

How to live.

Interview with Shiv Charan Singh, May 2013.

SCS: How to live our lives? This question is worth consideration. Given the law of cause and effect: that everything we do does have a certain effect. When we want a certain result but we behave in such a way that produces a different result then it's a contradiction.

So does it matter how we live our lives ? The short answer is 'yes if you care about the consequences'. On the other hand, if you do not care about the result then, no why should it matter whatever you do. However if you find yourself complaining about your life then you can at least be challenged to take some responsibility. Since whatever is happening in your life is, at least partly, related to the way you are living your life.

So If you care about the quality of your experience then you will be wise to look at how you are living your life. If you do not care you may well say it does not matter how life is lived. But then in some way you give up the right to complain.

Of course the one, in each of us, who likes to be the victim and gain the sympathy and pity of others will want to use the complaint. further more it is way of manipulating and controlling others to hold them responsible for your condition.

The contradiction in this approach is that, while the victim mentality tends to deny having any, or much significant, influence over one's own life will none the less often be occupied in trying to influence others.

(Note: this is not intended to give an attitude of blame or shaming towards anyone, and particularly not said without compassion for all human suffering and respectfully takes into account those whom life's accident of circumstances has truly given them some challenges.)

While we are all subject to many forces beyond our control still there is a significant, though immeasurable, degree of influence we can bring to our on experience. By our actions, our words and our thoughts. By our communication and relation to others. By our lifestyle and basic habits such as sleeping, eating, exercise, bathing and even dress and general practices of self care and hygiene.

Speaking of how we live and the consequences is not intended to make a moral or value judgement. It need not be put into the theme of right or wrong. The point of action and reaction - sequence of consequence - is a strong point in itself. Independent of any projection that says ' it is bad if you live this way or good if you live another way. Rather this is a simple proposition and invitation to another way of thinking. A neutral attitude and conscious approach to understand that one thing leads to another and that's all there is to it. This is scientific logic and can be studied. Results can be predicted and so there are plenty of examples from medical systems around the world that provide evidence of lifestyle and its

effect on physical, emotional and mental well being There are government laws, social guidelines and rituals, religious rules, family traditions and other such forces that partly attempt to enforce upon us codes of behaviour, and in some cases also consequences of punishment and/or reward for that behaviour. These remain relative and there will be plenty cases and opportunities where these limits can be bypassed with minimum consequence or effect to one's self.

One law however we are not free from. It comes with existence, as if it is a law of nature itself. By nature's own inherent intelligence whatever we do or do not do has traceable direct results, for ourselves as well as for others to varying degrees. We are writing our own future story with every present deed.

AD: I was thinking about all these people who don't believe in anything greater than themselves, they may not care at all.

SCS: then the question is different but before we come to that let's be very clear.

If you are not having any experience in your life that makes you uncomfortable, makes you unhappy or complain or leaves you in pain, it will be easier to say it doesn't matter what we do. But if you are having certain circumstances – physical, emotional, any, circumstances that does not feel good – “I don't like this” - then look at your behavior, look at simple things like how you sleep. does it correspond to what you want in your life? Each smallest daily action, or routine, is definitely contributing to what is going on, to what you are experiencing.

This is independent of whether you believe in God, higher power, intelligent design, something beyond or not.

But how to live: it is not only in the food you eat, or company you keep, but also your behavior to others. For example if you talk rudely then there needs to be no surprise that perhaps you don't have friends. In such an example we can say that if you don't care about not having friends, then yes, it doesn't matter as long as you are happy with the consequences. You can say, it doesn't matter. But if you don't like the consequences ...

You can always say, it's their fault, it has nothing to do with me. However that would never be the whole truth. People have their problems and prejudices and they may project something on you. This will not change the fact that you are always contributing some factor that effects the outcome. If you want something to change, change something. Don't just complain, wait for a change, or lose time hoping for change, thinking somebody else can fix it for you. You need to change something if you want your life and experience of life to change.

AD: There is a need to be actively involved?

SCS: Let's put it like this. I am suffering and do not realize that I am producing this condition in me of high blood pressure and the pain in my liver. I go to the doctor and the doctor tells me I need to stop eating red meat, cut down on alcohol and reduce salt intake. So clearly there is a cause and there is an effect. If you don't like effects, you have to change causes. If you don't care for the effects, you don't have to change anything.

If you don't want to take any responsibility: "I just want the doctor to fix it" - use some artificial solution, make the pain go away, not looking at the cause of the pain – you have that right. Pain killers exist in medicine, so you don't notice your pain. You can eat badly and take a tablet to help you digest. You can be mentally stressed and take tablets to sleep. There are lots of things to do to keep covering the effects and never face, or take some responsibility, for the causes. Some people, may have a strong constitution, an insensitivity to pain, and apparently escape many consequences through their whole life. Sooner or later, however, things do accumulate, because you are ignoring the causes.

Another example: somebody takes tranquilizers and after 25 years, the dose level needed to still have the same effect of calming the nerves is so high, that in fact it is life threatening. The same dose just don't work anymore, because the cause is still there. It is pushing through no matter how one tries to cover it with the tranquilizers. That kind of a model exists on many levels and in many areas of our life. "I am feeling nervous, so I smoke a cigarette - I feel that my nerves are ok now". Actually, the problem has not been solved, I'm just not aware of the problem. It distracted me, it made me kind of numb but the deep anxiety still continues and I will generate it and accumulate it. It will affect my health.

As we said there is no "right" or "wrong", we are not preaching, not saying that you are evil because you chose to use tranquilizers. It's a question of how deeply you want to look at it. How much responsibility you want to take – "life is not going as I would like and I am prepared to self-help instead of looking for a quick fixes - there are always new products on the market if quick fixes still work for you. There are lifestyle alternatives if quick fixes stop working, or you feel motivated and ready to take a proactive involvement in your own life experience.

AD: That sounds like modern medicine in our world.

SCS: A bit, not all medicine is for that. Some people have tried to manage thyroid problem, even with meditation, herbs, iodine, diet, acupuncture etc. Yet in many cases the problem just continues because the problem is so deep, or the imbalance is so established, maybe it has become genetic, and it's not clear what the causes are. In such a case Thyroxine, the medical solution, is a relatively harmless medicine with relatively little side effects and doesn't oppress some other functions. It simply helps the thyroid do what it is designed to do. That's just an example of where we can also give appreciation to Western, or modern, medicine. So again lets remember we are not prescribing a right or wrong way. Simply applying consciousness and letting that have its own impact.

I haven't met anybody, even in the yoga community, who could absolutely overcome thyroid problem by so called natural methods alone. I stay open minded. I also stay open minded to the Western medicine. Though certainly there has been tendency for some of the solutions of Western medicine to move towards just covering up, treating the symptoms, and in many cases the damage is big. It does not free us from the law of cause and effect. Rather it tends to complicate the scenario by adding more causes and therefore more effects.

Finally lets remember that when a condition progresses beyond a certain level of management, or recuperation, then surgery is often life saving.

AD: Media places a lot of value in being known to other people. When somebody dies, they

estimate how many people knew him/her as if the value of this person could be measured by the number of people who had known her.

SCS: Nearly everybody is known to somebody. Briefly speaking, it is common enough in this world that value is accorded by numbers: how big a fish you caught, how many kilometers you can run, how fast, how many goals did you score, how much money did you earn in your job, how many friends, fans or students you have. We can make a long list of things which are valued in society measured by quantity, numbers. Simply as a common occurrence you can't denounce it completely that quantity gives real value other than the artificial value. Not enough food on the table is life threatening. Too much food in the stomach is life threatening. Quantity can be too little or too much. The contrasting value is the type of food; the quality. So there exists a natural tension, which will sometimes appear as a competition or merely a contrast between quantity and quality.

AD: Should we live so that other people remember us?

SCS: What matters is the quality of a person's wisdom rather than quantity of people who knew them. And there is nothing bad about wishing that some of that wisdom may be passed on and remembered by others.

It's a contrasting value. Nowadays you can give false quality: "he's a friend of the prime minister", then he has value, not many people knew him but he was a friend of the prime minister so therefore he has value. He did not know the prime minister but more people knew him than knew the prime minister. And so on. Such examples are based on social beliefs and fantasies about value.

AD: It does not matter that much when you are dead whether it's quality or quantity, right?

SCS: It depends to who? to the dead there is no reason why it should matter at all. Clearly to those who are living something seems to matter, because they wouldn't be busy with it. People do get busy with it. T-shirt is just a T-shirt made of cotton in India, for example, but if it's styled and has a label on it then it's different. "It's the great Italian designer", suddenly its price value in numbers is very high and it's assumed to be of high quality which it may, or may not, truly have. Because it's associated with the name it gets given a high price. And people say, and believe, that it must be of great value, because they put this price on it. Look at the price, it's 80 euro compared to 10 for a T-shirt in a Chinese shop. This must have a better quality; or so we like to think. But of course this is not necessarily the truth – it can be the same T-shirt with a label. So quality is often a false quality - it is associated with something that our collective hypnosis agrees to to give a high value, and therefore it is also assumed to have high quality.

AD: My connection to the first question is – should we live the life so that people remember us? That's what people say: it's worth living so that others remember us after death.

SCS: I won't say "should" or "shouldn't" although that's how it's put in a society.

Unfortunately even some spiritual teachers frequently speak about what we should and should not do, or be, or say, or think. So I am just taking this moment to invite us to be free

from this attitude of 'should'. Rather by invitation, by giving experience, by inspiration, by example, we can propose awareness and allow people to reach their own conclusions. awareness of the law of cause and effect will eventually bring people to reflect and decide to change their sense of purpose and their course of action.

So back to the question of being remembered after death. it is not right or wrong to aim for this. but whoever claims it should be done might also want to give an explanation as to why. I can only say that i would wish that people remember the teachings, that people remember their experience of self and of expanded awareness. What about a memory of happiness that is not dependent on temporary external things. I'd like people to have experienced a non-dependent joy of self, and to remember the experience so that they can regenerate themselves through that and live their lives from there. If people have found me to be a person of significance in their lives, I'd like to ask why – was it my behavior? I did service and they found it inspiring. I would like them not to remember myself but that doing service is a good thing: "I was inspired and I'd like to do service too". If there is a result, knowing that somebody was motivated to do service then that would be meaningful; not to me but in itself. just remembering me for my service, and not following the example, is not going to have much effect. and there is no value in that to me or to others.

If i am remembered for my words, then equally it would be a question of what impact that has for the one remembering. Just remembering and quoting me over and over will not change much. Putting those words into action and embodying them in ones presence is more likely to bring meaningful change into a person's life. But in the end it is for each person to decide if they want to remember someone that died or not, and if so, for what and with what effect.

When I am dead I don't know what people would do and I am not going to worry. If you ask why I am alive and if there is anything I'd like to be remembered for. My answer is nothing. In fact I don't care for that at all and would not recommend it. Please do not remember me but remember anything you've learnt from me; by my mistakes, my example, the words of the teachings i have passed on to you. If remembering me helps you remember, and practice, what you've learnt (by association) then we might be tempted to say it is worth remembering me. However right here is where the confusion comes in, and where it is so easy to slip into idol worship and avoid any personal challenge and responsibility. For myself remembering a great soul means remembering their deeds and words which can be an inspiration, and their role model, which can inspire courage to act for the greater good.

Remembering a person is neither right or wrong. It is not a matter of should or shouldn't but a question of the outcome. There is no value of imposing the rule that we must live to be remembered or that we must remember a person after they have died. If we survey the situation we will probably find that if lots of people do remember a person it is usually not because he knew lots of people or was a friend of the prime minister. It is more likely to be the value that person has contributed to the world they lived in. Something which can be motivating, moving people towards more awareness, more virtuous behavior towards each other, conscious interaction. Remembering a person for these things may lead us to similar actions. Though i am sure any person who lives like that does not do so with the intention of being remembered. In fact the paradox is that the less one is concerned about being

remembered the more likely they will be remembered.

AD: There could be that particular one person that moved me, made me understand.

SCS: If that's the case, so it should be asked: remembering that person, what else is there to remember? Is it only the person, is it an attachment, what does it bring or change in your life? What is the value? Remember that nothing is right or wrong unless you make it so. and independent of any projection or fantasy about being right or wrong, or doing what you believe you should do, the fact is there are always consequences and we have to live with these consequences, which may even be with us in some other form after life - but that is another discussion.

AD: Is there one path or many paths one should take for a meaningful life?

SCS: I think you know my answer to that – there are many paths yet there is a commonality and a global intuitive common sense that people have of a good person – a life of virtue, healthy well-being, compassionate, respect for others. I think there is a global general sense of what is a good life but one can reach to those qualities in many different ways. It can be meaningful to be a street sweeper, a person who is daily cleaning rubbish or a healer who puts their hands on many people or causes miracles. Life is as meaningful as we make it to be, and, at least for a while, it can contain, and entertain, any meaning we wish it to. However it is interesting to think that life has its own meaning, and the fact we exist has its own meaning. In which case there is no need to generate further meanings, and we could better spend our time reflecting on the inherent meanings of life's different aspects.

AD: Being a seeker we come upon many paths, teachings, methods and we get lost.

SCS: We often get lost because we don't know what we are looking for. We know we are looking for something but we don't know for what. We even think we know what we are looking for but we don't actually know what. We think we want more knowledge. We don't realize that what we need is experience. We think we need knowledge, so we go chasing knowledge. Most knowledge however, will never give us experience unless we know how to translate that knowledge into experience. Therefore we continue to feel and think (imagine/believe) that there is something missing and so we go on seeking. In terms of seeking and applying technology, or techniques, we each believe we are so much different from anybody else; that our story, and our problem, is unique and special. With this illusion driving us so we each go looking for that special answer, right technique, that is just for me; the right mudra, the right meditation, the right type of diet and lifestyle, that is right for our own exceptional style.

We do not realize. or want to realize, we have more in common than we have differences. Even if each one of us is unique, no doubt, still the percentage of our uniqueness stays in contrast with the percentage of our commonality. It's not how we think it is. So we search for the right thing for ourselves in order to stress our individuality and supposed specialness.

AD: Especially in our Western world, there is no humility ...

SCS: There seems to be a tendency towards globality, yet equally there is the drive for individualism, and it seems to be stronger in the west. On humility: It is a matter of being ready and willing to follow some general guidelines. For instance what makes a healthy diet when we take into account the basic nature and function of the physical human body? Research will show that what optimizes good health for a long life is more or less a universal set of guidelines. No matter where you are in the world, if you over-eat, if you under-eat, or if you eat too much processed food, for example processed sugar, or flour, the results will be the same – there'll be problems. So universal guidelines can be found in terms of what constitutes a life of well-being, health of the body.

Everybody knows that, yet do they want to know? They take a small problem, magnify it out of proportions and start believing that now they have to search for solution of this problem. Some of these problems we have to live with, and there is no solution. Maybe I have a limp or certain scars and these will always be part of what I live with. They are not going to go away, they cannot be fixed. Let's say that my knee gives me some pain, and it could be that there really is nothing I, or anyone, can do about it. For example an operation may magnify the problem. It may help or may not, there is no guarantee.

We don't want to exclude a fact that there may be a problem for which a specific medicine or diet may help you. Some people, for reasons unexplainable or which could only be explained by things like reincarnation, past life memories might have affinity with Tai Chi or American Indian Shaman journey, or whatever. Why does something appeal to me and doesn't to another person, maybe past life memories, maybe coincidence or even no explanation. But it's not about right or wrong. This technique simply speaks to you, works for you, you feel called to that, you get into it and go through it. If you find in a couple of years that it doesn't work for you, it is kind of exhausted, then you change it. Change your beliefs, change your practice, change your style.

We are in a world of information overload, supermarket overload, product overload, so this is more difficult. People find it confusing. What to do?

What if we would apply the process of taking things away rather than adding more. All those things in front of you, all these choices given to you. Admit to yourself, am I missing much if I am not interested in that? If I don't do that? Put it aside and continue this process of taking away as much as you can because then the things in front of you will be seen more clearly for what they actually are. It takes away some of the fog, the background mist is out of the way. What stands in front of you can be seen more vividly and you can identify what's more appropriate for you. We are socialized to add more, to accumulate, by the media, commercial life, market place society, family patterns. I always want more, more books, more knowledge, more toys, more photographs, technology, more everything.

AD: More teachers ...

SCS: It's all exterior and just crowding you and clouds your intuition. Intuition cannot function with so many screens and filters blocking or confusing clear vision and clarity of consciousness. If we want to do something about this then the work is to eliminate. We can call it 'eliminate to illuminate'. To develop balance we need to change our cultural habits.

When I come to my desk, the first thing I look for is what can be removed, what I can get rid

of, throw away, complete today: make that phone call, write that letter, get done, finish it, clear it. How may I delete it and get out of the way, then it's clearer to see the ones I have to deal with next. Continue to work that way. If somebody writes you e-mail, with 10 paragraphs, look at each paragraph not like "what a story, and what fascinating details" but rather look for what is irrelevant, sometimes maybe only one paragraph really carries the message or the question; usually about 5% is relevant. When responding you will note that you only need to respond to 5%, rest is decoration, interesting or not, it doesn't matter. In that way you can work effectively, efficiently and it's not a lot of stress. You don't get overloaded with that super overflow of information. It's worth learning to identify that overflow of information, and, yes, it takes a little training.

AD: As individuals we have individual destinies or is there a common goal for all?

SCS: What do we mean by destiny or goal? It's not about your destination it's what you become through your journey – you become a diamond, you become a Sikh, you become a radiant being – could this be more important. That sense of becoming, how we reach to our excellence? How each one will get from here to there, how will they prosper, manifest and express it in their lives? That would be different in each case. There are many factors, abilities and limits in our self, obstacles we have to cross and support we have around us around us. To one person crossing obstacles is easy. In which case to claim some special excellence for something you could have done blindfolded doesn't mean anything. While for another person, who had many restrictions in their life, and to achieve the same thing they have to turn themselves around and gather their courage, then it's impressive; this is excellence. There is a context: what adversities you have had, what calamities you had to deal with? Did it make you or did it break you? How did you go through that and what has it made of you? How do you bear it, i.e. with a smile for the people around you? Can you still give a smile, with all you have been through, or do you fall into a pit of self-pity? It's a matter of reaching for your own excellence.

AD: Once you have reached for your excellence do you have obligation to other people?

SCS: I don't think that anybody has that right to put that obligation on you, my experience is that teachers, when they reach that state of excellence, there awakens an interior obligation, or imperative, which doesn't have the same meaning of an imposed obligation. It rather becomes inevitable, it's a natural unfolding. Then you can even say that you never reach excellence because there's always another step beyond where you currently are. You reach your personal excellence and further development of that excellence is to inspire others. It's my understanding. People tend to set rules that you have to, it's not an obligation that anybody puts on you. It's an imperative, a natural impulse to share and serve others towards their excellence.

AD: What is true: our everyday experience or glimpses of another reality like in dreams or meditation?

SCS: That's a big question of what is true, what is reality and dreams? Who says dream are reality? Who says that what we are living now is reality and not a dream? My understanding and my sense is that even in dreams our imagination plays tricks on us. Surely in dreams we

do have a different perspective which is no more real than when we are apparently awake.

So here is an interesting approach, we are using the word “perspective”. Even though we are awake in the same world we can have different perspectives. We have the same journey like on a train, we see the same countryside, and we may also eat the same meal. Yet our description of the experience will be very different. Our personal constructs and patterns will give us very different perspectives on how was the journey and how we did, or did not, enjoy the train ride. The fact that we can have different perspectives tells us something. I allow that to imply to me that there is a greater background reality upon which we all can have different perspectives, different colorings. White is white but when you look through a prism you get more blue or orange. Still white is white, the light is the light so in that sense of a greater background. May we call that reality.

There are perspectives on reality but they are not realities. They are virtual realities. It’s a real perspective, it’s real to you, but lets not call it reality. You might call it my 'reality' and yes, your reality is your perspective. So it can happen in dreams or meditation, by accident, even walking in the street, or through drugs, or trauma, or love making, or there so many other ways that influence and change our perspectives. As we grow up we adopt our position and points of view, which then become ingrained in us as pattern.

Patterns sometimes break suddenly if I am transparent but even then it is just another fantasy. And that already tells you that this perspective is not the only one. You see, the fact that you suddenly could have a switch of perspective, a new point of view, see life from another angle, is clear evidence that the older understanding, which was so convincing, was in fact just a belief and not a reality. However it comes about, the fact that it happened tells you certainly that the normal way you see things around you is not the only perspective, and this changes the value and importance that is given to everyday reality. Somebody might fight to hold on to their normal, or habitual, perspective because of fear. Even if we get glimpses of other virtual realities we find it too frightening to face the implications. So it is understandable and not to be judged if someone chooses to hold on to their limited world view and self view.

Still we can only extend the invitation to slowly reflect, not merely on the existence of other virtual realities, but on the possibility of the existence of an absolute reality which is in the background. Like the screen on the wall on which we project movies but the screen is always there. It’s always just a white cloth but it is the ultimate reality.

One of the mantras we use in Kundalini yoga / “Aad such, jugaad such, haibhee such, Naanak hosee Bhee such” is saying “that cloth, that white background, was there before the time, through the time, is still present now and after everything is coming and going, that reality will remain the case. So this to me is reality, this to me is the truth. Everything else is angles, perspectives, projections.

There are different metaphors that have been given through times to help us understand that there is a common element. For example waves coming from the ocean but the ocean remains the ocean. When we are not busy with the shapes and the shadows on the wall then we turn our attention to the light. But when the mind becomes busy then the light light refracts and produces form and image. Then we say “look it’s a horse” – but it is just dancing

shadows, just waves on the water.

AD: We are not able to perceive the whole ocean being tiny little as we are.

SCS: Not true, water is water so if you know the essence of one drop of water, the entire ocean is actually made of the same stuff. It is possible to know the whole all of something through knowing one part. We can think of fractals or holograms to give some explanation, but it is more than that. It is also intuitive or even a mystical understanding. In deep contemplative meditation you enter into real knowing. You become and therefore fully experience the inner nature of that drop of water, or whatever you choose to focus on. In the same way knowing a single grain of sand you can come to know the desert, which is countless pieces of the same thing. So also by reflection on your true nature, and coming to know yourself, then you will know the entire humanity, which is billions of selves existing in bodies made of the same 5 elements and the same dust as everybody.

Yet for true and false reasons we are still inclined to think of ourselves as distinct and individual. We exist as a mistaken identity in a personalized form of a common essence with the purpose of crystalizing to a distinct point of ecstasy that can be stable and self-radiant without the costume and decoration of this temporary mind/body system. Will we allow our consciousness to think that way? That depends on the case.

AD: Is it practical to think that way in our everyday life?

SCS: Neither practical or non-practical. Of course if you reflect deeply upon these questions then it will challenge and change the way you think, speak and behave. But this does not have to mean that I become dysfunctional, or that the practical life cannot be lived. What is before me is still before me. You are sitting in a chair and we are having this conversation. The fact that this has a transparency to it, that I am aware that this is the temporary passing scenario, theatre of life, and that the background reality ever remains clear, doesn't make me dysfunctional. This is not impractical, it could even be practical in the sense that it serves me not to be over-attached to the forms that appear in the everyday life in projecting reality.

AD: Does the Western society support us in getting to our excellence? Shouldn't we move somewhere else for better environment?

SCS: We have to be careful, just because we get inspired by so called Eastern philosophies it does not follow that we should automatically reject the Western world and everything in it. We incarnated, took birth, here in the West and we have to work with that and the various values and systems that we find around us. I will say only a few things now but you'd be surprised how long the list could be. The fact that we can package things to distribute them to people, the equipment, machinery, industry – why should that have no value? The fact that we put things in print, distribute them in various forms of transport. the fact that we have the telephones and the internet, the technology, the multi media communication system; think of its value in a crisis to spread news and information. The existence of modern medicine and all the results of endless research with all it has offered to society. Should all these things be considered only useless or bad?

It's not so much a civilization in the West and all its elements that are good or bad, helpful or

not, it's rather how I use them. Do I use them in such a way that serves me to my excellence, my greater consciousness and in a way that is not detrimental to others reaching their excellence. Am I applying it in that way?

We could ask me what particular part of Western civilization do we feel need to be treated with more caution or distance. The fact that we have this individualism is not inherently evil, we are here to go through civilization of individualism. This is what we are here for. The fact that it is captured in superficial form has, of course, its consequences but the impulse towards that individualization is not wrong, rather it is inevitable. There are many things in the Western society that actually nourish our individuality, in a corrupt way, in a distorted form, in a way that maybe feeds our mistaken identity and misses the point. None the less everything sooner or later can lead us to the real point.

AD: So the key is the usage?

SCS: Yes, largely it is a question of what you want to understand or what you want to achieve with this life and how you will use, abuse or lose the time and tools you have available.

AD: It's like with a knife: you cut bread with it or you stab someone.

SCS: Or you defend somebody from a murderer. The basic idea is simple enough and it is for each one to choose to evaluate their own life and the aspects of their current civilization identifying where is the strength, where is the weakness and what can be achieved with it. What merit, or value, does it has, and according to which temporary belief system.

AD: How do we measure advancement on spiritual path?

SCS: Mostly I think it is better not to and this is where the question of reality comes in. When you get busy measuring, then what are we measuring against? what is the reality reference that ensures an accuracy of your measurement? For all our comparing and competing what difference does it make? Like we've said you reach a personal level of excellence and then you realize this is just a beginning of a whole new journey. Next step is to go and share and help the others, serving them towards their own excellence. So the path may be never ending. How do you measure, how far you are on the way to infinity? No matter how far you go, infinity remains infinitely further along the road. So I think we have to be very careful of any kind of measuring. What is a person looking for when they are trying to measure advancement? This is the self-importance of the mistaken identity. The temporary personality also known as the ego-mind, has this tendency, like a donkey following a carrot, to look for approval, confirmation, and success. Society is well established with the purpose of bringing the mind into its program. How to make the child do well at school? You give them rewards and certificates, qualifications and prizes, badges and fun.

We have ego, we have the mind, and the mind tends to respond to reward. We cannot throw it away too quickly. We don't say to the child simply "no reward, no recognition for anything" because it would be a very rare child that wouldn't need that. Guru Naanak reached that when he was taken to the temple and given the, so called, sacred thread that a child gets at a certain age and he just broke it with his own hands. He said what is the value of this, can you

not give me a thread that does not break? The thread he was referring to was the True Name, the true sense of identity.

If someone would reach to that experience of the true and permanent sense of self then this would lead to the state and status of supreme excellence. There would be such a level of self-confidence in their being, then they don't need recognition of others. Honestly speaking that's probably very rare. Therefore, in the everyday life, we recognize some value in the temporary achievements and acknowledge it: "well done, we did it". We did 62 minutes of meditation or we did 3 days of white tantra, we did so much selfless service, we gave so much in charity – "well done, give yourselves a round of applause". So it's not right and it's not wrong but certainly limiting. There is a catch because we need this sense of progression to get us so far but in the meantime you get attached to one thing – the mistaken identity through reward. You have to give up needing a reward to make more progress. The journey is filled with paradoxes and contradictions. Consciousness and awakening is a breakthrough rather than a progressive journey. The curtain opens, the veil is dropped, the walls of limiting perspectives fall away, and suddenly there is the immeasurable, incomparable, incomprehensible light of consciousness. Until then all progress that can be measured is merely relative and of little or no fundamental importance.

So here we are, we don't need to say it's right or wrong, we can say it's all right that people do that. If somebody is asking about their progress on the way then at a certain moment, we might ask them - 'are you ready to let that go, to not make that important? Why are you asking, what do you need? Are you saying 'I am not feeling very confident, I am not sure if I am on the right way, I need verification.' Ok, we'll help you along and we'll check it out (using some invented false, temporary and relative measuring reference) and we'll do verification. We will give you approval, recognition, certification, qualification, whatever you want and will pay for. I say it like this just to raise the question of value of such things. However there is still some use for this approach. Like the mileage reading on a car that can indicate it is time to go for a service; like measuring the blood pressure to know if you need a lifestyle change; using a thermometer to check your temperature; taking a blood test to see if you need medication. In the same way there may be signs that indicate your progress towards a life influenced by spiritual insight or awareness. forgiveness, sacrifice, humility, compassion, equanimity, service and so on. The only problem is that these things can be faked and testing for them is not so straightforward as having a eye test at the doctor's clinic.

Measurements have a value in their own world where they are taken, interpreted and applied. On the spiritual way however, there is not only the progress of going through changes of our value system but the further, more radical, step of letting go of a value system that is measurable and meaningful only in the world of the rational ego/mind. At that step the idea of progress falls apart and the question of how far we might have come is meaningless.

AD: There is a widely used methodology used in projects to get a picture of the situation and your position in the picture.

SCS: The world as we know it turns around these visible and measurable signs (like the pass marks in exams). Therefore it is not suggested that it is to be rejected. Rather let it become more transparent. less dominating, and make yourself available for a different experience and awareness. Make yourself available to be flexible and see the world from different points of view. In this way contribute to more understanding between each other. And then Enjoy the paradox of taking a fixed position in order to make choices in, and communicate yourself to the world.

The invitation of spiritual path is always towards letting go of the exterior and material life, while deepening the inner sense of self that is independent of that. It's very important, we lose ourselves in the very attempt to seek answers. The path asks for letting go of attachments, perspectives, comparing, competing, knowing, controlling, assuming, compensating, justifying and much more. A lot of releasing yourself from these things, rather than getting attached and getting another measurement – how far I may have come?

Living a simple life of discipline replaces these things and guides us to just keep steady without thinking of the distance or objective of the journey. remember it is what the journey makes of you not where you arrive; what you become through the journey not what goal or destination is reached.

Should we communicate our spiritual discoveries to others? We have covered this – at a certain point it becomes imperative to share, but still some discipline is advised. We share if asked. The orientation is not to preach to, or force spiritual discoveries upon, others. How can I know my spiritual discoveries are real and not a lie? How can i be sure that they are relevant to another being. Unless there is a degree of empathy that allows me to be sufficiently attuned to your condition I may start preaching some sermon, laying out some knowledge, and it is not related to what's going on for you, to where you are right now. When you ask a question there is a lot of background thinking behind it. What informed your question? what is your set of beliefs, your perspective, your position, and where you are on your journey? What is it you are really looking for? How much do you want it? Why, what will you do with the answer? is this the good moment, are you ready for an unexpected answer? You see a deep reading of your question determines the response that is given.

AD: Yes, like now I am getting the answers to some of my questions but when asking questions I have also been thinking about our readers and it's changed my perspective a little.

SCS: Ok. By the way, since it is advised to share only if asked, it does imply that it is appropriate to be available, to be present. Just because nobody is asking it does not mean I should go and lock myself in my room, in a cave or monastery. Being available means having that sense that I am at service so if somebody should ask I will respond. Perhaps first with questions in order to fully get the sense of the question that has been asked. Sometimes we might feel that there is an unspoken question or need. Well then you can invite - "are you having a difficulty, would you like to speak about it?" Then the response tell you if there is a call for conversation or not.

A professional person makes their profession known, through advertising, business cards etc.

I am a consultant therefore how much do I imply when I offer a conversation? Am I offering according to a specified time limit, at a special location, and for a specified fee. Or is my offer is only making it known that I am available - this comes with the imperative. It's like flying a flag, lighting a candle in the window, firing a flare into the night's sky. But one does not need to make that much effort. As it is written in some scriptures that one who has been through that experience, reached that consciousness, broken out of the realm of limits, and whose quality has been tested in the higher realms they will bear a mark. That can be understood on the surface level or on a deeper level. The exterior mark that can be put on and taken off like a uniform; the priests wearing a collar or a robe, a Sikh with a turban, and so on. On another level it might not be something that can be removed or even hidden or camouflaged. Like a scar or a limp that tells you the person has been through something. Then there may be something far more subtle, unnoticed by most, yet inseparable from the person. A quality that has its own impact without any extra or special effort. This deep and subtle mark will make us avoid a person or be strangely drawn to want to speak to them. Such a person walks in, and mixes with, the world, present and available, yet with no special mission or message to declare. Like a book that only speaks if you open the pages, they will only speak if asked a question. The conversation will be short and to the point, unless you ask another question to turn the next page of the book of wisdom.

AD: Do the same rules apply to spiritual development and business development?

SCS: You can have both. Business does tend to have its corruptions but so does life in general. There is impurity in the world: the soil we walk upon, the water we drink, the air we breathe, there's impurity everywhere. But one can integrate more consciously, listen more, have sense of responsibility as people try to do with ecological awareness and our human contribution to global warming. So the same with spiritual sensitivity, born from consciousness, in business. Listen to the employees, listen to their needs and their ideas, more sharing of the profit and so on. There are many ways, a more conscious and communal approach can be taken.

There are spiritual insights, approaches that are relevant to business and are there material approaches that are relevant to your spiritual progress. If you look at it both ways, then you are more likely to find the meaningful interaction between the two. What can one offer to the other? So for example, a yoga teacher who completed the training knows how to teach but do they know how to establish their business as a yoga teacher. You may be inspired by the teachings but as to how to market your class you may not know.

Does it make sense to have personal website for you, what you're doing, what's your projection, how does the internet work and so on. How to manage finances, legal issues, how to manage a studio, what are health and safety issues, do you need liability insurance. Many elements of business may be needed, especially in the West, so that you are formally and practically set up to teach a yoga class. If it's not you, it's the yoga studio you are teaching for, or at, they are running a business, which makes it possible for you to even teach there. You may not believe in business and feel that you just want to teach. But it is important to respect that teaching, in most cases, is only possible because someone is running a business. The ideal is the ethical consciousness with which you run your business. How you run your business becomes a mark or expression of your spirituality. There doesn't have to be

conflict. Yet when we bring the spiritual and material together then each one gets challenged. Spirituality does not become something that just lives in the clouds and business is not only for profit at the cost of other people's well-being. If the two come face to face, each one has to make some compromises and be transformed. Spirituality becomes less monastic or hermetic and business becomes less gross and selfish. In this way the two serve each other. Both these things become less competing, more supporting.

In spirituality, short and long-term planning are connected. I need my daily routine in my spiritual practice but I need to understand consequences of my actions over long-term perspective. Long-term in spirituality means beyond this life. In spirituality you do make investments. Every kriya you do is an investment, every meditation you do is an investment, taking care of your diet is an investment, how you live is an investment, and your personal welfare of caring for your family is an investment. Building community, neighborhood and the global community it's all an investment.

In business there may tend to be a short term view of investment. Getting rich quick, like cut all the trees, drain the soil till we can no longer grow anything on it. Spiritual insight brings the long term view. Then we take care of the land and the earth. We want to be able to sustain the farming over a long time and give our children a world that can sustain them. All these things can work on many levels. There has to be cross-relationship. Only that makes sense.

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