



MOTH & THE FLAME  
SAWAN ASHRAM  
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*Ashram* is the Sanskrit word for refuge, a sanctuary, a place of higher learning, a quiet place in nature specifically suited for imparting spiritual knowledge from master to disciple. When the land for Sawan Ashram was acquired, it was a sparsely inhabited forest on the outskirts of Old Delhi. Dedicated in 1951, the ashram's foundation stone was laid by Sant Kirpal Singh himself, sprinkled with dust he had gathered from the threshold of his Master's Dera or hermitage. (This recalled for me my earlier vision of cosmic dust, and its unusual significance.)

Over the years, an urban tide surged around the ashram's perimeter, and the area became a busy town. However, the moment one passed through the wrought-iron gate, beyond the outer babble and traffic's din, one entered an island-oasis, saturated with brightness so palpable that I sometimes chortled, 'this charged atmosphere can be sliced, served on a plate and eaten!'

The ashram was an international school of longing and awakening, a nucleus around which innumerable hearts were caused to turn and flare, to orbit in a kind of dervish dance without form. I soon learned, however, that ashram life was not a 'piece of cake.' Facing and changing mind's habitual tendencies is ever a formidable task—one often prefaced by intense personal turmoil. But for those willing to sacrifice their lower nature for the higher, there is no better accelerator of inner growth when combined with individual practice of the Word. Visitors to this mystic perfumery, whether buying or browsing without commitment, inevitably received some of the Master's fragrance, or grace, as largesse.

I soon settled into the rhythms of this esoteric community, enjoying it immensely. The experience was an intensely personal one, centered in the Master-teacher/disciple-student relationship. There were profound lessons to be learned from the discourses and informal sessions, if not from just observing the Master in a kaleidoscope of actions and interactions. Trying to put one's deepening understanding into practice during the daily round was a constant challenge. One learned, like Robert The Bruce's persistent spider, that success at any level often requires many a temporary fall.



*In the mornings, Master often put visitors into meditation in the ashram courtyard. Instructions were detailed and accompanied by sweeping hand gestures contracting to a point between the eyes, which he would tap with his finger to demonstrate the location of the third-eye. On this particular morning, I had been long peering through the camera, just waiting for the perfect moment. Finally, he looked penetratingly through the camera, and into my being. Click! Then, eyes closed for the inner journey.*

There was immanent beauty and charm in Sant Kirpal Singh's discourses whether delivered in his native Punjabi and Hindi, or in fluent English (learned in youth while attending a Christian mission school). He was also well versed in classical Persian, and his knowledge of the world's religious scriptures was nothing less than encyclopedic. He knew by heart the 1,400 page Adi Granth of the Sikhs, and whenever he wanted to illustrate a point, freely quoted the Bible, the Koran, Vedanta, and luminaries such as Rumi, Buddha, Bulleh Shah, Wordsworth, Emerson and others. No matter how obtuse a subject, he picked up its universal thread in a way that both scholar and unlettered could comprehend his gist. His language was simple, powerful and unadorned; his accent difficult to identify and challenging for the Western newcomer. He was fond of parables and maxims drawn from village life. His sense of humor was highly developed, but so subtle and dry, it would sneak up and catch one unawares. Once caught in it one might almost expire from laughter. He once joked, 'A saint who never laughs is a sad saint.' When someone once asked him, 'Sir, how should we address you?' he chuckled and humbly replied, 'Just call me Mister Zero.'

Harish Chaddha, the editor of the Urdu and Hindi Sat Sandesh magazines, shared one of his experiences: 'I had once again been late with the Master's work; I went to him like a truant before the class teacher. But to my surprise the Master was not forthcoming with the usual reprimand. Instead he started off by talking of the special purpose God has in fashioning each individual object in creation. Then, planting his eyes on me, he ended, "I believe God made you to serve as a touchstone for testing the patience of a saint!"'

His first discourse that I attended was informally delivered in a local disciple's garden on January 28, 1967. He spoke of one of the greatest of human frailties, certainly one of mine, that of judging others. Excerpts follow:

*If we realize that death is certain, there will be a change in our life. We must remain attentive in meditation; if not, the mind will think of others and judge their actions. Instead of the good in others, we take their negative qualities to be our guiding factor. Beware, for, 'As you think so you become.'*

*God has said: 'He is my loveliest child who sees Me in others.'*

*Thoughts are very potent. Have a sweet tongue, honeyed with humility; it should not injure the feelings of others. You aspire to love God, yet you curse those in whom He resides; injuring the feelings of others is a great sin. If you have to face a person with evil qualities, it is better to move to one side. It is easy to seek God, but very difficult to mend yourself. If we realized that God resides in others, would we want to hurt them? If others won't give up their evil ways of hurting, why should you depart from your sweet ways of helping?*

*I have selected the best piece of advice; now it's up to you to follow it or not. God has given us this tongue to glorify Him and to sing His praises; not to hurt the feelings of others.*

Whether meeting him one-on-one or in huge throngs, practically everyone experienced an unforgettable loving power emitting from his eyes. Even if that glance lasted no longer than a flash, it seared deep into the psyche. Many, upon seeing him for the first time, would start quaking in their shoes and burst into tears, including those who had forgotten how. His glances would run the gamut of father-stern to mother-tender in the blink of an eye, yet shining through the mask was an immutable theocentric, consciousness-raising Light. Like the Masters of ancient time, Sant Kirpal Singh was one with the heart of Light.