

# TRUE FREEDOM

by Darshan Singh

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DEAR Brothers and Sisters in God:

Today is your Independence Day and people are celebrating it by lighting fireworks and by ringing bells. It is my proud privilege to be with you here in this city while you are celebrating this great day in your history. It was in Boston that the flame of American independence was lit, and this great city played a very important role in the struggle for freedom.

The quest for liberty is basic to human life, and it is enshrined in the Preamble to your Declaration of Independence. It affirms: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal and they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that amongst these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

From the beginning of time, saints and seers have been telling us that just as there is a world and cosmos without, there are universes within. And whatever applies to the world outside, applies in a larger measure to the world inside. The most fundamental right which God has given us is to travel into the inner space, to rise above body-consciousness, and soar into the higher spiritual realms and attain self-knowledge and God-realization. It is only by pursuing this right that man can attain eternal life, true liberty and lasting happiness. Just as today we light fireworks and we ring bells to celebrate our Independence Day, so too we have to ignite the Light of God and we have to ring the bell of the Holy Word or Naam to attain the be-all and end-all of our life which is self-knowledge and God-realization.

Again, as we need an emancipator like George Washington or Mahatma Gandhi to grant us political freedom; similarly, we need a Godman, a Word-made-flesh, a living Master, to grant us eternal liberation, eternal peace, and eternal salvation within. The journey towards freedom is a long and difficult one. We must shake off the shackles of mind and matter, traverse into those spiritual realms beyond body-consciousness, and reach our ultimate goal of communion with the Creator. And for attaining this ultimate goal, as I explained earlier, we have to ignite the Light of God and ring the bells of the Holy Word or the Naam within.

It is said that in the beginning, God was all alone. He was an Ocean of All-consciousness. Then He thought of becoming many from one. This thought produced a vibration, and God assumed two forms: one, the Light of God, and the other, the Music of the Spheres, the Harmony of Harmonies, the Celestial Music, or the Unstruck Lasting Melody as it is described by various prophets and saints. These two gifts of Light and Sound are known as the Holy Word. It is said in the holy Bible: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." And again, it is written in Genesis: "Let there be light, and there was light." Saint Augustine has said "I entered and beheld with the eye of my soul, above my mind, the light unchangeable. He who knows the truth knows what that light is. And he that knows it, knows eternity." Again, the Jewish Talmud speaks of the Light of God in these words: "By means of that light which was created on the first day, man was able to gaze at the whole eternity from one end to the other."

Khwaja Hafiz, the famous Persian mystic, has said: "Nobody knows where is the abode of my Beloved, but the sound of bells emanates from there." Again, Maulana Rumi says: "Seek the sound that never ceases, and seek the sun that never sets." Tulsi Sahib, a great Indian mystic, has said: "A sound is coming from the eternal abode to call you back." Other saints and seers have also talked about these two primal manifestations of God which are the Light of God and Music of the Spheres.

Whosoever has attained communion with God has done so with contact with these two gifts. At present we find that our attention, which is the outer expression of our soul, is passing through nine apertures of our body, and is lost in sensuous pleasures. These nine apertures are: two eyes, two ears, two nostrils, mouth, and two openings below. The saints and seers have been advising us that we should invert our attention from the outer sensuous pleasures to the higher spiritual regions within. We are constituted of soul and intellect. The most important part of our being is the soul. We are doing all that is possible to keep our physical body spic and span. Again, we are trying to have the greatest development in the field of our intellect. We have already reached the moon and are trying to reach the other planets, but despite our advancement in the physical sphere and the intellectual sphere, we have still not been able to attain the lasting happiness for which we have been searching from the dawn of time. It is true that we are reaching the other planets, but we have not been able to reach the heart of our neighbor; we do not know whether our neighbor is writhing in pain or is dying of starvation.

The saints and seers have been advocating that since soul is the most important element of our being, we should pay due attention to its progress also. If we have seen anybody leaving the body we would have realized that our body and our intellect function so long as the soul is in the body. It is the soul which animates and enlivens our body and intellect. The moment our soul leaves the body, the body cannot raise its finger. The intellect also ceases to function. So our soul is the most important element of our being, and we should accord it the proper priority in our life.

So all saints and seers have been emphasizing the necessity of our spiritual progress in order to attain lasting happiness, lasting bliss, lasting peace, lasting tranquility and lasting salvation. They have been telling us that our mind has a thousand wives and it is very difficult to control it. Guru Nanak has said that if we are able to control our mind, we have won the battle of our life. But it is very difficult to still the mind. The mind can be stilled only when it comes in contact with the Light of God and the Celestial Music or the Holy Word. Now it is being dissipated by indulging in the sensuous pleasures. Normally, our soul should control our mind, and our mind should control our outer senses. But now the whole system is a reversal of the ideal one. What we find is that our senses drag our mind, and since our mind and soul are living together as a jiva in the body, the soul is also dragged with the mind into the sensual pleasures. Our prophets and saints have been advising us that the path of our salvation is the path of inversion. We should invert our senses from without and invert them inward and upward to the spiritual realms so that our mind is able to taste of the Water of Life which is within us. All our scriptures have stated that the fountainhead of the Water of Life, or amrit as it is called in the Gurbani, or the aab-e-hayat as it is called by the Sufis, is within us. After we cross the first three regions, the physical, the astral, and the causal, we reach the fountainhead of the Water of Immortality. And when we drink at that fountain, our soul is purified. It shakes off the shackles of the mind. Our mind is not a small thing. Just as our soul is of the same essence as God, our mind is also of the same essence as Brahm. It is only by drinking at the fountainhead of life, and tasting the amrit or the aab-e-hayat, that our mind gets stilled. So our saints and seers have been advocating that we go into inner space, just as

mankind has started soaring into outer space for the last two decades.

Outer space has so far been traveled only by a selected few - the richest and most advanced countries. Outer space is not available to each individual. As opposed to outer space, inner spiritual space is available to everyone, to every individual on this earth. By coming in contact with the Light of God and the Music of the Spheres our soul can rise above body-consciousness and traverse the regions of the stars, the moon, and the sun inside. The real stars, moon, and sun are in the spiritual realms within us, and the outer stars, moon, and sun are their reflections. When we cross the stars, moon, and sun in our inner journey, we come face to face with the radiant form of our Master.

To attain our ultimate goal of self-knowledge and God-realization we have to go to the lotus feet of a living Master. Just as I have told you that we must ignite the Light of God within, and we must ring the bells of the Holy Word to have our independence, similarly, we need an emancipator to bring about our ultimate freedom. That emancipator is called the living Master on the spiritual path. The need of a living Master cannot be over-emphasized. We send our children to teachers at schools, colleges, and universities, and if they want to go in for a Ph.D., they always go to a living teacher. That is an accepted principle in our life. But when we start thinking about our inner journey homewards, about attaining the ultimate goal of our human life, which is self-knowledge and God-realization, then we pause to think whether there is a necessity of a living Master. If for attaining our exoteric knowledge, our worldly knowledge, there is no substitute for a living teacher, then how can there be a substitute for a living teacher for attaining esoteric knowledge, the eternal knowledge - that knowledge by knowing which everything else becomes known. So it is essential that we go to the feet of a living Master to traverse into the spiritual regions beyond.

Then again, we have so many libraries, we have so many books, we have the records of those who have been carrying on research in various fields, but with all these records, we still go to living teachers. If we want to perform an experiment in physics, then we must have an up-to-date laboratory and seek the guidance of a great exponent of that subject in order to achieve the desired results. Similarly, this human body is the temple which God has made with His own hands. God does not reside in temples which have been made of stone with human hands. And this human temple is the laboratory in which both God and our soul reside. So our laboratory is up-to-date, its constituents are perfect, as we have been created by God Himself, and all that we need is the guidance of the most competent exponent, a living Master. If we perform the experiment of self-knowledge and God-realization with all sincerity, and have the guidance of a living Master, we are bound to achieve the results of communion of our soul with the Creator. Just as the study of books alone does not help us in attaining our ultimate goal in the scientific field, similarly, the study of scriptures alone cannot help us achieve our goal in the spiritual realms.

We have so many scriptures, and since these scriptures describe the experiences of the soul which are beyond the human intellect, it is all the more necessary to seek the guidance of somebody who has undergone those experiments and experiences himself, and who can explain to us the true import of these scriptures. As these scriptures describe the realms and experiences which are beyond our intellect, our saints, seers, and prophets have often explained them in allegories, parables, and symbols. What often happens is that whatever is meant to be allegorical and symbolic we take to be literal; and whatever is to be taken as literal, we take to be symbolic. And it is in this respect that we cannot understand the true import of our scriptures. It is absolutely essential that for understanding our scriptures in their true import, we must go to the lotus feet of one who has traveled into the spiritual realms beyond, who has crossed the astral, the causal, and

the supracausal plane, and who has achieved communion of the soul with the Creator. Only such a personality can explain to us the true import of these books.

Spirituality is not a matter of mere knowledge; it is a matter of experience. Spirituality is firsthand experience. And that experience can only be granted by a Master-soul who has himself risen above body-consciousness and has attained communion with God. He can grant us such experience through his life impulse. So we need to go to the lotus feet of a Master. To be more exact, it is the Master who calls us to his own lotus feet. It is a basic concept of mysticism that love always emanates from the heart of the Beloved. The Master sends his radiation, binds us in the silken bonds of love, and then brings us to his own lotus feet. He is concerned only with the distribution and showering of the unbounded treasures of love and eternity which he brings with him. He does not look to our failings. He is so compassionate that he does not look to our weaknesses, to our sins. He concerns himself only with the divine task of distributing the eternal gift of the holy Word. He initiates us into the mysteries of the Beyond. He gives us a direct contact with the Light of God and the Celestial Music on the very day of initiation. He teaches us the art of dying while living, because in reality the art of dying while living is the art of attaining immortality. All our scriptures have talked of this art of dying while living. The Muslim scriptures say: "Die before death." Dadu the great mystic saint, has said: "Everybody has to die, O Dadu; why not conquer death while living?" Thomas a Kempis has said: "Learn to die so that you may begin to live." Again, the holy Bible says: "Unless ye be born anew, ye cannot enter the kingdom of God." And being born anew is to learn the art of dying while living.

So the Master teaches us this art, helps us in rising above body-consciousness, and helps us in crossing the inner realms of the stars, the moon, and the sun. Then we come face to face with the radiant form of our Master. The form of our Master at that stage is so enrapturing, so captivating, so enticing that we gradually lose ourself into that form. Then, the Master takes us under his own protective wings through the higher spiritual realms, and we gradually go beyond the first three planes. There we shake off the shackles of mind and matter, and our soul becomes completely purified of all the human sins. It is only when we have crossed the supracausal plane that our soul starts realizing that we are of the same essence as God, and there it cries out "Sohang" which means "I am that," or "Tat Twam Asi" which also means the same thing. The mystic word for this stage is "Anal-haq" which means "I am God," and it is only at this stage that the soul realizes that it is of the same essence as God. It continues traversing the higher planes, and first merges in the Master. That is the first stage of mysticism which is known as fana-fil-Sheikh or merger with the Master. Then through the Master's grace and God's blessings, the soul enters our eternal home, Sach Khand, and after crossing the stages beyond Sach Khand, ultimately it attains communion with the Creator. That is the stage where our soul attains lasting happiness, lasting peace and lasting salvation. This ultimate stage is known as fana-fil-Allah, or merger in God.

So it is absolutely essential that we must have the guidance of a perfect living Master. Unless we get the guidance of a perfect living Master we cannot traverse through the higher planes. In this connection, I am reminded of a tale from the old Indian scriptures. There was a king who was fond of listening to the scriptures, and for this purpose, every day he had assigned the duty of reading the scriptures to one of his own ministers. And that minister would read aloud to him all the scriptures one by one. This process went on for years. But he was not satisfied because he had read that once you listen attentively to the scriptures, then you attain salvation. So one day he called his minister and told him, "I have read that the study of these scriptures should be able to

grant salvation to me, but years have passed and though I have listened to the scriptures read out by you, I have not attained that state so far. So I give you this final chance. Start reading the scriptures again, and if you are not able to grant me salvation by the time you complete reading the scriptures, you will have to pay with your life." The minister got the fright of his life because he was conscious in his heart of hearts that he had not attained salvation himself. How would he be able to grant salvation to the king? But as it was the commandment of the king, he started reading the scriptures. As the days passed by, the inevitable end of the reading of the scriptures was approaching. The minister was getting more and more worried. He would often come home, toss himself in his bed, and lie listless. He would not take any meals because he could see that death was staring him in his face. He had a very wise daughter. And that daughter, when she saw her father in such a helpless plight, asked him about the reason for his worry. At first he would not say what was worrying him. But on the persistence of his daughter he told her the whole story. He told her that his days in this world were numbered, and as soon as the reading of the scriptures was over, he would lose his head. The daughter sought a private interview with the king and told him, "Your majesty, my father has served you with all his heart all these years. He has been very sincere in the discharge of his duties, and I seek one boon from you before the reading of the scriptures is over and my father meets his death."

Recalling the sincere services of the minister, the king agreed to the wish of the girl. The daughter requested the king to meet her behind his palace the next day, about sunset. The next evening, when the king arrived, he found that his minister and his daughter were already there. The daughter of the minister spoke to the king and told him to bear with her for a few minutes and do as she wanted him to do. The king agreed. The daughter tied the hands of the king around the back of a tree. Then, she tied the hands of her own father around the back of another tree. So both the king and the minister were tied to two trees which were just near each other, and from where both of them could see each other. At that juncture, she requested the king to unbind her father. The king got exasperated and said, "O foolish girl, I am myself bound, how can I unbind your father?" She replied with all humility, "Sir, the same is the case with my father. My father is still bound to this world and he has not achieved salvation. How can he grant you salvation?" Realizing the truth of her statement, the king granted the boon of saving the life of the minister.

This story tells us one thing very clearly, and that is that we must go to the lotus feet of a Master saint who has himself realized the mystery of life and death, because he alone can help us in realizing our ultimate goal of self-knowledge and God-realization. A man who has himself not risen above body-consciousness, and who speaks of the scriptures only from an intellectual level cannot help us in solving this mystery. So the importance of a living teacher on the spiritual path cannot be overemphasized. Again, a living Master is an embodiment of love. God is love, our soul being of the same essence as God is love, and the way back to God is also love. Our Master brings the eternal treasures of love from the highest abode and he showers the same on us. One of my verses is:

*Although everything in this world is transitory,  
I have brought with me the eternal gift of love for  
distribution to one and all.*

So Masters bring this gift and shower it on us. And this gift does not consist only of love for God; it consists also of love for mankind. It is only when we love all mankind, nay the entire

creation, that we can love God. And we can get this boon of loving the entire creation and loving God only from a perfect Godman. In this connection, there is a story of Bhai Kanehiya in the Sikh scriptures. He was a great devotee of the tenth Guru, and his duty was to give water to the soldiers on the battlefield. Some of his colleagues came and reported to the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh Ji, that he was giving water both to their own army men and to the army men of their adversaries. The result was that when they had inflicted wounds on the adversaries, the enemy would again be fresh and they would start fighting again and giving them a hard time. They thought that he was doing disservice to their Master's cause. The great Guru called him to his court and asked him to explain his actions. And Bhai Kanehiya replied, "Sir, I give water neither to the Hindus nor to the Muslims; I give water to you, and wherever I see your Light I give water to that Light. I see your Light in every human being, so I give water to every human being." It is only the gift of the Master which enables us to see the Light of God and Light of the Master in every human being and in every form of creation. And it is only when we achieve that stage when we see the Light of God in every atom, in every petal, in every flower, in every bird, in every animal, and in every man, that we start believing truly in the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man.

Just as the attainment of independence is a long one, so too the journey to our spiritual home is a long and difficult one. And in this age of shortcuts, when the span of life has decreased, we need a shortcut to spirituality also. In India the average span of life is only fifty years, and I find that even in your advanced country it is about sixty-five to seventy years. We read in our old scriptures that some of the rishis and munis did penances for sixty-five thousand years and eighty thousand years, and even then when their final test came, they were not able to succeed in it. So we have to achieve all that they achieved in their long lives, in the short span that we are now having. And then we are not sure that each one of us will enjoy seventy years or sixty-five years of life. This life is most fickle, it is most unfaithful. We do not know when our life will cease. Robert Browning has said: "Who knows, the world may end tonight." Now, I am speaking to you. I am not sure of whether I will be able to utter the next word or not. Somebody dies in his childhood, somebody dies in his youth, and somebody dies later on in life. Our saints and seers tell us to catch the time by the forelock and to make the best use of the time, and to attain our goal in the shortest possible period. And for that, it is essential that we adopt that procedure of meditation which is the shortest cut to spirituality.

There are various forms of yoga in which it is necessary to have a very healthy and a spic and span body. These forms of yoga take breathing into account while doing their meditations, but that is a very long process. It is not in keeping with the short life that we have at our disposal. The path of the Surat Shabd Yoga, or the Sant Mat, or the path of the Masters, is the shortest cut to spirituality. Other forms of yoga start by concentrating the attention either at the kundalini which is the base of the spinal cord, or the navel center, or the heart center, or the throat center, or with the tongue center. And some of the Jain followers concentrate on the tip of their nose. They gradually cross these stages and ultimately start concentrating at the third eye or the single eye which is the highest seat of the soul in the body. This is known to be the divya chakshu, or the nukta-e-sweda in ancient Indian scriptures and Sufi scriptures. The Surat Shabd Yoga, however, starts by concentrating at the highest seat of the soul in the body and that is at the third or single eye. Thus, it is the shortest cut to spirituality. Again, the Surat Shabd Yoga is the most natural form of yoga. It does not entail that we should have an extraordinarily healthy body. It can be practiced by a child of five years and an old man of even a hundred years and more. And since it is the quickest and most natural of all the paths, the Masters of Surat Shabd Yoga advocate that in

the short span of life we have, we should follow this path so as to achieve the ultimate goal of self-knowledge and God-realization in our lifetime.

The path of Surat Shabd Yoga is the path of positive mysticism. The criticism leveled by our Western brothers against the Eastern form of mysticism is that it requires us to leave our hearth and home to go deep into the icy caves of the Himalayas or into the huts of the deserts and to spend all our time there in meditation. They think that this is a path of escapism - that we escape discharging our worldly duties. But the path of the Masters is not the path of negative mysticism. The path of negative mysticism is one of renunciation - of leaving the world - and going into the deserts, the jungles or into the mountains, far from the madding crowds, and spending our life there in meditation. Surat Shabd Yoga believes in what I call positive mysticism, and that is the path which was given to the entire world by Guru Nanak and all other saints of the highest order. Guru Nanak has said that we should be like the lotus flower which has its roots in the muddy water but which remains blossoming and smiling, and remains unsullied with the effects of water. Similarly, we should be like the swan which floats on water, but whenever it wants it can fly with dry wings. So we should remain in this world, we should attend to our worldly obligations, but we should always remember God. We should always bear in mind the ultimate aim of human life, which is self-knowledge and God-realization, and by practicing the holy Word or Naam we should cross the ocean of life and reach our ultimate destination.

Ours is a path of positive mysticism. We owe our duties to our parents, to our families, to our society, to our nation, and then we have our obligations at the international and cosmic level. We must discharge all these duties, but we should do so in a spirit of detachment. This is not a path of renunciation. It is a path of attending to our duties in a spirit of detachment, and we should always keep an eye on the be-all and end-all of our life.

I have already described the various stages through which a living Master helps us. He helps us to master the art of dying while living. He grants us direct contact with the Light of God and the Music of the Spheres. He brings us above the body-consciousness. He grants us the boon of the radiant form of the Master within, and then takes us through the higher spiritual realms under his own protective wings. He takes us beyond the physical, the astral, the causal, and the supracausal planes, and leads us to our eternal Home, the Sach Khand. Even beyond that, he takes us to that final stage where our soul merges in God and attains lasting peace, lasting bliss, lasting happiness and lasting salvation. I began by speaking of the Declaration of Independence of your great country, which talks about life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. We have attained them in the political field and we are happy about it. But we will attain eternal life, true liberty and lasting happiness only by following the spiritual path and attaining merger of our soul with the Creator.