his life. If this important task remains unaccomplished, then it must be accomplished with a sense of urgency, because who knows what the future holds? So let this accomplishment of the purpose of life be your immediate focus.

The Religion of Humanity

I have tried to press home the message that there is one religion and that is the religion of humanity. It is the only universal religion and we should all live together in this way. Upholding good human values is a key factor in devotion and all the devotees are required to stay on the track of humanity. In an athletic race, a runner who strays from his lane is disqualified. Even if he crosses the finishing line first, he is denied the gold medal. Not only this, but he loses the chance of obtaining even the silver or bronze medal. In devotion, one should stay on the right track – *the path of humanity*. I would strongly recommend that everyone must move within the required parameters in order to win this game of our life.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Avtar Bani- This is the Holy Scripture of the Nirankaris, which was compiled at the behest of Baba Avtar Singh Ji, the second in the lineage of Mission's spiritual Masters. Verses from this scripture are commonly recited within the Satsang or Sangat and more particularly, the concluding discourse in every Satgat is often based on a stanza from this book.

Baba- A prefix or title used for wise and mature personages, such as the Masters of the Nirankari Mission: Baba Boota Singh Ji, Baba Avtar Singh Ji, Baba Gurbachan Singh Ji and Baba Hardev Singh Ji.

Bhog- Prior to eating their food, a Nirankari devotee offers a morsel of it to the person sitting next to him, as a way of expressing thanks for having received it. The devotee sees every human as a reflection of his Master.

Charnamrit- Holy Water, which is created by washing the feet of devotees. The fundamental basis of any water becoming holy is dependant upon the faith of the seeker and its application. Such water is considered to have holy values because of the sacred intent behind its creation and use.

Dhan Nirankar- Greetings used by devotees when they meet each other. It means God is Great. The words are also normally recited before anybody speaks in Satsang functions.

Formless- Reference to Formless Nirankar (see Nirankar below).

Guru- Literally it means a teacher, 'one who leads you to the light of revelation from the darkness of ignorance'.

Sat Guru- The Spiritual Master who has the capacity to enlighten all seekers with the Knowledge of God (Braham Gyan – see below), He looks not at one's background, culture and attire. Those who come to him with a desire for enlightenment may have the veil of ignorance removed. It is held that through such realisation, one achieves the prime purpose of coming to this earth, namely to achieve salvation and unity with God

Braham Gyan – Realisation or Knowledge of God. A seeker is said to have attained Braham Gyan when he becomes initiated with the Knowledge of God. This can be received from any authorized representative of the Sat Guru His Holiness Baba Hardev Singh Ji. The seeker is required to have a thirst to know and this intuitive insight can be received in an instance. This enables the seeker to achieve 'self realisation' and for redemption of life the knowledge introduced by the Sat Guru is paramount to a devotee.

Five Noble Pledges- When one attains the Braham Gyan, he is required to practise five noble pledges. For a devotee, these pledges form a practical aspect of devotion to Nirankar. See concluding pages for a short summary.

Mahapursh- A term used within Nirankari circles to address one another. It actually means a divine person. His Holiness was once asked why devotees were addressed thus. He replied that such an address is a constant reminder of the fact that one has to achieve this elevated state of being in one's journey in life. As devotees attain liberation through the Realisation of God, they

are given this honorific title or appellation to live up to.

Manglacharan– This is the penultimate prayer prior to the conclusion of the Sangat. It is recited by the assembly for the welfare of the whole of mankind

Nirankar– A term or name for God. The two syllables that make up the word are: *nir* meaning 'without' and *kar* meaning form respectively. There are many accepted names of God because God has many qualities. Nirankar forms another part of that sequence. This name is commonly used by the members of the Sant Nirankari Mission today, but they have no issue with using other names to reflect the divine. For them God is also known as Ram, Allah, Waheguru, Ishwar, Tao etc. and are often used within their spiritual gatherings.

Namaskar– This is the act of bowing. When Nirankaris meet each other, they touch each other's feet with a sense of humility. This is to acknowledge the residence of spirit of Nirankar which exists within all human beings.

Nirankari Baba Hardev Singh– Spiritual Head of the Sant Nirankari Mission, an international spiritual movement, which seeks to promote universal brotherhood through the fatherhood of God.

Satsang Bhawan– This is the name given to the place of worship, in which the community gets together to praise and pray to God. It must be noted that such worship for a Nirankari is not constrained by time or place as one can pray wherever and whenever one likes. However, such worship together as a community in a Sangat provides additional bliss and enrichment.

Santokh Sarover– This is a site developed from a marshy area in the outskirts of New Delhi to one of natural beauty, now forming a focal point for the Mission and visitors alike. The landscaped park provides a recreational area for the young and old alike. It has a calm and serene atmosphere where visitors can come to relax from their busy schedules. It takes its name from a great devotee of the Mission, who served the Mission tirelessly. A museum, set up on the grounds, features Journey Divine, which gives a magnificent introduction to the work of the Mission, using the latest technology to depict the history of the Mission and its charitable work.

Sadh Sangat– This is a gathering of devotees or enlightened beings. Sadh Sangat literally means the holy company of the wise.

Satsang or Sangat – This is the act of worship in a gathering or congregation.

Seva – The selfless service of Humanity. It is done selflessly without the expectation of reward. Although this service in question may be carried out in many different ways, the intent behind the action must always be that of selflessness.

Sevadal– Those who carry out seva (selfless voluntary work) as a team, are known as Sevadal (Volunteers). They are the formal members of this Mission, who dedicate themselves to service of humanity throughout their lives. The purpose is to make a positive contribution to society they live in, through charitable initiatives, as well as by serving the devotees of the Sadh Sangat. They should aim to be role model citizens.

Simran– Prayer. This could be recited by way of repetition with the aim of maintaining

connection with God.

Nirankari's repeat the following:

**"Tuhi Nirankar,
Mein Teri Sharan Houn,
Mainu Baksh lau."**

This is translated as

"Thou Formless one, I am in thy shelter, please protect me."

One can recite this at any time. In fact, one is encouraged to do so whilst waking, eating, sleeping, working, resting or at any convenient time as prayer is without any time constraints.

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FIVE NOBLE PLEDGES

1. **Submission-** One is required to accept wholeheartedly that one's body mind and wealth, indeed all you own are gifts from God. In order to guard against these things becoming a source of greed or false pride, one should accept them as a mere trustee and to vow to use these gifts for the betterment of mankind.

2. **Broad-mindedness-** To live above the worldly divisions of nationality, race, colour and creed. A devotee is required to accept all beings without prejudice, as members of one global family, created by the One Divine Maker. Condemnation, criticism and hatred of any person is not acceptable.

3. **Responsible Living-** One is to rise above the petty discriminations of lifestyle, diet and dress, for these factors are often geographically, historically and culturally determined. These factors all too often become a source of conflict in the world. A committed devotee learns to live and let live, observing broadness of mind inspired by Formless Nirankar for tolerance and diversity.

4. **Community Responsibility-** To live a life of integrity and to fulfil one's responsibilities towards the family and the wider community. There is no need to renounce the world or to indulge in penances in order to be able to come closer to God. Rather, pledge to live in the world as a good citizen, sharing the burdens of others by working to create cohesion in the community.

5. **Discipline-** To honour the sanctity of the *Braham Gyan* as a divine blessing. In order to avoid misinterpretation and confusion, the Knowledge should not be divulged without permission of the living Spiritual Guide. The Knowledge, in its essence, is greater than words can contain and often expressed by subtle intent. When a Sat Guru, or enlightened authority speaks, it is a conversation of the inner self, which transcends all physical boundaries. When the Sat Guru perceives that an individual has fully grasped the essence of the Knowledge, he bestows that individual with the authority for that individual to share this Knowledge with others.