CHAPTER III

LIFE IN FULLNESS

This earth, the arena of so many struggles and strifes, full of sharp antinomies and contrarities, presenting, as it does, a vast panorama of life in its variegated forms and colors, is but a speck in the boundless creation of the great Creator:

There is no end to the creation;
There are countless forms of life with varied
names, species and colors;
Writ on the objective world by the ever-flowing
Pen of the Creator.

– Nanak

With all its seeming imperfections, this world serves a useful purpose in the divine Plan, just like an apparently insignificant cog in the machinery of a great powerhouse. Nature, the handiwork of God, is not the least extravagant in its design and plan. This world is a penitentiary, a house of correction, a sort of purgatory, a plane of expiation, a training ground where souls get chastened by experience. It is a half-way house between the physical planes and the spiritual realms. The powers that be of the earth are hard taskmasters, believing still in the ancient *Mosaic Law* of "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." Here all kinds of third-degree methods are employed and hard knocks are administered; rendering less than justice, untempered by compassion and mercy, so that one should take his lessons seriously and, by

degrees, turn away from the way of the world to the Way of God. Life on the earth-plane, then, is a dreadful thing "dark with horror", and we are the lost children of God in the labyrinthine wilderness of the world.

Evolution is in the nature of living *monads* and consists in their moving towards their Source and becoming one with It, for true happiness lies in "fellowship divine, fellowship with the Essence, till we shine, fully alchemized and free of space." But the tragedy of life on earth is that "we do not know what we are and much less of what we may become." "What we are we do not see; what we see is our shadow," says Socrates. The "inner being" in us is so constituted after the fashion of God that it knows no rest until it rests in Him. "A truly religious experience," says Plotinus, "consists in the finding of the true Home by the soul exiled from Heaven." And this experience can be ours if only we know how to unhook the "Self" from the trammels and trappings of the body and the mind.

Self-realization and God-realization are the highest objects of mundane existence. Self-realization precedes God-realization. "Know Thy Self" has ever been an article of faith with the ancients. First the Greeks and then the Romans, in their turn, laid great stress on *gnothi seauton* and *nosce teipsum*, as they called it respectively, and both of these terms stand for "Self-knowledge" or knowledge of the "Self" in us. The knowledge of the Self or *Atma Jnana* of the Hindu Rishis, and *Khud Shanasi* of the Muslim dervishes, comes first. Next comes the realization and experience of the Overself or God – *Paramatma* or *Rab-ul-almeen* – and this is called *Khuda Shanasi* or Knowledge of God.

The process of Self-realization, whereby the Self can be separated from the mighty maze of mind and matter, begins with introversion – the receding of the attention. The attention is the outward expression of the soul into the world. The Self- realization process is an art of inversion of the attention from the world of the senses to the world within and beyond the physical senses, technically called *Para Vidya*. Real life, or Reality, is something that is cognized only in a deathlike state, a state that intervenes and depends upon conscious withdrawal of the sensory currents from the physical body to the eye-focus. Life is "an active Principle, however removed from the senses and observation."

In the workaday world, we are prone to all kinds of lusts – lust of the flesh, eyes, ears and other sense-organs – and we are being constantly swayed by countless attachments, myriads of aspirations and desires, springing from the diverse longings of the heart and from the unknown latencies lying hidden in the folds of the mind. All types of likes and dislikes, prides and prejudices, loves and hatreds – and many other things – unwittingly keep creeping into our personal consciousness. All these things fritter away our spiritual energy and keep us away from the ultimate Goal and purpose of our life, to wit, Self-realization.

This ignorance of the aim of life is a serious malady with which we are afflicted, and it is the cause of bondage – bondage of the soul to a world "bursting with sin and sorrow." Yet, there is a Power within us that resurrects (revives) the soul. We have, therefore, to take a turnabout from this outer drama of hectic activity and find the still-

center of our being within the human body where the All-pervading and All-free Power resides.

This human body is verily the temple of God, and the Holy Ghost dwells therein. So all this present outer activity has got to be reversed and geared back into the opposite direction. This process is termed by Emerson as "tapping inside", and as "going into the fox-hole of the brain", as was once remarked by President Harry Truman, for it was into this fox-hole that he repaired whenever he wanted peace and relaxation from the burden of his high office. The *Vedas* call it *Brahmrendra* or the hole through which Brahm can be contacted.

"Knock and It shall be opened unto you," St. Matthew (7:7) says significantly enough. It shows that a Door within the body leads into the Realm beyond – the Kingdom of God. And of this Inlet it is said:

> Strait is the Gate, and narrow is the Way which leadeth unto Life, and few there be that find It.
> – St. Matthew 7:14.

To locate this Gate and to have an experience of the ingress brings about personal conviction, for nothing becomes real till it is experienced. The intellect is finite and so is reasoning based upon intellect. Scriptural texts speak of Truth but they do not demonstrate It, much less give an actual contact with Truth. Logical knowledge is all inferential and cannot be depended upon with complete certainty. Certitude comes only when "the eternal WORD speaks."

The shortest, the swiftest and the surest way to plumb Truth is through a mortal leap (into the Unknown) says Henri Bergson, the great philosopher. Perception, intuition and reasoning just help in understanding the Reality to a certain extent at the level of the intellect; but "seeing is believing" – seeing within with one's own eye, the "Single Eye" as It is called. Of this Inlet, or ingress, little is known by the people at large. Nanak emphatically declares:

The blind find not the Door.

In order to find the "strait Gate" and the "narrow Way" leading unto Life – Life eternal, the Life of the spirit as distinguished from the life of the flesh – we have of necessity to recoil from the present downward and outward expansion, gather in the outgoing faculties of the mind at the seat of the soul, and bring our attention fully behind and between the two eyes. In other words, we have to change the center of our being from the heart-center, as at present, to the eye-center (*Tisra Til* or *Nukta-i-sweda*) and develop the "Single Eye" of Which Jesus speaks:

> If, therefore, thine eye be "Single", thy whole body shall be full of Light.
>
> – St. Matthew 6:22.

This "Single" or "Third Eye", variously called by the sages as the *Shiv Netra, Divya chakshu* or *Chashm-i-batin*, provides an ingress into the spiritual world – the Kingdom of God – now a lost Realm to most of us. It is here at the Eye-center that one has to tap within, to "knock", and

knock hard with fully concentrated and single-minded attention, as an undivided individual, in order to find the Way-in and gain an entry into the astral world. Hence the exhortation:

> Now is the time to awaken and lovingly
> remember the Lord.

But how? We have not seen Him. And one cannot concentrate on and contemplate the formless void, as He is. In the same breath comes the sage's counsel as well:

> Learn of this (approach to the Absolute) from
> some Godman.

What does the Godman say?

> Fix thou thy attention at the Eye-focus, the Seat
> of the Lord Shiva (the *Shiva-netra*), for then
> everything will follow of itself in due course, as
> you will gain experience of the "Self" in you.

The Masters tell us that the entire world is blindly groping in the dark, chasing the fleeting shadows which are ever eluding and ever fading away into airy nothings as we draw nigh to them; while the Fountain-head of all bliss and harmony lies untapped within at the Eye-center which is the seat of the soul in the body in the waking state. This center, when located, gives an access to, and provides a supra-conscious contact with, the Realms that lie beyond the farthest ken of the human mind. Equipped with the sense-organs, our only means of outer knowledge is through them. But the soul is perfect without the

senses, for its action is direct and immediate, and not indirect and mediate – depending on outer aids – as knowledge of the world is.

After obtaining this contact at the Eye-focus, one is led, step by step, to the true Home of the Father. This is Life in fullness. Thrice blessed is man, for it is given unto him to have the Power to traverse the inner Regions, both astral and causal, and to go into the Beyond (*Par Brahm*) to reach the Region of eternal bliss (*Sach Khand*) outside the pale of repetitive creation, Dissolution and Grand Dissolution.

But so long as one does not withdraw himself from the outer world and from himself as well – from his body, mind and intellect – he does not draw any nearer to God. It is only when the outward man perishes (when the human in the body is trans-humanized) that the inward man (the spirit) is renewed, and the dizzy heights of the Mount of Transfiguration are gained, and one becomes a Living spirit, freed from the body and its impediments, capable then of getting the inner experience of meeting the ancient Masters like Moses and Elijah (St. Matthew 17:1-3) or of joining the Lord in the Feast of Passover (St. Matthew 26:26-29; St. Mark 14:22-25). It is at this place of inner contact that the Lord awaits His disciples:

> Behold, I (Christ-Power) stand at the Door and knock: if any man hear my Voice, and open the Door, I will come into him, and will sup with him, and he with Me.
>
> – The Revelation (to St. John) 3:20.

All this inner experience that St. John reveals to us, he had when he was transformed "in the Spirit" (Revelation 1:10), and he speaks of the coming in of the Lord "as a thief in the night" (in the darkness of the soul – I Thessalonians 5:2). Hafiz, a Persian mystic of great repute, also testifies:

> The Murshid (Master) comes in the darkness
> with a Lantern in His hands.

"The Way Godward," says Prophet Mohammed, "is narrower than a hair and sharper than the razor's edge." It is described by Nanak as *khande-di-dhar* (the sword's edge) and thinner than a hair; one has actually to pass through a death-like experience. In this context Saint Plutarch says:

> At the moment of death, the soul experiences the same impressions and passes through the same processes as are experienced by those who are initiated into the Great Mysteries.

But how many of us are prepared to experience the death processes while living? We are all mortally afraid of death. And why so, when we know, and know so well, that it is the necessary end of all created things? The reasons therefore are not far to seek. In the first place, we have not learned "to die at will" while living. And secondly, because we do not know what happens after death. Where do we go? What lies beyond the death-trap? This is why we have a horror of death, and why the mere idea of death holds us in a state of mortal terror:

The entire world is mortally afraid of death,
And everyone desires to have an endless life.
If by the grace of the Guru one learns of
death-in-life,
He becomes the knower of divine Wisdom.
O Nanak! he who dies such a death,
Gains for himself the Gift of Life eternal.

Death, after all, is not a dreadful incident.

How charming is divine philosophy;
Not harsh and crabbed as the ignoramuses
suppose;
But sweetly melodious as Appolo's lute;
And a perpetual feast of nectared sweet.

Death, in reality, opens new vistas and new horizons of Life beyond the grave, and the flames of the funeral pyre that engulf, entomb and extinguish the mortal remains, do not touch the soul. "Dust thou art and to dust returneth" (Genesis 3:19) was not spoken of the soul. The Life-Principle in us, or in fact in every other living thing, never dies. It is only the elemental parts that go through a process of change which we erroneously call "death" and wrongly understand to be an extinction.

"In nature death feeds Life and Life illumines death." It is the universal law that operates everywhere and on all planes of existence. "The wise men discover that the perception of Reality comes with the annihilation of the self (the bodily self in which the soul is incarcerated)." The moment the spirit voluntarily breaks through the fetters, something breaks in upon the spirit with a "terrible Il-

lumination from the World behind the world" making It "the Prophet of the Most High God." It is at the Mount of Transfiguration (St. Matthew 17:2) that one gets revelations and sees the mingling of Heaven and earth. It is here that one finds "the dark grows luminous and the void fruitful."

Everyone has, as a matter of course, to die some day – man, bird or beast, rich or poor, healthy or diseased, young or old. The soul which takes on the physical raiment has to shed it one day. Death alone is certain and real, while life (in this world) is uncertain. We seldom pause to think about the long Journey which lies ahead for the inner being in us. We usually lament the death of others and mourn for them for days on end, but are not wise enough to care for our own end and prepare ourselves for the final Journey into the great unknown that lies beyond life's end. Before an analysis is offered of the death- process, practical and informative as it may be, it would be worth our while to know at least what we are. *Who are we? Whence do we come? Whither do we go?* And, above all, *what is the meaning or purpose of life?*

Man, as constituted at present, is an aggregate of body, mind and intellect with a great motor-power working from behind called "soul." Formed and environed, as we are, through the ages, our attention – the outgoing expression of the soul – is continuously flowing outwards and downwards through the nine portals of the body: the eyes, the ears, the nostril nares, the mouth, and the two passages below the waist. It is not that we wish it or do it voluntarily, but the outgoing of the attention has just become a habit with us. We are not yet master of the house

in which we live. We are being constantly dragged out by the mind and the senses, through the various sense-organs, into the vast and varied fields of sense-enjoyments.

It is this constant association of the Self in us (the attention) with the mind and the material objects that has not only debased us, but has defaced us beyond recognition, and now we do not know what we really are. We have become so identified with the limiting adjuncts that we do not know anything independent of and apart from them.

Unless the Self gets depersonalized by throwing off the mask of dross personality with which it has covered itself and becomes disrobed Self, pure and simple, by dissociation from these countless limiting agents – (1) the mind, comprising the faculties of hording impressions (*chit*), thinking (*manas*), reasoning intellect (*buddhi*), and egoism or self-assertiveness (*ahamkar*); (2) the sheaths or coverings: physical (*ann-mai*), subtle (*pran-mai* and *mono-mai*), causal (*vigyan-mai* and *anand-mai*); (3) the inborn *gunas*: the natural propensities of righteousness (*satva*), mercurial restlessness (*rajas*), and inaction born of ignorance (*tamas*); (4) the five elements (*tattwas*): earth, water, fire, air and ether, of which the entire physical creation is made; and (5) the twenty-five compounded elements (*prakritis*) in varying degrees of proportion, which prepare the physical molds or bodies in different shapes and patterns, shades and colors as a result of karmic reactions – the Self, imprisoned in so many meshes, cannot know its own real nature, much less its divine Ancestry and the rich Heritage, all of which comes to light

only when it comes to its own and realizes itself as the self-Luminous "Self".

Let us see what some of the English thinkers have to say in this context:

> Man is a little world in himself, made cunningly of elements and an angelic spirit. His God-like qualities have been depraved by the fall, and he is constantly visited by divine wrath – wars, plagues, and thunderstorms. Yet, he can enjoy a civilized happiness, provided he treats the world as a preparation for the next, and keeps the body subject to his soul.
>
> – J. Donne

> What is it to trust on mutability, Sith that in this world nothing may endure?
>
> – John Skelton

> There is within the all-comprehending ambit of animal instinct, some secret urge which drives the chosen men towards transcending of animal impulse. This transcending animal impulse manifests itself as complete disinterestedness (of all that is in the world without). The urge of animal ego is completely disregarded; and the evidence of this disregard is a willing submission to a "self-sought death." An acceptance of the annihilation of the animal instinct is arrayed against this acceptance . . . (till) nothing remains on the subjective side but pure consciousness, and one is

transformed into a Superior Being whom he imagines (contemplates) . . .

Nothing ever becomes real till it is (actually) experienced – even a proverb is no proverb till your life has illustrated it. But how many philosophers have made this acquisition?

For this, the mind has to be reintegrated (made an undivided whole), as a faculty of sense, integrating which is a prelude to and a necessary condition to total detachment from it. The self must be whole before one can wholly detach oneself from it (body, mind and intellect). It is an all-seeing mind which embraces the totality of being under the aspect of eternity. As we gain our entrance into the world of Being, a total vision is ours.

There is a communication between mystery and mystery, between the unknown soul and the unknown reality; at one particular point in the texture of life the hidden Truth seems to break through the veil.

– Middleton Murray

How, then, is this inner urge to be fulfilled? The process of getting fully into, and staying completely in, the eye-focus (the Gateway to the so-called "death"), is akin to a part of the process of death.

The process of withdrawal of the sensory currents from the body below the eyes is a voluntary one, and one

comes to experience the Mysteries of the Beyond into which a Master-soul (*Sant Satguru*) initiates a disciple during his lifetime. The Master-soul gives a first-hand inner experience of conscious contact with the holy *NAAM* – the divine Light and the holy Sound-Current (Holy Ghost – see St. Luke 3:16) as coming from the right side, Which are the lowest Expressions of the Divinity within. One cannot by one's own unguided and unaided efforts have an access into the spirit world when one cannot hold on by himself even in the physical world without the active aid and guidance of many teachers from the cradle to the grave. Herein lies the paramount need and importance of the contemporary *Satguru* or *Murshid-i-Kamil* (Perfect Master, adept in the science and art of the soul), competent enough to disentangle the spirit-currents from every pore of the body, the plane of sensations as it is, and to raise the soul above body-consciousness to witness for itself the inner divine splendiferous glory.

With the process of withdrawal of the sensory currents from the body, the death-like process commences. You have not to do anything except simply to sit in a calm, composed and fully relaxed position with the attention fixed at the eye-focus and engage in *Simran*, or repetition of the charged names, which carry the Life-impulse of the Masters through the ages and serve as passwords into the Regions beyond. While so established in an easy posture (or *asan*) in healthy surroundings, you forget yourself, entirely forgetting even the life-giving and life- sustaining *pranas* (vital airs) which will of themselves gradually slow down and grow rhythmic, as do the entire respiratory and circulation systems of the body.

At first, the sensory currents begin gradually to withdraw from the extremities of the body – from the tips of the hands and feet – and come upwards, gradually passing through the various bodily centers (*chakras*), each of which being the region of one of the five elements of which the body is composed, until leaving the heart-center they reach the throat-center, the seat of *Shakti*, the Mother of the universe (the all-pervading energy), benumbing the entire bodily system below the eyes. From there they proceed directly to the center behind the eyes (the *Agya Chakra*). This is where the spirit-currents get collected and gain an entry into the fox-hole within (*Brahmrendra* or the hole of Brahm) and have a peep into the Brahmand or the cosmic universe. This is the tenth aperture in the body, the only inlet, apart from the nine outlets. This is the place where you have to "knock" and get admittance into the realms above – realms more vast, more glorious, self-luminous and self- resounding with rapturous strains of celestial Music, Music unheard anywhere in the physical world which has been left below, now no more than a great slum area, fraught with miseries and tribulations "fading into a faint reflection of the World of Ideas" as Plato puts it.

At this stage, man becomes truly blessed by having access to the ethereal region, the world of spirits. He is now at the threshold of the astral world in the company of the Radiant Form of the Master (*Guru Dev*) with his *Gurbhakti* complete in every respect. When a disciple reaches the Radiant Form of the Master, his job of self-effort is over. The Guru Dev now takes charge of the spirit of the man and trains the spirit in *SHABD-bhakti*, or devotion to the Sound Current, which is His own real

Form *(SHABD Swaroop).* From here He takes the spirit along with Him on the Spiritual Journey that lies through countless regions of varying spiritual sublimity: into the causal or instrumental plane, the seed-world, the ever pregnant Mother with vast and countless regions lying enfolded in its womb; and then on into the Supercosmic Beyond (*Par Brahm*) where there are planes of Silence (*Sunn*) and Great Silence (*Maha Sunn*); and finally on to *Sach Khand* where dwells the Formless One of ineffable Radiance (the Ocean of Consciousness) called *Sat Purush*, the primal manifestation of the Supreme Being. This holy process of withdrawal is simple, natural and does not involve any onerous austerities. It does not involve a drastic control of the *pranas*. The Masters have evolved this rare technique and termed it "Science of the Soul." It can best be learned under the able and competent guidance of some Master- Saint, well-versed in the theory and practice of the Life-Current (WORD) that exists in all created things, the creative and sustaining Principle upholding all.

All of the scriptures of the world bear testimony to this fundamental truth:

In the beginning was *Prajapati* (the Supreme Being),
With Him was *Vak* (the Holy WORD),
And the *Vak* (the WORD) was verily the Supreme Brahm (*Par Brahm*).

– Vedas

In the beginning was the WORD, and the WORD was with God, and the WORD was God. The Same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made. In Him was Life; and the Life was the Light of men.

– St. John 1:1-5.

Kalam or *Kalma* is the All-creative Principle. God spake: *Kun-fia-kun*, "Let there be", and from this fiat the whole creation sprang into being.

– *Alquran* (Koran)

SHABD is the Creator of the earth,
SHABD is the Creator of the firmament,
SHABD is the Source of Light,
And SHABD resides in the heart of all.

– Nanak

It is on this basic Principle of all existence (Light and Sound of God) that the Master gives a practical experience to all those who come to Him in search of Truth. The rare boon of holy initiation, an explanation of the theory and a first-hand experience (*Shiksha* and *Diksha*) of the saving Life-lines within, is not an end in itself but just a beginning, a preliminary step for starting on the long Journey of the soul to the true Home of the Father.

Those who have chosen to undertake this course of life are indeed fortunate. They experience this rare phenomenon of "death- in-life" and thus become *jivan-*

mukat or liberated beings while yet in flesh, leading a Life in fullness on whatever plane they like, but always remaining within the Will of God. Such a lucky one, fully entrenched in God-head, is in full control of his intellect, mind and senses. He is the master of the house and not a handmaid of his mind and intellect. Like a good charioteer, sitting in the chariot of the body, he directs his intellect aright, which in turn gives a correct lead to his mind; and his mind, when trained in the path of righteousness, refuses to be swayed by the senses, which gradually lose their potency and cease themselves to be attracted by the glamor of the sense-subjects. Thus is reversed the primal process of expansion, and one gets settled in himself with the result that the still waters of the mind begin to reflect the Light of God, fulfilling the ancient maxim:

> Unless the senses are subdued, the mind is stilled
> and the intellect, too, is in a state of equipoise,
> one cannot witness the glory of God.
> (See also Psalm 46:10.)

The rich experience of Life in fullness is variously called "the second birth", the birth of the Spirit as distinct from the birth of the flesh. Led by the Spirit, one now lives and walks in the Spirit, abandoning the lusts of the flesh, and cuts right across the inexorable *Law of Cause and Effect* or *karma*, which keeps all others in perpetual bondage. With the day to day progress on this Path, new vistas of indescribable joy and beatitude open up and new horizons loom into view, encompassing the totality of all that is, thus giving greater and greater awareness, first personal, then supramental, next cosmic and then super-cosmic.

Hereafter the liberated souls, freed from all the shackles of mind and matter, enjoy perpetual bliss in the Life of the spirit, with an outlook on life entirely changed – the vast creation now becoming the manifestation of the One Life-Principle pulsating everywhere in him and around him and in all things, animate and inanimate. The world that he now witnesses is totally different from the world known to him before. It now looks to be the veritable abode of God and one sees God truly dwelling in it, nay in every constituent part of it – for all created things appear like so many bubbles in one vast Ocean of Life.

Hereafter the liberated soul lives unto the Lord and dies unto the Lord. Like St. Paul, he gets "crucified in Christ" (*Fana-fi- sheikh*) and Christ lives in him; and with repetitive experience of the death process, he triumphantly swallows death in victory – the Father and the Son becoming One. Though the outward man of flesh and bones still persists and continues to exist, to spin out what remains of the karmic web of life, yet the inward man (the spirit in man) is renewed – growing stronger and more sublime with time.

Forsake the flesh for the spirit. Learn to die so
that you may begin to live.

– Thomas a Kempis.

In this context, we have:

While the people are mortally afraid of death, I
welcome death as a harbinger of bliss.
Die, and be thou dead to the world –
Such a death I experience many times a day.

– Kabir.

In all the four Bible Gospels, we come across so many references of like nature:

> He that findeth his Life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for My sake shall find It.
>
> – St. Matthew 10:38,39 and St. Matthew 16:24,25; St. Mark 8:34,35; St. Luke 9:23,24.

> He that loveth his life shall lose It; and he that hateth his life in this world, shall keep It unto Life eternal.
>
> – St. John 12:25.

Dadu, a celebrated Saint, says:

> O Dadu! learn to die ere death overtakes thee,
> What will it profit thee, when die thou must?

Guru Nanak also says the same thing:

> O Nanak! practice such a yoga (discipline) as may teach thee to die in life.

Prophet Mohammed, too, exhorted his *ummat*, or "the faithful", to practice the art of dying before death:

> "Before thy death, do thou die"
> – *Mautooqibalantumautoo.*

The mystic Muslim divines, like Kwaja Hafiz, Shamas Tabrez and Maulana Rumi greatly emphasized the importance of such a unique inner experience:

So long as you do not transcend the plane of the
senses, you remain unaware of the inner Life.
Thou hast raiments besides the outer (physical)
one;
Why then dost thou fear to come out of the
body?

One may go on multiplying any number of apothegms on this subject. So we may close it with a passage from the writings of Earl R. Wassermann:

Many are only imperfect individualizations of the One; and death permits the un-individualized, and hence unbounded, spiritual Life. The post-mortal Life, therefore, is a spiritual existence; for death, destroying the many-colored dome, allows the soul to "out-soar the shadows of night" instead of working inwards to destroy organic existence.

What then appears to be physical destruction, proves to be spiritual immortality. What we call "life" is a decay; therefore, earthly confinement, the mortal atmosphere, stains the radiance of Eternity. On the other hand the resurrected soul – re-incorporated into the One – not the shadow of death or physical matter, is discovered in the true sense, spreading Itself throughout nature, for the final Reality everywhere is Spirit . . .

> Were the atmosphere of mortality removed, man would perceive that "the One remains" and that "Heaven's Light forever shines"; and that day and night are one and even so life and death, Lucifer and Vesper . . . .and that the ultimate Reality of both, earthly life and the post- mortal eternity, is the Spiritual One . . . and this realization of the spiritual identity of mortal and post-mortal life finally ceases the pairings of opposites like "life and death"...since the One glows "through time and change, unquenchably the Same."

Wassermann then goes on to say:

> Learn to go unterrified into the gulf of death, for where mortal existence ends, the spiritual existence begins. With death, the resurrected soul out-soars the shadows of the night, and is reincarnated into the changeless One.

Prophet Mohammed also speaks of "death in life" in much the same strain:

> A death like this will not take thee to the grave,
> But it shall lead thee from darkness to Light.
> Learn, then, to die every day by transcending the body.

When a man learns to transcend the human in him, the Master in His Radiant Form comes in to help the soul onwards to its true Home, guiding the soul on the higher

planes, both in one's lifetime and even after when the mortal coil is finally cast off. In this connection Nanak says:

O Nanak! snap all the ephemeral ties of the world
and find thou a real friend in some Saint;
The former shall leave thee while ye live, but the
Latter shall stand by thee even in the
hereafter.
Following the instructions of a Satguru, take
hold of Truth.
Be thou true to Him and He shall stand true to
thee unto the last.

A Muslim *dervish* likewise says:

O brave soul! take a firm hold of His hem,
For He is truly above all the worlds, here and
above.

Similarly we find in the Gospels:

Lo! I (Christ-Power) shall be with thee till the end
of the world. I shall not leave thee nor forsake
thee.

– St. Matthew 28:20;
St. Paul's Letter: Hebrews 13:5.

In this way the highest mission of human life is achieved and the fullness of Life is experienced. This is the subject of contacting the "Self" by the "self" which disengages from the thorns and thistles of the worldly life, under the proper guidance and help of a Master-soul who vouchsafes this inner experience to all alike, irrespective of sex, age,

avocation, religious affinities and affiliation, and social orders based on blood, social class, caste, color or creed.

The spirit has got to be divested of the false halo of the self-created and self-projected personality that one unwittingly weaves around himself. Unless one becomes a pure spirit, divested of the love of all created things, one cannot enjoy the Life of the Creator, which is a Life of fullness in beatitude.

IV
DEATH IN BONDAGE

In nature death follows life and life proceeds from death. Death as a cessation of life in one form is but a prelude to re-living in another, and generally at a higher level of existence than before, and in better and more congenial environs.

Evolution is the law of life and it consists in active flowering of the latent possibilities in the spirit-matter, and comprises in its compass, not only evolution of the spirit-matter which grows more plastic and translucent in its onward march but also evolution of forms from minerals to human entities and lastly expansion of self-consciousness. The so-called dead matter is not really dead though the energy in it may for some time be in a congealed state.

A worn-out garment, that has outgrown its utility is to be cast off and replaced by a new one, moulded in, a fashion one desires the most. Such is the law of Dame Nature, the handiwork of God. The kindly Father, it is said, hath ordained that His children may have what they ardently wish for.

In providing the essentials of life on the earth-plane, Love, Light and Life and the necessary adjuncts thereto, like earth, water, sun, air and space together with all the means of sustenance,

the Supreme Lord of the universe is munificent beyond measure, and provides the same freely to all though each one gets according to his need and measure of descent. His bounties are innumerable and inexhaustible, and for ages man has fed upon them in diverse ways. Not satisfied with the limitless gifts, man ever craves for more—more of silver and gold, more of amenities and conveniences of life and more of everything else, and he struggles and strives endlessly for them. Instead of being grateful to the Lord for all that He has, by His grace, provided for us, we curse ourselves, curse those around us in better and more affluent circumstances than us, and curse the innocent stars above and do not hesitate to cavil at and criticise in stinging terms our own fate or destiny which we have by our own actions, forged for ourselves. 'With all his possessions, one loses his head for just a pittance.

Human life is a great privilege and a rare asset and blessing. It comes after passing through a long evolutionary process extending over time unending. It is an opportunity for amassing the riches of spirituality that lie hidden within us and of which we are hardly aware. But the majority of us are after ephemeral non-essentials—the sense-pleasures of the earth-life, and not real happiness. For these short-lived and fleeting pleasures, which we may or may not get, we, by all means, fair or foul, try to move heaven and earth, and more often than not pay dearly, even with our own life, and quit the stage of

Note: Due to a problem with scanning, we needed to replace this and the previous page with the similar text from the 1980 edition. We will repair this as soon as we can. Thank you for understanding!

human life with many a deep regret for one thing or the other, and for the unworthy means employed and the sorrows suffered in the attempt.

Nature is not extravagant in her design and purpose:

As one thinks, so he becomes.

Our feelings and emotions, thoughts and passions, desires and aspirations do not die with the death of the body. They constitute an inner vest, an undergarment (the astral body), beneath the physical cloak; and the spirit clothed therein, goes out to be covered by yet another mantle, drawing upon the karmic seeds lying in store in the causal or seed-body, the precious Treasure-chest. It is this causal, or instrumental, body with its vast resources that helps its inmate, the spirit, in fashioning a new mold, a fresh tabernacle of flesh, which may serve as a fitting vehicle for the fulfilment of what lies uppermost in the unconscious self.

The curtain finally rises, unfolding the entire panorama of life down to the minutest detail ere one passes out of sight from the stage of life. On the deathbed one may get a glimpse of Reality, but then it is too late to comprehend It. This process works on and on, giving at the end of each span on earth fresh momentum to the "wheel of life and death" with its natural concomitants of joys and sorrows, weal and woe – sometimes up and sometimes low – moving in interminable gyres, as one is never satiated with all that one gets in one's sojourn on earth, and each goes on adding new hopes and new desires, mixed with many a regret for what he wanted and

did not receive. He is thus unwittingly engaged perpetually in sowing the dragon's teeth, and life after life, he spends in fighting his self-started battles with his own self-raised armed bands which, like shadows, follow on his heels as untamed furies or the avenging spirits.

Nature, like the potter's wheel, provides the means of earth- life in the form of many clayey pots, one after the other, for slaking the insatiable thirst and expectations of each individual. Weighed down by countless desires from top to toe, one makes a slave of himself. Without them, one would revel in his Godhood. What is man, after all? – God plus desires. And, conversely, what is God? – Man minus desires.

The great philosopher-poet, William Wordsworth (1770-1859) draws a beautiful pen-picture of a growing child in his memorable *Ode on Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood*:

The soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
Hath had elsewhere Its setting, And cometh
from afar;
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do We come
From God, Who is our Home:
Heaven lies about us in our infancy!
Shades of the prison-house begin to close
Upon the growing Boy,
But he beholds the Light, and Whence It flows
He sees It in his joy;
The Youth who daily farther from the East

Must travel, still is Nature's priest,
And by the Vision splendid
Is on his way attended:
At length the Man perceiyes It die away,
And fade into the light of common day.

Earth fills her lap with pleasures of her own;
Yearnings she hath in her own natural kind,
And even with something of a Mother's mind,
And no unworthy aim,
The homely Nurse doth all she can
To make her foster-child, her inmate Man,
Forget the glories he hath known,
And that Imperial Palace whence he came.

This, then, is the sordid picture of life on earth as we ourselves witness from day to day. Even having our fill, as preordained, we are yet hungry – ravenously hungry for more and more of pelf and power, more of ephemeral pleasures and sense- enjoyments. Far from being thankful for what we have of the bounties of nature, "we look before and after, and pine for what is not." Nature cannot remain a silent spectator of our unappeased gluttony and with her magic wand turns us, Circe-like, into swine so that we may have our fill of the piffle and be done away with. It is only some wise Ulysses, armed with a magic- flower from Mercury (the messenger of the gods) who can fight the enchantress on her own ground and rescue his followers, getting them reconverted from swine into men, and along with them all others held in captivity by the sorceress in many different forms, each according to his or her innate nature. It is the type of the ruling passions that determines our course of life, not only here right now in the living present, but also in the hereafter.

Now let us have a look at the inevitable process of change called "death." This transference from one state of life to another is a necessary adjunct of life, and takes place in its own good time, but with a swift and stunning suddenness, the more so when it is least expected. Death knows no calendar, and no one can predict it, nor can anyone escape from it with all his cunning and wit. Each living thing has its own allotted span of life-time. We all live, move and have our being in time, and when the sands of time run out, this change comes, and continues to do so time and again, until one gets beyond the farthest bounds of time and arises into Timelessness.

Death, then, is something terribly real and unavoidable. It perhaps seems to be the only real thing in the midst of the unrealities of the world. Everyone, rich or poor, king or beggar, young or old, healthy or diseased, has to pass through the trap- door of death, whether one likes to do so or not. One may live for long or short, for a hundred years or just a while; but one cannot live on eternally in one and the same life-form which, in course of time, is sure to decay and become wearily burdensome, "a millstone around the neck" as it were, and one in sheer desperation would cry out in anguish for the quick riddance from the heavy load hanging around the Self in him:

Neither kings nor beggars remain,
All go, each one in his own time.

– *Ramkali M.1.*

A Muslim *dervish* therefore advises:

All thy life thou hast bemoaned the death of
others,
Why not sit for a while and ponder over thy own
fate?

"Is death a painful process?" is the next question. Generally speaking, it is so with most. The scriptures tell us of the excruciating pain that a dying person suffers at the time of death. In the *Bhagwod Purana* it is said that one experiences the horrors of death-pangs as if one were bitten by a million scorpions at once. The holy *Quran* (Koran) likens the throes of death to the condition of a person when a thorny hedge were pulled through the alimentary canal from one end to the other. The Sikh scriptures also speak in much the same strain: "The life-currents are wrenched out."

All such statements are merely illustrative of the immensity of the torture that one may experience when the demons of death appear to forcibly take the spirit out of the body. What actually happens at that time, it is only the dying man who knows. No one, after the actual experience of terminal death, has ever returned from across the borders of the death-land to tell us of the exact nature of his final sufferings. Each one suffers unto himself and becomes silent forever. To be on the death-bed is a veritable nailing on the cross, and the death-chamber is a charnel-house.

One can scarcely stand unmoved when some people toss restlessly for days on end with a death-rattle in their throat, writhing in extreme agony on the death-bed. Who can assuage the tortures of death? All stand helplessly

by: the best of physicians, administering drugs to the last; the attendant nurses, walking on tip-toes; the nearest of kith and kin with tearful eyes, woebegone looks and somber faces, awaiting the inevitable end. Who hears the piteous cries of the poor victim and his life companions, his wife and children?

As the wife with hairs dishevelled moans.
The solitary spirit wings its way alone.

– Kabir

Of Alexander the Great (356-323 B.C.), king of Macedonia and conqueror of the world as known at that time, it is said that it had been prophesied that he would die only "when the earth would be of steel and the sky of gold." As neither of these two phenomena were thought to be possible, the king was lulled into a false sense of perennial security. He imagined and believed that, like the Olympian gods, he was immortal. After long and wearisome campaigns in the Far-East, as he was passing through a desert near Babylon on his way back to Greece, he was stricken with fever. Being unable to hold on to his saddle, he was helped to dismount. One of his generals spread his steel coat-of-mail on the ground, lined as it was with velvet on the inside, and made the king lie thereon, and held up outstretched a gold-embroidered umbrella over the king's face to protect him from the scorching rays of the fierce desert sun.

It was then that Alexander, the great hero of many a battle, the "invincible conqueror", realized that his end was near, for he was now lying on the steely ground with a golden awning over him. He was overtaken by conster-

nation. Addressing the best of the physicians who were attending upon him he, with tearful eyes, begged that something should be done to save him for the time being, so that he could again reach home and meet his mother whom he greatly loved. But one and all of them expressed their helplessness. He then offered to them, at first, half of his kingdom and, finally, the whole of his kingdom if they could, by their medical skill, procure for him that much of a respite. But who could help to stay the divine decree? On the tenth day of his illness as his generals, one by one, passed through the tented chamber of the dying king, Alexander bade them good-bye and directed that, at his funeral, both of his hands be kept out of the shroud so that all could see that the great emperor was leaving empty-handed, in the same way he had come into the world.

Similarly, we hear the sad story of a great and talented queen who ruled over vast dominions. She was adored by her people for her dazzling beauty, and admired for her sagacity. She had ruled wisely and well for quite a long time. Brought up in the lap of luxury, with hundreds of attendants, she could not for a moment believe that there was such a thing as "death." When her end came, she was stricken with great sorrow and overtaken by poignant grief. The royal physicians by her bed-side could do nothing to assuage her fears and torments.

As death stared her in the face, her physicians tried to console her and they advised her to prepare for this last Journey. "What?!" in her horror, she exclaimed. And where was she going, she wondered.

"Alas! to the Land from where there is no return," was the simple reply. She could not believe her ears.

"Am I dreaming?" she inquired.

"No, you have to go, your majesty."

"Is there a land of no return? And if so, where is it?"

"It is far off from this world," said her courtiers.

"Could you not locate it for me in time? And what preparations have you made to make my stay over there comfortable?" asked the queen.

"None, your majesty."

"How many of you will accompany me to that land?" inquired the terrified queen.

"You will have to go alone and by yourself, Madam," said the courtiers.

"How many attendants will I be permitted to take with me?"

"None, not one."

Such, indeed, is our ignorance of the realities of life. We are clever, very clever in the workaday affairs of the world. But strange as it may seem, we know next to nothing of the stern retribution that awaits all of us; and we have, like all others, to go all alone and empty-handed.

Naked I came into the world, and naked shall I go.

– (See Ecclesiastes 5:15.)

That, indeed, is the inevitable fate of all. Weeping we come into the world, and weeping we depart from the world. To come weeping is understandable. A new-born babe does weep, as he emerges from the chamber of the womb, for he is severed from the Light of lights, the Light of Life, that has been sustaining him right through the period of gestation in that chamber, supended upside down. This is why we generally keep some sort of light on for the first few nights after the birth of the child. Whenever he cries, we turn his face toward that light, or at times, we play the rattle to amuse the baby and quieten him.

But why should we weep at the time of departure, when on the Way back to the parental care of the loving Father? It was open to us to re-link the strands of Life in us by consciously working for that end. This, willy-nilly, we do not care to do, and the human existence from the cradle to the grave runs by as a waste. Once this opportunity is lost, we go down in the scale of existence.

To fall from the top rung of a ladder, more often than not, proves fatal. Snapping the ties with acquired relationships of the world, spread over a number of years, is painful; and the departure is terrifically poignant, the more so as we are quite unprepared for the quit-notice that is sprung upon us. We do not know how to quit the "rented house" and where to go. The prospect of being thrown out into the "unknown", as we take the life after death to be, bewilders us. All of this serves to work up a state of hor-

ror, unimaginable horror of the worst type. This is why it is said:

> Remember thou the day you came weeping into the world to the jubilation of those around thee: Live thou such a life that you may depart laughing amidst the weeping and wailing of all.

Francis Quarles (1592-1644), a mystic poet, speaking of death, tells us:

> If thou expect death as a friend, prepare to entertain it;
> If thou expect death as an enemy, prepare to overcome it;
> Death has no advantage, but when it comes a stranger.

Herein lies the difference between the eastern and western thought on death. St. Paul, describing death as "the last enemy of man" said:

> I die daily.
>
> – I Corinthians 15:31.

And then St. Paul mockingly asked:

> O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?
>
> – I Corinthians 15:55.

The eastern savants hail death as an occasion for Union with the Beloved. The conclusion, however, is the same in both cases: that death claims an advantage over us only when it comes suddenly and swiftly as an unexpected stranger, neither as an expected friend nor as a dreaded foe, and when we are entirely unprepared to receive it or to meet its challenge.

Those who are prepared for death and are ever ready, receive it and welcome it, taking it as a Home-going and a means to achieve Union with the Beloved. A true lover of God, even when condemned to death for heresy, cheerfully lays his head on the block, and beseechingly calls for the executioner, praying that he make a short shrift of his body with his sword, as he sees reflected in it the Light of his Beloved (God). After all, what is death?

Death is a debt we must all pay.

– Euripides.

This being the case, why not pay off the debt and be forever free from the obligation? The body is the ransom or the dowry which the soul has to deliver to obtain ultimate release from the Law of Retribution.

To have some idea of what happens after death, let us have recourse to the scriptural texts. The Masters divide mankind into four categories. In the first group, there are those who have not had the good fortune to take refuge in any Sant Satguru, and these form a considerable bulk. They have to go all alone, each a solitary soul by itself, without any friend and companion. All such souls have to appear before, and abide by the decrees of the god of

Justice (*Dharam Raj*), who dispenses stern and strict Justice on the principle of "as you sow, so shall you reap" (see Galatians 6:7), without compassion or commiseration. This is what is called the inexorable *Law of Karma* which works relentlessly. This Law does not take into account any extraneous circumstances, and admits of no exceptions:

> Castes and colors avail naught
> there;
> One gets his meed according to his
> deeds.
>
> – *Asa M.3*

> Every way of a man is right in his own eyes;
> But the LORD ponderth the hearts.
>
> – Proverbs 21:2

At the appointed time, of which no one is aware, good angels (*Ramgans*) or bad angels (*Yamgans*) as the case may be, come to take the spirit forcibly out of the body, and one has to go along with them. They escort the spirit to the Judgement-seat, and each spirit has to render account of his thoughts, words and deeds.

> Fool, thinkest thou that because no Boswell is there to note thy jargon, it therefore dies and is buried? Nothing dies, nothing can die. The idlest word thou speakest is a seed cast into time, which brings fruit to all eternity.
>
> – Thomas Carlyle

Jesus, in no uncertain terms, has declared:

> And I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof on the Day of Judgement. For by thy words thou shalt be justified; and by the words thou shalt be condemned.
>
> – St. Matthew 12:36,37.

All thoughts, feelings and emotions, all words uttered intentionally or unintentionally, and all deeds done premeditatedly or casually, leave indelible impressions (*sanskaras* or *naqsh-i-amal*) on the tablet of the mind, and the account has to be rendered after death. It is all a summary procedure, but just, with no provision for logic-chopping or argument or appeal to any higher power, nor can there be any chance of release therefrom.

The one who has indulged all his life in sinful doings is sent to Hell (*Narak* or *Dozakh*) to undergo the penal servitude for a particular length of time as his misdeeds may merit, and thereby rid himself of the evil impressions and understand the Law that works for his ultimate good. When the allotted time expires, the soul once again takes birth so that it may have another chance to lead a reformed life freed from the evil now washed off, and make a fresh start avoiding the pitfalls of the past.

If one leads a life of righteousness, he is assigned a place in Heaven or Paradise (*Swarg*, *Baikunth* or *Bahisht*), where he, for some allotted time interval, enjoys the fruits of his good deeds, after which he too once again comes down to the earth-plane.

Thus, all souls ensconced in the karmic wheel of life move up and down by the ceaseless momentum of their own deeds. There is no escape from this ever-revolving giant wheel until one, by a stroke of good fortune, meets some Sant Satguru and the latter accepts him and helps him to a way-out and to the God-Way.

The spirits upon coming out of the Nether-World of Pluto, gradually work their way up from the mineral to the vegetable kingdom, and then to the world of insects and reptiles, and on to that of the feathery fraternity, and next to quadrupeds, and finally, to human beings:

After passing through the wheel of eighty-four,
thou hast gained the top,
O Nanak! now take hold of the Power of God, and
be thou eternally free,

– *Shri Rag M.5*

Even the *Devas* or deities, the various gods and goddesses, who are said to reign in regions of bliss, are there on account of their highly meritorious deeds on the lower planes. As soon as they exhaust the merit gained, they have also to return to the physical world. The blessed Lord Krishna, the adorable one, once explaining to Udhav, a devoted disciple of his, pointed to an insect crawling in the filth, and said: "O Udhav, this insect that you see before you has often times been Indra, the god of thunder and rain, and has often times been grovelling in the dirt, as at present. Such, indeed, is the fate of all."

Even the *Avatars* or incarnations, the embodiments of the Powers of God, are not immune from the inflexible working of the karmic wheel and are also called to Judgement. Like a soldier in an army, an Avatar is not immune from liability under the civil law, in addition to his obligations under the military law governing his profession. Even if he may be doing his duty under the command of his superiors, which is law unto him under military regulations, he may incur a civil liability under the civil law. His is a two-fold responsibility: one, under the army law – to wit, to obey implicitly what the officers order him to do on pain of being court-martialled if he disobeys; and, the other, under the civil administration if, in the discharge of his duties, he is found to have exceeded the limits of his military orders.

Gods and goddesses, and the incarnations of the various powers of God, are therefore included in this category, so far as the *Law of Karma* extends. With all of their privileged position, they, including the entire hosts of angels, are under the Law and not above the Law. This is why they, too, seek human birth, in which lies the possibility of escape from the toils and struggles onward to the Abode of Peace-eternal and Life ever-lasting.

Even the great *Rishis* with all of their austerities and penances, when the end of their allotted time draws nigh, wish and aspire for a human body in preference to celestial abodes in Heaven as the shining ones (*Devas*). The Rishis do so because it is in this way alone that they stand the chance of contacting a Satguru, receiving instructions from Him, and then rising above the inexorable *Law of Causation* or action and reaction.

Heroes like Arjuna and the Pandava brothers (except Yudhishtra, the *dharma-putra*: the embodiment of *dharma*, as he was commonly known and believed to be) were cast into the Nether Regions for engaging in a war, even though a war of righteousness and enjoined by no less a personage than the blessed Lord Krishna himself, because in doing so they could not, with all of the exhortations from Lord Krishna, divest themselves of the idea of doership.

Again, of Lord Krishna himself, it is said that he met his death by the chance arrow shot by a *bhil* (a hunter), thus requiting his past karma committed ages before as Rama, who had killed the invincible Bali, a forest prince, by the artifice of shooting an arrow from behind the cover of a tree. Rama and Krishna, it may be mentioned, were both incarnations of *Lord Vishnu* in different ages.

Similarly, of King Dasrath, the father of Rama, it is said that one night while hunting in the forest, he heard a gurgling sound that seemed to him to be that of some wild animal lapping water close by among the rushes and reeds. Guided by the sound, he aimed his arrow in that direction, hitting a young man, Sarvan by name, who had gone to the riverside to obtain water in a pitcher for a pannier on his back, and who had just left his blind and thirsty parents some distance away. Hearing the piteous and anguished cry of his victim, the king rushed towards the dying man, who told him of his plight and begged him to take the water to his parents. Full of grief, the king took the water to the aged couple and told them of the mishap. They could hardly bear the shock and died bemoaning their lot, wishing the same fate as theirs for the unknown

perpetrator of the crime. In course of time, the king also met the same fate, when he died in bitter agony caused by the pangs of separation from his son, Rama, who had been exiled for fourteen long years. This is how Nemesis overtakes each one in his turn, meting out what is due unto him. Thus, each one comes in his own way into the world, and goes out of it into "the valley of death" under the compulsive force of karma.

In the second category of mankind fall all persons who come in contact with a living Perfect Master, are accepted by Him, and initiated into the esoteric science of the soul, but for one reason or another, are not able to develop Communion with the holy WORD to any appreciable extent, be it on account of indulgence in sense-pleasures, or lethargy, or something else.

They stand on a different footing from those in the first category. At the time of death of these initiates, when the soul-currents begin to withdraw from the body, or a little earlier, the Satguru in His Radiant Form appears within to take charge of the departing spirit. The Radiant Form of the Master gladdens the heart of the devotee, and he gets so absorbed in Him that all attachments of the world fall off like autumn leaves; then he fearlessly and joyously follows Him into "the valley of the shadow of death."

> Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for Thou art with me; says the Psalmist. (23:4)

And this, indeed, is His troth:

Everyman, I will go with thee, and be thy Guide;
In thy most need to go by thy side.

Again:

For He (Christ-Power) hath said,
"I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."
– St. Paul's Letter: Hebrews (13:5).

The Master constantly keeps a watch over the affairs of the disciple. He is ever with him in weal and woe.

He (the Master) stands by him even before the Judgement-seat of God.
– Nanak.

With the *dervishes*, there is no reckoning of the deeds of their disciples. The Master is all in all, the sole judge and arbiter of the disciple's deeds, whether these be righteous or unrighteous, and deals with them as He thinks best.

For as the Father hath Life in Himself; so hath He given to the Son to have Life in Himself;
And hath given Him an Authority to execute Judgement also, because He is the Son of man.
– St. John 5:26,27.

It is because of such a deep solicitude for the disciple by his Master that Nanak so emphatically declares:

Love thou the true Master and earn the Riches
true,
He who believes in Him unto the last, the Master
rescues him true.
Like wandering sprites, the mind-ridden roam up
and down,
Animals in human form – devoid of Light
through and through.

– *Malar War. 1.*

Distance does not count with the Master. The Master-Power does come at the last moment, or even earlier, no matter where the disciple may be – far or near. The Master-Power apprises him of the impending inevitable hour of his exit from the world, and accordingly comes to escort him. The Subtle Form of the Master is resplendent and leads the spirit into higher regions. He assigns each spirit an appropriate place to which he may be entitled according to his *sadhna* or the practice of the holy WORD during his lifetime; and He imparts to him the necessary instructions for further and fuller development on the spiritual Path.

In My Father's House are many Mansions;
if it were not so, I would have told you.
I go to prepare a Place for you.
And if I go to prepare a Place for you, I will come
again, and receive you unto Myself; that
Where I am, There ye may be also.

– St. John 14:2,3.

In case one is to be chastised for his laxities, the Master Himself administers the necessary chastisement, but never lets him into the torture of Hell-fire. The divine-balance Holder (the King of Shadows: *Dharam Raj*) who Judges each departed soul according to his deeds, has no authority over the apt disciples of the Master, for they live in the Name of the Master:

> The Name of the LORD is a strong Tower; the righteous runneth into It, and is safe.
>
> – Proverbs 18:10.

It is not given to him (*Dharam Raj*) to pass and execute Judgement on the disciples of a true Master. In all such cases, the Master Himself decides and does things as He thinks best.

> The LORD taketh pleasure in them that fear (respect) Him, in those that hope in His mercy.
>
> – Psalm 147:11.

Again:

> For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth (accepts).
>
> – St. Paul's Letter: Hebrews 12:6.

In brief:

> Those who love the Master are never alone, nor are they answerable to any, nor do they suffer pain.
>
> – *Gujri War M.3.*

But such initiates as have no love for the world are not reincarnated on the earth-plane, unless for some particular reason the Master deems it necessary to do so; and in that case, such a one does not slide down the scale of existence but is reborn in some human family of pious and religious parents so that the new-born easily gets into touch with a Master-Saint and resumes on his Path Homeward, from an early age, without let or hindrance. For the "incorruptible seed" of the WORD sown by the Sower (the Master-Power) ever remains within the depths of the disciple's soul, and, in time, cannot but sprout, blossom and fructify by means of the Water of Life that he is sure to get from the true Master of his lifetime:

None can take away the Gift of the Guru;
He who has bestowed It, knows how to ferry the soul across.

– *Maru M.1.*

Once the Seed is sown by a Saint, none has the power to singe It.

– Soami Ji.

A mystic poet of Persia says:

On the Day of Reckoning, thou shalt know for certain, In the land of dervishes, there is no count of deeds.

– Hafiz.

Another mystic poet of Persia, says:

Death breaks away the cage, liberating the spirit;
Death has no sway over the Phoenix, that dies
to soar again; Why should I not fly back to my
Home? Why should I tarry in the clayey mold?
– Shamas Tabrez.

Again:

The lovers know where and how to die,
They accept and relish death as a Gift from the
Beloved:
With inner eye opened they see the glory of
God,
when others are forced blind-fold into the blind
alley.
While the lovers wend their Way happily to the
Lord, the ignorant ones die a horrifying death.
Those who pass sleepless nights in fear of God,
they have no regrets in life, nor any hopes and
fears;
While here, they seek His glance of grace, and
Merrily do they go in His holy Presence.
– Shamas Tabrez.

The third category of mankind comprises such persons as make the most of the instructions and commandments imparted to them by the true living Master, but have not yet attained Perfection though they are well on the Way to it. Such souls know of the day and time of their departure in advance of the event. Since they are fully conversant with the death process and everyday undergo its experience, they are not afraid of death and know firsthand its shadowy character. On the contrary, they

wishfully and wistfully await the appointed time and voluntarily throw off the worn-out mortal mantle, just in the same way as they had put it on at their advent into the world. They know some of the higher planes of the spirit-world which they traverse day in and day out along with the Master-Power. They also know the particular plane to which they are ultimately to go for their sojourn after death. There they live for some time and work their way up to still higher regions. They live all the time consciously in the love of the Master, and the Master-Power ever abides in them. He is their mainstay and support, and they owe no allegiance to anyone else.

> Led by the Spirit, they are no more under the Law (of Karma).
>
> – St. Paul's Letter: Galatians 5:18.

Last, but not least, comes the category of Perfected Souls. While living on earth, they are liberated beings (*jivan mukats*) and lead a freed Life of the spirit. They know full well, far ahead of the time, as to when they have to go back to the House of the Lord, and gladly await the hour, welcoming the manner in which the are to quit the bodily frame – be it on the cross or the gibbet, on the red-hot iron plates, or on the executioner's block. With no will of their own, they live in the Will of God, and joyously embrace death as a means of Reunion with the Beloved, unmindful of either the swift or lingering process of death, as may sometimes be ordained by the religious zealots and tyrannical pontiffs and potentates, for that is the moment of highest jubilation for them. Therefore, they live out their span of life from moment to moment. They care not if they are flayed alive, hacked to pieces, or burned at the

stake, nor if they are made to drink the cup of hemlock, or nailed to the cross along with felons. They give a hearty handshake to death as it comes in their way, no matter what form it may assume. This, then, is the Way that *Gurmukhs*, the Saints, and the Prophets follow.

Of Guru Amar Das, it is said that when the time of His departure drew nigh, he called for the Sangat (congregation of initiates) and addressed them: "I am going back to Hari (the LORD). No one should weep for me. He who will do so, will incur my displeasure. After I am gone, be ye all engaged in the silent Music of the soul."

Similarly, Shamas Tabrez said: "On the day of my death, as my bier slowly moves along, never for a moment feel that I am going with any regrets in life. When you see my coffin, utter not a word of separation, for then alone I am in Union with the Lord. When I will turn my face away from the world, I will then be facing the eternal Reality."

Hazur Baba Jaimal Singh Ji had foretold of His approaching end long before it actually came about. When he was nearing the end of His earthly pilgrimage, He said: "I am going back to my native Place, and none should press me to stay on. My mission in this life is over, and I have amassed immense spiritual Riches. Happily I go to the Mansions of the Lord."

It is a sacrilege to lament and bewail the passing away of Saints, for verily do they go back to their own Home. One may, if he likes, shed copious tears at the death of a worldly soul who is forcibly ejected from and dragged out

of the body by the Prince of the Nether World, and passes through devious processes up and down:

O Kabir, why weep for a Saint who goes back
Home;
Weep, if you must, for the worldly-wise who
tosses from hand to hand.

Saints, when called back upon completion of their mission, are given an honored place in His Court. To die such a death is a rare privilege and a great blessing, which may be envied by mighty kings and emperors.

CHAPTER V

WHAT AFTER DEATH?

And God said, "Let there be Light"; and there was Light.

– Genesis 1:3.

And this is the true Light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world. And Light is the life of men.

In memorable words like these, all the scriptures describe the *genesis* or creation of the world and all that is in the world. Rays of Light vibrating with the Music of Life, emanating from the Formless Absolute Existence came to manifest the world in its variegated colors in countless shapes and forms.

As above, so below.

The Spirit and Power of God manifested in the vibrating holy Light, pervades all the four Grand Divisions of the Universe: *Sach Khand*, the Abode of Truth or the Changeless Permanence in Its pristine purity, with the material cause (the Mind) yet hidden and involved therein; the *Brahmand* or the "Egg of Brahm", the second Grand Division of the Universe, of elemental essence, brought into being by the Universal Mind by the Will of

the Supreme Being; and the next, downwards, *Und*, or the third Grand Division, called the "astral world" with Mind-stuff in its subtle state; and, lastly, *Pind*, or the physical world, the fourth Grand Division, the handiwork of the gross mind.

During our sojourn on the earth-plane, we work out our destiny or fate, as planned with great precision and exactitude by what are called *Pralabdh* (or *Prarabdh*) *Karmas*, which determine in broad outline the general framework marking the duration and course of life in each case. This earth-plane is a big counting house or a clearing office, so to say, in which each one has to square up his or her account, coming down through the ages; and, in doing so, we willy-nilly open fresh accounts and thereby raise credits and debits to be paid off and cleared in the distant future, and no one knows how, or when, or in what form, or in what manner. Thus, while reaping the harvest sown in the past, we prepare the ground for fresh sowing, in season and out of season, with seeds which are good, bad, or indifferent; and all this we do promiscously, prompted by the mind and the physical senses.

The sages call the earth-plane *karma kshetra*, or the field of actions, where sowing and harvesting automatically go on all the time, under the superintendence, direction and control of *Dharam Raj*, the King of Shadows, who measures and Judges each thought, word and deed, however trivial and insignificant it may appear to be, rightly and justly, and administers Justice to each at the end of one's life-span. Nanak calls this region *Dharma Khand*, for each pilgrim soul coming to this region has to realize in fullness the existence of the *Law of Retribution and Requital*, which governs all alike with no favors and no exceptions.

Each soul is burdened with the weight of his own acts and deeds, and learns, sometimes with hard blows and heavy knocks, the grand lesson of Brahm, the Lord of the three realms: the gross or physical world; the subtle or astral world; and the causal or instrumental world (*Pind*, *Und* and *Brahmand*); all of which are the mind-zones of the Universal Mind, with numberless planes and subplanes, including *inter alia* various Hells and Heavens with intermediate stages as one may create by one's senses, sensibilities and susceptibilities, likes and dislikes, loves and hatreds, prides and prejudices, born of desires of one kind or the other.

Each soul thus builds its own habitat, and not only here on earth but also in the hereafter: in the astral and causal worlds, where one's impressions are stored up which have been gathered from time to time, in different incarnations from the beginning of time. All these impressions linger in the soul in the form of general latencies in the folds of the karmic body; and a part of them, at the time of physical rebirth, prepares an etheric body in advance of the coarse, dense body. Thus, "destiny is cast into the mold before the physical vesture is prepared", to work out the causes involved therein.

Similarly, at the time of death the departing soul carries with it all the life-impressions, deeply engraved on the tablet of the mind, and the ruling passions of the entire lifetime, now singled out in blazing colors, which determine the level of the departing soul's future destination in the astral world, or further in the causal world of spirits. Stripped of the physical mantle, each soul displays its subtle individuality, as it were, in the light of the noonday sun.

Men may deceive themselves here on earth for any length of time, by wearing pious looks and drèssing in distinctive clothes. They may for their entire lifetime on earth succeed in deceiving others; but none can play the hypocrite in the astral world, where one is denuded of the solid outer covering, the gross garment of the flesh:

O Nanak! it is There that the divine Mystery is
finally revealed:
The Perfect are they who worship Perfection,
And the imperfect are perfected over There;
Such, as dying come here to be born again, are
yet imperfect.

The astral world is the world of spirits or disembodied souls – souls having cast off the physical body and yet still enfolded in the subtle and causal coverings. The astral world is also called *Pitri Lok*, the place of the *Pitris* or *manes* of the deified souls of the "departed ancestors." Here the souls are imprisoned in the seven shelled encasement of the astral world, drawing subtle material from each of the seven sub-planes existing therein. It is here that the souls work out the causes which they set going on the earth-plane, by undergoing certain purificatory processes in the divine crucible, so as to make them worthy of "the Land of the shining ones" after the dross is burned off.

Mrs. Annie Besant (1847-1933) – a student of Madame Helena Blavatsky – in her famous study, *The Ancient Wisdom*, has given a graphic description of the various sub-planes in what she calls *Kam Lok*, a lower sub-plane in the astral world. As the name indicates, *Kam*

Lok is a "place of desires", and is said to contain seven subdivisions, each peopled by souls of persons of varying natures and temperaments. The scum of society, the vilest of the vile, the murderers and marauders, the ruffians and profligates and persons with bestial tastes and brutish appetites who, while living on earth, shaped for themselves bestial astral bodies, now appear, after death, in savage forms in their natural likenesses and native hideousnesses, in the lowest strata of the infernal region, roaming about, roaring, raving and raging, fiercely and furiously, *pret*-like wandering in search of the means for the gratification of their insatiate desires.

In these gloomy and loathsome surroundings, they reap the harvest of their own sowing, and learn the much-needed lesson which they failed to learn during their lifetime on earth, as they were whirled away on the tide of lusts and desires. Nature's lessons are bitter and sharp, but merciful in the long run – designed, as they are, for each soul's ultimate good.

To the next sub-plane go such souls as quit their bodies with some deep anxiety weighing heavily on them, or such souls as had implacable appetites, or desires for self-enjoyment and gratification.

Then there are two sub-planes for those who are educated and thoughtful people, chiefly occupied with worldly affairs during their lifetime on earth. Their attention is directed more onwards than backwards because they belong to the progressive types.

From the fifth sub-plane onwards, the environment changes considerably, becoming astral in the true sense of the word, that is, truly "starry", studded as it is with stars, and the surroundings are cheerfully inspiring. These three sub-planes (5,6 and 7) are euphemistically termed "Heavens" – Heavens of a lower type, sometimes spoken of, as by the later Jews, as "infernal Heavens", being situated in the infernal world as distinguished from supernal Heavens.

The religious and philosophic busy-bodies find their way to the materialized Heavens in the fifth region, which they desired and coveted while on earth: like the "Happy Hunting Grounds"; the Valhalla (the final resting place of the illustrious dead and the heroes slain in battles); the joy-filled *Bahisht*, or "Paradise", of the Muslims; the golden Jewelled- Gated "New Jerusalem"; or the Lyceum-filled Heaven.

The souls of the more advanced types, like artists, find a place in the sixth sub-plane. The seventh or the highest sub- plane is entirely for the materialistically-oriented intellectuals, like politicians and administrators, and men of science who were pronouncedly materialistic on earth, and wedded to the ways of the world in their acquisition of knowledge.

Life in *Kam Lok* is said to be more active, with forms more plastic and the spirit-matter more highly charged and more subtle and intangible and imperceptible, although transparent and translucent. The thought-forms here appear and disappear with kaleidoscopic rapidity because of the great frequency of the vibrations which are generated by sensations, feelings and emotions.

A spiritually advanced soul with a purified astral body merely passes through *Kam Lok* without delay. The pure and temperate soul, though less vapid in his plight, dreams away peacefully through it. Other souls, less developed still, awaken to consciousness in the region similar to the one in which they worked during the time of their earth-life. Those whose animal passions still cling to them (*prets*) wake up, each literally and exactly "to his own place" in the appropriate region to which he belongs. This plane is treacherous and tricky, and as such, those who are initiated into the divine Mysteries of the Beyond by a Perfect Master of their time are not permitted to tarry, lest they be bewitched here. On the contrary, they are quickly led under cover through this plane to higher regions for gaining maturity and stability so as to be able, at a later time, to face it with confidence and to withstand the tempting witchery and the delusive and illusory charms of the place, and thus do not get stuck-up in their March upwards to the pure spiritual region.

From the astral world of desires, some of the souls pass on to another world: the world of thoughts. It is a mental zone (*mano- mai srishti*) created by the thinking mind, or *manas* as it is called. Thoughts have tremendous energy and each person, while on earth, creates his own dream-land by flights of imagination and fancy; and to this, the soul is gradually led on after death to experience "the castles built in the air", as the saying goes.

Mind at every stage, from the Universal Brahm, with His pure Mind-essence, down to the individual, weaves a world of its own and then takes delight to live in it, just as a spider in a web of its own making flits up and down,

right and left, on the gossamer texture so artistically crafted from the light, filmy substance coming out of its own body. Similarly do the thought-patterns and thought-images of each individual soul go out to make a wonderful thought-kingdom, far in advance of the time that the thinker in the body is freed from the prison-house of the physical existence in the material world.

As you think, so you become.

This is the *Law of Nature*, and no one can escape from Its operation. In this world of thoughts, thought-vibrations are the only channels of communication between soul and soul, and all the souls live in close communion with each other. There, space and time do not matter. If, at all, there is any separation between them, it is only the result of a lack of sympathy and not for anything else.

All in all, life there in the world of thoughts is richer, fuller and more advanced than in any of the foregoing regions, but it continues to be delusive inasmuch as it is the outcome of the mind-stuff; and no one, even There, can totally escape from delusion, though each one enjoys – in full – his own Heaven- world, vast and expanding, or shallow and restricted according to one's own mind-stuff; but all the same each soul retains a sense of reality in the midst of the surrounding illusion.

A sanctuary of special interest in the mental world of thoughts is *Dev Lok*, the abode of the *Devas*, or "the shining ones" – the souls of people who were highly enlightened in their time on earth and greatly advanced in their

researches. Here are located the *Swargas* and *Baikunths* of the Hindus, the *Sukh Vati* of the Buddhists, the Heavens of the Zoroastrians and Christians, the *Arsha* of the less materialized Muslims, and the Supernal Paradises or Pleasure-grounds of the later Jews. Here lies the Garden of Eden from where man was expelled and excluded by God for his first disobedience of His Commandments.

John Milton (1608-1674), a great poet and genius of his age, and a profound political and spiritual thinker, has in his immortal classics, *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*, given a wonderful account of the Fall of Man and his Resurrection and return unto God through the intercession of the Son of Man.

Without wading through the scriptures of the various religions, dealing with the post-mortal existence of man in the various realms, we would do well, once again, to refer to *Brahma Vidya* or the Divine Wisdom, rightly termed by the Greeks as *Theosophia*, which provides an adequate philosophy, embracing in its fold the wisdom of the East and the West.

Turning again to the great occultist, Mrs. Annie Besant, we find the mental (or causal) plane inhabited by the souls of human beings after they have cast off their physical and astral vestures. Purged of the selfish animal passions, each soul enters into this region to reap the harvest of good deeds, whatever the same may be, large or small, according to the measure of good thoughts of personal self-aspirations and ambitions, hopes and fears, loves and interests. We cannot have more than what we are, and our harvest is according to our sowing:

Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.
– St. Paul's Letter: Galatians 6:7.

It is a Universe of the "Good Law", mercifully just, which brings to each the exact wages, or meed, of his work on earth. Everything thought of, every aspiration worked up into power, frustrated efforts transmuted into faculties, struggles and defeats becoming pillars of strength and power, sorrows and errors forged into shining armor, now find fruition in one of the seven sub-planes, or Heavens, in the Land of the midnight Sun where, self-consciousness awakening, one is made fully conscious of his non-Self surroundings; and, with memory spreading out into the hitherto unknown past, is brought to view the cause that worked out its life on earth and the causes that have been wrought by it, likewise, for the vast future. The past, the present and the future now present to the soul an integrated view of life, like an open book, with nothing hidden or withheld. Here the soul develops an all-seeing eye, and becomes a perfect seer, so far as one's individuality is concerned, in the true sense of the word.

In this Heaven-world of the causal plane, the lowest part is assigned to the least developed souls having sincere and unselfish love for their families and friends, and an admiration for nobler, purer and better persons than themselves. The measure of their meed is accordingly narrow and shallow, the cup of their receptivity being small, but – still bubbling over to the brim with joy, purity and harmony – they are reborn after a while on the earth-plane with improved powers and faculties.

In the next part come the souls of men and women of religious faith, with hearts and minds turned towards God – the personal God of their own choice, having any name and any form they had faith in – and, to them, the Nameless and the Formless appears in the said likeness in which they lovingly worshipped Him, overwhelming them with devotional ecstasy according to their mental and emotional capacity. The Divine veils Himself in the form familiar to His devotee. It is really strange that men forget that all deities reside in the human heart. We have but to turn inward to get a glimpse of the Formless in the very form in which we adore Him the most. It is therefore said:

Formless is He, and yet all forms are His;
Nameless is He, and yet all names are His;
Call Him by any name thou wishest, and He
turns to thee.

To the third part, come devoted and earnest souls who see and serve God in man, and worship Him in His manifested creation. In this sub-plane, they are perfected into great philanthropists of times yet unborn, and endowed with a rich power of unselfish love for mankind.

The souls of Master-minds in the fine arts, like music, sculpture and painting; the researchers and discoverers of the laws of nature; eager and reverent students delving into the depths of knowledge, get an opportunity in the fourth sub-plane to develop into perfect teachers of mankind in the ages to come; and when they do come, they serve as torch-bearers and leave their footprints on the sands of time.

Next, there are three lofty regions of formless Heavens. A large number of souls simply attain to the lowest reaches, have but a brief stay and a flash of insight, according to their sowing, and then they come back to the earth-plane after this dip into the great unknown. But souls with deep thinking and noble living, who correctly and immediately perceive truths, see the fundamental causes, the underlying unities, and learn of the changeless working of the divine Law in all harmony, in the midst of the most incongruous effects as may appear to the untrained eye – and where: "though all things differ, all agree." – Alexander Pope.

More advanced souls, with memory perfect and unbroken, find their way to the sixth sub-plane. After garnering the riches of the divine Mind (*Brahmand*), they return to the earth-plane as great pioneers of mankind, to justify the ways of God to man and to glorify God. The "mighty dead" of ages gone by get a taste of the "glorious living", seeing and witnessing as they do, the working of the Will of Brahm in Its fullness, with no link missing in the chain of causation.

Into the loftiest sub-plane comes the souls of the Masters of *Brahma Vidya* and of their initiates (*Brahmacharis*), for none but an initiate can find the "strait Gate" and the "narrow Path that leadeth unto Life", and so the chosen few enter into the Land and Life of Brahm. They enjoy their self-consciousness to the highest point, but they are not yet endowed with cosmic consciousness.

In the end, Mrs. Annie Besant sums up the position thus:

> Such is an outline of the "seven Heavens" into one or the other of which men pass in due time after the "change that men call death." For death is only a change that gives the soul a partial liberation, releasing him from the heaviest of his chains. It is but a birth into a wider life, a return after a brief exile on earth to the soul's true Home (Home of the Universal Mind), passing from a prison into the freedom of the upper air. Death is the greatest of earth's illusions; there is no death, but only changes in life-conditions. Life is continuous, unbroken, unbreakable: "unborn, eternal, ancient, constant," it perishes not with the perishing of the bodies that clothe it. We might as well think that the sky is falling when a pot is broken, as imagine that the soul perishes when the body falls to pieces.

The run of mankind after death finds no rest in the three worlds: the physical, the astral and the causal. The souls, freed from the physical vesture, are carried on, up and down, in the giant *Brahmanic* wheel of life by the momentum of their own thoughts, words and deeds. It is all a play of the individual mind, with its vast field of ramifications, spreading out from the lowest, the physical world, up to the mental (causal) worlds wherein one builds his own tabernacles in the hereafter, for a temporary stay, long or short, according to one's needs for learning the lessons of Brahm, as the soul advances on the path towards Perfection. Each

soul gathers as rich a harvest as it can, before exhausting the causes set in motion through the external stimuli from the powers that be in one's surroundings in the various planes in the three worlds previously described.

The causal, or the seed-body, of the human soul, the innermost vest, has yet two more very subtle and sublime linings underneath, respectively called the *buddhic* (the *vigyanic*) and the *nirvanic* (the *anandic* or blissful). It is only a brave soul, very brave indeed, like that of Prince Siddhartha, who may enter into Buddhahood and become the Buddha, the Enlightened one, and enjoy the bliss of the Creator of the three universes (the three worlds); and who comes to the earth-plane to give the *Law of Dharma* unto the world, with emphasis on desirelessness, so as to free the mind of all attachments, and then to tread the eight-fold path of righteousness leading to Perfection. Again, it may be the *Jain* Tirthankara, the *Mahavira*, the bravest of the brave, who could dare approach the divine Throne of Brahm and give out to the world the *Law of Universal Love and Ahimsa*, love for all creatures from the tiniest insect, crawling in the dust, and for the water and air spirits, floating in countless numbers in their respective spheres, invisible to the naked eye.

In the Buddhic plane, one develops the intellectual side of the divinity within him, and begins to see and realize the self- same Self in himself, as in all around him, and see that each is as much in that Self as others are. Thus, each soul comes to realize the great fundamental Unity of existence: the *sutra Atma*, carrying

everything from an ant to the elephant, like so many beads on the string of a rosary, in spite of the differences in shape, size and color, both within and without, or the effects of climatic conditions, or mental makeup, or the inner development and growth.

Now, in the Buddhic plane, the human *monad* – the outbreathed life of Brahm – dwells in the inbreathed life of Brahm, with divine powers and divine attributes, and now aspires for the bliss-aspect of the divinity achieved – the *Atmic* or the *Nirvanic* consciousness of *Sat-Chit-Anand* – the heart and soul of the universe, which the soul now realizes, and then becomes one with it.

It is, indeed, a long and weary process to understand correctly the *Brahm Vidya*, and then to successfully practice it: to traverse the *Brahmand* from end to end, from stage to stage, from the physical world of coarse matter to *Brahm Lok* proper, the region where *Maha-Maya* in its finest and most subtle form reigns. The *Brahmand* is the manifestation of the Power of God lodged in "*Om*", the most sacred syllable in the Vedic lore; hence *Brahmand* is the *akar*, or form, of Om (*Om- kar*); the *Brahmand* is the *Logos* of the Greeks and the *Ek-Onkar* of the various scriptures.

This is the ultimate end of human attainment, says *Vedanta* – the highest teachings as given by the later Vedic teachers and scholars (the *Rishis* of old), as a result of their intense meditative experiences in the snow-capped mountain fastnesses, or in the thick-forest dwellings. Brahm is the very life of the universe, comprising, as it

does, the three worlds described previously, with all that exists in each. Therefore, Brahm is the *Triloki Nath*, the Lord of the three-fold panoramic life in its fullness.

The words of wisdom of the *Rishis* we find in aphoristic form, as gems of "purest ray serene" in their valuable treatises known as the *Upanishads*, which are rightly considered as *Vedantas*, or the final rungs or parts of *Veda*, the efflorescence of divine wisdom, which ends with the *Maha Vakya* ("the great Truth") – (*Tat Tvam Asi*) "Thou art That" – meaning that the soul is Brahm, in its real nature and essence. When a soul realizes this fundamental truth, it involuntarily proclaims: "*aham Brahm asmi*" or "I am Brahm", or "I and my Father are One", or "I speak nothing on my own but as my Father bids me to do." – (St. John 12:49,50.)

The greatest lesson that one derives from *Vedanta* is that we are all one – one in our origin, one in our make-up, both inner and outer formation; one in our potentialities and powers, however latent and involved they may be; we are all equally capable of developing the same, may be sooner or later, for the process of development or unfoldment of the Self is essentially the same for all; and then the Goal, too, is one for all mankind, for all of us are worshippers of Brahm.

In this way, the out-breathed life constituting, as it does, the individual mind, merges in the in-breathed life of the universal Mind, or *Mahat*: "the great Mind of the cosmos" – the third *Logos* or Divine Creative Intelligence, the Brahm of the Hindus, the *Mandjusri* of the Buddhists, the holy Spirit of the Christians, and the *Allah-hu* of the mystics and Sufi dervishes.

Here in *Brahm Lok*, souls remain for long and in close proximity to Brahm, imbibing the love, the intelligence and the bliss of that Being or Power; and, again, so long indeed is the stay there that one is prone to believe and call it a veritable salvation: "the flame merging in the Flame (of Brahm)". But the stay there, however long it may be, is not eternal; and it lasts only till the *Brahmand* itself dissolves when the Universal Mind rolls up its life, absorbing all the souls in its fold wherever they may be. This drama of the infolding and unfolding of life, called *Brahmand,* is repeated again and again; and the grand play continually goes on, in and through eternity. The divine philosophy deals with it so beautifully:

How charming is divine philosophy,
Not harsh and crabbed as dull fools suppose;
But musical as is Apollo's lute,
And a perpetual feast of nectarèd sweet.

It is from Brahm that there spring the three great powers (*Brahma*, *Vishnu* and *Shiva*), creating, sustaining and destroying all that is of the matter and *Maya*, in one form or the other. These three offspring or powers come into being by Brahm's *Shakti*, or *Maha-maya*, called "the Mother of the Universe," but not in the sense of the sex as we ordinarily know it to be. Once again we take the simile of the spider's light filmy substance that comes not from without but rather from within the spider's body, or of the cocoon or the silky case which is spun by a larva from the fine threads of its own making, to protect itself as a chrysalis while it develops into a silkworm, from which threads in course of time, we prepare all sorts of silken garments of so many designs and colors to cover

our nakedness, and take delight to stunt in borrowed clothings.

Nanak, speaking of the working of God's creation, also refers to the triple Principle concerned with creating, sustaining and destroying – all working according to the Will of the Supreme Being, as viceregents, only exercising delegated authority; and, as strange as it may seem, it is not given to them to know Him, since they are a part of the objective creation and He, the Supreme Being, is subjective and formless:

The Great Mother, conceiving, brought forth
three regents:
The first creating, the second sustaining, and the
last destroying.
What He desires, they perform;
They work under His Will.
But great the wonder, though He watches over
them, they behold Him not.
Hail, hail to Him alone:
The Primal, Pure, Eternal, Immortal, and Immutable in all ages!

As to the vast and stupendous work connected with the administration of the three worlds in the creation, including all sorts of Hells and Heavens in them, *Vishnu*, the second counterpart of Brahm, in the great triumvirate or *trimurti*, wields the power of administrator. Once questioned as to how he (Vishnu) could manage such a big show and make the elaborate arrangements for the innumerable souls entrusted to his care, by providing all sorts of comforts and woes in the supernal and nether

worlds in his domain, he just smiled and said: "Oh! I have nothing to do at all, for each soul that comes into any of my worlds brings its own load of pains and pleasures, thereby creating its own Hell or Heaven, both on the earth-plane and thereafter. Whatsoever each one needs, in any of my realms, is arranged for by itself; and I simply look on, unconcerned, at the human drama, tragic or comic, or tragi-comic, as the case may be, unfolding the infold in each one's Self." Thus runs the divine machinery automatically, all on its own and by itself, but all under His Will.

Brahm is a great power, too great for the human mind to conceive; and of the Beyond, none but the Saints know and can speak with authority – not the formally canonized saint, of whom we know, but the Saints of the status of *Sant-Satguru*, authorized and Commissioned by Truth – the Truth that was in the beginning, the Truth that now is, and the Truth that shall remain hereafter – to teach mankind and initiate such aspiring souls into the mysteries of the Beyond and beyond the Beyond-state, as may be ripe for the purpose of understanding correctly and properly the Causeless Cause of all the causes that operate down below, in each of the worlds, and are ready to live the Life of the spirit as *jivan mukats*, or liberated beings, while yet in the flesh:

> A *jivan mukat* is one who knows and practices the art of "death-in-life"; and when he finally quits the stage, he quits it for good, never to return again.
>
> – Nanak

This is what *Para Vidya*, or the Knowledge of the Beyond, teaches.

Apart from this, there are many categories of teachers of *Brahm Vidya* which is *Apara* in character and paves the way for *Para*; and all of them teach people in the ways of Brahm, all according to their own capabilities. The Prophets and Messiahs generally prophesy the coming of great events, train mankind to live a godly life, and bring to them the tidings and messages of God (Brahm). The *Avatars* are incarnations of the various powers of Brahm, and their function is to keep the world agoing in a balanced and orderly manner, by holding the balance of the social order aright between righteousness and unrighteousness. The *yogis* and *yogishwars* remain within the sphere of their *yog-maya* (mind-force), and lead their initiates up to the highest point within their yogic powers.

The *Brahm Lok* has many sub-loks, called *Puris*, *Bhavans*, *Tabaqs*, or Divisions, each allotted to one or the other of the powers of Brahm, such as *Brahma Puri*, *Vishnu Puri*, *Shiva Puri*, *Indra Puri*, and so on, to each of which the souls of the worshippers of these powers, collectively called "Brahm", are irresistibly attracted and drawn in the course of time, each to his own destination in the place to which he belongs.

The ancient Greeks speak of this three-fold aspect of Divinity as the "Three Sisters of the Spinning Wheel" – one engaged in spinning the thread of life for each soul, the other in adorning and embellishing the thread of life, and the third in cutting the said thread of life when the allotted time comes to an end.[11] Similarly, in the Christian theology, we have the first *Logos*, the creative principle in nature, the second *Logos* and the third *Logos*, who carry on similar duties of their own. This is the famous *Doctrine of the Trinity*: the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost.

Where all the philosophies of the world end, there the true religion begins. It is only after the soul, the "dweller in the body", sheds its dross personality comprising as it does, the three vestures or vehicles of body, mind and intellect, and becomes an entity in its pristine simplicity – an undivided whole, the great immortal tree, evergreen and ever-fresh in its native Essence, in spite of the ever-changing surrounding panorama of life – that the soul can break through the magic hall of multi-colored mirrors and transcend the *trigunatmic* Egg of Brahm, and escape into the Beyond.

One has to be born anew, like a new-born Phoenix, arising out of the ashes of its own previous self with renewed youth and vigor, so as to be able to live through the Life of the spirit that lies ahead.

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11. This "three-fold aspect of Divinity" can be found described in detail in "the Story of Er" recounted by Socrates in the last few pages of Book 10 of the dialogue THE REPUBLIC preserved by Plato.

To cross the mental (or causal) world is not so easy as it may seem to those untrained in the mysteries of the Beyond. It is the most delusive world – where even the *Mahatmas* and the *Rishis*, with all their learning and *tapas*, fail to hold on to their own high ground. What is there in that vast Universe which Brahm would not like to offer to those earnest souls who try to escape from his domains and reach the True Home of their Father?

At every step, be it in the physical world, the astral or the mental world, Brahm tries to block the way of the aspiring souls. The great Prophets and Messiahs and all others, have given their experiences of the fierce encounters that they had with *Satan*, *Mara*, *Ahriman* or with the evil spirits – the *Asuras*, the *Demons* and their agents – in countless ways, fair or foul, whereby they try to obstruct the way, and to win over the seekers after Truth by assurances of worldly kingdoms and principalities. If the seekers do not succumb to these temptations, then they attempt with threats of violence by fire, thunder, earthquake, heaven-splittings, cloud-bursts, lightnings, and what have you.

It is in predicaments like these that one can only stand these trials and tribulations when one has by his side one's Guru or *Murshid*, for the Guru-Power then draws and absorbs the disciple-soul into Himself and takes the soul along the Path of "Ringing Radiance". For each soul, Brahm stakes his all and does not yield, unless he is convinced that the seeker clings to the protection of the Master-Power (*Akal* or the Timeless). Do we not see, even in the material world, that the rulers and governments of each country seal their borders to prevent the

unauthorized emigration of their subjects, and that they devise laws to control such outflow?

Great indeed is the power of Time, and none can
conquer it.
And yet Time itself is in mortal dread of the
Timeless Music,
Lest He himself may get lost in the Divine
Harmony.

We have had an exegesis of *Dharma Khand* by Nanak elsewhere in these pages. After that, the great teacher goes on to describe the Journey of the pilgrim-soul through various regions culminating in *Sach Khand.*[12] The next two regions, he respectively calls *Gyan Khand* ("the realm of knowledge") and *Saram Khand* ("the realm of ecstasy"). In the former, the soul's horizon expands immeasurably, for it comprehends at once the manifold nature of all created things having an infinity of forms and phenomena, and understands the immutable laws of the workings of nature. In the latter region, the soul, becoming attracted by the Power of the WORD, gets a taste of and an insight into the real nature of things.

Next comes *Karm Khand* or "the realm of grace" (Par Brahm). With the purification wrought by the Holy WORD, the soul is freed once and for all times of even the faintest, vague and indefinite traces of the dross in the form of *vasnas*, and matter no longer blinds the vision, and one becomes fully conscious of Him, coming as the soul does, face to face with the pure Essence of the WORD,

12. For more complete details see Stanzas 34 through 37 of *THE JAP JI: The Message of Guru Nanak.*

the Light of Life, giving birth to *Brahmand* and all the worlds included therein.

Finally, the soul, upon reaching *Sach Khand* – the Abode of Truth – realizes, in fullness, the complete Oneness and Harmony according to His Will:

> All hearts filled with God, they Live beyond the reach of death and of delusion . . .
> All destined to move according to His Will . . .
> Such is the Beauty that to describe It is to attempt the impossible.

This arising of the soul into Super-conscious awareness is termed, as said before, "Life everlasting", from Which there is no return.

What Nanak has described above falls within the realm of *Vijnana* (subjective inner experience: direct and immediate), as distinct from *jnana* or theoretical knowledge which the Master expounds and imparts to the disciple through a correct rendering of the scriptures. A Perfect Master is all of the scriptures combined and something more. The scriptures, after all, are the record of the experiences of holy men, who appeared from time to time to teach mankind in the ways of God. We can, without doubt, read the scriptures if we are proficient enough in the ancient and archaic original languages in which they were written; but we cannot get at their true import in the contradictory translations and differing social traditions of today, nor can we reasonably reconcile the apparent differences and explain the discrepancies in the scriptural texts of the various religions. He who

has access to the inner Fountainhead of the Life and spirit of all these texts, Which of course is common to all men, with His first-hand inner knowledge makes the intended meanings of the scriptures easily intelligible to us all, in a way simple enough both for Himself and for us.

In the company of a Saint, it is said, God comes nearer to man, for God Himself speaks through Him. As we are all scripture- bound in one way or the other, the Master takes full advantage of these different scriptures which come in handy to Him as aids in His work of spiritual regeneration, to lead different types of people aright along the line of least resistance in each case.

A *Murshid-i-Kamil* is not content with imparting mere theoretical knowledge. He gives a practical demonstration of what He says, and therein lies His greatness. One who cannot grant on the soul-level some actual experience of What he asserts at the level of the intellect, is not a Master-soul in the true sense of the meaning of the word **Master**, and his words cannot carry weight and conviction.

A Satguru is verily Truth-personified: God in the garb of man. His mission is to lead human souls to the True Home of His Father (*Sat* or Truth) called *Sach Khand* or the Abode of Truth, the first Grand Division that came into being by His Will and hence the region of pure Spirit, eternal and indestructible.

The Path of the Masters is a grand Road leading from merely the physical-material world to the purely spiritual Realm, beyond all duality and pairings of opposites. The Satguru says:

Move ye in the vast Sea of Light-substance,
In your hearts in your perfection.
Go on, and on, and on, until there is not a vestige
of the human left.
The Light-substance knows no limit.

His is the Path not of Hells and Heavens, nor of toils and sorrows, but one of a flowery Boulevard "studded with Heavenly Lights and the soul-stirring strains of Divine Harmonies", and above all, He Himself, as an unfailing Friend and an unerring Guide, comes in all His glory in full Radiance and accompanies the pilgrim-soul into the great Beyond, instructing in the Life of the spirit as He proceeds along, explaining the beauties and the mysteries of the Way, guarding against pitfalls and warning us of the sharp turns and twists that lie en route.

The disciple, from the very beginning at Initiation, is taught how to withdraw from the body and rise above body-consciousness into higher regions. The inner man is to withdraw himself from his coarse bodily-encasement, just as a hair is drawn out of butter; for it is the soul in the "luciform body" to use the Neo- Platonist phraseology, that rises to find the Self. The *Mandukya Upanishad* tells us:

Not grasped by the eye, nor by speech, nor by the
gods (the senses), nor by austerity, nor by
religious rites and rituals and ceremonies, but
by serene wisdom, the pure essence doth see
the Partless One in meditation.

So do the Western scholars say:

> True happiness never comes through the avenue of the senses. Boundless joy can be ours, only if we know how to rise above the senses and catch the sublime Vision which comes to the pure.

The divine Wisdom, in short, is at once the Science and Art of Soul, and only a Theocentric Saint, well versed in both, can solve for us the riddle of life and death by giving us a first-hand experience of "death-in-life", thereby demonstrating beyond the least shadow of doubt:

> Life is a pure Flame, and we live by an invisible Sun within us.
> What has life and death to do with Light? In the image of My Light, I have made you. The relativities of life and death belong to the cosmic dream. Behold your dreamless being.
> Creation is Light and shadow both, else no picture is possible.
> The darkness grows luminous and the void becomes fruitful only when you will understand that you are nothing. It is only at the Mount of Transfiguration that you will get revelation and see the mingling of Heaven and earth.

To worship Perfection is the highest education in life; and only a Perfect one can, by transmitting His own Life impulse, release the soul from its trammels of mind and

matter and grant a Vision of the sublime Reality. He who can, at the very first sitting, open the inner eye, more or less, to a glimpse of Heaven's holy Light and unstop the inner ear to the Music of the Spheres, alone is entitled to be called a Perfect Saint and a True Guru. It is of such a One that Shankara says:

> No known comparison exists in the three worlds for a true Guru. If the philosopher's stone is assumed to be truly such, it can only turn iron into gold, and not into another philosopher's stone. The venerated Teacher, on the other hand, creates equality with Himself in the disciple who takes refuge at His feet. The true Guru is therefore peerless, nay transcendental.

Guru Arjan, speaking of his Master, Guru Ram Das, says,

> I have searched the entire *Brahmand*, but have not found one who may come up to my Master.

And finally he said:

> *Hari* (God), it seems to me, has taken for Himself the appellation of "Ram Das".

In the workaday world, we are all very busy, very busy, indeed, too busy to think of God, much less to practice the Presence of the living God and still less to live in His holy Presence. If at all, at odd moments, we speak and talk of Him, worship Him, and offer our prayers to Him, we do so not to win Him for His own sake, or to reach un-

to Him for our own sake, but just to seek favors from Him and to get an easy and quick riddance from our difficulties and to escape from our trials and tribulations.

Again, if we at times feel serious about God, we try to find Him in the earthly surroundings about us, the snow-covered mountain caves, the burning desert sands, the depths of sacred pools and rivers, worshipping Him in the elemental powers of nature like the rising sun, or the vacuous expanse above, the thunderous clouds, the Lucifer and the Vesper; and worse still, in the hollows of trees, in the fish of the sea and the fowls of the air – and no wonder, with all our efforts, we do not find Him.

God Himself has declared:

> I am so big that the entire world cannot hold Me, nor can the Heavens provide an adequate support for Me, nor can the earth provide Me a seat; but strange as it may seem to you, I reside in the hearts of Holy Men. If you desire to see Me, seek Me there and you shall find Me.

Kabir also tells us:

> How can you find the Reality where It is not?
> Seek thou the Real where Reality dwells.
> Take hold of him who knows the Real,
> He shall hie thee to Him in no time.

This, then, is the way to Self-illumination. The process, though seemingly complicated and lengthy, is simplified

by the grace of a Perfect Master (Sant Satguru). He provides the magic wand, the "*Open Sesame*", that does the trick, and enables one to get access to What is inaccessible:

He who goes beyond the Sat Lok,
He knows the Incomprehensible and the
Inexpressible.
It is in the Nameless that the Saints live,
The slave Nanak finds peace in Him.

Thus, we see that if one could learn to "die while living", achieve a voluntary death at will, one would gain Life everlasting, free from the endless cycle of births and deaths and rebirths. Saints, therefore, sing praises beyond measure for such a death, teach us how to transcend the various planes, and to traverse into the Beyond and gain the Kingdom of God which is our birthright, now lost to us. It is within our reach if we but listen to them, accept their teachings and follow them diligently and with willing obedience.

After death, each one of us has to go blindly in a state of utter destitution and helplessness. The scriptures, all the world over, place a high premium on crossing the borderland between life and death on this side of that world and, then, death and life on the other side:

Where thou hast to go after death,
Why not gain a foothold while alive?
– *Shri Rag M.1*

O Nanak! learn to die while there is yet time; for verily this, indeed, is a real yoga.

– *Suhi M.1*

Die thou and remain dead to the world, A death like this I experience many times a day.

– Kabir

With the grace of the Master, one may ride over the mind;
By vanquishing the mind, you meet the Lord for certain.

– Kabir

Be ye dead while ye live and be fearlessly free,
With a competent Master by thy side, there will be nothing to rue.

– Kabir

You will get rich dividends, should you know
How to die before death overtakes you.

– Bulleh Shah

SHABD or the eternal Life Current is the only help on this Path:
In SHABD we die (get absorbed), in SHABD we live eternally with no fear of death,
This is the true Water of Life that a rare soul may get with His grace.

– *Sorath M.3*

What does the Master give? He makes manifest the eternal Sound Current which is the Life of the universe and in Which we all live. By riding on this Audible Life Stream we, while living on earth, can transcend, at will, the various planes of existence – and come back into the physical when we so desire:

> Without the aid of SHABD (or WORD), thou canst not get out of the clayey mold. There is no other way besides.
>
> – Soami Ji

Salvation, or Life-everlasting, cannot be earned by deeds howsoever righteous or commendable, in themselves, they may be, or in the eyes of the world. Salvation is purely a Gift of grace from a Godman with the Power of God working in Him to the full:

> For by grace are ye saved . . . and not by yourselves; It is the Gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.
>
> – St. Paul's Letter: Ephesians 2:8,9.

> Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.
>
> – St. Paul's Letter: Titus 3:5.

> Neither is there Salvation in any other (Name): for there is none other Name under Heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.
>
> – the Acts of the Apostles 4:12.

> For the grace of God that bringeth Salvation
> hath appeared to all men.
> – St. Paul's Letter: Titus 2:11.

And His grace shall continue to appear hereafter as long as God exists and His creation continues to people the earth.

This, then, is the way to eternal Life, by living in the Life- Principle itself, ever in Communion with the Holy WORD, the Will of God (Hukam); and there is no way other than this, try howsoever hard one may to find another. But the revelation of the Godway in the Living Life-Lines within (the Holy Light and the Voice of God) solely depends upon the grace of some Godman, a WORD-personified Saint, "unto Whom all things have been delivered by the Father", and of Whom it is said:

> No one knoweth the Son, except the Father,
> neither doth any man know the Father, except
> the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will
> reveal Him (the Father).
> – St. Matthew 11:27.

Time and again, great souls come into the world to remind us of our true Home. They tell us with a clarion call that this world is not our natural Habitat. We are here just for a brief span as travellers in a *caravanserai* and must therefore prepare to quit, and the sooner we do it, the better it would be. We must, therefore, work for the Kingdom of Heaven and gain Life- eternal. "May Thy Kingdom come on earth as It is in Heaven." And of this Kingdom, it is said:

> The Kingdom of God cometh not with (outer) observation; Neither shall they say, "Look here!" or "Look there!" for behold (see for yourself), the Kingdom of God **is within** you.
>
> – St. Luke 17:20,21.

and

> Know ye not that this body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which **is in** you, Which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?
>
> – St. Paul's Letter: I Corinthians 6:19.

This is why all of the sages and seers exhort us:

> The place where thou hast to quit in the end has gripped thee most,
> Little dost thou know of the Place thou hast to dwell for good.
>
> – Nanak

> *Arsh* (Heaven) is thy true Abode, my soul,
> Fie on thee, thou art entangled in a clayey mold.
>
> – Shamas Tabrez

> Thou, my Lord, dwelleth in thy native Land,
> While I am here grovelling in dust.
>
> – Nanak

> Your Place is where earth is not,
> Why dost thou cling to the earth?
>
> – Soami Ji

Human life is just as a vapor,
Why not live in Communion with the eternal
WORD?

– Kabir

Those who have Communed with the WORD,
their toils shall end.
And their faces shall flame with glory,
Not only shall they have Salvation,
O Nanak! but many more shall find freedom with
them.

– Nanak