

THE QUESTIONING OF THE SOUL

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“Many millions are literarily primitive folk who are treading the same paths that their ancestors trod centuries ago, and who not only have no desire for learning themselves, but in many cases regard with suspicion the introduction of schools in their communities.” — DeWitt Mackenzie, *India’s Problem can be Solved* (1943)

My *Dādā*¹ is the smartest person I know. He knows about everything I ever ask, and I ask a lot of questions. He always tells me a story before I sleep—sometimes he teaches me about *Rawalpindi*², sometimes about the stars in the sky, sometimes about the different animals in the forest, and sometimes even about farming. I like the story of Mohan Ji a lot.

Respect and honor. Those were the two traits *Dādā* always pointed out about Mohan Ji. Mohan Ji was a farmer and *Dādā*’s *chacha*³. *Dādā* explained that he not only worked hard as a farmer, but also found happiness while doing so. He tended his land with full connection to the Divine, blissfully working without fear of failure. *Dādā* explained that it was the honor and respect that Mohan Ji had for the practice of farming that allowed him to be in *Chardikalā*⁴.

I see that many people get dejected when the sun is out too long or the rain is not calm, but when I grow older, I hope to be different, like Mohan Ji. I hope *Dādā* is always there to teach me, I wish everyone had a *Dādā* to tell them stories like I do.

“Working in bliss”. Working. Bliss. Something about those two words while writing the section above made me want to take a moment to separate them.

As a human I want to be in bliss; however, as I try to meditate on the experience of bliss, I usually find only short, temporary, and elusive moments.

¹ Grandfather

² City in Punjab

³ Uncle

⁴ Unwavering Optimism

I find bliss while walking through the trees up the path to my room. I find bliss drinking chai. I find bliss Facetiming my bubbly five-year-old cousin. But bliss through interim daily actions is different from bliss of the mind. Being in a state of bliss is hard.

In my value system, a consistent focused remembrance of the ever-expansive and all-encompassing Oneness brings bliss. The Oneness that is perfectly permeating and all-pervading, here, there, everywhere. I have felt this remembrance, this connection. Yet, it is hard. It is not difficult to achieve momentarily, but it is hard to maintain.

But work can't be blissful, right? Work is work. Work is production. Work serves to stimulate the economy and bring me sustenance as a citizen of the world. However, does sustenance truly come from my actions or the quality of my mind? I have never in my "formal" education been taught about the importance of bliss when working. Yet, it is the experience of bliss that keeps me grounded in life. It is when I'm connected to Oneness that no task seems too tall.

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Every week *Dādā* assesses my physical strength with an arm wrestle. I never win, and according to him, the main reason I lose is that I am not drinking enough of the hot milk *Mamma*⁵ gives me. *Mamma* says milk makes your bones stronger. I don't understand how.

Maybe the whiteness of the milk is what makes you strong. I've seen some bones of animals around, and they always look so lifeless and easy to crack. I wonder if I poured milk on them, if they would then be hard and strong. Does the whiteness of milk give strength to something that's already dead? Maybe not, since bones themselves are white.

I really want to be strong. I want to be ready to always stand up for others against injustices no matter the obstacle. As *Dādā* explains: Strength of the physical body must be grounded with strength of the mind. Contemplate through the lens of a saint. Embrace the spirit of a warrior.

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As I write this, I am sitting in my childhood home for what may be the very last time. I came home from college this weekend to help my family move to our new house, and specifically, to help my dad and sisters dismantle my bed and other furniture and move it to our garage.

⁵ Mother

Usually, empty spaces feel numbing. But everything about the blank walls, the open space, the eerie quietness feels like home, feels like comfort. Even in the emptiness, this space feels so full. People say home is where your family is. Maybe that is true. I'm starting to feel like home is more so where your memories are, where your imagination takes control.

I remember playing with my sister's Polly Pocket dolls in the TV room, I remember running down the stairs prompting my mom to always yell at me to slow down, I remember the countless home-cooked meals, I remember spending hours and hours playing basketball in my front driveway. I think it's curious that in these moments of reflection I only remember happiness.

All thanks to you, my beloved Guru.

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I can't wait until I get to play *Chaupar*⁶. It's my favorite game. I love that no matter how you start the game, you can always still win. Even when everything seems to be going right, something can go wrong. You never know how much your opponent may advance, and truly you have no control over it.

Every time I feel like I am gaining momentum, my piece is captured by the opponent, and I must start again. I tend to get frustrated. *Dādā* tells me victory comes to not only those who have patience, but also those who realize it is never permanent.

Whenever I win, I am so thrilled that all my efforts paid off, but I almost immediately feel a desire to be victorious again. It's almost as if winning once is never enough, I want to win again.

Unfortunately for me, if I win, *Dādā* doesn't let me play anymore. He says you must learn to be content with both the wins and losses in life: appreciate the good for when you have it, as that helps you appreciate the bad that is also always approaching.

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The Being of a Bird

Some move together. Some move alone.
Some flap, some flutter, some glide.

⁶ A historic Indian board game

flying low to the ground, soaring high to the sky.
creeping, ambling, waddling.

How do they know
without being told?
Who lives in each flutter
each creep, each waddle?
Who does this doing?

At dawn they chirp, they whisper, they play.
They listen to one another.
Melodic presence.
They sing. They praise.

Flight is freedom.
Fear is bondage.
No flight with fear.

Take the leap.
Trust yourself for
you are He and He is you.
Jump into the sky.
Glide, Flutter, Soar.
Fly.

—

In the evening my family unwinds from the day's work. We change to something comfortable and relaxing. We trickle into our shared space to begin *Rebraas Sahib*⁷. We start together, anyone of us leading and the rest following. We sit cross-legged, fold our hands, smile, and begin. Breathing, praying, meditating. We focus our consciousness on Oneness. At the end, *Dādā* sometimes will speak upon the Guru's teachings.

Each day we pick a different stanza to discuss. Today, *Dādā* focuses on the words of Guru Arjan Dev Ji⁸ within *Rebraas* written to be recited in *Raag Goojaree*—a raag that is historically focused on the value of time and the value of the present moment.

⁷ Evening prayer for Sikhs

⁸ The fifth Sikh Guru.

Dādā explains that the Guru questions: O mind, why and what are you so afraid of? When each person is sustained by Oneness. Just look at the flamingo.

Dādā turns to me and asks, “Have you paid close attention to one before?”

I shake my head no and start to think about flamingos. I love watching them walk, their long legs make it seem like they stand through the water, never sinking. Their necks are curled. Their beaks point down as if they yearn to embrace humility or perhaps, they face down as a sign of respect. Oh, and the pink is so beautiful.

Dādā continues, the Guru explains that the flamingos fly hundreds of miles, leaving their young behind. The Guru questions: Who feeds those young flamingos, who teaches them to now feed themselves? What force enables them to move through the world?

Dādā looks directly at me and says, “You don’t ever have to be afraid; even if you are all alone, He is here, there, everywhere. For the Divine is in you, *Putar*⁹.”

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This life is both heaven and hell. It is delightful, yet it is cruel. We feel joy, yet we feel anguish. We have meaningful relationships, yet we experience betrayal. In this life, we are easily tricked by the illusion of materiality.

Dādā reminds me that our house is not even our home. He says, “Even as we abide and work within the reality that we are placed, we must not forget its inherent fallacies. Think of waves:

From the water rise the waves and from the waves, the water rises. But both are referred to with different names. Doesn’t the wave exist in the water, and the water exists in the wave?

We are not even a wave, but just a drop. A drop in that ever-expansive ocean. But as a drop, we are as a part of that One as the One is a part of us.”

So where should we go to live? I ask. He laughs, gently touches my cheeks, and smiles.

“*Putar*, don’t worry, home is everywhere. We still have individual responsibilities in this material world. We have a family to be a part of, and people to help and care for. While we can choose to perhaps remove ourselves from worldly obligations

⁹ Loving name for son

completely, that wouldn't necessarily be kind to those around us. Instead, how can we train our mind so meticulously so as to live without forgetting the home of our heart?"

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Whenever *Dādā* shares his wisdom, I always search for an answer, a truth, a goal for myself to be a better human. What I fail to understand is that the process of “making sense” is actually a chain on my ability to think. I try to conceive truth through frameworks only valid within one conception of reality. A reality that does not allow for any other truths to exist. A reality where the protagonists are Certainty and Validity.

What wisdom is is an emotional response—a heartfelt understanding, feeling, being. Wisdom is something that is affect-based. In that, every individual is affected differently. When *Dādā* shares, I feel him. I feel his joy. I feel his compassion. I feel his frustration. I feel his anger. But that feeling might not even be what he intended to share.

With that is a need to realize that what is more important is not truth, but the truth that works for you and to encourage you to continue along your path.

—

I get worried easily. It begins while I sleep, continues as I wake up, as I get dressed, as I walk out, as I talk to others. Worries consume me.

My *Papa*¹⁰ never really seems fazed. He lives his life content and at his own pace. He doesn't bother his brain with what he calls “just life”. He smiles, he gets up, he moves on.

He laughs and shares with me the words of the Guru.

“rē mūrē tū hōshai ras lapatāiō.”

(Rey) o (moorrey) fool (too) you are (lapttaaio = clinging) engrossed in (hochhai = trivial) transitory (ras-i) pleasures.

He says, working hard towards a goal is important. In fact, it can be rewarding. But remember, these goals, these forms of potential fulfillment, exist only within a conceived conception of our world.

This is hard for me to understand, especially when I feel dictated by worldly demands.

¹⁰ Father

I feel such joy, such excitement, such pride in my individual journey.
But to understand why this *ras* falls short, why this *ras* is only a trick: I experience the
ras of the mind.

The pleasure of living within this world of duality with a non-dual spirit.
To be fortunate enough to have a chance to go back Home.
To be the Ocean.
To be with One. To be One.

—

I love Chaah. She's my favorite person in our *pind*¹¹. She is kind, loving, and fierce.
What amazes me about her is that she is not only incredibly smart, but also humble.
In school, she always knows what to say and how to say it.

I don't know why Chaah likes me, but she's been my friend for as long as I can
remember. These days, school doesn't excite me as much as it once did. I find that I
get more out of my time when I spend it with *Dādā*, running around, or playing my
*Dilruba*¹². Chaah is the only one who seems to get that.

I don't like having to compete in class. *Dādā* says knowledge is only a figment of
someone's imagination. But I know my teacher and *Dādā* wouldn't agree. Knowledge
is what my teacher says and that is that.

Chaah recognizes that we all don't learn in the same way: knowledge is free-flowing.
If we listen to what our heart desires, we will without a doubt learn. We will not only
absorb what is around us, but also learn more about ourselves. To pursue knowledge
is useless when knowledge must actually choose you. The knowledge from within has
to find you for you to even have a chance to find it.

Without any hesitation, Chaah sticks up for me in school and says, "Himat Singh, if
anyone says anything to you, you let me know, I got your back." Chaah is a master at
*Gatka*¹³, so I wouldn't mess with her.

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To be a Warrior of God.

¹¹ Village

¹² Classical Instrument invented by Guru Gobind Singh Ji, the tenth Sikh Guru

¹³ Sikh Martial Art

I entered a restaurant with my friends last weekend. As usual, when I enter, I do my glance. I look around to make sure no one is looking at me a second too long. Once I feel safe enough, I enter.

When I first came to this country, where I seem to be a man who is out of place, I decided if I was to be anything I would be myself. If I embrace myself for my own beauty others will look past their own prejudices and see that too.

It set out to be more of a challenge than I expected.

I walk a path where I make a commitment to be ready to jump and protect no matter the consequence. I abide by a code of conduct that mandates me to give myself up for the protection of others without even a thought of fear.

My uniform makes me stand out. This ease of identification should place comfort, safety, and security at the hearts of those around me. My identity should serve as a tool of love, compassion, and peace.

Instead, sometimes I tend to find myself lost. This strange world has no clue. I tell myself I am okay with it, and sometimes I truly am. I don't blame the people around me, I just can feel disheartened. I cross paths with people and wish they knew just a little, a little about me, a little about my Gurus. They seem like they have the time to know a little about everything, yet somehow my experience as a human is lost within their conceptions of "general" knowledge.

In the restaurant as I walk towards the bathroom, a tall, heavy-built gentleman approaches me quickly. My immediate reaction is, "Oh now what." But as the man rushes over he says, "Hey, you are a Sikh right?"

As I start to utter a form of an affirmation, he interrupts me and says, "Can I give you a hug?"

He shares about how a Sikh family who owned the gas station next to his house in Rhinebeck fed him every day and took care of him through a tough time. He says, "Now every time I see a Warrior of God, I have to say hello."

I smile, hug him back, and thank my Guru. For I see my Guru within this gentleman and with that my purpose seems clear once again. I think to myself...

I am in service to all.

I am above no one.

I am nothing.

I am a vibration.

I am a light.

I am an energy.

I am a *Sant*.

I am a *Sapai*.¹⁴

And with my head bowed, and my hands folded together. I silently mutter to myself.

I am a Warrior of God.

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¹⁴ Sant Sapai can be translated to Saint Soldier (a phrase coined by the sixth Sikh Guru, Guru Hargobind Ji)