

Guru Nanak's Religious Pluralism and Sri Guru Granth Sahib



Mool Mantar as scribed by-
Bhai Gurdas in the Kartarpuri Bir

**Harbans Lal
Roshan Attrey**

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Roshan Attrey

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Sri Guru Granth Sahib

Guru Nanak
Foundation

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Guru Nanak was a man of God, not of religion. Amidst the xenophobia and religiosities of the 15th century, he treated all religions as diverse ways of worshiping the same Creator. He shared his poetic meditations with people of diverse faiths through recitation and music, and went on to found a tradition of interfaith dialogue across South Asia, East Asia, and the Middle East.

Sri Guru Granth Sahib is the bani (hymns) of Guru Nanak, five of his successors, and thirty Bhagats and Mureeds, compiled by Fifth Guru Arjan into what we know as the Aadi Granth (1604), and finalized and canonized by Tenth Guru Gobind Singh as the eternal Guru (1708). The symbol of Ik Onkaar orients all toward the Transcendental Reality that is worshiped by Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Jews, and others.

In this book, Dr. Harbans Lai and Dr. Roshan Attrey elucidate what the Guru Granth authors tutored their Sikhs and Mureeds. It focuses on how followers connect to Sabd (i.e., Shabad, the Guru's hymns), and in doing so become genuine seekers of divine wisdom. Several chapters, supported by the Guru Granth and Sikh theologian Bhai Gurdas, examine how the human Guru concept evolved into the Sabd Guru and then into the eternal Guru. Dr. Lai and Dr. Attrey expound Guru Nanak's religious pluralism and how it works through the bani of his successors, and highlight how the Gurbani succeeds as a unique interfaith scripture for the world.

GURU NANAK'S
RELIGIOUS PLURALISM
AND
SRI GURU GRANTH SAHIB

Harbans Lal
Roshan Attrey

GURU NANAK FOUNDATION, NEW DELHI

GURU NANAK'S RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

AND SRI GURU GRANTH SAHIB

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On His 550th Birth Anniversary
in the year 2019

To Guru Nanak who lighted our way
*- with the hope for a more loving,
connected, and enlightened world*

CONTENTS

MESSAGE	ii
ACCLAIM	iii
FOREWORD	iii
PREFACE	viii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	xiii
CHAPTER 1	1
INTRODUCTION	1
Human Engagement with the Creator and Creation	1
One Creator Many Forms	2
Among the Youngest, Sikhism	3
Guru Nanak's Religious Pluralism	3
How Sikhism Evolved: A Thumbnail View	4
Sri Guru Granth Sahib and the Authors	5
Organization of the Book	6
CHAPTER 2	8
THE GURU: The Teacher Of Heart And Mind	8
Evolution of the Guru Concept	8
October 1708	10
The Guru without Precedence	12
CHAPTER 3	14
SRI GURU GRANTH SAHIB: The World Without Frontiers	14
Gurbani - the Article of Faith	14
The Guru Perpetual and Everlasting	15
The Universality	17
Poetic Devices	19
Conclusion	20
CHAPTER 4	22
REVEALED THEOLOGY	22
Revelations	24
Revelations (Inspirations) to Guru Nanak	25

How Revelation Transforms Nanak _____	27
Guru Nanak's Interfaith Dialogues _____	31
The perpetuation of Guru Nanak's Revelation _____	31
Conclusion _____	33
CHAPTER 5 _____	34
SIKH THEOLOGY Versus HISTORY _____	34
History's Detours to Theology _____	35
Watch out for History infiltrating Theology _____	35
Thus Decreed the Sikh Gurus: Follow the Guru Granth Theology _____	36
Looking into the Future: Innovative Planning _____	37
Scripture vs. History: The Issue of Sikh Theology _____	42
Conclusion _____	46
CHAPTER 6 _____	49
DIVERSITY IN SPIRITUAL ECOLOGY _____	49
Guru Nanak's Vision of Spiritual Pluralism _____	49
Pluralistic World means Diversity in Human Ecology _____	50
One Purpose _____	52
Many Mythologies for Many Scenarios _____	55
Sri Guru Granth Sahib the Interfaith Scripture _____	61
Spirituality Unshackled from Divisive Ethnicity _____	63
Discourage Profiling and Labeling _____	67
Diversity in the Gurus' Life Style _____	70
The Metaphor of the Orchard _____	73
Conclusion _____	77
CHAPTER 7 _____	81
THE SIKH WAY OF WORSHIP: Venerate the Sacred	
Scripture As Guru _____	81
The Tradition of Deity Worship _____	82
Evolution of the Guru Worship in Early Sikh Traditions _____	84
Worship in the Early Sikh Tradition _____	87
Rejection of Conventional Components of Worship _____	88
<i>Paath Deedar</i> Replaces Pooja _____	90
The Object of Sikh Worship _____	92

The Word (<i>Sabd</i> or <i>Shabad</i>) Becomes Guru _____	94
Images of <i>Sabd</i> (<i>Shabad</i>) in Guru Worship _____	94
The Guru Granth Worship: <i>Shabad Deedar</i> Needs Gurbani Knowledge _____	99
<i>Paath Deedar</i> defines a True Sikh _____	102
Conclusion _____	105
CHAPTER 8 _____	107
SEEKING THE WORD: The Sikh Vehicle For	
Contemplation _____	107
Daily Code of <i>Paath Deedar da Dhyan</i> _____	108
Sikh Code on <i>Ardaas</i> _____	108
Preparing for Daily Path _____	109
Concept and Practice of <i>Dhyan</i> and <i>Paath Dhyan</i> _____	114
<i>Paath Dhyan</i> or Gurbani “Mentation” _____	117
The <i>Paath Deedar</i> Process: A Cookbook Lesson _____	119
<i>Paath Deedar</i> : The Gurus’ Choice of Meditation _____	122
Meditation of Mindfulness _____	122
How to Tell the <i>Paath</i> ’s Effectiveness? _____	123
Conclusion _____	124
CHAPTER 9 _____	127
THE LEAP OF FAITH _____	127
CHAPTER 10 _____	132
CHANTING THE HYMNS _____	132
CHAPTER 11 _____	138
MIND IN A STATE OF DISCONNECT _____	138
Troubling Absence of Any Gain _____	139
Listening with Inattentive Mind _____	141
A Protean Mind _____	142
Mind’s Protean Nature _____	145
Origins of a Protean Mind _____	148
Cultural Milieu Promoting Restlessness _____	152
Come Home, My Mind, Meet the Guru _____	157
Empty Your Mind of Baggage _____	160
Conclusion _____	163

CHAPTER 12	165
THEOLOGY OF MOOL MANTAR: The Commencing	
Verse Of Sri Guru Granth Sahib	165
Mantra	167
The Sikh View of Mantra	168
To Realize the Goals of Life	170
Exegesis of <i>Mool Mantar</i>	176
Conclusion	192
CHAPTER 13	194
CONCLUSION	194
NOTES and WORKS CITED	198

MESSAGE

These are proud and blissful moments for us that we are celebrating the 550th Birth Anniversary of Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji. Gurmat enlightens us and tells us that the commemoration of our Divine Mentors makes us wiser and more optimistic.

Guru Nanak Foundation, New Delhi has decided to bring out a set of five seminal books on Sikh philosophy as our tribute to the sacred memory of Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji. By doing so, we are carrying forward the legacy of the Panth Rattan Dr. S. Inderjit Singh, formerly President of Guru Nanak Foundation, New Delhi. We believe that the spiritual guidance of the Founding Guru is an ever-fresh fountain of life and enlightening ideas and doctrines.

The book by Dr. Bhai Harbans Lal and Dr. Roshan Atrey is one in the series highlighting this eternal truth. I highly appreciate their scholarly elucidation of the way the Guru Granth Sahib ought to be approached by Sikh believers and non-Sikh seekers of a spiritual path. I am grateful to Dr. Jaspal Singh, formerly Vice Chancellor, Punjabi University, Patiala and S. Tarlochan Singh, formerly Chairman, National Commission for Minorities, Government of India, for supporting our venture and highlighting the merits of the book. I also thank Dr. Kehar Singh, formerly Chairman, Punjab School Education Board, for reviewing the manuscript and making valuable suggestions.

I pray to the Almighty that these commemorative celebrations enthuse our endeavours with innovative ideas and enable us to understand our present circumstances, aims, and future prospects in the light of Guru Nanak Dev Ji's teachings. We feel blessed offering this book to the followers of the Panth Guru.

Harpreet Singh

President

Guru Nanak Foundation, New Delhi

ACCLAIM

The distinctiveness of Sri Guru Granth Sahib lies in its strong emphasis on religious pluralism. It is quite explicit in accepting and respecting the identities of different religious traditions. Not only this, the *bani* (the verses) of the sacred Sikh scripture appreciates and glorifies pluralism, and it views the diversity of the world as its beauty and strength.

Furthermore, the *bani* clearly manifests that religious pluralism is not a matter of knowing other religious traditions, but respectfully interacting and having open dialogues with them. Undoubtedly, Guru Nanak's philosophy of interfaith understanding through dialogue is the only way to attain peace, progress, and unity in the world.

I appreciate and congratulate Dr. Harbans Lal and Dr. Roshan Attrey wholeheartedly for writing this valuable and felicitous book. Prepared with immense love for the divine message of Sri Guru Granth Sahib, it will definitely attract widespread attention of readers across the world.

DR. JASPAL SINGH

Formerly Vice Chancellor
Punjabi University, Patiala, Punjab

FOREWORD

It is an honor and a privilege for me to write this foreword. I have devoted my life to serving people of India, particularly my Sikh community. Since my school days, I have been advocating Sikh causes. On many occasions, I have visited Sikh diaspora in various continents and shared my knowledge of the teachings and values of my religion. During those visits, I realized how important it was for Sikhs to use English, the most international language, in their communication about the Sikh religion and Sikh issues. I also recognized that they had a dire need for English language books on Sikh teachings and Sikh heritage. Naturally, when my long-time colleague Dr. Bhai Harbans Lal told me about the book he was writing with co-author Dr. Roshan Attrey, I felt elated.

The book covers the subject close to my heart: it elucidates how the wisdom-seeking Sikhs derive their guidance and inspiration from their Guru that lives in the hymns of Sri Guru Granth Sahib. It discusses the selected themes of the sacred Sikh scripture with clarity and eloquence. The subject should impel every English-knowing Sikh to read it. Non-Sikh readers, too, will likely be interested in learning how profoundly and inseparably the humanity and Divinity are connected in the Granth Sahib. And especially the millennial Sikhs, I expect, will find the book highly valuable.

Dr. Harbans Lal and I have known each other since our school days, i.e., for about seventy years. We were colleagues in the school of the All India Sikh Students Federation (AISSF) from its beginning years. I view Bhai Sahib as a highly acclaimed scholar, writer, and public speaker. He has published extensively in his profession and is now a professor-and-chair emeritus of pharmacology and neuroscience from the University

of North Texas Health Science Center at Fort Worth, Texas. American College of Neuropsychopharmacology included him in the archives of the most productive medical scientists of the past 50 years. For 14 years he served as Editor-in-Chief of Drug Development Research, a monthly medical research journal. The Society of Neuroscience honored him with the title of Distinguished Neuroscientist.

Outside of his professional career, Dr. Lal has devoted his entire life to serving and promoting Sikh causes, with a focus on Sikh religion and the Guru Granth Sahib. He holds an extensive record of writing and speaking on, and organizing events related to, Gurmat, Sikhi, and Sikh communities. For his achievements and services, he has received numerous honors and awards. He especially cherishes the honorary title ‘Bhai Sahib’ conferred on him first by the All India Sikh Students Federation (AISSF) and then by Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), referred to as the Sikh Parliament. Guru Nanak Dev University at Amritsar has also honored him with the honorary degree of Doctor of Literature.

Presently, in his mid-80’s, Dr. Lal is writing a blog “Seeking Wisdom” to share his knowledge and wisdom with the world on Sikhi, Gurmat, the Guru Granth Sahib, Sikh history, and Sikh community.

Co-author Dr. Roshan Attrey is a retired English professor. He had a distinguished career as professor and chair of English and foreign languages, dean of liberal arts, and assistant vice president for academic affairs at Livingstone College, Salisbury, North Carolina, USA.

Dr. Attrey enjoys writing on cultural and religious subjects. His articles have been published in *The Charlotte Observer*, the *Saathee* magazine, and *The Sikh Review*, Kolkata. He has also been invited by Indian universities to serve as an examiner for Ph.D. dissertations in English and American literature.

As part of his social and cultural life, Dr. Attrey has long since been serving the Charlotte-area Indian American

community through writing, speaking, and organizational activities. Among those activities, stands out his volunteer work as a founding secretary and board member of the Sikh Heritage Society of Greater Charlotte; a founding board member of India Association of Charlotte and a chair of the Festival of India; a board member of the Hindu Center; and an appointed member of the Mayor's International Cabinet in Charlotte.

These two authors, coming from diverse backgrounds, have contributed to the making of the book in different measures. They met first time in Charlotte, North Carolina, as participants in the upcoming Inaugural Event of the Gurdwara Sahib of Charlotte held on October 26, 2003. The event included the International Seminar on Sikhism. Dr. Lal, the Seminar Coordinator, had invited Sikh scholars from the United States, Canada, and India. Dr. Attrey recorded the seminar proceedings and published about it and the inaugural function in *The Sikh Review*, Kolkata. The following year Dr. Lal asked his new friend from Charlotte to join him in writing this book on the Guru Granth Sahib.

The work is based on Dr. Harbans Lal's profound devotion to Sikhi and Sri Guru Granth Sahib. It represents his lifelong endeavor as a Sahajdhari Sikh to comprehend Gurmat and the Sikh scripture and to share his understanding through writing – which, spanned over eight decades, beginning in Haripur, the erstwhile British India (now Pakistan), developing in India, and then blossoming and culminating in the United States.

And the work takes its present form from Dr. Attrey's years-long dedication, diligence, and hard work in writing, organizing, and revising it. He has endeavored not only to make it lucid and reader-friendly, but he has also contributed to its content considerably. The result is a book that is unified, coherent, readable, unique, and suitable for the audience from different faiths.

The authors recognize the unfathomable character of the Sikh scripture – they do not claim their work to be an exhaustive

study of the themes. While keeping their focus mainly on the selected issues, they have provided the background of historical and religious ideas and facts that many readers may need in order to understand Sikhism and the Sikh scripture appropriately.

Those unacquainted with Sikhi or the Sikh scripture would find it fascinating to learn how the Guru concept evolved in Sikhism in contrast to Hinduism and other Indian religions. The book reviews the reasons why the Tenth Sikh Guru installed this scripture as the eternal Guru. It explains the purposes and manner in which the Sikhs revere Gurbani, the verses in the Guru Granth Sahib.

Similarly, many non-Sikh readers would be amazed to learn that *kirtan*, the sacred music, occupies the most central aspect of the Sikh congregational services and that no Gurdwara service may be complete without it. They will also learn the significance of the Sikh insignia, ੴ, *Ik Onkaar*.

Though many other writers tend to mix history and tradition in their reading of the Sikh scripture, I am pleased with the authors' view on this subject. They state in the Preface that "The Guru Granth Sahib should primarily define, guide, and validate the religious and spiritual teachings for the Sikhs rather than history and tradition." The book underscores this thought throughout.

The book is unique in that it offers an understanding and vision of the sacred Sikh scripture and Sikhism not found elsewhere, especially in the way it approaches readers in the East and West. It describes the Sikh religion as Guru Nanak had envisioned it – pluralistic, inclusive, and contemporary. It appropriately presents the Guru Granth Sahib as an interfaith scripture with particular relevance and appeals to all. The book points out "many of the issues confronting our diverse and pluralistic world," particularly the world that emerged after 9/11 (Preface).

I would highly recommend the book to readers of all stripes, Sikh and non-Sikh, scholar and lay, and suggest that they read it

from cover to cover. The Preface and Introduction orient the reader to appreciate and comprehend the book better.

An important side note to this foreword: In 2019 Sikhs all over the world are planning to celebrate the 550th Parkash Utsav of Guru Nanak Dev Ji. I urge them to focus a little less on the magnitude of processions, *kirtan darbars*, and *langars*, and a little more on the magnificence of the Guru's message. Unfortunately, while planning large-scale celebrations, we often forget to plan how to share Sikhi across the globe. I ask Sikhs to get involved in disseminating Sikh philosophy and in sharing the message of Gurbani and do so with humility and humanity befitting a Guru's Sikh.

The modern world is seeking the peace of mind. Since the Guru Granth Sahib is an inexhaustible source of peace, joy, and growth, let us orient the world to it – make it accessible to people. Bhai Harbans Lal and Dr. Roshan Attrey have attempted to do just that. Their work will likely introduce countless people to the sacred Sikh scripture and Sikhism, thereby serving the cause of Sikhi. And the book – please note – will make a good gift for Sikhs to give their friends and relatives.

In closing, I want to applaud Dr. Harbans Lal and Dr. Roshan Attrey for writing this book. Readers across the world, I sincerely hope, will find it an essential source of learning about Sikhism and the Sikh scripture, and recognize how Divinity and humanity merge in the Sikh approach to the Creator. Moreover, I believe that the Guru Granth Sahib will always be, as the authors have so fervently expressed, an ever-continuing Guru *shabad langar*, available to all regardless of their color, caste, creed, race, social status, or gender.

TARLOCHAN SINGH

Formerly Member of Parliament and
Chairman, National Commission for Minorities
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January 2, 2019

PREFACE

Sri Guru Granth Sahib, the subject of our book, is Guru Nanak and his successors' vision of Sikhi and religious pluralism. An unfathomable sea of spiritual learning, it guides the destiny of millions of people. We feel its grandeur and complexity as we attempt to write about it. Moreover, as we write, we realize the limitations of our knowledge and skill. We approach our subject with humility.

Our main goal is to make certain select themes of the Guru Granth Sahib intelligible to readers across the globe, Sikh and non-Sikh. While we commend the most studies done in the past, they do not adequately serve the need of most young seekers and the Western laity to know and follow the scripture because they are often written in a complex Punjabi or English language that the latter cannot easily understand. Moreover, our work becomes all the more important in the post-9/11 world since it addresses many of the issues confronting our diverse, pluralistic world.

We the authors come from different backgrounds, and our differences have only helped us approach our subject more objectively. One (Harbans Lal) grew up through the escalating struggles of the 1930's and 1940's British India in Haripur, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and the ordeals of the post-partitioned India in Punjab. The other (Roshan Attrey) grew up rather removed from the partition's ordeals, in the quiet Shivalik hills, the Northern Himalayas foothills, with the prospect of earning an education he could not have had in the colonial India. While the former became a pharmacologist-cum-neuroscientist, the latter, a professor of English language and literature. One has spent most of his life reading and understanding Sikhi and the Guru Granth Sahib and serving the Sikh community at large. The other, grown up as Hindu, has spent over two decades serving the Gurdwara

and studying Sikhism – thanks to his Sikh wife and Sikh friends in Charlotte.

And then, as luck would have it, the Gurdwara Sahib in Charlotte brought the two together, at its inaugural celebrations in October 2003, leading us to become friends and coauthors.

It took us many years to write this book, wrestling, for instance, with the nuances of the English language and the accuracy of the meaning of religious-spiritual terms and ideas. We think our differences have only enriched the book, enabling us to make it thought-provoking, informative, and objective. We have tried to make it lucid and readable and to create one voice. Its content is mostly the product of the former's understanding of Sikhi, and its form is largely the product of the latter's judgment of the English language and the art of writing.

There are numerous ways to read and interpret the Guru Granth Sahib, but none do we recommend as most suitable. The way or approach depends on the author – his or her background and goals. Therefore, we would like to state below some of the main ideas, assumptions, or guidelines underlying the writing of this book, which might help the reader understand it better:

1. The Guru Granth Sahib should primarily define, guide, and validate the religious and spiritual lives of Sikhs rather than history and tradition. The religious and spiritual truth should primarily be what the scripture says. Anything outside the bounds of what was approved by the Tenth Guru in his last sermon should at most be secondary if not unnecessary. In other words, the Guru Granth Sahib should constitute Sikhi rather than Sikh history and tradition.
2. We struggle with a dilemma as authors, perhaps a common experience of many others writing on the scripture: How to separate the content of the book (the scripture) from its form – the context from the text, one part from the other, the metaphor from its figurative

meaning, or the allusion from its referent? Meanings are embedded and interwoven in the text and context, causing various interpretations and disagreements among followers and readers.

3. Each reader or believer responds differently to a *sabd* (hymn or verse), commonly spelled and pronounced as *shabad*, from the Guru Granth Sahib and finds a different meaning in it. Believers find direction and consolation from the shabads of their own choice, and the choice depends on their temperaments, proclivities, and desires. The appeal of the scripture may be through the style of language, the kind of metaphors, or the type of content. The choice and appeal of a shabad may also depend on how well the text describes, defines, or resonates with the believer's state of mind and what is lying hidden in that state or resting on its surface. No two readers or believers may respond to a passage the same way simply because they are two different human beings, a product of their environments and other forces that shaped them.
4. The Guru Granth Sahib provides spiritual sustenance and guidance to the traditionalist as well as the modern believer, including one who is just looking for an anchor, something to believe in. The Sikh sacred scripture offers the message of a monotheistic religion expressing the yearning of the believer to be united with the universal father or mother called *Ik (Ek) Onkaar*, Waheguru, or God, in a manner its authors – the Gurus and Bhagats – felt inspired to describe Him/Her/It. It is imbued with a modern spirit, which finds its best expression in such values as democracy, pluralism, freedom, and individuality.
5. The Sikh scripture is not a manifesto for political or economic liberation. A discussion of the socio-politico-religious aspects of Sikh history remains outside the scope of this book, except where it seems warranted by the

scripture and pertinent to our elucidation of the text and the scripture. Also, there, such discussion is used only to explain an aspect of theology that may best be explained by illustrations from contemporary history.

6. The scripture deals primarily with truths transcending the scientific or secular. It speaks of natural and supernatural truths, God and His creation, humanity and community, and social-cultural life. To claim that our religion is scientific or secular based on the scripture, as many may have been trying to do, seems not so relevant to us; after all, we cannot perform scientific experiments on religious content – saying so, though, does not mean that it does not have such elements in it. In short, it is unnecessary to claim scientific or secular truths in the scripture, and any attempts to prove it so would be a needless distraction to the believers because doing it so would be an attempt to prove that our religion is principally about provable things.
7. The Granth encompasses the provable and improvable, the rational and irrational, the mundane and supernatural. It is a book of religious faith that fulfills the human need for religious experience and liberation, providing moral, religious, and communal guidance as needed. It needs not be defined by science and technology, and its truths are not to be judged by any contradictions that rational mind may not comprehend.

In this study, we focus on such topics that we consider central to our own as well as others' understanding and appreciation of the Sikh scripture and religion (others include Sikhs and non-Sikhs). We acknowledge we are not attempting to be comprehensive.

These are the topics we have discussed: the Guru concept and the Sikh scripture; Guru Nanak's sacred words serving as articles of faith for the Sikhs and his religious pluralism; revealed theology; multiple authors of the Guru Granth Sahib; the great leap of faith serving as a process of initiation into the

Sikh faith; the Sikh worship and meditation; interaction between the divine and the human, including the significance of soul and its relationship with cosmos; significance of music in a religious pursuit (sacred recitation and kirtan-singing); and theology of *Mool Mantar*.

At the same time, we wish to show wherever feasible that the Granth has a significant appeal to 21st century readers because it is an interfaith scripture for the benefit of all people and is characterized by a reflection of modern ethos, a universal spirit that touches human life across the barriers of time and space.

We sincerely hope that readers across the world, Sikhs and other faith communities, would find our work enlightening and enriching – especially young Sikh readers in the Western diaspora, who may not have the advantage of cultural and linguistic nourishment vital for understanding the contexts, form, and content of their scripture. We expect it to be a valuable source of reference in libraries and homes, and a means to augment a non-Sikh appreciation for the Sikh faith (Sikhi) and Sikh community. At the same time, we very much hope that readers will provide their feedback, adding to our knowledge and helping us prepare for an updated version.

HARBANS LAL, Ph.D., D.Litt. (Hon.)
ROSHAN ATTREY, Ph.D.

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We acknowledge specific use of all our sources to the best of our ability in Notes and Works Cited. We also thank online SGGS translations and public domain information. *We want to mention too that, since the English spellings of many non-English terms are not standardized, a number of terms may not have been spelled uniformly in the book.* And we apologize for any oversight on our part, for any errors of omission and commission.

To Readers: We present this book not as experts but learners, wishing to share our limited knowledge and understanding of Sikhi and the Guru Granth Sahib. *We would like to hear your comments, criticism, and suggestions and to address them hopefully in the future.*

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Human Engagement with the Creator and Creation

Perhaps there never was a time when people did not look up to the sky and bow to the Supreme Being, the Awesome Wisdom. They addressed their prayers in different languages and faith traditions, hoping they would be heard. They waited for enlightenment whenever the earthly existence felt too burdensome; they expressed gratitude when being alive felt good. Were their prayers heard? They knew they were, the scriptures tell us.

We don't know when humans first heard the Cosmic Voice and transcribed it as the divine command. Over thousands of years, the various individuals, communities, and nationalities have heard it and continue to do so. They have heard it innumerable times, though perhaps not the same command each time, and assigned it meanings according to their genetic makeup, culture, language, and country. Essentially, that command received and interpreted variously, morphed into various scriptures, resulting in the birth of different faiths, *dharmas*, religions, spiritual paths, and religious communities. Thus, the divine message was received numerous times by the Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, Jews, Christians, Muslims, Native Americans, and others as a response to their concerns and prayers, addressing the exigencies of their times.

Sometimes the human transaction with the Cosmic Voice was personal – like one that Christians experience in their relationship with Jesus Christ, Muslims through their prophet and Holy Scripture, or Hindus with Lord Krishna or other *avatars* of their Supreme Being. Sometimes it was impersonal – like one that Sikhs feel in their belief in *Ik Onkaar*, the Almighty Waheguru (One God, Infinite Wisdom), manifested in the creation; or followers of the Vedanta, particularly Upanishads, in their belief in *That One*.

As communities of believers grew in the East and the West, individual or communal beliefs kept evolving under pressure of diverse forces and taking shape as belief systems called faiths, *dharmas*, or religions. And communities chose or accepted designations by which to address their Supreme Being. Although it is – or it must be – one Supreme Reality (as described in South Asian *dharmic* contexts), the perception and understanding of *That One* changed according to the time, place, culture, and language of the founder(s) of a religion and/or the community. And as times rolled on, the followers of each religion came to accept beliefs that sometimes were grounded in a reality based on facts and other times in a reality based on consensus among godmen and the group dynamics.

One Creator Many Forms

Call Him (or Her or It) by any name you please – *Ik Onkaar*, Waheguru, Ram (Rama), Allah, God, Jehovah, or Jesus; worship Him or *That One* as it gratifies you; all human encounters with the Omnipotent are special and unique. Although individual or communal belief in religious uniqueness transmutes often into believers' claims of religious superiority, rejecting other faiths as acceptable paths to the Creator and frequently leading to an ongoing strife, even wars, among competing religions, probably all religions accept the Supreme Being as a central object of human worship and an eternal source of power. Notwithstanding any differences and divisions, they

believe that He or *That One* is the Creator and Keeper of the universe and an all-pervasive, omnipotent, cosmic wisdom and power.

Among the Youngest, Sikhism

Most of the world's major religions were born either in India or the Middle East: Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism in the former; Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Baha'ism in the latter. Among the youngest, Sikhism, the sacred scripture of which is the subject of this book, was born in medieval India more than five centuries ago – 1469 AD being the year of the Founder Guru Nanak's birth and 1496 AD the year of his enlightenment and revelation.

Guru Nanak's Religious Pluralism

Before Guru Nanak embarked on his Divine Mission, he told his parents, "There is a call from Heaven; I must go whither He directs me to go."¹ He was divinely inspired to ameliorate the world. He saw human suffering and oppression all around him. So, to accomplish his mission, Guru Nanak commenced his travels, with two of his followers, one of Hindu and the other of Muslim background, and held interfaith dialogues at numerous places in South Asia, East Asia, and the Middle East.

As a result, he had the opportunity to meet with people of other religions, to teach them and learn from them, and thereby to build bridges with them. He urged his followers and all other people to extend their love and understanding to all people, and he affirmed their humanity without prejudice. In addition, he shared his poetic meditations with other people, which took the form of reciting and singing sacred verses called *sabds* (*shabads*) and collectively his *bani*. This was an innovative approach to helping people appreciate interfaith dialogues and encounters and to elevate humankind in a 15th century world of xenophobia, where people had grown up fearing the cruelty and injustice of the alien ruler and his representatives.

He employed his novel approach to stemming the ongoing degeneration of medieval society. Essentially, he regenerated it and set the course for his nine successors to build up a new way of life with a scripture of its own. Thus, his poetic meditations became the foundation for the Sikh scripture, Sri Guru Granth Sahib.

Guru Nanak saw all religions as different ways of worshipping the same Supreme Being. The *mool mantar* he composed orients a Sikh and a non-Sikh alike to the same Transcendental Reality that is worshiped by Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Jews, and others. In short, the founding Guru was a genuine religious pluralist. His spirituality was universal. And the nine Gurus after him and his disciples – Sikhs and Mureeds² – followed in his footsteps with respect to their beliefs in God and humanity.

How Sikhism Evolved:

A Thumbnail View

Sikhism, theologically known as *Gurmat* or *Sikhi* (*Sikhee*), was born in a period of religious renaissance known as the Bhakti movement among Indian religions and Sufism among Abrahamic religions. This religious movement was brought about by poets and prophets through their poems, hymns, beliefs, dialogues, and activism. In a certain sense, we might compare it to the European Reformation Movement, which swept through Europe, giving rise to Protestantism and the early modern society.

Ever since its inception, the Sikh religion, with its novel meaning of religion, has been growing and evolving in an ongoing interaction with the world. The primary arena for Sikhism's progressive evolution as well as its history has been South Asia. The principal faiths it has contended with, during its development period from the first Guru to the tenth Guru, are Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam. And in the two hundred years

of its development under the ten Gurus, Sikhism was most impacted and shaped by its response to the unrelenting abuse of people by the contemporary Muslim rulers and the associated Islamic leaders. In the nineteenth and twentieth century, furthermore, it was also much affected and molded by the colonial powers and Christianity.

On a different note, Sikhism has also been influenced by its century-long immigrant excursions into the Eastern and Western worlds. In the recent past, consequently, Sikhs have been faced with a different kind of challenge in the Western and Eastern diaspora: the challenge of communicating their spiritual heritage, global in scope, to their new neighbors in North America, Europe, China, Japan, and elsewhere – as well as to their own children. Their neighbors are mainly Jews, Christians, Buddhists, Native Americans, and Muslims. And their children are growing up in an environment totally alien to their scriptural and ancestral languages.

Sri Guru Granth Sahib and the Authors

The most central aspect of the Sikh religion is the *Sabd* (*shabad*), the Guru's hymns, constituting the content of Sri Guru Granth Sahib (SGGS). The Sikhs revere the *Sabd* enshrined in the Granth Sahib as their last and ever-present Guru. They turn to it for guidance; they seek wisdom and consolation from it.

The Guru Granth authors were spiritually inspired and socially alert personalities who lived in civil societies and yet outside of them and saw God as both immanent and transcendent. They addressed their people in their vernaculars instead of Sanskrit or Arabic; they composed verses in vernaculars that their contemporary societies would understand. Their messages spoke to their times and to the ages that followed them, and they continue to be relevant to us, though their languages are not spoken today. We may say that they mostly

employed metaphoric expressions permitting continually evolving interpretations with changes in time and cultures. Although the Guru Granth Sahib is rooted in the times of its authors, it continues to enlighten the followers of Sikhi in modern times and extends its appeal to modern seekers of spirituality in modern living all over the world.

In this study, we shall also refer to the Sikh scripture by several other names, such as *Sabd (Shabad)*, the Guru Granth Sahib, the Granth Sahib, the Guru Granth, or simply the Granth. And we shall identify the citations from the Granth by acknowledging Sri Guru Granth Sahib in its abbreviated form, SGGGS, with a page number.

Our aim, mainly, is to explore the major ways Sikhs approach their scripture and to study selected themes in the Guru Granth Sahib that the Sikh gurus and other saints and religious poets – referred to as authors of the Sacred Scripture – commonly shared. We want to show also that the Sikh scripture is Guru Nanak's and his successors' poetic guidebook for religious pluralism and an interfaith scripture for the world. The Sikhs today serve as its custodians to facilitate its availability to the world.

Organization of the Book

Foreword, Preface, and Acknowledgments, placed in the front matter, provide information that is significant for the readers' understanding of the book. Notes and Works Cited are placed at the end. The content of the book is divided into thirteen chapters. Chapters 2-12 cover a range of topics vital to the readers' understanding of the Sikh scripture and religion. They provide a broad discussion of the scripture and its significance to its devotees as well as the world at large.

Chapters 2-3 define the Guru concept and the Sikh scripture with a historical background. Chapters 4-5 show divinely revealed theology as a central aspect of the Granth, and thus the

INTRODUCTION

basis of Sikhism. Chapter 6 analyzes the modern message of pluralism in the sacred scripture.

Chapters 7-11 answer the following major questions: How do Sikhs worship? How do you become a Sikh? What is a leap of faith or initiation? How does a Sikh worship daily? What is the tradition of *paath*? What is the significance of such activities as sacred recitation and kirtan-singing (hymn chanting)? How should you perform them? And what is the role of the human mind in pursuing these rituals?

Chapter 12 discusses the theology of *Mool Mantar* and provides an exegesis of it. And Chapter 13 concludes the book by emphasizing the significance and appeal of the Sikh scripture to the world beyond its traditional cultural borders.

CHAPTER 2

THE GURU: The Teacher Of Heart And Mind

The concept of the guru evolved in the Sikhi tradition during the lives of the ten Sikh gurus (1469-1708), with far-reaching implications of the term not realized before. The concept became radically transformed with the Tenth Guru's proclamation as his last sermon that upon his death the Word as enshrined in the sacred scripture, Sri Guru Granth Sahib, shall be the Guru for eternity and that the Sikhs shall treat it as such for all their religious and spiritual purposes. Since then, the Scripture has been revered by the Sikhs as the eternal living Guru that they turn to for religious, spiritual, and even secular guidance and consolation. Further, the Guru Granth was seen as the message for the whole global village and not limited to any specific community, region, or culture.

The Scripture presides in the Gurdwara sanctuary as the Guru to receive, guide, and bless worshippers. In the digital age, its presence has become universal, and it is accessed by all communities and cultures without any restriction.

Evolution of the Guru Concept

We begin with an explanation of the term *guru*. In Indian traditions of various spiritual and religious disciplines, most of which are part of the Sanatan Dharma or what is popularly called Hinduism, the guru is a person in human form and a guide for spiritual knowledge. He or she is looked upon as a deity to worship. As traditions of the guru worship evolved in India,

conventional formats of initiation and rituals of worship of the guru as deity also evolved. They were, then, accordingly defined and practiced.

When the guru was alive, his initiates needed no formal or specific instruction on how to relate to their guru: they needed only to pay obeisance and be dedicated and respectful to him (barring a slim minority of female gurus in Hinduism, all gurus have been male). This was a normal, popular practice among masses when Guru Nanak was born, and it continued in the times of the ten Sikh gurus as part of the Sikh tradition.

There is an abundance of evidence, however, that Guru Nanak and his successors pointed to the Word or the guru's teachings to be the real Guru. And it is also true that for a long time to come devotees, Hindus as well as Muslims, from all over the world continued to flock, for example, to the Gurdwara Kartarpur in the town of Narwal in the Punjab province of the erstwhile India (currently Pakistan), to pay obeisance to Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh religion. The change in tradition was slow to take place; the devotees continued the practice of paying respect to the human guru during the 239 years of the ten gurus.

It was a practice much like the traditions prevalent at the time, except for one major difference: when a Sikh guru died, a human successor was installed, whereas a Hindu guru or a Muslim Pir, upon his or her death, was not necessarily followed by a human successor. And when it so happened, the Hindu and the Muslim followers worshipped an idol or a sacred site of the human guru and used his/her teachings for spiritual guidance (the practice continues even today).

Notwithstanding the above similarity with Hindus or Muslims, we want readers to be aware, all Sikh gurus have emphasized that the real Guru was the *Sabd* (*Shabad*) or the teachings and not the human body of a Guru.

There were nine successors to Guru Nanak; their followers revered them and received moral and spiritual enlightenment from them. Then, at the end of the tenth Guru's life, the practice of the guru succession took a radical turn, not common in the annals of religion, fundamentally moving Sikhism away from Hindu or Muslim practices.

October 1708

Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Guru, issued a decree on October 20, 1708, the day before his death, to end the tradition of the guru or Pir veneration in human form. On that occasion he installed the *Sabd* or Sikh scripture as the eternal living Guru, thus performing the most significant event of Sikh history.

He assembled the congregation for what looked like a preparation to announce his divine plans before leaving his human body. Instead of announcing the selection of his human successor he made his most momentous proclamation which would shape the Sikh faith for good as a religion of the book. This declaration, a decree, charted out a novel course for Sikhism with respect to seeking wisdom from the Guru.

Here is an eyewitness account from a *Bhatt Vahi* (a bard's scroll or record) by Bhatt Narbud Singh, a bard at the Guru's court who accompanied Guru Gobind Singh to Nanded.³ The bard describes the tenth Guru and his historic feat as follows:⁴

Guru Gobind Singh ji, in mahal daswan, beta Guru Tegh Bahadur ji ka, pota Guru Hargobind ji ka, parpota Guru Arjun ji ka, bans Guru Ram Dasji ka, Surajbansi, Gosal gotra, Sodhi Khatri, basi Anandpur, parganah Kahlur, muqam Nanded, tat Godavari, des dakkhan, sammat satran sai painsath, kartik mas ki chauth, shakla pakkhe, Buddhvar ke dihun, Bhai Daya Singh se bachan hoye, "Sri Granth Sahib lai aie." Bachan pal Daya Singh Sri Granth Sahib lai aye. Guruji ne panch poise ek narial age bheta rakheya, matha tekya, sarbat sangat se kaha: "Mera hukam hai, meri jagah Sri Granth ko

janana. Jo Sikh janega, tis ki ghal thaen paegi. Guru tis ki bahuri karega, satt kar manana."

This historic pronouncement uttered in the early eighteenth century Punjabi vernacular may be translated as follows:

Guru Gobind Singh, the Tenth Master, son of Guru Tegh Bahadur, grandson of Guru Hargobind, great-grandson of Guru Arjan, of the family of Guru Ram Das, Surajbansi Gosal clan, Sodhi Khatri, resident of Anandpur, parganah Kahlur, now at Nanded, on the banks of the Godavari river, in the Deccan (southern) province, asked Bhai Daya Singh, on Buddhvar (Wednesday), 4th day of Kartik (8th month), shukla pakkh (as per Hindu calendar, lunar month, the first fortnight period of the brightening moon, that is, waxing moon), samvat (Hindu calendar year) 1765 (October 20, 1708), to bring the Granth Sahib. Obeying his orders, Daya Singh brought the Granth Sahib and placed it on an altar already prepared for this purpose. The Guru placed before the Sacred Scripture five paise (coins) and a coconut as an offering and bowed his head before the Granth (after bowing before the congregation and the cantors as was his routine). He said to the sangat (fellowship of believers), "This is my commandment: Seek guidance from Sri Granth in my place. Any Sikh who accepts the Scripture as Guru, his/her wish will be fulfilled; he/she will be blessed with the Guru's grace. Know this as the truth."

Thus, Guru Gobind Singh addressed the holy congregation, and the cantor party of Bhai Nath Mal, a Sahajdhari Sikh⁵, sang hymns.

Professor Harbans Singh⁶ maintains that this was the most significant development in the history of the community. "The finality of the Sacred Scripture," he writes, "was a fact rich in religious and social implications." The personal guruship was

thus sealed, passing the succession to the Guru Granth Sahib in perpetuity. The Granth became for Sikhs the continuing authority, spiritual as well as historical. It became now the medium of the Divine Revelation descending through the gurus. Having declared the Granth as the Guru in the form of the contents in the Sacred Scripture for the Sikhs, the tenth Guru forbade the worship of any image, idol, painting, or picture. The volume of the Guru Granth contained the hymns collated by Guru Arjan and then updated by Guru Gobind Singh. The hymns were now the Guru.

The Guru without Precedence

As a result, the new guru would not look like any figure that devotees were accustomed to paying obeisance to in the past, one with a flowing white beard, sparkling eyes, colors, or icons of a holy man. The Guru of the followers of the new Sikhi movement would be, the last human Guru declared, in the form of the Word that is physically personified in the verses, songs, teachings, and inspirations. Simply put, the Guru would be in the Granth form, the Scripture – hence Sri Guru Granth Sahib.

Thus, a new concept and a unique format of the Guru were born, causing a fundamental departure from the Hindu and Muslim ways of the guru worship. The Granth worship became then a highly distinctive tradition requiring entirely novel types of religious practices. The term worship was even discarded. Instead, it was replaced by new ways of obeisance. There emerged new procedures for adoration, adulation, reverence, and veneration. They were to accommodate communication channels compatible with the Word form of the Guru.

In the course of time, it melded both wisdom and faith to create a unique culture in spiritual practice that people could learn to relate to.

Clearly, Guru Gobind Singh executed this transformation willfully and consciously, thereby distinguishing the Sikh Dharma or religion from Hinduism and all other Indian or

Western religions. He launched a fresh concept of guru reverence and sealed the new tradition forever, leaving no room to alter the now codified religious tradition.

His unique way of establishing a new tradition of veneration replacing the traditional worship will always remain a most enlightening story in world history. We will refer to this story and the new concept frequently in the course of the book.

CHAPTER 3

SRI GURU GRANTH SAHIB: The World Without Frontiers

Sri Guru Granth Sahib is a sacred scripture of the world⁷ and the eternal Guru of the Sikhs. An integral part of the world's spiritual heritage, the Granth may also serve as a scripture for a universal religion in the new global village. The hymns in the Sacred Scripture are popularly known as the *Gurbani*. They are venerated by Sikhs both as articles of faith and sacred literature.

Gurbani - the Article of Faith

The *Gurbani* literally means the Gurus' speech, what the Gurus have spoken or intentionally sought and selected from other enlightened souls. The term *Gurbani* is also interchangeable with the Gurus' *shabad* or Word. The term *shabad*, variantly spelled as *shabd*, *sabad*, or *sabd*, literally means (Sanskrit/Hindi/Punjabi) "word" and refers to a hymn in the Sikh scripture, the Guru Granth. The *Gurbani* is the Gurus' divine song for humanity enshrined in the Granth Sahib.

The Guru is a medium for bringing divine light to the darkened spirit; the light is in the form of knowledge contained in the Word (*Gurbani*, *shabad* or hymn). God revealed knowledge to the Gurus – from Guru Nanak Dev to Guru Gobind Singh – and other devotees of God in the form of inspirations that the authors of the Granth put in human languages now termed as the Word. The Gurus transmitted the divine knowledge by singing the Word (hymn) – their own compositions as well as those of thirty other enlightened

individuals included in the scripture. They offered divine knowledge to people through the Granth, believing that the Word would ultimately lead the initiate to its divine source and connect the Sikh to God and His creation.

Since its installation as Sri Guru Granth Sahib, Sikhs have accepted the scripture as the most truthful source of religious and spiritual guidance for them and believed in it as their ultimate Guru. Save the compositions of Guru Gobind Singh and two most eminent theologians of Gurmat, Bhai Gurdas⁸ and Bhai Nand Lal,⁹ no other scripture outside the Guru Granth is recognized as text considered permissible to be recited, sung, or propagated in Sikh congregations. These exceptions were made by the Tenth Guru and have been affirmed by the Sikh community time after time.

To a Sikh, the Granth is complete and inviolable; it is the ultimate embodiment of the message of the Guru; it is the Word beyond all words. That is what in essence Guru Gobind Singh told the congregation before his departure from the world; that is his last will and testament.

The Guru Perpetual and Everlasting

It is customary, and even necessary, for religious institutions to protect themselves from erosion; they want to preserve their doctrinal purity. They do so by enshrining their tenets and doctrines in a form that is tangible and permanent. The use of printed media has been the best and most effective form of preserving the doctrinal purity through the centuries, barring the recent use of electronic media.

The Gurus made full use of the best medium available to them so that their message would be transmitted to the posterity in its original intent. At the advent of what is now known as *Gurmat*, meaning the Guru's path, the most advanced medium available was the handwritten document.

Due to their uncanny foresight, the Gurus created what founders and followers of most great religions of the world would have liked to create but did not or could not. This is one complete volume containing their scriptures, designated as self-contained and supreme in its authority, impervious to tampering, and accessible to future generations in its original form. Further, the Gurus chose the medium of poetry that accommodates numerous poetic expressions both to prevent adulterations and to reach out to infinity. It permits the future cultures and the times that follow to interpret the scriptural messages that are appropriate to them, and that they can easily relate to.

Among the world's great scriptures, the Guru Granth is the only scripture that was composed, edited, proofread, and signed for authenticity by the founders of the faith in their lifetime. Perhaps no other scripture can make this claim. Moreover, the scripture is composed entirely in poetic form – it uses no prose and avoids narrative form.

The process culminating in scriptural authentication that the Granth went through, combined with poetic form, has helped preserve the Sikh doctrines despite various lethal onslaughts on Sikhs over the centuries. The process has given Sikhs their authorized version of the Sacred Scripture and has safeguarded the scripture against adulteration and the religion against extinction. The poetic form has helped keep the scripture intact because of its inherent power to withhold full revelation of a hymn's meaning and impact by any such means as exegesis, commentary, or translation. The printed volume contains 1430 pages, 5894 hymns, 28,534 lines, and 511, 874 words.

Originally, the Guru Granth Sahib was compiled by the fifth Guru, Arjan Dev, in 1604 in the city of Amritsar in India. It contained hymns of the first five Gurus and most of the saints and holy men of medieval India and the contiguous lands. However, the authorized version of the scripture, which is its second and last edition, was prepared by the tenth Guru, Gobind

Singh. He finalized it in 1705 at Damdama, a town in the state of Punjab in India. In the new version, he included hymns of the ninth Guru, Tegh Bahadur.

In 1708, prior to his death, Guru Gobind Singh conferred the status of permanent Guru on the Damdama version of the Guru Granth Sahib. Since then, this version has been transcribed and printed a number of times, and it conforms to the Damdama edition in every respect. More recently, the Guru Granth text in its original font and structure was made available in electronic media on digital compact discs, hard drives, cloud spaces, and numerous websites.

The Universality

The Guru Granth Sahib contains 5894 hymns. Guru Arjan contributed the largest number, a massive 2216. In addition to the hymns by other Gurus, he also included 937 hymns by fifteen other saints that he had collected and vetted; he also selected hymns of eleven poet laureates of his court, all compositions conforming to the beliefs and values of *Gurmat* as the Sikh religion is popularly known. Thus, the Guru Granth becomes a virtual congregation of holy souls coming from various denominations of the Hindus and Muslims, as well as groups of untouchables, scholars, and laity.

This variety of authors represents the cultural, linguistic, and religious diversity of erstwhile medieval India and contiguous regions that Guru Arjan and later Guru Gobind Singh could access and accept in conformity to their vision of the scripture. So when we read the Granth, we hear different languages used in various hymns, but recognize a similar view of, and uniform approach to, life and the Creator.

Languages employed in the various hymns reflect the diversity of cultural milieus and times in which the authors had lived. These languages evolved during the medieval period, allowing for variations, and were, to a great extent, mutually

comprehensible. There are at least twenty different languages of the Indian subcontinent, the Middle East, and the contiguous countries used in the Granth.¹⁰ The different voices are unified in the Sacred Scripture by the use of one script, Gurmukhi, which though widely believed to have been created by the second Guru, Angad, came into being as a result of the Guru's experiments with existing scripts of that time. Gurmukhi was deemed to be phonetically competent to meet the need of inscribing this multi-linguistic scripture, though it was not the original script of all hymns.

The languages of the Granth were leavened and enriched by words from Sanskrit, Prakrit, Persian, Arabic, Bengali, Marathi, and other languages. The influx of new vocabulary from the various language systems added significantly to the substance of Sikhism. They magnified its perspectives on the human relationship to the Creator and the created universe, perhaps in the way Latin, Greek, and other languages may have done for Christianity. Thus, the Granth became a treasury of languages that communicated with most segments of contemporary society.

As stated earlier, the Gurus chose poetry as the form of the Granth. A great many of the hymns are cast in traditional Indian verse forms, termed *shlokas* and *paudis*, and can best be sung and comprehended in the context of well-known classical Indian ragas; many other hymns are in popular folklore and meters (*alahanis*, *ghoris*, *chands*, etc.). In every hymn, there exists an unbreakable relationship between music and verse. Underlaid with scholarly integrity and sophistication, thoughts are wedded to melody and music.

Music, integrally connected to the poetic form, is an inseparable aspect of the Granth and all sacred ceremonies in Sikhism. An organic part of the hymns, melody forms the basis of their rhythm and organization. Hymns follow a definite metrical system called *ragas*. A raga, a term in the Indian musical system, is a pattern of melodic notes. By virtue of its

form, the raga preserves the originality of the composition and, more importantly, becomes a vehicle of divine experience as it conveys sounds of God's creation to the congregation. The Granth has thirty-one ragas; some of them were invented by the Gurus themselves for their own compositions.

This organic unity of content and form – form being poetry set to music – is uniquely built in the Granth's metrics and notations. Various poetic devices have been used to convey religious thought with all their spiritual and metaphysical connotations. Imagery being the most important of devices serves as a major vehicle of philosophical and spiritual ideas, which may not otherwise be really conveyed. Sources of imagery are ancient Indian religions and mythology, particularly Hindu traditions, Muslim stories, and common life experiences.

Thus, the Guru Granth, while delineating the spiritual path, also encompasses the secular life of society. The Granth hymns promote a precondition for contemporary rulers and administrators that they infuse a spiritual element in their governing policies for the sake of their own success and the welfare of society. In other words, the Sikh scripture remains all-inclusive in its concern with the needs of body and soul, of this life and hereafter. Hymn after hymn it tells us to take the path to experience divinity in human life.

Poetic Devices

The Gurus, being keen observers and lovers of the natural world, created powerful images of panoramic splendors, beautiful life forms, and changes of seasons so that humans could see the Almighty's magnificence in His creation and let love for the Creator take root in their hearts. These images help create such formidable prosody that hymns resist all human attempts at exegesis, commentary, or translation to fully capture the beauty of their thought and poetry. Hymns are often chanted and sung without exegesis for an emotional and mystical

experience, although exegesis accompanies as often at most congregational rituals.

Poetic devices create a mystical appeal for devotees seeking to comprehend the mystery of the Creator who is ineffable, inexpressible, and incomprehensible. The mystery remains, but seekers of divine experience read the scripture feeling at home with its imagery, metaphors, and symbolism. They feel a special kind of closeness with *Ik Onkaar* or Waheguru, the Infinite Wisdom, which is characterized by a feeling of urgency, mysticism, and divinity touching their hearts.

Participation in a Sikh congregation by chanting the sacred hymns in unison is like swimming in a river of spiritual energy. Similarly, meeting with a Sikh with the *Gurbani* at heart is to enter an oasis of tranquility. Poetic devices integrated with music, whether in a congregation or a single devotee, transform ordinary words into logos, sacred word, and become instrumental in bringing the Creator and the seeker closer.

Poetic devices were also used to comment on the contemporary world. In their hymns, many Guru Granth author-poets critically alluded to or described contemporary scenes, the way people lived, suffered and died, and the way kings and rulers treated their subjects. They exposed the public corruption and degradation, stressed the need for social reform, rejected religious dogmas and superstitions, and promoted the economic development of the downtrodden besides their spiritual and emotional progress. Their writings mirror the social, economic, and political conditions of the day. They aim their satires on reactionary rulers, obscurantist clergy, and fake fakirs or godmen, and do so openly and uncompromisingly to make honesty and spirituality dominant over mundane life.

Conclusion

Thus, it becomes obvious to us as we complete the first perusal of the scripture that Guru Arjan Dev, the 1604 compiler-editor of the Sacred Scripture, intended to establish the

fundamental unity of all religions and mystical experiences. He brought so many minds and souls together to present a unified doctrine that would be applicable to all civil societies. And he did so notwithstanding the differences of languages, dialects, religions, and regions. His single-minded purpose was to produce a scripture with a message that is spiritual, all-encompassing, and universal in character. The result of his efforts, which culminated in Guru Gobind Singh's work, is a Sacred Scripture that appears to be free from bias, animus, and debate – an amazing quality in a scripture during times of rampant obscurantism, factionalism, and religious fanaticism. The Guru Granth embraces a world without frontiers.

CHAPTER 4

REVEALED THEOLOGY

Prophets, messiahs, and gurus have envisioned God over the millennia as a permanent haven from the vagaries of a transient world, which is the world of senses, of historical events, of evolving reality. Perhaps they all had this wish – that their beliefs, ideas, and revelations would pass on to posterity unaltered and unadulterated. But only a precious few have ever had their wish realized. And among them, founding fathers of Sikhism were one rare exception. Thanks to their spiritual wisdom, their bond with the world they lived in, and their relationship with *Ik Onkaar* or Waheguru, they installed their revealed vision (meaning divinely inspired) permanently into the languages spoken and understood by the civil society.

This was a unique approach that Sikh gurus adopted to reveal and preserve Sikh theology. They preempted incursions of temporal reality recorded as *history* into the Sikh belief system and shielded the scripture from the influence of happenings that occur in the passage of time. This approach forestalled the intrusion of conventional historical beliefs into the newly emerging Sikh faith. Thus, the gurus ensured that their spiritual beliefs would be delivered to their descendants and followers in an untainted form.

In modern thinking, however, history vis-à-vis Sikh theology has become an academic discipline by which to describe events that cause concepts to be born. History refers to the concepts in terms of the actual spatial and temporal

phenomena from which they were derived. To a historian, all eventful materials recorded as history are happenings on earth that have occurred essentially without any supernatural intervention.

The problem with a historian's viewpoint is that events cannot be principles, ideas, laws, or directives; they are only concrete happenings originating either out of the past or the present, devoid of any whiff of divinity or antecedent to any divine revelations. Thus, history becomes the handmaid of things or happenings that may be seen as random, unregulated, and unprincipled. Consequently, a historian tends to see even God, if He/She/It must have a place in his or her scheme of things, as dictated or driven by past events or by God's own concrete identity rather than by any abstract or eternal principles acting from outside history.

Our study of the Guru Granth Sahib does not support this view of the divine knowledge as espoused by history. The Granth requires theology, not history, to explain its underlying concepts, ideas, principles, or eternal verities. Theology deals with universal and eternal messages, enabling us to understand the timeless truths through a study of the scripture, which history is inherently incapable of doing.

The internal evidence of divine revelation found in the Guru Granth verses, compiled by the founders, is the basis of Sikh theology. This evidence should stop much awkward acrobatics that scholars, historians, and theologians may sometimes indulge in. Some scholars, for instance, may promote an evolutionary course for theological developments, while some others may use specific historical events as a basis to establish Sikh doctrines and their applications. To us, neither approach is consistent with the intention of the Guru Granth's authors. In fact, these approaches take us away from the truths underscored in the Granth's teachings.

To explore this subject in greater detail, we are dividing it into two chapters. This chapter explains that the Guru Granth immortalized a theology that was revealed by Sikh gurus and other holy men, and that the process of immortalization was unique in that it could not be tampered with by clergy and historians. The next chapter discusses how history (forces extrinsic to the Granth Sahib) attempts to influence revealed Sikh theology and create a new theology not validated by the Sikh scripture and the gurus.

Revelations

The words “revealed” and “revelation” used in the book are intended to signify divine inspiration experienced by the Gurus, and not what they mean in Abrahamic religions. From time to time, in many different ways, the laws of God’s creative intentionality and the ways of spirituality are revealed to – i.e. divinely inspired in – human beings and the most common way is prophetic visions. The prophet receives a divine vision and delivers it to humanity in the language of a particular time and society, often in an attempt to found a religion.¹¹ The prophet’s words become the scripture, thereby forming the basis of the religion; this is often the way all prophetic religions are born.

Other ways of revelation may result from scientific inquiries into the orders of nature and the world, enabling us perhaps to unlock the doors to divine treasures and allowing us to see the divine handicrafts. These ways are limited, however, by the nature of the tools of science, which, despite being constantly upgraded, always remain inadequate.

The Guru Granth Sahib espouses a religion of inspired theology. Its founder, Guru Nanak, disclosed this aspect in his mission statement to Bhai Lalo at his very first stop on his first missionary journey.

Bhai Lalo was a carpenter in the town of Eminabad in erstwhile India (now Pakistan). He earned his living honestly and longed to meet with the Guru. Although invited to stay with a

rich trader of the town, Guru Nanak preferred to stay with Bhai Lalo.

Before leaving the area for a longer journey, Guru Nanak appointed Bhai Lalo his first missionary and instructed him to initiate his first *dharamsal*, an organized congregation of Truth seekers. Describing his mission to Lalo, Guru Nanak said:

ਜੈਸੀ ਮੈ ਆਵੈ ਖਸਮ ਕੀ ਬਾਣੀ ਤੈਸੜਾ ਕਰੀ ਗਿਆਨੁ ਵੇ ਲਾਲੇ॥

जैसी मैं आवै खसम की बाणी तैसड़ा करी गिआनु वे लालो॥

As the Word of and about the Creator descends to me, so do I articulate to people, O Lalo.

(SGGS¹² 722; SriGranth.org¹³)

Revelations (Inspirations) to Guru Nanak

As Guru Nanak began to receive God's revelations, he made his first pronouncement of prophecy in 1496 after his historic meditation on the banks of the Kali Bein River in the Punjab state of the Indian sub-continent. At that time Guru Nanak was a 27-year old man, employed as a business manager of the store and properties of one Daulat Khan, a Muslim, who was also the head of the town of Sultanpur Lodhi.

The Kali Bein River has a special historic significance in North India because it provided the venue of revelation to Guru Nanak. The 160-kilometer long river springs from Dhanao village and merges in the confluence of the Beas and Satluj rivers. The base spring was considered holy by local Dhanao people. Mogul Emperor Akbar (1542-1605) ordered it brick-lined for preservation and pilgrimage.

Halfway in the Kali Bein's journey toward the confluence lies the town of Sultanpur Lodhi, an old Muslim settlement on the riverbanks, regarded as holy by the Sikhs. There in the town stands a gurdwara commemorating Guru Nanak's first revelation. Several other monuments in the town memorialize the Guru's dialogues with the community of scholars and religious leaders.

The Guru visited the river daily for his bath and meditation in the early hours of the morning. Thereafter, while on his way to work in town, he often visited with a Muslim holy man for a chat. It is during one of these meditations on the riverbank that he is believed to have experienced the revelation (i.e. to have been divinely inspired) and become enlightened.

One morning, Guru Nanak disappeared around the river and spent, it is said, three days in meditation. He re-emerged in a divine trance, reportedly, and as soon as he came out of that trance, he said he had a vision, an inspiration, a revelation. The revelation inspired him to assume the role of a prophet/teacher to teach the world that a Divine Presence permeates the universe and that the religions were only man-made and should not be employed to profile and divide people. It was the night of full moon in November 1496 (some historians report the year to be 1499) that he emerged from his meditation with a message.

The day of Guru Nanak's enlightenment known as Guru Nanak's Parkash Divas, meaning the day of enlightenment through the Guru, is celebrated every year. Thousands of devotees flock to the holy town of Sultanpur Lodi to pay their homage. In 2005, President of India Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam visited this memorial of enlightenment as it is called today, and in 2006 the Government of India, encouraging Indian tourists to visit this city, declared it a holy city to be preserved as part of the Sikh heritage.

On this day Guru Nanak began to claim in more than one way that the Creator had summoned him and assigned him the mission of the divine message to all humanity. He claimed to have received the message directly from the ONE in a state of heightened consciousness, and he then began to share it with people by singing it in inspired hymns.

The Guru said that he would transcribe the divine message for people of all times. The formal pronouncement of his mission startled the town's people, although they had known him as a

spiritually enlightened person. Those vested in the old beliefs went to the authorities to complain that Nanak was claiming to be a new prophet.

When the town authorities heard complaints against Nanak, the town's head Daulat Khan summoned him for a high-level dialogue/conference. Khan also invited his chief religious advisor, a Muslim Imam, leading a group of imams and other Muslim scholars, to interrogate Nanak about his prophetic experience.

A public dialogue took place, taking almost a week to conclude. Many questions were asked, many issues were raised; Guru Nanak answered them all and also made many pronouncements during the dialogue.

At the end of the meeting, much to the Imam's befuddlement, Khan declared that Nanak had indeed received a divine revelation and had the responsibility to found a religious order. The following excerpt taken from the oldest written record available describes Khan's judgment:

...ਤਬ ਕਾਜੀ ਹੈਰਾਨ ਹੋਇ ਰਹਿਆ । ਤਬ ਖਾਨੁ ਕਹਿਆ ਕਾਜੀ ਇਸ ਕਉ ਪੁਛਣਾ ਤਕਸੀਰ ਹੈ ਏਹੁ ਖਦਾਇ ਕਾ ਕੋਈ ਅਉਲੀਆ ਹੈ॥

...The Imam, the chief interrogator, was wonderstruck. Then, Khan, the head of the town, told the Imam that further questioning would be arrogant, and declared that this person is a prophet of Khudaa (Islamic term for God).

(B 40 Janamsakhi)¹⁴

This public acknowledgment of Nanak as God's messenger clearly earned him the title of the prophet in the Muslim tradition and the title of the Guru in the non-Muslim traditions of India.

How Revelation Transforms Nanak

Nanak learned that divine knowledge would be transmitted to him day and night, and he acknowledged this experience as a divine vision. He affirmed that his assignment to spread the divine message came directly from the Creator. His most quoted

verse marking this event is recorded in the Guru Granth Sahib as follows:

ਹਉ ਢਾਢੀ ਵੇਕਾਰੁ ਕਾਰੈ ਲਾਇਆ॥
ਹਤ ਫਾਫੀ ਵੇਕਾਰੁ ਕਾਰੈ ਲਾਇਆ॥

I, a minstrel, was out of work, when the Master took me into His service.

ਰਾਤਿ ਦਿਹੈ ਕੈ ਵਾਰ ਧੁਰਹੁ ਫੁਰਮਾਇਆ॥
ਰਾਤਿ ਦਿਹੈ ਕੈ ਵਾਰ ਧੁਰਹੁ ਫੁਰਮਾਇਆ॥

To sing His Praises day and night, He gave me His Order, right from the start.

ਢਾਢੀ ਸਚੈ ਮਹਲਿ ਖਸਮਿ ਬੁਲਾਇਆ॥
ਫਾਫੀ ਸਚੈ ਮਹਲਿ ਖਸਮਿ ਬੁਲਾਇਆ॥

My God and Master has summoned me, His minstrel, to the True Mansion of His Presence.

ਸਚੀ ਸਿਫਤਿ ਸਾਲਾਹ ਕਪੜਾ ਪਾਇਆ॥
ਸਚੀ ਸਿਫਤਿ ਸਾਲਾਹ ਕਪੜਾ ਪਾਇਆ॥

He has dressed me in the robes of His True Praise and Glory.

(SGGS 150)

Addressing God directly, Guru Nanak stated further that he was simply the Master's mouthpiece, who expressed only what the One Sustainer ordained him to:

ਤਾ ਮੈ ਕਹਿਆ ਕਹਣੁ ਜਾ ਤੁਝੈ ਕਹਾਇਆ॥
ਤਾ ਮੈ ਕਹਿਆ ਕਹਣੁ ਜਾ ਤੁਝੈ ਕਹਾਇਆ॥

When I spoke, I spoke as You made me speak.

(SGGS 566)

Bhai Gurdas, the most reputed Sikh theologian, recorded this event, which is popularly known as Nanak's Bein River *antar dhyān smādhi*, referring to an ancient Indian spiritual practice of sliding into a state of inner quiescence where, to receive the divine vision, the higher faculties of mind are found concentrated on visions perceived within, but detached from the physical sensory system. He depicts this event in the following verses:

ਸੁਣੀ ਪੁਕਾਰਿ ਦਾਤਾਰ ਪ੍ਰਭੁ ਗੁਰੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਜਗ ਮਾਹਿ ਪਠਾਇਆ॥

ਚਰਨ ਧੋਇ ਰਹਰਾਸਿ ਕਰਿ ਚਰਣਮ੍ਰਿਤੁ ਸਿਖਾਂ ਪੀਲਾਇਆ॥
 ਪਾਰਬ੍ਰਹਮ ਪੂਰਨ ਬ੍ਰਹਮ ਕਲਿਜੁਗ ਅੰਦਰਿ ਇਕ ਦਿਖਾਇਆ॥
 ਚਾਰੇ ਪੈਰ ਧਰਮ ਦੇ ਚਾਰਿ ਵਰਨ ਇਕ ਵਰਨੁ ਕਰਾਇਆ॥
 ਸੁਧੀ ਪੁਕਾਰਿ ਦਾਤਾਰ ਪ੍ਰਭੁ ਗੁਰੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਜਗ ਸਾਹਿ ਪਠਾਏਆ॥
 ਚਰਨ ਧੋਏ ਰਹਰਾਸਿ ਕਰਿ ਚਰਣਮ੍ਰਿਤੁ ਸਿਖਾਂ ਪੀਲਾਏਆ॥
 ਪਾਰਬ੍ਰਹਮ ਪੂਰਨ ਬ੍ਰਹਮ ਕਲਿਜੁਗ ਅੰਦਰਿ ਇਕ ਦਿਖਾਏਆ॥
 ਚਾਰੇ ਪੈਰ ਧਰਮ ਦੇ ਚਾਰਿ ਵਰਨ ਇਕ ਵਰਨੁ ਕਰਾਏਆ॥

On hearing the cries of the suffering humanity, God, the One who bestows gifts, sent Guru Nanak to the world. Nanak, after traditional cleansing of feet, sat in prayer and, upon completing the prayer, received the nectar of immortality (literally, the wash of God's feet turned nectar) for his disciples. He revealed to the world oneness of God, calling Him the Supreme Absolute, the Infinite Wisdom. Proclaiming their equality, he united all four social divisions (castes) of Hindu society as one people.

(Bhai Gurdas, Vaar 1, Pauri 23)

Bhai Gurdas further elaborated this revolutionary belief in the following verse, expressing the primacy of God, the source of infinite wisdom:

ਪਹਿਲਾ ਬਾਬੇ ਪਾਯਾ ਬਖਸੁ ਦਰਿ ਪਿਛੇ ਦੇ ਫਿਰਿ ਘਾਲਿ ਕਮਾਈ॥
 ਰੇਤੁ ਅਕੁ ਆਹਾਰੁ ਕਰਿ ਰੋੜਾ ਕੀ ਗੁਰ ਕਰੀ ਵਿਛਾਈ॥
 ਭਾਰੀ ਕਰੀ ਤਪਸਿਆ ਵਡੇ ਭਾਗੁ ਹਰਿ ਸਿਉ ਬਣਿ ਆਈ॥
 ਬਾਬਾ ਪੈਧਾ ਸਚਖੰਡਿ ਨਉ ਨਿਧਿ ਨਾਮੁ ਗਰੀਬੀ ਪਾਈ॥
 ਬਾਬਾ ਦੇਖੈ ਧਿਆਨ ਧਰਿ ਜਲਤੀ ਸਭਿ ਪ੍ਰਿਥਵੀ ਦਿਸਿ ਆਈ॥
 ਬਾਝਹੁ ਗੁਰੁ ਗੁਬਾਰ ਹੈ ਹੈ ਕਰਦੀ ਸੁਣੀ ਲੁਕਾਈ॥
 ਪਹਿਲਾ ਬਾਬੇ ਪਾਯਾ ਬਖਸੁ ਦਰਿ ਪਿਛੇ ਦੇ ਫਿਰਿ ਘਾਲਿ ਕਮਾਏ॥
 ਰੇਤੁ ਅਕੁ ਆਹਾਰੁ ਕਰਿ ਰੋੜਾ ਕੀ ਗੁਰ ਕਰੀ ਵਿਛਾਏ॥
 ਭਾਰੀ ਕਰੀ ਤਪਸਿਆ ਵਡੇ ਭਾਗੁ ਹਰਿ ਸਿਉ ਬਣਿ ਆਏ॥
 ਬਾਬਾ ਪੈਧਾ ਸਚਖੰਡਿ ਨਉ ਨਿਧਿ ਨਾਮੁ ਗਰੀਬੀ ਪਾਏ॥

बाबा देखै धिआन धरि जलती सभि प्रिथवी दिसि आई॥

बाझहु गुरु गुबार है है है करदी सुणी लुकाई॥

First of all Baba Nanak obtained the gate of the grace of God, and then he underwent the rigorous discipline of the body, heart, and mind. He lived on all kinds of herbs and other vegetation for food and accepted dirt and stones as his bed. He offered his full commitment to the divine mission and devotion to the One. His efforts and fortunes bestowed upon him proximity to God. Baba thus reached the region of Truth wherefrom he received the divine numenon, Naam, the storehouse of nine treasures of wisdom, and humility. In his meditative vision, Baba viewed the whole humankind burning in the inferno of lust, anger, greed, possessiveness, attachment, and narcissistic ideation. Further, he heard the screams of common folks and came to a conclusion that the Earth was bereft of the wisdom of the Infinite and shrouded in utter darkness.

(Bhai Gurdas, Vaar 1, Pauri 24)

Nanak then started telling his followers that they should accept the hymns he was singing as recounting of the Truth he received in his mystic visions, which would guide them to be in tune with the Infinite. The following verse says that devotees will become one with God by realizing (materializing) the *Satguru's Bani*, the True Guru's or God's Word, through their actions:

ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਕੀ ਬਾਣੀ ਸਤਿ ਸਤਿ ਕਰਿ ਮਾਨਹੁ

ਇਉ ਆਤਮ ਰਾਮੈ ਲੀਨਾ ਹੇ॥

सतिगुर की बाणी सति सति करि मानहु

इउ आतम रामै लीना हे॥

Accept as True, Perfectly True, the Word of the True Guru's Bani. In this way, you shall merge in God, the Supreme Soul.

(SGGS 1028)

Thus, Guru Nanak expressed and affirmed his perception of himself as the recipient of divine revelations and his hymns as manifestations of those revelations, proclaiming them as divine truths.

Guru Nanak's Interfaith Dialogues

Once Nanak had been accepted as God's messenger by the clergy and the elite of Sultanpur Lodhi, the town was not the same anymore. Clergy and scholars were transformed as were their followers in all religions. The town was transformed into a center of pilgrimage for people of faith. It became, too, a center for serious spiritual dialogues among all faiths and between Guru Nanak's followers and those of traditional religions, a tradition still observed in this town.

After inhabitants of the town had transformed and people of surrounding areas had received the message, Nanak left Sultanpur Lodhi to undertake long journeys to faraway lands. Accompanied by a Hindu and a Muslim as his companions, he visited holy places of major religions, particularly Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, and Buddhism, to share his divine message. He imparted his teachings through dialogues with people of faith and leaders of civic and intellectual institutions as well as rulers and politicians of all stripes.

Guru Nanak clearly saw the need to take his message to every corner of the world accessible to him at that time. He travelled a record of nearly 38000 kilometers in his life time. He visited countless centers of religious learning, political activism, and intellectual activity to learn about them and to engage people in a dialogue about their belief systems. He urged them to examine their beliefs, to cherish and realize the divine message in their religions, and to discard superstitions and fanaticism that had crept in their time-worn religious practices.

The perpetuation of Guru Nanak's Revelation

The prophetic theme of the founder of Sikhism was perpetuated and continually emphasized by his nine successors. Its continuity has amply been documented by Pashaura Singh¹⁵ and Sahib Singh¹⁶. For example, Guru Nanak's immediate successor Guru Angad said,

ਸਚੁ ਤੇਰਾ ਫੁਰਮਾਨੁ ਸਬਦੇ ਸੋਹਿਆ॥
ਸਚੁ ਤੇਰਾ ਫੁਰਮਾਨੁ ਸਬਦੇ ਸੋਹਿਆ॥

Your Teachings/Command is True; we are adorned with the Word of Your Shabad.

(SGGS 150)

Similarly, Guru Ram Das, the fourth Guru, addressing the Sikhs, emphasizes the equation between the Satguru and the truth and between the Satguru's word and God in the following verse:

ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਕੀ ਬਾਣੀ ਸਤਿ ਸਤਿ ਕਰਿ ਜਾਣਹੁ
ਗੁਰਸਿਖਹੁ ਹਰਿ ਕਰਤਾ ਆਪਿ ਮੁਹਹੁ ਕਢਾਏ॥
ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਕੀ ਬਾਣੀ ਸਤਿ ਸਤਿ ਕਰਿ ਜਾਣਹੁ
ਗੁਰਸਿਖਹੁ ਹਰਿ ਕਰਤਾ ਆਪਿ ਮੁਹਹੁ ਕਢਾਏ॥

O GurSikhs, know that the Bani, the Word of the True Guru, is absolutely true. The Creator God Himself causes the Guru to chant it.

(SGGS 308)

Guru Ram Das continues to underscore the truthfulness of the Guru's Word in another verse:

ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਕੀ ਬਾਣੀ ਸਤਿ ਸਰੂਪੁ ਹੈ ਗੁਰਬਾਣੀ ਬਾਣੀਐ॥
ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਕੀ ਬਾਣੀ ਸਤਿ ਸਰੂਪੁ ਹੈ ਗੁਰਬਾਣੀ ਬਾਣੀਐ॥

The Word of the True Guru's Bani is the embodiment of Truth; through Gurbani, one becomes perfect.

(SGGS 304)

Kal, the senior-most bard and leader of the scholars' group in Guru Arjan's congregation, said that the fifth Guru's major mission was to reveal the scripture to the people. He stated this as follows:

ਸਬਦੁ ਗੁਰੂ ਪਰਕਾਸਿਓ ਹਰਿ ਰਸਨ ਬਸਾਯਉ ॥
ਸਬਦੁ ਗੁਰੂ ਪਰਕਾਸਿਓ ਹਰਿ ਰਸਨ ਬਸਾਯਉ ॥

God dwells on His (Guru Arjan's) tongue, and He reveals the Shabad Guru (divine knowledge) to him (which he shares with the world).

(SGGS 1407)

Conclusion

Finally, it came to Guru Gobind Singh as his honored privilege and destiny to immortalize the form and content of the revealed scripture. He secured the compositions of his predecessors, along with those of others, and canonized them by ordaining and installing the *Sabd* enshrined in the Granth as the Eternal Guru of the Sikhs. Asking the Sikhs to follow the Sacred Scripture as their Eternal Guru was his last command as well as his last will and testament on behalf of all Gurus. Thus, Guru Gobind Singh sealed the Sikh scripture against any interpolation, adulteration, or transgression from any source, particularly the historical routes to theology.

CHAPTER 5

SIKH THEOLOGY Versus HISTORY

Sikh theology is the Sikh belief system that binds followers of Sikhi into one community. It is grounded in the Guru Granth Sahib. It attempts to define the nature of the Supreme Being, the relationship between the Creator and humanity, and the way humans should live on this planet. All aspects of the Sikh belief system, including Sikh tenets, values, practices, and institutions, owe their origin to the sacred scripture and ought to maintain their allegiance to it. Faithful followers of Sikhi ought to guard Sikh theology against any forces that may alter it, particularly history.

This chapter, a continuation of the previous one, discusses how history meddles with and affects revealed Sikh theology and the consequences of this meddling to Sikh community and Sikh religion. It also points out that, in the absence of a scripture written and sealed by the prophets themselves, other world religions have suffered onslaughts of history and from theologies created by historical developments. It suggests, too, that the mode of the Granth's compilation makes it more accessible to many cultures and civil societies all over the world, particularly to the Indian diaspora, and that such mode strengthens unity among them and degrades the inroads of regional fanaticism, sectarianism, and ethnocentrism preexistent or spawning among them.

History's Detours to Theology

In the course of its history, the Sikh community may have to wrestle with what is naturally ingrained in human nature – skepticism. The faithful followers may have to actively deal with their doubts about the Guru Granth Sahib being the only source of their religious guidance. Unless they are alert to the dangers of disbelief, their beliefs may not continue to be impervious to invasions of the content imported from history.

Some religious scholars, intellectuals, and strategists may question whether the Sikh scripture as eternal Guru is immune to change. They may introduce ideas not consistent with the content and interpretations of the Granth Sahib and may consider allowing historical events to influence practices of the Sikh religion. Such developments would amount to history making inroads into the Sikh belief system, Sikh theology, and consequently compromising it. If this happens or is allowed to happen, Sikhs and their institutions will be confronted with serious implications for their future.

Watch out for History infiltrating Theology

If we should believe that Sikh theology was born from historical events, or originated from concepts derived from history, rather than from divine inspiration, we would obtain radically different scenarios or implications. The first implication is that the Gurus neither proclaimed Sikh theology nor caused it to be proclaimed. The second is that Sikh theology has continued to change and evolve with history. And the third is that the Guru Granth containing Sikh theology is not eternal and that Guru Gobind Singh's command to Sikhs to accept the Scripture as eternal is apocryphal. Should any of these scenarios take hold, it would be a serious blow to the Sikh doctrines and theology impacting on civil society.

Most theologians and scholars concur that none of these scenarios is true. No Sikhs conversant with the Sikh tradition and

scripture doubt the Sikh theology's doctrine of eternity manifested in Sri Guru Granth Sahib. Should they deny the doctrine, a conflict would arise between the eternal nature of Sikh theology and the origin and nature of history itself. Such denial would lead us to accept that the Gurus were all powerful in creating a specific history in order to give birth to a theological principle and that they had anticipated historical events that had to take place to permit a new theology. This speculation clearly defies our understanding of what the Gurus could or could not have done.

To clarify the above argument, it would be instructive to put the above puzzle differently and entertain a hypothetical, contrary scenario.

Imagine that the current nature of Sikh theology is fluid and evolving and that it may be constructed on the basis of either the founders' original intent or the historical discoveries claimed by the clerics and sects. Sects, charismatic clerics, godmen, and even academicians are known to have claimed such discoveries with the objective of taking over religious institutions after the founders had departed. Only to conjecture the shape of Sikh theology under this scenario, many denominations would have sprouted based upon their own interpretation of Sikh history.

We may compare the scenario to the split in Christianity in the sixteenth century. The Reformation movement gave rise to Protestantism and to its numerous denominations. If this scenario were to materialize among Sikhs, Sikhism as we know it would probably disappear.

Thus Decreed the Sikh Gurus: Follow the Guru Granth Theology

The purpose of discussing this hypothetical scenario is not to debate the merits and demerits of one or the other way of constructing theology. The purpose is to impress upon Sikh clergy, Guru Nanak's followers, and scholars the Gurus'

collective imperative that Sikh theology be based on the revelation immortalized in the Guru Granth Sahib verses. After all, we ought to know, our founders never left this decision for us to make. Should the Sikhs choose to reject their Gurus' intention and permit transgression of history into the reconstruction of their theology, they would do irreversible damage to the religion.

The concept of revealed theology sets the Sikh religion apart from many other world religions. In the case of other world religions, such as Christianity, only historical routes to theology had to be accepted because the founding prophets had left no written word behind. Whenever a founder leaves no written record or instruction to followers, the emerging academic disciplines use historical discoveries to construct their theology. Eventually, scholars, clergy, and sects make theological pronouncements based on discoveries tailored to suit their hypotheses and proclivities.

On the other hand, it is almost impossible to "reconstruct" the past accurately, as Professor Pashaura Singh¹⁷ emphasizes. When we reconstruct the past, we offer an interpretation of the past – not the past as it was because it is quite difficult to completely understand the events of that time. And, moreover, the interpretation depends upon the personal agenda of the interpreting historian.

In short, the Sikh Gurus clearly intended Sikh theology to be based upon the divine knowledge revealed to them by the ONE Timeless and what they revealed, in turn, to the faithful through their compositions. They scribed and preserved these compositions in Sri Guru Granth Sahib for eternity. Occasionally, the Gurus accepted some hard historical evidence only to corroborate their revealed message.

Looking into the Future: Innovative Planning

The Sikh theology that the prophet or the founder gave his followers for their guidance was followed during his life – and

for some time thereafter - diligently and unquestioningly. Sects began to form, however, when the first Guru's message had spread to more diverse people. Clerics, fundamentalists, and academicians started to wield influence and to overlook the revealed message in favor of historical events in order to support a theology suited for their purposes.

As it has happened to other world religions, new sects of Sikhism began to form for various reasons. For instance, proponents (clerics, scholars, others) of newly emerging sects tried to dig out historical evidence to bolster their claims when the written word of the founder could not be used to back up a certain doctrine in theology.

Presently, many contemporary clerics and scholars have been wrestling with a temptation to derive Sikh theology from historical events. Should they succumb to their temptation, each one would be able to start a new sect. Regrettably, however, many sects are already beginning to form among followers of Sikhism, particularly in North India. This is a serious challenge to religion, which must be dealt with seriously.

It is important to understand how the sects form. The process of sect formation goes like this.

First, the leaders interested in forming a sect select historical events based on their objective. Even hearsay can be used as part of their selection process. To bolster their claim to a sect, they may use reputed historians in support of their viewpoint, belief, or theology.

Although this has not occurred much in Sikhism, many other world religions have succumbed to such adulteration in their theology. Shia and Sunni sects in Islam exemplify the use of history to claim authenticity of their sects. Among Sikhs, Namdhari, Radha Soami, and Nirankari sects may be such examples, although their influence is not significant as yet.

As compared to other world religions, Sikhism has not yet experienced the problem of sect formation as seriously. The

reasons are, among others, the implicit faith of its followers in their eternal Guru, Sri Guru Granth Sahib, and its relatively short history. In the course of time, however, the problem could become serious if well-educated, faithful Sikhs ceded control over managing and directing the religion to highly motivated and resourceful clerics, supported by politicians, extremists, popular preachers, and writers. As a consequence, Sikhism would then succumb to clericalism bolstered by popular writings.

If history has intruded in other world religions, and it has numerous times, it can very well do so in Sikhism, too, given enough time.

The tenth Guru rendered the Sikh scripture immune for futurity to the vicissitudes of history by proclaiming it as the ultimate word for Sikhs to follow. The Guru stated that there would be no alterations in, nor any questions regarding, the Sikh theology derived from divine inspirations and revelations etched in Sri Guru Granth Sahib.

Guru Gobind Singh's elaborate ceremony on his last day on this earth was deliberate and definitive in accomplishing the canonization of the Granth. In absence of that most celebrated event, there could always be occasions for history to intrude into Sikh theology.

Presently many Sikh thinkers are concerned about the increasing influence of history ("historical route to theology") on the value of traditions and theology based on hard evidence of revelation. Although there are multiple histories written on the foundation of Sikh principles, the universal light shown in Sri Guru Granth Sahib is the only record of revelation acceptable to Sikhs. The belief in revelation is supported by a preponderance of internal evidence.

Guru Nanak underscores the significance of the Guru's word in contradiction to history by saying,

ਗੁਰ ਕਾ ਕਹਿਆ ਅੰਕਿ ਸਮਾਵੈ॥
ਗੁਰ ਕਾ ਕਹਿਆ ਅੰਕਿ ਸਮਾਵੈ॥

One who takes the Words of the Guru into his very fiber

ਨਿਰਮਲ ਸੂਚੇ ਸਾਚੇ ਭਾਵੈ॥
ਨਿਰਮਲ ਸੂਚੇ ਸਾਚੇ ਭਾਵੈ॥

is immaculate and holy, and is pleasing to the True God.

(SGGS 933)

The founding Guru heard the message from the True One and expressed it in the above verse as a revelation. Guru Arjan also urges the Sikh, in the following verse, to follow the path the Guru pointed to in the Scripture:

ਇਤੁ ਮਾਰਗਿ ਚਲੇ ਭਾਈਅੜੇ ਗੁਰੁ ਕਹੈ ਸੁ ਕਾਰ ਕਮਾਇ ਜੀਉ॥
ਇਤੁ ਮਾਰਗਿ ਚਲੇ ਭਾਈਅੜੇ ਗੁਰੁ ਕਹੈ ਸੁ ਕਾਰ ਕਮਾਇ ਜੀਉ॥

So walk on this Path, O sister soul-brides; do that work which the Guru tells you to do.

(SGGS 763)

Even if a historical event was true and taken from the life history of a guru, Guru Nanak advised us not to squander time and energy in following it. He exhorted his followers to ignore the Guru's conduct, meaning history, and follow instead the Guru's Word.

Guru Nanak pointed out the difference between his words and the divine vision. He urged Sikhs to comprehend the divine mystery expressed through his words so that they may transform their instincts and ingrained habits. For instance, he says emphatically in the voice of a prophet:

ਏਨਾ ਅਖਰਾ ਮਹਿ ਜੇ ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਬੁਝੈ ਤਿਸੁ ਸਿਰਿ ਲੇਖੁ ਨ ਹੋਈ॥
ਏਨਾ ਅਖਰਾ ਮਹਿ ਜੇ ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਬੁਝੈ ਤਿਸੁ ਸਿਰਿ ਲੇਖੁ ਨ ਹੋਈ॥

No accounting is due from the Gurmukh who understands the Divine through these letters.

(SGGS 432)

Guru Gobind Singh, the last Guru, sealed Guru Nanak's instructions for ever. On October 20, 1708, when he called upon his congregation to take note of his last word, the Guru proclaimed his historical sermon as the final act of his life. There

he ordained Sri Guru Granth Sahib as the final source of Sikh theology.

By design, he chose the occasion just before his death to etch in stone what his predecessors had written in verses in the revealed scripture.

The *Gur-Bilas Patshahi Chhevin* leaves no doubt about the recognition by the Sikhs of the Guruship of the Guru Granth Sahib after the death of Guru Gobind Singh.

The *Gur-Bilas* was begun by its author, poet Sohan, in May 1717 and completed on July 22, 1718 (*Sawan 22, Sudi 5, 1775 Bikrami*), within ten years of the Guru's death. Its fourth chapter is devoted to the compilation of the sacred scripture by Guru Arjan, and the first twelve verses of the fifth chapter to formal installation of the scripture in the Darbar Sahib, Amritsar. Therein the author has invariably used the then-accepted prefix Guru to the *Granth* and has called it the *Guru Granth*. The following verses of chapter IV are very significant:

ਮਮ ਆਗਿਆ ਸਭ ਹੀ ਸੁਨੇ ਸਤਿ ਬਾਤ ਨਿਰਧਾਰ ।
ਗੁਰੂ ਗਰੰਥ ਸਮ ਮਾਨੀਓ ਭੇਦ ਨਾ ਕੇਉ ਬਿਚਾਰ॥409॥
...ਗੁਰੂ ਗਰੰਥ ਕਲਜੁਗ ਭਯੋ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਰੂਪ ਸਮਾਨ ।
ਦਸ ਪਾਤਸ਼ਾਹੀਆ ਰੂਪ ਇਹ ਗੁਰੂ ਗਰੰਥ ਜੀ ਜਾਨ॥412॥
ਗੁਰੂ ਦਰਸ ਜਿਹ ਦੇਖਨਾ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗਰੰਥ ਦਰਸਾਇ ।
ਬਾਤ ਕਰਨ ਗੁਰ ਸੇ ਚਹੈ ਪੜੇ ਗਰੰਥ ਮਨ ਲਾਇ ।413॥

Hear ye all, this precept of mine as true and certain. Recognize the Granth to be the same as the Guru, think not of any difference (between the two). In the Kali-yuga, the Guru Granth has assumed the form of Sri Guru. Recognize the Guru Granth to be the very self of the Ten Gurus. (412) He who wishes to see the Guru, let him see the Guru Granth. And he who wishes to speak to the Guru, let him read the Granth with a devoted mind.

(Chapter IV old ed., p. 75; new ed., p. 90)

The last verse of the above writing was rewritten and read often in all Sikh congregations, lest the followers should forget this command of the Guru. For his last ceremonial act, Guru

Gobind Singh had prepared a volume of the Guru Granth a few years earlier. He had dictated its final version to his scribe, Bhai Mani Singh, including all what he thought to be the divine order, and left out what he thought was not central to Sikh theology. He had completed this process in the year 1705 (for details see Pashaura Singh¹⁸).

Scripture vs. History:

The Issue of Sikh Theology

The issue of theology was settled – or should have been considered settled – right in the very act of Guru Gobind Singh's October 20, 1708 proclamation and his installation of the Granth Sahib as the eternal Guru. In 2008 the Sikh community completed the tercentennial celebration of that day, venerating Sikh history's most important event, the canonization of the Guru Granth Sahib. But, unfortunately, the issue still remains ambiguous for countless followers who tend to mix up history, tradition, and the scripture as sources of Sikh theology.

This debate will not end unless the followers come to recognize that Sikh theology is supposed to derive not from any other source, such as history or tradition, but the scripture. And the followers will remain uncertain about Sikh theology unless they see that the tenth Guru's 1708 proclamation was intended to encompass the belief that the sacred scripture, the eternal Guru, would be the ultimate source of religious guidance for Sikhs and the final source of Sikh theology.

If the followers should overlook the Guru Granth Sahib as the source of revealed theology, they would be looking for the source at a wrong place – in the outer world, meaning history and tradition, social, secular, or communal agents, and other external forces. Consequently, the outer world, transitory and ever-changing, would then try to determine the meaning of the scripture and direct the Guru (i.e. Sri Guru Granth Sahib). In short, history, tradition, or other worldly agents cannot and

should not be the sources of Sikh theology; only the sacred scripture can be and is.

Over the last three hundred years since the installation of the Granth as eternal Guru, the Sikh community has lived through numerous challenges and changes, but for many followers, the matter of theology has remained ambiguous and debatable. It must be recognized, however, that despite many social and religious challenges, Sikhs were held together by one constant in their lives: Sri Guru Granth Sahib, their sacred book, along with the Sikh theology based on it.

The issue of theology will keep coming so long as individual Sikhs will continue to assert their intellectual and religious freedom to deviate from the tenth Guru's proclamation and form new sects based on their interests and desires. It is critical, then, to explore the issue of theology being rooted in the scripture and not in other sources.

This debate is intended to protect Sikh theology from the onslaughts of many sect leaders and scholars who are rapidly emerging in India and outside.

Coincidentally, you might wonder why biographies of Sikh gurus vary so much. An individual guru's life is depicted differently by different scholars depending on their viewpoint and purpose. It is logical to infer, then, that differing biographies might owe their origin to sect leaders and, in turn, to scholars writing under the influence of the sect leaders' differing accounts of the lives of the gurus, employing their own perceptions and interpretations, not necessarily anchored to truthful facts.¹⁹

To preserve Sikh theology and doctrines, similar efforts were also called for earlier in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and many Sikh theologians responded readily. Most prominent of them were Bhai Kahan Singh of Nabha, Max Arthur McAuliffe, Bhai Vir Singh, Principal Jodh Singh, Principal Satbir Singh, and Professor Sahib Singh. In different decades of the last century, all of them brought to the

community's attention the evils of accepting historical events for the purpose of constructing theological beliefs or even day-to-day traditions that Sikh community could believe and practice.

On the other hand, Western scholars like Mcleod and his school of Sikh scholars gave equal credence to history as told. For example, they used *Janam Sakhis*, *Hukam Namas*, *Rahit Namas*, and such other documents as sources to build Sikh theology. They followed what we call academic tradition and viewed Sikhism as a religion based upon history rather than revelation. However, Sikhism should not leave any scope for the academic tradition to reconstruct any historical evolution into Sikh theology.

As it has been pointed out before, the earlier followers of a religion follow the theology given them directly by the prophet or the founder during his life, and they continue to do so for a while thereafter. When some time has passed since the founder's death and his message has spread widely among diverse groups of people, history begins to emerge as a force that affects the original theology. In the course of time, clerics, sects, fundamentalists, and academicians begin to influence theology and cite historical events to serve their purpose. Then, the interested theologians and philosophers begin to increasingly take shelter under those historical events in order to lay claim to a newer and evolved theology.

Revealed theology has suffered intrusions of history in many other religions; it has suffered in Sikhism, too, though not as severely. Still, history continues being employed as a basis of Sikh theology in some sects. Some scholars of Sikhism have been building their stands entirely on historical accounts provided by writers of the gurus' times and of later periods. But they do not always stick to their argument – they don't mind taking a stand outside of history when it suits them.

It is not difficult to label the same historical event as true or untrue if it is not yet authenticated. So much of Sikh history is

still written in sand; the writings may drift in any direction the wind blows, tempting sect leaders to ride the wave. And when it suits their purposes, some clerics, sect leaders, and scholars wouldn't hesitate to turn around and use the Guru Granth Sahib to prove their point for a different audience. They alternate at will between the scripture and history to take different stands, depending on what would profit them most. This trend must not be accepted; it must be debated, analyzed, and rejected.

It is true that for over a century we have been interpreting many old documents on tradition and history that most of the time are not authenticated and ignore historiography. Many sect leaders and their supporting scholars have constructed some aspects of Sikh theology based on the works accepted only by tradition. For example, they have derived many of their beliefs from the *Bhai Bala pothies* and from the writings of Bhai Santokh Singh, Bhai Gurdas the second, Kesar Singh Chhiber of Bansawaliwala repute, Bhai Prehlahd Rehat Nama, and the authors of *Sarabloh Granth*, and even from Panth Parkash and Twarikh-e Khalsa. Since the Guru Granth corroborated some events based on them, these writings were allowed to make a permanent place in our memory bank as authenticated works.

It is important to recognize, however, that these works have parts that are quite at variance with, and are not validated by, the Guru Granth theology. They must not be allowed to influence the Gurmat's eternal theology.

It is characteristic of the bards, singers, and *kathakars* to glorify the writings and authors listed above. Such glorification arouses the audience emotionally, entertains it, and generates larger remuneration for the performers. Consequently, they cause tremendous confusion about Sikhi in the new generation, particularly educated Sikh youth. In addition, popular stories told by preachers and partisan historians and scholars, backed by their sect leaders, have significantly contributed to the growth of misinformation about Sikh beliefs. Although the revealed

theology scholars have corrected many fallacious ideas and beliefs, the debate continues concerning the role played and the power wielded by partisan historians and scholars and by bards, singers, and kathakars, in propagating and popularizing ideas and beliefs unsupported by the Guru Granth.

While some might expect such dualistic handstands of flip-flopping between history and the Guru's verses as a source of theology to attain a long-term victory, we strongly believe that theology without substantial scriptural support can hardly be viewed as a victory. Using unauthenticated, historical documents for constructing Sikh theology seems to be only a transient victory for sectarian beliefs. But such beliefs, unfortunately, will sow seeds of new and unanticipated setbacks to the Sikh future.

Conclusion

Eventually, the educated Sikhs are becoming more conscious of the true Sikh teachings preserved by the Guru Granth Sahib. Their awareness of the eternal nature of those teachings and of their applicability to the plurality of humanity in the world is growing. Consequently, their opposition to erroneous theology based on historical evidence is on the increase. Being educated, they also realize that the founders, several centuries ago, did inscribe in the scripture some historical accounts that seemed integral to the scriptural text, and that the Guru Granth authors did so poetically in parables and metaphors in order that their message might outlive all specific periods of time and situations.

Yet those educated in modern schools of thought have also felt the need, where called for, to build a distinct type of historical explanation of, or around, each of their theological beliefs. While such need seems to be desirable, relevant explanations must be derived from documented teachings of the Guru rather than a transliteration of historical events described in unauthenticated or apocryphal texts.

When ambitious humans desire a certain religious outcome – which sometimes has happened with older and traditional, as well as new, religions – they appropriate and interpret history and the scripture to produce that outcome. Their interpretations of religious principles and the scripture, which they impose on the followers, become a pretext for their actions and an instrument of validation of their beliefs. And when pretexts are allowed to creep into one's faith in the Guru Granth Sahib, Sikhs should fear the onset of an era of blind beliefs, dogmas, bigotry, superstition, exploitation, and vested interests in their religion – an era when the faithful will be pushed back again into the dark ages, reminiscent of the times in which Guru Nanak lived.

The source of divine knowledge – knowledge of the Creator and His creation (*hukam*) – is not human reasoning but revelation from the Creator. This holds true for Sikhism as well as other older religions. God reveals Himself when He chooses to do so. Christianity, for instance, is based on God's revelation to Jesus of Nazareth. The Islamic tradition believes that the Prophet Muhammad received revelations from Allah, which were memorized and later written down by his disciples in the language of their time. Hindus believe that the *Vedas* were revealed to the sages that the sage Vyasa edited and compiled. Similarly, the *Bhagavad Gita* was revealed by Lord Krishna to his disciple Arjuna. Thus, the concept of revelation is an extremely important aspect of theology in all major religions of the world.

One thing, however, that distinguishes Sikhism from all other religions is the canonization and installation of the scripture as eternal Guru by the last prophet Guru Gobind Singh.

Sikh theology is the divine wisdom revealed to the gurus in a vision. The gurus wrote down that wisdom in poetic form so that the revealed message thus preserved would remain fresh and relevant for ages to come. In other religions, revelation records were handed down to the faithful over centuries before attaining

their final form, and were, consequently, affected by the very process of handing down and communication in languages of different periods. Humans can write down only what their language is capable of communicating, and communication or communicability varies from age to age, from language to language, from culture to culture. Therefore, Guru Gobind Singh sealed the Sikh scripture, for the benefit of future societies, against interpolations, adulterations, or transgressions from historical routes to theology.

Sir John Templeton illustrates the timeliness of revelation and the language of revelation in *The Humble Approach: Scientists Discover God*:

Suppose, for the sake of argument, that God had wished two thousand years ago to reveal a modern set of complex scientific ideas describing the cosmos, say, the general theory of relativity, then who would have had the ability even to know the symbols and concepts necessary to have been able to write the theory down even in its simplest form? In this simple example can we see that revelation can have limiting aspects which are dependent on the cultural context within which that revelation is made? Perhaps God is ready to reveal Himself more and more with time. Perhaps by research, each generation can be able to comprehend a little more. Over 90% of our concepts about divine creativity have become known only in the 20th century as scientific researches have progressed spectacularly.²⁰

It is this predicament that the Sikh gurus had in mind when they wrote the Guru Granth hymns in poetic form with abundant use of metaphors. Thus, the Guru Granth Sahib revelation may continually be interpreted and re-interpreted, becoming relevant to each era, despite changes in cultural norms and understanding.

CHAPTER 6

DIVERSITY IN SPIRITUAL ECOLOGY

Guru Nanak's Vision of Spiritual Pluralism

Guru Nanak anticipated that the Earth would continue to usher in a new ecological age, spiritually, in which diverse cultures, faiths, and religions, once isolated from one another, would live as good neighbors forming a worldwide community, a close-knit global village. In that village, new ideas and insights from science and technology, he expected, would enrich and enlighten the interaction among people of diverse faiths and cultures.

During his life the Guru visited many major religious centers of the world and promoted interfaith dialogues, thereby making a foundation for a diverse spiritual global village.

Guru Arjan followed Guru Nanak's path. He compiled the first world scripture, the Adi Granth or Guru Granth, in which he included authors from diverse backgrounds and diverse time periods. He employed a language allowing for diversity, which enjoyed wide currency in South Asia and, to some extent, in the Middle East. He favored the use of metaphors that would encourage new interpretations among new world cultures.

The Guru Granth created a philosophical system comprising diverse approaches to divine energy. Based on "unity in

diversity," the system celebrated the merits of each particular approach to divine energy and welded all approaches cohesively into one composite approach.

From the Guru Granth, we learn that each faith is inspired by a unique vision of the Divine and that in the course of time the various faiths have developed distinct ethnic identities. As a result, each faith perceives the Divine as the source of its unity. The multiple coauthors of the Granth promote appreciation of spiritual diversity and enunciate the "One Spirit One World" spiritual philosophy, in which each individual longs for the divine attributes celebrated in the Sacred Scripture.

The Granth gives the highest allegiance to the power and grace of the Truth and its creative energy that operates through humanity in all ages.

The Guru Granth challenges the religious people of the world to realize spirituality in their own faiths and work constructively with members of other faith traditions toward the realization of the Truth. The Scripture teaches us that a vision of the healing light of spirituality will overcome the social and ideological issues underlying much of the conflict among religions and the exploitation of the masses by illusory materialism.

Pluralistic World means Diversity in Human Ecology

The law of diversity is universal. It works in nature; it works in the world. We may call it a law of nature and a law of life. Plants and animals diversify to evolve and flourish; they perish if they don't. Diversity manifests in the evolution of stars and lands and their structures, which vary millions of times in size, just as it does in the evolution of cells and biological particles in the human body.

The law of diversity applies to religions, too. Pluralistic religions originate out of human ecology of diversity. They are

best suited to survive when they keep pace with human evolution and human ecology.

The Creator has not shaped all his creatures the same. He has given a distinct composition to all entities of the cosmos, from the tiniest quantum particle to the mightiest galaxy, assigning each its own orbit, its own energy, and its own life cycle. This was the cosmic vision (*Hukam*) of the Infinite Wisdom (*Ik Onkaar*) clearly articulated in The Granth Sahib.

The Creator's vision of diversity, thus, materializes in the distinctiveness of all individuals, including children, even identical twins, born to the same parents. The Scripture underscores this diversity in the following verses spoken by the various gurus.

Guru Amar Das, for instance, says:

ਵੇਕੀ ਸ੍ਰਿਸਟਿ ਉਪਾਈਅਨੁ ਸਭ ਹੁਕਮਿ ਆਵੈ ਜਾਇ ਸਮਾਹੀ॥
 ਵੇਕੀ ਸ੍ਰਿਸਟਿ ਤਪਾਝੈਅਨੁ ਸਭ ਹੁਕਮਿ ਆਵੈ ਜਾਝੈ ਸਮਾਹੀ॥

You (the Creator) created the world with its variety; by the Hukam (schema, order) of Your Command, it comes, goes, and merges again in You. (SGGS 947)

Guru Arjan speaks of this pluralism as follows:

ਹੁਕਮੇ ਅਨਿਕ ਰੰਗ ਪਰਕਾਰ॥
 ਹੁਕਮੇ ਅਨਿਕ ਰੰਗ ਪਰਕਾਰ॥

By His Hukam, there are so many colors and forms.

(SGGS 277)

ਹੁਕਮੇ ਨਾਨੁਕਾ ਵਡਾ ਥੀਵੈ॥
 ਹੁਕਮੇ ਨਾਨੁਕਾ ਵਡਾ ਥੀਵੈ॥

By His Hukam, they become tiny or huge.

(SGGS 962)

Just as our physical world is diverse, so are our religions, our cultures, social systems, orbits, and traditions. They all gather strength from diversity, serving as invaluable components within the Creator's order. The Guru Granth celebrates the Creator's power to enable people to assume diverse identities and to devise diverse identities of the Divine.

Guru Nanak addresses God in the following verse, bowing in utter humility to His infinite power, which manifests in natural and divine diversity:

ਮਿਤੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਲੋਕਾ ਪਾਵੈ ਹੈ॥

ਸਿਰੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਲੋਕਾ ਪਾਵੈ ਹੈ॥

Nanak places his head on the feet of all people.

ਬਲਿਹਾਰੀ ਜਾਉ ਜੇਤੇ ਤੇਰੇ ਨਾਵੈ ਹੈ॥

ਬਲਿਹਾਰੀ ਜਾਤੁ ਜੇਤੇ ਤੇਰੇ ਨਾਵੈ ਹੈ॥

I am a sacrifice to Your Names (identities of the Creator), as many as there are, O God.

(SGGS 1168)

One Purpose

The history of the pluralistic world lies in the history of religion itself. Religions came into being for one purpose: to answer the call of people on this earth. The call originated from the creation itself, and it originated mainly as an expression of innate human tendencies.²¹

The first human tendency is to conform to a worldly discipline; religion is one such discipline that people have been conforming to since the beginning of history. Religion is a human construct by which people have related to the Divine, and continue to do so, through the medium of cultural practices, which vary from nation to nation, land to land.

Discovered by a founder and promoted by followers, religion often gets encrusted over time with diverse rituals and rules; periodically, it needs to be "cleaned up," and the cleaning-up often leads to the birth of a new religion or a "reformed" variety of the same religion. This is an evolutionary process that all major religions – Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Sikhism – have gone through.

Initially, all religions promoted spirituality, meaning a practical understanding and practice of a relationship between a human being and the Supreme Being. Then in the course of time,

they evolved into more complex forms in response to the needs and desires of the followers. The followers lived in different geographical locations, belonged to diverse socio-cultural backgrounds, and encountered challenges not experienced hitherto by earlier followers. Eventually, differences in cultures and climes gave rise to diversity in religious practices. Perhaps the global need of religion experienced by the followers of Sikhi is not different from that experienced by people of other religions.

Sri Guru Granth Sahib brings under focus the universal belief in spirituality in the sense that human beings and the Creative Soul, *Karta Purakh*, are inextricably connected by the creation-Creator bond. Human beings need to learn and experience this relationship. Thus, the Sikh Scripture concentrates on the human need to seek a religious education to learn the relationship between the human soul and the Creator, and the Sacred Scripture gratifies that need and nurtures the human soul.

Guru Nanak, for instance, speaks of this time-honored need in the following verses:

ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਮਨੁ ਸਮਝਾਈਐ ਆਤਮ ਰਾਮੁ ਬੀਚਾਰਿ॥
ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਮਨੁ ਸਮਝਾਇਐ ਆਤਮ ਰਾਮੁ ਭੀਚਾਰਿ॥

The Guru-oriented people train their minds to contemplate God, the Cosmic Soul.

(SGGS 18)

ਕਾਇਆ ਮਹਲੁ ਮੰਦਰੁ ਘਰੁ ਹਰਿ ਕਾ ਤਿਸੁ ਮਹਿ ਰਾਖੀ ਜੋਤਿ ਅਪਾਰ॥
ਕਾਇਆ ਮਹਲੁ ਮੰਦਰੁ ਘਰੁ ਹਰਿ ਕਾ ਤਿਸੁ ਮਹਿ ਰਾਖੀ ਜੋਤਿ ਅਪਾਰ॥

The body is a mansion, a temple, a home of the Creator, the Karta Purakh, who has infused His Infinite Light into it.

(SGGS 1256)

Religion further concerns itself with the rescue of the human mind from maya and maya-induced images of pseudo-self.²² Maya is the deceptive and illusory materialism that lures human souls away from divine reality. Under its influence, the

individual forgets the Creator, becomes attached to the world, and believes in the duality of reality, the divine on one hand and maya on the other.

In the following verse Guru Amar Das aptly describes maya as the cause of spiritual destruction:

ਏਹ ਮਾਇਆ ਜਿਤੁ ਹਰਿ ਵਿਸਰੈ ਮੋਹੁ ਉਪਜੈ ਭਾਉ ਦੂਜਾ ਲਾਇਆ॥
ਏਹ ਮਾਇਆ ਜਿਤੁ ਹਰਿ ਵਿਸਰੈ ਮੋਹੁ ਤਪਯੈ ਭਾਉ ਦੂਜਾ ਲਾਇਆ॥

It is Maya causing the individual to forget the Karta Purakh; it is Maya arousing in the individual emotional attachments and love of duality.

(SGGS 921)

Guru Amar Das directs us to the purpose of religion, which is to enable us to see into the nature of things, see them as they are, and know them spiritually. Religion is supposed to help us deal with our illusions, our falsehoods, our ways of distorting reality, and our prejudices.

The third Guru's concern with how human attachment to the world of *maya* impacts on the human relationship with the Creator becomes all the more relevant to the present human condition.

With emerging technologies and the resulting materialistic abundance, our experience with the culture of illusions is increasing. Every moment of our waking hours we witness the make-believe world of mega accomplishments of modern materialism. At the tantalizing prime times of television, illusory benefits of materialistic mirages dance in front of us like shadows on the wall of Plato's cave. Further, the market-driven mass media culture makes us forget the real purpose of this life, disabling us to remember who we are and where we are heading. We define ourselves by our appearances; we seek satisfaction by looking in the mirror at our designer clothes, our celebrity turbans, our exteriors. We are mesmerized by the fabricated image of an illusionary person, and that image becomes our reality. In other words, we become the form, the exterior, the

thing. Thus, *maya*, producing images of a material world, distracts us, controls us, and keeps us from knowing the *Karta Purakh*.

The main objective of the founder of every world religion was to liberate individuals from illusions of *maya* and imprisonment of narcissism by teaching them how to connect to the Cosmic Soul. Fundamentally, it is our seeking and making that cosmic connection that we call spirituality. In fact, spirituality is not possible without self-knowledge; it consists in our attempts to know the self and then to connect the self to the Cosmic Soul manifested in the creation.

Many Mythologies for Many Scenarios

What varied from time to time, however, was the mode of transmission used by a founder to convey his/her message to the faithful, which became a major source of diversity in religion. The religious ways varied to suit different communities and times; these ways were termed religions, one religion being different from the other.

To make a religion suitable for people of different periods it was necessary for religious practices to vary. Thus, diverse religious practices in different lands became instrumental in producing the religious diversity we have in the world. This diversity is greatly affirmed in the Guru Granth Sahib and upheld by the Gurus.

Guru Gobind Singh celebrated *it* wondrously in word and deed. In several religious texts that are traditionally attributed to him, he emphasizes the shared humanity and spirituality of diverse people. In the poetry of *Akal Ustat*, for instance, the speaker says:

ਮਾਨਸ ਸਬੈ ਏਕ ਪੈ ਅਨੇਕ ਕੇ ਭਰਮਾਉ ਹੈ॥

मानस सबै एक पै अनेक को भ्रमाउ है॥

All human beings are one and the same, although there is a deception of differences (due to a multitude of environments and societies).

(*Akal Ustat, Chhand 86. 1. 2*)

The speaker further pronounces that the religious and mythological diversities owe their origins to differences in people's geographical locations and cultures:

ਦੇਵਤਾ ਅਦੇਵ ਜੱਛ ਰੰਪ੍ਰਬ ਤੁਰਕ ਹਿੰਦੂ ਨਿਆਰੇ ਨਿਆਰੇ
ਦੇਸਨ ਕੇ ਭੇਸ ਕੇ ਪ੍ਰਭਾਉ ਹੈ॥

देवता अदेव जछ गंधब तुरक हिंदू निआरे निआरे
देसन के भेस को प्रभाउ है॥

As there are gods, demons, or celestial musicians as diverse beings of another world, so are Muslims (citizens of Islamic nations) and Hindus (natives of the Indian subcontinent) as diverse human beings of this world. They all look and act differently; their apparent differences stem from their national and cultural influences, from the clothes they wear.

(*Akal Ustat, Chhand 86. 1. 3*)

The same scenario may apply even to the origin of mythologies. In old times, it was customary to develop mythical stories to explain religion. It became traditional to answer questions by narrating the best stories a wise man could invent in an effort to give order to his religious system. Thus, the mythical stories of all religions deal with the life issues of a period, and they often arrive at the logical conclusion that there must be a God responsible for the order. But this God was seen differently in different cultures.

In the primitive times, this type of logic often given by clergy laid foundations to mythologies that made sense to followers. We may illustrate it by re-telling a universal story (source unknown) – call it Hungarian, or Indian if you please:

Peasants living in the tiny hamlets of the Hungarian plains were proud to tell visitors: "Did you know that our village is the center of the world? You can check it out for yourself easily enough. All you have to do is go to the square in the

middle of the village. In the middle of the square is the church. If you climb its tower, you can see the fields and forests spreading out in a circle all around, with our church in the center." The fact that the neighboring villages also thought they were at the hub of the world didn't matter – after all, what did foreigners living on the periphery of the universe know?

Such delusions were taken seriously. These traditional peasants based their views on perfectly sensible bits of information. When they were looking down from the church spire, the village did, in fact, look as if it stood at the center of the world. All traditions were based on these observations they learned in childhood from their elders. Thus, their early learning held a stronger truth-value for them than anything they learned later. From their isolated vantage point, the reality they knew made perfectly good sense.

Unfortunately, every ethnic or regional religion propagated by its wise men teaches the same locally plausible, yet ultimately erroneous, hypothesis. This did not change over time, except that the vernacular of stories and their promises evolved to suit the new age. Don't we hear every day from many churches and other religious places that their scriptures were more authentic or originated from God's lips much more than anyone else's? "After all," they would say for a proof, speaking hypothetically, "*Everyone knows* that their prophet was sent by God Himself and assigned a uniquely higher position than any other prophet." It does no good to point out to them that, if that were the case, everyone in this world would have heard the same exclusive commandment from God, the One Supreme Being. Such questioning would only confuse and irritate them, to the extent that they would declare sanction of excommunication against those challenging the centrality of their faith.

Scenarios may vary from one religion to the other, but claims remain the same. Every ethnic group or cluster of

humanity is not only being led to believe that it is at the center of the universe, but also that it is endowed with unique virtues that make it somehow superior to any other ethnic group. Every religion that is narrowly organized and based on ethnicity tends to instill a similar prejudice in its members.

As we think over these scenarios, we see the development of a core of self-centeredness in each religion. Over time when populations expanded or migrated to different lands, they split into tribes or ethnic groups. Communication broke down among them due to such factors as geographical distances and the human desire and need to develop self-contained groups. As a result, ethnic religions grew in number, which utilized their own vernaculars and histories to create mythical stories of their own. Ethnic groups developed their own rules for living, which allowed them to lead a coherent life in their own limited environment.

In the course of time, these rules became ingrained in respective societies and became codified as religions. They were adopted as the foundation of many ancient cultures and many new religions. Thereafter, the cultures that humankind developed became the underlying bases of religious practices, and diverse religious practices began to look different, thus producing different religions.

In the following excerpt from *Akal Ustat*, the speaker reflects over the religious diversity, especially the self-centeredness of each religious group that developed among human populations:

ਕੇਉ ਭਇਓ ਮੁੰਡੀਆ ਸੰਨਿਆਸੀ ਕੇਉ ਜੋਗੀ ਭਇਓ
 ਕੇਉ ਬ੍ਰਹਮਚਾਰੀ ਕੇਉ ਜਤੀ ਅਨੁਮਾਨਬੋ॥
 ਹਿੰਦੂ ਤੁਰਕ ਕੇਉ ਰਾਫਿਜੀ ਇਮਾਮ ਸਾਫੀ
 ਮਾਨਸ ਕੀ ਜਾਤਿ ਸਬੈ ਏਕੈ ਪਹਚਾਨਬੋ॥
 ਕਰਤਾ ਕਰੀਮ ਸੇਈ ਰਾਜਿਕ ਰਹੀਮ ਓਈ

ਦੂਸਰੇ ਨ ਭੇਦ ਕੇਈ ਭੂਲਿ ਭ੍ਰਮ ਮਾਨਬੇ॥
 ਏਕ ਹੀ ਕੀ ਸੇਵ ਸਭ ਹੀ ਕੇ ਗੁਰਦੇਵ ਏਕ
 ਏਕ ਹੀ ਸਰੂਪ ਸਬੈ ਏਕੈ ਜੋਤਿ ਜਾਨਬੇ॥
 ਕੋਠੁ ਭਝਠੋ ਮੁੰਡੀਆ ਸੰਨਿਆਸੀ ਕੋਠੁ ਜੋਗੀ ਭਝਠੋ॥
 ਕੋਠੁ ਬ੍ਰਹਮਚਾਰੀ ਕੋਠੁ ਜਤੀ ਅਨੁਮਾਨਬੋ॥
 ਹਿੰਦੂ ਤੁਰਕ ਕੋਠੁ ਰਾਫਜੀ ਝਮਾਮ ਸਾਫੀ॥
 ਮਾਨਸ ਕੀ ਜਾਤਿ ਸਬੈ ਏਕੈ ਪਹਿਚਾਨਬੋ॥
 ਕਰਤਾ ਕਰੀਮ ਸੋਝੈ ਰਾਜਕ ਰਹੀਮ ਓਝੈ॥
 ਦੂਸਰੋ ਨ ਭੇਦ ਕੋਝੈ ਭ੍ਰਲਿ ਭ੍ਰਮ ਮਾਨਬੋ॥
 ਏਕ ਹੀ ਕੀ ਸੇਵ ਸਭ ਹੀ ਕੋ ਗੁਰਦੇਵ ਏਕ॥
 ਏਕ ਹੀ ਸਰੂਪ ਸਬੈ ਏਕੈ ਜੋਤਿ ਜਾਨਬੋ॥

Many believe they are superior because they are celibate or meditate, have given up material comforts or assumed a different look, or wear long and matted hair or wear no hair. Others feel superior because they are Hindus or belong to a particular sect of Islam. But no one should overlook the basic fact that followers of all religions are all human beings. The Creator who provides for all humans is one God of all, and that God alone should be worshipped. Do not remain ignorant; believe in no other than one God. All humanity is equal; we all have the Creator reflected in us; we all carry within us the divine spark manifesting one Creator, one God.

(Akal Ustat 92)

To illustrate the occurrence of religious diversity in the world, with a common underlying goal, authors of the Guru Granth describe the practices of various religions at many places in the scripture. The Founding Guru, for instance, points out the practices of both Semitic and Indian religions in the following verses:

ਮੁਸਲਮਾਨਾ ਸਿਫਤਿ ਸਰੀਅਤਿ ਪੜਿ ਪੜਿ ਕਰਹਿ ਬੀਚਾਰੁ॥
ਮੁਸਲਮਾਨਾ ਸਿਫਤਿ ਸਰੀਅਤਿ ਪੜਿ ਪੜਿ ਕਰਹਿ ਬੀਚਾਰੁ॥

The Muslims praise the Islamic law; they read and reflect upon it.

ਬੰਦੇ ਮੇ ਜਿ ਪਵਹਿ ਵਿਚਿ ਬੰਦੀ ਵੇਖਣ ਕਉ ਦੀਦਾਰੁ॥
ਬੰਦੇ ਸੇ ਜਿ ਪਵਹਿ ਵਿਚਿ ਬੰਦੀ ਵੇਖਣ ਕਉ ਦੀਦਾਰੁ॥

The God's bound servants are those who bind themselves to see the God's Vision.

ਹਿੰਦੂ ਸਾਲਾਹੀ ਸਾਲਾਹਨਿ ਦਰਸਨਿ ਰੂਪਿ ਅਪਾਰੁ॥
ਹਿੰਦੂ ਸਾਲਾਹੀ ਸਾਲਾਹਨਿ ਦਰਸਨਿ ਰੂਪਿ ਅਪਾਰੁ॥

The Hindus praise the Praiseworthy God; the Blessed Vision of His Darshan, His countless forms are incomprehensible.

ਤੀਰਥਿ ਨਾਵਹਿ ਅਰਚਾ ਪੂਜਾ ਅਗਰ ਵਾਸੁ ਬਹਕਾਰੁ॥
ਤੀਰਥਿ ਨਾਵਹਿ ਅਰਚਾ ਪੂਜਾ ਅਗਰ ਵਾਸੁ ਬਹਕਾਰੁ॥

They bathe at sacred shrines of pilgrimage, making offerings of flowers, and burning incense before idols.

ਜੇਗੀ ਸੁੰਨਿ ਧਿਆਵਨਿ ਜੇਤੇ ਅਲਖ ਨਾਮੁ ਕਰਤਾਰੁ॥
ਜੇਗੀ ਸੁੰਨਿ ਧਿਆਵਨਿ ਜੇਤੇ ਅਲਖ ਨਾਮੁ ਕਰਤਾਰੁ॥

The Yogis meditate on the absolute God there; they call the Creator the Unseen God.

(SGGS 465)

ਸੁਖਮ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਨਾਮੁ ਨਿਰੰਜਨ ਕਾਇਆ ਕਾ ਆਕਾਰੁ॥
ਸੁਖਮ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਨਾਮੁ ਨਿਰੰਜਨ ਕਾਇਆ ਕਾ ਆਕਾਰੁ॥

But to the subtle image of the Immaculate Name, they apply the form of a body.

(SGGS 466)

Finally, another verse, quoted below, which is traditionally ascribed to the tenth Guru, drives home the point that human beings are not different from one another, that they are connected by their common humanity and mortality – indicating a genuine spiritual consciousness in the speaker:

ਏਕੈ ਨੈਨ ਏਕੈ ਕਾਨ ਏਕੈ ਦੇਹ ਏਕੈ ਬਾਨ

ਖਾਕ ਬਾਦ ਆਤਿਸ ਐ ਆਬ ਕੇ ਰਲਾਉ ਹੈ॥

ਏਕੈ ਨੈਨ ਏਕੈ ਕਾਨ ਏਕੈ ਦੇਹ ਏਕੈ ਬਾਨ॥

खाक बाद आतिस औ आब को रलाउ है ॥

All human beings are alike – they have same eyes, same ears, same body, same tongue, and eventually they all die.

(Akal Ustat, 51)

Sri Guru Granth Sahib the Interfaith Scripture

The Guru Granth Sahib is the most recent collection of revealed scriptures in world history. It came into being to fulfill the spiritual need of pluralistic societies with multiple approaches. Its composers felt strongly that multiple responses were necessary to meet the spiritual need of future generations.

The Guru Granth Sahib was compiled first time by Guru Arjan in 1604 and then completed by Guru Gobind Singh. He then ordained it as the Guru in 1708. The interfaith nature of this scripture becomes evident from the fact that Guru Arjan did not limit the authorship of the Sacred Scripture to the Sikh Gurus alone, but extended it to authors representing other religious persuasions, too. Other factors that bolster the Scripture's interfaith character are the Guru's choice of the site for the holy temple where to install his version, his choice of individuals associated with the temple, and the multilingual media used to construct the Granth.

The fifth Guru contributed over one third (2218) of 5894 hymns to the Granth; the remaining two thirds were composed by five other Gurus over a period of two centuries, nineteen other religious leaders spanning several centuries, and eleven poets of Guru Arjan's court. Thus, a total of thirty six (36) authors from divergent cultural and geographical backgrounds offer us their revelations – their sense of God and His creation, and of the human value system giving meaning to human existence. Here Hindus, Muslims, scholars, and untouchable peasants meet in the same congregation of holy souls to offer us

the experience of an unmatched plurality of religious visions, unparalleled among world religions.

While the fifth Guru's choice of religiously diverse authorship is clearly a sufficient reason for the universal religion to be viewed as interfaith, there are other factors further highlighting his intention to present the newly emerging religion as such.

Consider his choice of the site for the first compilation and installation of the Granth (it was no coincidence, we believe): The land site of Amritsar is associated with India's two ancient religions, Hinduism and Buddhism. Sage Valmiki wrote the Indian epic *Ramayana* at this site – a book revered as scripture by most Hindus, and Buddha meditated here. Some even say that a major part of the *Vedas*, the sacred Hindu scriptures, was partially composed and collated here thousands of years ago.²³

Then, add to the above a very special relationship of two of the Guru's contemporaries with the site, one perhaps by providential design and the other by the Guru's own choice. The Mughal Emperor Akbar, a great Muslim ruler known for his interfaith endeavors, gifted the land to Guru Amar Das's daughter Bhani, married to the fourth Guru, Ram Das, on which Guru Arjan built the sacred town with the holy Sikh temple therein (in which the sacred scripture was to be installed). Another Islamic religious leader, Mian Mir, a famous Sufi saint, laid the foundation stone of the holy temple on the Guru's invitation.

The interfaith character of the Granth is further strengthened by the multilingual media employed by its authors to capture their divine visions. The principal language selected for the Granth was a composite of many languages and dialects, which allowed for diversity of religious voices. It was the language of holy men that had evolved over several centuries, thirteenth to seventeenth. This language enjoyed wide currency in the Indian subcontinent and to some extent in Southeast Asia and the

Middle-East. Based upon the local dialects, it was leavened with expressions from Sanskrit, Prakrit, Persian, Arabic, Bengali, Marathi, and many other languages.

For thousands of years, Sanskrit had claimed the central place in Hindu scriptures and in most Hindu religious performances; also, Sanskrit was believed by Hindus to be the language of gods. On the contrary, the gurus chose contemporary society's languages and a newly created script called *Gurmukhi* for the Granth Sahib, thereby rejecting the tradition and demolishing the claim of any human language to be the language of gods. The spiritual language of the Granth was intended to communicate with every segment of society on its own turf and in its own mother tongue, and to meet that need numerous linguistic systems of the Indian subcontinent, South East Asia, and the Middle East were employed. The newly created script permitted preservation of multilingual hymns in one volume in a phonetically correct format.

Obviously, Guru Arjan Dev intended to celebrate the diversity of religious and mystical experiences that he could encompass in his world and, at the same time, establish the fundamental unity of spirituality and faith through the Guru Granth Sahib. In this scripture, he founded an integral congress of all minds and souls operating on the same spiritual vibration. He elevated the songs of saints, Sufis, and bards to the level of the logos to salute the power of the Word and to reveal the glory of One Reality. Thus, in the mode of religious dissemination, the role of professional clergy was eliminated.

Spirituality Unshackled from Divisive Ethnicity

The world we live in has much greater religious, political, and cultural diversity than the one in which Jesus, Mohammad, Ved Vyas, or even Nanak lived. A wide variety of Christians, Sikhs, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Jains, Native

Americans, and all of the various combinations thereof inhabit this world. Each group has ethnic components to its practices and emphasizes its own needs and point of view about the function of religion in a pluralistic society. Sometime such emphasis may be misplaced and divisive and cause much destruction.

Today when we see the world plagued by religious violence, we wonder why humanity is not more peaceful and happier than before as it was promised by the death of communism, the arch enemy of religious freedom and other civil liberties, and by the rise of prosperity and freedom due to capitalism and democracy. Perhaps the answer is that too much love for one's own ethnicity and brand of religion and too little for others' humanity and religion breed a kind of religious and ethnic narcissism that insulates an ethnic group from others, causing the former to dehumanize the latter. So the consequences are: religious fanaticism rising to a crescendo, ethnic groups aspiring to absolute religious and other triumphs over other groups, and the world becoming increasingly more dangerous.

Today, most clergy, being fanatic about their beliefs, are confusing the laudable principles of religious diversity with narrow definitions of underlined ethnicity. Many times, there is a total failure on their part to transcend their biological, geographical and ethnic differences. Instead, they regularly manifest the tunnel vision of ethnicity in everything they do, sometimes even creating and showing differences where none might exist only to prove their uniqueness. They promote the ancient traditions of sectarian religions and make prevailing religious practices partisan. They exhibit an adversarial relationship with other world religions. They glorify those who advocate the supremacy of their religion over others, give religious sanctions to violence against innocents, and praise struggles between social classes and religious groups.

Selfish motives, one can argue, underlie most of the ethnic struggles launched by religious leaders. Expressions of divisiveness in religious organizations have been progressively consolidated in our social life. As a result, the way in which most religious institutions carry out their day-to-day activities presents a fundamental challenge to the concept of inculcating universality and spirituality in our culture. Spirituality is getting entrapped in the walls of ethnic religiosity. Often religious leaders ignore inculcating faith in the spiritual dimension of human nature.

Guru Nanak bemoans the futility of ethnic, selfish, or narcissistic approaches in the following verses:

ਕਲਹਿ ਬੁਰੀ ਸੰਸਾਰਿ ਵਾਦੇ ਖਪੀਐ॥

ਕਲਹਿ ਬੁਰੀ ਸੰਸਾਰਿ ਵਾਦੇ ਖਪੀਏ॥

The strife of this world is evil; the world is consumed with it.

ਵਿਣੁ ਨਾਵੈ ਵੇਕਾਰਿ ਭਰਮੇ ਪਚੀਐ॥

ਵਿਯੁ ਨਾਵੈ ਵੇਕਾਰਿ ਭਰਮੇ ਪਚੀਏ॥

Without God's Name, life is worthless. People are being destroyed by doubt.

ਰਾਹ ਦੇਵੈ ਇਕੁ ਜਾਣੈ ਸੇਈ ਸਿਝਸੀ॥

ਰਾਹ ਦੋਵੈ ਝਕੁ ਜਾਯੈ ਸੋਝੈ ਸਿਝਸੀ॥

One who recognizes that all spiritual paths lead to the One shall be emancipated.

ਕੁਫਰ ਗੋਅ ਕੁਫਰਾਣੈ ਪਇਆ ਦਝਸੀ॥

ਕੁਫਰ ਗੋਅ ਕੁਫਰਾਯੈ ਪਝਿਆ ਦਝਸੀ॥

One who speaks lies shall fall into hell and burn.

ਸਭ ਦੁਨੀਆ ਸੁਬਹਾਨੁ ਸਚਿ ਸਮਾਈਐ॥

ਸਭ ਦੁਨੀਆ ਸੁਬਹਾਨੁ ਸਚਿ ਸਮਾਈਏ॥

In the whole world, the most blessed and sanctified are those who remain absorbed in Truth.

ਸਿਝੈ ਦਰਿ ਦੀਵਾਨਿ ਆਪੁ ਗਵਾਈਐ॥

ਸਿਝੈ ਦਰਿ ਦੀਵਾਨਿ ਆਪੁ ਗਵਾੜਏ ॥

One who eliminates selfishness and conceit is redeemed in the Court of the God.

(SGGS 142)

Guru Nanak continues to underscore the problem of religious conflicts caused by human selfishness in promoting one's own sectarian viewpoint of spirituality and religion. He says,

ਏਕੁ ਸਾਹਿਬੁ ਦੁਇ ਰਾਹ ਵਾਦ ਵਪੰਦਿਆ ਜੀਉ ॥
ਏਕੁ ਸਾਹਿਬੁ ਦੁਇ ਰਾਹ ਵਾਦ ਵਖੰਦਿਆ ਜੀਤ ॥

There is only One God and Master, but there are two paths claimed, by which conflict increases.

(SGGS 688)

The message conveyed by these verses is that the objective of faith for people ought to be spirituality, which does not threaten ethnicity or diversity, and that the presence of diversity in religion should strengthen religious cooperation and faith in spiritual values of the new society. Spirituality, the soul of religious cooperation, is distinct from religious ethnicity. Spirituality transcends all boundaries of ethnic religions. If prevailing religious thoughts should continue to be divisive, it would be our collective failure in translating our expressed faith into the spiritual dimension of human nature, which is to seek the Truth.

The first Guru highlights this dimension in the following verse:

ਏਕੇ ਧਰਮੁ ਦ੍ਰਿੜੈ ਸਚੁ ਕੋਈ ॥
ਏਕੋ ਧਰਮੁ ਦ੍ਰਿੜੈ ਸਚੁ ਕੋਇ ॥

There is only one principle of Dharma; everyone must seek the Truth.

(SGGS 1188)

The interfaith spirit of the Guru Granth calls for the destruction of the divisive boundaries. It calls for the creation of the ethos, rituals, laws, and institutions that incorporate diversity in faith without losing sight of the ultimate reality. Guru Ram

Das highlights in the following verses the vision showing the founding Guru being allied with God as opposed to the worldly divisiveness:

ਮਿਥਿਆ ਦੂਜਾ ਭਾਉ ਧੜੇ ਬਹਿ ਪਾਵੈ॥
ਮਿਥਿਆ ਦੂਜਾ ਭਾਉ ਧੜੇ ਬਹਿ ਪਾਵੈ॥

In the false love of duality, people sit together and form separate alliances.

ਪਰਾਇਆ ਛਿਦ੍ਰੁ ਅਟਕਲੈ ਆਪਣਾ ਅਹੰਕਾਰੁ ਵਧਾਵੈ॥
ਪਰਾਇਆ ਛਿਦ੍ਰੁ ਅਟਕਲੈ ਆਪਣਾ ਅਹੰਕਾਰੁ ਵਧਾਵੈ॥

They criticize others' faults, only to bolster their own ego, their self-conceit.

ਜੈਸਾ ਬੀਜੈ ਤੈਸਾ ਖਾਵੈ॥
ਜੈਸਾ ਬੀਜੈ ਤੈਸਾ ਖਾਵੈ॥

As they sow, so shall they reap.

ਜਨ ਨਾਨਕ ਕਾ ਹਰਿ ਧੜਾ ਧਰਮੁ ਸਭ ਸ੍ਰਿਸਟਿ ਜਿਣਿ ਆਵੈ॥
ਜਨ ਨਾਨਕ ਕਾ ਹਰਿ ਧੜਾ ਧਰਮੁ ਸਭ ਸ੍ਰਿਸਟਿ ਜਿਣਿ ਆਵੈ॥

Humble Nanak has joined the Creator's alliance of Dharma, of spirituality, which shall overcome the whole devious world.

(SGGS 366)

In the following verse, Sikh theologian Bhai Gurdas encapsulates the message enshrined in Guru Ram Das's vision, urging us to appreciate other religious paths and to wish them well:

ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਪੰਥ ਸੁਖ ਚਾਹਤ ਸਕਲ ਪੰਥ...॥
ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਪੰਥ ਸੁਖ ਚਾਹਤ ਸਕਲ... ॥

The Guru-oriented people wish well for all paths.

(Gurdas, *Kabit* 58, line 1)

Discourage Profiling and Labeling

We tend to profile people in terms of tribes, cultures, castes, religions, economic and social classes, genders, ages, politico-territorial nations, ethnic groups, and family lineage. And then we ascribe to them certain characteristics based on how we perceive ourselves as opposed to them. This habit of profiling, labeling, or defining “others” in contrast to “us” is a mother of

adversarial antagonism, of divisiveness. It permits and enables religious fanaticism to take hold of innocent followers of the faith. Fanatics can then refract the world's scriptural lights through prisms of their own designs. They can first claim and then practice exclusivity of their faith and consider conversions of others to their beliefs as part of their religious fervor. Finally, fanaticism begins to serve as an enemy of peace and a basis of wars between nations, peoples, and families. It results in the destruction of the human spirit and the human body.

Through the Guru Granth, Guru Nanak sensitized his followers to the harms fanatics may inflict on others by dividing this world between “we” and “others” or “us” and “them.” He promoted the theology of non-duality to bring humankind together when he began the scripture with the sacred words ੴ, pronounced as *Ik Onkar* (variantly, *Ek Onkar*), meaning “One Spirit One World” (for further discussion see Lal, 2006).

The Guru Granth begins with the symbolic number one, ੴ, meaning the Undivided Virtual Reality, the One that permeates through all creation and may be understood as One Spirit. The letter *Ik* or *Ek* is followed by the symbol *Onkar*, meaning the manifestation in creation that includes all worlds and all humanity with one soul residing in them. The soul is defined here as the manifested extension of the One. Thus, the whole creation is considered as one.

Not only did Guru Nanak give this mantra of “One Spirit One World” the first place on the first page of his revealed scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib; his nine successors repeated, too, this profoundly symbolic word 568 times in their writings in the Sacred Scripture.

Further, Guru Ram Das promoted an attitude of gratitude for God-given bounties and wisdom of non-duality as reflected in the following verse:

ਮੈ ਊਪਰਿ ਨਦਰਿ ਕਰੀ ਖਿਰਿ ਸਾਚੈ ਮੈ ਛੋਡਿਅੜਾ ਮੇਰਾ ਤੇਰਾ॥

ਮੈਂ ਊਪਰਿ ਨਦਰਿ ਕਰੀ ਧਿਰਿ ਸਾਚੈ ਮੈਂ ਛੋਡਿਅਡਾ ਮੇਰਾ ਤੇਰਾ॥

I tender my gratitude to the Eternal Wisdom (God) who granted me the gift of inner understanding to abandon the distinction between mine and thine.

(SGGS 561)

Prior to Guru Ram Das, Guru Amar Das has said that we label people good and bad only when we do not recognize in them the presence of the same soul that we have:

ਸਭਨਾ ਕਾ ਪ੍ਰਭੁ ਏਕੁ ਹੈ ਦੂਜਾ ਅਵਰੁ ਨ ਕੋਇ॥

ਗੁਰ ਪਰਸਾਦੀ ਮਨਿ ਵਸੈ ਤਿਤੁ ਘਟਿ ਪਰਗਟੁ ਹੋਇ॥

ਸਭੁ ਅੰਤਰਜਾਮੀ ਬ੍ਰਹਮੁ ਹੈ ਬ੍ਰਹਮੁ ਵਸੈ ਸਭ ਥਾਇ॥

ਮੰਦਾ ਕਿਸ ਨੇ ਆਖੀਐ ਸਬਦਿ ਵੇਖਹੁ ਲਿਵ ਲਾਇ॥

ਬੁਰਾ ਭਲਾ ਤਿਚਰੁ ਆਖਦਾ ਜਿਚਰੁ ਹੈ ਦੁਹੁ ਮਾਹਿ॥

ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਏਕੇ ਬੁਝਿਆ ਏਕਸੁ ਮਾਹਿ ਸਮਾਇ॥

ਸਮਨਾ ਕਾ ਪ੍ਰਭੁ ਏਕੁ ਹੈ ਦੂਜਾ ਅਵਰੁ ਨ ਕੋਝੁ॥

ਗੁਰ ਪਰਸਾਦੀ ਮਨਿ ਵਸੈ ਤਿਤੁ ਘਟਿ ਪਰਗਟੁ ਹੋਝੁ॥

ਸਭੁ ਅੰਤਰਜਾਮੀ ਬ੍ਰਹਮੁ ਹੈ ਬ੍ਰਹਮੁ ਵਸੈ ਸਭ ਥਾਝੁ॥

ਮੰਦਾ ਕਿਸ ਨੋ ਆਖੀਐ ਸਬਦਿ ਵੇਖਹੁ ਲਿਵ ਲਾਝੁ॥

ਬੁਰਾ ਭਲਾ ਤਿਚਰੁ ਆਖਦਾ ਜਿਚਰੁ ਹੈ ਦੁਹੁ ਮਾਹਿ॥

ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਏਕੋ ਬੁਝਿਆ ਏਕਸੁ ਮਾਹਿ ਸਮਾਝੁ॥

There is One God for all; there is no other. By the Guru's grace, the God comes to abide in your heart (mind); there you experience His revelation. God knows all hearts; He dwells in every place. So who should we call evil? Behold the Word of the Shabad (hymn), and lovingly dwell upon it. We call others bad and good as long as we live in duality. The Gurmukh understands the One and Only God; that person is absorbed in the One God.

(SGGS 757)

In the following verses, Sikh theologian Bhai Gurdas urged the followers of the Guru Granth Sahib to avoid labeling people, referring to Hindus and Muslims, and to become humble instead:

ਉਸਤੁਤਿ ਨਿੰਦਾ ਸਾਧਿ ਕੈ ਹਿੰਦੂ ਮੁਸਲਮਾਣ ਸਬਾਏ॥

ਪੈਰੀ ਪੈ ਪਾਖਾਕ ਸਦਾਏ॥

उसतुति निंदा साधि कै हिंदू मुसलमाण सबਾए॥

पैरी पै पाखाक सदाए॥

Instead of praising one and slandering the other, they (Sikhs) have become admirers of both Hindus and Muslims. In utter humility, they bow to all.

(Bhai Gurdas, *Vaar 7*, Pauri 2)

Diversity in the Gurus' Life Style

The Gurus made every effort to demolish the walls that were erected between people of different faiths. Guru Nanak was the first prophet who founded the tradition of interfaith dialogue in South Asia. He did so by dialoguing with his playmates, village administrators, school teachers, and leaders of various religions. His conversations are recorded as dialogues or *goshats* as we call them in our vernacular. Further, all gurus maintained a fluid personal identity. To illustrate, it would suffice to cite a few specifics about the founding Guru's life.

The image of Guru Nanak is recorded as always transforming; he was seen mixing with people of all identities. He was born of a Hindu mother but raised by a Muslim midwife. In one account during his journeys, he is represented as an ascetic who lived on sand (a gurdwara built to immortalize this style is called "*Roori Sahib*," meaning Guru's bed of pebbles). In another identity, he became a householder who toiled for a living, as is evident from his life in the town of Kartarpur – meaning the Creator's villa, settlement, or city – which he had founded and where he lived for the last eighteen years of his mortal life. Yet, in another mode, he was a spiritual savant discoursing with the religious elite of all religions like *sidhas*, *yogis*, and *mullahs*.

One time Guru Nanak is described as undertaking a pilgrimage to Mecca in the garb of a Muslim *haaji*. During his

Mecca visit, the Guru conducted dialogues daily with the clergy of that land and pilgrims of other lands. It is in one of those dialogues he was asked which of the existing religions was better and more suitable for humanity. His response was clearly that of an interfaith activist. As recoded by Bhai Gurdas, it is quoted below:

ਪੁਛਨਿ ਗਲ ਈਮਾਨ ਦੀ ਕਾਜੀ ਮੁਲਾਂ ਇਕਠੇ ਹੋਈ॥
 ਵਡਾ ਸਾਂਗ ਵਰਤਾਇਆ ਲਖਿ ਨ ਸਕੈ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਕੋਈ॥
 ਪੁਛਨਿ ਫੋਲਿ ਕਿਤਾਬ ਨੇ ਹਿੰਦੂ ਵਡਾ ਕਿ ਮੁਸਲਮਾਨੋਈ॥
 ਬਾਬਾ ਆਖੇ ਹਾਜੀਆ ਸੁਭਿ ਅਮਲਾ ਬਾਝਹੁ ਦੋਨੇ ਰੋਈ॥
 ਹਿੰਦੂ ਮੁਸਲਮਾਨ ਦੁਇ ਦਰਗਹ ਅੰਦਰਿ ਲਹਨਿ ਨ ਢੋਈ॥
 ਕਚਾ ਰੰਗੁ ਕਸੁੰਭ ਦਾ ਪਾਣੀ ਧੋਤੈ ਥਿਰ ਨ ਰਹੋਈ॥
 ਕਰਨਿ ਬਖੀਲੀ ਆਪਿ ਵਿਚਿ ਰਾਮ ਰਹੀਮ ਇਕ ਥਾਇ ਖਲੋਈ॥
 ਰਾਹਿ ਸੈਤਾਨੀ ਦੁਨੀਆਂ ਗੋਈ॥
 ਪੁਛਨਿ ਗਲ ਈਮਾਨ ਦੀ ਕਾਜੀ ਮੁਲਾਂ ਝਕਠੇ ਹੋਏ॥
 ਵਡਾ ਸਾਂਗ ਵਰਤਾਏਆ ਲਖਿ ਨ ਸਕੈ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਕੋਏ॥
 ਪੁਛਨਿ ਫੋਲਿ ਕਿਤਾਬ ਨੋ ਹਿੰਦੂ ਵਡਾ ਕਿ ਮੁਸਲਮਾਨੋਏ॥
 ਬਾਬਾ ਆਖੇ ਹਾਜੀਆ ਸੁਭਿ ਅਮਲਾ ਬਾਝਹੁ ਦੋਨੋ ਰੋਏ॥
 ਹਿੰਦੂ ਮੁਸਲਮਾਨ ਦੁਝ ਦਰਗਹ ਅੰਦਰਿ ਲਹਨਿ ਨ ਢੋਏ॥
 ਕਚਾ ਰੰਗੁ ਕਸੁੰਭ ਦਾ ਪਾਣੀ ਧੋਤੈ ਥਿਰ ਨ ਰਹੋਏ॥
 ਕਰਨਿ ਬਖੀਲੀ ਆਪਿ ਵਿਚਿ ਰਾਮ ਰਹੀਮ ਇਕ ਥਾਏ ਖਲੋਏ॥
 ਰਾਹਿ ਸੈਤਾਨੀ ਦੁਨੀਆਂ ਗੋਏ॥

Muslim scholars, the Qazi, and the maulvi, congregated around Guru Nanak and began to dialogue on matters of faith and religious commitment. They said to the Guru that he had created a great mystery with his external attire and deep knowledge of all religions. Could you open your book and search for the answer whether a Hindu or a Muslim is superior or distinguished? Baba Nanak responded to the pilgrims and their leaders that without good deeds both would be made to repent.

No one is accepted in the court of the Creator only by a claim to membership in a religion whether it is Hinduism or Islam. As the color of safflower is transient and easily washed away in water, the color of religiosity is only momentary. By denouncing the deity of your opponent's religion you are engaging in the worst kind of mudslinging. In the process, you are engaging the whole world in the ways of Satan.

(Bhai Gurdas, *Vaar 1*, Pauri 33)

The Guru is then seen giving discourses at Hindu holy places, such as Haridwar, and wearing an external appearance of a Hindu ascetic. There, too, he dialogued with the various sects of Hinduism. His dialogues with the *Sidhas* and *Yogis* have been made part of the Sikh scripture.

Nanak is described as a saint who took delight in wearing clothes in styles of Muslim *pirs* and Hindu ascetics. He chose companions and disciples whose castes and religions did not match. His first Sikh was a Muslim, Rai Bullaar, and the second too was a Muslim, Bhai Mardana. His lifelong companions included a Hindu, Bhai Bala, and a Muslim Bhai Mardana. In his social transactions, he paid no heed to spatial or dietary religious taboos. It was not without reason that historians, besides calling him Guru, identify him as *shah* or king, *baba* or wise man, *pir*, *sadh*, *bhagat*, *faqir*, and *darves*. These varied terms of salute represent an overtly non-conforming personality of Nanak.

The way Nanak's earthly life concluded, or rather the way his followers chose to perform his last rites upon his death, represents the mystery of his faith. He had preached a revealed spiritual mission all his life, established numerous religious centers, and attracted large followings, and yet his followers could not decide whether to perform his last rites according to Hinduism or Islam or a different way – Hindus wanting to cremate the body and Muslims to bury it.

This historic indecision was witnessed in the town of Kartarpur where Guru Nanak had spent the last eighteen years of his life. There he held daily congregations, spread his message,

and appointed his successor. His followers from the Hindu background were known to be Guru Nanak's Sikh, while his Muslim admirers were known to be Pir Nanak's *Mureed*.

It is simply amazing that the town's people weren't able to name his religion and that this event wouldn't strike to most people as unusual. Even his successor, Guru Angad, who was named as the second Nanak and was present at the scene, chose not to help them resolve their dilemma. Perhaps this entire episode took the form it did because the universe of Guru Nanak was free from rigid religious identities, and hardly anyone thought of this dilemma as unusual. Till this day (author Harbans Lal visited this site in November 2001), Muslim people of Kartarpur and its surroundings continue to worship at the mausoleum on Guru Nanak's grave in a cemetery.

The Metaphor of the Orchard

In the new world of science and technology, with all its unprecedented freedom to choose one's beliefs and religious practices, the Guru Granth Sahib promotes mutually dependent, symbiotic relationships among faith communities. In such a world, the Guru Granth theology can help sprout orchards of faith people longing to experience the Creator within creation, within each human being. It will, then, encourage a multi-cultural style of living aiming to establish peace and justice in the world.

Page after page, as you read the scripture, you find the gurus challenging the religious people of the world to realize spirituality in their own faiths and to work constructively with members of other faith traditions toward the realization of the Truth. They clearly recognize, as the Granth reveals, a common spirit capable of connecting all major religions by the values they espouse, such as compassion, honesty, respect, generosity, kindness, and goodness to all. And they depict this spirit by using metaphors for the manifestation of the Supreme Being in

His creation. The gurus as poets selected nature imagery to display *Ik Onkaar* or Waheguru's involvement with the world. They use nature in the form of orchards as a metaphor for an ever-changing and interconnected world of Maya surrounding or overlaying the oases of *amrit*, the elixir of immortality.

Guru Arjan Dev's use of the orchard stands out as a beautiful metaphor to describe the world of diversity in faith and culture. It is meant to show the interconnectedness of the world and particularly to encourage devoted seekers to avoid the poisoned pools in their quest of the pool of immortality. He says:

ਏਕੁ ਬਗੀਚਾ ਪੇਡ ਘਨ ਕਰਿਆ॥ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤ ਨਾਮੁ ਤਹਾ ਮਹਿ ਫਲਿਆ॥
 ਐਸਾ ਕਰਹੁ ਬੀਚਾਰੁ ਗਿਆਨੀ॥ ਜਾ ਤੇ ਪਾਈਐ ਪਦੁ ਨਿਰਬਾਨੀ॥
 ਆਸਿ ਪਾਸਿ ਬਿਖੁਆ ਕੇ ਕੁੰਟਾ ਬੀਚਿ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤੁ ਹੈ ਭਾਈ ਰੇ॥
 ਸਿੰਚਨਹਾਰੇ ਏਕੈ ਮਾਲੀ॥ ਖਬਰਿ ਕਰਤੁ ਹੈ ਪਾਤ ਪਤ ਡਾਲੀ॥
 ਸਗਲ ਬਨਸਪਤਿ ਆਇ ਜੜਾਈ॥ ਸਗਲੀ ਫੂਲੀ ਨਿਫਲ ਨ ਕਾਈ॥
 ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤ ਫਲੁ ਨਾਮੁ ਜਿਨਿ ਗੁਰ ਤੇ ਪਾਇਆ॥
 ਨਾਨਕ ਦਾਸ ਤਰੀ ਤਿਨਿ ਮਾਇਆ॥
 ਏਕੁ ਬਗੀਚਾ ਪੇਡ ਘਨ ਕਰਿਆ॥ ਅਮ੍ਰਿਤ ਨਾਮੁ ਤਹਾ ਮਹਿ ਫਲਿਆ॥
 ਏਸਾ ਕਰਹੁ ਬੀਚਾਰੁ ਗਿਆਨੀ॥ ਜਾ ਤੇ ਪਾਈਐ ਪਦੁ ਨਿਰਬਾਨੀ॥
 ਆਸਿ ਪਾਸਿ ਬਿਖੁਆ ਕੇ ਕੁੰਟਾ ਬੀਚਿ ਅਮ੍ਰਿਤੁ ਹੈ ਭਾਈ ਰੇ॥
 ਸਿੰਚਨਹਾਰੇ ਏਕੈ ਮਾਲੀ॥ ਖਬਰਿ ਕਰਤੁ ਹੈ ਪਾਤ ਪਤ ਡਾਲੀ॥
 ਸਗਲ ਬਨਸਪਤਿ ਆਇ ਜੜਾਈ॥ ਸਗਲੀ ਫੂਲੀ ਨਿਫਲ ਨ ਕਾਈ॥
 ਅਮ੍ਰਿਤ ਫਲੁ ਨਾਮੁ ਜਿਨਿ ਗੁਰ ਤੇ ਪਾਇਆ॥
 ਨਾਨਕ ਦਾਸ ਤਰੀ ਤਿਨਿ ਮਾਇਆ॥

The world is an orchard; a variety of vegetation is growing in it. And in its midst is growing the fruit of immortality. Think, O seeker of Truth, think in such a way that you may achieve Nirvana and become immortal. There is only one gardener who tends this orchard. He brings numerous sorts of vegetation and plants them there. He takes care of every leaf and branch. They

bear fruit - none is without fruit. And there also grows the tree the gardener has planted that bears the fruit of immortality, of eternal divinity. While you the seeker may find (be alert!) the pools of poison there, look in the midst for the pool of immortality, the amrit, the life-giving nectar, which is also there. One who receives the eternal faith of divine understanding from the teachings of the Guru says Nanak, such a blessed one alone succeeds in crossing over the ocean of Maya, i.e., this world, this life.

(SGGS 385)

The orchard or garden as a metaphor has been used by other authors of the Granth, too. Long before Guru Arjan, Kabir used a tree in an orchard as a metaphor for God's creation displaying harmony and interconnectedness. He said:

ਤਰਵਰੁ ਏਕੁ ਅਨੰਤ ਡਾਰ ਸਾਖਾ ਪੁਹਪ ਪਤ੍ਰੁ ਰਸ ਭਰੀਆ॥

तरवरु एकु अनंत डार साखा पुहप पत्र रस भरिआ॥

You may observe a single tree in an orchard. That too will have countless branches and twigs; its flowers and leaves may be filled with its life-giving nectar.

(SGGS 970)

Long after Kabir, Guru Gobind Singh employs nature imagery to emphasize the interconnectedness of the entire creation, animate and inanimate, though without using the metaphor of the orchard. This is how the poet describes the organic relationship of a diverse universe in the following verses:

ਜੈਸੇ ਏਕ ਆਗ ਤੇ ਕਨੂਕਾ ਕੋਟਿ ਆਗਿ ਉਠੇ

निआरे निआरे हुँइ कै फेरि आग मै मिलाहिंरगे॥

ਜੈਸੇ ਏਕ ਧੂਰਿ ਤੇ ਅਨੇਕ ਧੂਰਿ ਪੂਰਤ ਹੈ

धूरि के कनूका फेर धूरि ही समाहिंरगे॥

ਜੈਸੇ ਏਕ ਨਦ ਤੇ ਤਰੰਗ ਕੋਟਿ ਉਪਜਤ ਹੈ

पानि के तरंग सबै पानि ही कहाहिंरगे॥

ਤੈਸੇ ਬਿਸ੍ਵ ਰੂਪ ਤੇ ਅਭੂਤ ਭੂਤ ਪ੍ਰਗਟ ਹੋਇ
ਤਾਹੀ ਤੇ ਉਪਜਿ ਸਬੈ ਤਾਹੀ ਮੈ ਸਮਾਹਿੰਗੇ॥
ਜੈਸੇ ਏਕ ਆਗ ਤੇ ਕਨਕਾ ਕੋਟਿ ਆਗ ਤਠੈ
ਨਿਆਰੇ ਨਿਆਰੇ ਹੁੜ ਕੈ ਫੇਰਿ ਆਗ ਮੈ ਸਿਲਾਹਿੰਗੇ॥
ਜੈਸੇ ਏਕ ਧ੍ਰੀਰੇ ਤੇ ਅਨੇਕ ਧ੍ਰੀਰੇ ਪੂਰਤ ਹੈ
ਧ੍ਰੀਰੇ ਕੇ ਕਨਕਾ ਫੇਰ ਧ੍ਰੀਰੇ ਹਿ ਸਮਾਹਿੰਗੇ॥
ਜੈਸੇ ਏਕ ਨਦ ਤੇ ਤਰੰਗ ਕੋਟਿ ਤਪਜਤ ਹੈ
ਪਾਨਿ ਕੇ ਤਰੰਗ ਸਬੈ ਪਾਨਿ ਹੀ ਕਹਾਹਿੰਗੇ॥
ਤੈਸੇ ਬਿਸ੍ਵ ਰੂਪ ਤੇ ਅ ਭ੍ਰੂਤ ਭ੍ਰੂਤ ਪ੍ਰਗਟ ਹੋਏ
ਤਾਹੀ ਤੇ ਤਪਜਿ ਸਬੈ ਤਾਹੀ ਮੈ ਸਮਾਹਿੰਗੇ॥

As out of a single fire arise millions of sparks and merge back into the same fire. As out of dust arise millions of dust particles and merge back into the same dust. As out of an ocean arise millions of waves and merge back into the same ocean. So from One God emerge all creations, animate and inanimate, and all return to the same Creator.

(*Akal Ustat, Chhand 87*)

The Guru Granth underscores that all those living on this planet are inter-related and interdependent. They are related to each other by a common element of the Divinity they have inherited. They are illuminated by the same divine light running through everyone as a single thread. Guru Nanak expresses this thought as follows:

ਸਭ ਮਹਿ ਜੋਤਿ ਜੋਤਿ ਹੈ ਸੋਇ॥
ਤਿਸ ਦੈ ਚਾਨਣਿ ਸਭ ਮਹਿ ਚਾਨਣੁ ਹੋਇ॥
ਸਭ ਮਹਿ ਜੋਤਿ ਜੋਤਿ ਹੈ ਸੋਝ॥
ਤਿਸ ਦੈ ਚਾਨਣਿ ਸਭ ਮਹਿ ਚਾਨਣੁ ਹੋਝ॥

Every heart contains the same divine light. It is the light of the Divine that brightens all hearts.

(SGGS 663)

The orchard model of the Guru Granth's new world is not for mere tolerance of others. It provides us with a blueprint for constructive and active engagement with those who are "different" and recognizes that diversity can enrich one another and the global communities.

Conclusion

The September 11, 2001 attack on the United States shows us that divisive sectarianism promoted by the misguided clergy poses perhaps the greatest challenge that world religions have ever encountered. To ward off this continuous challenge, the people of faith must answer an array of questions. Why are there so many religious traditions? Why do religious sects proliferate? While preferring our own tradition, should we reject the others as false? Alternatively, do they all point to the same truth, each in a different way that is better understood by the culture of its adherents? Are the teachings of our religion specific injunctions or literary metaphors to be interpreted by newer generations? Could new scientific ideas and insights persuade us to view them as metaphors? Can we seek the truth in a religious tradition without adhering to its rituals or ethnic habits? Can we combine elements from many traditions in our own unique way; or must we simply accept one tradition and close ourselves off from all others?

The Guru Granth Sahib gives the highest allegiance to the power and grace of the Truth and its healing energy that operates through everyone and all ages. The Sacred Scripture created a philosophical system based on "unity in diversity" that celebrates the unique merits of each particular approach to the divine energy, and also provides a way that these approaches can be welded into a cohesive common framework.

The gurus challenged the religious and spiritual people of the world centuries ago as the interfaith dialogues are doing today. Presently the challenges for people, Sikhs and non-Sikhs

alike, as much now as in the past, are: how to realize spirituality in their own highest ideals; how to unfold the spiritual potential of their unique traditions to its fullest; and, while progressing toward realization of the Truth in their own objectives, how to work constructively with members of other faith traditions.

Not long ago, in 2008, the tercentennial celebrations of the *Gurta Gaddi*, the installation of the Granth Sahib as the Eternal Guru, challenged the Sikhs worldwide to listen to the Sacred Scripture with their hearts and minds open to it, and to disseminate its message to their neighbors with love and respect for them. It was the most appropriate occasion for the Sikhs to launch the project of spreading the message embedded in the opening words of the Sacred Scripture, *Ik Onkar*, meaning One Spirit One World.

As part of those tercentenary celebrations, in Nanded, India, the representatives of the fifty world's religions, participating in an international interfaith conference, unanimously adopted "The Sri Hazur Sahib 2008 Declaration of Guiding Principles for Civil Society" to promote interfaith dialogue for world peace and to improve civil society. The declaration asked all people, Sikhs and non-Sikhs, to be guided by the following principles (listed in abridged form):

1. Recognize "the divine light in every living being."
2. Treat "natural things and habitats as our sacred shrines."
3. See all humans endowed with God's creativity.
4. Believe that humans are "capable of emulating divine attributes" as given in *Mool Mantar*.
5. Recognize "Divinity in work and service, in art and science, in philosophy and religion, and in the environment and creation."
6. Believe that righteous living is "believing in human equality, human dignity, justice, and human behavior that cleanses body and mind."
7. Construct "institutions of altruism and sharing."
8. Support the "most vulnerable in our society."

9. Show “spiritual and moral responsibility to guide politics and political institutions and ... religious organizations.”

10. Create a world order free from greed and self-absorption.

Essentially, these ten principles focus on the Guru Granth Sahib’s interfaith character, sharing beliefs and values with other world’s religions. (For further details, visit:

sikhiwiki.org/index.php/Interfaith_Conference_on_Guru_Granth_Sahib)

We sincerely hope that the Sikhs accept the above challenge – understand Sri Guru Granth Sahib, share it with the world, and follow the ten principles – for their own improvement as individuals, community, and citizens. This will enable them to fulfill the gurus’ prophesy for the world to become an Orchard of God.

Not limiting the light to themselves, they ought to share it with others and disseminate it as the gurus have asked them to. Sikh scholars have told us again and again that the gift of divine wisdom the gurus have given us is meant to be spread to every corner of the world. Let us pay heed to the following verse composed by Balvand and Satta, Sikh scholars of Guru Arjun’s court:

ਉਗਵਣਹੁ ਤੈ ਆਥਵਣਹੁ ਚਹੁ ਚਕੀ ਕੀਅਨੁ ਲੋਆ॥
 ਜਿਨ੍ਹਰੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਨ ਸੇਵਿਓ ਮਨਮੁਖਾ ਪਇਆ ਮੇਆ॥
 ਦੁਈ ਚਉਈ ਕਰਾਮਾਤਿ ਸਚੇ ਕਾ ਸਚਾ ਢੇਆ॥
 ਤਗਵਣਹੁ ਤੈ ਆਥਵਣਹੁ ਚਹੁ ਚਕੀ ਕੀਅਨੁ ਲੋਆ॥
 ਜਿਨ੍ਹੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਨ ਸੇਵਿਓ ਮਨਮੁਖਾ ਪਝਆ ਮੋਆ॥
 ਦੂਠੀ ਚਤਠੀ ਕਰਾਮਾਤਿ ਸਚੇ ਕਾ ਸਚਾ ਫੋਆ॥

The Guru meant to spread the Light from the direction of sunrise to sunset in all directions and in all continents. Those who do not serve the cause of the Guru in this way are selfish, and they may die in shame. It is a miracle of God that the Light will increase manifold when it is spread and shared.

(SGGS 968)

Clearly, Balvand and Satta understood and believed in what Guru Arjan asked his followers to do – share and multiply the spiritual light among civil societies.

CHAPTER 7

THE SIKH WAY OF WORSHIP: Venerate the Sacred Scripture As Guru

In the religious traditions of India before Guru Nanak, a guru was always a person in human form, looked upon as a spiritual guide and a deity. Guru Nanak and his successors departed radically from that form of worship and founded the new religion in which the Sacred Scripture formally replaced the human guru in 1708. In the past when a human deity completed his life on earth, an idol, a painting, or a statue of the guru replaced him, and thus the worship continued. In Sikhism, the *Sabd* or Word Guru became personified in the verses, songs, teachings, and inspirations.

This novel paradigm of worship needed entirely new types of rituals, religious practices and, above all, channels of communication in the service of the Word form of the Guru. It needed to meld wisdom and faith in creating a new culture in a spiritual tradition that people could learn to relate to without feeling lost or outmoded. Therefore, as a central part of their worship, Sikhs developed a unique way or process of reading, reciting, listening to, and contemplating their scripture.

The founders of Sikhism helped this process by laying the foundation of several institutions of exegesis and exposition as part of their religious practices. These practices inculcate intellectual deliberation, wisdom, and meditation while preserving faith in the institution of the Word Guru.

The Sikh way of worship is a substantial subject of many aspects, so for the sake of convenience, we have divided it into two chapters. This chapter explains the Sikh way of worship comparing it to other ways of worship, describes the evolution of Sikh worship and its reasons to turn away from the traditional Indian ways of worship and delineates *paath deedar* as the Sikh way of worship and a defining characteristic of a Sikh. The next chapter focuses on the method of Sikh worship, particularly demystifying the process of *paath deedar*, as well as its content and significance.

The Tradition of Deity Worship

The Guru Granth is revered by the Sikhs as a sacred book and, to indicate its rank as their eternal Guru on account of its holding a physical form of Guru *Sabd*, is called Sri Guru Granth Sahib. In other religious traditions of India, principally Hindu, the guru is a human being, just as it was for the Sikhs until the 1708 declaration of Guru Gobind Singh, and is respected as a spiritual guide and revered as a deity – a sacred medium and guide to the divine powers.

The tradition of deity worship has been engraved in all religions in one form or the other since their inception. Hinduism practices deity worship known as *pooja*, which is deeply rooted in its religious culture. Buddhism has the Buddha image fixed in the worship rituals of its followers. Christianity, Islam, and other religions, too, have their own forms of deity worship. The Sikh way of worship, however, is unique among them all and avoids using the Hindu term, or the Hindu form, of worship.

The *pooja*, a Sanskrit term for the Hindu worship, means any form of worship, communion, or adoration of a holy object with the purpose of seeking fulfillment of a desire. Worship, performed ritually, consists of a number of distinct components: a worshiper engaged in *pooja* or worship; an object of worship (e.g., an icon, a *murti* – *meaning* idol, statue – or another consecrated object like fire); a deity represented by the object of

worship; alternatively, a person representing a deity (such as one claiming to be an incarnation of a deity, or one believed by the devotee as a deity-like figure); and the purpose of worship, which is to seek the deity's blessing for *verdaan* (meaning, in Sanskrit, granting of a wish) by pleasing the deity through worship.

There are two ways to perform worship: one is an overt way employing physical postures and movements; second is an inward way using the process of *dhyan*, meaning contemplation or meditation, a process whereby the devotee becomes connected to the deity by focusing all his or her sensory and mental energies.

The above components of the ancient tradition of worship are accepted and acknowledged, but not recommended, by the authors of the Guru Granth Sahib. For example, Guru Ram Das describes the ritual of worship, when profiling a believer of Sikh thoughts, in the following verse:

ਜੇ ਚਿਤੁ ਲਾਇ ਪੂਜੇ ਗੁਰ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਮੇ ਮਨ ਇਛੇ ਫਲ ਪਾਵੈ ॥

ਜੋ ਚਿਤੁ ਲਾਭ ਪੂਜੇ ਗੁਰ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਸੋ ਮਨ ਇਛੇ ਫਲ ਪਾਵੈ ॥

One who worships the Guru with devotion has his/her desires fulfilled.

(SGGS 303)

The scripture contains numerous examples like the above illustrating the significance of the Guru worship as the deity worship, the way to connect to God.

The *Guru-Shabad* manifested in the sacred book is revered by the Sikhs as their eternal Guru and was given the title Sri Guru Granth Sahib, which designates the position traditionally given to the deity in other religions. To indicate that the Guru-Shabad revealed in the Granth, meaning a Sacred Scripture in Sanskrit, is a deity, the book is called the Guru Granth. And to indicate that the holy Granth deserves the reverence reserved for a deity, the Guru Granth has been given the Indian titles of respect *Sri* and *Sahib* (in Sanskrit, *Sri* is a title of reverence for a

deity or guru, and in Urdu, *Sahib* is a respectful form of address for a man of high status).

So the Sikhs worship their *shabad guru* residing in the Guru Granth as their eternal Guru. They express their reverence to it as a deity that possesses the word of God, just as adherents of other spiritual traditions look up to their guru as a guide for spiritual knowledge and a deity to be worshipped. However, there is a major difference.

Evolution of the Guru Worship in Early Sikh Traditions

Traditions of the Guru worship originated among ancient religions when a living deity became the object of worship. In particular, the Hindu tradition has directly influenced the earlier followers of Guru Nanak and his successors. The ten Sikh gurus were revered as gurus in human form by their followers and believed to be an indispensable source of divine knowledge and wisdom about metaphysical reality and God. During the lifetime of the Sikh Gurus, the newer formats of initiation and rituals of the guru-deity worship were defined, applied, and formalized. However, there is evidence that the gurus themselves did not approve of the physical formats of worship and that they presented themselves as mere messengers of the divine message.

When gurus in human form lived in the midst of their followers, their initiates needed no instruction regarding how to relate to the guru, except learning to be dedicated and reverent to the deity. Sikhs were impacted by these traditions since most of them were either practicing Hindus or Muslims before coming to the house of Guru Nanak. Sometime, they carried their traditions into the Sikh guru worship, but soon their old practices, as they applied them in the new religious setting, began to evolve into novel formats.

To illustrate how the Nanak devotees might have followed their guru worship customs, think of them flocking, which they

actually did, from all over the world to the Gurdwara Kartarpur to pay obeisance to the founder of the Sikh religion. The town of Kartarpur is located in the county or district of Narowal in the Punjab Province of old India (now Pakistan). The Guru spent the last eighteen years of his life in this town establishing his following.

Followers of Nanak continued the practice of revering the Guru the Hindu or Muslim way for some time during the two centuries when the ten Sikh gurus were accessible in human form²⁴.

While the Sikh concept, as well as practice, of guruship was developing a new religious tradition, many Hindus were resistant to change. They had to proceed gradually in giving up the old way of worship. When a Hindu guru died or, as one would say, completed his or her life on earth, a new guru took over and continued the tradition. Moreover, if it was not possible to have a new human guru as successor, the followers created an idol or a statue of the human deity and worshiped it. Guru Nanak wrote about the practice of idol worship among Hindus, which continues to this day, in the following verses:

ਰਿੰਦੂ ਸਾਲਾਹੀ ਸਾਲਾਹਨਿ ਦਰਸਨਿ ਰੂਪਿ ਅਪਾਰੁ॥
 ਤੀਰਥਿ ਨਾਵਹਿ ਅਰਚਾ ਪੂਜਾ ਅਗਰ ਵਾਸੁ ਬਹਕਾਰੁ॥
 हिंदू सालाही सालाहनि दरसनि रूपि अपारु॥
 तीरथि नावहि अरचा पूजा अगर वासु बहकारु॥

The Hindus praise the praiseworthy God through His countless visible forms. As pilgrims they cleanse at sacred shrines; they make offerings of flowers and burn incense before idols of those forms.

(SGGS 466)

When the Hindus and Muslims came to Guru Nanak, they gradually learned the Sikh way of worship. The change in the guru worship concept and belief commenced by the first Guru was completed by the tenth Guru – a radical transformation in the way the Sikhs worshipped God. Further, with the ending of

guruship in human form, a new concept and format would transform a deeply rooted practice of guru worship into something having little precedence in the annals of religious history. At this juncture, the Sikhs reached a fork in the road and had to abandon the traditional ways of worship. They took a road not traveled before, a radically different path from the Hindus and Muslims in their religious journey. They eventually adopted what their gurus were promoting all the time, *Sabd vichaar* as a mode of worship.

The departure of their last human guru presented them with the final time of resolution: to jettison the traditional belief in human guru and to embrace the belief in God as the formless deity. Even though the Sikh gurus had encouraged worship of the formless divinity in their lifetime, it was realized only partially in the way they had intended.

After Guru Gobind Singh, the Guru would not be in human form; there would be no formation of a body, image, idol, painting, or picture of the Guru. The Guru would not look like any figure that the devotees from Hindu background were accustomed to worshiping in their past. It would not have a flowing white beard, sparkling eyes, or colors and icons of a holy man such as a mark on the forehead or knots in the hair. Henceforth the Guru of the Sikhs would be in the form of the *Sabd* or Word that is physically personified in the verses, the songs, the teachings, and the inspirations, none of which would lend to a statue formation.

Adoption of an immortal, timeless guru was a major break with the age-old custom of the human guru, requiring the followers to adjust their religious and spiritual behavior to the new way of worship. As stated earlier, this change required creating new religious norms, new processes for worship, and new techniques of accessing the scripture and communicating with the guru and the devotees as might be appropriate to the Word form of the Guru. It needed to blend both wisdom and

faith in building an original culture of worship in a spiritual practice that people could learn to feel at home in across the barriers of time and place. The narrative of the evolution of Sikh traditions of worship is indeed an enlightening one.

Worship in the Early Sikh Tradition

The institution of worship or *pooja* with its traditional vocabulary was going to continue in the Sikh tradition, but with new definitions of the actual practices. For instance, Guru Ram Das, besides other gurus, used the old vocabulary to promote the new guru worship:

ਗੁਰਸਿਖਾਂ ਮਨਿ ਹਰਿ ਪ੍ਰੀਤਿ ਹੈ ਗੁਰੁ ਪੁਜਣ ਆਵਹਿ॥
ਗੁਰਸਿਖਾਂ ਮਨਿ ਹਰਿ ਪ੍ਰੀਤਿ ਹੈ ਗੁਰੁ ਪ੍ਰਯੋਗ ਆਵਹਿ॥

The Guru's Sikhs love God with all their hearts, so they come to worship the Guru.

(SGGS 490)

The above verse suggests the Gursikhs' difficulty – indeed every devotee's – unstated but implied: how to reach and love God who is formless and materially undefinable, and then presents the solution: worship the Guru, who is the medium to God. In other words, one must first worship the Guru since the Guru is the way to God.

Similarly, Guru Arjan extols the Guru worship in the following verse, saying that it is a great fortune, blessing, or godsend for the devotee to find the Guru to worship:

ਵਡੈ ਭਾਗਿ ਪੁਜ ਗੁਰ ਚਰਨਾ॥
ਵਡੈ ਆਗਿ ਪ੍ਰਯੋਗ ਗੁਰ ਚਰਨਾ॥

Great fortune is to worship the Guru's feet.

(SGGS 395)

The above verse implies that the seeker, no matter how well-intentioned, may not find the way to God, which is through the Guru, without being fortunate or blessed, meaning without a divine blessing. Here conversation on and about Guru *Sabd* was considered to be Guru worship.

These are just a couple of examples from the several references in the Granth showing acceptance of the vocabulary of *pooja* in the Sikh tradition. Again, it should be pointed out that the Sikh tradition accepts all recognized components of the *pooja* ritual vocabulary as described earlier in the chapter. Guru Ram Das, for instance, underscores the significance of these components while referring to *pooja* in the following verse:

ਜੇ ਚਿਤੁ ਲਾਇ ਪੂਜੇ ਗੁਰ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਸੇ ਮਨ ਇਛੇ ਫਲ ਪਾਵੈ ॥

ਜੋ ਚਿਤੁ ਲਾਏ ਪੂਜੇ ਗੁਰ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਸੋ ਮਨ ਝਲੇ ਫਲ ਪਾਵੈ ॥

One who worships the Guru's image (Guru Deity's teachings) with heart and mind (through mentation) finds the fulfillment of one's desires.

(SGGS 303)

While, in the earlier phase of Sikhism, the details and paradigm of the Sikh worship were taken and adapted from the conventional *pooja*, they were gradually transformed by the Sikhs profoundly, differentiating them clearly from the Hindu or Muslim way of worship. This transformation was a necessary step in Sikhism becoming autonomous as a new way of approaching Guru and God and organizing individual and social life in the world.

Rejection of Conventional Components of Worship

Although the Sikhs kept the vocabulary of *pooja*, they replaced the traditional objects associated with it. Rejection of conventional objects of worship is alluded to in numerous verses of the Sacred Scripture. Right at the founding of the religion, the first Guru criticized the image worship, considering it a misguided practice. For instance, he says:

ਪਾਥਰੁ ਲੈ ਪੂਜਹਿ ਮੁਗਧ ਗਵਾਰ ॥

ਪਾਥਰੁ ਲੇ ਪੂਜਹਿ ਮੁਗਧ ਗਵਾਰ ॥

One who worships a stone (statue) is a bewitched ignoramus.

(SGGS 556)

Kabir, too, criticized the people who worship icons (nonliving) while inflicting cruelty on the living. Predicting dire consequences of their cruelty to the living and their pooja of the lifeless, he portends bluntly:

ਸਰਜੀਉ ਕਾਟਹਿ ਨਿਰਜੀਉ ਪੂਜਹਿ ਅੰਤ ਕਾਲ ਕਉ ਭਾਰੀ॥
ਸਰਜੀਤ ਕਾਟਹਿ ਨਿਰਜੀਤ ਪ੍ਰਭੁ ਹਿ ਅੰਤ ਕਾਲ ਕਤ ਭਾਰੀ॥

You murder living beings and worship lifeless things; your end is going to be burdensome.

(SGGS 332)

Guru Nanak further points out in the following verses the futility of worshipping idols of various gods and goddesses and shows the ignorance of such devotees:

ਦੇਵੀ ਦੇਵਾ ਪੁਜੀਐ ਭਾਈ ਕਿਆ ਮਾਗਉ ਕਿਆ ਦੇਹਿ॥
ਦੇਵੀ ਦੇਵਾ ਪ੍ਰਭੂਏ ਭਾਏ ਕਿਆ ਮਾਗਤ ਕਿਆ ਦੇਹਿ॥

Why worship gods and goddesses, O brothers? What can we ask of them? What can they give us?

(SGGS 637)

ਦੁਬਿਧਾ ਨ ਪੜਉ ਹਰਿ ਬਿਨੁ ਹੋਰੁ ਨ ਪੂਜਉ ਮੜੈ ਮਸਾਣਿ ਨ ਜਾਈ॥
ਦੁਬਿਧਾ ਨ ਪੜਤੁ ਹਰਿ ਬਿਨੁ ਹੋਰੁ ਨ ਪ੍ਰਭੂ ਮੜੈ ਮਸਾਣਿ ਨ ਜਾਈ॥

I am not torn by doubt; I worship none other than God; I visit no tombs or cremation grounds to worship.

(SGGS 634)

While the Guru Granth Sahib discourages its followers from worshipping idols, it exalts worshipping the Shabad. The Shabad is believed to have divine attributes enshrined in it, and those attributes are defined at many places in the Granth. A person endowed with divine attributes is respected but not worshipped. Guru Arjan, for instance, praises a Yogi liberated from the bondage of Maya and considered meeting him or her to be very fortunate:

ਐਸਾ ਜੋਗੀ ਵਡਭਾਗੀ ਭੇਟੈ ਮਾਇਆ ਕੇ ਬੰਧਨ ਕਾਟੈ॥
ਸੇਵਾ ਪੂਜ ਕਰਉ ਤਿਸੁ ਮੁਰਤਿ ਕੀ ਨਾਨਕੁ ਤਿਸੁ ਪਗ ਚਾਟੈ॥
ਏਸਾ ਜੋਗੀ ਵਡਭਾਗੀ ਭੇਟੈ ਮਾਝਾ ਕੇ ਬੰਧਨ ਕਾਟੈ॥
ਸੇਵਾ ਪੂਜ ਕਰਤ ਤਿਸੁ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਕੀ ਨਾਨਕੁ ਤਿਸੁ ਪਗ ਚਾਟੈ॥

By great good fortune, one meets such a Yogi that has cut the bonds of Maya. Nanak serves and reveres this rare man and bows to him most humbly (kisses his feet).

(SGGS 208)

Prior to Guru Arjan, Kabir used the traditional vocabulary to signify the Guru worship. He says in the following verse that the Guru worship is imperative to the realization of God in your life:

ਲੇਹੁ ਆਰਤੀ ਹੋ ਪੁਰਖ ਨਿਰੰਜਨ ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਪੁਜਹੁ ਭਾਈ॥
ਲੇਹੁ ਆਰਤੀ ਹੋ ਪੁਰਖ ਨਿਰੰਜਨ ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਪੂਜਹੁ ਭਾਈ॥

O brothers, if you wish to worship the Pure, Primal God, worship the True Guru who is the way to God.

(SGGS 1340)

As we read the Guru Granth verse after verse, we learn that it is only the Guru-deity that is accepted as an object of the new way of worship in the Sikh teachings. In the following verse, Kabir brings home his belief that the True Guru and God become one by sharing the Truth:

ਸਤਿਗੁਰੁ ਪੁਜਉ ਸਦਾ ਸਦਾ ਮਨਾਵਉ॥
ਸਤਿਗੁਰੁ ਪੂਜਤ ਸਦਾ ਸਦਾ ਮਨਾਵਤ॥

It is the True Guru I worship; ever and always I bow to Him, I surrender to Him.

(SGGS 1158)

Paath Deedar Replaces Pooja

While, in the earlier phase of Sikhism, Sikh worship was substantially like ancient customs of pooja, in course of time it experienced a radical transformation by dint of a conscious choice of the Gurus and became a novel form of worship. This newly popularized practice of worship is the institution of *paath deedar*.²⁵ This form of worship became necessary because the

traditional worship, *pooja*, which consisted of rituals aimed at invoking the Spirit of the Deity, became untenable for the new Sikh traditions, which had redefined the Sikh deity and its spirit. Thus, Sikhs, in their daily prayer, began to refer to their worship as *paath deedar*.

The concept of Sikh worship becomes illuminated by the way Ungar defines “good worship.” This is what happens to you, says Ungar, when you worship with total devotion: “... the Spirit is seen in front of you and touches your passions. Passions are touched when we dare to admit the truth when we opt for the depth of love over the little lies (of ego) that seek not to rock the boat. Passion lets loose when ideas come together, when someone says something that you knew, but couldn't articulate when the separate pieces fall into place. Passion lets loose when people are called to remember their truest selves when we break out of the little boxes that define and separate us. Moreover, of course, passion lets loose when we sing. Really sing, not reading ahead for the words sung.”²⁶

The concept of the Guru worship in the form of *Sabd Deedar* is the most basic of the Sikh tenets today; it is one of those tenets that distinguish Sikhism from other religions. The very prescription of *paath deedar* in the Sikh Code of Conduct implies that the most significant worship of his/her Holy Mentor, the Guru, must be through *paath deedar*, meaning visualizing the teachings in the verses of the Guru Granth; this is a “must conduct” for a committed Sikh.

Further, even though the invocation of the Deity is supported among the Sikhs, their Deity worship consists of the enlightenment of their consciousness. It is explained by Guru Arjan in the following verse, saying that the purpose of worship is to invoke one's deity through the Sikh meditation on Naam, i.e., the Divine Identity:

ਏਕ ਨਾਮ ਕੇ ਥੀਓ ਪੂਜਾਰੀ ਮੇ ਕਉ ਅਚਰਜੁ ਗੁਰਹਿ ਦਿਖਾਇਓ॥

ਭਇਓ ਪ੍ਰਗਾਸੁ ਸਰਬ ਉਜੀਆਰਾ ਗੁਰ ਗਿਆਨੁ ਮਨਹਿ ਪ੍ਰਗਟਾਇਓ॥

एक नाम को थीओ पूजारी मो कउ अचरजु गुरहि दिखाइओ॥

भइओ प्रगासु सरब उजीआरा गुर गिआनु मनहि प्रगटाइओ॥

I have become a worshipper of the Naam (identity) of One; the Guru has shown me this path as an amazing wonder. Resulting from my worship the Divine Light has been invoked and everything in my mind is illuminated; the Guru has revealed this spiritual wisdom to my mind as a reward.

(SGGS 209)

As indicated by this verse, Guru Arjan accepted all four elements of a classical definition of worship, but he redefined those elements into entirely new concepts. In his act of worship, he includes the worshiper (ਪੁਜਾਰੀ), the deity (ਏਕ ਨਾਮ), meaning One Naam or Name, invocation (ਅਚਰਜੁ ਗੁਰਹਿ ਦਿਖਾਇ) of the deity (ਗੁਰ ਗਿਆਨੁ), and the fulfillment of the devotee's desire (all pervasive enlightenment). Thus, Guru Arjan did not change the ancient vocabulary or tradition but metamorphosed it to give birth to an entirely new paradigm. Various components of this paradigm are discussed below in greater detail.

The Object of Sikh Worship

Various religious traditions prescribe a wide range of worship objects suitable for cultivating quiescence, receptivity, and mindfulness during the meditative processes. They have laid down elaborate rituals and explanations with regard to focusing on the physical and spiritual qualities of a deity. Arguably, it is under the influence of these practices that many Sikh devotees are found to wrongly focus their eyes on either physical or mental images of the physical body of either one of the ten gurus, a holy person of their choice, or even the body of the Guru Granth Sahib (including decorations).

Many self-styled gurus in human form go as far as asking their followers to focus their eyes into the eyes of the spiritual instructor or another spiritual leader for meditation. When the

holy man is not available, the devotees fix their sight on the mentor's images in photographs or paintings. Their religious mentors argue that these practices are merely tools the devotees deploy to gain initial familiarity with the features of the guru's body or the body of their other human mentors, but that, during the actual meditation, one would focus purely on a mental image of one's form. This approach – focusing on a physical object, a person, or any part of a person – is forcefully rejected in contemporary Sikh traditions. Guru Nanak denounces the idol worship as follows:

ਨਾਰਦਿ ਕਹਿਆ ਸਿ ਪੂਜ ਕਰਾਂਗੀ॥ ਅੰਧੇ ਗੁੰਗੇ ਅੰਧ ਅੰਧਾਰੁ॥
ਨਾਰਦਿ ਕਹਿਆ ਸਿ ਪ੍ਰਯੋਗ ਕਰਾਂਗੀ॥ ਅੰਧੇ ਗੁੰਗੇ ਅੰਧ ਅੰਧਾਰੁ॥

Those who worship according to Narad's instructions (idol worship described in ancient Hindu scriptures) are blind and mute, the blindest of the blind.

(SGGS 556)

The mystic poet Kabir, before Guru Nanak, deprecates the idol worship in the following verse:

ਬੁਤ ਪੂਜਿ ਪੂਜਿ ਹਿੰਦੂ ਮੁਏ ਤੁਰਕ ਮੁਏ ਸਿਰੁ ਨਾਈ॥
ਬੁਤ ਪ੍ਰਯੋਗਿ ਪ੍ਰਯੋਗਿ ਹਿੰਦੂ ਮੁਏ ਤੁਰਕ ਮੁਏ ਸਿਰੁ ਨਾਈ॥

Hindus die worshipping idols; Muslims die ritualistically bowing their heads.

(SGGS 656)

Some religious clerics believe the Guru Granth to be the eleventh Guru and promote the use of physical forms of the Sikh scripture for worship. The physical forms include the body of the Granth Sahib or its decorations, a statue or painting of the guru's portraits, a written word or a verse from Sri Guru Granth Sahib, or similar other objects displayed in the Sikh places of worship. These clerics consider such forms to be aids in the preliminary stages of meditation. Many devotees, for lack of Sikhi knowledge, fall for this argument and begin to focus on the book (and sometimes its decorations) in which the Guru's verses are

inscribed. Many others focus on the Gurbani verses as printed in the book or on posters.

All those who follow the above-described rituals and reasoning are actually misled by the deeply ingrained traditions from their past. Influenced by those traditions, then, millions of devotees are inclined to seek spirituality from the clergy rather than from their eternal guru, the Sabd Guru.

The Word (*Sabd* or *Shabad*) Becomes Guru

Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth and last Guru in human form staged the most significant event of the Sikh history on October 20, 1708, a few hours before he passed away at Nanded, Maharashtra, in central west India. He assembled the congregation for what looked like an occasion to announce his divine plans for the Sikh religion before his death. He made the most profound proclamation of his life by declaring the end of the old tradition of the human guru and confirming the new tradition of the *Shabad Guru* (Word Guru). He installed the Granth (collection of Gurus' hymns) as the eternal Guru for the Sikhs, thus launching a new concept of the guru worship.

This event of canon formation is recorded in Sikh history as the most pivotal one. You may read about it in the contemporary record, *Bhatt Vahi*,²⁷ with a sense of immediacy.

Thus, the Granth Sahib²⁸ was ordained and installed as the Eternal Guru of the Sikhs, and the hymns comprising the Granth were and are believed to be the divine messages to the world. And it is the divine knowledge in the hymns that is and will remain for ever the object of the Sikh veneration.

Images of *Sabd* (*Shabad*) in Guru Worship

For the purpose of worship or meditation, Sri Guru Granth Sahib must not be represented by a physical configuration or a product of the imagination (e.g., painting, drawing, or printing). When a seeker brings an image of the Guru to mind, the seeker's mind must be focused on the attributes he/she recalls of the

divine entity or manifestation, particularly compassion and contemplation. These attributes may be the meaning of the Guru's verses that touch the seeker's heart at the very moment of meditation; or there may be other qualities of the Infinite Wisdom (ਵਾਹਿਗੁਰੂ), *Ek Onkaar*, or God, becoming manifest to the seeker. We may call this practice the guru worship or *shabad parmaan* (*sabd witness*).

Many readers might ask how humans can possibly conceive anything without reference to material reality. It is one of those questions, we the authors think, that may never be answered to a materialist's or skeptic's satisfaction. All we may say is that while normally humans conceive or comprehend abstract entities in reference to sensory experiences and perhaps don't use any content words without reference to a physical reality – knowing their dependence on senses, intelligence, and intuition to experience reality – the guru worship requires that the devotee concentrate on the Word, not the image.

According to the Sikh theology, the *SABD parmaan* or Gurbani is the object of meditation and not any physical form of the Guru. This belief is emphasized, underscored, and repeated many times over in the Guru Granth. To show how significant this belief is to a Sikh, we quote below the words of different gurus and saints and, without adding any commentary or interpretation, let the words in original and translation speak directly to the reader.

To begin with the first compiler and author of the Guru Granth, Guru Arjan writes about the “mentation” and the guru worship as follows:

ਗੁਰ ਕੀ ਮੁਰਤਿ ਮਨ ਮਹਿ ਧਿਆਨੁ॥
ਗੁਰ ਕੈ ਸਬਦਿ ਮੰਤ੍ਰੁ ਮਨੁ ਮਾਨੁ॥
ਗੁਰ ਕੀ ਸ੍ਰੂਤਿ ਸਨ ਮਹਿ ਧਿਆਨੁ॥
ਗੁਰ ਕੈ ਸਬਦਿ ਸੰਤ੍ਰੁ ਸਨੁ ਮਾਨੁ॥

Meditate on the image of the Guru within your mind. Let your mind recognize the Guru's Shabad (word or hymn) as mantra (as the object of understanding or worship).

(SGGS 864)

Believing the Guru's Word as the Guru's body, Bhai Gurdas took great pains to explain the concept of the Guru Shabad as either the object of sustained "mentation" or that of worship. He was appointed by Guru Arjan as the first scholar to expound the Guru's philosophy for the masses by presenting the exegesis of the scripture to the congregation.

In the following verses, Bhai Gurdas explained Guru Arjan's teachings this way:

-ਗੁਰ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਕਰਿ ਧਿਆਨ ਸਦਾ ਹਜੂਰ ਹੈ॥

ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਸਬਦ ਗਿਆਨੁ ਨੇੜਿ ਨ ਦੂਰ ਹੈ॥

ਗੁਰ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਕਰਿ ਧਿਆਨ ਸਦਾ ਹਜੂਰ ਹੈ॥

ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਸਬਦ ਗਿਆਨੁ ਨੇੜਿ ਨ ਦੂਰ ਹੈ॥

You should practice sustained mentation (dhyān) on the Word of the Guru, and consider it to be the image or body of the Guru who is always with you. The seekers who are Guru-oriented acquire knowledge (meaning) of the Guru's Word. This way they do not leave any space or distance between them and the Guru.

(Bhai Gurdas, Vaar 3, Pauri 10)

-ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਸਤਿ ਸਰੂਪ ਹੈ ਧਿਆਨ ਮੂਲੁ ਗੁਰ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਜਾਣੈ॥

ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਸਤਿ ਸਰੂਪ ਹੈ ਧਿਆਨ ਮੂਲੁ ਗੁਰ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਜਾਣੈ॥

The true Guru is Truth personified. The Guru-oriented people know this Truth to be the basis of their dhyān (sustained mentation) in meditation.

(Bhai Gurdas, Vaar 6, Pauri 19)

-ਗੁਰੂ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਗੁਰ ਸਬਦੁ ਸੁਣਿ ਸਾਧਸੰਗਤਿ ਆਸਣੁ ਨਿਰੰਕਾਰੀ॥

ਗੁਰੂ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਗੁਰ ਸਬਦੁ ਸੁਣਿ ਸਾਧਸੰਗਤਿ ਆਸਣੁ ਨਿਰੰਕਾਰੀ॥

The Word is the Guru, the object of worship; the Guru-oriented Sikhs listen to the Word and see in it seated the Formless Creator.

(Bhai Gurdas, Vaar 2, Pauri 11)

-ਸਾਵਧਾਨ ਗੁਰ ਵਾਕ ਨ ਮਨ ਭਰਮੀਵਣਾ ॥

ਸਬਦ ਸੁਰਤਿ ਹੁਸਨਾਕ ਪਾਰਿ ਪਰੀਵਣਾ ॥

ਸਾਵਧਾਨ ਗੁਰ ਵਾਕ ਨ ਮਨ ਭਰਮੀਵਣਾ ॥

ਸਬਦ ਸੁਰਤਿ ਹੁਸਨਾਕ ਪਾਰਿ ਪਰੀਵਣਾ ॥

Be attentive to the Word of the Guru; don't let the mind go astray, don't let it lose faith. Get absorbed into the Word, and you will sail across the sea of life.

(Bhai Gurdas, Vaar 3, Pauri 19)

-ਸਬਦਿ ਸੁਰਤਿ ਚੇਲਾ ਗੁਰੂ ਪਰਮੇਸਰੁ ਸੇਈ ॥

ਦਰਸਨਿ ਦਿਸਟਿ ਧਿਆਨੁ ਧਰਿ ਗੁਰ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਹੋਈ ॥

ਸਬਦਿ ਸੁਰਤਿ ਚੇਲਾ ਗੁਰੂ ਪਰਮੇਸਰੁ ਸੋਝੈ ॥

ਦਰਸਨਿ ਦਿਸਟਿ ਧਿਆਨੁ ਧਰਿ ਗੁਰ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਹੋਝੈ ॥

One who realizes the Word in his consciousness is divine. And one who has the Word in his consciousness, dhyān, or sustained mentation actually worships the Guru.

(Bhai Gurdas, Vaar 13, Pauri 2)

-ਗੁਰ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਗੁਰੁ ਸਬਦੁ ਹੈ ਸਾਧਸੰਗਤਿ ਮਿਲਿ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤੁ ਵੇਲਾ ॥

ਗੁਰ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਗੁਰੁ ਸਬਦੁ ਹੈ ਸਾਧਸੰਗਤਿ ਮਿਲਿ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤੁ ਵੇਲਾ ॥

The Gur Shabad (the Word) becomes the Guru (the Guru image) when the Guru-oriented Sikhs (congregation) meet in the ambrosial hour to worship together.

(Bhai Gurdas, Vaar 24, Pauri 11)

-ਗੁਰ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਗੁਰੁ ਸਬਦੁ ਹੈ ਸਾਧਸੰਗਤਿ ਵਿਚਿ ਪਰਗਟੀ ਆਇਆ ॥

ਗੁਰ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਗੁਰੁ ਸਬਦੁ ਹੈ ਸਾਧਸੰਗਤਿ ਮਿਲਿ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤੁ ਵੇਲਾ ॥

The Gur Shabad (the Word) becomes the Guru (the Guru manifests in their midst) when the Guru-oriented Sikhs (congregation) meet in the ambrosial hour to worship together.

(Bhai Gurdas, Vaar 24, Pauri 25)

-ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਪਰਗਟੀ ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਸੁਖਫਲੁ ਸਬਦ ਵਿਚਾਰਾ॥
ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਪਰਗਟੀ ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਸੁਖ ਫਲੁ ਸਬਦ ਵਿਚਾਰਾ॥

The true Guru becomes manifest in the consciousness when a Guru-oriented seeker contemplates on the soothing Word of the Guru.

(Bhai Gurdas, Vaar 20, Pauri 29)

-ਗੁਰ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਗੁਰ ਸਬਦੁ ਹੈ ਸਾਧਸੰਗਤਿ ਸਮਸਰਿ ਪਰਵਾਣਾ॥
ਇਕ ਮਨਿ ਇਕੁ ਅਰਾਧਣਾ ਦੁਤੀਆ ਨਾਸਤਿ ਭਾਵੈ ਭਾਣਾ॥
ਗੁਰ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਗੁਰ ਸਬਦੁ ਹੈ ਸਾਧਸੰਗਤਿ ਸਮਸਰਿ ਪਰਵਾਣਾ॥
ਇਕ ਮਨਿ ਇਕੁ ਅਰਾਧਣਾ ਦੁਤੀਆ ਨਾਸਤਿ ਭਾਵੈ ਭਾਣਾ॥

The Guru-oriented seekers (the congregation) perceive the Shabad as the Guru image manifesting the Sat Guru or God. They meditate (concentrate) on that One with one mind and, seeing no other but that One, rejoice in God's Oneness and Will.

(Bhai Gurdas, Vaar 32, Pauri 2)

Thus, all evidence goes to suggest that there is a definite distinction between traditional worship or meditation promoted in ancient India and the Guru Granth *paath deedar* introduced by the Sikh school for worship. Whereas the former brings the mind to concentrate on some physical form of a deity, the latter focuses on the qualitative knowledge of the Divine and on freedom from a sense of duality. Further, the *paath deedar* brings enlightenment and adoration of One Creator to mind.

This textual analysis bears out that the teachings of the Guru Granth promote the tradition of worship but reject physical forms of the guru as objects of worship or meditation. Both the human form and the book form are forbidden for the Sikh to meditate on. Thus, the true Sikh practices promote the *Paath Deedar*, meaning mentation of *Shabad Parmaan*, and make a clear distinction between the meditative visions of *Shabad Parmaan* contained in the Guru Granth and physical forms of the Guru Granth as objects for meditative practices.

The Guru Granth Worship: *Shabad Deedar* Needs Gurbani Knowledge

For the Guru Granth worship or *shabad parmaan* (*paath deedar*), we must know as a prerequisite the meaning of the verses of the Sacred Scripture. We need to comprehend first the literal meaning of the verses, then their figurative and contextual meanings, and then their implications to us in our individual lives. To accomplish this, all Sikh gurus laid a foundation of exegesis as an important religious practice. On the very first day of its installation, the Guru Granth recitation was immediately followed by an exegesis.

When Guru Arjan completed the first edition of the Granth Sahib in 1604 and installed it in the holy sanctuary of Sri Harimandir at the Golden Temple in Amritsar, he instructed the Sikhs to read the Granth with all their intelligence and wisdom, and asked them to imbibe the meaning with all their faculties awake instead of doing a mere ritualistic reading. Bhai Santokh Singh, a great Sikh historian of the eighteenth century (translated in 1984), while reporting on the Guru's instructions, wrote as follows:²⁹

ਪਾਠ ਸਮਸਤ ਕਰੈ ਬੁਧਿ ਸੇਂ ਪਿਖਿ ਪੂਰਬ ਕੇ ਸਮ ਲੇਹਿ ਬਨਾਈ॥

All of you should read the Granth with full wisdom; if you did, your age-old problems would resolve.

Similarly, Sikh theologian Bhai Gurdas considers only that person to be worthy of the Guru's religion who, as the following verse says, is Guru-oriented and obeys the Guru's will:

ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਮਾਰਗੁ ਆਖੀਐ ਗੁਰਮਤਿ ਹਿਤਕਾਰੀ॥

ਹੁਕਮਿ ਰਜਾਈ ਚਲਣਾ ਗੁਰ ਸਬਦ ਵੀਚਾਰੀ॥

ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਮਾਰਗੁ ਆਖੀਐ ਗੁਰਮਤਿ ਹਿਤਕਾਰੀ॥

ਹੁਕਮਿ ਰਜਾਈ ਚਲਣਾ ਗੁਰ ਸਬਦ ਵੀਚਾਰੀ॥

The way of the Guru-oriented is defined as adopting the wisdom of the Guru, living in the way of the Divine, and contemplating upon the Word of the Guru.

(Bhai Gurdas, *Vaar 9*, Pauri 2)

From this discussion, it should become clear that our knowledge of the Guru Granth begins with our knowing the true meaning of the verses, and that once we establish the true meaning the millions of seekers would succeed in their *paath deedar*. However, we soon realize how difficult it is, if not impossible, to establish the true meaning of the scripture because the meaning is determined by how a certain verse and, for that matter, the Granth touch the heart and mind and soul of the seeker. In other words, the true meaning of the scripture is not and cannot be one standard meaning, but an indeterminate accumulation of meanings borne out by an indeterminate number of readings by countless seekers in the various states of mind in different settings.

Simply put, the meaning depends on how the seekers comprehend the scripture in their personal situations. In the course of time, then, we may reasonably expect the meaning of the Granth verses to be a vast continuum of actual meanings sensible to different cultures, and continually evolving.

There are various approaches to the interpretation and translation of the Guru Granth (Gurbani) verses employed by diverse schools of Sikhism. The Gurbani contains knowledge on the relationship between God and humanity, the Creator and creation, and infinite wisdom and the finite human mind. This knowledge may not be easily understood or described in human language because of the imperfections of human communication. It is often to be translated, interpreted, and understood by various seekers according to who they are and what they are. Guru Arjan points out the difficulty in establishing a standard meaning in the following verse:

ਪ੍ਰਭ ਕੀ ਅਗਮ ਅਗਾਧਿ ਕਥਾ॥

ਸੁਨੀਐ ਅਵਰ ਅਵਰ ਬਿਧਿ ਬੁਝੀਐ ਬਕਨ ਕਥਨ ਰਹਤਾ॥

ਪਰਮ ਕੀ ਅਗਮ ਅਗਾਧਿ ਕਥਾ॥

ਸੁਨੀਐ ਅਵਰ ਅਵਰ ਬਿਧਿ ਬੁਝੀਐ ਬਕਨ ਕਥਨ ਰਹਤਾ॥

Theology is profound and unfathomable. It is heard in one format but understood in different formats. It is beyond usual descriptions.

(SGGS 498)

Prior to Guru Arjan, the first Guru had explained to the seekers how complex and universal the meanings of the Gurbani were and would remain so through the ages:

ਤੁੜੇ ਠਾਕੁਰ ਮਾਹਰੇ ਤੁੜੀ ਗੁਰਬਾਣੀ॥

ਰੂੜੀ ਠਾਕੁਰ ਮਾਹਰੀ ਰੂੜੀ ਗੁਰਬਾਣੀ॥

Universal (beautiful) is my God (the Supreme God and Master), and universal (beautiful) is His language (the Word of the Guru's Bani).

(SGGS 421)

While translating the Guru Granth verses, we must be cognitive of one important reality: The Granth verses teach mostly through metaphors, allegories, similes, and fables, spoken in natural languages of the time, and they acquire or reveal different meanings in different contexts. Metaphors allow vernacular languages to transcend many of the limitations of a formal language, resulting in greater flexibility of expression.

Sikh gurus lived and traveled in Hindu and Muslim worlds so they used the metaphors of their times and places. This is not unique to Sikhism. Jesus was a Jew and spoke about Moses, Abraham, and Isaac. Buddha was raised as a Hindu and referred to Hindu symbols and gods in his teachings. However, it is not these allusions to established religions of their forefathers that gave birth to Sikhism, Christianity, or Buddhism. Nanak, Jesus, and Buddha were preaching serious reforms and doctrinal breakthroughs in languages that their contemporary societies would understand. They preached new ways for their times.

In other words, when the Gurus spoke of Hindu gods in poetry, they did so as part of their vernacular language rather than as statements supporting any religious story or faith. Their hymns incorporated metaphors that their audiences would have understood without necessarily mistaking those metaphors for statements supporting truths of historical events or of ancient Indian epics.

It is for these reasons that perhaps no translation of the Granth would adequately provide the true meaning of the scripture. We may only say that metaphors, similes, and fables were used in the Granth to communicate what couldn't have been done otherwise – they ensured that the sacred and secular knowledge of the Sacred Scriptures become accessible to the future generations of seekers.

A critical consideration in our practice of the *paath deedar* is that we first analyze the Guru's verses in a formal language and then comprehend their metaphoric or intrinsic meaning, which transcends the barriers of time, place, and history.

***Paath Deedar* defines a True Sikh**

The institution of *paath deedar* is of critical significance in the life of a Sikh. The gurus considered it a defining characteristic of a Sikh. Guru Ram Das, for instance, defines a Sikh in the following hymn as one who gets up every morning to perform *paath deedar* and then to continue its practice all day long:

ਗੁਰ ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਕਾ ਜੇ ਸਿਖੁ ਅਖਾਏ ਸੁ ਭਲਕੇ ਉਠਿ ਹਰਿ ਨਾਮੁ ਧਿਆਵੈ॥
ਉਦਮੁ ਕਰੇ ਭਲਕੇ ਪਰਭਾਤੀ ਇਸਨਾਨੁ ਕਰੇ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤ ਸਰਿ ਨਾਵੈ॥
ਉਪਦੇਸਿ ਗੁਰੂ ਹਰਿ ਹਰਿ ਜਪੁ ਜਾਪੈ ਸਭਿ ਕਿਲਵਿਖ ਪਾਪ ਦੇਖ ਲਹਿ ਜਾਵੈ॥
ਫਿਰਿ ਚੜੈ ਦਿਵਸੁ ਗੁਰਬਾਣੀ ਗਾਵੈ ਬਹਦਿਆ ਉਠਦਿਆ ਹਰਿ ਨਾਮੁ ਧਿਆਵੈ॥
ਜੇ ਸਾਸਿ ਗਿਰਾਸਿ ਧਿਆਏ ਮੇਰਾ ਹਰਿ ਹਰਿ ਸੇ ਗੁਰਸਿਖੁ ਗੁਰੂ ਮਨਿ ਭਾਵੈ॥
ਜਿਸ ਨੇ ਦਇਆਲੁ ਹੋਵੈ ਮੇਰਾ ਸੁਆਮੀ ਤਿਸੁ ਗੁਰਸਿਖ ਗੁਰੂ ਉਪਦੇਸੁ ਸੁਣਾਵੈ॥

ਜਨੁ ਨਾਨਕੁ ਪੁੜਿ ਮੰਗੈ ਤਿਸੁ ਗੁਰਸਿਖ ਕੀ ਜੇ ਆਪਿ ਜਪੈ ਅਵਰਹਨਮੁ ਜਪਾਵੈ॥
 ਗੁਰ ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਕਾ ਜੋ ਸਿਖੁ ਅਖਾਏ ਸੁ ਭਲਕੇ ਤਠਿ ਹਰਿ ਨਾਮੁ ਧਿਆਵੈ॥
 ਤਦਮੁ ਕਰੇ ਭਲਕੇ ਪਰਭਾਤੀ ਝਸਨਾਨੁ ਕਰੇ ਅਮਿਤ ਸਰਿ ਨਾਵੈ॥
 ਤਪਦੇਸਿ ਗੁਰੁ ਹਰਿ ਹਰਿ ਜਪੁ ਜਾਪੈ ਸਭਿ ਕਿਲਕਿਖ ਪਾਪ ਦੋਖ ਲਹਿ ਜਾਵੈ॥
 ਫਿਰਿ ਚੜੈ ਦਿਕਸੁ ਗੁਰਬਾਣੀ ਗਾਵੈ ਬਹਦਿਆ ਤਠਦਿਆ ਹਰਿ ਨਾਮੁ ਧਿਆਵੈ॥
 ਜੋ ਸਾਸਿ ਗਿਰਾਸਿ ਧਿਆਏ ਮੇਰਾ ਹਰਿ ਹਰਿ ਸੋ ਗੁਰਸਿਖੁ ਗੁਰੂ ਮਨਿ ਭਾਵੈ॥
 ਜਿਸ ਨੋ ਦਫ਼ਾਲੁ ਹੋਵੈ ਮੇਰਾ ਸੁਆਮੀ ਤਿਸੁ ਗੁਰਸਿਖੁ ਗੁਰੂ ਤਪਦੇਸੁ ਸੁਧਾਵੈ॥
 ਜਨੁ ਨਾਨਕੁ ਖੂਝਿ ਮੰਗੈ ਤਿਸੁ ਗੁਰਸਿਖ ਕੀ ਜੋ ਆਪਿ ਜਪੈ ਅਵਰਹਨਮੁ ਜਪਾਵੈ॥

One who calls himself or herself a Sikh of the True Guru rises early in the morning and meditates on (chants) the name of God. First, he/she cleanses his/her body and mind, and then, following the Guru's instruction, worships the Creator, so all his/her sins, misdeeds, and negativity are erased. A Sikh is one who sings the Gurbani at sunrise; he/she sings it and worships God even while doing other things. The Guru is pleased with the Sikh who worships God with every breath of his/her. The Guru's teachings become accessible only to that person who is fortunate enough to receive God's grace. The humble Nanak seeks the dust of the feet of that Sikh who recites the Naam (God's name) and inspires others to do the same.

(SGGS 305)

This often-recited hymn encapsulates the significance of Sikh worship. The hymn defines a true Sikh as one who, having cleansed his body and mind, contemplates on and chants the name of God early in the morning, and seeks God's grace and forgiveness. The emphasis is obviously on contemplation, thereby seeking a direct connection to the Almighty.

In another shabad, which is given below, Guru Ram Das presents himself as a Sikh that all others want to emulate:

ਹਰਿ ਗੁਣ ਗਾਵੈ ਸਦਾ ਦਿਨੁ ਰਾਤੀ ਮੈ ਹਰਿ ਜਸੁ ਕਰਤੇ ਅੰਤੁ ਨ ਲਗੀਆ॥
 ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਮਨੁਆ ਇਕਤੁ ਘਰਿ ਆਵੈ ਮਿਲਉ ਗੋਪਾਲ ਨੀਸਾਨੁ ਬਜਈਆ॥
 ਨੈਨੀ ਦੇਖਿ ਦਰਸੁ ਮਨੁ ਤ੍ਰਿਪਤੈ ਸ੍ਰਵਨ ਬਾਣੀ ਗੁਰ ਸਬਦੁ ਸੁਣਈਆ॥
 ਸੁਨਿ ਸੁਨਿ ਆਤਮ ਦੇਵ ਹੈ ਭੀਨੇ ਰਸਿ ਰਸਿ ਰਾਮ ਗੋਪਾਲ ਰਵਈਆ॥

ਤੈ ਗੁਣ ਮਾਇਆ ਮੇਹਿ ਵਿਆਪੇ ਤੁਰੀਆ ਗੁਣੁ ਹੈ ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਲਹੀਆ॥
 ਏਕ ਦ੍ਰਿਸਟਿ ਸਭ ਸਮ ਕਰਿ ਜਾਣੈ ਨਦਰੀ ਆਵੈ ਸਭੁ ਬ੍ਰਹਮੁ ਪਸਰਈਆ॥
 ਹਰਿ ਗੁਣ ਗਾਵੈ ਸਦਾ ਦਿਨੁ ਰਾਤੀ ਮੈਂ ਹਰਿ ਜਸੁ ਕਹਤੇ ਅੰਤੁ ਨ ਲਹੀਆ॥
 ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਮਨ੍ਹਾ ਝਕਤੁ ਘਰਿ ਆਵੈ ਮਿਲਤੁ ਗੋਪਾਲ ਨੀਸਾਨੁ ਬਜੜਿਆ॥
 ਨੈਨੀ ਦੇਖਿ ਦਰਸੁ ਮਨੁ ਤ੍ਰਿਪਤੈ ਸ਼ਬਨ ਬਾਧੀ ਗੁਰੁ ਸਬਦੁ ਸੁਧੜਿਆ॥
 ਸੁਨਿ ਸੁਨਿ ਆਤਮ ਦੇਵ ਹੈ ਭੀਨੇ ਰਸਿ ਰਸਿ ਰਾਮ ਗੋਪਾਲ ਰਵੜਿਆ॥
 ਤੈ ਗੁਣ ਮਾੜਿਆ ਮੋਹਿ ਵਿਆਪੇ ਤੁਰੀਆ ਗੁਣੁ ਹੈ ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਲਹੀਆ॥
 ਏਕ ਦ੍ਰਿਸਟਿ ਸਭ ਸਮ ਕਰਿ ਜਾਯੈ ਨਦਰੀ ਆਵੈ ਸਭੁ ਬ੍ਰਹਮੁ ਪਸਰੜਿਆ॥

I sing glories of God the One, day and night; I sing His praises and cannot fathom His limits. The Guru-oriented mind returns home (after wandering all day) and meets the God of the Universe, to the beat of celestial drums. I see the Divine with my eyes, and I am gratified; and then I listen to the Guru's Bani, the sacred Word. By listening, my soul is delighted by the subtle essence emanating from the chanting of the Name of the Master of the Universe. Because of being captive to their three natural attributes or qualities (Note 2), people are attached to Maya (which is this whole world); but only the Guru-oriented can transcend the three attributes and be liberated from Maya – only the Gurmukh can experience the absolute state of bliss, look upon the world with detachment, and witness God pervading the entire universe.

(SGGS 833)

It is important to point out that *Maya* is the phenomenal world or materialism that is deceptive and illusory and lures human souls away from the Divine reality. Under its influence the Creator is forgotten, worldly attachments take root, and duality becomes the object of interest. This thought is expressed most succinctly and profoundly by Guru Amar Das in these words:

ਏਹ ਮਾਇਆ ਜਿਤੁ ਹਰਿ ਵਿਸਰੈ ਮੇਹੁ ਉਪਜੈ ਭਾਉ ਦੂਜਾ ਲਾਇਆ॥
 ਏਹ ਮਾੜਿਆ ਜਿਤੁ ਹਰਿ ਵਿਸਰੈ ਮੋਹੁ ਤਪਜੈ ਭਾਤ ਦੂਜਾ ਲਾੜਿਆ॥

This is Maya, by which the God is forgotten; emotional attachment is born and love of duality wells up.

(SGGS 921)

Conclusion

In the Sikh tradition the guru worship, an essential part of its religious practices, is a drastic departure from the conventional view of worship in India. It is unlike the worship in other religions both in theory and in practice. Whereas the object of worship representing a deity in ancient Indian religions has been a living human being or a substitute in some form, the Sikh religion forbids the use of any human figure or physical object for this purpose. Instead, it believes in the Word Guru (Shabad Guru) as an object of worship enshrined in the Guru Granth Sahib.

The Sikh worship is a process by which the believer or seeker seeks the mentation on *Shabad Parmaan*,³⁰ first to instill the spiritual truth in the mind and then to experience that truth in real life. Should the Sikhs worship faithfully and regularly, the process would cultivate their minds for the divine consciousness to grow, and nurture their hearts for the Word Guru to live in. So Sikh worship consists in the evocation of the Guru within, and it requires both faith in and intellectual acceptance of the Word Guru.

More importantly, however, the worship is an affirmation of an otherwise unaffirmable relationship between one's consciousness and the Word of the Guru. In this state when the deity is invoked, the consciousness is in communion with the deity, the Supreme Being. Then, one witnesses the Guru reflected in the consciousness in stages analogous to the ones showing reflections of the moon in a lake of water: first on a wave, then on ripples, and finally on a quiet and unruffled expanse of water. Guru Amar Das explains this experience beautifully in the following verse:

ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤ ਬਾਣੀ ਗੁਰ ਕੀ ਮੀਠੀ॥ ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਵਿਰਲੈ ਕਿਨੈ ਚਖਿ ਡੀਠੀ॥
ਅੰਤਰਿ ਪਰਗਾਸੁ ਮਹਾ ਰਸੁ ਪੀਵੈ ਦਰਿ ਸਚੈ ਸਬਦੁ ਵਜਾਵਣਿਆ॥
ਅਮਿਤ ਬਾਣੀ ਗੁਰ ਕੀ ਮੀਠੀ॥ ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਵਿਰਲੈ ਕਿਨੈ ਚਖਿ ਡੀਠੀ॥
ਅੰਤਰਿ ਪਰਗਾਸੁ ਮਹਾ ਰਸੁ ਪੀਵੈ ਦਰਿ ਸਚੈ ਸਬਦੁ ਵਜਾਵਣਿਆ॥

The life-giving word of the Guru is sweet. Only some rare Guru-oriented seekers may witness and taste it. Those who do will be enlightened, and when enlightened they will get to drink the divine nectar, the supreme essence, which will result in absolute gratification and ultimately bring them to the gate of the Truth, the Supreme Being, God.

(SGGS 113)

This final stage represents the culmination of Sikh worship. Here you witness the truths of the Guru's teachings becoming visible within your consciousness and the darkness of ignorance disappearing. A verse from Guru Nanak would be an apt ending to our discussion:

ਦੀਵਾ ਬਲੈ ਅੰਧੇਰਾ ਜਾਇ॥ ਬੇਦ ਪਾਠ ਮਤਿ ਪਾਪਾ ਖਾਇ॥
ਉਗਵੈ ਸੂਰੁ ਨ ਜਾਪੈ ਚੰਦੁ॥ ਜਹ ਗਿਆਨ ਪ੍ਰਗਾਸੁ ਅਗਿਆਨੁ ਮਿਟੰਤੁ॥
ਦੀਵਾ ਬਲੈ ਅੰਧੇਰਾ ਜਾਝ॥ ਬੇਦ ਪਾਠ ਮਤਿ ਪਾਪਾ ਖਾਝ॥
ਤਗਵੈ ਸੂਰੁ ਨ ਜਾਪੈ ਚੰਦੁ॥ ਜਹ ਗਿਆਨ ਪ੍ਰਗਾਸੁ ਅਗਿਆਨੁ ਮਿਟੰਤੁ॥

When the lamp is lit, darkness is dispelled. When the scriptures are read, the sinful mind is destroyed. When the sun rises, the moon becomes invisible. Where spiritual wisdom appears, ignorance disappears.

(SGGS 791)

CHAPTER 8

SEEKING THE WORD: The Sikh Vehicle For Contemplation

Seeking the Word, sustained “mentation” on the Guru Granth hymns, *paath deedar*, and various other terms are used to describe the process that a Sikh follows as part of his/her spiritual life. It is a process a seeker practices everyday aspiring to realize the Supreme Being within. The *paath deedar* is the Sikh’s vehicle for contemplation on the Guru Granth verses and the qualitative knowledge of the Divine. The contemplation, a discourse between the human mind and the *Gurbani*, requires complete concentration of the mind for the spiritual understanding of the divine knowledge.

The object of worship or meditation for the Sikhs, as stated previously, is not the deity Guru in physical form, but the Word or shabad enshrined in Sri Guru Granth Sahib. Both as a guide for spiritual knowledge and a deity to worship, the Word encompasses the verses, teachings, and inspirations accessible to a seeker. Transitioning from the early form of deity worship to the Word Guru, Sikh worship needed novel types of religious practices, procedures for worship, and congregational channels of communication, which came into being and evolved over the centuries. The *paath deedar* is clearly a new way to approach God and central to Sikh worship.

This chapter, a continuation of the previous one, further explores and expands on the topic of *paath deedar*. It illustrates

the unique way the Sikhs worship their Word Guru, describing the method, technique, or process of seeking the Word.

Daily Code of *Paath Deedar da Dhyan*

Sikh Code on *Ardaas*

According to the Sikh Code of Conduct, the daily Sikh congregational prayer known as *ardaas* must contain a recitation inclusive of the “prayer that seeks the grace of God for contemplation on the *Paath* of Guru Granth.”³¹ In the Guru Granth vocabulary, it is described as ਪਾਠ ਦੀਦਾਰ ਦਾ ਧਿਆਨ (*dhyān* of *paath*). The exact verse runs as follows instructing the seekers’ congregation to concentrate on the Supreme Being:

ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਜੀ ਦੇ ਪਾਠ ਦੀਦਾਰ ਦਾ ਧਿਆਨ ਧਰਕੇ ਬੈਠੇ ਜੀ ਵਹਿਗੁਰੂ॥
Call on Waheguru, the Infinite Wisdom, God, reciting that sacred Name, with your mind focused on the reading and vision of Sri Guru Granth Sahib.

(*Sikh Rehat Maryada* 10)

On December 30, 1933, a conclave of 170 Sikh representatives, including scholars, clergy, and holy men, was held at Amritsar to write a code of conduct for the Sikhs to follow. A draft was prepared from materials collected by several committees, which they had been working on since 1927. The 1933 draft was further modified to its final version in 1945 and published in 1946.

This Sikh Code of Conduct prescribed the invocation of *paath deedar*. The Sikh representatives were so conscious of the deeper meaning of contemplation on the Guru Granth *paath*,³² i.e., sacred readings of the Guru Granth, that they felt that meaning in the depths of their being. They made the commitment to *paath deedar* by placing it prominently in the most important portion of their congregational prayer and the daily declaration.

In the first supplication of the prayer, each of the ten Gurus is remembered according to his most memorable worship of

God. Then the eternal Guru, the sacred Guru Shabad, is remembered in terms of its *paath deedar*.

As a note of caution, the paraphrase of the prayer is not “*darshan deedar*,” which some Sikh clergy and cantors have naively begun to recite in recent years. Such paraphrase might only encourage idol worship, not consistent with the Sikh teachings.

Preparing for Daily Path

One of the basic tenets of Sikhism, the *path deedar* is an essential part of the practice of Sikh worship. It is in effect the Guru-Shabad worship, aiming to invoke the Spirit of the Deity – aiming in effect to materialize the Guru-Shabad.

A Sikh begins his or her day with a *paath deedar* of Gurbani. (Gurbani is a term used by the Sikhs for verses contained in the Guru Granth.) A specified routine of the *paath deedar* follows an ardaas and ends with an ardaas; the ardaas includes a vow a Sikh takes to begin his or her next day with a *paath deedar*. So the day of a Sikh begins with a *paath deedar* and ends with a *paath deedar*.

The *paath deedar* is also practiced during the daily routine of taking a *vaak* or the order of the day, which consists of the *paath deedar* of a randomly selected hymn. Every Sikh or a seeker is urged to practice this routine every morning and repeat it every evening.

There is a built-in practice of prayer for this routine, which allows one to experience the *paath deedar*. The practice requires the opening of the Guru Granth for a formal reading. Prior to opening the sacred book, the reader goes through the sequence of a unique psychic-spiritual experience so as to enter a receptive mode of *Shabad Parmaan*.

The term *Shabad Parmaan* is used for any *Gurbani* verses serving as a testimony of divine knowledge. It is to be mystically received by the reader depending upon his or her psychic-

spiritual readiness and receptivity. This testimony seems to be grounded in human reason and perception and yet transcends them.

This is how a Sikh seeking the Word proceeds in his or her spiritual quest. First, the seeker becomes mentally prepared to receive the *shabad deedar* before opening the Sacred Scripture. Before lifting the covering cloth off the Granth to begin reading, he or she performs a formal prayer, whether silent or vocal, which is followed by another prayer, a silent one, from the depths of the heart. Usually, the seeker closes his or her eyes for this practice of the *shabad deedar* before opening the Granth.

The silent prayer goes something like this:

I am seeking your grace, my Guru; I am seeking the Word that came out of your mouth – the Word which is divine knowledge. I know not what to pray for, so I don't pray for anything of this world. I long for your vision; I wait for your Word, my Guru.

Often a passage from the Guru Granth is read and recited silently. Here is, for instance, a passage from the Sacred Scripture recited by author Harbans Lal in his daily prayer for *paath deedar* and by many other Sikhs:

ਦਰਮਾਦੇ ਠਾਢੇ ਦਰਬਾਰਿ॥

ਤੁਝ ਬਿਨੁ ਸੁਰਤਿ ਕਰੈ ਕੇ ਮੇਰੀ ਦਰਸਨੁ ਦੀਜੈ ਖੋਲ੍ਹਿ ਕਿਵਾਰ॥

ਤੁਮ ਧਨ ਧਨੀ ਉਦਾਰ ਤਿਆਗੀ ਸ਼ਵਨਨ੍ਹ ਸੁਨੀਅਤੁ ਸੁਜਸੁ

ਤੁਮ੍ਹਾਰ॥

ਮਾਗਉ ਕਾਹਿ ਰੰਕ ਸਭ ਦੇਖਉ ਤੁਮ੍ਹਰ ਹੀ ਤੇ ਮੇਰੇ ਨਿਸਤਾਰੁ॥

ਦਰਮਾਦੇ ਠਾਢੇ ਦਰਬਾਰਿ॥

ਤੁਝ ਬਿਨੁ ਸੁਰਤਿ ਕਰੈ ਕੋ ਮੇਰੀ ਦਰਸਨੁ ਦੀਜੈ ਖੋਲ੍ਹਿ ਕਿਵਾਰ॥

ਤੁਮ ਧਨ ਧਨੀ ਉਦਾਰ ਤਿਆਗੀ ਸ਼ਵਨਨ੍ਹ ਸੁਨੀਅਤੁ ਸੁਜਸੁ ਤੁਮ੍ਹਾਰ॥

ਮਾਗਤ ਕਾਹਿ ਰੰਕ ਸਭ ਦੇਖਤੁ ਤੁਮ੍ਹਰ ਹੀ ਤੇ ਮੇਰੇ ਨਿਸਤਾਰੁ॥

I stand humbly in Thy Court, God. Who else can take care of me but Thee? Please open Thy door, and grant me a revelation of

Thy Deedar, Thy Being. Thou art the richest of the rich, Thou art generous and detached; I desire to listen to Thy glories. Whom else should I ask for help, knowing that all are poor? Thou only art my salvation.

(Kabir, SGGS 856)

The first reading is usually that of a randomly selected hymn, which is traditionally called the Order of the Day. Some will do only that much in the morning and read further in a later session. Through this routine, one attempts to achieve quiescence of mind³³ and develops a state of receptivity to receive the Order of the Day from the Guru Granth, our spiritual mentor. This done, the seeker may then turn to the worldly routine or continue to read further as per his or her spiritual regimen.

This way is how a Sikh may cultivate a routine to the point it becomes a habit. When the routine becomes a habit, the seeker's mind becomes composed enough to enter the Sikh spiritual domain or sanctuary. In that state of composure or quiescence, the seeker may begin with the silent prayer described above and wait for a spiritual response from within. He or she may wait for one, two, three, four, or five minutes. If at the end of this waiting, the seeker has not felt a response arising from within, he or she may go ahead, as most of us do, with the rest of the routine.

A Sikh may conduct this exercise of initiating receptivity the next day, the day after, and all the days of his or her life. He or she may repeat this silent form of prayer until he or she feels the heartbeat slowing down and the desire for shabad deedar intensifying.

While these effects may not become evident to a beginner, one is likely to experience them within a month of an unbroken and persistent practice of this routine. The idea is to connect to the inner center of one's being and recognize it as the locus of that divine element, that vital life force, which for its realization yearns for a connection with the Supreme Being. A seeker can

make this connection only by persistent practice of *paath deedar*, which is a daily communion with *Ik Onkaar*, Waheguru, the Infinite Wisdom, or God.

Once a seeker has begun to feel the existence of that divine element within, he or she may begin to commune with the all-pervasive Divinity, and when that happens, the individual is on the way to new spiritual experiences, to a novel understanding of his or her place in the vast universe. The seeker will then suddenly see his or her finite existence pitted against the infinite universe and his or her mortal life juxtaposed against the eternal Supreme Being.

These realizations will eventually lead a seeker to recognize that humans on their own can learn nothing and experience nothing, and that only by seeking and attaining their spiritual connection with the metaphysical, eternal, divine reality, the Infinite Wisdom, or God, they may be able to transcend the limitations inherent in human nature.

The *shabad deedar* then becomes a spiritual instrument for the seekers to deal with their mortality and numerous inadequacies. This spiritual instrument also chips at, and eventually brings down, the stone wall of ego, which always obstructs self-realization and connection with God. The seekers' realization of the insignificance of their wisdom, abilities, and possessions produces in them true humility, which in turn causes the melting of their egos. It is in that state of humility they cease to stand apart and disconnected from all other humans and God and become connected to the unfathomable divine spirit. It is only then they may become worthy of God's grace. Thus, the entire regimen of seeking the Word becomes a process of seeking God's grace.

The prayer, then, becomes true and real when one affirms that the enduring wisdom, power, and meaning come from the grace of God. Thus, silent prayers prepare a person to receive for that day, often without his or her awareness of it, the Guru

Granth wisdom. These prayers enable the seeker to explore and experience the Word for divine knowledge and eventually for the grace of Waheguru or *Ik Onkaar*, the Infinite Wisdom.

Here are some additional verses for continuous prayer one may practice to achieve receptivity. The seeker not only repeats these statements over and over again but also takes their sense into his or her consciousness and dwells on their meaning and relevance to the self.

ਹਉ ਢਾਢੀ ਹਰਿ ਪ੍ਰਭ ਖਸਮ ਕਾ ਹਰਿ ਕੈ ਦਰਿ ਆਇਆ॥
 ਹਰਿ ਅੰਦਰਿ ਸੁਣੀ ਪ੍ਰਕਾਰ ਢਾਢੀ ਮੁਖਿ ਲਾਇਆ॥
 ਹਰਿ ਪੁਛਿਆ ਢਾਢੀ ਸਦਿ ਕੈ ਕਿਤੁ ਅਰਥਿ ਤੂੰ ਆਇਆ॥
 ਨਿਤ ਦੇਵਹੁ ਦਾਨੁ ਦਇਆਲ ਪ੍ਰਭ ਹਰਿ ਨਾਮੁ ਧਿਆਇਆ॥
 ਹਰਿ ਦਾਤੈ ਹਰਿ ਨਾਮੁ ਜਪਾਇਆ ਨਾਨਕੁ ਪੈਨਾਇਆ॥
 ਹਤ ਫਾਠੀ ਹਰਿ ਪ੍ਰਭ ਖਸਮ ਕਾ ਹਰਿ ਕੈ ਦਰਿ ਆਝੁਆ॥
 ਹਰਿ ਅੰਦਰਿ ਸੁਣੀ ਪ੍ਰਕਾਰ ਫਾਠੀ ਸੁਖਿ ਲਾਝੁਆ॥
 ਹਰਿ ਪੁਛਿਆ ਫਾਠੀ ਸਦਿ ਕੈ ਕਿਤੁ ਅਰਥਿ ਤੂੰ ਆਝੁਆ॥
 ਨਿਤ ਦੇਵਹੁ ਦਾਨੁ ਦਝੁਆਲ ਪ੍ਰਭ ਹਰਿ ਨਾਮੁ ਧਿਆਝੁਆ॥
 ਹਰਿ ਦਾਤੈ ਹਰਿ ਨਾਮੁ ਜਪਾਝੁਆ ਨਾਨਕੁ ਪੈਨਾਝੁਆ॥

I am a humble minstrel of God, my Creator and Master; I have come to His doorstep. The Infinite has heard my cries of anguish; He has called me, the humble minstrel, into His Presence. The Infinite called the minstrel in, and asked, "Why have you come here?" The seeker responded, "O Merciful God, please grant me the gift of continued meditation on Thy Name." And so the God, the Great Giver, inspired Nanak to chant God's Name and blessed him with the robe of honor.

(SGGS 91)

There are other hymns that are commonly employed for the same purpose, one of which, composed by Guru Arjan Dev, is quoted below:

ਸੁਨਹੁ ਬਿਨੰਤੀ ਠਾਕੁਰ ਮੇਰੇ ਜੀਅ ਜੰਤ ਤੇਰੇ ਧਾਰੇ॥

ਰਾਖੁ ਪੈਜ ਨਾਮ ਅਪੁਨੇ ਕੀ ਕਰਨ ਕਰਾਵਨਹਾਰੇ॥
 ਪ੍ਰਭ ਜੀਉ ਖਸਮਾਨਾ ਕਰਿ ਪਿਆਰੇ ਬੁਰੇ ਭਲੇ ਹਮ ਥਾਰੇ॥
 ਸੁਣੀ ਪੁਕਾਰ ਸਮਰਥ ਸੁਆਮੀ ਬੰਧਨ ਕਾਟਿ ਸਵਾਰੇ॥
 ਪਹਿਰਿ ਸਿਰਪਾਉ ਸੇਵਕ ਜਨ ਮੇਲੇ ਨਾਨਕ ਪ੍ਰਗਟ ਪਹਾਰੇ॥
 ਸੁਨਹੁ ਬਿਨੰਤੀ ਠਾਕੁਰ ਮੇਰੇ ਜੀਅ ਜੰਤ ਤੇਰੇ ਧਾਰੇ॥
 ਰਾਖੁ ਪੈਜ ਨਾਮ ਅਪੁਨੇ ਕੀ ਕਰਨ ਕਰਾਵਨਹਾਰੇ॥
 ਪ੍ਰਭ ਜੀਤ ਖਸਮਾਨਾ ਕਰਿ ਪਿਆਰੇ ਬੁਰੇ ਭਲੇ ਹਮ ਥਾਰੇ॥
 ਸੁਠੀ ਪੁਕਾਰ ਸਮਰਥ ਸੁਆਮੀ ਬੰਧਨ ਕਾਟਿ ਸਵਾਰੇ॥
 ਪਹਿਰਿ ਸਿਰਪਾਤ ਸੇਵਕ ਜਨ ਮੇਲੇ ਨਾਨਕ ਪ੍ਰਗਟ ਪਹਾਰੇ॥

Hear my prayer, O my God and Master; all living beings depend upon Thee. Thou preserve the honor of Thy Name, O God, the cause of all causes. O Dear God, my beloved, accept me as Thy own. Whether good or bad, I am Thine. Almighty God and Master heard my prayer and set me free from my bonds and saved me. God dressed me in the robe of honor and included me in his Cosmos; Nanak says, the Creator is revealed in the glory throughout the world.

(SGGS 931)

Soon a seeker will sense that he or she is in the *dhyān* mode of receptivity, which is required for sustained mentation on the Shabad Parmaan. The meaning of receptivity and *dhyān* may not be revealed the same way to all seekers, but the meaning may come to all, opening a passage of the Guru Shabad to their consciousness. Through the practice of prayer, different seekers would receive different messages depending on the myriads of their spiritual states. Each seeker should continue with his or her spiritual journey.

Concept and Practice of *Dhyān* and *Paath*

Dhyān

The term “mentation” (meaning mental activity) is a portmanteau word we may use to translate the term *dhyān*. We

are using it as a collective equivalent of the various senses of dhyān, traditionally meaning mind, meditation, attention, and contemplation. The dhyān of (on) *paath* of the Guru Granth has a deep meaning for the spiritualists today. The term ਪਾਠ ਦੇ ਦੀਦਾਰ ਦਾ ਧਿਆਨ (*paath de deedar da dhyān*, meaning *dhyān* of *paath*) means the sustained focus of consciousness on the sacred reading of or listening to the *Shabad Parmaan* contained in the verses from the *Gurbani*.

The theological and pragmatic meanings of the *paath* have been discussed above and in the previous chapter.³⁴ *Dhyān* is a Sanskrit term derived from the root *dhyai*, in turn, derived from the root *dhi*, which denotes a vision, while the corresponding verb means "to have a vision." In the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, the term may be rendered as "sustained mentation" or simply "mentation." It would be worthwhile for anyone interested in mentation or meditation to read and listen to B. Alan Wallace on Buddhist meditation and mindfulness.³⁵

The term is explained in the Sikh scriptures through many examples. Sikh theologian Bhai Gurdas underscores the significance of *dhyān* in many of his verses by using analogies, metaphors, and similes. He clarifies its meaning most eloquently in the following verses:

-ਦਰਪਣਿ ਵਾਂਗਿ ਧਿਆਨੁ ਧਰਿ ਆਪੁ ਆਪ ਨਿਹਾਲੈ॥

दरपणि वांगि धिआनु धरि आपु आप निहालै॥

Focus your dhyān like on the mirror to experience a vision of yourself clearly.

(*Bhai Gurdas, Vaar 9, Pauri 1*)

-ਚੰਦ ਚਕੋਰ ਪਰੀਤਿ ਹੈ ਦੇਖਿ ਧਿਆਨੁ ਧਰੰਦਾ॥

चंद चकोर परीति है देखि धिआनु धरंदा॥

The red-legged partridge (chakore) is in love with the moon, and it looks at the moon and remains still while keeping the dhyān (sustained mentation) on it.

(Bhai Gurdas, Vaar 2, Pauri 17)

-ਧਿਆਨੀ ਚੰਦ ਚਕੋਰ ਗਤਿ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤ ਦ੍ਰਿਸਟਿ ਸ੍ਰਿਸਟਿ ਵਰਸਾਈ॥

ਧਿਆਨੀ ਚੰਦ ਚਕੋਰ ਗਤਿ ਅਮ੍ਰਿਤ ਦ੍ਰਿਸਟਿ ਸ੍ਰਿਸਟਿ ਵਰਸਾਈ॥

The Sikh of the Guru practices dhyān or sustained mentation on the Sabd (Word) as the bird chakore meditates on the moon to experience the joy of nectar visualized as pouring over the whole creation.

(Bhai Gurdas, Vaar 11, Pauri 2)

-ਕਛੂ ਆਂਡਾ ਧਿਆਨੁ ਧਰਿ ਕਰਿ ਪਰਪਕੁ ਨਦੀ ਵਿਚਿ ਆਏ॥

ਕਛੂ ਆਂਡਾ ਧਿਆਨੁ ਧਰਿ ਕਰਿ ਪਰਪਕੁ ਨਦੀ ਵਿਚਿ ਆਏ॥

The tortoise lays its eggs in the sand, and by its dhyān on their well-being, it leads them to maturity and brings them into stream water.

(Bhai Gurdas, Vaar 11, Pauri 9)

-ਜੈਸੇ ਬਗ ਧਿਆਨ ਧਾਰਿ ਕਰਤ ਅਹਾਰ ਮੀਨ...॥

ਜੈਸੇ ਬਗ ਧਿਆਨ ਧਾਰਿ ਕਰਤ ਅਹਾਰ ਮੀਨ...॥

Dhyān is the concentration of a crane becoming still to catch a fish for a meal.

(Bhai Gurdas, Kabit 240, verse 3)

-ਪਾਣੀ ਅੰਦਰਿ ਕਵਲ ਜਿਉ ਸੂਰਜ ਧਿਆਨੁ ਅਲਿਪਤੁ ਰਹਾਏ॥

ਸਬਦ ਸੁਰਤਿ ਸਤਿਸੰਗਿ ਮਿਲਿ ਗੁਰ ਚੇਲੇ ਦੀ ਸੰਧਿ ਮਿਲਾਏ॥

ਪਾਣੀ ਅੰਦਰਿ ਕਵਲ ਜਿਤ ਸੂਰਜ ਧਿਆਨੁ ਅਲਿਪਤੁ ਰਹਾਏ॥

ਸਬਦ ਸੁਰਤਿ ਸਤਿਸੰਗਿ ਮਿਲਿ ਗੁਰ ਚੇਲੇ ਦੀ ਸੰਧਿ ਮਿਲਾਏ॥

Despite its roots hanging in and buffeted by the water, the lotus remains unmoved in its dhyān upon the sun (the source of its life) and stays detached from its surroundings. And so does the seeker of divine experience by breaking the wall between him/her and the holy mentor through the shabad consciousness attained in the company of the holy.

(Bhai Gurdas, Vaar 6, Pauri 6)

Thus, Bhai Gurdas illustrates the pragmatic meaning of *dhyān* through a series of meditative states. These states, beginning with the attainment of quiescence, proceed to subtler

states of contemplation on the object of mentation. The meaning of dhyān can further be illustrated by quoting Guru Nanak's words:

ਧਿਆਨ ਰੂਪਿ ਹੋਇ ਆਸਣੁ ਪਾਵੈ॥

ਧਿਆਨ ਰੂਪਿ ਹੋਝ ਆਸਣੁ ਪਾਵੈ॥

By becoming an embodiment of dhyān, one attains the true Yogic stance.

(SGGS 877)

Paath Dhyān or Gurbani “Mentation”

The process of dhyān on paath deedar requires sustained mentation on the discourse between the human mind and the Gurbani. It requires the mind to be intensely alert, energetic and focused so that the aspirant acquires a spiritual understanding of the Creator and creation through the vehicle of Shabad Parmaan. Mark what the fifth Guru said to his Sikh (student, disciple, or wisdom seeker) in the following verse:

ਗੁਰ ਕੈ ਬਚਨਿ ਰਿਦੈ ਧਿਆਨੁ ਧਾਰੀ॥

ਰਸਨਾ ਜਾਪੁ ਜਪਉ ਬਨਵਾਰੀ॥

ਗੁਰ ਕੈ ਬਚਨਿ ਰਿਦੈ ਧਿਆਨੁ ਧਾਰੀ॥

ਰਸਨਾ ਜਾਪੁ ਜਪਤ ਬਨਵਾਰੀ॥

Let the heart meditate on the Word of the Guru. And the tongue shall sing the Song of the Creator.

(SGGS 740)

The verse implies that during the meditation of *shabad deedar* the Guru is answering the disciple's unstated but implied question as to how one should approach God. A simple answer is that the Word of the Guru is the Song Celestial, the Song of *Banvari* or God. The seeker will know the Guru – and thence God – by hearing, reading, and reciting the Guru's Hymns.

By *paath deedar*, one is singing the Song Celestial. That's key to the Will or spirit of God. Letting one's heart meditate or *mentate* on the Word by reciting that Word constitutes or

amounts to singing the Song of the Divinity. When it is done, one is on the path that leads to divine vision, knowledge, and understanding of God. Once that intuitive knowledge of the Creator dwells in one's heart, one is able to do His Will.

Through sustained mentation and recitation of Shabad Parmaan, a Sikh invokes God by invoking the Guru as an intercessor. The Guru knows the path to God; the Guru shows the path to God; nay, the Guru becomes the path. Therefore, the Guru provides answers to the seeker's interrogatories related to the purpose of human existence and the world.

By his teachings, the Guru reveals the knowledge to the one who consciously accepts the regimen of sustained mentation and recitation of Shabad Parmaan. By this regimen, the seeker absorbs into his/her consciousness the spiritual theology and its applications received from the Guru. By this process, the Gurbani becomes alive in the seeker's mind as he/she dwells on its meaning during prayers; by doing so the devotee finds him-/herself worshipping the divine in its highest form. Thus, the Word abides in the seeker, and the Guru becomes the activity of the seeker's consciousness.

According to Bhai Gurdas, the actual mentation process aims to seek the vision of the Guru, thereby the vision of God, and then to equip the seeker with the ability to conquer all the mind's evils so as to be eventually liberated from them. Thus, Bhai Gurdas describes sustained mentation on the Guru in the following verse:

ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰ ਦਰਸ ਧਿਆਨ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰ ਸਬਦ ਗਿਆਨ॥
 ਸਸਤ੍ਰ ਸਨਾਹ ਪੰਚ ਦੂਤ ਬਸਿ ਆਏ ਹੈ॥
 ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰ ਦਰਸ ਧਿਆਨ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰ ਸਬਦ ਗਿਆਨ॥
 ਸਸਤ੍ਰ ਸਨਾਹ ਪੰਚ ਦੂਤ ਬਸਿ ਆਏ ਹੈ॥

Sustained mentation on the Guru's self leads to the knowledge of the Guru's Shabad. Be armed with the Guru's Shabad (and its

Parmaan), and the five evils (causes of mortality) will come under your control.

(Bhai Gurdas, *Kabit* 135)

Obviously, Bhai Gurdas warns the Sikhs against the five evils (concupiscence, wrath, avarice, attachment, and ego or pride) and exhorts them to use the Word as a weapon against the five, which can be conquered but not eliminated. And he underscores the belief that one may acquire the possession of that weapon by a dedicated focus of one's heart and mind on the Guru's Self – that is, the “whatness” of the Guru Granth Sahib, which is in totality all that the body-mind can jointly absorb in the process of the *paath deedar*.

The Paath Deedar Process:

A Cookbook Lesson

The practice of *paath deedar* begins with the seeker's pondering over a scriptural verse. It can be carried out by ways not too difficult for a beginner, nor too simple for an advanced student, to follow. Here are some directions for seekers.

In the beginning, bring to mind a verse to chant silently or to contemplate its deeper meaning. Begin to chant a part or line of the verse. Do this tongue-tied as an exercise in a simple form of meditation. As you ponder and meditate on its central idea or theme, concentrating on it with total alertness, you will find its deeper meaning unraveling and revealing itself to you in the depths of your consciousness. The experience will make you feel the way a thirsty traveler walking in the wilderness on a hot summer day would feel upon finding a cold drink of water from the depths of a well. Guru Amar Das described this practice as follows:

ਰਸਨਾ ਹਰਿ ਰਸੁ ਪੀਜੈ ਅੰਤਰੁ ਭੀਜੈ ਸਾਚ ਸਬਦਿ ਬੀਚਾਰੀ॥

ਅੰਤਰਿ ਖੂਹਟਾ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤਿ ਭਰਿਆ ਸਬਦੇ ਕਾਢਿ ਪੀਐ ਪਨਿਹਾਰੀ॥

ਰਸਨਾ ਹਰਿ ਰਸੁ ਪੀਜੈ ਅੰਤਰੁ ਭੀਜੈ ਸਾਚ ਸਬਦਿ ਭੀਚਾਰੀ॥

ਅੰਤਰਿ ਖ਼ੂਹਟਾ ਅਮ੍ਰਿਤਿ ਭਰਿਆ ਸਬਦੇ ਕਾਠਿ ਪੀਏ ਪਨਿਹਾਰੀ॥

Fill your inner well with the nectar (water) of immortality so that you like a water-carrier draw the life-giving Shabad water from the well and quench your thirst.

(SGGS 570)

To put it differently, when you practice the *paath deedar* in earnest, using a selected verse for the act of dhyān, you should live through that verse, feeling its meaning or intent in your consciousness. Meditate on it and keep doing so until you have achieved a state of sustained mentation. When that happens, you will likely experience a feeling of exhilaration, of euphoria; you will also feel grateful for the consciousness of a spiritual reality you may not have experienced before. Try contemplating the following verse, which is Guru Amar Das's testimony of this state:

ਰਉ ਵਾਰੀ ਜੀਉ ਵਾਰੀ ਗੁਰ ਕੀ ਬਾਣੀ ਮੰਨਿ ਵਸਾਵਣਿਆ॥

ਅੰਜਨ ਮਾਹਿ ਨਿਰੰਜਨੁ ਪਾਇਆ ਜੇਤੀ ਜੇਤਿ ਮਿਲਾਵਣਿਆ॥

ਹਤ ਵਾਰੀ ਜੀਤ ਵਾਰੀ ਗੁਰ ਕੀ ਬਾਣੀ ਮੰਨਿ ਵਸਾਵਣਿਆ॥

ਅੰਜਨ ਮਾਹਿ ਨਿਰੰਜਨੁ ਪਾਏਆ ਜੋਤੀ ਜੋਤਿ ਮਿਲਾਵਣਿਆ॥

I am a sacrifice, my soul is a sacrifice, to those who enshrine the Word from the Guru's verses within their minds. In the midst of the darkness of the world, they become connected to the Immaculate One, and their human light merges into the Cosmic Light.

(SGGS 112)

Another verse from the Gurbani, composed by Guru Amar Das, continuing in the same vein, expresses a similar thought:

ਨਿਰਮਲ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤੁ ਗੁਰ ਤੇ ਪਾਇਆ॥

ਵਿਚਹੁ ਆਪੁ ਮੁਆ ਤਿਥੈ ਮੇਹੁ ਨ ਮਾਇਆ॥

ਨਿਰਮਲ ਗਿਆਨੁ ਧਿਆਨੁ ਅਤਿ ਨਿਰਮਲੁ॥

ਨਿਰਮਲ ਬਾਣੀ ਮੰਨਿ ਵਸਾਵਣਿਆ॥
 ਨਿਰਮਲ ਅਸ਼ਿਰੁ ਗੁਰੁ ਤੇ ਪਾਝੁਆ॥
 ਵਿਚਹੁ ਆਪੁ ਸੁਆ ਤਿਥੈ ਮੋਹੁ ਨ ਮਾਝੁਆ॥
 ਨਿਰਮਲ ਗਿਆਨੁ ਧਿਆਨੁ ਅਤਿ ਨਿਰਮਲੁ॥
 ਨਿਰਮਲ ਬਾਣੀ ਮੰਨਿ ਵਸਾਵਣਿਆ॥

The immaculate ambrosial nectar is obtained from the Guru. When selfishness or ego is eradicated, you lose attachment to the self and the world of Maya.³⁶ Immaculate is the spiritual wisdom, and totally immaculate is the meditation of those whose minds are filled with immaculate verses of the Word.

(SGGS 121)

In essence, the Guru is saying that if your efforts in *paath deedar* culminate in attaching your mind to the Word so that your consciousness abides in the Word and the Word abides in your consciousness, you shall experience a heightened spiritual exhilaration, a divine ecstasy. It needs to be said that though you may practice *path deedar* as directed, you may achieve this state of worship only through the Guru's grace. Guru Arjan points out below the significance of grace for the believer seeking a divine connection:

ਕੁਕਮੁ ਕਰਿ ਕੀਨ੍ਹੇ ਨਿਹਾਲ॥ ਅਪਨੇ ਸੇਵਕ ਕਉ ਭਇਆ
 ਦਇਆਲੁ॥

ਗੁਰਿ ਪੂਰੈ ਸਭੁ ਪੂਰਾ ਕੀਆ॥ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤੁ ਨਾਮੁ ਰਿਦ ਮਹਿ ਦੀਆ॥
 ਕਰਮੁ ਧਰਮੁ ਮੇਰਾ ਕਛੁ ਨ ਬੀਚਾਰਿਓ॥ ਬਹ ਪਕਰਿ ਭਵਜਲੁ ਨਿਸਤਾਰਿਓ॥
 ਪ੍ਰਭਿ ਕਾਟਿ ਮੈਲੁ ਨਿਰਮਲ ਕਰੇ॥ ਗੁਰੁ ਪੂਰੇ ਕੀ ਸਰਣੀ ਪਰੇ॥
 ਆਪਿ ਕਰਹਿ ਆਪਿ ਕਰਣੈਹਾਰੇ॥ ਕਰਿ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਨਾਨਕ ਉਧਾਰੇ॥
 ਹੁਕਮੁ ਕਰਿ ਕੀਨ੍ਹੇ ਨਿਹਾਲ॥ ਅਪਨੇ ਸੇਵਕ ਕਤ ਭਝੁਆ ਦਝੁਆਲੁ॥
 ਗੁਰਿ ਪੂਰੈ ਸਭੁ ਪੂਰਾ ਕੀਆ॥ ਅਸ਼ਿਰੁ ਨਾਮੁ ਰਿਦ ਮਹਿ ਦੀਆ॥
 ਕਰਮੁ ਧਰਮੁ ਮੇਰਾ ਕਛੁ ਨ ਬੀਚਾਰਿਓ॥ ਬਹ ਪਕਰਿ ਭਵਜਲੁ ਨਿਸਤਾਰਿਓ॥

प्रभि काटि मैलु निरमल करे॥ गुर पूरे की सरणी परे॥

आपि करहि आपि करणैहारे॥ करि किरपा नानक उधारे॥

By His divine will God makes us happy. God shows mercy to His servant, His devotee. The Perfect Guru makes everything perfect. The Guru implants the immortal Naam, the God's Name, in the devotee's heart. My Guru did not weigh the (flawed) record of my deeds or my spiritual practice. The Supreme Guru (by His grace) has rid me of my impurities and made me stainless. I have sought the sanctuary of the Perfect Guru, that is, God, the doer and the prime mover (primary cause) of all actions (I am only the medium). By God's Grace, Nanak came to save us.

(SGGS 1184)

Paath Deedar: The Gurus' Choice of Meditation

Meditation of Mindfulness³⁷

Why did the Gurus choose *Paath Deedar* as a form of meditation? It is a question many would ask. Meditation has been given a central place in the Sikh practices³⁸ - perhaps more central than in any other religion. And *paath deedar* as a form of meditation,³⁹ specifically prescribed, was considered by the Gurus to be superior to other forms of meditation. The seeker practicing meditation, as discussed earlier, progressively attains these states: the quiescence of mind, the mindfulness of Divine attributes, and finally the receptivity for Divine vision. Guru Ram Das tells us as follows how our performance of *paath deedar* will affect the outcome of our mortal life:

ਗੁਰ ਕੇ ਬਚਨ ਕਰਨ ਸੁਨਿ ਧਿਆਵੈ ਭਵ ਸਾਗਰੁ ਪਾਰਿ ਪਰੈ॥

गुर के बचन करन सुनि धिआवै भव सागरु पारि परै॥

One who listens to the Guru's teachings and practices sustained meditation on them will be carried across the ocean of this life.

(SGGS 1263)

The Gurus knew the problem of the mind's fickleness. *Paath deedar* being a divine form of meditation holds our hand, figuratively speaking, to lead us every step of the way. This practice shifts our attention from the mundane concerns of this

life to the long-term welfare extending to the life of angels. The process helps cultivate the quiescence of the mind, inculcate introspection, and monitor the interaction between the mind and the divine spirit. The function of this form of meditative practice is to assist the practitioner in attending to the object of meditation without distraction. Thus, the method of *paath deedar* rounds up the vacillating mind to the actual experience of hearing the inner voice providing divine guidance. In the following verse, Guru Arjan exhorts his mind, knowing its fickle nature too well, to get hold of the Guru's Word so that it does not wander:

ਅਸਥਿਰ ਰਹਹੁ ਡੋਲਹੁ ਮਤ ਕਬਹੂ ਗੁਰ ਕੈ ਬਚਨਿ ਅਧਾਰਿ॥

ਅਸਥਿਰ ਰਹਹੁ ਡੋਲਹੁ ਮਤ ਕਬਹੂ ਗੁਰ ਕੈ ਬਚਨਿ ਅਧਾਰਿ॥

Oh my mind, take the Guru's Word as your support to remain steady, not to ever waver.

(SGGS 678)

Similarly, in the following verse, Guru Ram Das urges the follower to accept the truth and the redeeming power of the Guru's Word:

ਗੁਰ ਕੇ ਬਚਨ ਸਤਿ ਜੀਅ ਧਾਰਹੁ॥ ਮਾਣਸ ਜਨਮੁ ਦੇਹ ਨਿਸ਼ਾਰਹੁ॥

ਗੁਰ ਕੇ ਬਚਨ ਸਤਿ ਜੀਅ ਧਾਰਹੁ॥ ਮਾਣਸ ਜਨਮੁ ਦੇਹ ਨਿਸ਼ਾਰਹੁ॥

True are the words of the Guru's teachings; enshrine them in your soul. Emancipate and redeem your body, and redeem this human incarnation.

(SGGS 1401)

How to Tell the *Paath's* Effectiveness?

In the process of seeking mentation on *Shabad Parmaan*, we concentrate on a shabad from the Guru Granth – ponder it, recite it silently, chant it to be heard, and become conscious of the truth inherent in it. When we realize a certain divine truth within, however small or partial, peace and quiet descend upon us, leading to a sense of well-being and self-assurance. When practiced faithfully and regularly, *paath deedar* opens up our

consciousness to let the divine power working in us and to let the True Guru dwell in our heart.

Therefore, we need to return to the *paath deedar* process after the Morning Prayer as soon as we can. If possible, we need to repeat the process in the middle of the day and again in the evening. If we cannot sleep continuously throughout the night, we should yield to our inner demand to recite the *Gurbani*, no matter what time.

Most of us familiar with the *Gurbani* can recite many verses by heart, but our recitation and continuous dwelling on the verses will be of little significance without understanding their deeper meaning. Only then do these verses become the Word when we consciously remember them during the waking hours. This should be done not as a vain repetition, nor as a superficial affirmation, but rather as a conscious and sincere endeavor to discover their meaning, which we want to dwell on. As we repeat and continue this practice, it would not be long before we begin to realize that we have heard the verses as the gift of God. This is a gift that comes from God without our deserving it, without our personal effort. When *paath deedar* becomes an act of the Guru within us, we realize the divine element in us as part of God, thus becoming self-realized.

Conclusion

Essentially, the tradition of *paath deedar* in the Sikh code of conduct believes that if our consciousness abides in the Word, and the Word abides in us, we shall live the most exhilarating kind of spiritual experiences. When we contemplate on the Guru Granth verses during our formal prayer and our meditation of mindfulness throughout our day, we in the process go through the periods of silence, reflection, introspection, meditation, and finally communion, which prepare us to receive the nectar of immortality or what we call *Naam*. And when we seem to be making no progress, feeling no response, in the three- or four-minute periods of *paath deedar*, we must stay the course

consciously, willfully, and optimistically. This is because we cannot measure the outcome of our efforts in terms of a few periods of reflection or even after a week or a month of this practice.

The journey that takes us to that ultimate end of the Sikh worship begins with our humble acknowledgment of our limitations to God at the beginning of our prayer, basically entreating the Divine to bestow upon us the grace so that we may realize the spirit within us. Observing the steps of the process, we concentrate on the verse we choose, contemplating on its sound and sense, reining in the fickle mind when it wanders, and centering on the True Guru, and thus hoping to catch the vision of the real meaning of the Gurbani and realize the divine power abiding in us. Then the Guru will be an actual presence in our consciousness to enlighten it; the Guru will be a power, an influence, and a being, though always remaining undefined. The following verse by Guru Nanak states it aptly:

ਜੇ ਹਉ ਜਾਣਾ ਆਖਾ ਨਾਹੀ ਕਹਣਾ ਕਥਨੁ ਨ ਜਾਈ॥

ਜੇ ਹਤ ਜਾਣਾ ਆਖਾ ਨਾਹੀ ਕਹਣਾ ਕਥਨੁ ਨ ਜਾਈ॥

Even if I know the Divine Power, I cannot describe it; it is beyond all description.

(SGGS 2)

So all we can and must do is persist and persevere in our practice of paath deedar as explained in the chapter, and when we do that, the Guru is expected to become a presence in our heart. We hear an inner voice, then, telling us that the Shabad Guru is with us and will never desert us. We see the light, the vision, enlightening us, which will guide us to the end of our life and beyond. That's how the Guru's Word becomes part of our being. The following verse by Guru Arjan testifies to its becoming part of our soul and its enduring power:

ਗੁਰ ਕਾ ਬਚਨੁ ਬਸੈ ਜੀਅ ਨਾਲੇ॥

ਜਲਿ ਨਹੀ ਡੂਬੈ ਤਸਕਰੁ ਨਹੀ ਲੇਵੈ ਭਾਹਿ ਨ ਸਾਕੈ ਜਾਲੇ॥

ਗੁਰ ਕਾ ਬਚਨੁ ਬਸੈ ਜੀਅ ਨਾਲੇ॥

ਜਲਿ ਨਹੀ ਡੂਬੈ ਤਸਕਰੁ ਨਹੀ ਲੇਵੈ ਆਹਿ ਨ ਸਾਕੈ ਜਾਲੇ॥

The Guru's Word abides within my soul. Water cannot drown it; thieves cannot steal it; fire cannot burn it.

(SGGS 679)

Then, with the Guru's presence felt within, we will become a benediction to everyone we come in contact with. The divine light we see will remove the darkness of doubt and illusion. In a state of exalted joy, we will then be able to recite the following verse by the Fifth Guru with faith:

ਗੁਰ ਕੈ ਬਚਨਿ ਮਿਟਿਆ ਮੇਰਾ ਭਰਮੁ॥

ਗੁਰ ਕੈ ਬਚਨਿ ਪੇਖਿਓ ਸਭੁ ਬ੍ਰਹਮੁ॥

ਗੁਰ ਕੈ ਬਚਨਿ ਮਿਟਿਆ ਮੇਰਾ ਭਰਮੁ॥

ਗੁਰ ਕੈ ਬਚਨਿ ਪੇਖਿਓ ਸਭੁ ਬ੍ਰਹਮੁ॥

The Guru's Word has removed my doubts. The Guru's Word has made me see God everywhere.

(SGGS 239)

CHAPTER 9

THE LEAP OF FAITH

Sikhs are not required to perform any ritual. Still, they have to take at least one pledge, a big Leap of Faith, indicating their allegiance to the Sikh faith, which is an essential part of becoming a Sikh. This is a commitment Sikhs make to the Eternal Guru, Sri Guru Granth Sahib, when they consciously choose to become Sikh. (For the faithful from the Muslim background, the term *Mureed* may be used instead of Sikh.)

To many this Leap of Faith defines a Sikh according to the *Sikh Rehat Maryada*, requiring belief in the teachings of the Guru Granth Sahib. The ceremonial oath described in the chapter is a public demonstration of a Sikh's commitment to that most cherished belief.

The Leap of Faith process usually begins when a child is taken to a local Sikh congregation, the Gurdwara, to receive lessons on reading the Gurmukhi alphabet, the script of the Guru Granth. The age varies depending on the parents' discretion concerning the readiness of their child to learn the alphabet. The child continues to learn how to read the Gurmukhi language until he or she becomes proficient in reciting the scripture.

When the child is able to read the Gurbani verses adequately, a special ceremony is scheduled at the Gurdwara for him or her to perform the first public recitation of Sri Guru Granth Sahib. The community is invited to attend the event – a joyful occasion much like the celebration of a birth or another landmark event in a youth's life.

The ceremony is reminiscent of the Bar Mitzvah or Bat Mitzvah in the Jewish tradition. The young man or woman at 13 is called to read the Torah and/or Haftarah portion at a Sabbath or another service. The tradition assigns them the responsibility for the Torah study, including a discussion of that week's Torah portion. The Jewish ritual gives them the responsibility for their moral, religious, and spiritual lives.

On the Leap of Faith day among the Sikhs, the *granthi* or *raagi* (the Sikh cantor) conducts the ceremonial kirtan and recitations and introduces the aspirant Sikh (student) to the congregation while reciting a special prayer for him or her. In addition, the raagi invites the youth's parents and the congregation together to ask for the Guru's grace and guidance for the youth being initiated.

The prayer, which is recited loudly, includes a pledge by the new aspirant to submit himself or herself to the Guru for the rest of his or her life. The principal way to submit to the Guru is to read the Granth diligently and regularly as dictated by religious custom and to observe its commandments. On this occasion, the aspirant youth recites first five stanzas of *Japuji* from the opened volume of Sri Guru Granth Sahib. At the end, the aspirant bows before the Guru Granth, as does the congregation. Then, the congregation joins the parents in the celebration with sanctified food, sweets, and gifts.

The occasion was appropriately given the name *Gurcharani Lago Diwas*, meaning the day the youth made a commitment of lifelong devotion to, speaking figuratively, the Guru's feet, that is, the Guru's philosophy.

As stated earlier, the daily reading of the Sacred Scripture is required of all Sikhs. What the followers sometimes refer to as reading of Sri Guru Granth Sahib is normally called the Guru Granth *paath*. There is a set tradition of doing a *paath* that the new initiate undertakes on the day of initiation upon taking the Leap of Faith pledge and practices it all his/her life.

The *paath* practice has been discussed in detail in the previous chapters of the book. Here only some of its major aspects, as relevant to the Leap of Faith ceremony, may briefly be touched upon. Above all, the granthi's instruction to the initiate in the ways of doing the *paath* is of paramount importance.

First, the *paath* is not just rote activity or vocal practice; nor is it a mere intellectual exercise. It includes all these and much more: it is done with both the heart and the mind working in unison, requiring a coordinated effort of both the left and the right brains. In brief, a *paath* requires the reader to utilize both logical and intuitive faculties of the mind.

While there might be other ways to describe it, we view the process of doing a *paath* and its interpretation as follows. First of all, the readers (the Granth followers) prepare a sacred space to do *paath*, where they are going to read a passage from Sri Guru Granth Sahib with devotion and comprehension. To comprehend the passage fully, they learn its literal and deeper meanings; they research the history and culture of the time when the passage was written and to which our Guru spoke. Thus, they begin to understand the central idea and spiritual insights treasured in the verses centuries ago, which we continue to read today for our moral and spiritual edification.

The *paath* requires that readers read the text deliberately, without feeling rushed, that they pause and meditate on the text with mindfulness of the symbols, metaphors, and meanings they read into the passage they are processing. At the same time, while meditating, they pray for divine guidance. When in prayer, they need to have a mind free from mundane thoughts, virtually empty, a consciousness cultivated and prepared to receive the real meaning of the Word, the verse, where the real meaning unfolds. Often the real meaning does unfold when they pray in total humility, with the stillness of the mind.

When the meaning of the passage reveals itself, readers experience *Paath Deedar* or *Shabad Deedar*. How deep the experience is may depend upon how far the reader's consciousness has evolved.

The *granthi* explains all these aspects of the *paath* to the novice Sikh. Thus, the Leap of Faith initiation teaches the initiate to do the *Gurbani paath*, introducing it as neither a simple ritual nor a complex scholarly endeavor. It is described as a sacred rite for every Sikh, by which he or she obtains a continuous connection to the Guru for spiritual guidance. Therefore, the reading process is an integral part of the total *paath* practice. It requires intellectual and rational deliberation or reflection on the text; this kind of thoughtfulness of the Word is the key to achieving spiritual wisdom and understanding of the meaning of life. The initiate is told to learn to keep faith in the process in order to receive inner light or wisdom.

In the course of time, the seeker learns to develop faith and trust in the divinity of the Guru, which grows by disciplined practice, and at the same time, the seeker is encouraged to question his or her own understanding of the Guru's teachings in order to continue growing spiritually. This process lets a Sikh's mind and soul evolve to a higher state of consciousness.

Since *paath* is not a perfunctory ritual, no one else can ever do it on another's behalf; a seeker must seek the divine light directly, consciously, and willfully. In other words, the reading process, the *paath* experience, the intellectual deliberation, the wisdom, and the soul's evolution must all happen to the seeker, the devotee, the Sikh. The Leap of Faith ceremony is truly a required and indispensable beginning of a lifelong spiritual journey.

During their migration to foreign countries, Sikhs may be forgetting this rite of initiation or losing its significance, so it is necessary that local Sikh communities all over the world re-establish the rite in an encouraging environment. This rite will

prepare their children for communication with their Guru, and parents will rejoice over this accomplishment of their children. This pledging ceremony is a more important ceremony as compared to a birthday celebration, a Bar Mitzvah, or a “tying of turban” celebration.

Thus, the Leap of Faith ceremony shows a public commitment to the most important pledge of the belief in the Guru Granth Sahib. It conforms to the Sikh tenets described in the *Rehat Maryada*, requiring belief in the teachings of the Sacred Scripture. Through their daily *paath* of the Scripture, the initiated Sikhs go directly to their Guru for a personal direction for the day. Through the daily *paath*, they affirm that Sikhs everywhere will be united under one leader, Sri Guru Granth Sahib and that in so doing the Sikhs will act in a unified Divine accord as one people.

CHAPTER 10

CHANTING THE HYMNS

Perhaps no religious scripture in the world may give such prominence to poetry and music as the Guru Granth Sahib. Poetry and music constitute the art of kirtan and, for the Sikhs, claim the highest respect in the singing of the hymns. Traditionally, Sikh congregations at all gurdwaras expect kirtan to be the main part of their religious service. At the most visible and visited Sikh shrine, Sri Darbar Sahib, popularly known as the Golden Temple, in Amritsar, India, kirtan is sung round the clock, almost incessantly.

Kirtan is a form of chanting of hymns that were composed by the Sikh gurus and other holy persons and incorporated in Sri Guru Granth Sahib. It is a kind of meditation that leads us to a state of inner wakefulness in which we spiritually see a world imperceptible to our senses. Sikhs have carried on the tradition of kirtan from the very beginning of their religion.

As the following verse points out, Guru Arjan wanted the devotees to understand the extraordinary significance of listening to kirtan and reciting the hymns:

ਗੁਰ ਦੁਆਰੈ ਹਰਿ ਕੀਰਤਨੁ ਸੁਣੀਐ॥ ਸਤਿਗੁਰੁ ਭੇਟਿ ਹਰਿ ਜਸੁ ਮੁਖਿ ਭਈਐ॥
ਕਲਿ ਕਲੇਸ ਮਿਟਾਏ ਸਤਿਗੁਰੁ ਹਰਿ ਦਰਗਹ ਦੇਵੈ ਮਾਨਾਂ ਹੇ॥
ਗੁਰ ਦੁਆਰੈ ਹਰਿ ਕੀਰਤਨੁ ਸੁਣੀਐ॥ ਸਤਿਗੁਰੁ ਭੇਟਿ ਹਰਿ ਜਸੁ ਮੁਖਿ ਭਈਐ॥
ਕਲਿ ਕਲੇਸ ਮਿਟਾਏ ਸਤਿਗੁਰੁ ਹਰਿ ਦਰਗਹ ਦੇਵੈ ਮਾਨਾਂ ਹੇ॥

At the Gurdwara, listen to kirtan glorifying the Divine. By listening to it, you may experience the True Guru's presence, which is God's presence, so keep chanting praises of God.

(SGGS 1075)

The Guru Granth hymns were composed to be recited and sung. The composers classified them on the basis of the Indian music form called *raga*. In the traditional Indian music, a *raga* (pronounced as *raaga*), is a metrical system, a pattern of melodic notes, which expresses an ambience, a feeling, intensifying a religious or secular theme, and sets forth a tonal system on which variations are improvised within a prescribed framework of typical progressions, melodic formulas, and rhythmic patterns.

The music form chosen by the composers gives the Granth a character that is unique in two ways: it preserves the originality of the composition, since the poetry is hard to imitate or adulterate, and more importantly it intensifies the divine experience. The Sacred Scripture has a total of thirty-one *ragas*, some of which were invented by the gurus. Under each *raga*, the hymns are arranged in different meters as *chaupadas* and *ashtapadas*; long poems include *chhands*, *vaars*, and verses.

At the time of compiling the Granth, the Gurus showed a scholarly concern for the integrity of the verses by preserving the inner relationship between their content and form. While much of their poetry is in traditional verse forms (e.g., *shlokas* and *paudis*), which could best be recited and understood in the context of well-known classical *ragas*, several of their hymns and songs also made use of popular folklore and meters (e.g., *alahanis*, *ghoris*, and *chhands*).

In the history of world scriptures, it is for the first time that the founders of a religion succeeded in total musicalization of thought, aiming to serve as an exclusive medium of religious experience and propagation. The Sikh gurus accomplished this task in a systematic, skillful, and scholarly manner. Thus, music integrated with thought made for an unusually rigorous, yet

supple, discipline of the Guru Granth's own metrics and notations.

The Guru Granth verses are generally sung in a process we call kirtan. This process is prescribed to reveal the true meaning directly to the *Surat* through cosmic vibrations. *Surat* is the higher consciousness or awareness nourished by the gurus' teachings.⁴⁰ The body's energetic vibrations from human voices performing kirtan bond themselves to the spiritual light of universal intelligence, as Deepak Chopra often says, and become cosmic vibrations. As we learn to chant the Guru Granth verses, the total manifestation of God speaks to us in metaphoric images.

The physical body of a singer of the Guru Granth verses experiences the essence of each word as the word hits the awakened brain time and again. The holy verses that are so molded by the sound currents also bring about a calming effect on the restless body. In the following verse, Guru Arjan urges the devotee to chant God's name as he points to the sublime effect that kirtan exercises on the human mind:

ਹਰਿ ਕੀਰਤਨ ਮਹਿ ਏਹੁ ਮਨੁ ਜਾਗੈ॥

हरि कीरतन महि एहु मनु जागै॥

The mind wakes up when it listens to the Kirtan of God the Sustainer.

(SGGS 199)

To watch a *sangat*, a Sikh congregation, chant the sacred hymns in unison is to witness massive spiritual energy rising before our eyes. Moreover, to become part of that *sangat* and that chant is to experience that divine energy. In that state of spiritual experience ordinary words cease to be ordinary; they are rendered sacred and become logos.

The sound waves of kirtan keep the mind of a person focused on the Word. They heal the body and cleanse the mind. In the course of time, the sound waves of the *gurnat ragas*⁴¹

impact the whole being of a person – the physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual being – and result in the body, mind, and spirit becoming one interconnected whole. Thus, the waves implant the basis for both spiritual and mental growth in the human psyche. This implanting is known as the *shabad-surat* in Sikh traditions.

The following verse by Guru Arjan points out how kirtan may enable a seeker to experience God's presence, His pervasiveness:

ਨਾਨਕ ਦਾਸੁ ਹਰਿ ਕੀਰਤਨਿ ਰਾਤਾ ਸਬਦੁ ਸੁਰਤਿ ਸਚੁ ਸਾਖੀ॥

ਨਾਨਕ ਦਾਸੁ ਹਰਿ ਕੀਰਤਨਿ ਰਾਤਾ ਸਬਦੁ ਸੁਰਤਿ ਸਚੁ ਸਾਖੀ॥

Nanak becomes imbued with the kirtan of the One Sustainer. By focusing his Surat or deep consciousness on the Shabad (Word), the listener realizes the presence of the Infinite Wisdom, God.

(SGGS 1227)

The text and music of the Granth are inextricably bound together. The text set to music by the raagi (cantor) reveals teachings of the gurus and other holy men to the listening ear. A large number of verses were originally composed with music as an organic part of the text; others were assigned musical notes by the fifth Guru, Guru Arjan. Thus, music enhanced the power of expression of faith that comes out in its full impact in every Gurdwara.

Eventually, the import and message of kirtan are fully realized by every devoted adherent to the faith. Even those who have no knowledge of the Sikh religion are overwhelmed by the fresh and vital sounds of the music. The Gurus emphasized retention of purity in the performance form of kirtan, and Sikhs have maintained that purity over the centuries down to this day. Thanks to technology, newly invented electronic devices have enriched and intensified our experience of singing and listening to the Gurbani. Through the new technology, the faithful are increasingly connecting to kirtan in their day-to-day life.

There are some boundaries we must accept in the selection of hymns. Not all Sikh hymns and poetry are acceptable for kirtan in a gurdwara. The only kirtan of the Guru Granth hymns and the compositions of Guru Gobind Singh, Bhai Gurdas, and Bhai Nand Lal may be performed in a congregation. Similarly, we must adhere to tradition in the selection of tunes or musical measures. It is unwise, if not improper, to employ non-prescribed ragas, rhythms, folk tunes, or traditional musical measures when singing the hymns in a gurdwara. It is also unwise to induct into team-singing any improvised and extraneous exhortations. For the full impact of the Gurbani hymns, adherence to the rules of chanting as prescribed for the kirtan tradition is essential.

The authors of the Guru Granth emphasize in different ways the significance of kirtan to the seeker, the practitioner, and they do so in numerous references to it in the Sacred Scripture. Most prominently, Guru Arjan encapsulates that significance in his verses. For instance, he describes the healing power of kirtan in one's life in the following verse:

ਹਰਿ ਕੀਰਤਨੁ ਸੁਣੈ ਹਰਿ ਕੀਰਤਨੁ ਗਾਵੈ॥
 ਤਿਸੁ ਜਨ ਦੁਖੁ ਨਿਕਟਿ ਨਹੀ ਆਵੈ॥
 ਹਰਿ ਕੀਰਤਨੁ ਸੁਧੈ ਹਰਿ ਕੀਰਤਨੁ ਗਾਵੈ॥
 ਤਿਸੁ ਜਨ ਦੁਖੁ ਨਿਕਟਿ ਨਹੀ ਆਵੈ॥

If a person listens to kirtan of God and sings kirtan of God, pain and suffering shall not come near that person.

(SGGS 190)

The virtues of kirtan are endless and referred to at numerous places in the Granth. In the latter part of the Granth, once again, the fifth Guru brings home to the seeker the belief that the practice of kirtan is the sure path to peace in this life and to freedom from the cycle of birth and death. He says in the following verse:

ਬਚਨ ਸਾਧ ਸੁਖ ਪੰਥਾ ਲਹੰਥਾ ਬਡ ਕਰਮਣਹ॥

ਰਹੰਤਾ ਜਨਮ ਮਰਣੈਨ ਰਮਣੈ ਨਾਨਕ ਹਰਿ ਕੀਰਤਨਹ॥

ਬਚਨ ਸਾਧ ਸੁਖ ਪੰਥਾ ਲਹੰਥਾ ਬਡ ਕਰਮਯਹ॥

ਰਹੰਤਾ ਜਨਮ ਮਰਯੋਨ ਰਮਯੋਨ ਨਾਨਕ ਹਰਿ ਕੀਰਤਨਹ॥

Words of the Holy are the path to peace and earned only by good deeds. If you sing kirtan of God, says Nanak, you will be liberated from the cycle of birth and death.

(SGGS 1360)

Thus, kirtan becomes an indispensable medium of understanding and experiencing the sacred teachings of the Gurus. It becomes a path for the seeker leading to the ultimate destination – *Ik Onkaar*, Waheguru, the Infinite Wisdom, or God.

CHAPTER 11

MIND IN A STATE OF DISCONNECT

Listening to recitations from the Guru Granth Sahib in the form of paath and listening to kirtan in the congregation, at home, or through electronic media are the most common Sikh religious routines. As described earlier in the book, these routines have always been and will continue to be, part and parcel of the congregational services in Sikhism and the most popular form of religious practice in the Sikh life. It is mainly through them that Sikhs connect to the Guru and the Infinite Wisdom.

Today, kirtan and recitations are an essential part of every gurdwara service and almost an exclusive form of activity among many Sikh groups. Several groups hold incessant singing of the Scripture, sometimes overnight, often all weekend.

The attraction of kirtan is attributed to claims of its potency in reviving contemplative consciousness. It offers an occasion for hearing the Divine Word. By listening to it, chanting it, and hearing its transcendental reverberation within, it is believed, we cleanse the mind of doubts, heal it, and bring it a state of unity. By so doing the mind becomes connected to the Guru and the Infinite Wisdom or God. Kirtan is a devotional method of meditation, promoted in many faiths. However, its potency cannot be realized until the conditions discussed in the chapter are satisfied.

Troubling Absence of Any Gain

Kirtan may take many to a spiritual high, and the first sign of this ecstasy is seen in one's urge to sing along with the cantors when in the Sikh congregation. We have seen this happen in Sikh congregations, though for a great majority of devotees the scene may be different.

Having participated in thousands of congregations and having enjoyed the captivating melodies, participants may still feel spiritually empty – feel that they have really gained nothing spiritually, that no awakening of the divine has occurred within, and that the experience of the divine consciousness is not in sight.

This is not a novel experience or a new phenomenon; it has happened before, more often than we may acknowledge. Guru Amar Das refers to this lack of spiritual gain:

ਇਕਿ ਗਾਵਤ ਰਹੇ ਮਨਿ ਸਾਦੁ ਨ ਖਾਇ॥

इकि गावत रहे मनि सादु न पाइ॥

Some sing on and on, but their minds do not find happiness.

(SGGS 158)

In other words, there are those who continue to sing kirtan but cannot taste the spiritual ecstasy in their consciousness. Put simply; the Guru says: The person sings; the mind does not feel it. Sikh theologian Bhai Gurdas described this dilemma as follows:

ਰਾਗ ਨਾਦ ਸਭ ਕੇ ਸੁਣੈ ਸਬਦ ਸੁਰਤਿ ਸਮਝੈ ਵਿਰਲੋਈ॥

राग नाद सभ को सुणै सबद सुरति समझै विरलोई॥

Everyone listens to melody and sound (tone); a rare one connects the Sabd or hymn with the deep consciousness.

(Bhai Gurdas, *Vaar* 15, Pauri 16)

Both verses underscore the pointlessness of singing kirtan when it is all “raag naad” (melody and sound or tone) devoid of Word consciousness – when the body sings, sound divorced from sense, and the mind does not.

A sort of mindlessness of singing kirtan without understanding what the Guru says – it happened long ago, and it is happening now in our time. Performing kirtan without probing the spiritual mystery in the Shabad is hollow. Ineffectual is our kirtan when we make no conscious effort at connecting to the unfathomable powerhouse that lights all lights in the universe, within and without.

The scripture further points out that many singers of the holy kirtan attain no gnosis, no understanding of spiritual mysteries because they do not listen to the teachings of the Guru consciously; rather they perform and listen to the shabad unconsciously and habitually. The following verse by Guru Teg Bahadur says it all:

ਗੁਰਮਤਿ ਸੁਨਿ ਕਛੁ ਗਿਆਨੁ ਨ ਉਪਜਿਓ ਪਸੁ ਜਿਉ ਉਦਰੁ ਭਰਉ॥

गुरमति सुनि कछु गिआनु न उपजिओ पसु जित उदरु भरउ॥

No gnosis is lit up in my mind upon listening to the teachings of the true Guru because I am merely listening to the teachings as a beast eats food only to fill its belly.

(SGGS 685)

The point is that a person who is deeply entangled in material life will take a considerable re-orientation of thought and sustained practice of mental stillness, or *mann dee ikagarta* (in Gurmukhi), to achieve spiritual consciousness of the Universal Divinity. When a practicing Sikh is at peace and harmony with the world he/she lives in – connected to it and yet detached from it – and feels connected to the Supreme Being, he/she has attained mental stillness, a state of spiritual ecstasy. The path to reach that state of mental stillness or tranquility is riddled with numerous obstacles. This chapter analyzes them based on the Guru Granth Sahib and indicates how to deal with them so that we can attain that particular condition of being.

Listening with Inattentive Mind

Primarily, the reason we do not benefit from kirtan is that our mind and consciousness are not tuned and primed to listening to it; we are inattentive, lacking concentration, devoid of mental stillness. This mental inattentiveness was clearly recognized by the gurus as a perennial human problem. They addressed it many times in the scripture, which is illustrated in the following verses.

Guru Arjan Dev points out the dichotomy of the lips and mind in these words:

ਗੀਤ ਨਾਦ ਮੁਖਿ ਰਾਗ ਅਲਾਪੇ ਮਨਿ ਨਹੀ ਹਰਿ ਹਰਿ ਗਾਵਾ॥

ਗੀਤ ਨਾਦ ਮੁਖਿ ਰਾਗ ਅਲਾਪੇ ਮਨਿ ਨਹੀ ਹਰਿ ਹਰਿ ਗਾਵਾ॥

The lips sing hymns with tunes and melodies of kirtan, but the mind does not sing of the Creator.

(SGGS 1003)

In the following verse, Guru Arjan Dev further describes the singing-reciting teacher as attached to Maya and separated from the Creator:

ਮੇਰੇ ਮੇਹਨ ਸ੍ਰਵਣੀ ਇਹ ਨ ਸੁਨਾਏ॥

ਸਾਕਤ ਗੀਤ ਨਾਦ ਧੁਨਿ ਗਾਵਤ ਬੋਲਤ ਬੋਲ ਅਜਾਏ॥

ਮੇਰੇ ਮੋਹਨ ਸ਼ਰਣੀ ਝਹ ਨ ਸੁਨਾਏ॥

ਸਾਕਤ ਗੀਤ ਨਾਦ ਧੁਨਿ ਗਾਵਤ ਬੋਲਤ ਬੋਲ ਅਜਾਏ॥

The faithless, the worldly, sing songs and tunes, and chant them; but all this goes waste and useless. O my God, let my ears not listen to this sort of songs.

(SGGS 820)

The Guru also writes that the aspect of kirtan that is heard only in flesh is not necessarily an ingredient of the kirtan meditation. Such kirtan is a wasteful exercise, like many other religious rituals, unless it leads to true contemplation.

Guru Arjan Dev describes below some journeys in search of reality and transcendence:

ਪੇਥੀ ਪੰਡਿਤ ਬੇਦ ਖੇਜੰਤਾ ਜੀਉ॥ ਹੋਇ ਬੈਰਾਗੀ ਤੀਰਥਿ ਨਾਵੰਤਾ ਜੀਉ॥
ਗੀਤ ਨਾਦ ਕੀਰਤਨੁ ਗਾਵੰਤਾ ਜੀਉ॥ ਹਰਿ ਨਿਰਭਉ ਨਾਮੁ ਧਿਆਈ ਜੀਉ॥
ਪੇਥੀ ਪੰਡਿਤ ਬੇਦ ਖੋਜੰਤਾ ਜੀਤ॥ ਹੋਏ ਬੈਰਾਗੀ ਤੀਰਥਿ ਨਾਵੰਤਾ ਜੀਤ॥
ਗੀਤ ਨਾਦ ਕੀਰਤਨੁ ਗਾਵੰਤਾ ਜੀਤ॥ ਹਰਿ ਨਿਰਮਤ ਨਾਮੁ ਧਿਆਈ ਜੀਤ॥

Pundits, religious scholars, research the Vedas. Some renounce the world (family and society) and bathe at sacred shrines of pilgrimage (moving from shrine to shrine as pilgrims). Some others spend lives singing tunes, melodies, and religious songs. But I spend my life meditating on the Naam, the entity of God, One devoid of fear.

(SGGS 216)

Founding Prophet Guru Nanak recognized very early the need to focus on the significance of kirtan and defined it as a process of contemplation as opposed to a process of musical accomplishment or physical activity. He stressed the importance of meditating on God's Name in the following verse:

ਗੀਤ ਨਾਦ ਕਵਿਤ ਕਵੇ ਸੁਣਿ ਰਾਮ ਨਾਮਿ ਦੁਖੁ ਭਾਗੈ॥
ਗੀਤ ਨਾਦ ਕਵਿਤ ਕਵੇ ਸੁਣਿ ਰਾਮ ਨਾਮਿ ਦੁਖੁ ਭਾਗੈ॥

I have heard religious songs, music, and poems, but it is only the contemplation of God's Name that takes away my pain.

(SGGS 1109)

A Protean Mind

The most troubling characteristic of the human mind is its protean nature – its tendency not to ever stand still to listen or to meditate. The mind tends to wander, to drift, in the midst of, in the very act of, listening or meditating – it is always in a state of flux. We join the *sangat* and join in the kirtan-listening and singing, and before long we find our mind taking off undirected, unleashed, desiring what it does not have, can't have, or shouldn't have, or simply dreaming of something totally mundane or profane.

As the following verses by Guru Nanak exemplify, the scripture never tires pointing out the protean nature of the human

mind and the critical need of reining it in as a prerequisite to contemplating the Divine presence:

-ਚੰਚਲੁ ਚੀਤੁ ਨ ਰਹਈ ਠਾਇ॥

ਚੰਚਲੁ ਚੀਤੁ ਨ ਰਹੈ ਠਾਝ॥

The fickle consciousness does not remain still.

(SGGS 932)

-ਮਨੁ ਚੰਚਲੁ ਧਾਵਤੁ ਫੁਨਿ ਧਾਵੈ॥

ਮਨੁ ਚੰਚਲੁ ਧਾਵਤੁ ਫੁਨਿ ਧਾਵੈ॥

The human mind is restless (fickle, volatile); it keeps running and rushing.

(SGGS 222)

Over and over we experience the same restless nature of the human mind when we attempt to listen to the spiritual voice in kirtan. Moreover, we feel troubled when we struggle to hold our thoughts still and fail to succeed.

When we close our eyes attempting to listen, we are amazed to discover a boiler factory inside of us. As Guru Arjan says,

ਮਨਹਿ ਬਿਆਪਤ ਅਨਿਕ ਤਰੰਗਾ॥

ਮਨਹਿ ਬਿਆਪਤ ਅਨਿਕ ਤਰੰਗਾ॥

The mind is troubled by so many different waves and bubbles.

(SGGS 759)

Countless unharnessed waves trouble the human mind continuously. During each attempt to listen or connect to the shabad, all sorts of thoughts begin to flash through our mind. Our thoughts, for instance, run like this: Did I turn off my Internet phone line? Did I turn off my car's headlights? Did I put the cat outside? Thus, all sorts of thoughts and feelings, important and unimportant, come unannounced, invading our minds. Thoughts of places and people and of revenge and animosity, or feelings of fear, doubt, alienation, or sensuality come to us, often inaudibly seeping in, and sometimes flooding like a tide.

Clearly, our mind is born with instincts that act like antennas scanning and picking up all the voices of mental processes. Voices come not only from the present outside world but also, and more so, from the realm that holds eons of mental and spiritual history. The Gurus describes this phenomenon at several places in the scripture.

Guru Teg Bahadur, for instance, expresses it as follows:

ਚੰਚਲ ਮਨੁ ਦਹ ਦਿਸਿ ਕਉ ਧਾਵਤ ਅਚਲ ਜਾਹਿ ਠਹਰਾਨੇ॥

ਚੰਚਲ ਮਨੁ ਦਹ ਦਿਸਿ ਕਤ ਧਾਵਤ ਅਚਲ ਜਾਹਿ ਠਹਰਾਨੇ॥

The restless mind wanders in ten directions as it is restless to be anchored.

(SGGS 685)

Guru Arjan depicts the human mind as a globetrotter searching for an anchor, saying:

ਭਰਮੇ ਭੂਲਾ ਦਹ ਦਿਸਿ ਧਾਵੈ॥

ਨਿਮਖ ਮਾਹਿ ਚਾਰਿ ਕੁੰਟ ਫਿਰਿ ਆਵੈ॥

ਭਰਮੇ ਭ੍ਰੂਲਾ ਦਹ ਦਿਸਿ ਧਾਵੈ॥

ਨਿਮਖ ਮਾਹਿ ਚਾਰਿ ਕੁੰਟ ਫਿਰਿ ਆਵੈ॥

Deluded by doubt, the mind wanders in ten directions. In an instant, it circumambulates the four corners of the world.

(SGGS 277)

The fifth Guru decries the human mind below by comparing it to a dog running around madly, directionless:

ਜਿਉ ਕੁਕਰੁ ਹਰਕਾਇਆ ਧਾਵੈ ਦਹ ਦਿਸ ਜਾਇ॥

ਜਿਉ ਕੁਕਰੁ ਹਰਕਾਇਆ ਧਾਵੈ ਦਹ ਦਿਸ ਜਾਇ॥

The mind runs around in ten directions like a mad dog.

(SGGS 50)

Guru Amar Das, too, portrays below a similar picture of the mind – restless, control-resistant, confused, divided, and doubtful:

ਇਹੁ ਮਨੁ ਚੰਚਲੁ ਵਸਿ ਨ ਆਵੈ॥

ਦੁਬਿਧਾ ਲਾਗੈ ਦਹ ਦਿਸਿ ਯਾਵੈ॥

इह मनु चंचलु वसि न आवै॥

दुबिधा लागै दह दिसि धावै॥

This restless mind does not get reigned in. It wanders in ten directions, doubt-ridden, straddling on duality.

(SGGS 127)

Mind's inherent resistance to becoming still is a universal human characteristic. In this aspect, the modern mind is not radically different from the human mind in the Middle Ages or classical antiquity. This tendency relates to mental impulses driving people ceaselessly to seek new experiences and possessions without finding fulfillment.

Guru Teg Bahadur describes this phenomenon of the mind as follows:

ਸਾਧੇ ਇਹੁ ਮਨੁ ਗਹਿਓ ਨ ਜਾਈ॥

चंचल त्रिसना मंगि बसतु है जा ते बिरु न रहाਈ॥

साधो इहु मनु गहिओ न जाई॥

चंचल त्रिसना संगि बसतु है या ते थिरु न रहाई॥

O seekers, no matter how hard you try to control it, this mind cannot be restrained. Restless desire dwells within it, making it hard not to waver.

(SGGS 219)

Mind's Protean Nature

Mind's mutable nature has always been a subject of argument and exploration among psychologists, philosophers, theologians, scientists, and writers, but it has mattered quite differently and personally to seekers of spirituality, particularly those seeking spirituality by meditation or meditative chanting. Such spiritualists have viewed the wavering mind as a serious hindrance to their pursuit. The goal of their meditations and inculcation of spirituality is stalled when the mind wanders, does

not concentrate, roaming away from the domain of the soul. Guru Arjan Dev says it aptly in the following two verses:

-ਤਿਭਵਣ ਧਾਵੈ ਤਾ ਕਿਛੁ ਨ ਬੁਝੈ॥

त्रिभवण धावै ता किछु न बूझै॥

The mind wanders through the three worlds aimlessly and gains nothing of spirituality.

(SGGS 1078)

-ਮਨੂਆ ਡੋਲੈ ਦਹ ਦਿਸ ਧਾਵੈ ਬਿਨੁ ਰਤ ਆਤਮ ਗਿਆਨਾ॥

मनूआ डोलै दह दिस धावै बिनु रत आतम गिआना॥

Their minds swing, wandering rudderless in ten directions, resulting in having no devotion and gaining no self-knowledge.

(SGGS 1013)

Time and again the Guru Granth says that the human inability to control and concentrate the mind purposefully may be the greatest hindrance to one's self-realization and understanding of spirituality. Guru Nanak illustrates this idea in the following verse:

ਚੰਚਲੁ ਚੀਤੁ ਨ ਪਾਵੈ ਪਾਰਾ॥

चंचलु चीतु न पावै पारा॥

The fickle consciousness cannot comprehend the Divine frontiers.

(SGGS 1189)

Further, Guru Amar Das wonders how a wandering mind can attain enlightenment:

ਮਨ ਕੇ ਅਧਿਕ ਤਰੰਗ ਕਿਉ ਦਰਿ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਛੁਟੀਐ॥

मन के अधिक तरंग किउ दरि साहिब छुटीऐ॥

How can a mind churning with so many waves of desire be emancipated in the Divine Court?

(SGGS 1088)

Guru Arjan, then, links the wandering mind to blind worldliness bereft of godliness and spirituality. He says,

ਅੰਧ ਬਿਉਹਾਰ ਬੰਧ ਮਨੁ ਧਾਵੈ॥ ਕਰਣੈਹਾਰੁ ਨ ਜੀਅ ਮਹਿ ਆਵੈ॥

अंध बिउहार बंध मनु धावै॥ करणैहारु न जीअ महि आवै॥

When the mind wavers and wanders being bound to visionless worldly affairs, then the Creator does not come to reside in it.

(SGGS 1143)

To drive home the point that only a mind anchored spiritually can become part of the universal consciousness of the Supreme Being, the Gurus have decried the restless mind in numerous verses. They point out that only a mind free from distractions and not absorbed in ego can merge in the Supreme Reality. As the following verses point out, the very company of the restless mind erases the effectiveness of one's good deeds and spiritual virtues. The reason is that evil impulses take charge, corrupt the good impulses, and urge a person to pursue activities that satisfy his/her animal nature.

Mark the intensity of criticism directed at a vacillating mind in the following verses:

-करम धरम संजम सुच नेमा चंचल संगि सगल बिधि हारी॥

करम धरम संजम सुच नेमा चंचल संगि सगल बिधि हारी॥

Good deeds, religious practice, self-discipline, and practice of truthful principles – all means to salvation – are diminished when accompanied by a fickle mind.

(SGGS 1388)

-मनमुख चंचल मति है अंतरि बहुरतु चतुराਈ॥

कीता करतिआ बिरथा गइआ इकु तिलु थाइ न पाई॥

मनमुख चंचल मति है अंतरि बहुतु चतुराई॥

कीता करतिआ बिरथा गइआ इकु तिलु थाइ न पाई॥

Self-oriented people possess a fickle mind; being self-absorbed, they hold much cleverness within; all their deeds and efforts come to naught, earning not a sesame seed of place (an iota of significance).

(SGGS 1414)

Origins of a Protean Mind

Why we find it difficult to control our mind is a perennial question addressed by artists, writers, philosophers, scientists, psychologists, theologians, and spiritualists. Artists and writers, on one end of the spectrum, affirm the nature of mind as protean – seeing it as the ebb and flow of the tide, the waxing and waning of the moon, an impermanent condition – and harness it to create their artistic and literary universe without worrying about its origin. Seekers of spirituality, on the other end, bemoan and worry about the fickleness or inconstancy of mind because it hinders their spiritual progress. However, scientists have investigated the origin of mind's mutability in evolutionary terms and come up with answers which, fused with theological and artistic responses, might provide solace to troubled seekers of spirituality.

A quasi-scientific-theological-artistic response may run something like this: A wandering mind is not anyone's fault; it is mostly the result of a deep-rooted habit of mind we are born with. Apparently, not so profound a statement, it simplifies the basis of our restlessness.

Our fickle-mindedness comes from our evolutionary history where the laws of the jungle prevailed.⁴² A discussion of the role of evolutionary history in establishing the habits of mind is beyond the scope of this book.⁴³ It should suffice, then, to say that mind has been a subject of perennial interest to all people, from Plato and Aristotle to Freud and Jung, to post-modern psychologists and writers in the West, and from ancient Hindu philosophers and theologians to the Sikh Gurus to Zen Buddhists in the East. They all seem to agree that mind resists control but that we need to harness the mind's creative energy by disciplining it.

However, novelists and other artists explore and capture the mind's fickleness by such techniques as stream-of-consciousness – for instance, James Joyce in *Ulysses* and Virginia Woolf in

Mrs. Dalloway – thereby revealing the mind’s non-material reality but without bewailing its fickle nature. It requires no debate to say that the mind is always in a state of flux and hard to control, but how to harness its energy and focus it purposefully is arguable and uniquely handled by Transcendental Meditation.

Darwin and other scientists have shown how evolution has shaped the mind of various species making it adaptable for their survival. In the process, these species have developed instinctive responses necessary for their survival. In doing so, their minds have become so agile at continuously attending to their material needs that they find it hard to rein in their minds long enough to pursue a spiritual object.

Let us explain it further. It has been argued and is now believed that we have spent many of our previous lives in the form of lower and higher animals. In its evolutionary development, the animal world learns to continually take in information from its surroundings and to exercise its reflexes to “fight or flight” at every opportunity or challenge. There are many examples of this development.

Have you ever seen, for instance, a cat or mouse sitting still without a wandering mind? A frog’s or a bird’s response to children approaching it? Mark the speed and efficiency of these creatures when they sense any change in their surroundings. Try to kill a cockroach with a fly swatter, and you will notice its incredible agility to sense your moves and intentions. Approach a docile-looking bird or an insect quietly, and you will notice its instantaneous sensing of the danger and taking immediate flight. The same restlessness is observed in underwater creatures. Throw some food in a fish tank and watch countless fishes rushing to devour it as if they were expecting it – and perhaps, instinctively, they were.

In short, animals at all levels of evolution are always found to be scanning their surroundings for any danger to life or their

possessions. They also scan for any opportunity for food or other life necessities. Consequently, the human animal inherits these tendencies and carries them with him or her to sequential human lives. Initiatives for the real purpose of human life – which are aimed at self-realization and connecting to the Supreme Being manifested in all creations, as believed in Sikhism and other Indian religions – are lost in the practice of those animal instincts.

Guru Arjan Dev explains below the endless struggle that humans go through in their spiritual pursuit:

ਉਦਮ ਕਰਹਿ ਅਨੇਕ ਹਰਿ ਨਾਮੁ ਨ ਗਾਵਹੀ॥
 ਭਰਮਹਿ ਜੇਨਿ ਅਸੰਖ ਮਰਿ ਜਨਮਹਿ ਆਵਹੀ॥
 ਪਸੂ ਪੰਖੀ ਸੈਲ ਤਰਵਰ ਗਣਤ ਕਛੂ ਨ ਆਵਏ॥
 ਬੀਜੁ ਬੋਵਸਿ ਭੋਗ ਭੋਗਹਿ ਕੀਆ ਅਪਣਾ ਪਾਵਏ॥
 ਰਤਨ ਜਨਮੁ ਹਾਰੰਤ ਜੂਐ ਪ੍ਰਭੂ ਆਪਿ ਨ ਭਾਵਹੀ॥
 ਬਿਨਵੰਤਿ ਨਾਨਕ ਭਰਮਹਿ ਭ੍ਰਮਾਏ ਖਿਨੁ ਏਕੁ ਟਿਕਣੁ ਨ ਪਾਵਹੀ॥
 ਤਦਮ ਕਰਹਿ ਅਨੇਕ ਹਰਿ ਨਾਮੁ ਨ ਗਾਵਹੀ॥
 ਭਰਮਹਿ ਜੋਨਿ ਅਸੰਖ ਮਰਿ ਜਨਮਹਿ ਆਵਹੀ॥
 ਪਸੂ ਪੰਖੀ ਸੈਲ ਤਰਵਰ ਗਣਤ ਕਛੂ ਨ ਆਵਏ॥
 ਬੀਜੁ ਬੋਵਸਿ ਭੋਗ ਭੋਗਹਿ ਕੀਆ ਅਪਣਾ ਪਾਵਏ॥
 ਰਤਨ ਜਨਮੁ ਹਾਰੰਤ ਜੂਐ ਪ੍ਰਭੂ ਆਪਿ ਨ ਭਾਵਹੀ॥
 ਬਿਨਵੰਤਿ ਨਾਨਕ ਭਰਮਹਿ ਭ੍ਰਮਾਏ ਖਿਨੁ ਏਕੁ ਟਿਕਣੁ ਨ ਪਾਵਹੀ॥

Human beings make all sorts of efforts but do not chant God's name, that is, do not meditate on the Supreme Being (whereby they will realize their spiritual identity). The reason is they have been wandering through countless cycles of birth and death; they die only to be born again to go through another life cycle. This way human have lived countless lives as beasts, birds, stones, and trees – the number cannot be counted. During those lives, the seeds of habits are planted, and the organisms going

through numerous experiences reap what they have sowed. They suffer the consequences of their own actions. As a result of acquired habits and instincts, precious human life is lost in the gamble, and God is not pleased with them. Nanak in prayer says that the humans are wandering in doubt, and their minds do not find any rest, not even for an instant.

(SGGS 705)

We can reasonably infer that, during evolutionary history, the development of animal instincts for ceaseless attention to outside distractions would have been extremely valuable for the survival of the species. There was a necessity to continuously practice and preserve the skill of spreading the mind in all directions very diligently during each form of life that we have gone through. The animal species would have done it until they had perfected the habit, thereby letting nature eventually embed this skill (and skill becoming instinct) in our genetic codes for transmission.

Just as it is in the animal world, this instinct for survival continued to build and was transmitted in the earlier forms of human life. It ensured that we would always be on the lookout for any danger or opportunities. This trait would help us become more acquisitive, obtaining more material possessions and worldly powers. All these instincts and their manifestations in human behavior rendered humans more adaptable, more elastic. That was the intention of evolution.

However, we must know the price we have paid for this neat scheme of our genes. Like Faust, we shall never rest contented with what we have achieved. Our mind will always be on the run or prowling to scan every thought from inside and every real or imaginary sensation from outside. In everyday life, even in the more developed human form, this Faustian dissatisfaction can easily be documented. Try sitting still and think or meditate; your mind will begin wandering, obliterating any gain from such an exercise, even if it is to your detriment.

Guru Amar Das describes this experience and habit in these words:

ਇਹੁ ਮਨੁ ਚੰਚਲੁ ਵਸਿ ਨ ਆਵੈ॥

इहू मनु चंचलु वसि न आवै॥

This mind is restless, and I have no control over it.

(SGGS 127)

He continues to point out how the restless mind suffers in life:

ਮਨੁ ਚੰਚਲੁ ਬਹੁ ਚੋਟਾ ਖਾਇ॥

मनु चंचलु बहु चोटा खाइ॥

The fickle mind is struck down so many times.

(SGGS 362)

Cultural Milieu Promoting Restlessness

The seeds of restlessness were sowed during man's earlier life cycles and continued to be fertilized through the various stages of human development, culminating in modern civilization. The mode of this fertilization lies in the influence of human culture which, next to evolutionary restlessness, constitutes the second most important influence on the human mind.

To begin with, our genes have equipped our mind with the survival instinct, which impels us always to be alert in order to improve our chances of worldly survival. This and other instincts tell us continuously that if our mind is not alert someone will attack us or take advantage of us in some way. Our culture has also taught us that we must always strive for more just to stay even. If we examine this philosophy deeply, we may reach the conclusion that the cultural rules, in essence, are similar to the laws of the jungle where a built-in paranoia is considered necessary for survival. We may even infer that the cultural rules are based on the laws of the jungle. Then there is another potent, albeit secondary, influence impacting on our cultural rules and consequently our mind – the accelerated tempo of modern living.⁴⁴

If we think of human life as a journey, it would not be an exaggeration to view it as a journey of distractions – distractions created and sponsored by the family, society, and the self. An infant is born with animal instincts of a wandering mind. Soon the infant is surrounded by rattles. Although rattles keep changing form and name according to a person's age, they all serve one function: to distract him or her from concentrating long enough on anything in particular – and in the long run, from concentrating, particularly, on the meaning of life, on self-realization, and connecting spiritually to the Creator and the world.

Saint Kabir describes these distractions, the worldly influence, as follows:

ਜੇਨਿ ਛਾਡਿ ਜਉ ਜਗਮਹਿ ਆਇਓ॥ ਲਗਤ ਪਵਨਖਸਮੁ ਬਿਸਰਾਇਓ॥

ਜੋਨਿ ਛਾਡਿ ਜਤ ਜਗਮਹਿ ਆਏਓ॥ ਲਗਤ ਪਵਨਖਸਮੁ ਬਿਸਰਾਏਓ॥

Having gone through the cycle of previous lives, a human being (baby) comes to this world. And soon upon arrival, he/she is touched by the human culture and forgets the Creator.

(SGGS 337)

As soon as this infant outgrows the first rattle, the object of his/her first love, he/she is given or finds another toy, and this process continues to the end of the life's journey. His/her entire attention from infancy through adolescence and into adulthood is occupied with rattles. These rattles are designed and programmed so that they become part of the evolving human culture. Society or the world does everything in its power to absorb the individual's mind in these distractions.

Guru Nanak describes below the various stages of life from birth to death that keeps the individual occupied, distracted, and separated from God. The stages are an integral part of the cultural environment and refer to some of the individual's toys, objects of his/her love, obsession, or occupation, and their effects:

ਪਹਿਲੈ ਪਿਆਰਿ ਲਗਾ ਬਣ ਦੁਇ॥ ਦੂਜੈ ਮਾਇ ਬਾਪ ਕੀ ਸੁਇ॥
 ਤੀਜੈ ਭਯਾ ਭਾਭੀ ਬੋਬ॥ ਚਉਥੈ ਪਿਆਰਿ ਉਪੰਨੀ ਖੇਡ॥
 ਪੰਜਵੈ ਖਾਣ ਪੀਅਣ ਕੀ ਧਾਤੁ॥ ਛਿਵੈ ਕਾਮੁ ਨ ਪੁਛੈ ਜਾਤਿ॥
 ਸਤਵੈ ਸੰਜਿ ਕੀਆ ਘਰ ਵਾਸੁ॥ ਅਠਵੈ ਕ੍ਰੋਧੁ ਹੋਆ ਤਨ ਨਾਸੁ॥
 ਨਾਵੈ ਧਉਲੇ ਉਭੇ ਸਾਹ॥ ਦਸਵੈ ਦਧਾ ਹੋਆ ਸੁਆਹ॥
 ਗਏ ਸਿਗੀਤ ਪੁਕਾਰੀ ਧਾਹ॥ ਉਡਿਆ ਹੰਸੁ ਦਸਾਏ ਰਾਹ॥
 ਪਹਿਲੈ ਪਿਆਰਿ ਲਗਾ ਥਠਾ ਦੁਇ॥ ਦੂਜੈ ਮਾਝੁ ਬਾਪ ਕੀ ਸੁਇ॥
 ਤੀਜੈ ਭਯਾ ਭਾਭੀ ਬੋਬ॥ ਚਤੁਥੈ ਪਿਆਰਿ ਤਪੰਨੀ ਖੇਡ॥
 ਪੰਜਵੈ ਖਾਣ ਪੀਅਣ ਕੀ ਧਾਤੁ॥ ਛਿਵੈ ਕਾਮੁ ਨ ਪੁਛੈ ਜਾਤਿ॥
 ਸਤਵੈ ਸੰਜਿ ਕੀਆ ਘਰ ਵਾਸੁ॥ ਅਠਵੈ ਕ੍ਰੋਧੁ ਹੋਆ ਤਨ ਨਾਸੁ॥
 ਨਾਵੈ ਧਤਲੇ ਤਭੇ ਸਾਹ॥ ਦਸਵੈ ਦਧਾ ਹੋਆ ਸੁਆਹ॥
 ਗਏ ਸਿਗੀਤ ਪੁਕਾਰੀ ਧਾਹ॥ ਤਡਿਆ ਹੰਸੁ ਦਸਾਏ ਰਾਹ॥

The first stage or love of the baby is the mother's milk; second, consciousness of mother and father; third, awareness of brothers, sisters-in-law, and sisters; fourth, love of games in life; fifth, love of eating and drinking; sixth, the sexual desire that overlooks distinctions of caste; seventh, possession of wealth and home; and eighth, anger (born from excessive ego) destructive to the body. All these lead to the ninth stage, old age, when hair turns gray and breathing becomes shallow. Then the tenth stage arrives to end this precious life in a heap of ashes. Family and friends bid the dead farewell, mourning, weeping. And the swan-like soul takes flight, asking which way to go.

(SGGS 137)

These stages determine the form and direction of human culture, which originates and develops in response to the human need to survive and to create protective mechanisms for human existence. Human culture is apparently supposed to minimize undue competition and unexpected dangers in society, and the culture-created mechanisms should help us feel safe and relaxed. What happens instead is that strong impulses take over the

operation of these mechanisms, influencing man to use them in the way he has developed as a social animal. As a result, the animalistic influence is further amplified and exerted by the cultural rattles, and we end up with a mind that increasingly tends to be self-oriented and restless.

To highlight the wandering nature of a civilized mind, the following verse by Guru Amar Das may be quoted:

ਮਨਮੁਖ ਚੰਚਲ ਮਤਿ ਹੈ ਅੰਤਰਿ ਬਚੁਤੁ ਚਤੁਰਾਈ॥

मनमुख चंचल मति है अंतरि बहुतु चतुराई॥

The mind of a self-oriented person (manmukh) is fickle, full of trickery and cunning.

(SGGS 1414)

The mind, trapped in cultural imprisonment, learns to keep wandering, seldom having an opportunity to learn to calm down and be still. It is so programmed by our genes and culture that it cannot but remain focused on the material world, thus losing most of its capacity to sit quietly or to ponder on any significant thought.

The restlessness of mind has become so mighty in today's life that we feebly accede to its might and lose control of ourselves. Spiritual teachers often warn us about this helplessness. The following verse by Guru Teg Bahadur comments on this condition:

ਪਾਪੀ ਹੀਐ ਮੈ ਕਾਮੁ ਬਸਾਇ॥ ਮਨੁ ਚੰਚਲੁ ਯਾ ਤੇ ਗਹਿਓ ਨ ਜਾਇ॥

पापी हीऐ मै कामु बसाइ॥ मनु चंचलु या ते गहिओ न जाइ॥

The heart of the sinner is filled with countless unfulfilled desires. One cannot control one's fickle mind.

(SGGS 1186)

We often overlook the power of cultural dictates to generate and exacerbate the mind's restlessness. For example, many subtle messages from our cultural milieu promote classification of people as us vs. them, as friend or foe – in other words, society or culture tends always to create the “other” or the

outsider. Most of us accept these divisive thoughts as a part of cultural norms, which, though seemingly harmless, constitute a powerful base for the mind's fickleness.

In the following verse, Guru Arjan Dev criticizes the norm of the *other* as a reason for mind's fickleness:

नख पारै केतु बैरी मीतु॥ उख लगु निहचलु नाही चीतु॥

जब धारै कोऊ बैरी मीतु॥ तब लगु निहचलु नाही चीतु॥

As long as the "friend or foe" is the social norm, mind shall not be still (quiet, anchored).

(SGGS 278)

Cultural practices, religious ceremonies, artistic performances, games, sports, and leisure, in general, are meant to create oases of peace. However, they do not. Rather commercial, social, and political interests create environments that further intensify the inherited restlessness of mind. The topic, how cultural influences impact on the development of the human mind has been discussed at length by Harbans Lal in another work.⁴⁵

It is ironic that even when efforts are made to provide an environment conducive for the stillness of the mind, we find ourselves unable to participate. Even when we place ourselves in a religious congregation or a social organization where we may have some peace, our mind engages in planning schemes which would abort that peace. When, for instance, we are participating in a religious service at a gurdwara, a temple, or a church, our mind goes astray thinking of social or personal agendas. Instead of cultivating spirituality we seek recognition, management takeover, or competition with other members of the congregation. Profane impulses occupy our time even in those places. Thus, we lose the opportunity for spiritual advancement or even for life's simple pleasures. We are warned against such engagements by the Gurus time and again.

Guru Arjan Dev, for instance, expresses in the following verse how a fickle mind can keep one from achieving the noble ends of life:

ਕਰਮ ਧਰਮ ਸੰਜਮ ਸੁਚ ਨੇਮਾ ਚੰਚਲ ਸੰਗਿ ਸਗਲ ਬਿਧਿ ਹਾਰੀ॥

ਕਰਮ ਧਰਮ ਸੰਜਮ ਸੁਚ ਨੇਮਾ ਚੰਚਲ ਸੰਗਿ ਸਗਲ ਬਿਧਿ ਹਾਰੀ॥

I was defeated in achieving my purpose to do good deeds and to practice Dharma, self-discipline, and purity as long as I associated with my fickle mind.

(SGGS 1388)

Guru Ram Das points out how humans fail to reign in their mind:

ਬਾਹਰਿ ਭੇਖ ਬਹੁਤੁ ਚਤੁਰਾਈ ਮਨੁਆ ਦਹ ਦਿਸਿ ਯਾਵੈ॥

ਬਾਹਰਿ ਭੇਖ ਬਹੁਤੁ ਚਤੁਰਾਈ ਮਨੁਆ ਦਹ ਦਿਸਿ ਯਾਵੈ॥

In society we appear to be smart, wearing attractive clothes or religious garbs, but we can't control our mind - it wanders in all directions.

(SGGS 732)

Guru Nanak warns the world by saying that the vacillating mind is driven by the five vices, which are a constant barrier to spiritual life:

ਪੰਚ ਚੋਰ ਚੰਚਲ ਚਿਤੁ ਚਾਲਹਿ॥

ਪੰਚ ਚੋਰ ਚੰਚਲ ਚਿਤੁ ਚਾਲਹਿ॥

The five thieves – five vices (lust, anger, greed, excessive attachment, and ego) caused or supported by five senses – drive the fickle mind.

(SGGS 1021)

Come Home, My Mind, Meet the Guru

The Guru Granth hymns promote ways to harness the mind. First, they help us recognize the problem; then, they lead us to see the solution, revealing in the process the impact of the Guru's teachings on our life.

Guru Amar Das says that our mind is always riding a merry-go-round, being controlled by our instincts and senses. It

is always on the run, as we are always on the run, seldom able to experience spirituality.

ਮਨੁਆ ਦਹ ਦਿਸ ਧਾਵਦਾ ਓਹੁ ਕੈਸੇ ਹਰਿ ਗੁਣ ਗਾਵੈ॥
 ਇੰਦ੍ਰੀ ਵਿਆਪਿ ਰਹੀ ਅਧਿਕਾਈ ਕਾਮੁ ਕ੍ਰੋਧੁ ਨਿਤ ਸੰਤਾਵੈ॥
 ਮਨੁਆ ਦਹ ਦਿਸ ਧਾਵਦਾ ਓਹੁ ਕੈਸੇ ਹਰਿ ਗੁਣ ਗਾਵੈ॥
 ਙੰਦ੍ਰੀ ਵਿਆਪਿ ਰਹੀ ਅਧਿਕਾਈ ਕਾਮੁ ਕ੍ਰੋਧੁ ਨਿਤ ਸੰਤਾਵੈ॥

The mind wanders in ten directions. Being in the grip of overpowering senses and constantly afflicted by sexual desire and anger, how can the mind sing praises of God?

(SGGS 565)

In other words, the mind does not stay still for a moment; our senses never cease to deceive it and steer it. To harness the mind through meditation is a goal of every practitioner of spirituality. Guru Arjan represented this urge of a seeker in the following verse:

ਬੰਧਨ ਤੇ ਛੁਟਕਾਵੈ ਪ੍ਰਭੂ ਮਿਲਾਵੈ ਹਰਿ ਹਰਿ ਨਾਮੁ ਸੁਨਾਵੈ॥
 ਅਸਥਿਰ ਕਰੇ ਨਿਹਚਲੁ ਇਹੁ ਮਨੁਆ ਬਹੁਰਿ ਨ ਕਤਹੂ ਧਾਵੈ॥
 ਹੈਕੇਉ ਐਸੋਹਮਰਾ ਮੀਤੁ॥ ਸਗਲ ਸਮਗ੍ਰੀ ਜੀਉਹੀਉਦੇਉ ਅਰਪਉਅਪਨੇ ਚੀਤੁ॥
 ਬੰਧਨ ਤੇ ਛੁਟਕਾਵੈ ਪ੍ਰਭੂ ਮਿਲਾਵੈ ਹਰਿ ਹਰਿ ਨਾਮੁ ਸੁਨਾਵੈ॥
 ਅਸਥਿਰੁ ਕਰੇ ਨਿਹਚਲੁ ਙਹੁ ਮਨੁਆ ਬਹੁਰਿ ਨ ਕਤਹੂ ਧਾਵੈ॥
 ਹੈਕੋਊ ਏਸੋਹਮਰਾ ਮੀਤੁ॥ ਸਗਲਸਮਗ੍ਰੀ ਜੀਤ ਹੀਤ ਫੇਤ ਅਰਪਤਅਪਨੋ ਚੀਤੁ॥

Is there anyone who can liberate me from bondage, who can unite me with the Creator, who can recite to me the praises of God? Is there anyone who can make this restive mind still and steady so that it ceases to wander? Is there one such friend I have? I would give this friend all my possessions, my heart and soul.

(SGGS 674)

A detailed analysis of the ways to harness the mind is not the scope of this chapter. Suffice to say, the mind, to be harnessed, must be anchored to the Divine presence and removed from the company of our instincts or memes. Those who can

access the Guru Granth Sahib may find answers there; others may look into their own faith and seek spiritual mentors for help. However, one thing is clear: you must reject the advice of the mind and its sensory helpers and instead listen to the voice of the Guru as this verse by Guru Arjan says:

ਮਨ ਕੀ ਮਤਿ ਤਿਆਗੀਐ ਸੁਣੀਐ ਉਪਦੇਸੁ॥

ਮਨ ਕੀ ਮਤਿ ਤਿਆਗੀਐ ਸੁਣੀਐ ਉਪਦੇਸੁ॥

Renounce the intellectual cleverness of your mind, and then listen to the spiritual teachings.

(SGGS 814)

Mind's restive behavior keeps us from listening to kirtan. We will gain from kirtan only when we succeed in bringing our mind to join in the singing, to be in harmony with God, to have God's place in it. The Guru guides us in this process as alluded to in the following verses. Guru Amar Das emphasizes that the seeker will find the True Guru not outside but within, when his/her mind has ceased wandering and is anchored in the Divine Presence:

-ਗੁਰ ਸਭਾ ਏਵ ਨ ਪਾਈਐ ਨਾ ਨੇੜੈ ਨਾ ਦੂਰਿ॥

ਨਾਨਕ ਸਤਿਗੁਰੁ ਤਾਂ ਮਿਲੈ ਜਾ ਮਨੁ ਰਹੈ ਹਦੂਰਿ॥

ਗੁਰ ਸਭਾ ਏਵ ਨ ਪਾਈਐ ਨਾ ਨੇੜੈ ਨਾ ਦੂਰਿ॥

ਨਾਨਕ ਸਤਿਗੁਰੁ ਤਾਂ ਮਿਲੈ ਜਾ ਮਨੁ ਰਹੈ ਹਦੂਰਿ॥

You will not find the Guru's company out in the world, not nearby, neither far away. You will meet the True Guru in your mind when your mind is in His Presence.

(SGGS 84)

-ਕਹਿ ਕਹਿ ਕਹਣੁ ਕਹੈ ਸਭੁ ਕੋਇ॥ ਬਿਨੁ ਮਨ ਮੂਏ ਭਗਤਿ ਨ ਹੋਇ॥

ਕਹਿ ਕਹਿ ਕਹਣੁ ਕਹੈ ਸਭੁ ਕੋਇ॥ ਬਿਨੁ ਮਨ ਮੂਏ ਭਗਤਿ ਨ ਹੋਇ॥

Everyone recites (does paath) for the sake of recitation (paath), but you cannot love God, become one with God, without stilling your mind – without removing your ego.

(SGGS 1277)

Guru Arjan stresses the significance of the Guru's grace in receiving enlightenment:

ਸਦਾ ਸਦਾ ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਨਮਸਕਾਰ॥ ਗੁਰ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਤੇ ਗੁਨ ਗਾਇ ਅਪਾਰ॥

सदा सदा सतिगुर नमसकार॥ गुर किरपा ते गुन गाइ अपार॥

By the Guru's grace, I glorify the God Infinite. And my mind becomes illumined.

(SGGS 1235)

In the following shabad, Guru Ram Das expresses the joy of the mind coming home to meet *Ik Onkaar* or *Waheguru*:

ਮੇਰੇ ਮਨ ਪਰਦੇਸੀ ਵੇ ਪਿਆਰੇ ਆਉ ਘਰੇ॥

ਹਰਿ ਗੁਰੂ ਮਿਲਾਵਹੁ ਮੇਰੇ ਪਿਆਰੇ ਘਰਿ ਵਸੈ ਹਰੇ॥

ਰੰਗਿ ਰਲੀਆ ਮਾਣਹੁ ਮੇਰੇ ਪਿਆਰੇ ਹਰਿ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰੇ॥

ਗੁਰੁ ਨਾਨਕੁ ਤੁਠਾ ਮੇਰੇ ਪਿਆਰੇ ਮੇਲੇ ਹਰੇ॥

ਮੇਰੇ ਸਨ ਪਰਦੇਸੀ ਕੇ ਪਿਆਰੇ ਆਤ ਘਰੇ॥

ਹਰਿ ਗੁਰੂ ਮਿਲਾਵਹੁ ਮੇਰੇ ਪਿਆਰੇ ਘਰਿ ਵਸੈ ਹਰੇ॥

ਰੰਗਿ ਰਲੀਆ ਮਾਣਹੁ ਮੇਰੇ ਪਿਆਰੇ ਹਰਿ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰੇ॥

ਗੁਰੁ ਨਾਨਕੁ ਤੁਠਾ ਮੇਰੇ ਪਿਆਰੇ ਮੇਲੇ ਹਰੇ॥

O my beloved, my mind, home deserter, Come home! Meet the Guru, God, who will dwell in you, my beloved. Revel in God's love with His blessings, my beloved. Guru Nanak is pleased, my beloved, when we are united with God.

(SGGS 451)

Empty Your Mind of Baggage

The Guru wants us to experience kirtan as meditation, asking us to sing the praises of God without letting anyone or anything else occupy our mind during that time. That is, the mind must be free of any company or baggage. Guru Arjan expresses this belief with amazing simplicity and poetic beauty in the following verses:

-ਮਿਲੁ ਸਾਧਸੰਗੇ ਭਜੁ ਨਿਸੰਗੇ ਕੁਲ ਸਮੂਹਾ ਤਾਰੀਐ॥

ਮਿਲੁ ਸਾਖਸੰਗੇ ਭਜੁ ਨਿਸੰਗੇ ਕੁਲ ਸਮੂਹਾ ਤਾਰੀਏ॥

Feeling free from baggage, in the company of the good and holy, sing and chant the Creator's attributes, meditate on the Divine; it will save not just you – it will save your whole family tree.

(SGGS 461)

-ਸਾਧਸੰਗ ਜਪਿ ਨਿਸੰਗ ਮਨਿ ਨਿਧਾਨੁ ਧਾਰੇ॥

ਸਾਖਸੰਗ ਜਪਿ ਨਿਸੰਗ ਮਨਿ ਨਿਧਾਨੁ ਧਾਰੇ॥

In the company of the good and holy, mind free from baggage, sing and chant the Creator's attributes, meditate on the Divine – That name is the treasure you carry in your mind.

(SGGS 679)

Before Guru Arjan's time, Kabir expressed that devotees can experience the Supreme Being only when their mind is "mindful," is in the present, not carrying the burden of their past or future:

ਭੇਟੀਅਲੇ ਰਾਇ ਨਿਸੰਗਾ॥

ਭੇਟੀਅਲੇ ਰਾਝ ਨਿਸੰਗਾ॥

meet my Sovereign God when I am alone, mind free from baggage.

(SGGS 972)

Further, Guru Arjan urges all devotees in the following verses to first unburden themselves of their baggage and then join the *sangat* to meditate on the Creator:

-ਸੰਤਸੰਗੇ ਭਜੁ ਨਿਸੰਗੇ ਰੰਤੁ ਸਦਾ ਅੰਤਰਜਾਮੀਆ॥

ਸੰਤਸੰਗੇ ਭਜੁ ਨਿਸੰਗੇ ਰੰਤੁ ਸਦਾ ਅੰਤਰਜਾਮੀਆ॥

In the company of the good and holy, mind free from baggage, sing and chant the Creator's attributes, meditate on the Divine, Who always knows who and what you are, your heart, mind, and soul.

(SGGS 1278)

-ਸਾਧਸੰਗਿ ਜਪਿ ਨਿਸੰਗ ਜਮਕਾਲੁ ਤਿਸੁ ਨ ਖਾਵਨੇ॥

ਮੁਕਤਿ ਜੁਗਤਿ ਅਨਿਕ ਸੂਖ ਹਰਿ ਭਗਤਿ ਲਵੈ ਨ ਲਾਵਨੇ॥

ਪ੍ਰਭ ਦਰਸ ਲੁਬਧ ਦਾਸ ਨਾਨਕ ਬਹੁੜਿ ਜੇਨਿ ਨ ਯਾਵਨੇ॥
ਸਾਧਸੰਗਿ ਜਪਿ ਨਿਸੰਗ ਜਮਕਾਲੁ ਤਿਸੁ ਨ ਖਾਵਨੋ॥
ਮੁਕਤਿ ਜੁਗਤਿ ਅਨਿਕ ਸੂਖ ਹਰਿ ਭਗਤਿ ਲਵੈ ਨ ਲਾਵਨੋ॥
ਪ੍ਰਭ ਦਰਸ ਲੁਬਧ ਦਾਸ ਨਾਨਕ ਬਹੁੜਿ ਜੋਨਿ ਨ ਧਾਵਨੋ॥

Anyone who chants and meditates in the company of the good, the holy, with a mind free from baggage, will not be devoured by the angel of death. Devotional worship of God is the key to liberation from birth and death and happiness beyond compare. The humble Nanak longs for the Blessed Darshan of God so that his mind never wanders again in the evolutionary cycles of birth and death.

(SGGS 1323)

Sikhs have often heard the following narrative meant to enlighten them and urge them to cultivate a mind free from baggage. In the Indian town of Sultanpur Lodi, the story goes, Guru Nanak was invited to join the *Qazi* (Muslim priest) and Nawab Daulat Khan Lodi in the afternoon *namaz* (Muslim prayer) at the local mosque. While the Qazi conducted his prayer, the Guru remained standing and did not kneel as required of those present at the service. Incensed by this nonconformist behavior of Nanak, the Qazi expressed his resentment against him.

To this Guru Nanak calmly responded, “What prayer was I expected to join? The Qazi’s mind was wandering to his new-born foal he had left unharnessed in his yard before coming to the mosque and suddenly remembering a well in the enclosure and fearing lest the foal should fall into it.”

Nanak’s criticism did not stop there; it went on to encompass the Nawab as well, saying that the good ruler’s mind, too, was quite far away from the prayer – Khan’s mind was in Kabul, Afghanistan, settling a horse deal.

The Guru then explained that the prayer in the flesh was no prayer until the mind was participating. The narrative illustrates

the primacy of concentration of mind during kirtan and any form of prayer. The Muslim audience was moved by the profound lesson in the Guru's demonstration.

A similar folktale is popularly cited in other religious circles to illustrate the same point. A trader stopped at the door of a holy man on his way to the market in order to sell his goods. The doorkeeper of the holy place asked the trader to leave his baggage outside the door before he could visit with the holy man. The trader put aside his luggage and proceeded. Still, the holy man declined to see him. He was told that, even though he had left his suitcases outside, he was still worried about their safety from thieves. Even if he was not carrying the baggage on his body, he was carrying it on his mind and thus not following the holy man's instruction to leave the stuff outside.

Bhagat Kabir, in the following verses, echoes the same thought and advises his followers not to take any company (mental baggage) to the place of a holy congregation. There the purpose is to meet an enlightened soul, and you cannot achieve it unless you go there by yourself, alone, free from any thoughts of the past or future.

ਕਬੀਰ ਸਾਧੂ ਕਉ ਮਿਲਨੇ ਜਾਈਐ ਸਾਥਿ ਨ ਲੀਜੈ ਕੇਇ॥

ਪਾਛੈ ਪਾਉ ਨ ਦੀਜੀਐ ਆਗੈ ਰੇਇ ਸੁ ਰੇਇ॥

ਕਬੀਰ ਸਾਧੂ ਕਤ ਮਿਲਨੇ ਜਾਇਏ ਸਾਥਿ ਨ ਲੀਜੈ ਕੋਝ॥

ਪਾਛੈ ਪਾਤ ਨ ਦੀਜੀਏ ਆਗੈ ਹੋਝ ਸੁ ਹੋਝ॥

When you go to meet a holy man, says Kabir, do not take anyone or anything along. Once you have started, do not go back (don't let your mind wander back to the past); whatever is to happen in the future will happen.

(SGGS 1370)

Conclusion

In short, the Guru Granth Sahib says to the Sikh, the seeker of truth: Leave all your baggage, your attachments, behind before seeking entry into God's house. Make your mind quiet

and free, and feel content just being in the presence of the Guru. When you listen to kirtan and sermons, be present and alert, with body, mind, and spirit, with no thoughts of the past, present, or future. Become one with the shabad.

CHAPTER 12

THEOLOGY OF *MOOL MANTAR*: The Commencing Verse Of Sri Guru Granth Sahib



Mool Mantar as scribed by Bhai Gurdas in the Kartarpuri Bir⁴⁶

ੴ ਸਤਿਨਾਮੁ ਕਰਤਾ ਪੁਰਖੁ ਨਿਰਭਉ ਨਿਰਵੈਰੁ

ਅਕਾਲ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਅਜੂਨੀ ਸੈਭੰ ਗੁਰਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ॥

ੴ ਸਤਿਨਾਮੁ ਕਰਤਾ ਪੁਰਖੁ ਨਿਰਭਉ ਨਿਰਵੈਰੁ

अकाल मूरति अजूनी सैभं गुरप्रसादि॥

The commencing verse of Sri Guru Granth Sahib is traditionally recited by Sikhs as *mool mantar* (variantly, *moolmantar* or *mul mantar*) and written in Gurmukhi script as shown above – in the boxed picture, captioned as “*Mool Mantar* in Gurmukhi in the handwriting of Bhai Gurdas,” followed by its modern printed form in the first verse line. The next printed line is its exact rendering in Hindi (Devanagari script). In the Roman alphabet, it reads: “*Ik Onkaar sat naam kartaa purakh nirbhau nirvair akaal moorat ajooni saibhang gur parsad.*”

The opening verse is given the primary position in Sikh theology. It enunciates the human relationship with the Creator and signifies the need for evolution of human consciousness from animal consciousness to God consciousness. It is centrally located in Guru Nanak's visionary writings, which are assigned the status of divine revelation.

Guru Arjan appropriately chose this verse to inaugurate his most monumental endeavor of compiling the Sikh Scripture known as Sri Guru Granth Sahib or the Guru Granth. He assigned the *mool mantar* verse the first place on the first page.

The Guru Granth is, as stated in other chapters, the eternal Guru for the Sikhs, and *mool mantar* the most basic, sacred verse of the faith. The verse has acquired an extraordinary significance for its followers and is the subject of continuous discussion among Sikh scholars.

Though named by Sikh congregations as *mool mantar*, the verse has not been given any such title in the Sacred Scripture. Even Bhai Gurdas, who wrote a highly significant commentary on the verse, did not use this title. The term has, however, gained currency in discussions among Sikhs because of its referent value.

The *mool mantar* verse appears before the beginning of Guru Nanak's seminal composition, *Japu*, popularly known and

read as *Japji* or *Japji Sahib*. Considered the formal statement of Guru Nanak's spiritual and religious beliefs, the *mool mantar* of *Japji* is the subject of discussion in many monographs.⁴⁷

According to a Sikh tradition, Guru Nanak recited *mool mantar* upon his emergence from the Bein River. As discussed earlier in chapter 4, Sikh traditions accept the Bein River occurrence as a juncture of the first divine revelation or inspiration to Guru Nanak. The *mool mantar* composition was the first of the many hymns that Guru Nanak claimed as divine knowledge inspired to him during his first revelation.

Mantra

Mool mantar means the root, primary, or basic *mantar* or *mantra*. Accepted scholarly etymology links the term *mantra* with the Sanskrit words '*manas*,' meaning 'mind,' and '*trâna*,' meaning protection or bringing under control. Thus, a *mantar* is a technique employed to bring the mind under control so that it (the mind) may meditate on divine attributes and thereby attain a state of higher consciousness.

In Indian theological literature, particularly in Hindu traditions, the word *mantar* or *mantra* stands for a secret word or phrase, which is practiced and/or recited by a devotee to invoke deities who perform miracles. These miracles are meant to fulfill the devotee's desires and to bestow occult powers upon him or her. In Buddhist tradition, a devotee practices the *mantra* as a word or verse in order to achieve tranquility of mind.

In many other religious traditions of the East, a *mantar* is imparted usually as a secret word or phrase to a disciple by a holy man, a monk, a saint, a guru, or a yogi. In Punjab and certain other parts of India, the practice of imparting a *mantar* refers to the esoteric practice of initiating disciples by giving them *naam* (name) and inducting them into the inner circles of a *sant* (saint).

The Sikh View of Mantra

The Sikh gurus did not adopt the above-described practices of mantra meditation; they disseminated their teachings of the *Gurbani* and the rite of initiation freely and openly. They freely distributed the gift of *naam* in religious congregations. This practice, called *Guru vartae* in Sikh annals, was aptly described as *Guru shabad langar* by Sikh scholars of Guru Arjan's court (Balvand and Satta, SGGS 967).

It is not uncommon, however, to find that many Sikh clerics or sect leaders also continue to follow the practice of giving *mantar* in a way similar to the Hindu custom. Even in initiating a Sikh in the *Khande di Pahul* ceremony, the Hindu-like ritual of initiation is gradually being introduced.⁴⁸ Furthermore, this *mantra*-giving tradition continues today among the Sikh sects, particularly the Namdhari, Radha Soami, Nirankari, and Ruhani Satsang.

Guru Nanak, visibly, did not approve of the contemporary *naam*-giving practices. His disapproval of giving *naam* through the *mantra* ritual is particularly significant in this context. He wrote:

ਪ੍ਰਿਗੁ ਤਿਨਾ ਕਾ ਜੀਵਿਆ ਜਿ ਲਿਖਿ ਲਿਖਿ ਵੇਚਹਿ ਨਾਉ॥
 ਖੇਤੀ ਜਿਨ ਕੀ ਉਜੜੈ ਖਲਵਾੜੇ ਕਿਆ ਥਾਉ॥
 ਖਿਗੁ ਤਿਨਾ ਕਾ ਜੀਵਿਆ ਜਿ ਲਿਖਿ ਲਿਖਿ ਵੇਚਹਿ ਨਾਤ॥
 ਖੇਤੀ ਜਿਨ ਕੀ ਤਜੜੈ ਖਲਵਾੜੇ ਕਿਆ ਥਾਤ॥

Condemned is their livelihood who make a business of writing and selling the divine name. Their crop is ravaged; their harvest is wasted.

(SGGS 1284)

Sikh theologian Bhai Gurdas, too, condemns those who subscribe to any mantra, except the *Guru Shabad* or hymns of the *Guru Granth*, for meditation or any religious practice. He says,

ਪ੍ਰਿਗੁ ਜਿਹਬਾ ਗੁਰ ਸਬਦ ਵਿਣੁ ਹੋਰ ਮੰਤ੍ਰ ਸਿਮਰਈ॥

धिगु जिहवा गुर सबद विणु होर मंत्र सिमरणी॥

The lips and tongue that recite any other mantra than the Guru Shabad or hymns of the Holy Scripture deserve condemning.

(Bhai Gurdas, Vaar 27, Pauri 10)

Although the Sikh gurus discarded the tradition of *mantra*, they kept the term in Sikh vocabulary and reinterpreted its meaning differently for a Sikh. This reinterpretation was explained by Bhai Gurdas, who wrote extensively on the practice of *mantra*. The following verses from his compositions encapsulate the use of *mantra* concept in Sikh tradition.

According to Bhai Gurdas, when a seeker comes to the Guru, he or she is given the *mantra* of faith and trust in meditative life. The seeker is taught the life of *naam*, *daan*, and *isnaan*, which would enable him or her to experience the divine attributes and to practice the deeds that cleanse the body and the mind. Bhai Gurdas says:

ਭਾਉ ਭਗਤਿ ਭਉ ਮੰਤ੍ਰ ਦੇ ਨਾਮੁ ਦਾਨੁ ਇਸਨਾਨੁ ਦ੍ਰਿੜਾਇਆ॥

ਮਾਤ ਭਗਤਿ ਭਤ ਮੰਤ੍ਰ ਦੇ ਨਾਮੁ ਦਾਨੁ ਝਸਨਾਨੁ ਫਿੜਾਝਾ॥

The Guru imparts to the seeker the mantra of faith and conviction for spiritual life, and it reinforces in him or her the practice of naam, daan, and isnaan causing him or her to experience the divine attributes of altruism and gratitude and the deeds that cleanse the body and the mind.

(Bhai Gurdas, Vaar 5, Pauri 13)

In other words, the seeker learns from the Guru how to focus on *Naam* – which is mindful awareness of the Divine Presence; how to give *Daan* – which is living the life of altruism while seeking Divine Benevolence; and how to practice *Isnaan* – which is implementing ethics of Good Deeds that cleanse the body and the mind.

Bhai Gurdas further explains the significance of the Mool Mantar as follows:

ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਸਬਦ ਸੁਰਤਿ ਲਿਵ ਮੂਲਮੰਤ੍ਰੁ

ਆਨ ਤੰਤ੍ਰ ਮੰਤ੍ਰ ਕੀ ਨ ਸਿਖਨ ਪ੍ਰਤੀਤਿ ਹੈ॥
ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਸਬਦ ਸੁਰਤਿ ਲਿਖ ਮੂਲਮੰਤ੍ਰ
ਆਨ ਤੰਤ੍ਰ ਮੰਤ੍ਰ ਕੀ ਨ ਸਿਖਨ ਪ੍ਰਤੀਤਿ ਹੈ॥

The root mantra for Sikhs is meant to bring their consciousness in tune with the Shabad of the True Guru; Sikhs do not have any other religious or mythical formulas or words meant to invoke deities.

(Bhai Gurdas, *Kabit* 183)

For a Sikh, the *Guru Sabd* – that is, the teachings of the Guru as given in the *Guru Granth Sahib* – is considered the only *mantra* of any significance. This teaching is further emphasized in the following verses by Bhai Gurdas:

ਮੰਤ੍ਰ ਮੂਲੁ ਸਤਿਗੁਰੁ ਬਚਨੁ ਇਕੁ ਮਨਿ ਹੋਇ ਅਰਾਧੈ ਕੋਈ॥
ਮੰਤ੍ਰ ਮੂਲੁ ਸਤਿਗੁਰੁ ਬਚਨੁ ਇਕੁ ਮਨਿ ਹੋਇ ਅਰਾਧੈ ਕੋਈ॥

The teachings of the true Guru are the root mantra worth practicing with single-mindedness.

(Bhai Gurdas, *Vaar* 26, *Pauri* 9)

Bhai Gurdas concludes:

ਮੰਤ੍ਰ ਮੂਲੁ ਗੁਰੁਵਾਕੁ ਹੈ ਸਚੁ ਸਬਦੁ ਸਤਿਗੁਰੁ ਸੁਣਾਏ॥
ਮੰਤ੍ਰ ਮੂਲੁ ਗੁਰੁਵਾਕੁ ਹੈ ਸਚੁ ਸਬਦੁ ਸਤਿਗੁਰੁ ਸੁਣਾਏ॥

The root mantra is the Guru's hymns; only the True Guru imparts the eternal teachings to the seeker.

(Bhai Gurdas, *Vaar* 40, *Pauri* 22)

Thus, undoubtedly, whenever there is any mention of an acceptable mantra for a Sikh, it always refers to the teachings or hymns of the Guru given in the *Guru Granth*.

To Realize the Goals of Life

The sacred words of faith in *mool mantar* are not just a collection of nouns and adjectives describing God as an entity somewhere out there, though that is how it has often been translated to date; rather it is a cluster that describes the seeker's inner experience of Divinity. There is an ocean of intelligence in

this set of sacred words. When we meditate on mool mantar every day and make it a sacred practice, then we become aware of the reality of the Divine within each one of us. The purpose of Sikhi is to realize this reality within us, and we do so through contemplation of the commencing verse of the Guru Granth and other teachings of the Guru.

Guru Amar Das emphasizes this reality clearly in his teachings as illustrated in the following two verses:

-ਇਸੁ ਕਾਇਆ ਅੰਦਰਿ ਨਾਮੁ ਨਉ ਨਿਧਿ ਪਾਈਐ ਗੁਰ ਕੈ ਸਬਦਿ ਵੀਚਾਰ॥

ਕਾਝੁਆ ਅੰਦਰਿ ਨਾਮੁ ਨਤ ਨਿਧਿ ਪਾਝੈ ਗੁਰ ਕੈ ਸਬਦਿ ਵੀਚਾਰਾ॥

Within this body are all treasures of the Divine identity; they are discovered through contemplating the Guru's Shabad.

(SGGS 754)

-ਘਰ ਹੀ ਵਿਚਿ ਮਹਲੁ ਪਾਇਆ ਗੁਰ ਸਬਦੀ ਵੀਚਾਰਿ॥

ਘਰ ਹੀ ਵਿਚਿ ਮਹਲੁ ਪਾਝੁਆ ਗੁਰ ਸਬਦੀ ਵੀਚਾਰਿ॥

Within the home of their own inner being, they find the Palace of the Divine Presence when they reflect on the Guru's Shabad.

(SGGS 30)

The seekers meditate upon mool-mantar through advancing states of consciousness. They recite and meditate upon its words and phrases to realize themselves as spiritual beings. This process fulfills their life goals according to gurmat-guided concepts. All steps to higher consciousness are embedded in Mool Mantar.

A set of sacred words, *mool mantar* is not a secret, esoteric formula, but a statement of God's attributes that we humans should emulate. When we attempt to emulate them conscientiously, we begin to be elevated from a human state of mind to a godlike state and feel imbued with a divine spirit. When we meditate regularly, we are awakened to new dimensions of who we are and who we are within our journey of self-awareness. The goal of the practice is to transform our awareness from separation to unity.

When the primary focus of our life is materialism in its diverse forms, we view ourselves as separate beings, comparing, competing, struggling, self-absorbed, and alone. However, when we transform our life's focus to God, we begin to change – we feel empowered by a divine force that enables us to view ourselves as connected to humanity, as part of the world. In other words, we begin to feel a kind of unity within the self and with the world that we never experienced before. Only in that state of spiritual unity can we experience and express love and freedom.

There is an innate urge in each one of us to succeed and be happy and fulfilled. When we do not succeed, we feel unhappy. While success may be socially measurable, with a consensus on how to achieve it, there is no such consensus on how to be happy and fulfilled. Guru Nanak was keenly aware of the reality of human suffering, like Buddha and others before him, which human beings experienced then as they had before and as they continue to experience now.

Guided by a divine mission, the founder of Sikhi discovered the ultimate way to deal with human unhappiness, to alleviate human suffering. He had the revelation and composed *mool mantar* as the Sikh Article of Faith. Its sacred words are designed for meditation, which, when performed regularly as a habit, offers humanity an immense opportunity not merely to pray to God, obey or fear God, but even to become godlike. Becoming godlike is a spiritual state free from suffering and bondage, a realm of love and freedom.

In revealing this opportunity for humanity, Guru Nanak outlined the transformative method by which all those who practice it may escape the prison of animal instincts and egoistic nature, the sources of human unhappiness, and may realize the joys of life by rising to a godlike state. The practice of *mool mantar* may gradually endow the devotee with divine attributes, thereby making him or her capable of doing as God does.

Such a state is potentially the crowning achievement of all intelligent and spiritually exalted beings. According to Guru Nanak, we are destined to become like God but have slipped, or been tricked, into becoming inmates, posing as creatures of destiny, a ghastly spread between what we are and what we could become. The Guru expresses this belief beautifully in the following verses:

ਹਰਿ ਕਾ ਸੇਵਕੁ ਸੇ ਹਰਿ ਜੇਹਾ॥ ਭੇਦੁ ਨ ਜਾਣਹੁ ਮਾਣਸ ਦੇਹਾ॥
 ਜਿਉ ਜਲ ਤਰੰਗ ਉਠਹਿ ਬਹੁ ਭਾਤੀ ਫਿਰਿ ਸਲਲੈ ਸਲਲ ਸਮਾਇਦਾ॥
 ਹਰਿ ਕਾ ਸੇਵਕੁ ਸੋ ਹਰਿ ਜੇਹਾ॥ ਭੇਦੁ ਨ ਜਾਣਹੁ ਮਾਣਸ ਦੇਹਾ॥
 ਜਿਤ ਜਲ ਤਰੰਗ ਤਠਹਿ ਬਹੁ ਭਾਤੀ ਫਿਰਿ ਸਲਲੈ ਸਲਲ ਸਮਾਝਦਾ॥

A worshiper of God is so much like God but, being trapped in a human body, does not recognize this secret. As water rises in waves of many forms and merges in water again, so the worshiper, after taking many forms, merges in God.

(SGGS 1076)

Through the opening verse of his composition in the Guru Granth, Guru Nanak teaches us that the more we recognize, practice, and express our authentic self, the more we instill within ourselves the desired attributes, and the more we experience meaning, joy, and fulfillment. If we desire a genuine spiritual and personal growth, a better relationship with our environments, and a truly fulfilling life, then we need to awaken our divine inner self and connect it to the source of all divinity.

Guru Amar Das eloquently expresses this belief as follows:

ਮਨ ਤੂੰ ਜੋਤਿ ਸਰੂਪੁ ਹੈ ਆਪਣਾ ਮੂਲੁ ਪਛਾਣੁ॥
 ਮਨ ਤੂੰ ਜੋਤਿ ਸਰੂਪੁ ਹੈ ਆਪਣਾ ਮੂਲੁ ਪਛਾਣੁ॥

O my mind, you are the embodiment of the Divine Light; recognize your own basis, your origin.

(SGGS 441)

This recognition of the source and awakening of the devotee's mind are exactly the purpose of reciting the sacred words embedded in Mool Mantar. The Guru continues,

ਏ ਮਨ ਜੈਸਾ ਸੇਵਹਿ ਤੈਸਾ ਹੋਵਹਿ ਤੇਹੇ ਕਰਮ ਕਮਾਇ॥

ਏ ਸਨ ਜੈਸਾ ਸੇਵਹਿ ਤੈਸਾ ਹੋਵਹਿ ਤੇਹੇ ਕਰਮ ਕਮਾਝ॥

O my mind, you will become the one you serve and emulate, and your deeds will transform accordingly.

(SGGS 755)

The Guru urges the seeker – his own mind as well as all other devotees – to serve the Supreme Being, do His will and, in the process, become like Him. Moreover, when the devotee does so (follows the Guru's instruction) by immersing the self in God and adopting godlike traits, his or her deeds transform radically from worldly to spiritual.

Prior to Guru Amar Das, Bhagat Kabir has expressed a similar belief in many of his verses. In a concrete and powerful language, he emphasizes the necessity of forsaking one's pride in order to become part of God. Nobody can enter the God's court without leaving his or her pride and other baggage behind.

Here are a number of verses in which Kabir powerfully describes the prerequisites for the seeker to gain proximity to God:

-ਕਬੀਰ ਰੋੜਾ ਹੋਇ ਰਹੁ ਬਾਟ ਕਾ ਤਜਿ ਮਨ ਕਾ ਅਭਿਮਾਨੁ॥

ਕਬੀਰ ਰੋੜਾ ਹੋਝ ਰਹੁ ਬਾਟ ਕਾ ਤਜਿ ਸਨ ਕਾ ਅਭਿਮਾਨੁ॥

Kabir, let yourself be a pebble on the path; abandon your egotistical pride.

(SGGS 1372)

-ਐਸਾ ਕੋਈ ਦਾਸੁ ਹੋਇ ਤਾਹਿ ਮਿਲੈ ਭਗਵਾਨੁ॥

ਏਸਾ ਕੋਝ ਦਾਸੁ ਹੋਝ ਤਾਹਿ ਮਿਲੈ ਭਗਵਾਨੁ॥

Such a humble servant shall meet the Creator.

(SGGS 1372)

-ਕਬੀਰ ਰੋੜਾ ਹੂਆ ਤ ਕਿਆ ਭਇਆ ਪੰਥੀ ਕਉ ਦੁਖੁ ਦੇਇ॥

ਕਬੀਰ ਰੋੜਾ ਹੂਆ ਤ ਕਿਆ ਭਇਆ ਪੰਥੀ ਕਉ ਦੁਖੁ ਦੇਝ॥

Kabir, what good would it be to be a pebble? It would only hurt the traveler on the path.

(SGGS 1372)

-ਐਸਾ ਤੇਰਾ ਦਾਸੁ ਹੈ ਜਿਉ ਧਰਨੀ ਮਹਿ ਖੇਹ ॥

ਏਸਾ ਤੇਰਾ ਦਾਸੁ ਹੈ ਜਿਤ ਧਰਨੀ ਮਹਿ ਖੇਹ ॥

Your slave (devotee), O God, is like the dust of the earth.

(SGGS 1372)

-ਕਬੀਰ ਖੇਹ ਹੂਈ ਤਉ ਕਿਆ ਭਇਆ ਜਉ ਉਡਿ ਲਾਗੈ ਅੰਗ ॥

ਕਬੀਰ ਖੇਹ ਹੂੰ ਤਤ ਕਿਆ ਭਇਆ ਜਤ ਤਤਿ ਲਾਗੈ ਅੰਗ ॥

Kabir, what then, if one could become dust? It is blown up by the wind, and sticks to the body.

(SGGS 1372)

-ਹਰਿ ਜਨੁ ਐਸਾ ਚਾਹੀਐ ਜਿਉ ਪਾਨੀ ਸਰਬੰਗ ॥

ਹਰਿ ਜਨੁ ਏਸਾ ਚਾਹੀਐ ਜਿਤ ਪਾਨੀ ਸਰਬੰਗ ॥

The humble servant of God should be like water, which cleans everything.

(SGGS 1372)

-ਕਬੀਰ ਪਾਨੀ ਹੂਆ ਤ ਕਿਆ ਭਇਆ ਸੀਰਾ ਤਾਤਾ ਹੋਇ ॥

ਕਬੀਰ ਪਾਨੀ ਹੂਆ ਤ ਕਿਆ ਭਇਆ ਸੀਰਾ ਤਾਤਾ ਹੋਇ ॥

Kabir, what then if one could become water? It becomes cold, then hot.

(SGGS 1372)

-ਹਰਿ ਜਨੁ ਐਸਾ ਚਾਹੀਐ ਜੈਸਾ ਹਰਿ ਹੀ ਹੋਇ ॥

ਹਰਿ ਜਨੁ ਏਸਾ ਚਾਹੀਐ ਜੈਸਾ ਹਰਿ ਹੀ ਹੋਇ ॥

The humble servant of God should be just like God.

(SGGS 1372)

The above verses point out the imperative for the seeker: Give up false pride and embrace humility. Be a pebble of the path, be dust, be like water; nay, transcend the very materiality of this mundane life and be like God by emulating Him.

Thus, the Gurus and Bhagats urge us to meditate on the sacred words of Mool Mantar in our daily practice of mindfulness, total consciousness, of the Creator so that we may

become self-realized, reach our ultimate goal of self-realization. This practice will enable us to live profoundly at the deepest level of consciousness, a level where we truly know ourselves as divine beings, as creators and miracle-makers, fearless, god-like, without enmity toward anyone, and with limitless intelligence.

Exegesis of *Mool Mantar*

ੴ, *Ik Onkaar*, the first term, consists of two symbols, a numeral and a letter, combined into one. The numeral *IK* (or *EK*) means indivisible One and the letter *Onkaar* means God as a virtual and eternal reality manifested in the creations. Combined together the two symbols mean that One Reality manifests in all creation, including all worlds and all humanity, with one soul residing within them.

The soul here is defined as the manifested extension of One Reality. Thus the whole creation is considered to be One – one reality manifesting in the entire creation embodying the Infinite Wisdom in nature and the universe. In the colloquium of civil society, it may be abbreviated as One Spirit One World as, not long ago, it was presented to the NGOs assembly at the United Nations and adopted by representative Sikh and non-Sikh organizations working on global platforms.

In a nutshell, *Ik Onkaar* represents God as the Divine Presence permeating the creation, including the human soul within and its expansion outside. Guru Nanak explained this belief in direct and straightforward words as follows:

ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਕਰਿ ਕੈ ਵਸਿਆ ਸੇਇ॥

कुदरति करि कै वसिआ सोइ॥

He (God) created the Creative Power of the Universe, within which the Creator dwells.

(SGGS 83)

Guru Arjan explains the meaning of *Ik Onkaar* in the following hymn with multiple examples:

ਬਾਜੀਗਰਿ ਜੈਸੇ ਬਾਜੀ ਪਾਈ॥ ਨਾਨਾ ਰੂਪ ਭੇਖ ਦਿਖਲਾਈ॥

ਸਾਂਗੁ ਉਤਾਰਿ ਬੰਮ੍ਰਿਹਓ ਪਾਸਾਰਾ ॥ ਤਬ ਏਕੇ ਏਕੰਕਾਰਾ ॥
 ਕਵਨਰੂਪ ਦ੍ਰਿਸਟਿਓ ਬਿਨਸਾਇਓ ॥ ਕਤਹਿ ਗਇਓਉਹੁ ਕਤ ਤੇ ਆਇਓ ॥
 ਜਲ ਤੇ ਉਠਹਿ ਅਨਿਕ ਤਰੰਗਾ ॥ ਕਨਿਕ ਭੂਖਨ ਕੀਨੇ ਬਹੁ ਰੰਗਾ ॥
 ਬੀਜੁ ਬੀਜਿ ਦੇਖਿਓ ਬਹੁ ਪਰਕਾਰਾ ॥ ਫਲ ਪਾਕੇ ਤੇ ਏਕੰਕਾਰਾ ॥
 ਸਹਸ ਘਟਾ ਮਹਿ ਏਕੁ ਆਕਾਸੁਘਟ ਛੂਟੇ ਤੇ ਓਹੀ ਪ੍ਰਗਾਸੁ ॥
 ਭਰਮ ਲੇਭ ਮੇਹ ਮਾਇਆ ਵਿਕਾਰ ॥ ਭ੍ਰਮ ਛੂਟੇ ਤੇ ਏਕੰਕਾਰ ॥
 ਓਹੁ ਅਬਿਨਾਸੀ ਬਿਨਸਤ ਨਾਹੀ ॥ ਨਾ ਕੇ ਆਵੈ ਨਾ ਕੇ ਜਾਹੀ ॥
 ਗੁਰਿ ਪੂਰੈ ਰਉਮੈ ਮਲੁ ਧੋਈ ॥ ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਮੇਰੀ ਪਰਮ ਗਤਿ ਹੋਈ ॥
 ਬਾਜੀਗਰਿ ਜੈਸੇ ਬਾਜੀ ਪਾਝੈ ॥ ਨਾਨਾ ਰੂਪ ਖੇਖ ਦਿਖਲਾਝੈ ॥
 ਸਾਂਗੁ ਤਤਾਰਿ ਥਮ੍ਹਿਓ ਪਾਸਾਰਾ ॥ ਤਬ ਏਕੋ ਏਕੰਕਾਰਾ ॥
 ਕਵਨਰੂਪ ਦ੍ਰਿਸਟਿਓ ਬਿਨਸਾਝਓ ॥ ਕਤਹਿ ਗਝਓਤਹੁ ਕਤਤੇ ਆਝਓ ॥
 ਜਲ ਤੇ ਠਹਿਓ ਅਨਿਕ ਤਰੰਗਾ ॥ ਕਨਿਕ ਭ੍ਰੂਖਨ ਕੀਨੇ ਬਹੁ ਰੰਗਾ ॥
 ਬੀਜੁ ਬੀਜਿ ਦੇਖਿਓ ਬਹੁ ਪਰਕਾਰਾ ॥ ਫਲ ਪਾਕੇ ਤੇ ਏਕੰਕਾਰਾ ॥
 ਸਹਸ ਘਟਾ ਮਹਿ ਏਕੁ ਆਕਾਸੁ ॥ ਘਟ ਛੂਟੇ ਤੇ ਓਹੀ ਪ੍ਰਗਾਸੁ ॥
 ਭਰਮ ਲੋਭ ਮੋਹ ਮਾਝਆ ਵਿਕਾਰ ॥ ਭ੍ਰਮ ਛੂਟੇ ਤੇ ਏਕੰਕਾਰ ॥
 ਓਹੁ ਅਬਿਨਾਸੀ ਬਿਨਸਤ ਨਾਹੀ ॥ ਨਾ ਕੋ ਆਵੈ ਨਾ ਕੋ ਜਾਹੀ ॥
 ਗੁਰਿ ਪੂਰੈ ਹਤਮੈ ਮਲੁ ਧੋਝੈ ॥ ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਮੇਰੀ ਪਰਮ ਗਤਿ ਹੋਝੈ ॥

The actor stages the play, playing the many characters in different costumes; but when the play ends, the player takes off the costumes, and then becomes one, and only one. How many forms and images appeared and disappeared? Where have they gone? Where did they come from? Stop here and contemplate on the message of the hymn. Countless waves rise up from the same water. Jewels and ornaments of many different forms are fashioned from the same gold. I have seen seeds of all kinds being planted – when the fruit ripens, the seeds appear in the same form as the original. The one sky is reflected in thousands of water pans and pots, but when the pots are broken, only the sky remains. Human minds are full of doubts, greed, attachment, corruption, and numerous manifestations of Maya. When the

human mind is freed from the layers of those misgivings, one realizes that all is One Reality and its manifestation. At the end the Creator alone is imperishable; God will never pass away. He does not come, and He does not go. Through these teachings, the Perfect Guru has washed away the filth of ego from my mind. Nanak says, "I have attained the realized state of mind."

(SGGS 737)

To explain the hymn in simple terms, Guru Arjan illustrates *Ik Onkaar* with an example of drama players, magicians, and jugglers. A player is one who entertains the audience by staging a variety of plays made up of make-believe worlds. The player plays many characters in varying costumes. Here every character seems real in itself and believable, engrossing the audience. When the curtain falls to end the show, one would realize, however, that the only reality in the show was the one player who played different roles and that all others were merely his or her manifestations in diverse costumes and roles.

Similarly, there are other examples cited in this hymn. Countless waves and bubbles are manifestations of the same water. Countless jewels are manifestations of one gold. The sky is reflected with apparent differences in many pots and pans full of water. Moreover, behind all those images there is only one entity providing for countless formats.

This is Sikhi's metaphysical and religious position. God is everything, and everything is God – the world is either identical with God or is an expression of God's nature. Therefore, everything that exists constitutes a sacred unity, and this all-inclusive unity is divine. Every existing entity originates from and is an integral part of *that one Being* we call *Ik Onkaar*, God, or Waheguru, and all forms of reality are either modes of appearances of this Reality or identical with it. Then, through *Ik Onkaar's* manifestation within us, we are destined to become self-realized as godlike.

This sacred word of Sikh faith enunciates the principle of the unity of humanity, environment, and all creation. It states

that the human spirit is engaged in a collective growth process and that oneness is the motivating force in humankind's collective evolution.

One spirit and one unified world end all tension between the finite and infinite and thus form the basis of unity among all humans; we may experience God by experiencing that unity of God's creation. In God alone can we transcend the divisions inherent in our separatist attitudes of "mine" and "yours," and "we" and "others." This spirit lifts us from the narrow confines that divide us and are the source of prejudice and discrimination.

From the sacred symbol of *Ik Onkaar* derives another doctrine fully elaborated in the later verses of Japji – the doctrine of *Hukam* (ਹੁਕਮ). It provides us with a sense of the universe as God's blueprint, the *Hukam*. This derivation is evident in the following hymn. The hymn simply states that all laws of nature, regardless of how we are accustomed to defining and classifying them, are God's purpose in action. They permeate all creations and manifestations of ONE. Guru Nanak says:

ਏਕੇ ਹੁਕਮੁ ਵਰਤੈ ਸਭ ਲੇਈ॥ ਏਕਸੁ ਤੇ ਸਭ ਓਪਤਿ ਹੋਈ॥
 ਰਾਹ ਦੇਵੈ ਖਸਮੁ ਏਕੇ ਜਾਣੁ ॥ ਗੁਰ ਕੈ ਸਬਦਿ ਹੁਕਮੁ ਪਛਾਣੁ॥
 ਏਕੋ ਹੁਕਮੁ ਵਰਤੈ ਸਭ ਲੋਝੈ॥ ਏਕਸੁ ਤੇ ਸਭ ਓਪਤਿ ਹੋਝੈ॥
 ਰਾਹ ਦੋਵੈ ਖਸਮੁ ਏਕੋ ਜਾਣੁ॥ ਗੁਰ ਕੈ ਸਬਦਿ ਹੁਕਮੁ ਪਛਾਣੁ॥

The blueprint of God's Will prevails throughout all the worlds. All of them arise from the One. There may be seen multiple avenues, but we must consider them as one. Through the Guru's teachings, we learn to realize God's Will.

(SGGS 223)

Ik Onkaar is followed by eight sacred words describing divine attributes that humans must emulate to be God-like. Their emulation is a dynamic realization that those attributes are ours on account of the divine within us.

ਸਤਿ ਨਾਮੁ (सति नामु), *Sat Naam*, the first divine attribute, means God within us identified as Eternal Truth, which is our real identity, our true name, the truth identity. By meditating on *Sat Naam* we are liberated from our worldly identities. Our real identity is not our worldly name, worldly religion, nation, or profession; it is that which characterizes the name of God – and the name of God is Truth, and that is our name, our real identity. In Sikhi, the *Naam* refers to the Divine Identity within us and within everything around us.

The human mind with animal instincts confuses human beings with false identities. It creates its own concept, its own identity. When we meditate on Sat Naam, we hear the Divine Identity within us responding. And when we experience the Naam consciousness, we hear the sound of the Divine within us and in everything around us.

All social identities are given to us to cope with everyday existence, but those identities work to convince us that we are the things that the labels describe — this way they pigeonhole us into many entities. Some are intended to preserve our evolutionary history; others to trap us in the present or the future; still, others to enslave us to serve the culture and society. As long as we can recognize the identities as worldly designations, distinct from the real and eternal identity, we remain liberated from the worldly bondage, a necessary condition for our spiritual realization. We need to understand that these identities keep our mind engaged in our mundane existence and in social servitude.

The sacred word Sat Naam instills in us the Cosmic Awareness as our true identity. Guru Arjan underscores this belief as follows:

ਕਿਰਤਮ ਨਾਮ ਕਥੇ ਤੇਰੇ ਜਿਹਬਾ॥ ਸਤਿ ਨਾਮੁ ਤੇਰਾ ਪਰਾ ਪੂਰਬਲਾ॥
किरतम नाम कथे तेरे जिहबा॥ सति नामु तेरा परा पूरबला॥

You speak those names that are given to you or that serve to indicate the deeds or professions required of you. But Sat Naam identifies you with the Eternal Truth.

(SGGS 1083)

In the following verses, Guru Arjan points out that everything, except the divine identity, is transient and false:

ਨਾਮ ਬਿਨਾ ਸਭਿ ਕੂੜੁ ਗਾਲ੍ਹੀ ਹੋਛੀਆ॥

नाम बिना सभि कूडु गाल्ही होछीआ॥

Without the Naam, everything else is false and worthless.

(SGGS 761)

The Guru-oriented people are, as Guru Nanak says in the following verse, averse to falsehood or transient truth; they love only the eternal truth and remain forever engaged in its contemplation:

ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਕੂੜੁ ਨ ਭਾਵਈ ਸਚਿ ਰਤੇ ਸਚ ਭਾਇ॥

गुरमुखि कूडु न भावई सचि रते सच भाइ॥

The Gurmukhs or the Guru-oriented do not like falsehood. They are imbued with Truth and love only Truth.

(SGGS 22)

ਕਰਤਾ ਪੁਰਖ (करता पुरखु) *Kartaa Purakh*, the second divine attribute, means God as the creative soul. The Guru urges us to meditate on it and to discover our own creative force by identifying it with God, the Creative Force behind all creations. This sacred word inculcates in us the sense that the Divine is the doer through us and that we are not passive observers of reality. When the creative force in us becomes activated, we begin to create in partnership with God the Creator. Guru Arjan speaks of his revelation and the divine force working within him as follows:

ਪਿਤਾ ਹਮਾਰੇ ਪ੍ਰਗਟੇ ਮਾਝ॥ ਪਿਤਾ ਪੂਤ ਰਲਿ ਕੀਨੀ ਸਾਂਝ॥

पिता हमारे प्रगटे माझ॥ पिता पूत रलि कीनी सांझ॥

My Father has revealed Himself within me. The Father and son have joined together in partnership to create.

(SGGS 1141)

It is the Guru Granth view that the human soul is not a passive observer of reality but a partner in divine creativity. Its nature is to expand and unfold its full potential. For example, the evolution of the human species is a unique creation. The impulse to evolve is thus inherent in the very nature of life. As creators in partnership with the Creator, we are not limited to evolving through tiny, incremental steps. With our potent imaginations, we can design and manifest dramatic and profound changes in our lives and the world around us. How awesome responsibility and a challenge!

Our challenge is to break free of our present concept of the soul as a static entity and discover it as a dynamic force working in us creatively. Once we have this discovery, we may dream new dreams that lead us to experience the Ultimate through human creativity.

Our belief in, and meditation on, the sacred word *karta purakh* enable our mind to stay above the undesirable ego. Bereft of that belief and meditation, we become self-absorbed and egoistic, believing that we are the doers of everything. Consequently, our faith in the self alone as the doer, as the measure of this life, separates us from the Divine. By believing that we do not owe our creativity to the Divine Force, we show lack of gratitude and humility, being tied to the self, and do not know the possibilities of creativity in human life. The individual needs to learn to be a creator and at the same time to surrender to the Inner Divinity.

ਨਿਰਭਉ (निरभउ), *Nirbhau* (*nir* means “without” + *bhau* means “fear”), the third divine attribute to emulate, refers to God as fearlessness within us. “Meditate on that God who is devoid of fear,” instructs the Guru, so that you are liberated from what haunts you in your waking hours and during your sleep – fear of poverty, of violence, of helplessness, of communal judgment, of

the Day of Judgment, and fear of disease, old age, loneliness, and death.

Recent researches in behavioral sciences reveal that the evil of fear makes people most miserable social creatures and that most people are consumed with the desire for freedom from fear. It seems the challenge of attaining a state of fearlessness, a most consuming human preoccupation, is at odds with all the objectives of modern life. Humans have created a world of competition, causing fear of competition from others for jobs and resources for life, natural or industrial, and causing a culture of fear in numerous other ways, such as fear of not winning, fear of losing – losing job, house, health, insurance, youth, beauty, relationship, and ultimately life.

A fearless state is so rare a phenomenon that, not surprisingly, the aim of all world thinkers, through the ages, has been how to achieve and maintain inner harmony without fear. Among them, Socrates' appeal, "Know thyself," was the last attempt of a free mind to ask the world to gauge its own depth and to attain inner harmony. Buddha renounced the world only in protest against the fear of suffering and pain. Saint Kabir sought the path of liberation from the incarceration of fear. He said,

ਦੇਵ ਕਰਹੁ ਦਇਆ ਮੇਰਿ ਮਾਰਗਿ ਲਾਵਹੁ ਜਿਤੁ ਭੈ ਬੰਧਨ ਤੂਟੈ॥

देव करहु दइआ मोहि मारगि लावहु जितु भै बंधन तूटे॥

O Divine Guru! Show me compassion, and put me on the path that may free me from the incarceration of fear.

(SGGS 475)

According to Sikh philosophy, a follower begins to experience the consciousness of the fearless state with the strengthening of his/her belief that the fearless entity of the Divine resides within each of us. Guru Ram Das continues with the same thought as follows:

ਕਾਇਆ ਨਗਰਿ ਬਸਤਹਰਿ ਸੁਆਮੀ ਹਰਿ ਨਿਰਭਉ ਨਿਰਵੈਰੁ ਨਿਰੰਕਾਰਾ॥

ਕਾੜਆ ਨਗਰਿ ਬਸਤਹਰਿ ਸੁਆਮੀ ਹਰਿ ਨਿਰਭਤ ਨਿਰਕੈਰੁ ਨਿਰੰਕਾਰਾ॥

Where does the Eternal Master who is without fear, without vengeance (antipathy), and without form reside?

(SGGS 720)

The above verse by Guru Ram Das raises a question about the abode of *Har Swami* who does not experience fear or animosity. All seekers of the Eternal Master want to know where God lives – in what city or village, in what continent or country. The answer is God is both immanent and transcendent, within and without. God permeates the entire universe and lives in the human heart, too, the seat of human fear and animosity. Moreover, when a devotee experiences Him in his/her heart, all his/her fear and malice disappear.

Connecting with Guru Ram Das's question, Guru Arjan asks, as if using the Socratic Method, why fear would spring if God the fearless is within us:

ਓਹੁ ਅਬਿਨਾਸੀ ਰਾਇਆ॥

ਨਿਰਭਉ ਸੰਗਿ ਤੁਮਾਰੈ ਬਸਤੇ ਇਹੁ ਡਰਨੁ ਕਹਾ ਤੇ ਆਇਆ॥

ਓਹੁ ਅਬਿਨਾਸੀ ਰਾੜਆ॥

ਨਿਰਭਤ ਸੰਗਿ ਤੁਮਾਰੈ ਬਸਤੇ ਝਹੁ ਡਰਨੁ ਕਹਾ ਤੇ ਆੜਆ॥

God is the eternal, indestructible master. God is fearless and abides within you. Then, whence does the fear emanate, why would you be afraid?

(SGGS 206)

Believing that fearlessness is a divine virtue to be realized by meditation on God the *nirbhau*, Guru Nanak emphasizes the worship of the fearlessness through the sacred word of *nirbhau* in *mool mantar*. Guru Arjan, then, makes the purpose of worship obvious in the following verse:

ਨਿਰਭਉ ਜਪੈ ਸਗਲ ਭਉ ਮਿਟੈ॥

ਨਿਰਭਤ ਜਪੈ ਸਗਲ ਭਤ ਮਿਟੈ॥

If you meditate upon the Fearless, all fears will vanish.

(SGGS 293)

Guru Amar Das had earlier stressed the same point in the following verse:

ਜਿਨ ਨਿਰਭਉ ਜਿਨ ਹਰਿ ਨਿਰਭਉ ਧਿਆਇਆ ਜੀ ਤਿਨ ਕਾ ਭਉ ਸਭੁ ਗਵਾਸੀ॥

जिन निरभउ जिन हरि निरभउ धिआइआ जी तिन का भउसभु गवासी॥

Those who meditate on the Fearless One become fearless – all their fears are dispelled.

(SGGS 11)

This theology of fearlessness took a concrete shape in Guru Teg Bahadur. It impelled him to create a worldwide system of spiritual behavior that urged the spiritual seekers to be neither agents, nor objects, of fear. In the following *shalok* he lays out this rule for human behavior that a person of God should neither fear nor frighten anyone:

ਭੈ ਕਾਹੂ ਕਉ ਦੇਤ ਨਹਿ ਨਹਿ ਭੈ ਮਾਨਤ ਆਨ॥

ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਸੁਨਿ ਰੇ ਮਨਾ ਗਿਆਨੀ ਤਾਹਿ ਬਖਾਨਿ॥

भै काहू कउ देत नहि नहि भै मानत आन॥

कहु नानक सुनि रे मना गिआनी ताहि बखानि॥

One who does not frighten anyone and is not afraid of anyone or anything either, says Nanak, listen, my mind: call that person spiritually wise.

(SGGS 1427)

ਨਿਰਵੈਰ (निरवैर), *Nirvair* (*nir* means “without” + *vair* means “enmity”), the fourth divine attribute, characterizes God as one without animosity or malice. “Meditate on that God who is *Nirvair*,” instructs the Guru, so that you will begin to look at others without animus: consequently, you may achieve that state of life in which you feel free from ill feelings toward others, such feelings that take away your power to love others. Our feeling of *vair* (animosity) makes us see *vair* all around us, thus perpetuating violence in the world. Guru Arjan illustrates this thought beautifully in the following verse:

ਇਕੁ ਸਜਣੁ ਸਭਿ ਸਜਣਾ ਇਕੁ ਵੈਰੀ ਸਭਿ ਵਾਦਿ॥

इकु सजणु सभि सजणा इकु वैरी सभि वादि॥

If the One within me is my friend, then all around me are my friends. If there is animosity within, then all around me are in conflict with me.

(SGGS 957)

It is often observed that Sikhs who practice meditation of *moolmantar* refuse to hate even their enemies, even those who wish them grievous harm. By practicing the *nirvair* attitude, they discover the power of love over hatred. They learn that hate takes away their power of love and reason, and that animosity deprives them of experiencing the joy of love for others. Freedom from malice saves them from experiencing the sickness resulting from their ill will to others.

To learn to love and reason from the deep of their heart is a form of religious practice Sikhs learn from their *mool mantar* meditation. Guru Gobind Singh made his congregation hear the explanation of Bhai Kanhaiya who was caught offering water to fallen enemy soldiers. As a Sikh, Bhai Kanhaiya explained, his trusting and healing the enemy expressed his belief in the presence of the Creator in everybody. It was his way of confirming the evolution of Sikh faith in a God that is both immanent and transcendent.

Meditation on the sacred word *nirvair* would enable Sikhs to realize their world order based on *sarbat ka bhalla* principle.

For the past three centuries, every Sikh has been praying for achieving the ideal state of being *nirvair* personally and the well-being of all people universally. Every Sikh individually and all Sikhs collectively make the following statement and repeat it in the daily congregation:

ਨਾਨਕ ਨਾਮ ਚੜ੍ਹਦੀ ਕਲਾ ਤੇਰੇ ਭਾਣੇ ਸਰਬੱਤ ਕਾ ਭਲਾ॥

May the Name of God, as taught by Nanak, prevail in the world, and may all humankind prosper by God's will.

-- Ending of Ardaas

ਅਕਾਲ ਮੂਰਤਿ (अकाल मूर्ति), *Akaal Moorat* (*Akaal* means “timeless” + *Moorat* means “image” or embodiment), the fifth divine attribute to emulate, is God as the Being within and beyond Time. “Meditate on that eternal verity,” says the Scripture, which is not subject to time cycles, which is free from life and death.

By meditating on this sacred word, we realize the timeless and deathless spirit within us, the real self that never dies. Then, we learn the real meaning of life and death by understanding the *akaal moorat*, nature of the real self.

Moreover, when we experience that spiritual awakening, we begin to reflect a sense of eternal truth and reality in our behavior and our dealings with society and its environment. Guru Amar Das stresses this goal of human life as follows:

ਮੂਲੁ ਪਛਾਣਹਿ ਤਾਂ ਸਹੁ ਜਾਣਹਿ ਮਰਣ ਜੀਵਣ ਕੀ ਸੋਝੀ ਹੋਈ॥

मूलु पछाणहि तां सहु जाणहि मरण जीवण की सोझी होई॥

Identify your real basis and origin; then you shall know your Master, and then you will comprehend the real meaning of life and death.

(SGGS 441)

The other aspect of it is that the human mind that contains numerous memes is ever changing. These memes go through births and deaths numerous times in any human life. Guru Nanak is teaching us about the life and death of these memes.

ਅਜੂਨੀ (अजूनी), *Ajooni*, the sixth divine attribute, describes God as one beyond incarnation or reincarnation. Recognize that God within you – that one who is never born and never dies, who is totally unlimited by the bounds of body, form, or image, and who is not an anthropomorphic image.

It would be relevant to emphasize that the Gurbani does not approve God’s anthropomorphism. The term (*anthrop* in Greek means “human being” and *morphe* means “shape”) is defined as assigning human attributes to nonhuman entities, such as nature, animals, and divine beings. World literature abounds in its usage as do most religions. Most men and women have employed it

through the centuries as a necessary means of comprehending and relating to God.

Sikhism, however, considers it an anathema to assign human attributes to, or worship anthropomorphic representations of, an omnipotent and omnipresent God. Comparing it with Hinduism and Abrahamic religions such as Islam, Judaism, and Christianity, it stands in contrast to them in its opposition to anthropomorphizing God. Many adherents of those world religions feel more at home worshipping anthropomorphic gods or the God that partakes of human qualities that his devotees can relate to and is not impersonal. As is taught in Mool Mantar, Sikhism adheres to a belief in God manifested in creation without a specific humanoid form, status, or qualities.

According to nineteenth-century German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, the concept of the Deity has evolved progressively through the ages from the worship of gods in the shape of animals, a practice called theriomorphism (Greek *therion*, "animal"; *morphe*, "shape") to a belief in anthropomorphism and polytheism, and then in monotheism. Hegel also believed that the concept of anthropomorphism reached a culmination point in the Christian belief that God took human form and that Jesus Christ was both fully human and fully divine.⁴⁹ Such belief is in contrast to Sikh beliefs.

Our relationship with God, our soul being God's manifestation in us, makes us *ajooni*; therefore, meditation on this attribute of the Creator enables us to realize that evolution.

When we live in animal consciousness, we go through numerous lives of animal instincts and animal behaviors. Thus, in our lifespan, we live and die continually whenever we think and act like animals and their species, or when we live and think as social entities, or live in the lower forms of consciousness.

For example, Guru Arjan illustrates below how one may go through many animalistic states of mind when one is deprived of the spiritual vision bestowed by the Guru's teachings:

ਗੁਰ ਮੰਤ੍ਰ ਹੀਣਸਯ ਜੇ ਪ੍ਰਾਣੀ ਪ੍ਰਿਗੰਤ ਜਨਮ ਭ੍ਰਸਟਣਹ॥

ਗੁਰ ਮੰਤ੍ਰ ਹੀਣਸਯ ਜੋ ਪ੍ਰਾਣੀ ਧਿਗੰਤ ਜਨਮ ਭ੍ਰਸਟਣਹ॥

That mortal who lacks the wisdom of Guru's Mantra – lives a cursed and contaminated life.

ਬੁਕਰਹ ਸੂਕਰਹ ਗਰਧਭਹ ਕਾਕਹ ਸਰਪਨਹ ਤੁਲਿ ਖਲਹ॥

ਕੂਕਰਹ ਸੂਕਰਹ ਗਰਧਭਹ ਕਾਕਹ ਸਰਪਨਹ ਤੁਲਿ ਖਲਹ॥

That blockhead lives like just a dog, a pig, a jackass, a crow, a snake.

(SGGS 1356)

Prior to Guru Arjan, Guru Amar Das too had criticized those who do not contemplate the Guru's wisdom, saying that they suffer the states of consciousness of lower life entities by going through the seemingly endless cycle of life and death of animal instincts:

ਮਰਿ ਮਰਿ ਜੰਮਰਿ ਸਬਦੁ ਨ ਵੀਚਾਰਹਿ॥

ਮਰਿ ਮਰਿ ਜਮਹਿ ਸਬਦੁ ਨ ਵੀਚਾਰਹਿ॥

They continuously experience the cycle of birth and death of mind and spirit when they do not seek wisdom from the Guru's teachings.

(SGGS 1045)

Through the divine consciousness of *ajooni*, we are liberated from the cycle of life and death and reach a true state of nirvana within a human lifespan. This is in contrast to the ancient Indian belief in meditating one's life away to end transmigration cycles in the future. By realizing *ajooni* our inner self evades living and dying as the state of mind of thousands of animal species.

Guru Nanak prepared his followers to end the ever-changing cycles of different forms of consciousness within a human lifespan.

ਸੈਭੰ (ਸੈਭੰ), *Saibhang*, the seventh divine attribute, describes God as self-created, self-existent, self-creating, and beyond beginning or ending. "Meditate on this divine attribute of *saibhang*," says the Scripture; by so doing you will inculcate similar characteristics in you. This divine attribute is reflected in

the human soul, which too is self-created, self-existent, self-creating, and beyond beginning or ending.

By meditating on this aspect of God, a person learns to transcend the limitations as a mortal being, and realize the distinction between "being" and the "one who is overcome." Guru Nanak explains it this way:

ਕਾਲੁ ਬਿਕਾਲੁ ਭਏ ਦੇਵਾਨੇ॥ ਸਬਦੁ ਸਹਜ ਰਸੁ ਅੰਤਰਿ ਮਾਨੇ॥

ਕਾਲੁ ਬਿਕਾਲੁ ਭਏ ਦੇਵਾਨੇ॥ ਸਬਦੁ ਸਹਜ ਰਸੁ ਅੰਤਰਿ ਮਾਨੇ॥

Time and Timelessness become meaningless concepts for those who imbibe the sublime essence of the Shabad in their minds.

(SGGS 1021)

ਗੁਰ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ (ਗੁਰਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ), *Gur Parsad*, the eighth divine attribute and last word of *moolmantar*, refers to the gratefulness of Guru-in-God's blessing and grace. "Meditate on *Gur parsad* with a sense of gratitude," says the Guru. It will connect you to, and enable you to merge in, the Divine consciousness.

When we meditate on *mool mantar*, we emulate these divine attributes of God in our mind, consciousness, and behavior and, as a result, feel liberated from the bondage of humanoid existence, eventually becoming one with God and even god-like.

However, this will happen only when we invoke blessings of the Guru-in-God by meditating on the theology of *Gur parsad*, essentially meaning the grace of God. When we inculcate and realize the meaning of gratitude through the Guru's teachings, we begin to live in gratitude, thus gratitude becoming our eternal attitude.

Gratitude is a fundamental and universal spiritual principle in all religious traditions, but perhaps more so in Sikhism. While celebrated once a year at a festival of Thanksgiving in the Western tradition, the Sikh tradition encourages that celebration in the lives of its followers on a regular basis.

Attitudes and acts of thanksgiving are basic in Sikh religious ceremonies, festivals, and celebrations. Inculcation of

gratitude releases the underlying moral and spiritual forces in each one of us; we use them for the benefit of humanity as a whole and raise society to a higher level of culture.

The Guru Granth prescribes gratitude as one form of worship. Guru Nanak says,

ਗਾਵੈ ਕੇ ਦਾਤਿ ਜਾਣੈ ਨੀਸਾਣੁ॥

गावै को दाति जाणै नीसाणु॥

Some sing of His gifts and recognize the gifts as signs of His Presence. (SGGS 1)

When we recognize God through His creation, particularly what we perceive as divine gifts to us, we align ourselves in harmony with nature and all creations. This alignment, then, helps us to open ourselves to God's gifts in other religions. The water of thanksgiving nourishes the roots of spirituality and religions, helping them become dynamic, creative, and altruistic.

The spirit of thanksgiving permits different religious traditions to live side by side in friendly cooperation, enabling them to develop harmonious and peaceful relationships among them. Obviously, cultivation or inculcation of the spirit of gratitude is of great relevance to the solutions for contemporary crises of extremism from which humanity is suffering.

God's grace and benevolence are limitless. He/She supplies us with vast resources to fulfill our needs. We receive, for instance, light and heat from the sun, water from the clouds, grains from the Earth, and oxygen from the atmosphere. He created milk in our mother's breasts before we were born. The Creator lets us rest in sleep at night. He takes care of the creation, without expecting anything in return.

Thus, Guru Nanak ends his profound composition of *mool mantar* with a meditation on *Gur parsad*. Guru Amar Das underscores its significance by saying,

ਨਦਰਿ ਕਰੇ ਸੇਈ ਸਚੁ ਪਾਏ ਗੁਰ ਕੈ ਸਬਦਿ ਵੀਚਾਰਾ॥

नदरि करे सोई सचु पाए गुर कै सबदि वीचारा॥

One who is blessed with God's grace reflects upon the Word of the Guru's teachings and reaches the realization of Truth within.

(SGGS 570)

Conclusion

According to the Sikh scriptures, the *mantar* is a sacred word or verse of Sikh faith meant to be realized in the deep consciousness as sacred knowledge, whereas most people in India view the term *mantar* as a mysterious verse or formula designed to praise or invoke a deity for a specific purpose. The Sikhs believe that the inaugural *mantar* of the Guru Granth, commonly called *Mool Mantar*, is purposed to inculcate in human consciousness the select attributes of God out of countless attributes of God, and that such inculcation occurs when they meditate on these attributes. The belief is that these aspects of the Creator, when meditated on and practiced with conscious and conscientious devotion, elevate a devotee to a godlike personality.

The commencing verse of Sri Guru Granth Sahib is believed to be the essence of Sikh philosophy. Guru Nanak received it during his meditative trance at the banks of the Bein River in Sultanpur Lodhi in 1496. Therefore, the words in the composition of *mool mantar* may be termed as the Sikh Words of Faith or even, to use the terminology of world scriptures, the Sikh Articles of Faith. They draw our mind to the divine aspects that the Guru has identified for us to meditate upon. The goal is to raise human consciousness to God-consciousness within the human lifespan.

To sum it up, everyone who meditates on and practices *mool mantar* will worship the Infinite and convert one's finite consciousness by *Gur Parsad* to divine consciousness, mirroring godlike human behavior. This very objective of the Guru, as Guru Nanak defined it, may be quoted as follows:

ਜਿਨਿ ਮਾਣਸ ਤੇ ਦੇਵਤੇ ਕੀਏ ਕਰਤ ਨ ਲਾਗੀ ਵਾਰ॥

ਜਿਨਿ ਮਾਣਸ ਤੇ ਦੇਵਤੇ ਕੀਏ ਕਰਤ ਨ ਲਾਗੀ ਵਾਰ॥

He made angels out of humans, without delay.

(SGGS 462)

CHAPTER 13

CONCLUSION

Sri Guru Granth Sahib respects all people no matter what color, caste, creed, or gender. Its focus is the worship of *Ik (Ek) Onkaar*, or Waheguru, i.e. One Awesome Wisdom, One all-pervasive Reality manifested in the universe. It shows us the way for a life that has meaning and peace. It celebrates the values that make the world a better place to live in: love for humanity and environment, spirituality, pluralism, unity in diversity, inclusiveness, and altruism. And it inspires us to be engaged in good deeds for the family, community, country, and world.

The most significant and everlasting sources of strength identified by Guru Nanak are *Naam*, *Daan*, and *Isnaan*. *Naam*, literally meaning name, is mindful awareness of Divine Presence. *Daan*, literally meaning charity, giving, or donating, is to live the culture of altruism while seeking Divine Benevolence. And *Isnaan*, literally meaning bathing or cleansing, is to implement ethics of good deeds that cleanse the body and mind. Guru Nanak asked his followers to make these part of their lives; the Guru Granth Sahib elaborates on their significance fully.

No doubt, the Guru Granth should matter to all of humanity. Its very opening verse, *Mool Mantar*, for instance, signals that the founding Guru is invoking no ethnic or sectarian deity. The object of his spirituality is *Ik Onkar*; One Reality manifested in all creations, one that subsumes and transcends all gods and goddesses and ought to be worshipped by the whole world. Addressed by different names by different people – such as

CONCLUSION

Ram, God, and Allah – *Ik Onkar* alone is the ultimate Supreme Being. It creates, activates, and nourishes the universe.

Bhai Gurdas, the Sikh theologian of the highest repute, wrote that Guru Nanak, during his dialogues with the Siddhas (Hindu godmen), told them about his mission:

ਕੂੜੁ ਅਮਾਵਸਿ ਵਰਤਿਆ ਹਉ ਭਾਲਣਿ ਚੜ੍ਹਿਆ ਸੰਸਾਰ॥

ਕੂੜੁ ਅਮਾਵਸਿ ਵਰਤਿਆ ਹਤ ਭਾਲਣਿ ਚੜ੍ਹਿਆ ਸੰਸਾਰ॥

I am to visit with people of the world as they are being thrown in the darkness of falsehood.

(Bhai Gurdas, *Vaar* 1, Pauri 29)

Bhai Gurdas continues to describe the Guru's concern for the whole universe as follows:

ਬਾਬੇ ਡਿਠੀ ਪਿਰਥਮੀ ਨਵੈ ਖੰਡਿ ਜਿਥੈ ਤਕਿ ਆਹੀ॥

ਬਾਬੇ ਤਾਰੇ ਚਾਰਿ ਚਕਿ ਨਉਖੰਡਿ ਪ੍ਰਿਥਮੀ ਸਚਾ ਢੇਆ॥

ਗੁਰਮਖਿ ਕਲਿ ਵਿਚ ਪਰਗਟੁ ਹੋਆ॥

ਬਾਬੇ ਡਿਠੀ ਪਿਰਥਮੀ ਨਵੈ ਖੰਡਿ ਜਿਥੈ ਤਕਿ ਆਹੀ॥

ਬਾਬੇ ਤਾਰੇ ਚਾਰਿ ਚਕਿ ਨਉਖੰਡਿ ਪ੍ਰਿਥਮੀ ਸਚਾ ਢੇਆ॥

ਗੁਰਮਖਿ ਕਲਿ ਵਿਚ ਪਰਗਟੁ ਹੋਆ॥

Baba Nanak visualized all continents on the earth, determined the need to speak the truth to them, and then decided to reach all of them with his universal message.

(Bhai Gurdas, *Vaar* 1, Pauri 28 and 27)

Thus, Guru Nanak was known as *Jagat Guru*, meaning the spiritual light for the world. He was there to teach people how to imbibe the truth. With his boundless wisdom, he rescued the world in the Age of Darkness. Similarly, his successors continued to be called world preceptors. For example, the Bhatt's called Guru Angad the world preceptor.

Then, it should become evident that the scripture Guru Nanak commenced was meant for the entire world, not for Sikhs only. The first Guru and other authors of the scripture are addressing all people in their verses. In other words, the

Gurbani's message of love, altruism, and goodness is for the amelioration of the whole human race.

As a global Guru, the Guru Granth affirms the humanity of all people. As a norm, Sikhs and other followers of the Sikh scripture, too, express this affirmation and reflect it in their welcoming attitude toward outsiders worshipping along with them in every Sikh house of worship. This openness and inclusiveness of the Guru Granth have always been part of the Sikh tradition and attitude concerning outsiders. The Gurdwara service always welcomes and attracts adherents of all religions, including non-believers.

The Sikh scripture came into being to fulfill the religious and spiritual needs of people irrespective of their ethnic or other differences. Originating with Guru Nanak and compiled by fifth Guru Arjan Dev, the Guru Granth took its final and complete form with Guru Gobind Singh's 1708 proclamation that Sikhs will revere it as their eternal Guru. The tenth Guru liberated the future Gurmat seekers from dependence on the vagaries of human gurus forever, but he also gave them the charge for understanding and following the Guru Granth Sahib and sharing it with the world at large.

We close this book with two verses, appropriately, one by Guru Arjan, the compiler of the Guru Granth Sahib and the other by Balvand and Satta, scholars in Guru Arjan's court. The first verse presents the world – all seven billion – as one family, with the Creator as our father. The second verse depicts the Guru Granth as an inexhaustible Guru's langar (free kitchen) of Gurbani for all members of this family.

Guru Arjan enjoins in the following verse all Sikhs and non-Sikhs alike to affirm our common humanity and kinship as children of One Father, the Supreme Guru:

ਏਕੁ ਪਿਤਾ ਏਕਸ ਕੇ ਹਮ ਬਾਰਿਕ ਤੂ ਮੇਰਾ ਗੁਰ ਹਾਈ॥

एकु पिता एकस के हम बारिक तू मेरा गुर हाई॥

CONCLUSION

One God our Father – of That One, we are his children. And You, That One, are my Guru.

(SGGS 611)

By describing all humans as siblings, created by the universal Creator, our Father, the fifth Guru lifts us from our mundane existence to a transcendental state in which we are united as a family – not divided by caste, class, tribe, nation, gender, or religion. One God, *Sat* Guru lights our path, removing the darkness, and enables us to navigate our life through the tempests of our worldly existence.

In the second verse as follows, Balvand and Satta glorify the Guru's sacred compiled work, the *Adi Granth*, as a source of inexhaustible knowledge meant to be distributed worldwide:

ਲੰਗਰੁ ਚਲੈ ਗੁਰ ਸਬਦਿ ਹਰਿ ਤੋਟਿ ਨ ਆਵੀ ਖਟੀਐ॥

ਖਰਚੇ ਦਿਤਿ ਖਸੰਮ ਦੀ ਆਪ ਖਰਚੀ ਖੈਰਿ ਦਬਟੀਐ॥

ਲੰਗਰੁ ਚਲੈ ਗੁਰ ਸਬਦਿ ਹਰਿ ਤੋਟਿ ਨ ਆਵੀ ਖਟੀਐ॥

ਖਰਚੇ ਦਿਤਿ ਖਸੰਮ ਦੀ ਆਪ ਖਰਚੀ ਖੈਰਿ ਦਬਟੀਐ॥

Langar, the free kitchen, of the Guru's Shabad has been opened; its supplies never run short. Its provisions were given by the Creator to be shared, and God would never let them run out.

(SGGS 967)

As envisioned by the fifth Guru, Balvand and Satta describe *Gurbani's* purpose as a never-ending *Guru shabad langar*. The metaphor of *langar* suggests the divine mission of *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*: which is to serve divine food *gratis* to all so that nobody will go hungry – no matter what their color, caste, sect, or gender, and no matter what their culture, language, status, ethnicity, or nationality. And the *langar* will never run out of provisions because it is eternally supplied, supported, and underwritten by the Creator.

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² Sikhi Wiki, Muslim devotees of Guru Nanak. www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/Muslim_Devotees. Muslim devotees of Guru Nanak were called *Mureed* or *Murid*.

³ Gurbachan Singh and Sondeep Shankar, *The Sikhs: Faith, Philosophy and Folks*, New Delhi: Roli Books, 1998, p 55. See also Wikipedia.

⁴ The Sikh Encyclopedia, Guru Gobind Singh. www.thesikhencyclopedia.com/biographical/gobind-singh-guru.

⁵ See Sikh Historian Ganda Singh and Dr. Harbans Lal on Bhai Nath Mal, a Sahajdhari Sikh. See Lal, 1999 for further discussion.

⁶ Harbans Singh, *Guru Tegh Bahadur*, New York City: Sterling Publishers, 1982, pp. 11-17.

⁷ Sri Guru Granth Sahib (Amritsar, India: Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), 1983, reprint). Completed in 1705 by Guru Gobind Singh and reprinted by SGPC, Amritsar. No English rendering is an exact translation but an approximate one attempting to communicate the sense of the original.

⁸ Bhai Gurdas (1551-1636), from *Sikh Encyclopedia*, much honored in Sikh learning and piety, was a leading figure in early Sikhism. He enjoyed the patronage of Guru Arjan and, under his

supervision, inscribed the first copy of the Sikh Scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib, which is still extant.

⁹ Bhai Nand Lal was the Poet Laureate of Guru Gobind Singh's court and his most loved disciple. He was asked by the Guru to compile the Guru's injunctions for the Sikhs to guide them after the Guru had completed his life's journey. The tenth Guru made himself available to converse with Bhai Nand Lal so as to guide him to compose his writings. Nand Lal wrote two *rehatnamas*: one known as *Rehatnama* written in 1695, four years before the Vaisakhi of 1699 (the day Guru Gobind Singh is known to have instituted the *khande di pahul*, translated as baptism of the Sword), and the other in 1699 known as *Tankhahnama*.

¹⁰ Piara Singh Padam, *Aad Granth Bhaasha te Shabad-Bhandhar*, Nanak Parkash Patrika, 6 (June), 113-126, 1994.

¹¹ Guru Nanak explained the difference between his words and his divine vision. He urged Sikhs to comprehend the divine mystery behind its verbal expression in order to control their instincts. For instance, he says:

ਏਨਾ ਅਖਰਾ ਮਹਿ ਜੇ ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਬੂਝੈ ਤਿਸੁ ਸਿਰਿ ਲੇਖੁ ਨ ਹੋਈ॥

एना अखरा महि जो गुरमुखि बूझै तिसु सिरि लेखु न होई॥

(SGGS 432)

¹² Hereafter all quotations from the Granth will be identified by an initialism of Sri Guru Granth Sahib, SGGS, followed by a page number.

¹³ *SriGranth.org*, by Kulbir Thind, Jasjeet Singh Thind, et al., a Sri Guru Granth Sahib search engine and resource for SGGS quotations in Gurmukhi and Devanagari scripts in Nirmala UI font, and their English translations. Hereafter all quotations will be identified by SGGS, followed by a page number.

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¹⁶ Sahib Singh, *About Compilation of Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, translated by Daleep Singh, Amritsar, India: Lok Sahit Parkashan, 1996.

¹⁷ Pashaura Singh, Diaspora Network Note, April 4, 2001.

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²⁰ John Marks Templeton, *The Humble Approach: Scientists Discover God*, Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press, 1995.

²¹ Harbans Lal, 'Power of Present in Shaping our Self-Image', *From Both sides of the Ocean*, 35, 12-17, 1996.

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²³ *India Today Magazine*, Special Issue, October 2, 2006.

²⁴ For discussion see: H. S. Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994.

²⁵ Harbans Lal, 2000.

²⁶ Roberto Mangabeira Ungar. *The Religion of the Future* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014). https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Religion_of_the_Future.

²⁷ Sikh Encyclopedia, Guru Gobind Singh.

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²⁸ Harbans Lal, 2002.

²⁹ Bhai Santokh Singh, *Sri Gur Partap Suraj Granth*, Raas 3, page 40, reprinted from *Khalsa Samachar*, 1984.

³⁰ Harbans Lal, 2002.

³¹ *Sikh Rehat Maryada*, Published by Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, 14th edition, 1978, p 10.

³² Harbans Lal, ‘Guru Granth Paath: The Sacred Reading’, *Understanding Sikhism – The Research Journal*. 2: 30-36. 2000.

³³ Harbans Lal, ‘Motivation for Naam Simran: The Sikh Way of Meditation’, *Guru Nanak: Ideals and Institutions*, H. S. Soch and Madanjit Kaur (edi.), Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University Press, 1998, 60-85.

³⁴ Harbans Lal, ‘Guru Granth Paath: The Sacred Reading’, *Understanding Sikhism – The Research Journal*. 2: 30-36. 2000.

³⁵ B. Alan Wallace, ‘Tibetan Buddhist Meditation’, *Tricycle Magazine Mental Discipline: Buddhism for Beginners*. <https://tricycle.org/magazine/tibetan-buddhist-meditation/>

³⁶ *Maya* is the phenomenal world, the material reality, deceptive and illusory, which lures human souls away from the Divine reality. Guru Amar Das describes aptly the effect of *Maya* on people, saying:

ਏਹ ਮਾਇਆ ਜਿਤੁ ਹਰਿ ਵਿਸਰੈ ਮੇਹੁ ਉਪਜੈ ਭਾਉ ਦੂਜਾ ਲਾਇਆ॥

एह माइआ जितु हरि विसरै मोहु उपजै भाउ दूजा लाइआ॥

In English it means: “*Under its influence the Creator is forgotten, worldly attachments take root, and the duality becomes the object of interest.*” (SGGS 921)

³⁷ For discussion on definition, see Harbans Lal, ‘Motivation for Naam Simran: The Sikh Way of Meditation’, *Guru Nanak: Ideals and Institutions*, H. S. Soch Singh and Madanjit Kaur (edi.), Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University Press, 1998, 60-85.

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