

# NISHAAN

NAGAARA



## **SPECIAL ISSUE**

**Annual Conference on  
Sri Guru Granth Sahib  
San Jose, USA**



*The Eighth Annual Conference on Sri Guru Granth Sahib, organised by the Chardi Kalaa Foundation, the San Jose Gurdwara Sahib and SikhNet was held on 7 September 2019 at San Jose in California, USA. One of the largest and arguably most beautiful gurdwaras in North America, the Gurdwara Sahib at San Jose was founded in San Jose, California, USA in 1985 by members of the then-rapidly growing Sikh community in the Santa Clara Valley.*



CHARDI KALAA  
FOUNDATION



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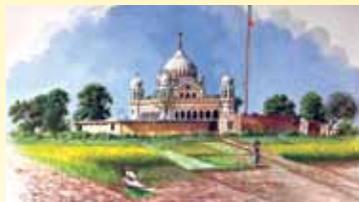
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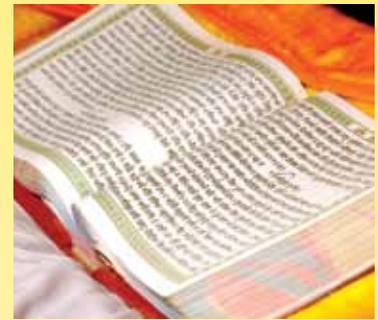


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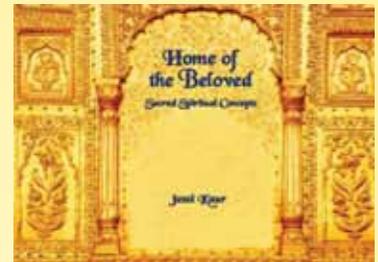
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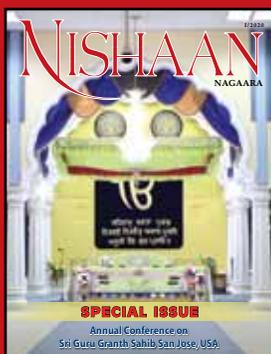


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Cover: Darbar Sahib at San Jose Gurdwara

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## BETWIXT & BETWEEN: Progressing Apace



There are two points to this Editorial. One is to address some issues and caveats that define the mission statement of a *vision*. The second part is on the essence of what the *Sri Guru Granth Sahib 2019 Conference* was about.

This is the eighth year of these yearly conclaves, brain child of the *Chardi Kalaa Foundation* housed in San Jose's majestic gurdwara. Eight years ago, the enterprise had connections with the *Sikh Review* but over the past six years it has cemented intimate relationship with the *Nishaan*; both publications are India-based classics in keeping their finger on the pulse of the Sikh community. *Chardi Kalaa* has now also developed links with *SikhNet*, the

primary and largest internet portal on Sikhi with a worldwide reach.

With these linkages our yearly conferences on Guru Granth and its message have put us on a path to reconstruct a *modus operandi* for Sikhs and Sikhi that is consistent with the teachings as we continue to understand them!

What exactly do we mean by this loaded statement? The purpose is not at all to reinvent Sikhi, which is both timeless and universal, with its structure clearly and wisely laid out by the Founder Gurus. But Sikhi has to be decoded and lived by us today and by the generations to come. The world is changing as are the issues that beset

us; similarly, changing are the instruments and tools of new realities in this wide world.

We live as Sikhs in a world full of people that barely know we exist, much less who we are. *They do not know us and we do not know them; more importantly, we hardly know ourselves.* These are matters that deserve and demand our attention.

The first step is to explore who we are and why we are the way we are. Where else to start but with the fundamentals that define and shape us? Hence these yearly conferences.

*Our medium: The art of conversation, dialogue and discussion.*

Many of us have immensely enjoyed being, so to say, bricks and mortar men and women, usually in designing research protocols and, in Sikhi, those who prefer to play with possibilities. It seems that we may charitably be labeled *idea-guys*, or alternatively summarily dismissed as by Kabir (*Baatan hee asmaan gavaavay; aessay logan se kya kahiyae*: Guru Granth Sahib p. 332).

Sikhs are at a pivotal moment in history. A small minority with a life-changing experience of the new and the old worlds hectically defining the untrodden path ahead. And that is us.

Our weapons: an unending curiosity and a rich treasury of the wisdom of Sikhi of which we know but a little. Endless opportunities beckon us. And this is our moment. *Carpe diem* as if no other way exists.

Parenthetically speaking, the new world and old realities are like the head and the heart that are often at loggerheads. Or is it the East and the West in the same space and time where we desperately hope that, contrary to Rudyard Kipling, the twain shall meet?

Our traditional ways give us a format and a language to bridge our differences and move forward. Remember that differences give birth to diversity and richness in thought and action while unity that follows is our strength. One without the other leaves us weak and ineffective.

Our realities have changed. Our basic educational framework is entirely different as is our language and base of experience and expectations. Where and how we live have different constraints

rooted in customs, habits and laws that govern us. Our neighbours are often strangers to us as are we to them. And a rapidly evolving technology governs our interaction with the world around us.

Effectively the world is a platform where (President) Trump and his policies have space but so do issues such as mixed marriages, birth control, divorce and adoption, human rights, race, health care and inequality, or *Keertan* and *Katha*, even *Rehat Maryada* or the place of *Sarbat Khalsa*. Pros and cons of Sikh Academic Chairs, too, are fair game. If Sikhi is a way of life, all such issues have a place. These issues enrich us.

So, I take notice of a new initiative – a periodic conversation on commercial television – new and defining its place on these issues, challengingly titled *The Way Forward* by a young talented Sikh lawyer Harjot Singh with two colleagues Ravinder Singh and I.J. Singh. The programme airs on *Jus Punjabi* and leans on people of the wider community around us, Sikhs and non-Sikhs, to parse matters that are common to all of us in the new and wide world.

We need to create models for discussion on all matters that touch life here on this earth, whether spiritual or mundane; sacred or profane. The traditional boundaries between “us” and “them” can’t be left unexplored. What should be the role of a government of the people in a democratic nation where all are created equal, demands ongoing and patient conversation.

In short, anything that affects life demands conversation where Sikh voices have a place. And Sikhs need not always speak with one voice. We must make room for conversation, differences, education, and change.

*Conversation demands that we talk with each other, not at each other.* The ultimate goal of honest productive communication remains unchanged. The idea is to disagree freely without ever becoming disagreeable.

Future symposia may even deal with traditional issues in Punjabi with guest speakers who are mavens of Gurbani or Sikh sangeet. Others may use English or a mixture of languages as necessary. The goal is communication here



in America where the audience is a *mélange* of ages and faiths.

We need to outline perhaps ten possible programmes and see how they pan out. We will need to track attendance and feedback from those who attend. This a model that should serve us today and tomorrow. Many will want more of it, others will excoriate it every day. If not, then we haven't done our job.

In the end we see this as free standing, economically viable institution that outlives its founders. Any shop that closes its doors when the founders close their eyes, is a failure.

### The 2019 Conference at San Jose

The Conference opened with *keertan* rendered by young Sikhs who performed in *Raag* with traditional instruments from the Guru period and Sikh tradition. These trainees of Professor Dalbir Singh and Bibi Leena Kaur set the right tone and aura. This took us to the next part of the day-long event: *Conversation and Dialogue*.

A much-needed panel discussion led by Jessi Kaur featured a mixture of old and young speakers. The topic: *Sikh Dating & Marriage in the Diaspora*. Nothing could be timelier. A multi-generational panel of young and not so young Sikh men and women wrestled boldly with the issues. Pushpinder Kaur, Amrita Ghumman, Simran Ghumman, Jagmohan Singh Sahni and Daljit Singh Viridi parsed the clash of the old and the new, the young and those who might be in the evening of the lives. Thoughtful and sorely needed. Such events are not meant to provide cookie cutter solutions but to point a path of exploration consistent with Gurbani and Sikhi and that is what it did. A few more follow-up events and a continuing dialogue remain essential.

Considering that 2019 marks 550 years since the advent of Guru Nanak and his mission that gave birth to Sikhi, several speakers highlighted this theme. Gurpreet Kaur took us on a travelogue of Sikh history, connecting us with Sikh heritage that is now in Pakistan. Brig. Rawel Singh followed with his profound command of Gurbani, Ralph

Singh with delightful humour to make serious points to ponder and I.J. Singh in an overview of Guru Nanak's message as transcending generations creating a trajectory of Sikhism. Jessi Kaur then followed with a poetic tribute to Guru Ramdas and how to connect with the divine within. It was delightful to hear a young Sikh with hardly any grey in his beard, Chetandeep Singh, speak masterfully about the intricacies of *Naam* – not an easy matter. We make special note of a presentation by Kuldeep Singh on a most unusual topic: *The Delightful Wit of Guru Nanak*.

The intensive programme also included thoughtful speeches by a few young speakers: Armeet Singh (*Vices, Khands, Humility, Equality and Grace*), Japleen Kaur (*18th Century Sikhs and Lessons for Today: How we can resolve them*), Geeta Kaur (*Salok from Japji Sahib and its Message today*), and 12 years old Sehaj Singh Basat, opined on events and teachings from our Sixth, Seventh and Eighth Guru. Note the themes in the young people's presentations: they are not simple nursery school stuff. They require considerable serious thought, work and effort.

This full day was followed by a formidable gathering for dinner and a very well laid out spread – a wonderful facility at the upscale gurdwara. Better yet the dinner speaker, Dr. Dalvir Singh Panu, who is also a serious scholar of *Janamsakhis* and related hagiographic literature. The hour was late and the material complex but first rate. His work deserves more dedicated time and attention. But it is refreshing to see lay Sikhs (apart from *Gyanis and Granthees*) parsing such ramifications of our religious lore.

The conference was live streamed again this year through *SikhNet*. In addition to the live audience at the Gurdwara San Jose in California, over 10,000 viewed it on line around the world. The videos of all the sessions, as well as the text of the papers and background information on the participants are accessible on the web at [www.chardikalaa.com](http://www.chardikalaa.com)

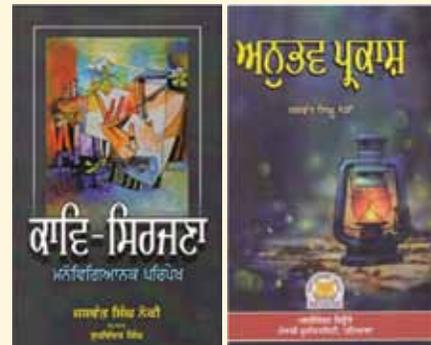
See you again next year!

**I.J. Singh, Inder Mohan Singh  
& Gurinder Pal Singh**



# In Reverence and Awe

Dr Jaswant Singh Neki, the renowned psychiatrist and prolific writer, metaphysical poet and leading scholar of Gurmat studies, a great supporter of the 'Chardi Kalaa Foundation' and Editorial Director of the 'Nishaan Nagaara' was remembered with much reverence and awe at the Eighth Annual Conference on Sri Guru Granth Sahib at San Jose Gurdwara.



Dr. Jaswant Singh Neki was not only a psychiatrist of international standing but also a prolific writer, award winning metaphysical poet, and a leading scholar of religious studies. He had devoted virtually his entire life to Gurmat studies in addition to winning recognition in his professional life as Director Post Graduate Institute (PGI) at Chandigarh and as Head of Department of Psychiatry at the All India Medical Institute New Delhi.

In the area of religious and literary activities, he had the rare distinction of being recognised by virtually all leading, relevant, organisations, having written 38 books of Punjabi literature and particularly on the Sikh faith.

The books released by Dr Inder Mohan Singh and Mrs. Kanwerjit Kaur Neki on 7 September 2019 were 'Kaav-Sirjana' and 'Anubhav Parkash', which Dr Jaswant Singh Neki was completing when he passed away.

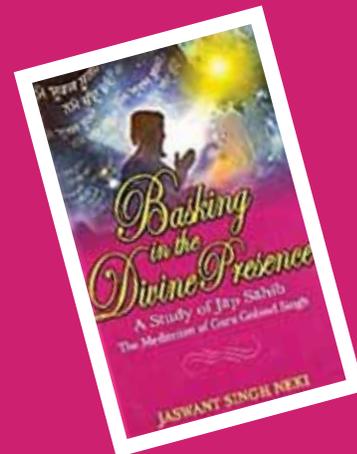
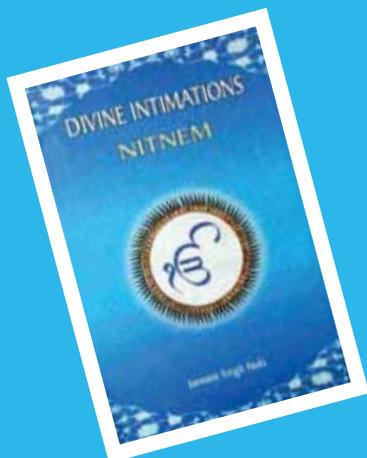


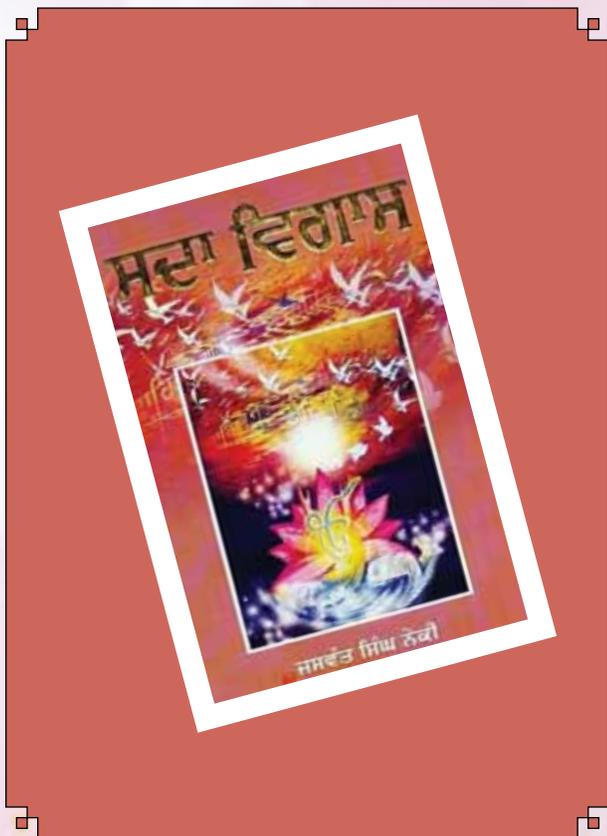
# Looking back :

## Dr Jaswant Singh Neki, the multifaceted personality

Some years back, the Nagaara Trust had organised a function at the India International Centre, New Delhi on the release of four books by Dr Jaswant Singh Neki : *Divine Intimations: Nit Nem*; *Basking in the Divine Presence : a Commentary on Jaap Sahib*; *Sada Vigas*: a collection of spiritual essays in Panjabi, and *Panjabi Has Vilas* which was on Panjabi folk humour.

As then recorded, Editor of *Nishaan Nagaara*, S Pushpindar Singh welcomed Dr Jaswant Singh Neki while S Anup Singh introduced the speakers. Dr Bhagwan Josh, Professor of History at JNU, eulogised the author's versatility : "renowned psychiatrist, a distinctive poet and a reputed theologian." According to him, Neki ji ranked with such poets as the venerable Bhai Vir Singh and Puran Singh, but was quite distinct from them. "Bhai Vir Singh espouses to give verse form to Sikh values somewhat pedagogically. Puran Singh thrills his readers with his inspired emotional and spiritual sensibility. Dr Jaswant Singh Neki with his global world view relates himself to basic human concerns and brings forth appreciable psychological insights and philosophical discernment to his suave verse".  
"Neki ji di sangat vich rangat hai."





Bhai Sikandar Singh, a Sikh theologian, spoke about Neki ji's book 'Divine Intimations' and elaborating, brought into relief how each baani of Nit Nem describes the Indescribable, 'the One' Universal God and also charts the way for the devotee to reach Him.

Prof I N Chowdhury, former Secretary of the Sahitya Academy, spoke about the book

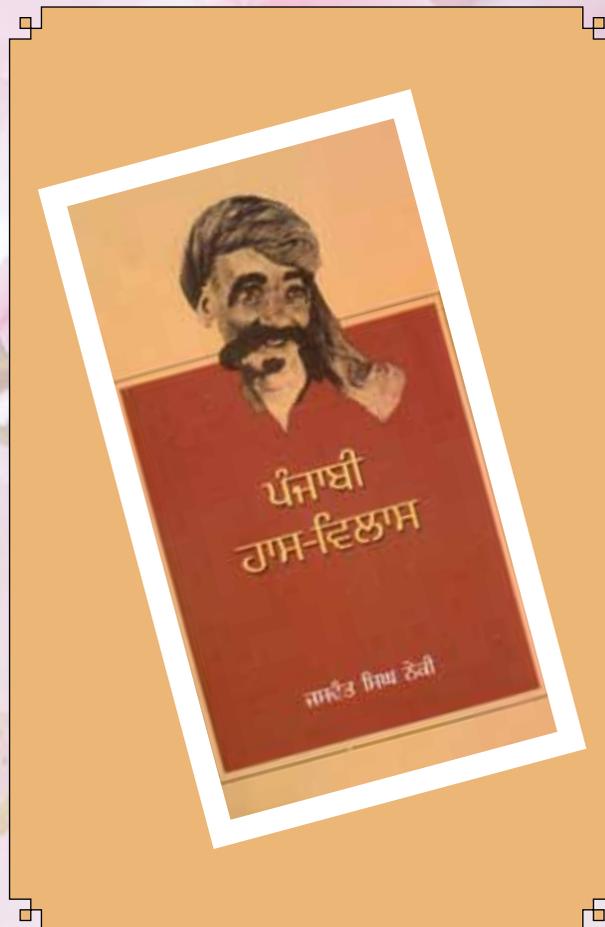
'Basking in the Divine Presence' and expressed his marvel on the amazing rhythms of

Jaap Sahib. "Dr Neki has not just translated this great spiritual composition

but has, in places, even further embellished it"!

Dr Mohinder Kaur Gill, a renowned Sikh scholar and former Principal of Mata Sundri College, talked about *Sada Vigas*, a seminal work that deserves a discussion forum for each one of its chapters. Dr Vanita observed that this book was valuable not only for its profound thought, but also for the aptness of its diction and distinctive style of its prose.

Dr Neki's book on Panjabi humour was commented on by the Director of the National Book Trust, who observed that Dr Neki was not only an academican, but also one with impressive personality and an attic wit that is reflected in his book on Panjabi humour.



In his characteristically modest response, Dr Jaswant Singh Neki thanked all the speakers for saying "only nice things about him", but was "painfully aware of his multifaceted inaptness". Quoting Farid he said, "*Gunhi bharia main phiran, lok kahin darvesh.*"

That was the inimitable and remarkable personality, Dr Jaswant Singh Neki and we are all blessed in having been guided by him.

Some of Dr Neki's writings which appeared in past Issues of the *Nishaan Nagaara*, are reproduced for readers.



Dr. Jaswant Singh Neki on

# SRI GURU GRANTH SAHIB

## A Unique Compendium of the Word Divine

**S**ri Guru Granth Sahib is not just a granth (a bound volume), it is a compendium of the Word Divine. It is a Guru (divine mentor), because the Word is the real Guru, not the physical body of the Guru. Guru Amar Das tells us

ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਨੇ ਸਭੁ ਕੇ ਵੇਖਦਾ ਜੇਤਾ ਜਗਤੁ ਸੰਸਾਰੁ ।  
ਡਿਠੈ ਮੁਕਤਿ ਨ ਹੋਵਈ ਜਿਚਰੁ ਸਬਦਿ ਨ ਕਰੇ ਵੀਚਾਰੁ ।

*The whole world does behold the Guru,  
One is liberated not by seeing by Him,  
But by contemplating his Word.*

SGGS p.594

So, Sri Guru Granth Sahib is the Guru that holds and shall continue to hold, the divine Word in perpetuity, for all times. The prefix Sri and the suffix Sahib are reverential epithets, the former derived from the Aryan tradition, and the latter from the Semitic. This itself underlines the transcultural import of this holy work. It transcends the narrow bounds of sectarianism and presents itself as the spiritual mentor for all mankind. Whoever becomes conversant with its message, is impelled to vouch for its universal nature. Arnold Toynbee, a historian of world renown, observed: "the Adi Granth' is part of mankind's common spiritual treasure" and, "the Sikh religion and its scripture the Adi Granth will have something of special value to the rest of the world."

Beside the works of the Sikh Gurus, this compendium also accommodates the works of a large number of Hindu and Muslim holy men. Thus it enshrines the core of the spirituality of diverse faiths. Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh faith said

ਸੂਰਜੁ ਏਕੇ ਰੁਤਿ ਅਨੇਕ ।  
ਨਾਨਕ ਕਰਤੇ ਕੇ ਕੇਤੇ ਵੇਸ ।

*Just as a single sun yields a variety of seasons,  
So too the Creator has many revelations.*

SGGS pp.12-13

Hence it is that the Sikhs must hold every divine revelation with due reverence. The following line of Bhakta Kabir, found in Sri Guru Granth Sahib underlines this instruction even more explicitly:

ਬੇਦ ਕਤੇਬ ਕਹਹੁ ਮਤ ਝੂਠੇ ਝੂਠਾ ਜੇ ਨ ਬਿਚਾਰੈ ।

*Do not say that the Vedas and the Semitic scriptures are false,  
False is he who contemplates them not.*

SGGS p.1350

The Fifth Guru, Arjan Dev, undertook to compile this Granth. The primal reason for this undertaking was to so preserve the Gurus' compositions as not to leave the possibility of their being deleted, distorted, or exploited in any way by schismatic groups. The *Mahima Prakash* (AD1776) records that the Guru set to work with the announcement "As the Panth (the Way) has been revealed, so there must be a granth (book)." Bhai Gurdas was to be the able calligrapher. The making of the Granth was not an easy task. It involved not only sustained labour, but also rigorous intellectual discipline and most precise editorial skill, quite unknown during those times. From an enormous amount of material, selections had to be made first. What was genuine had to be shifted from the apocryphal. The selected material had to be arranged according to a predetermined, immaculate schema. The stanzas and the verses in each stanza were numbered so that no foreign or apocryphal verse could be inserted. All the words in a line were joined without leaving the customary space between them in order to preclude insertion of even an unwelcome grapheme that might alter the meaning.

A spiritual genius and master of methodological exactitude, Guru Arjan, got the scripture created. It was of a large size of around 7,000 hymns, and consisting of 1948 pages of 12 in. x 8 in. size. This complete work was called *Pothi Sahib* or the revered book. After the completion of its compilation in 1704 AD, it was installed in *Harmandir Sahib*, now popularly known as 'Golden Temple'. Two things about this shrine are also worth appreciating. First, that its foundation stone was laid by a Muslim holy man, Hazrat Mian Mir, second that the temple has four doors, one on each side signifying that anyone from any direction is welcome to this temple and none is barred. Thus, not only the Granth Sahib, but also the temple in which it was first installed, exhibit the stamp of pluralism and thereby that of universality.

The text of Sri Guru Granth Sahib consists of high class spiritual poetry, almost the entire body of which is set to appropriate musical modes or ragas to enhance its



aesthetic effect. However, the basic aim of this scripture is not merely to yield aesthetic pleasure, but primarily to make these aesthetic devices a vehicle for transmitting numinous experience. The effect intended was that the devotees may feel impelled and inspired to seek that kind of numinous experience themselves as that a way to liberation from the grand illusion called *maya*. Guru Arjan Dev gives us an inkling of this process of liberation in the following words:

ਫੂਟੇ ਆਂਡਾ ਭਰਮ ਕਾ ਮਨਹਿ ਭਇਓ ਪਰਗਾਸੁ ।  
ਕਾਟੀ ਬੇਰੀ ਪਗਰ ਤੇ ਗੁਰਿ ਕੀਨੀ ਬੰਦਿ ਖਲਾਸੁ ।

*The shell of illusion has burst, and the mind illumined.  
The Guru has shattered the fetters from my feet,  
And from bondage, has set me free.*

SGGS p.1002

The Sikhs have always believed that the contents of this holy book, ab initio, been studiously preserved by their authors themselves. That fact vouches for its authenticity. A number of scholars, applying certain methods derived from the textual analysis of the holy Bible, have tended to cast doubt over the validity of this belief. Others employing the same kind of methods, somewhat more critically, have been able to find fault with many of the conclusions of the previous scholars; and in the words of McReynolds, they assert that, “textual criticism is a nitpickers’ paradise because of the small variations we blow up to mean a great deal.”

During the times when the Pothi Sahib was compiled, the printing press was not in existence. Hence, only hand-written copies of it could be made. In fact, the first such manuscript copy was made expeditiously, by the devotee Bhai Banno, who was to carry it from Amritsar to Lahore for binding. Banno sought the Guru’s permission to take the Pothi Sahib to his village, Mangat, for the Sikhs there to have its holy view. The Guru allowed this on the condition that neither would Banno tarry at Mangat, nor spend more than one night at any one place enroute. However, it occurred to Banno that he could have a second copy transcribed on the way with the help of other devotees that accompanied him. He thus succeeded in making a copy of the *Pothi Sahib*. He brought back both the volumes, the original as well as the copy thereof. When Guru Arjan Dev perused the copy made by Bhai Banno, he could identify a good number of inaccuracies and few apocryphal additions in it. That is why, he gave it the designation of *khari beed* i.e. the ‘unsavory’ recension. He did not affix his signatures on it but only signed the original Pothi Sahib. It is not hard to imagine that when secondary, tertiary, or further-removed copies came to be made how many more errors must have crept into the relevant manuscripts. One can imagine that innumerable manuscript copies of the scripture must have been made, but, perhaps hardly any of them could have been compared with the original, as

that volume had fallen into the hands of the schismatic adversaries, who would not part with it.

In 1947, when the country came to be divided, hundreds of thousands of Sikhs were thrown out of what is now Pakistan. Many hundred manuscript copies of Sri Guru Granth Sahib were brought by the Sikh refugees to be deposited at the Sikh Reference Library as the homeless refugees had no place where to install them. Shiromani Gurdwara Prabhandak Committee got around sixty of them short listed and set up a group of three knowledgeable scholars to make a comparative textual study of these. Part one of their work was published in 1977. The avowed purpose of this work was to invite further scholars to go over the textual differences and draw conclusions as to which was the correct version. The project was doomed from the start because of the non-availability of the *Pothi Sahib* as well as the *Damdami beed* (vide infra). The dejected three scholars must have given up further work as no subsequent part(s) came to be published. The differences found were mostly such as could be explained away or were of the nature of nitpicking. That is perhaps why the then-being marketed popular version of the scripture continued to reign in the Gurdwaras as, perhaps, it compared fairly well with most of the more reliable manuscripts. In 1984, during the army action on the Akal Takht Sahib, all the manuscripts in the Sikh reference Library were bundled away by the army, and their fate has not been revealed even until today. Hence, whatever possibility of further work existed, even that has disappeared.

Since the original Pothi Sahib had fallen into the bands of adversaries of the Guru’s House, the Sikhs had become bereft of it for a considerable period of time. However, when Guru Gobind Singh, after being forced out of Anandpur, and hounded by Moghul forces, found some safe respite in Talwandi Sabo, he dictated from his memory the entire text of Pothi Sahib adding to it the works of his father and predecessor Guru, Tegh Bahadur. The thus-enlarged recension came to be known as *Damdami beed*. This enshrines within itself the spiritual wisdom of the entire five centuries – from the birth of Shaikh Farid (1172) to the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur (1675). Its message not only extends over time but also over space – for its contributors hail from very diverse parts of India. It is this recension that was canonised by Guru Gobind Singh in 1708, just before his demise. Ever since, this Word-Guru has persistently ruled over Sikh hearts and they have held it with reverence greater than shown by any to any other holy book.

Let it be pointed out this catholic scripture is not the exclusive asset of the Sikhs. It is the Gurus’ gift to entire mankind. It is for the Sikhs to arrange for its universal message be transmitted to the entire world.

*Reprinted from Nishaan Issue I/2004*



Dr. Jaswant Singh Neki on

# Kirtan

## The Supreme Spiritual Vehicle

The Sages have said, “He who hears music feels his solitude”. It is only secondarily, that the sound of music can be considered sensual. It must make sense first. However, sense generally follows reflection. Poetry, as a verbal air is essentially reflective. It can communicate a message. Music, on the other hand, is immediate; it slips straight into one’s being. Kirtan, which is a combination of the two, poetry and music, is the spiritual vehicle that carries a consecrated message directly to our soul. Music is supremely suited for meditation because it has certain spiritual characteristics of its own. These include its inherent (aesthetic) qualities, its dialectic disposition and its essence of infinity. No wonder then that kirtan has been considered a cherished means of expressing devotion.

When a mystic sings, he neither sings a song nor a dirge; he rather sings of his experience of the Absolute. This has been affirmed by Guru Nanak Dev in the following words:

ਗਾਵਹੁ ਗੀਤੁ ਨ ਬਿਰਹੜਾ ਨਾਨਕ ਬ੍ਰਹਮ ਬੀਚਾਰੈ ॥

*Sing not songs of love or pangs of separation.  
Sing of your reflections on the Absolute.*

SGGS p.581

The Gurus and the Bhaktas were not only poets and musicians, they were primarily accomplished mystics as well. Hence, the songs they composed and sang were real fragments of Shabda Brahman.

The tradition of meditation through kirtan has been ubiquitous in Indian religions. Such of its sub-traditions as *stutigan, stotragan, vedagan, mantragan* have been prevalent from times immemorial. Various stylistic traditions of kirtan including *bhajangayan, kalkshep abhang, hari katha* etc. have long been popular with devotees of most denominations.

The art of kirtan evolved even further under the aegis of the Sikh Gurus. They paid full attention to both its raga (musical) and its bhava (meaning) aspects. They also held that while a musician practices only *ahat* (struck) *shabda* (word/sound), a practitioner of

kirtan must practice *ahat* as well as *anahat* (unstruck) *shabda* simultaneously. For the Gurus, music was primarily the medium for communicating the *shabda*. Their preference was *shabda-shruti yoga* in which *dhuni* and *dyana* have a mutually responsive role.

Guru Nanak Dev says:

ਧੁਨਿ ਮਹਿ ਧਿਆਨੁ ਧਿਆਨੁ  
ਮਹਿ ਜਾਨਿਆ ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਅਕਬ ਕਹਾਨੀ ।

*The meditation is in the music,  
and mystical knowledge is in meditation.  
This is how the un-discursable discourse  
is uttered by the Guru*

— SGGS p.879

Meditation through music is thus the preferred spiritual vehicle in the devotional system of the system of the Gurus.

Music should not be considered as only delightful entertainment. One must appreciate that music primarily is the vehicle of cosmic creation and divine immanence. It is cosmic energy revealed as pervasive harmony. Guru Nanak perceived the vibrations of this Primal Harmony and sang his ecstatic composition *Sodar* in which he recounts his experience of everything in the world, as also the entire corpus of the world, emitting that subtle, primal music:

ਵਾਜੇ ਤੇਰੇ ਨਾਦ ਅਨੇਕ ਅਸੰਖਾ ਕੇਤੇ ਤੇਰੇ ਵਾਵਣਹਾਰੇ ॥  
ਕੇਤੇ ਤੇਰੇ ਰਾਗ ਪਰੀ ਸਿਉ ਕਹੀਅਹਿ  
ਕੇਤੇ ਤੇਰੇ ਗਾਵਣਹਾਰੇ ॥...  
ਹੋਰਿ ਕੇਤੇ ਤੁਧਨੇ ਗਾਵਨਿ ਸੇ ਮੈ ਚਿਤਿ ਨ  
ਆਵਨਿ ਨਾਨਕੁ ਕਿਆ ਬੀਚਾਰੇ ।

*The sound-currents are Your instruments and  
countless musicians are playing on them  
There are so many Ragas with their harmonics  
And so many minstrels singing hymns of You.*

*So many others to sing of You,  
but they come not in my mind.  
How can Nanak think of them all?*

SGGS p.8-9

Three types of Yoga, Raja, Jnana and Bhakti have traditionally been identified as major spiritual pathways. Of these, Bhakti Yoga provides its soul to kirtan. A raja yogi attains *nirodha samadhi* i.e. *samadhi* attained by control of the senses. A jnani attains *bodha samadhi* i.e. that attained through sublimated intellection. A bhakta, a man of devotion, attains *bhava samadhi* i.e. *samadhi* attained through feeling and emotion, primarily the emotion of love. And love, in its ecstasy, is most inclined to sing. Kirtan, thus, is the God-inspired musical effulgence of devotional ecstasy.

Every performance of kirtan ought to be dedicated to the Divine Presence. It is such dedication alone that enlivens the *tala* (rhythm), sweetens the *nada* (sound), mellows the *raga* (melody) and consecrates the *shabda* (hymn) of kirtan. The presence, on which love and devotion have to be is not just outside us; it is very much within us too.

Mystical expression is ineffable. Words fail to express it, arithmetic loses its prowess, logic flounders fully and the senses become impotent. Music alone can aptly express such an experience. Real kirtan is that which emerges out of mystical experience and reflects the union between *jivatma* (individual human soul) and *Paramatma* (the Transcendent Cosmic Soul). Bhakta Namdev, in his own words, tells how he sings when he perceives the Supreme Presence:

ਜਬ ਦੇਖਾਂ ਤਬ ਗਾਵਾਂ ।  
ਤਉ ਜਨ ਧੀਰਜੁ ਖਾਵਾਂ ।

*When I see Him, I sing His praises.  
Then I, His humble servant,  
get wrapped in patience.*

SGGS .656

The Gurmat kirtan that the Gurus practiced and patronised has its own distinctive aesthetics, symphonic as well as harmonic. Though it accepted much of the classical Indian musicology for its basis, it also digressed from it in some significant ways. For example, it made no use of exciting ragas such as Deepak because excitement is immiscible with devotion. The Gurus evolved some new ragas as well. These include *Asa*, *Maru* and *Tukhari*. Guru Nanak, not only introduced *Raga Asa* but also employed it as possibilities adapting it to sixteen different tone-centres (*ghars*).

The first location where kirtan was established by Guru Nanak before he set out on his historic odysseys,

was at Sultanpur. Mardana accompanied him and played his rabab when the Guru sang. After his return from his extensive travels, he settled down in Kartarpur and there, Mardana's sons were his minstrels. With the successive Gurus, the primary centre of kirtan shifted successively to Khadur, Goindval, Amritsar, Kiratpur and Anandpur. Alongside of rababis, two other traditions, those of ragis and dhadis, who came to emerge out of those centres. Guru Gobind Singh, the last of the Guru Nanaks successors was himself a great musicologist. He is said to have introduced the *khayal* style of singing in kirtan.

An organic symbiosis essentially prevails between the meaning of the hymn and the spirit of the raga in which it has been prescribed to be sung. This symbiosis would essentially have been fortified by the innovative skills of the Court-minstrels of the Gurus who aimed at attaining the Gurus approval and appreciation for every meaningful and significant innovation.

The patterns of symbiosis thus emerged through the direction, and possibly also active intervention, by the Gurus themselves. The salutary results of such experiments must have been transmitted from generation to generation by the rababis and ragis of those times.

One such family that seems to have taken pains to transmit the salubrious stylistic of Gurmat Sangeet on to its successive generations has been the Semdhi family. It first became noticeable during the pontificate of Guru Amar Das. One of its later successors, one Sahib Singh (other than the one who was among the Panj Piaras), is known to have received Anrit from Guru Gobind Singh.

In the twentieth century, Bhai Jawala Singh, a descendant of that family, became reputed as a stalwart ragi who possessed profound knowledge of the traditional ritis (styles) of the Gurus times. His son, Bhai Avtar Singh devotedly took pains to receive as much out of his fathers cumulative acquisition as possible. On that count, and with further personal efforts, he became a venerable ragi in his own right. He not only remained one of the foremost ragis for several decades but had also been considered a reliable consultant in traditional Gurmat Sangeet. His demise recently has caused a wide gap in the field of traditional kirtan. His departure has been felt woefully by connoisseurs of Gurmat Sangeet. Fortunately, as per valued family traditions, he did pass on much of his learning to his worthy relatives. For that, he deserves the gratitude of the entire community of kirtan-lovers.

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# A Remarkable Life

## Dr. Jaswant Singh Neki

In this evocative piece written in 2009, Ravinder Singh Taneja throws some light on Dr Jaswant Singh Neki's multi-faceted personality.



Accolades and awards were a part of Dr Jaswant Singh Neki's life

A man of many dimensions and diverse accomplishments, Dr Jaswant Singh Neki is a veritable polymath and renaissance man in our midst, remains a visible and active presence in Sikh affairs as one of our most treasured of public intellectuals.

Trained as a physician, most of us know him in his avatar as a man of medicine: psychiatrist, public health policy, Head of the Department at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) in New Delhi, and Director of the Post Institute (PGI), Chandigarh, Punjab. He also found time to spend time in Africa as advisor to the World Health Organisation.

But we do not always connect Dr JS Neki, the medical man, with Jaswant Singh Neki, the award winning poet. Few of us know that his first published poem – in praise of Guru Gobind Singh written in *Braj Bhasha* – appeared in the *Khalsa Samachar* back in 1937, when he was barely twelve years old.

Awarded the Sahitya Akademi award in 1978 for his work *Karuna Di Chuh Ton Magron*, he has over a dozen published collections of poetry, beginning with *Asle to Ohle Tak* in 1955, through the ground breaking autobiographical *Koi Naon Na Jane Mera* in 2000.

He is also a distinguished scholar of Sikhi with a prolific output – in English and Punjabi. His works include the classic *Ardaas: Darshan Roop Te Abhiyas*, an exposition of Sikh congregational prayer; *Sada Vigas*, a profoundly original interpretation of Gurbani; *Achetan di Leela*, a psychological perspective on Gurmat; *Divine Intimations*, an English translation of Nitnem in verse; *Prophet of Devotion*, the life of Guru Angad; *Pilgrimage to Hemkunt*, a coffee table travelogue; *Punjabi Haas Vilas*, a book on Punjabi humour, and so many other works, too numerous to be listed herein.



Dr Jaswant Singh Neki seen with the Pope

Dr. Neki is also an invaluable original source for anyone interested in modern Sikh history. Since his days as the President of the All India Sikh Students Federation in 1949 to his present role as advisor to the Dharam Parchar Committee of the SGPC and General Secretary of the Bhai Vir Singh Sadan in New Delhi, he has been an active witness and participant in contemporary Sikh affairs, with a firsthand knowledge and acquaintance with the Who's Who of the Sikh world. Although I have known him over the years, our meetings have been intermittent and far between, usually in social settings that are not always conducive to the kind of systematic exploration of his thought and outlook that I wished to record.

His presence in Columbus, Ohio gave me that opportunity. Over a couple of extended private conversations and a Sikhi workshop organised by the local sangat, we explored the entire range of Sikh experience, covering the gamut from the implication of being a Sikh, Sikh belief and practice, the current state of Sikh Institutions and the challenge of moral and ethical issues stemming from technology. In the process, I also got a glimpse of defining events in his life.

Dr Neki would rank high on my list of individuals that I would want to have for an evening of scintillating conversation. He has a certain gravitas about him (not surprising in one devoted to literary and scholarly pursuits), but wears it lightly. He can expound on abstruse philosophical concepts, but always with a touch of humour and with an open mind. He is a raconteur extraordinaire, and can hold you spellbound with stories and anecdotes; or have you in peals of laughter with jokes – all used with great effect to put his point across.

Jaswant Singh Neki became the first “born Sikh” in his family when he arrived in 1925. Religious boundaries between Hindu and Sikh were quite porous then, unlike the hardened walls that we witness today. It was not uncommon for Punjabi families to straddle what can be termed “mixed identities.” So it was with Dr Neki’s family.

“Expect the Unexpected” would be an apt header for any narration of Dr Neki’s life. Hearing him recount the sheer number of coincidences – or synchronicities, if you will – that have shaped the course of his life is nothing short of miraculous. I share a few of them, not so much to chronicle his life but to view these events from a Sikh perspective.

The Partition of Punjab in 1947 found the young Jaswant Singh – then a medical student in Lahore – down and out in Amritsar where he had made his way. Cut off from family, homeless and penniless, he faced an uncertain future. A series of baffling synchronicities saw him through.

First, a generous landlord, moved by his plight, offers him a room with rent to be paid “when able”. Just then, he chances upon the old canteen manager from Lahore, now a food stall owner in Amritsar. Free meals become available. But most remarkably, a windfall from the most unexpected – and unknown – source solves Jaswant Singh’s money problem, at least temporarily, enabling him to complete his medical education.

Wandering aimlessly around town one evening, concerned about money, he heard a voice summon him out of the blue. It was an old Sikh, a total stranger, who approached him with a proposition. “I have two thousand rupees on me. Can I entrust them to you for safekeeping?” he asked. “No,” Jaswant Singh responded, adding, “I am in desperate need and will be tempted to use the money.”

The old man retorted “And isn’t that what money is for – to spend?”

Overcome by the moment, an immensely relieved Jaswant Singh took the money but failed to ask about the old man’s identity or whereabouts or where he could return the money.

Fast forward to about a year later. Dr Neki, now a junior house physician, finds himself the beneficiary of a retroactive pay raise, with the arrears to be paid in a lump sum. His share: a princely two thousand and ten rupees! Happy at the windfall, he plans to dine out. No sooner does he step outside, that the same voice – the one that had summoned him a year ago – rang in his ears. It was the old Sikh again, back to claim his money.





Sometime later, Dr Neki found himself in a similar predicament yet, again. Now a Demonstrator at Christian Medical College, Ludhiana, he had a run in with the Principal over a day's personal leave that he needed to attend to an unwell grandmother. The Principal's intransigence led him to resign in a fit of anger. Jobless again, he found himself wandering aimlessly on the streets of Ludhiana this time, regretting his hasty decision. Sure enough, he had another inexplicable encounter. As he walked, an old man, a Sikh, who was selling his wares on the street, waved to him, saying, "Don't worry about your job; you have three offers coming." Dr Neki, needless to say, was incredulous. No sooner did he arrive home that he found two job offers waiting for him. One was from an old classmate, an industrialist, looking for a medical officer to run a clinic for his workers. The other was from S. Hukam Singh, the erstwhile Speaker of the Parliament of India, offering him an editorial position on his newly founded weekly.

What, I asked Dr Neki, was his reaction? He turned to me with a smile and said, "The old man had said three offers; where is the third, I thought?" The third offer arrived the same night via telegram from the Medical College, Amritsar.

His marriage to the daughter of his Professor at Medical School, his appointment as PGI Director and assignment as Consultant to the WHO, all followed a similar pattern. Dr Neki shared these and other events from his life to illustrate the point we happened to be discussing from Malcolm Gladwell's book, *The Outliers*: that successful and accomplished individuals are not propelled by genius and talent alone; they also rise on a tide of advantages, "some deserved, some not, some earned, some just plain lucky."

Dr Neki described the "lucky breaks" in his life in gurnat parlance as *nadar*, or Grace. *Rabb aap aaya si* (It was God Himself ...), he said. Ascribing success and accomplishment to *nadar* may be the humility of a Sikh, but surely, *nadar* shines indiscriminately on all of us. Why, then, do some of us appear to connect better with the flow of *nadar*? Why do these coincidences – synchronicities, if

you will – appear more pronounced in some lives than others? While I don't have the answer, I can offer a tentative explanation. The title of Dr Neki's translation of the *Sikh Nitnem: Divine Intimations* offers a clue. These are sure signs of the Divine working in our everyday, mundane lives.

While *nadar* may open doors and talent may provide the raw material, it takes hard work, discipline, persistence and perseverance to run leading medical institutions with distinction, stay actively engaged in Sikh affairs, and turn out literary and scholarly output of a high order over a long period of time.

There is no room for idlers in Sikhi. Honest effort (*udham*) is foundational to a Sikh's life and I got a glimpse of this in observing Dr Neki's punishing schedule in Columbus, Ohio, even when he was on holiday – he was up at 2 am, did his nitnem and then settled down to writing for the rest of the day, yet greeting intrusions like mine with cheer. The discipline and structure had been cultivated and honed over a lifetime was obvious.

Dr Neki's eclectic and holistic approach to Sikh scholarship was shaped early on by the influence of his grandfather, a man of learning with an abiding interest in scripture, and later, in Amritsar, by iconic figures of Sikh scholarship: Professor Sahib Singh, Bhai Jodh Singh and Principal Teja Singh, with whom he kept regular contact. An incident that Dr Neki narrated that involved these three stalwarts is very telling and worth narrating because it highlights the mutual respect and camaraderie that they shared, but also because they left a lasting impression on Dr Neki that influences his thinking thereafter. Professor Sahib Singh had been invited to preside over an event organised by the All India Sikh Student Federation. Sahib Singh demurred, explaining that he was pressed for time. He was then completing his seminal work on Gurbani *Viakaran* (Scriptural Grammar). "A lot of what he said about *viakaran* went right over my head," Dr Neki told me with a laugh. But Sahib Singh suggested Bhai Jodh Singh as an alternative, "*Bhai Jodh Singh noon kyon nahin puchda?*" Bhai Jodh Singh, it turned out, had a prior commitment and had suggested

Sahib Singh instead, “*Sahib Singh horan noon kyon nahin puchda?*”

When told that Sahib Singh could not make it, he solicited Bhai Jodh Singh’s view about the importance of grammar in understanding Gurbani. Bhai Jodh Singh responded with a chicken-and-egg question of his own, “*Kaka, mainu eh das, grammar pehlon aaya see keh language?*” (Son, what came first – grammar or language?)

Professor Teja Singh agreed to preside over the event. His response to the grammar and language question is a gem, in my opinion. Conceding that both Sahib Singh and Jodh Singh were more learned than he, Teja Singh agreed that both grammar and meaning (language) were important, but the true import of gurbani rested on personal experience as well. “*Mere naalon siyaneh neh, par anubhav jaruri hai.*” (They are wiser than me ... but I’d say that experience is important!): that alone will lead to the Transcendent.

In speaking of a Sikh’s engagement with the Guru Granth Sahib, Dr Neki sounded a similar note of caution. There are multiple senses in Gurbani, and we can get caught up in the literal or allegorical but miss the anagogical. The mode of communication that the Guru’s have employed, poetry, is not meant to be informational only – but transformational as well. Poetry is letting the WORD be heard beyond the literal meaning of the textual words. Gurbani must not just be read and understood but “ingested”, which involves assimilation and absorption.



Dr Jaswant Singh Neki and Sardarni Kanwerjit Kaur Neki

It is this natural amalgamation of science and poetry, of combining metaphor and analogy of multiple senses and ways of looking at Reality – that is so visible in Dr Neki’s work, and gives it a beauty and transcendence that can be transporting. An example from *Sada Vigas* comes to mind.

In an essay on the different dimensions of transcendence (*Pargamta Da Deedar*), Dr Neki uses the reproductive process as an illustration of transcending oneself (*haumai*) in an exquisitely poetic way: the metaphor of a delirious lover used for the male sperm; its wiggling tail as a sign of its delight in finding the beloved female egg, and in the ultimate loss of a separate sense of self that results from the union. While such a fruitful combination of the scientific and poetic outlook within an individual like Dr Neki may be deemed *nadar*, it is nonetheless an attitude that we need to consciously cultivate.

This fusion of science and poetry is a necessary framework to understand Sikhi in our current context. The two are not quite as apart as we have been led to believe. I found the following quote from the *Scientific Activist* very apt, “A scientist is an empirical poet and a poet is a scientist of more imaginative and creative hypotheses.” A Sikh life must be at once musical, mathematical, precise and poetic.

My motive in capturing and recording these conversations goes beyond a personal desire to share vignettes from the life of a multi-faceted personality and a much admired role model. Dr Neki is an important literary figure in his own right and a living link to many iconic figures in our recent history, as well as an active participant in shaping our community. There is a compelling need to maintain that link to our past by cultivating the habit of recording, documenting and archiving – of not neglecting – individuals like Dr Jaswant Singh Neki while they are still in our midst. I have attempted to capture a bit of oral history which I believe is just as significant as the written tradition in keeping our past alive. These recordings are bits and bytes of our larger history.

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# Embellishing the Conference

The Eighth Annual Conference on Sri Guru Granth Sahib, organised by the Chardi Kalaa Foundation, the San Jose Gurdwara Sahib and SikhNet began with a Youth Kiran, the *kirtanias* including Sneha Kaur (diliruba), Ishmeet Kaur (violin), Jasmyn Kaur (diliruba), Ganeev Singh (tabla), Manneet Kaur (diliruba), who rendered the Shabad *Darsahn Mango Deh Piare : Raag Asa in Panj Taal*.

keertan compositions. In his latest book, *Gurmat Sangeet Rachnavali*, Dalbir Singh has created 122 shabad compositions in thirty one Raags of Sri Guru Granth Sahib.

The Shabad *Merey Lalan Ki Sobha in Raag Kalyan : Mahala 5* was rendered by Kirpa Singh (Sitar), Amolika Narang (Sitar), Sahej Singh (Tabla), Simarpreet Kaur (Rabab), Mansimar Kaur (Rabab), Harshaan Singh (Rabab), Bhavandeep Kaur (Tanpura), Jasleen Kaur (Taus), Agamjot Singh (Surmandal).



They had been 'trained' in kirtan by Prof Dalbir Singh who has been spreading the knowledge of *Gurmat Sangeet* with devotion and dedication for the last thirty five years. He is son of the renowned Taus player Giani Beant Singh who was a disciple of Ragi Bhai Juwala Singh of Thattha Tibba gharana. Dalbir Singh started

acquiring the knowledge of *Gurmat Sangeet* from his childhood, and continued to seek it in his college years. He started learning the sitar from Shakuntalaa Arora, and later from Surinder Kumar Dutta, who was a disciple of Pandit Ravi Shankar. Dalbir Singh was awarded the gold medal in B.A. Honours Music from Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar and later received his Masters in Music from Punjab University, Chandigarh.

He has since established himself as a prominent educator and performer of *Gurmat Sangeet*, with students in various countries. Dalbir Singh has composed and published innumerable shabad

Their 'trainer' is Sardarni Leena Kaur who has been spreading Gurbani's message through multiple Radio channels for many years. Her interest in music originally started with exploring the 31 Raags in SGGGS ji to



understand and internalise the depth of Gurbani teachings. It quickly expanded to different horizons in music with the desire to revive Sikh heritage instruments among the younger generation, and extend the richness of Sikh musical background and lyrics in Punjabi language to the world, very inspired to bring the depth and light of Gurbani teachings through her music and seeks blessings from everyone in her endeavours. She started *Sikh Heritage Symphony* while also pursuing Masters in *Gurmat Sangeet* for acquiring higher education in this field.

**Readers may follow the kirtan video online ([http://www.chardikalaa.com/?page\\_id=2928](http://www.chardikalaa.com/?page_id=2928))**



Next on the programme was an unusual, a new and ‘out of the box’ subject, this one chaired by Sardarni Jessi Kaur that being on *Sikh Dating and Marriage in the Diaspora*.

Culturally, ‘dating’ is really part of the Western social milieu. Sikh communities in the Diaspora are faced with a clash of perspectives between parents that still uphold their traditional values, but their children, born and raised in the West want more freedom to chose their life partners. Jessi Kaur moderated an open discussion around the dating phenomena with a multi-generational panel of Sikh men and women.



Panel members included Amrita Ghumman who was born and raised in India and has been living in the United States for almost 30 years thereafter, now with her husband and 3 children. She is presently working

as Lead Physician with AMP Wellness Centre at Applied Materials. In her free time she enjoys gardening, cooking, reading and meditation – apart from playing with her two dogs!



Then there was young Simran Ghumman, who grew up in the Bay area along with her two brothers and is currently a student in the SFSU post-baccalaureate programme “with hopes to become a veterinarian”. During her undergraduate career at

UC Santa Barbara, she was heavily involved with the Sikh Student Association.

Pushpinder Kaur is an educator, an author with Punjabi as a *Second Language Curriculum Developer*. She is one of the founding members of Guru Nanak Khalsa School San Jose, the biggest

Sunday school with close to 700 students, one which has just completed 30 years. She designed *Stepping Stones* PSL Instructional Resources to teach Punjabi as a second language, her curriculum now used in about 70 Gurdwara Schools in the US, Canada and Australia.



She has written several children’s books including *The Boy with Long Hair*, and helped produce the *Cultural Safari* video with the *Kaur Foundation*, both resources accepted by the California Department of Education to be used in elementary schools. Pushpinder Kaur is also featured in *Jutti Kasoori*, a PBS documentary about the 100-year *History of Sikh Women in California*.

And, providing the male perspective was 70-year old Jagmohan Singh who, after finishing his education in India, moved to the United States about 50 years ago. This GurSikh is devoted to the Sri Guru Granth Sahib and takes part in Sadhsangat. He has three lovely daughters and five grandchildren, lives in San Jose with his wife Kawaljit Kaur.



Living in Palo Alto, Daljeet Singh Viridi is a Partner at Andreessen Horowitz, holds a Masters in Computer Science from UIUC and a bachelors from Santa Clara University.



**Readers may follow the lively discussions posted online by the Conference organisers ([http://www.chardikalaa.com/?page\\_id=2794](http://www.chardikalaa.com/?page_id=2794))**



# The Young Ones

There were also two short sessions when speeches were given by five young ones which may also be followed in the online ([http://www.chardikalaa.com/?page\\_id=2801](http://www.chardikalaa.com/?page_id=2801)).



**Sania Bhella**, who spoke with much maturity on *A Sikh's Perception Of Death*, has studied at the Khalsa School since she was 7 and after graduation has been teaching for the past 4 years. She has learned Kirtan in various raags as well as how to sing, play the harmonium and rabab. In addition, she has actively participated in the International Hemkunt Speech and Kirtan Competitions.



She was followed by **Armeet Singh** who spoke on *Our Vices, Khandas, Humility, Equality, and Grace*. He reflected that, the many years of being with the Guru Nanak Khalsa School, learning the tabla and participating in *Hemkunt* events, were “some of the best decisions of my life. By learning tabla I could participate in keertan and was fortunate to be taught by some of the world’s best. By participating at the *Hemkunt* speech, I learnt the art of public speaking and developed confidence in myself. These skills have enabled me to become a leader of my troop in Boy Scouts, vice president of the Programming Club in my school and volunteer teacher for the karate class, winning gold at Sri Hemkunt Internationals”.

Japleen Kaur spoke on *History of the Brave 18th-Century Sikhs and how their lives impacted Sikhism and Sikhs Today*. Her talk also touched upon the struggles that Sikh kids face nowadays

and how as a community, one can try to resolve those problems. Japleen Kaur is a 9th grader at EVHS, has been participating in the Hemkunt speech and kirtan competitions for a few years, plays the harmonium and has also been learning the dilruba for around two years. Outside of school, she enjoys playing field hockey and also reading.



**Geeta Kaur** discussed *Salok From Japji Sahib, Its Message, And How We Can Implement It In Our Daily Life*. She is a sophomore at Monta Vista High School in Cupertino, has been a regular participant in the *Hemkunt Speech Symposium and Gurbani Contest* for many years. She enjoys playing the rabab, harmonium and violin as well as performing Kirtan. On Sundays, she helps teach Punjabi and Gurbani to young children at Guru Nanak Khalsa School at San Jose Gurdwara



**Young Sahej Singh Basati** spoke on *Some important events and teachings from life of our Sixth, Seventh And Eighth Guru Sahiban*. Born in 2007, he went to school at the Guru Nanak Khalsa School, San Jose (GNKS) in 2014. “Not only did I learn Punjabi and Gurmat, I also participated in Keertan Darbars, tabla classes Gurbani competitions, and speech competitions. I have excelled in each one of these activities both at the regional and international level competitions”.



Dr IJ Singh on

# Guru Nanak's Legacy



Guru Nanak's perspective on humanity is larger than life and is timeless. Today there is a worldwide growing circle of more than 25 million Sikhs and non-Sikhs who revere his message. Let's parse some historical nuggets and impactful events of his meaningful life. Instead of a paean of praise to Nanak, the man and Guru, I offer an overview of the transformative agenda he gifted us.

Religions cannot always hold a nation together. Bangladesh and Pakistan are both Muslim nations; their 24 years old union collapsed in

1971. Muslim nations of the Middle East remain mostly at logger heads. Sunni and Shia Muslims like Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jews, are not too fond of each other. Explore the long factional history on the 250 sects of Christianity.

## Ground realities in the Punjab at Guru Nanak's time

India was never a single unified nation except under the British and the Mughals. A mélange of independent or quasi-independent nation-states, each with distinct culture, language, cuisine, music

and ethos, India was easy picking for invaders with limited manpower. Since 1947, it is a politically unified nation, but fragmentation persists.

For centuries, India was ruled by Muslim invaders, ruthlessly bent upon converting the natives, even by force. Hindu society, despite noble antecedents, was hamstrung by decadent religious culture, reprehensible caste system that continues to exist today, and the shamefully degraded place of women. A divided society had lost its moral compass, often willing to sell out to robber-barons. This is what the young Nanak observed.

### **How to Reclaim Humanity and Dignity?**

*A better tomorrow requires an ethical code, freedom of speech and action, participatory self-governance, transparent accountability, security, economic progress and infrastructure.*

Easier said than done! Two choices surface: evolution or revolution. Revolutions are bloody. They change rulers but not as easily a people's mindset that reflects inter – generational culturally ingrained habits of the heart. These traditions – the paradigm or default position of the mind – define the self. Lasting paradigm shifts demand time that transcends generations.

Guru Nanak launched exactly a transformative paradigm shift that took almost 240 years to bear fruit in its modern form. The path was mine-laden. Muslims, with connivance of some Hindu rulers, went on the warpath to defend their politico-religious dominance. Hindus saw Sikhi as undermining their hold on the people with challenging ideas about timeless – but backward – teachings on caste, place of women, idol worship and so on.

The first step was to bring the dispossessed people into a community. Guru Nanak started a free kitchen (*langar*) where people would come together, prepare and serve food to all, irrespective of caste, creed, colour or gender. Enjoy a meal, listen to uplifting poetry and teachings with music (*keertan*) and relate to each other as equals. In the then traditional society, high and low castes would never mix or break bread together. Nanak dismissed such notions. He taught people how

to live with each other – not caring if they were sharing their lives with a king or pauper, Brahmin or an untouchable. In India of that time, this was revolutionary.

Guru Nanak's teachings begin with an alphanumeric of his own design : *Ik Oankaar*.

*Ik* stands for the number One; *Oankaar* speaks of the Creator. If one can sense the Oneness of the Creator, there is no room left for a separate Jewish, Christian, Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, or Brand X, form of God. That would be a lesser god, not worthy of worship. Guru Nanak's Creator has no physical form and transcends all descriptions. This infinite reality by definition can never be captured by our finite mind or language.

This profound message framed the fundamentals of a productive and meaningful life in the language of the people as poetry to be musically rendered. Why? Because, at best, the spoken word settles in the head, music takes the message to the heart. And what exactly is the mind or the soul but both the heart and the head put together. Poetry is roomful of allegories, metaphors and analogies to hold the mind. The compositions used the classical timeless Raga system of Indian musicology. Music and poetry are thus interpreted, internalised, integrated, not literally rendered. Guru Nanak, accompanied by a Muslim musician, Mardana, took his message across much of the known world of that time.

### **Did Nanak intend to start a New Faith?**

I believe he did! He traveled throughout India, what is today's Pakistan and much beyond, south to Sri Lanka, north beyond Tibet, east to Assam, perhaps even China, and west to Afghanistan, Mesopotamia, Mecca, Turkey and neighbouring areas. Guru Nanak held dialogues with scholars of many faiths. After four odysseys, he returned to the Punjab and founded Kartarpur, now in Pakistan, as the Sikh model of Utopia where he nurtured the first Sikh community. Kartarpur soon became a bustling presence with businesses and traders. The community prospered. Guru Nanak lived there with his wife and two sons, preached the Sikh way of life and tilled his farm.





*The Holy Land: Darbar Sahib, Kartarpur now in Pakistan. A painting by Sukhpreet Singh, 2013*



Kartarpur was a magical step forward towards development of economically viable infrastructure. It was not near any Hindu or Muslim religious centre. Never did he recommend that Sikhs go to a Hindu or Muslim place of worship. His centre at Kartarpur was the community's hub and place of worship. If he entered a Hindu or a Muslim place of worship, it was not to join the rite but to impart a lesson.

### Passing the Torch

If a business or shop closes its doors at the death of the founder is it not a failed venture? An enterprise must continue past the generations to become an institution or movement.

*How to rebuild a people decimated by centuries of invasions? A massive transformative task needs more than hours, days, or years. Many dots to connect. life models, habits of the heart to be minutely re-explored, modified, even replaced. Habits of the heart are never easy to reform.*

*A paradigm shift is necessary.*

Guru Nanak lived five centuries ago. Times change; newer questions surface. His message and Sikh institutional development continued by his nine successors. Significantly all ten Gurus; wrote

under the name and authority of Nanak.

Lehna succeeded Nanak, became Guru Angad and shifted his base to Khadur Sahib. Now there were two urban centres flourishing in the Punjab. He systematised the rules of Gurmukhi and its script – the language of the people. Prior to this, Sanskrit, the language of the Brahmin elite, was the only medium deemed fit to convey scriptural teaching, hence available only to the Brahmins.

Amardas, the third Guru, chose Goindwal as his base, creating a third Sikh community without diminishing the luster of Kartarpur and Khadur Sahib. He upended the injustice to women, by appointing them to leadership positions in spreading Sikhi's message. He encouraged widows to remarry and condemned the horrendous Hindu practice of *satee* or self-immolation by widows. He started the tradition of twice-yearly conclaves of Sikhs, to reconnect and confer on issues that impact the community.

Guru Ramdas followed. He founded Ramdaspur that became Amritsar. It remains, over 400 years later, the largest, most important commercial, cultural and educational hub of the Punjab. It defines, through its history, the Sikh psyche today.



Painting of Darbar Sahib, Amritsar by Lasya Upadhyaya

Guru Arjan completed the development of Amritsar and *Harmandir* (Golden Temple), compiled writings of the previous four Gurus, along with his own, added compositions of a few selected Hindu and Muslim saints and poets whose views resonated with Sikhi, and installed the compilation as the first rendition of Sikh scripture (*Adi Granth*) in 1604, as the authoritative document on Sikh ethos. Amritsar has been the *defacto* capital of Sikh activities, social, educational, administrative or political, whether local or international since that time; Guru Arjan was the first Sikh martyr in the cause of freedom of religion. The lesson: *One must learn to die before picking up a weapon.*

In the 100 years since Guru Nanak, much had changed. Islam had become aggressively fanatic. The Sikh movement, continuing to emphasise peaceful coexistence with others, had acquired heft and visibility. Sikhi's message: *The Creator is not found in seclusion, ascetism or renunciation but within the active worldly life – the two are not mutually exclusive.* Guru Arjan had been martyred. So, Guru Hargobind, the sixth Founder-Guru formally enunciated the doctrine of *Meeri-Peeri* that emphatically merges the internal spiritual

life of worship, prayer and the mind with the outwardly directed worldly pursuit of action.

These two primary fundamentals of Sikh existence must never be sundered. Sikhs are to be peaceful and non-violent but not pacifist. So, Guru Hargobind wore two swords, of *Meeri* and *Peeri*, recognising that a successful human life is one of action (*Meeri*), never torn asunder from its spiritual foundations (*Peeri*). The good life demands both. He raised a militia to counter armed warfare thrust upon him; each subsequent Guru maintained armed militia. Guru Hargobind built the townships of Hargobindpur, Mehraj and Kiratpur, even a mosque for the many Muslims in that area.

Briefly, *Meeri-Peeri* and Akal Takht that he defined and built are at the core of nation building and critical to Sikh history and Sikh values. The term nation here does not imply geographical lines drawn in the sand.

The brief stints of the Seventh and Eighth Gurus, Har Rai and Harkishan were times of consolidation for the community. Guru Har Rai was dedicated to ecological concerns; Guru Harkishan is remembered for service to the poor during a horrendous epidemic.

Guru Tegh Bahadur founded Anandpur Sahib and Paonta Sahib. His martyrdom asserted the universal right of religious freedom, that for Hindus to refuse conversion to Islam under duress. *Guru Tegh Bahadur himself was not a Hindu*. The underlying principle here (often misattributed to Voltaire): “I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it.”



(Images courtesy: Sikhnet.com)

Guru Gobind Singh deserves much more than the brief space here. In 1699 he brought the transformative change started by Guru Nanak to its mature form. He created the community of Khalsa that changed the face of Punjab into a free outer directed people at peace with their inner self: the underpinnings of *Meeri-Peeri that must remain in sync*. Guru Gobind Singh also added Guru Tegh Bahadur’s compositions and prepared the final recension of the *Adi Granth* that he installed as the *Guru Granth*. He initiated Sikhs into the Khalsa order, then pleaded that Sikhs initiate the Guru himself as Khalsa. This novel idea of *Gur-Chela* in Sikhi antedates the Servant–Leader concept that one might encounter in modern academic programmes in Management.

Sikhi had come a long way. Guru Gobind Singh saw that Sikhs had earned self–governance. He decreed that henceforth, in Sikh praxis, *Guru Granth* remains the repository of all Sikh spiritual heritage while temporal authority rests in the Sikh community acting in awareness of the spiritual heritage that guides them.

An unforgettable historical nugget from the time of Guru Nanak unerringly captures the magic of Sikh teaching. It describes the Sikh way of life as a triad of (i) honest earnings, (ii) sharing rewards of life with the needy, best labeled *seva*; *langar* being one of many possibilities, and (iii) remaining always connected to the one Creator common to all, regardless of caste, colour, creed, gender or religious/cultural or national identities.

By the early 17th century, Sikhs had evolved the traditions of *Sarbat Khalsa* where community representatives would meet in conclaves, like town hall meetings that one sees across America today, to debate and discuss issues of peace and war or critical turns in directions, including traditions, Code of Conduct (*Rehat Maryada*), protocols and related Constitutional matters may be revisited as needed. The system exists but degraded by neglect and human inertia. In any path we need to know where we are at a given point. *Even more critical is the trajectory of the path. Then the journey becomes the destination.*

Guru Nanak, uniquely founded and shaped our journey very much as it takes us ahead. There can be no better legacy. The journey started with Guru Nanak. It does not end with his mortal life or with ours.

The onus is ours.

**Dr IJ Singh’s paper formed the basis of Nishaan’s Editorial Issue IV/2019 on the 550th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev ji.**

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S Rawel Singh on

# Guru Nanak's concept of Practical Spirituality through Truthful living

**S**pirituality is a broad term covering living by higher values, covers ethics, peace, and tranquillity. Some people link this with religion, some people do not, thinking religion is only dogmas, superstitions and rituals. However, dogmas do not form basics of any religion, and are later additions. It is also a fact that religion teaches ethics and religious organisations are always the first to provide succour to people in case of disasters, natural or otherwise. All religions therefore in their pristine form, are desirable to follow. Gurbani says religion should make better human beings.

**As in Sukhmani Sahib,**

*Sarab dharam mah-i sreyast dharam.*

*Hark ko Naam jap nirmal karam.* M: 5, p 266

(Of all the religious practices, the most sublime is to remember and conform to *Naam* or virtues and commands of the Almighty).

The fifth Guru says *Nanak key ghar keyval Naam* M: 5, p 1136

(The house of Nanak, which is the Sikh faith, relies only on *Naam*).

Faith in dogmas, rituals or superstitions achieves nothing.

Guru Nanak says in Japji Paurri 6

*Jeyti siratth upaee veykha vin karma ki milai laee.*

(In this universe, let me find anyone who can find God without working for this).

The basic meaning of *Naam* is name or identity. *Naam* has two forms in Gurbani : the first is Divine virtues or attributes by which the Almighty is recognised. These are numerous and called *Kirtam Naam* which is names based on attributes. Guru Nanak proclaims:

*Teyrey Naam aneyka roop ananta kahan na jaahee terey gun keytey.* M: 1, p 358.

(O Almighty, You have numerous names and countless forms; it is not possible to count Your virtues/attributes).

The second is *Sat Naam*, meaning eternal *Naam* or authority, i.e. Divine writ, *Hukam*, or laws of nature. Guru Sahib proclaims:

*Eyko Naam hukam hai Nanak satigur deea bujhaeey jeeo.* M: 1, p 71

(The One *Naam* is *Hukam*, commands or authority. *The Almighty is the lone Supreme authority*). Guru Nanak put these in the Mool Mantar, as the root mantra, as follows.

One *Naam* of the One Almighty.

*Ek Oankaar* (One God who is the beginning and indivisible).

*Sat Naam* (God, whose writ is inevitable).

The Fourth Guru says:

*Jap man sati Naam sadaa sati Naam.*

(My mind, ever remember and comply with Divine writ/*Hukam*).

*Kirtam Naam* as numerous attributes of the Almighty.

*Karta Purakh* (the Creator who is all-pervasive). *Nirbhau* (without fear). The Creator made the laws of nature, pre-existed them and hence is not subject to them. These laws have not been in fear of anyone. The Creator is not answerable to anyone. Guru Nanak elaborates on the Creator being *Nirbhau*.

*Bhai vich pavan vahai sad vaau, sagliaa bhau likhiaa sir leykh. Nanak nirbhau nirankaar sach eyk.* M: 1, p 464.

Every entity is in obedience of the Creator, only the One Eternal Formless Creator is not.

God is the highest authority.

*Nirvair* (without enmity; treats all equally).

*Akal Moorat* (epitome of eternity, transcends time, is timeless).

*Ajoooni* (without life form: God is the Spirit).

*Saibh'n* (Self created, Self-existent. God cannot be installed as an idol).

*Gurprasaad* (God, the Spirit, is formless and hence not found by the senses, recognised with the true Guru's guidance).



Understanding of Divine virtues motivate having vision of the Almighty.

The latter comes by obedience, says Guru Nanak: *Teyrey gun gaavaa deyh bujhaaee; jaisey sach mah rahau rajaee.* M: 1, p 795.

(O Almighty, please give understanding of Your virtues and powers; so that I live by Your will/commands).

*Khaana peenaa hasna sauna visar gaiaa hai marna. Khasam visaar khuaari keeni dhrig jeevan nahi rahna.* M: 1, p 1254.

(People eat, drink, laugh and rest; but have forgotten death. It is shameful not to obey commands of the Master, who provides all the pleasures).

The true Guru guides us on the right path.

*Nanak satgur bheyttiai poori hovai jugat. Hasandiaa kheylandiaa painandiaa khaavandiaa vichey hovey mukat.* M: 5, p 522.

(One knows the perfect way of leading life by following the true Guru's guidance. One then remains free of bondage while laughing, playing/ enjoying, wearing good clothes and enjoying food).

The soul comes from the Spirit to give life to the body, and wishes to merge back after death of the body. It is given a role to play in life with duties associated with it. The human being comes with four potentials for their roles, namely:

*Dharam* (dutifully perform the role in life).

*Arth* (obtain and contribute to economic wellbeing, and development).

*Kaam* (fulfilment of desires and aspirations).

If the soul is possessed by temptations in life connected with the above three, it loses its pristine form and cannot merge with the Spirit. This is overcome with the Guru's guidance to attain the fourth.

*Mokh* (Freedom from temptations).

Guru Nanak says

*Satigur kai vas chaar padaarath. Teen samaaey eyk kritaarath.* M: 1, p 1345.

(The four potentials are in hand of the true guru; if the three are controlled with his guidance, success in the fourth is obtained).

Guru Sahib says that no other means shall work.

*Manhatth budhi keyteea keytey beyd beechar.*

(Many people act by own will; many perform rituals with ideas taken from the Vedas).

*Keytey bandhan jee key Gurmukhi mokh duaar.*

(There are numerous fetters for the mind. Emancipation is attained by following the Guru).

*Sachahu orai sabh ko upar sach aachaar.* M: 1, p 62.

(One cannot reach the Eternal with these; above all is truthful conduct).

The fetters mentioned above are:

*Karam dharam sabh bandhna paap pun sanbandh.* M: 3, p 551.

(All religious rituals are fetters which hold back one from complying with Naam. Rituals are based on superstitions, good and bad deeds).

Here are practical examples from Gurbani on what is truthful living in all aspects of life, are analogies for attaining union of the soul with the Spirit.

*Kiv Sachiaara hooeeai kiv koorrai tuttai paal. Japji Paurri 1.*

(How to demolish the wall of falsehood and be considered truthful to be accepted for union with the Spirit).

*The wall of falsehood is Haumai or ego, acting by self-will.*

*Hukam rajaee chalna nanak likhiaa naal. Japji Pauri 1, p 1*

(This is willing conformance to Hukam, Divine commands, the laws of nature, written on the conscience).

### **On Love:**

*Ih kineyhi aasqi doojai lagai jaaey. Nanak aasaq kaaddehai sad hi rahai samaaey.*

(It is not love if one gets attracted elsewhere. True love is forever, through thick and thin).

*Changey changa kar maney mandai manda hoey. Aasaq ih na aakheei ji leykha vartai soey.* M: 2, p 474.

(One who is happy in good times but not in adversity; one who is love for benefits, is not in true love.)

*Nanak gali koorreeaa baajh preet karey. Tichar jaanai bhala kar jichar leyvai dey.* M: 1, p 594.

(Relationships without mutual affection are false. In these, one considers a relationship good only as long as s/he received benefits and the other gives.)

On the husband–wife relationship.





*Dhan pir ih na akkheeai bahan ikatthey hoey. Eyk jot duey moorti, dhan pir kaheeai soey.*

(Wife and husband are not those who just live together. When the two bodies have one soul, are spiritually united, then they truly are husband and wife).

*Dhan pir ka ik hi sang vaasa vich haumai bheet karaari. Gur poorai haumai bheet tori jan Nanak miley banvaari. M: 4, p 1262.*

(Wife and husband live together, but have a strong wall of ego between. Only when the true Guru breaks this wall, the wife meets the husband).

(Is an analogy for relationship between the soul and the Almighty).

Employment:

*Chaakar lagai chaakri jey chalai khasmai khasmai bhaae. Hurmat tis no agli oh vajahu bhi doona khaae. M: 1, p 474*

(One who takes an employment should act by directions of the employer: then s/he gets great regard and higher compensation.)

*Ih kineyhi chaakri jit bhau khasam na jaaey.*

(Why take a job, if one does not do it well and is afraid of the master?)

*Nanak seyyak kaaddheeai jey seyti khasam samaae. M: 2, 475*

(A good employee is one who merges his/her aim with that of the employer).

*Jey rat lagai kapraai jaama hoey pleet.*

If blood stains a garment, it gets defiled.

*Jo rat peevai maansa tin kiau nirmal cheet. M: 1. P 140.*

(How can those who drink human blood, by exploiting the gullible, be pure at heart? This applies to the clergy or employers who exploit simple people.)

**On Interpersonal relations:**

*Jis andar taat praaee hovai tis da kadey na hovi bhalaa. M: 4, p 308.*

(No good happens to a person who has antipathy to others).

*Jab dhaarai koe bairi meet. Tab lag nihchal naahi cheet. M: 4, 278.*

(As long as one treats some as friends and some as foes, and gets into conflicts, the mind is not at peace.)

*Nanak phikey boleai tan man phikaa hoey. Phiko phikaa sadeai phikai phiki soey. M: 1, p 473*

(Says Guru Nanak: One who speaks arrogantly, his body and mind become insipid, and cannot enjoy peace).

On Inter-religion relations: When Guru Nanak looked and found turmoil, he said:

*Nanak duneeaa kaisi hoe; saalak mit na rahio koe. Bhaae bandhi heyt chukaai. Duneeaa kaaran-i deen gavaai. M: 1, p 1410*

(What has become of the world? There is no guide nor friend left, love between siblings and between relatives has gone. People have forsaken Divine grace for transitory material gains and pleasures.) Nanak attributed this to people forgetting the two universal truths: God, whose commands forever apply, and death, which is inevitable.

*Kaal naahi jog naahi naahi sat ka ddhab. Thaanast jag bhrastt hoey ddoobta iv jag. M:1, p 662.*

(People are not conscious of God or death, no one follows the path of truth, people neglect Hukam/Divine commands.)

Places of worship have been corrupted, the world is sinking into evil ways.

**Gurbani and Science:**

People consider religion and science as two different and conflicting worlds. Their perception is that religion is only dogmas and superstitions while science is logical. This is misplaced.

Science is the study of natural phenomena, observing patterns in them and deducing laws of nature. Scientists give them names like law of gravity. Science does not make the laws; the Creator has made them religion calls them *Hukam* or Divine commands. Science does not claim to have found the ultimate truth on anything. Religion and science both agree that we can never know what all the Creator has made.

Religion or spirituality is concerned with cosmology, the latter covers study of the structure of the universe, how it came into being and the place of human beings in it.

Science has not been able to come to any conclusion on this, there are wide variations in estimation of when creation came into being, Guru Nanak says in Japji Paurri 21 that no one except the Creator knows when creation came into being.



As for the process of creation, the scientists have been struggling, have serially attributed this it to an accident, evolution and the Big Bang theory. Guru Nanak gave the following logical sequence of creation over five centuries back.

*Aapeenai aap saajio aapeenai rachio naau; duee kudrat-i saajeeai kar-i aasan ddittho chaau.* M: 1.p 463.

(The Creator created the self, next made Naam/cosmic laws; then created the universe and fondly watches over it everything conforms to laws of nature.)

This first stage created the galaxies, solar systems and planets – but not the creatures who live in them.

The creatures need air, water and food for sustenance; these were provided for before the creatures came into being.

This is how

*Saachey tey pavna bhaiaa, pavnai tey jal-u hoey jal tey tribhavan saajiaa ghatt-i ghatt-i jot-i samoey.* M: 1, p 19.

(From the Creator came air, and from air, gases formed water and the world was carved with water – and clay; the Divine Spirit is present in every being).

Nanak says

*Pahlo dey tai'n rijak samaaha; pichhah-u dey tai'n jant-u paahaa;*

(You first created the wherewithal and later the creatures).

*Tudh-u jeyvadd-u daataa avar-u na suaami lavai na koe laavniaa.* M: 5, p 130.

(There is none as great a benefactor as You; none comes near, O' Master.)

*Nanak jeeu upaaeykai likh naavai dharam bahaaliaa; othai sachey hi sach nibrrai chun vakh kadhey jajmaaliaa.* M: 1, p 463.

(The creatures were created with their roles ordained; the metaphoric judge Dharam Rai is tasked to watch their deeds and make them accountable; in this system only those conforming to truth, i.e. Divine commands, withstand scrutiny, others fail, and cannot attain union with the Creator.)

Regarding the place of humans in creation, the Shabad in *Raga Aasa* and Japji Pauri 27, starting with *Sodar teyra keyha*, proclaims the entire universe exists in harmony like components of a music group. There are musical instruments, their players and singers who perform as one composite group, asks all creatures to conform to *Hukam*.

Japji Pauri 34 says that the earth with its creatures exists as part of the system and so act accordingly:

*Raati ruti thiti vaar; paun paani agni paataal; tis vich dharti thhap rakhi dharamsaal.*

(The lunar cycle days and nights, water, air, fire, energy and land by provided, the Creator established the earth for its creatures).

*Tis vich jee jugat key rang; tin key Naam aneyk anant.*

(There are numerous life forms with their roles allotted. The laws of nature govern all these and the creatures must conform to them.)

How to identify the true Guru? Noting that personalities, not fundamentals of religions are responsible for intra-faith conflicts, Gurbani does not glorify any person, only glorifies the Formless Creator, the institution of the Guru, the seekers, and the holy congregation. Conformance to *Naam* is the means to find peace.

The Guru is not glorified as a person, but as an institution. Guru Nanak says: 'This is how the true Guru is recognised'.

*Nanak satigur aisa jaaneeai jo sabhsai laey milaaey jeeo.* M: 1, p 71.

(The true Guru is one who brings everyone together.)

*Jis miliai man hoey anand so satigur kaheei. Man ki dubidha jaaey har param pad laheei.* M: 4, p 168.

(The Guru is one in whose company we experience bliss, duality of the mind is dissolved, and the exalted state of Divine experience attained).

Guru Nanak calls himself the lowest amongst the lowly.

*Neechaa andar neech jaat neechi hoo ati neech.*

*Nanak tin kai sang saath vaddiaa sio kia rees.*

*Jithat neech samaaleean tithai nadar teyri bakhsees.*

(I am the lowest amongst the lowly; I would rather be in their company and not imitate the high and rich. For, Divine grace is bestowed where the lowly are looked after.)

About his faith, he says

*Ham nahi changey buraa nahi koey. Pranvat Nanak taarey soey.* M: 1, p 728.

(We are not good, but none is bad. Let us glorify the Almighty who alone can save us.)

Humility is a great virtue and is eulogised in Gurbani for spiritual experience.

## God is present everywhere

Guru Nanak found that people thought God was present at some sacred places: the Hindus consider God resides at Jagannath Puri, "the town of God", the Muslims consider Him to be at the Kaaba at Mecca considering it as God's abode. The Jews, Christians and Muslims call Jerusalem as the holy land, and fight over it, which continues till today.

Early scriptures have at that access to God was available to selected persons and at specific places. Many important places of Hindu worship like Amarnath and Badrinath are located in the mountains. Moses went to Mount Sinai to talk to God. Jesus went to Mount Olive to deliver his Sermon on the Mount. Prophet Muhammad received God's messages through Jabrael, also called Gabriel, in a cave on Mount Hira.

Guru Nanak emphasised that there is One Creator of the entire universe who is present everywhere and inside everyone.

He teaches: *Man mandar tan veys kalandar ghatt hi teerath nhaava. Eyk sabad merey praan bast hai bahurr janam na aava.*

(The mind is the temple, the body the seeker. Teerath, the holy place for bath is within. I keep Divine Word/ commands in my mind so as not to be reborn.)

*Agam agochar alakh apaara chinta karhu hamaari.*

(O Almighty, You are beyond reach of comprehension, not reached by sensory organs, Formless and Infinite; You take care of us creatures.)

*Jal thal maheal bharpur leena ghatt ghatt jot tumhaari.* M: 1, p 795.

(You are present in water, on land, in space; Your Spirit is present in every creature.)

Otherwise,

*Andrahu jhootthey paj baahar dunee andar phail. Atth satth teerath jey nhaavai utrai naahi mail.*

(Those who have deceit within but display goodness outwardly. their dirt of vices cannot be removed – the mind is not purified even if one bathes at all the "sixty-eight holy places".)

Guru Nanak guides mankind on how to overcome these.

*Ghar hi mundh videys pir, nit jhoorey samaaley. Mildiaa ddhil na hovaee ji neat raas karey.* M: 1, p 594.

(The Almighty (husband) is at home, that is within, but the soul (wife) thinks he is away and feels sad all



the separation, the Almighty is within us, but one feels separated and looks for mean to find God within.)

(Says Guru Nanak. It takes no time to find if s/ he transforms the intention, that is stops acting by self-will and obey Divine commands.)

The Sufi saint Bulhey Shah expresses thus:

*Jey rab jugle bhaudiaa milda ta milda gaeeaa majheaa.*

*Jey rab paani dhotia milda ta milda magra machheaa.*

*Bulhey Shah rab tina no milda, jinaa neeata hachheaa.*

(If one could find God by wandering in jungles, then cows and buffalos would find Him.

If one could find God by taking baths, then crocodiles and fish would find Him.)

*O Bulhey Shah, those with clean intention/mind are free of ego, find God.*

### God's message to humanity

*Pahla maran kabool jeevan ki chhadd aas; hohu sabhna ki reynuka tau aaau hamaarey paas.* M: 5, p 1102.

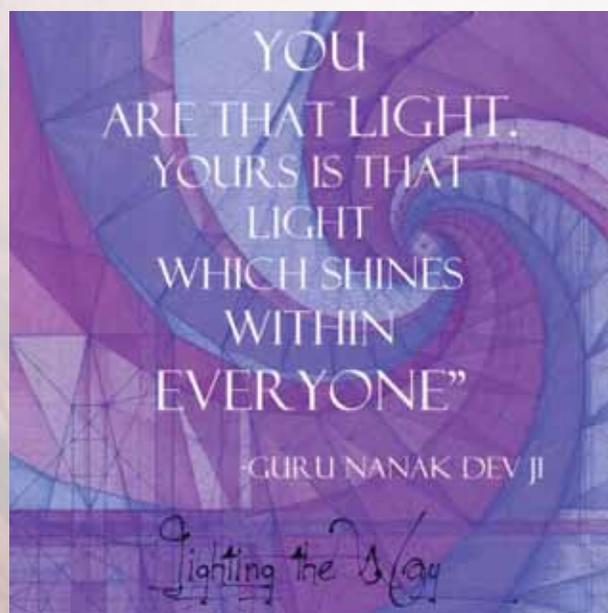
(First accept to die and give up hope to live, that is, kill your ego. Be humble to all, you will then come to me.)

Sheikh Farid also conveys such message from God.

*Aap savaarey mai miley mai miliaa sukh hoey; Farida jey too meyra hoey rahey sabh jag teyra hoey.* 95. Farid, p 1382.

(You will find Me if you transform yourself; your search will end and you will be at peace once you find me.)

How?



If you be mine, the whole world will be your friends, O' Farid.

People can be at peace individually and collectively by prising Divine virtues and obeying Divine commands.

*Chhaati seetal man sukhi chhant gobind gun gaaey. Aisi kirpa karhu prabh Nanak daas dasaaey.* M: 5, p 254.

(The heart is cooled, anxieties leave, and the mind is at peace of the one who sings and emulates virtues of the Almighty);

O Almighty, please bestow grace that I be the servant of Your servants, follow those who live in obedience to You.

**Make me humble.**



**S Rawel Singh** was born in December 1932 in what is today Pakistan and moved to the Indian side in 1947. Commissioned as an officer in the Indian Army in June 1954, he retired as a Brigadier in December 1986,

then became General Manager in Indian Telephone Industries Bangalore from 1986 to 1990.

He has written numerous articles on Sikhi and comparative religion which appeared on Sikhnet and are on his blog <http://www.sadhsangat.com/> His book on *Understanding Japji Sahib*, both digital and printed versions have been published by *Amazon Kindle*. This interprets Japji Sahib based on contents of Japji itself and also from Gurbani, and has translated Sri Guru Granth Sahib giving word-by-word meanings and underlying ideas together with transliteration, available on line at <http://www.sadhsangat.com/>.

He has studied the Gita, Bible and the Quran and now devotes his life to the study of Gurbani.



# Connecting with Sikh Heritage



Gurdwara Dera Sahib at Lahore: Shaheedi Asthaan of Guru Arjan Dev Ji

## Gurpreet Kaur's Journey to Pakistan

*For as long as I can remember, I heard stories about my mother's Daadke village near Lala Mussa, and the houses in Lahore. All left behind. A way of life, property, belongings, and even family. And the stories of orphaned children, families crossing into a partitioned India and adjusting to help them resettle.*

*For many Sikhs, going back to visit their roots remained a distant dream but my curiosity to just see what our elders spoke of came to fruition in February 2019. I was fortunate to accompany my husband, Bicky Singh, on a SikhLens-sponsored journey to Pakistan, to see and step on the same lands as our Gurus.*

*Starting in Lahore, we visited Gurdwaras, museums and sites related to our Gurus and important to Sikh history. We visited Sacha Sauda, Nanakana Sahib and Panja Sahib, including Guru related sites in their vicinity. We stayed overnight in the saraans, participated in morning and evening diwans, and partook langar. We drove to Peshawar and Shergarh Fort in KPK*

*(erstwhile North West Frontier Province), from Panja Sahib. We traveled to Rawalpindi and Gujranwala, via Jhelum, to visit remnants of local gurdwaras, built in the memory of our Gurus, and sites related to the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. We finally visited Kartarpur Sahib Gurdwara. While looking at the surrounding green fields, I wondered "is this what Baba Nanak saw too"?*

*In February 2019, to initiate our Guru Nanak 550 celebrations, our group travelled to ten cities in Pakistan, visiting about 60 sites of Sikh heritage. Heritage is not just religious, but is also historical and cultural, and includes nostalgia for a lost homeland. Our dynamic ancestors were not just saints and soldiers, but also entrepreneurs, builders, artists, thinkers, poets and promoters of interfaith harmony. When Sikhs visit places that are lesser known or forgotten, and interact with experts and locals in those areas, preservation and restoration will hopefully happen, at least at some places.*



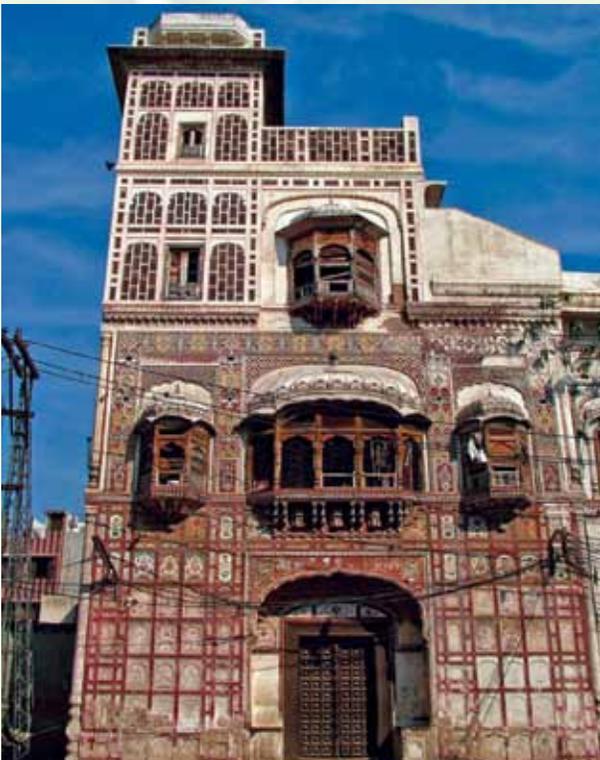


*Zamzama Canon of Bhangi Misl*

We first visited Lahore, and driving down the Mall Road, we saw the Bawa Dinga Singh Building with the name plaque still intact. In the middle of Mall road, with traffic on both sides was

the famous Zamzama cannon belonging to the Bhangi Misl, which was used by Maharaja Ranjit Singh in the Multan campaign.

Gurdwara Dera Sahib, the Shaheedi Asthaan of Guru Arjan Dev Ji, on banks of the river Ravi, is just outside the Lahore Fort, and the original



*The Haveli of Naunihal Singh, within the Walled City of Lahore*



*Gurdwara Singh Singhian in Shaheed Ganj*





structure still has a few frescoes and Gurbani verses inlaid on the walls. Pashtun-origin Sikhs and sewadars prepare and serve langar to visitors.

The Haveli of Naunihal Singh in the walled city of Lahore is one of the finest examples of Sikh architecture in Lahore. It is currently a government school, and as such is still preserved and maintained. The interior artwork and frescoes are beautiful and contain Sikh and interfaith representations.

Mian Mir, a Sufi saint, was respectfully invited to lay the foundation stone of the Harimandir Sahib in Amritsar by the Sikhs. The Mian Mir Mazhaar (mausoleum) in Lahore is a place of worship for Muslims, where Qawwalis (devotional music) are held every Thursday in keeping with the Sufi tradition.

Princess Bamba Sutherland was the eldest granddaughter of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, and late in her life, she returned to live in the land of her ancestors. She is buried at the Gora Kabristaan in Lahore.

Gurdwara Singh Singhania in Shaheed Ganj, memorialises the site where Mir Mannu massacred many Sikhs. Jag Reyatt, our official photographer, conveyed our feelings “Being there gave me the shivers”...

The martyrdom site and Gurdwara of Bhai Taru Singh is close by. The group visited Masjid of Wazir Khan, built by Nawab Wazir Khan during Shahjehan’s reign. He was a doctor and Governor of Punjab, not to be mistaken for that Wazir Khan of Sirhind.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh ruled over a secular state with respect for all. He paid his respects at this complex of mosques and graves of revered



Gurdwara Janam Asthaan Guru Ramdas Ji at Chuna Mandi, Lahore



Friday kirtan by descendants of Bhai Mardana at the Gurdwara of Guru Ramdas Ji

pirs, also contributing an annual tribute for their maintenance.

The Gurdwara Janam Asthaan of Guru Ramdas ji is in Chuna Mandi, Lahore. The descendants of Bhai Mardana continue their ancestral kirtan at this Gurdwara every Friday.

The privately-owned Fakir Khana Museum, ancestral home of the Fakir family, contains over 20,000 objects, many of them original paintings and artifacts of the Sikh era. Three of the family’s ancestors served in the court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh.



Gurdwara at Aitchison College, Lahore

Mozang Gurdwara was built to commemorate Guru Hargobind ji’s visit to Lahore. The famous Aitchison College in Lahore was the alma mater to very many noble Sikh families in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and still has a Mandir and Gurdwara on its premises. Trustee Syed Babar Ali, an alumini, a philanthropist and businessman,

gave us a guided tour, and remains active in preserving the Gurdwara Sahib.

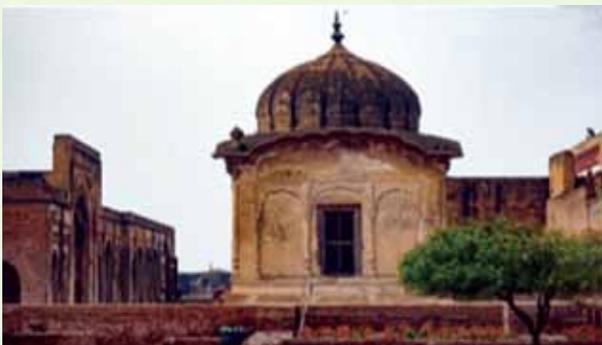
The Badshahi Masjid in the walled city of Lahore, just outside Lahore Fort is prime example of Mughal architecture, built by Aurangzeb. This was utilised as a garrison during the Sikh Kingdom.

The Lahore Fort was built by the Mughals but Maharaja Ranjit Singh held court and resided within it. He had several havelis and buildings constructed in typical Sikh architecture and surrounded by gardens. One of these structures was a Gurdwara. These buildings are identified by the narrow red bricks, elaborate arches, and balconies built on the outside walls. Some frescoes remain on the walls in the Haveli of Kharak Singh. Maharaja Ranjit Singh did not use the existing Mughal Durbars, instead building his own court, the Athdara. He however maintained the existing Mughal-period buildings and structures, also restoring the artwork decorating interior of the Sheesh Mahal.

There are several museums within the Lahore Fort, including the Sikh Gallery and the Armoury section. The Princess Bamba Collection,



Maharaja Ranjit Singh's court, the Athdara in Lahore Fort



Sikh architecture buildings in Lahore Fort

comprising her personal and inherited collection, was donated by her Secretary to the Lahore Fort museums after her passing.

After some days in Lahore, we went to Nankana 'Nanak Da Aana' Sahib. Just outside Nankana Sahib is Gurdwara Sacha Sauda, in Churkhana village, Farookabad. This is where Guru Nanak fed the hungry fakirs, which he considered as 'sacha sauda', a true transaction, which was beginning of the tradition of Langar. There is a *baoli* or well dug by Guru Nanak and langar of *daal-roti* is served to visitors by the resident sewadars. The gurdwara sanctum was constructed in 1837 by Maharaja Ranjit Singh, and the façade was built in the 1920s. The area around is being re-forested.



Gurdwara Sacha Sauda, Churkhana village, Farookabad

There are several gurdwaras in Nankana Sahib to commemorate various *sakhis* (stories) and sites related to Guru Nanak. Gurdwara Kiara Sahib is where his cattle grazed at the neighbour's fields, there being a large sarovar attached to the gurdwara. Nearby is Gurdwara Mal ji, where a cobra is said to have shaded the child Nanak as he slept. Gurdwara Patti Sahib is where Guru Nanak was sent to learn from the Pandit. Gurdwara Tambu Sahib is where Guru Nanak rested after returning from the 'sacha sauda'; Bebe Nanaki and his father took him home from here. Gurdwara Baal Leela nearby is where he played with friends.

The Guru Nanak High School in Nankana Sahib is a prime example of the wealth, vision and belief in education of our ancestors. It is





*Guru Nanak High School, Nankana Sahib*

currently a Government boy's middle school and is well maintained.

Rai Bular Bhatti was one of the earliest, outside the family, to recognise the divinity in Guru Nanak, and donated over 750 acres in Raipur Talwandi to Guru Nanak. We visited his mazhaar to pay respects.

Gurdwara Nankana Sahib is built at the birthplace of Guru Nanak, a large complex including the gurdwara, sarovar, langar hall and



*Gurdwara Nankana Sahib, Janam Asthaan Guru Nanak*



*Tree and memorial in remembrance of the Shaheeds, Nankana Sahib*

residential, buildings. The Gurdwara itself is built in Sufi style with no exterior walls, just open spaces with concentric rows of arches. The inner sanctum is made of marble and marks the Janam Asthaan of Guru Nanak. In the courtyard is the tree from which Sikhs were hung and burnt, and the memorial around it is in remembrance of the 20 Shaheeds (martyrs) who stormed the gurdwara in February 1920 to recover it from the Mahants. From the eighties, many Pakistani Sikhs from the Northwest Frontier and Peshawar areas have moved to Nankana Sahib.

The Katas Raj complex includes a pond, said to have been created by the tears of Shiva (like Pushkar in Rajasthan), and have several Hindu



*The Haveli of Hari Singh Nalwa, Katas Raj*

Shiv temples, an ancient Shivling, and the ruins of a Buddhist stupa. Sikh era footprints are seen in the red brick Haveli of Hari Singh Nalwa at top of the complex, which was his administrative office. Not far from Katas Raj is Tilla Jogia, which Guru Nanak visited during his Udasis and held discourses with the Jogis there.

The Harkishangarh Fort in Haripur was built by Hari Singh Nalwa and later reinforced by the British. It is currently being used as a Police Station, a District Tehsil Office and the Dispute Resolution Council. Lawyers and locals of the area have been working to protect and preserve the historial site.



Gurdwara Panja Sahib is associated with the sakhi of Guru Nanak and Walli Kandhari. The Gurdwara Sahib is surrounded by a channel of water, and a few steps below is the rock with Guru Nanak Dev ji's handprint. Koi fish abound in the waters, the fresh spring water being pumped in and recycled constantly. The gurdwara complex includes the saraan (guest rooms), residential quarters, offices and a large langar hall with kitchen. Interestingly, in Pakistan, most local Sikhs do not partake langar at the gurdwara, but serve langar to out of town visitors with devotion and respect.



*Gurdwara Panja Sahib at Hassan Abdal*

Nearby is the railway station of Hassan Abdal. In 1921, many Sikhs lay on the tracks to stop the oncoming train so as to give langar to the Sikh prisoners being taken to Attock fort.

On our way to Peshawar from Panja Sahib, we passed Attock Fort in the distance and stopped for a unique experience of Rabab music on the banks of the River Indus, with breakfast at Attock Khurd train station. It was from Attock Fort that Maharaja Ranjit Singh launched upon his Empire's northern and western expansion. Further along, on the banks of the Kabul River at Pir Sabak, Nowshera, the Sikhs fought the Durrani Afghans in 1823. Akali Phoola Singh died fighting here and an impressive pink marble samaadh was built at the site. The gurdwara was used as a crop research centre CCRI after partition, but the floods of 2010

extensively damaged the samaadh and gurdwara. We paid our respects to honour Sikh military lore. The Sikh army was multi faith, and a Nepalese general too died fighting here during that battle.



*Memorial Akali Phoola Singh, Pir Sabak at Nowshera*

At Peshawar, we visited Bhai Joga Singh Gurdwara and Bhai Biba Singh Gurdwara, which was re-opened two years ago. Sangat gurdwaras, Bhai Joga and Bhai Biba were both disciples of Guru Gobind Singh who were sent westwards to spread the message of Sikhi. Pashtun Sikhs of the area educate their children here and showed us their Khalsa School. We strolled through the Sethia Mohalla, admiring the intricate woodwork balconies and doors. The Sethi House is being restored to its former glory by Pakistan's Archaeology department. We then went to Gor Khatri where Gorakh Nath (Kanpatta) jogis used to live. During the Sikh era, Gor Khatri was used as the residence and official headquarters of General Paolo Avitabile, the Governor of Peshawar from 1838 to 1842.

The Shergarh Fort in Mansehra (named after General Man Singh), in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, was built in 1819 by Hari Singh Nalwa, one of the 30 forts to halt invasions from the west and north. The Sikhs battled the local Tanaoli tribe 17 times, and the fort remained with the victor. Shergarh Fort has been with the Tanaolis since the death of Hari Singh Nalwa. We were the first group of Sikh visitors here after partition, and were ceremoniously received with tribal 'gatka', folk music including by bagpipes, followed by a sumptuous *daawat*.

Then at Islamabad, a cultural treat of ghazals by Ehsen Ali, nephew of Ghulam Ali, viewing of Salman Khan's 'Knitted Beliefs' and Amardeep



Singh's 'Peering Soul' and 'Peering Warrior', followed by traditional Hunza cuisine. We were pleasantly surprised to find books on Sikhs and Amardeep Singh's *Lost Heritage* at the Saeed Book Bank. Shopping for Pakistani and traditional lawn suits was a special treat! A walk through Bhabhra Bazaar, earlier Khalsa Bazaar on the Murree Road at Rawalpindi brought home the warmth and hospitality of Punjabis, irrespective of which side of the border they are. "Aao ji Sardar ji" and photo requests abounded, as did complimentary fresh hot jalebis, and refusal for payment of purchased bakery items. A visit to the Taxila museum educated us on the ancient Buddhist history of the area.

On the drive from Rawalpindi to Gujranwala is Rohtas Fort, built by Sher Shah Suri. Sikhs lived in the village within the fort, as is evident



Gurdwara Choa Sahib ji, Rohtas fort

by the site commemorating the Janam Asthaan of Mata Sahib Kaur. Her father was a sewadar at Gurdwara Choa Sahib Ji, just outside Rohtas fort. Guru Nanak is said to have rested and had water from the spring (*choa*) at this site on his 4<sup>th</sup> Udasi, after visiting Tilla Jogian. The gurdwara was built in 1835 by Maharaja Ranjit Singh, who ensured safety of the Salt Range from Rohtas Fort. Activists and the Jhelum Heritage Society have successfully petitioned the Government to restore and preserve this Gurdwara, to make it functional. Many trees have been planted recently.

The elaborate Bhai Karam Sikh Gurdwara in Jhelum was originally built by Bhai Karam Singh and later rebuilt by the local sangat. We briefly



Bhai Karam Sikh Gurdwara at Jhelum

visited the Jhelum railway station as some of our group had ancestors who left their homes there during partition. I felt impelled to photograph Lala Mussa railway station, the train stop for my mother's ancestral village, about three kilometers away, visited by *tanga*.

The birthplace of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, son of Mahaan Singh, in Gujranwala is a red brick Haveli built in typical Sikh architecture. It has two 'vedhas' (courtyards), elaborate arches, slanted roshandaans, and a 250 years old banyan tree. The haveli is above the Machhi bazaar, residence of Sikhs at that time.



Birthplace of Maharaja Ranjit Singh at Gujranwala

Rori Sahib Gurdwara in Eminabad, Gujranwala, was restored about 12 years back and is where Guru Nanak meditated on the *rori* (gravel) after his first udasi, soon after Babar had invaded India in 1521. He recited Shabad Ang 360 of SGGS in *Raag Aasaa*, observing the barbaric





Rori Sahib Gurdwara at Eminabad, Gujranwala]

atrocities on the people. Gurdwara Rori Sahib was designed by Bhai Ram Singh and the lettering of the baani in the arches is in the shape of the tools of his trade, carpentry. Bhai Ram Singh was later invited by Queen Victoria to design the Durbar Hall at Osbourne House, Isle of Wight in the U.K. Gurdwaras Chakki Sahib and Bhai Lalo are in nearby Saidpur village.

The drive from Gujranwala to Gurdwara Kartarpur Sahib in Narowal district was through rural areas, and closer to Kartarpur Sahib, the



Gurdwara Kartarpur Sahib, Narowal

view from the bus was of lush green fields. Guru Nanak ‘retired’ at Kartarpur after his four Udasis, tilling his fields, growing food and holding prayer and discourse sessions for 18 years, until his passing. Guru Nanak was revered by Hindus and Muslims alike. The well and Persian wheel he used are just outside the Gurdwara complex.

Guru Nanak truly lived by the three principles of the Sikh way of life that he espoused: *Naam Japo*, *Kirat Karo* and *Vandd Chhako*, ‘Meditate on Naam, labour honestly, serve and share’. Gurdwara Kartarpur Sahib was closed after partition and reopened in 2000. [Read about this in Nishaan Issue IV/2019]

Our incredible trip to Pakistan was climaxed at the Dervish restaurant in Lahore, where we reveled in Qawaals by Zain and Zohaib.

The writer, Gurpreet Kaur was brought up in various states of India, acquiring a MSc degree from Delhi University before coming to Chicago for her MS. She worked as a computer programmer and analyst prior to joining her husband Bicky Singh at *Future Computing Solutions, Inc.*, to add value to a growing company, handling accounting and in change human resources.



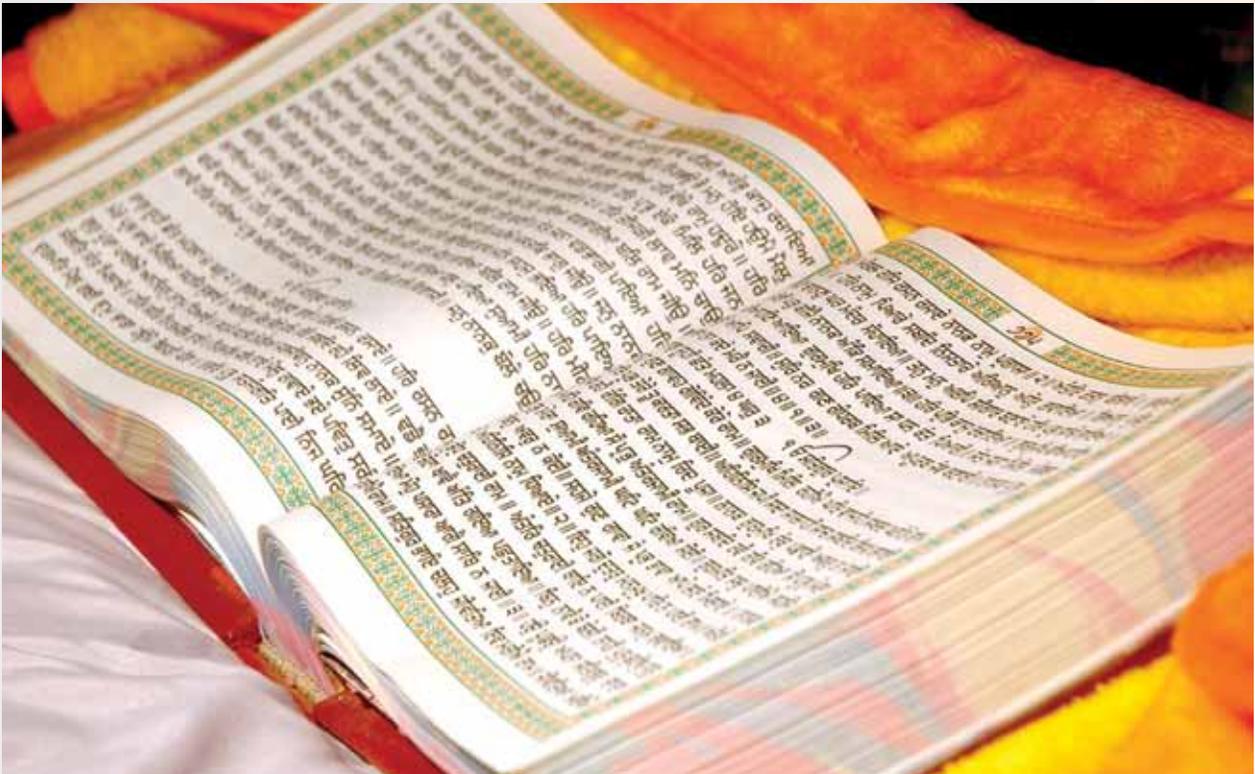
Gurpreet has raised her three children as Sikhs in a western environment, attempting to balance traditional and modern values. “Being born a Sikh is Waheguru’s gift, and becoming and being a Sikh is the realisation of it”! Gurpreet learnt Punjabi once in the US, a benefit of *parshaada sewa* and is self-taught in Gurmukhi. She spent twelve years volunteering at a Punjabi school, and currently represents Sikhs in Diversity Panels and law enforcement trainings.



# “Building a World without Walls”

Ralph Singh on

## Spreading the message of Jagat Guru Baba



The best way to preserve the Sikh identity is to spread the universal message of Sri Guru Granth Sahib. In today's fractured world where everyone is defined by their boundaries, how do we, as Sikhs, maintain our identity while glorifying our boundless Guru? Where has our history brought us and where will following the mystical yet practical teachings enshrined in our Eternal Guru, Sri Guru Granth Sahib ji, lead us?

How do we worship One who is *amajbai*? What does *na ko hindu na mussalman* mean to the dominant Sikh narrative? What if we were to think of Sri Guru Granth Sahib ji as not just the

Sikh scripture, but voice of the Cosmos? We are its caretakers. We are defenders of the truth, of justice, of equality, and the pluralism it teaches: *Everyone is part of my community, I see no one as an 'other'*.

Our character, work ethic, and compassion can provide a model for today's global citizens and civilization's needs, an ethos of love, born out of devotion to a shared Higher Power, a universal authority for Truth that transcends any worldly boundaries. It defies definition and despises artificial walls meant simply to solidify man's power and deny the glory of the Eternal transcendent One from which all power, all life, and all matter springs.



## Disruption and transformation

I begin with the transformative power of story to change the dominant narrative. Stories have the power to change the world. Moreover, the stories we choose to tell and how we choose to tell them determines the course of civilisation. This is the story of *Chardi Kalaa*. Our Gurus infused in us an irrepressible spirit to overcome all adversity

*I will make the sparrows tear the hawks from the sky: One of you will equal Sawa lakh or my name is not Gobind Singh*

In those who had no hope by means of lineage, or caste to ever gain access to power or even basic needs, those we may call the dregs of society, our Gurus infused such power that they transformed the face of their world, from one of constant fear and conflict, to one of peace.

So let us not lament the lack of a leader. We have the greatest leader in the Cosmos, he is Guru Gobind Singh ji (the 10<sup>th</sup> Nanak) and he left us the Eternal Guru, Sri Guru Granth Sahib, saying that if we would only follow the teachings, internalise *Naam*, we would see the Guru Himself emerge standing before us!

So the real question is whether we are worthy to be called his Sikhs. I, for one, know it is a constant journey and I ask all who this reaches pray that I am able to stay at His Holy Feet.

## Identity Crisis ?

We Sikhs are constantly confronted with a conundrum: are we distinct, universal or both? I say both ! It is only a conundrum if we accept the paradigm the material world has imposed on us as reality. I for one do not accept reality. I do not accept the poverty, injustice, racism and other forms of prejudice, the disrespect for women, the elderly, those with disabilities, I do not accept environmental degradation. So I proudly proclaim that what we see in the world is virtual reality. It is all man made. And we are the *avtars* born to change that reality. Except that, instead of *avtars*, our Gurus called us Sikhs!

So for a Sikh there are at least three parts to our life. The first is to elevate and share the particular teachings of our Gurus both within the community and in the world at large.

Secondly, to try our best to embody the teachings in our own lives and build a society and world which reflects the values and character which our Guru's spoke of: *sachae urai subh ko uper sach achar*

Third and most important is the inner life which not only adds meaning , it is the meaning, of life: *bhai parapet manukh deharia, gobind milan ki eh teri baria, avar kaj tere kite na kam mil sadh sangat bhuj kewal nam*



As a young student, this was my quest: where in the world could I find anyone who could connect me with God: *Koi an milavai mera pritam pyara ho tis pai ap vechai.*

My own story: Let me take you back to the summer of 1970: So how does a young American middle-class Jewish student end up in village India after my parents and grandparents had given me the best private school and college education that money could buy? Because although I had acquired more knowledge of how the world has failed and what solutions have been enshrined in the scriptures, philosophies and economic and political theories of the world, I had not found the Power, the Authority for that Truth and I had not found faith in myself to raise that flag for truth and justice. Spirituality was not part of curriculum.

And while I had studied what I thought were all the world religions and their scriptures, I had never seen a Sikh in my life nor heard of Sikhism.

2020 marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the remarkable Vision that changed my life forever. I had just graduated from the University of Rochester, but had spent my senior year at Columbia taking all graduate courses in East Asian studies. While I was accepted in grad school, I was not sure that was the path I was to follow. I was sitting with a friend in my apartment near Columbia's back gates, having a cup of tea, when in the blink of an eye, the room vanished and this remarkable Being was standing in front of me. A diamond-like light shone from his head and his eyes held the universe. He just held up his hand and said "Don't be afraid". He drew me out through his eyes, toured me around the universe made me feel like he possessed all knowledge I could ever attain and as a role model was everything I could ever aspire to be. He brought me back, showed me something similar to an atom, said "Meditate on this," and vanished. The room and my friend were back to normal but my life had forever changed.

I deferred my admission to grad school and leaving everything familiar behind, took off on a classic quest for Truth and God. Following the voice which led me, in February 1971. I came face to face with the one who had appeared to me

in that vision, in a small village community just outside of Delhi. That was how I was introduced to Baba Virsa Singh ji. He looked at me and said, "You're a student, have you found God in your books yet?" We both laughed. "Why do think it should be so easy to find God when it takes 30 years to become a Doctor, Lawyer, or Engineer: You should find God without any effort? This is God's school and just like reading, writing, and arithmetic are prerequisites to worldly learning, in God's school, everything starts with meditation." When I asked further, Babaji said, that while he could share many things, he wanted me to experience them myself, as everything was within me.

"Take this prayer and recite it like you are cramming for your final. God will come tomorrow and take your exam and you're way behind in your studies. Ask God's blessings that you have come in search of God."

And then he blessed me with Nam: *Ek Onkar Satnam Siri Wahe Guru.*

Now you may argue, as I have with leading Sikhs in India (from Bhai Randhir Singh's *jatha* in Ludhiana to Nihangs) and around the world, that *Naam* for a Sikh is *Wahe Guru*, but this is what began playing inside my head in a language that I had never heard before. And though the meaning "There is One God, Whose Name is Truth, Praise the Ever Greater, Ever More Wondrous God," made total sense, it was the Punjabi that was resounding and with the Guru's blessings still is. It is part of my being – it is my being, and I know its Power. Through it I see God's Light everywhere. My walls were breaking down.

### Breaking down the walls to peace

So following in the footsteps of classic iconoclasts, we have some walls to break down. The first wall we need to overcome is the wall of our ego that separates us from God and the Spiritual dimension. The quintessential question that Guru Nanak Devji states in our Japji Sahib: *kiv sachiarai hoyai, kiv kurai tutai paar.*

By wrapping our egos in Hukam we realise we a part of a cosmic order. *Nanak hukamai jai*



*bhujai te haumai kahi na koi.* Moreover, it is not simply a passive order – but dynamic – and as we are all subjects of the Order we can tap in and hear the orders *Hukami hukam chalayo raho.* And as we praise that Eternal One, we are enveloped in a love deeper than a million oceans.

So often the question arises, “Is Gurbani relevant today? How do we translate it so our children and others understand it?” It is always relevant, it is alive and always will be. Relevant to everyone who seeks a course for life. It is a self-paced course, distance learning that we discover within ourselves. It speaks to our personal needs, *gavai ko tan*, and supports and reinforces everyone’s growth and all professions. It helps us acquire all knowledge.

It is easy to link each line with every day parts of our lives.

We all spend time keeping up with our Facebook friends and leveraging our relationships on linkedin. But we need to friend the One from whom all friendships flow: *Jan ka meet Sajjan hai samian, tis jan ko kaho ka ki kumia.*

Light and the spiritual dimension are as close as our hands and feet as thin as a butterfly’s wing.

*Amrit vela sach nao, vadyai vichar:* We can send and receive signals from deep space, direct a satellite to Saturn, Jupiter, Pluto and beyond. But what frequency can control the human mind, our errant thoughts and passions? What frequency will open our tenth door and literally transport us to the dimension where all knowledge is accessible and all power is attainable. And this is all free!

We spend so much time as slaves to external stimuli, addicted to the material world. This is maya, *jag mohni, bin denta jug khaya*, we are so plugged into something that we constantly drown out the most beautiful sound in the Cosmos, that all of creation is singing *Gavai pavan pani vaisantar, gavai khanai charai*, Endless praises of the Eternal One. *Naam* which vibrates within all existence, the material and immaterial, the animate and inanimate.

Without this Vision, without listening to the Voice of our Guru, how can we cross this ocean?

We cannot see God everywhere, but see His Light shining in everything.

Our goal is to raise our consciousness to move beyond human as we recite in *Asa di Vaar* every morning, *Bal hari Gur apnai dio hari sadh var jin manas te devte kia kart na lagi vaar.*

Without first overcoming this first wall we cannot move on. It is the old question: “how can I change the world without first changing myself?” In Sikhism, those are simultaneous. Living in the world is our *tapasya*.

## The Second wall: what is true religious pluralism

*Ved Kiteb kaho mat jhutay:*

**Naam does not belong to anyone:** There is a clear conflict between the Sikhs and our Guru and as much conflict within the Panth as is with others around us. But take heart, all religions have suffered from the same fate. As the institutions grow, they try to control their adherents.

Sikh leaders came to Babaji in Amritsar on the 400th anniversary of Guru Granth Sahib, complaining “Every religion has their own scripture that talks only of their Prophets why would our Gurus leave us a scripture that includes everyone.” Baba ji laughed, “They knew a *katred* class like you would arise and they wanted to make sure the barriers stayed down.”

Think about this: Some of the most common shabads you sing and teach your children, all have the names of God.

Gobind: *Sahas Sahas Simro Gobind*

Allah: *Avar Allah Nur Upaya Kudrit Kai Subh Bandai*



When we bow before Sri Guru Granth Sahib, we bow before the words uttered by a child and an octogenarian, one born into a poor Muslim or low caste Hindu home, as well as six of the Sikh Gurus, to show that God can choose anyone to speak through.

How many realise that the beginning of our Panthic Ardas comes from *Chandi di War*, Guru Gobind Singh ji's ode to Durga Mata?

Babaji sent me to the *Millennium Peace Summit* at the United Nations with a simple message: "Break down the walls between your religions if you ever expect to have peace in the world." He called on them to celebrate each other's holidays.

### You cannot wall up the Light !

A case in point: I was just leaving after a full day at a major academic conference in New York when a Tibetan monk, one of the chief guests, stopped and greeted me, "Sat Siri Akal Sardar ji." His entourage was as surprised as I was wondering who this person was who commanded such respect from their teacher. He continued, "We Tibetans have great love for Guru Nanak. As a matter of fact, there is a famous shrine on the way to Ladakh where the Great Guru left his spiritual imprint on a rock. We would always stop to worship there, putting butter on the rock in reverence.

After many years away, I returned to Tibet was looking forward to paying respects at the shrine, but as we approached, I noticed the rock was now enclosed. My driver said, "the Sikhs have taken over, built a Temple and now we have to take off our shoes and cover our heads, so many people have stopped coming." But I asked, "isn't the Light still there?" The Monk smiled: "for those who can see it: it never goes away." But I got the message, we and others spend our time walling up the Light, claiming it as ours, instead of spreading it and sharing it with the world.

This does create a quandary. In order to "qualify" in the Western order, as a distinct religion and gain the respect and attention of religious scholars, we need our "own" scripture? Do we not need to build our own Gurdwaras,

to represent "our" distinct identity? Especially if we need to defend ourselves against the pressures of modern acculturation. In many ways, we are a "persecuted minority". But we cannot let that define our identity.

Let us not take the 'circle the wagons' approach of *Hum Hindu Nahi*, to define ourselves ! No company defines itself by what it is not: NOT Google, can you imagine MSoft or Apple's new logo, "We're NOT Google!" Let us proudly raise the flag of *Jagat Gur Baba* high and share the story of whom we really are.

### The Third wall:

*Subhai sanjiwal sadhainda, tu kisai na disai bahra jio* "Everyone is part of my community, no one is an other, or outsider"

Today's news is dominated by walls to keep those we consider "others" out. Bullying in schools and online is rampant for anyone who doesn't measure up or is branded as an "other". Naturally, we Sikhs have suffered more than others from post-9/11 hate crimes as we are presumed the visible manifestation of the "enemy."

This becomes personal.

### Real Stories: Power of SGGs to triumph over hatred

On 18 November 2001, four teens got drunk and torched *Gobind Sadan*, our main house in USA, thinking we were followers of Osama bin Laden and they were doing their patriotic duty to burn us out.

Two miracles followed. In the midst of a 100 year-old farmhouse with flames coming out from the roof from our Darbar Sahib room, not



only did Guru Granth Sahib and Dasam Granth remain unscathed by the fire, but not even a drop of water from the tons poured on to extinguish the flames reached a single word on the pages. Only a small area on the corners was dampened. The fire marshal said he had never seen anything like this in his life. BBC called it a miracle and the story was carried around the world.

The second miracle was the power of forgiveness. We immediately offered a prayer of forgiveness that the hatred and ignorance that led to this senseless act be taken away. It allowed the entire community to heal, refusing to be cast as victims we were able to control the narrative in the media which rallied the broader community to rebuild a sense of love and understanding, and everyone in the region came together to help rebuild our Gurdwara.

Forgiveness also transformed the lives of the young arsonists. I had the privilege of crossing the bar at their sentencing and reading that inspired statement of forgiveness face to face. For those interested in this story –<https://www.gobindsadan.org/the-story-behind-the-fire/>

In a story carried by Belief net and quoted in other print outlets, a friend who was a Methodist Minister who often participated in our interfaith services brought her daughter with her when she heard of the arson. As she walked around the burned-Out shell and described to her daughter how the Holy Scripture had survived the fire, the girl looked up and said, “Mom that means that God is truly present here.”

How often do we allow ourselves to feel God’s presence: the Guru is the very embodiment and presence of God. How often do we allow others to feel that presence? So I saw first-hand the power of Guru Granth Sahib to triumph over hatred. I was invited to present the story ‘Towards a Theology of Community’ at Harvard.

My main point was that how we define God and how we worship defines our sense of community. If we are taught that only people who look like us or worship together are part of our community, then it is easy to demonise everyone else as an outsider, a threat to the purity of our

clan and our teachings. The same is true of most majority minority relations today.

Guru Nanak Dev ji taught that “Everyone is part of my community, I see no one as another or outsider’, and so when faced with an attack by young people we embraced them as part of our community and recognised a teachable moment. To this day, whenever people see me, they say, “You are the ones who forgave those kids.” They may not know the names of our Gurus, but they know this turban stands for peace and justice for all.

*Langar*: nothing helps define our ethos and share it with the community around us than *langar*. More than even Gurdwaras, langar is the original Sikh “institution.” Community meals are the single most visible representation of sharing with those in need and can work in any setting. We must move out of the Gurdwara and serve the people around us.

### Missing link: correcting a myth

The missing link in the creation of Sri Guru Granth Sahib ji and the movement from Bedi to Sodhi occurred in one historic place in Goindwal Sahib. Only a short distance away from the 52-step *Baori* Sahib, one for each pauri of Japji Sahib, is a smaller Gurdwara, Chubara Sahib, the personal residence of Guru Amar Das ji. It was the birth place of Guru Arjan Devji, the place where Bhai Jetha was anointed Guru Ram Das, where Bibi Bhaniji asked for the boon that the Gur Gaddi stay with the Sodhi vans, and where Baba Mohun ji after Guru Amar Das presented him to serve Baba Siri Chand ji would sit in long periods of meditation and where he was the custodian of the pothis of his father and those Guru Nanak Devji entrusted to him by Baba Siri Chand ji.

It is here that Guru Arjan Dev ji stood in the street below and called up to Baba Mohun ji (who also happened to be his beloved Mamaji, his mother’s brother *Mohun tere uchal mandal*, there is the nail to which Guru Amar Das ji tied his hair to stay awake in the Samadhi, a box containing locks of his hair, and the Palki sahib which carried the pothis to Amritsar. Each year





the Taran Tarn sangat hold a *jaloose* reenacting the path from Goindwal to Harimandir Sahib that the pothis traveled. But amazingly enough, our so-called Sikh scholars sitting within a day's ride, deny this "as a myth". There are two ways to do research: study books and texts, or go the actual sites if available.

We unwittingly perpetuate the myth about Baba Siri Chand ji without realising that he spread the teachings of his father and Guru far and wide. Sindhis and Nanak Panthis owe their love to Baba Siri Chand ji. And while even the Anandpur Sahib Resolution called on the Panth to reunite the Udasis and the Nirmalas who spread the teachings of Guru Nanak Dev ji and Guru Granth Sahib, we mostly remain under the veil of ignorance, accepting a false narrative perpetuated by the British to undermine Sikh power and bring the poison of elections into our midst.

### **So what would a world without walls look like?**

#### **A place of love and reverence for all!**

There are few places where Siri Guru Granth Sahib is given as much reverence. Daily life is punctuated by the ending of one Akhand Paath at 2 a.m., only to be begun by another. On

major holidays, up to 13 Akhand Paaths, all done by devoted families, continue throughout the celebration.

But what makes Gobind Sadan different is that the teachings of religious pluralism enshrined in Guru Granth Sahib are actually visible. 50 years ago, what John Lennon could only "imagine," the title of his anthem: "Imagine a world where we can live as one," is a living reality. This is a practical demonstration of Guru Nanak Dev ji's Vision that Baba Virsa Singh ji built into Gobind Sadan, as we know it today: "God's house without walls."

To some, especially at this time of strong forces of acculturation in India and abroad, people cannot understand why there would be a scared fire (havan), a life size image of Jesus, a Mosque to offer a safe place for the area Muslims to pray, places where the Shma of the Jews is etched in stone, a meditation pavilion where the Buddha and Mahavir welcome you to sit in silence.

Holidays of all faiths are celebrated with great excitement to teach love and reverence to all who bring God's message.

If we as Sikhs talk about the universal message, and being able to experience the sacred everywhere, then we should be proud of this divine model.

## Where do we go from here?

That's a question each one must answer: *Sub Sikhian ko Hukam Hai, Guru Manio Granth, Guru Granth ji Manyo, Pargat Guran Ki Deh*

I have been speaking and writing on this recurring theme since the early 1970s, when I had the honour of preaching throughout the Punjab. I remember being called back to India to speak at the 1978 All India Akali Conference in Ludhiana following the 'Nirankari' affair where many Sikhs were killed protesting the Nirankari leader. Chandar Shekar, then Prime Minister addressed the gathering of one million, along with the entire Sikh high command (you can see the historic picture) among the cries that 'Sikhism was under threat and what must we and the government do to protect it'.



I rose and shared:

“Wherever I went throughout Punjab I would hear the *dhadis* sing,

*Jis da Sahib dada hoy kis nu mar na sakai ko, manu asadi datri asi us di soi*

Yet today we hear the cries that Sikhi is in danger, *Sikhi nu khatra hai!*

The one thing I've learned at Baba Virsa Singh ji's feet, is that

*Sikhi ek atul Sachai, and Sachai nu khatra kadi na paisakhda*

*Lekhen Sikh nu khatra pai sakda hai jai assi Guru di hukam nahi manda hai*

Sikhi is Eternal Truth and Truth can never be threatened. But Sikhs can be in danger when they don't follow their Guru's *Hukam*.

*Nam na japai te sabh da muhtaj*

If we forget *Naam*, we will be forever beholden to everyone.

Dharm is Eternal: *Aad Sach Jugaad Sach* and Sri Guru Granth Sahib is the Eternal Guru, Voice of the Cosmos.”

So the Guru will always be relevant. But will there always be Sikhs willing to distinguish themselves with the proudest title, aspire to be a Sikh? I say “Yes”!

Do we want to be part of what I truly believe to be the greatest, most powerful social movement to restore peace and justice on the planet, to distinguish ourselves for our character and courage, so everyone wants to have at least one Sikh friend to stabilise their community, their work place, their country, to serve others without converting them? To provide a face for pluralism?

Yes, yes, yes!

Then we need only follow the Guru Granth Sahib ji and proudly display our “colours,” our turbans, with pride.

*Ralph Singh believes stories have the power to change the world. His award winning multi-cultural Stories to Light Our Way, are used in public and private school social emotional learning programs to honour diversity, nurture character, and deter bullying. Baba*



*Virsa Singh ji. He lived with Baba Virsa Singh ji for six years as Babaji's first foreign devotee, rising early to recite Naam, do Paath, and working in the fields. He lectured throughout Punjab, from villages, to Gurdwaras and Universities.*

*Stateside in '77, with his wife Joginder, he helped develop the early Sikh education and camp movement, inner city langars, campaigned against '84 abuses, and helped bring the Sikh community into the interfaith movement. He speaks of the Power of Sri Guru Granth Sahib, to triumph over the post 9/11 arson attack on Gobind Sadan in USA, and brought the forgiveness, healing, and community building needed in today's fractured world.*

(Images from the Internet)



Jessi Kaur elucidates on the basic concepts of  
Sri Guru Granth Sahib in her book

# “Home of the Beloved”

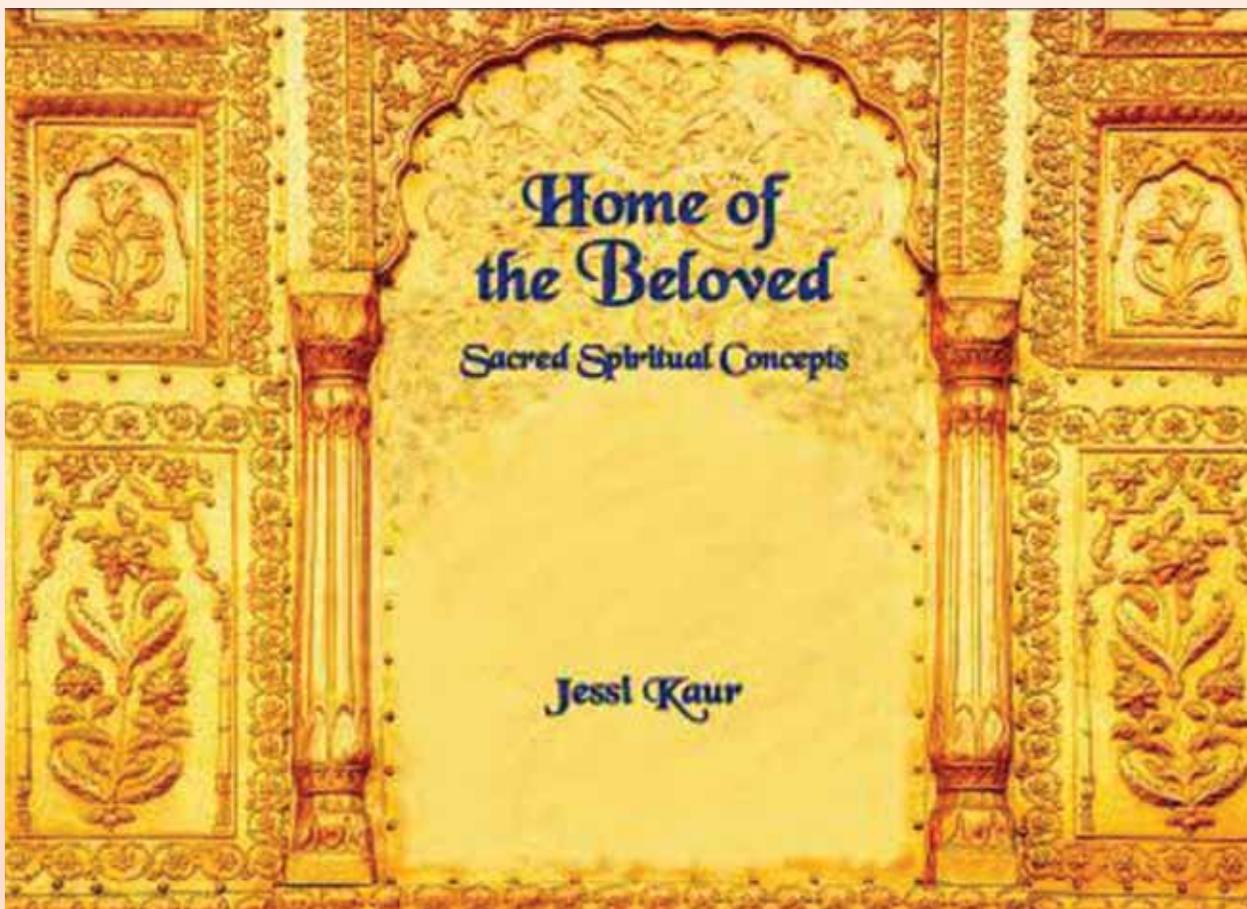
ਮੇਰੇ ਸੁੰਦਰੁ ਕਹਹੁ ਮਿਲੈ ਕਿਤੁ ਗਲੀ ॥ ਹਰਿ ਕੇ ਸੰਤ ਬਤਾਵਹੁ ਮਾਰਗੁ ਹਮ ਪੀਛੈ ਲਾਗਿ ਚਲੀ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ

“Tell me on what path will I find my Beloved? O’ Saints of the Lord,  
show me the Way, and I shall follow.” (Page 527 SGGS)

*In a deeply touching verse, Guru Ram Das seeks to know the way to the Beloved’s home. Our Gurus were one with Wahe Guru, the query is made on behalf of all of humanity. There is a deep thirst within our being, a longing that is not fulfilled by worldly relationships, amassing material acquisitions, or making pilgrimages to holy shrines. Sri Guru Granth Sahib shows us the path that reunites our yearning Soul with the Cosmic Force from which it has been separated*

*for aeons. It is a path that is finer than a strand of hair and sharper than a razor’s edge. It is a course that is ridden with distractions and pitfalls. Jessi Kaur shared excerpts from her upcoming book **Home of the Beloved** in which she explored the trail laid out by the Gurus that leads us back to Nijghar, our true home.*

*In **Home of the Beloved**, a coffee table book released in February 2020, Jessi Kaur elucidates the basic concepts of Sri Guru Granth Sahib(SGGS)*



that describe the soul's journey back to its Creator. In its Divine Wisdom the message of SGGS is as edifying as it is inspiring, as fortifying to the human spirit as it is cautionary about the pitfalls on the path to liberation. It shows the way to the Light as much as enables us to recognise the pull of maya that is our consort during our journey on this planet. In *Home of the Beloved* Jessi Kaur lays out the blueprint embedded in SGGS that takes us back to our true home, *Sach Khand*. She has done this with devotion and soulful understanding that comes only with Gurprasad. In the five sections of *Home of the Beloved* she expounds the Truth as revealed to Guru Nanak, the practice that empowers those that walk the path, the states of being that comprise the highs and lows of the human experience, the obstacles faced, and the abodes of consciousness that mark the journey.

### Some excerpts from the book

*Mero sundar kaho miley kit gali*

*Har kay sant batavo marg hum pecchai lag chali*

How do I find the path that leads to my Beloved?

O Saints of the Lord, show me the Way, and I shall follow. (Page 527 SGGS)

In a deeply touching verse, Guru Ram Das seeks to know the way to the Beloved's home. Our Gurus were one with Wahe Guru, the query is made on behalf of all of humanity. There is a deep thirst within our being, a longing that is not fulfilled by worldly relationships, amassing material acquisitions, or making pilgrimages to holy shrines. Sri Guru Granth Sahib shows us the path that reunites our yearning soul with the Cosmic Force from which it has been separated. It is a path that is finer than a strand of hair and sharper than a razor's edge. It is a course that is ridden with distractions and pitfalls. With Gurprasad, we are led to our true where ever lasting *anand* (bliss) prevails.

### IK

*Ikas te hoayo ananta Nanak Ikas mahe samaey jeo*  
From Oneness the Creator has brought forth the countless multitudes, says Nanak



They shall merge into the One once again.  
(SGGS p.131)

**Ik** is used as a proper noun for the One Creator. Of all the sacred spiritual concepts, *Ik* is most important to understand. *Ik* is the cornerstone on which the message of *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* is based. *Ik* is the Source of all that exists. *Ik* is the Cause behind all causes, without beginning or end. Although transcendental and invisible, *Ik* is manifested in all creation, and is an intrinsic part of it. *Ik* is also the unifying presence within creation. *Ik* is changeless, a force that remains constant in a dynamic universe.

*Ik* is written as numeral 'one' and stands for the One Universal Creative Force. Numeral one symbolises *Ik*'s singular and unique nature. *Ik* is indivisible, infinite, and fathomless. *Ik* existed before time, and shall continue to exist when everything else, even time and space, have dissolved.

The Universe, with its awe-inspiring diversity, is a play of *Ik*. People across the world may have distinct features, various lifestyles, their own unique cultures, but they constitute one human race. Just like the unifying diversity that is visible in the distinct colours of the rainbow that meld into each other, the waves that rise and ebb but remain a part of the ocean, musical notes that are different but combine to make a beautiful melody,





similarly, all humanity regardless of gender, caste, creed, or race is unified by the spark of the One that pervades in all.

We have given *Ik* several names, which include *Allah, God, Jehovah, Ram, and Wahe Guru.*

On the path of loving devotion, *Ik* is personalised as the Beloved, the true Friend, the Mother, and the Father from whom we have been separated. Our soul yearns for a union with *Ik* whose temple is within us.

Throughout *Gurbani*, the metaphor as the soul-bride seeking her husband is vastly prevalent. Our purpose of coming into the world in the human form is to realise our divinity, become immaculate and merge back with *Ik*, the Beloved. The journey begins when we are born. It is fraught with challenges; *Gurbani* shows us how we can empower ourselves. *Ik* waits for us to come back home.

## Onkar

*Onkar aad main jaana*

I know Onkar as the Primal Reality (*SGGS p.340*)

**Onkar** and *Ik* are the same entity. *Onkar* is the manifestation of *Ik*, its infinite expanse. By one booming command, *Ik* set in motion a dynamic evolutionary process of creation, a universe that is a vivid expression of the Invisible, the form of the formless One.

*Onkar* is the Universe in its myriad forms: beautiful, vibrant, ever-changing. It is the day and night, the sunrise and sunset. It is the animate and inanimate life that inhabits the mountains, trees, the oceans and the desert. It is the movement of every breeze, the flow of every river. It is the translucence in light, it is the sound of thunder, and it is the vibrating, pulsating, breathing planet that is our home. It is the body in which our soul resides; it is a part of the soul; it is every particle of atom and sub atom that exists.

*Onkar* encompasses the awe-inspiring galaxies known and unknown, and the multiverses that are still in the process of being discovered. No picture or idol, no temple or edifice, no form or feature can adequately represent the expanse of *Onkar*. However, *Onkar* is visible everywhere.

## Sidak

*Kar Sidak karni kharach badho laag raho name*

On your journey, let your deeds stem from faith and remain committed to the name. (*SGGS p. 64*)

**Sidak** is steadfast faith. It is the confidence of the seed that knows it will bloom. It is the trust of the stream that clashes with boulders to make its way to the Ocean. It is the fortitude of the butterfly that breaks free from her confinement as a caterpillar.

*Sidak* nurtures the fetus in the darkness of the womb. *Sidak* keeps the denuded tree in the fall standing steadfast while waiting for spring. *Sidak* allows the peacock to shed its iridescent feathers each year knowing they will come back in full glory again. *Sidak* believes in the Divine, is fearless, serene and full of hope at all times. *Sidak* doesn't question. It dwells in certainty. A life lived in *sidak* is sweet. Death in *sidak* is fearless. Without *sidak*, the world is a place of turmoil where, like an autumn leaf stripped from its branch, one floats in banishment and falls into oblivion.

*Sidak* is learned from the shining stories of those who upheld their faith and were not defeated by adversity. Those that gave up their lives, rather than their principles. Sikh history is replete with legends of such men and women who continue to inspire us through the annals of time. Saints, Masters and devotees of all traditions are anchored to *Sidak*. Their faith and confidence keep them committed to the Divine.

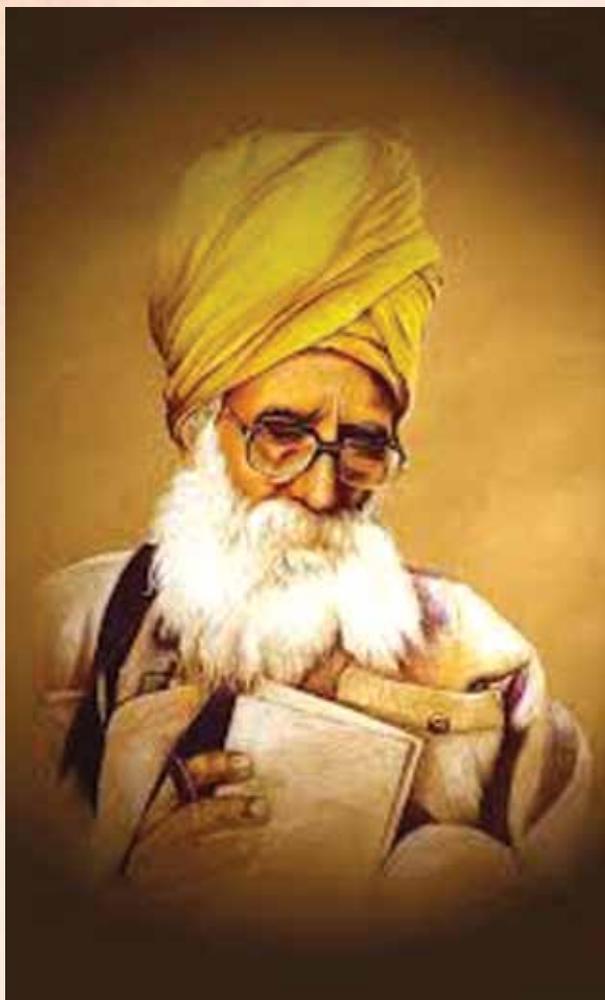
*Sidak* heals hearts, strengthens resilience and restores vitality. Even when defeat seems imminent, *sidak* leads us to victory.

## Seva

*Vich duniya sev kamaeay ta dargeh baisan paeay*

In the midst of this world serve. You shall be given a place of honor in the Court of the beloved, says Nanak. (*SGGS p.26*)

**Seva** is service without the trumpet of ego. It is a gift that seeks neither reward nor acknowledgment. True *seva* is performed with selflessness. *Naam* resounds in the one who serves. It is not easy to serve without ego and expectation of recognition or reward. With even a



Painting of Bhagat Puran Singh, the selfless crusader whose seva is enshrined at Pingalwara, near Amritsar

minuscule expectation, *seva* becomes a commercial transaction.

When all acts of *seva* are committed to the Divine, it becomes worship. *Seva* elevates the one who gives without obligating the one who receives.

Who does one serve? *Gurbani* urges us to serve the Divine. Serve those who are engaged in the service of the Divine. Serve with loving devotion. Serve the hungry and the deprived, serve the weak, the old and the sick. Serve because the needy strike a chord in you, and you experience their need as your own. Serve with integrity. Serve the environment, the air, the water, the great Mother Earth. Serve to uplift, serve to beautify and serve to transform. Serve the inner silence, the inner music, and the inner voice.

Do not serve your greed or your base appetites, or the greed and base appetites of others. Do not serve grudges or remorse. Do not serve attachment or anger. Do not serve that which bloats your ego or the egos of others. Do not serve under pressure or in fear. Do not serve to flatter or to fawn. Serve because you are one with all.

### Santokh

*Bina santokh nahin kou raaje*

There is no fulfillment without contentment. (SGGS p.279)

**Santokh** is contentment. *Santokh* comes in life when the illumined mind says, “enough!”

The constant rut to acquire is exhausting. We cannot relax and enjoy what we have because there is always the next object whose acquisition becomes a new drive. Our preoccupation with materialistic things leaves no time to reflect with gratitude toward the Giver. The jewel of *Naam* we carry within us is forgotten.

When the quest turns inward, we experience fulfillment. The glitter of the world loses its luster. Instead, thoughts turn to the Giver, and we experience enchantment in praising the Beloved. Hunger is satiated, desires peak and settle in the restfulness of sufficiency. We see the demise of ‘more,’ and the birth of contentment. The neurotic race to satisfy yet another appetite is over. The material and emotional clutter we have amassed, the toys of childhood, distractions of youth, and the more expensive acquisitions of middle age, lose their grip on us.

The act of renouncing the world may not bring contentment if the mind continues to crave what has been given up. The practice of *jap*, immersion in *Naam*, and ultimately *Gurprasad* bring *santokh*. We enter our inner depths where abundance abounds. The journey to the Beloved’s home continues in *santokh*.

### Nimrata

*Mithat neevi Nanaka gunn changeaya tatt*

Sweetness and humility, says Nanak, are the essence of virtue and goodness. (SGGS p.470)





**Nimrata** means humility. Of all the virtues dear to the Beloved, *nimrata* is the dearest. It is the crown jewel in the repository of virtues.

We often measure worldly success with how much power, influence, and dominance someone exercises over others. Impressive careers, high net worth, sprawling homes grant an esteemed place in society. We rarely find *nimrata* in such places.

*Nimrata* has a special domain. It dwells at the feet of the Guru. It knows the joy of serving. It treads kindly and gently. It extends a helping hand and offers a listening heart. It is not attracted to the glory of power or the glitter of worldly riches. There is gratitude in *nimrata* and acceptance. *Nimrata* does not judge; it does not blame or criticise. The wall of separateness does not exist in *nimrata*.

*Nimrata* forsakes us when we blow our own trumpet, talk over other people and listen less. When we think we are right, dig our heels in and become argumentative, *nimrata* is lost. When we compete rather than collaborate, when we belittle rather than appreciate, when we judge rather than accept, *nimrata* does not blossom in us. *Nimrata* is not obsequious. It is genuinely respectful. *Gurbani* states that the door to the home of the Beloved is tinier than a mustard seed and can only be entered with *nimrata* in the heart.

### Dharam Khand

*Kach pakae uthae pae Nanak gaya japey jae*

The mature and the immature, the good and the bad shall be judged there

Says Nanak, when you go home, you will see this. (SGGS p. 7)

**Dharam Khand** is the abode of human existence. The five *khands* are the five abodes or planes of consciousness on the spiritual journey. *Dharam Khand* is where the journey begins. This is where we are born, live, and die. Progression of days and nights, cycles of seasons, beings in various forms and different dispositions are part of the ever-evolving play of the Creator on this plane. *Hukam* prevails over everything. Every seed we plant as an action is counted and accounted for;

the record of our thoughts and deeds, worthy and unworthy, is writ in indelible ink. Virtues learned from *Gurbani* are practiced here. In *Dharam Khand*, the five thieves of lust, anger, greed, attachment, and pride thwart our progress. Those who live righteously and embrace *Naam* can develop spiritual strength to overcome the vices. They are chosen here and honored when they reach the home of the Beloved after their sojourn on this plane is over. In *Dharam Khand*, we create our future destiny. This is also where we bear the fruits of our actions in past incarnations.

### Gyan Khand

*Gyan Khand mein gyan prachand*

In the realm of wisdom, spiritual wisdom reigns supreme. (SGGS p. 7)

**Gyan Khand** is the abode of spiritual wisdom (*gyan*) where the mind becomes aware of the vastness of the Universe. The intellect shines and the limitlessness of the cosmos – numerous planets, myriads of galaxies, enchanting sounds of celestial music – is experienced here. Countless saints and sages, and enlightened beings who attained spiritual prowess, dwell in this abode. Boundless joy and beauty prevail in *Gyan Khand*.

We do not reach *Gyan Khand* through intellectual pursuits or worldly knowledge. *Gyan Khand* is reached by imbibing the principles and virtues laid out in *Gurbani*. With a daily practice of *Naam*, duality and doubt are dispelled. The vastness of the Creator and the creation is experienced in *Gyan Khand*.

### Saram Khand

*Saram Khand ki bani roop*

In this realm there is beauty (SGGS p. 8)

**Saram Khand** is the abode of spiritual endeavour and beauty. We reach here by working hard on ourselves and chiseling our minds and intellect. *Gyan* gathered in the previous realm is put into action. Self-reflection becomes deeper. The gross becomes subtle. The impurities of the mind are burnt through loving devotion; an inner radiance begins to shine.

In *Saram Khand*, our practice deepens. We exercise constant vigilance over our thoughts and live with integrity. We shed all that is false before we glisten and become exquisitely beautiful. Like the artisan who puts gold through fire and intensifies the heat to remove the hidden dirt, and then hammers the metal to smoothen it, we too must chisel our mind by imbibing the wisdom of *Gurbani* before we become radiant beings.

### Karam Khand

*Karam Khand ki bani jor*

In the realm of grace, Word is power. (SGGS p. 8)

**Karam Khand** is the abode of grace and power. The blessed ones congregate here after attaining spiritual power. It is not the power that enables dominion over others; it is Divine power that vanquishes the dominion of ego. Only the most elevated reach here. This is the plane of spiritual warriors that have overcome *kaam*, *krodh*, *lobh*, *moh*, *ahankar* and *haumai*. The power of *Akal Purakh* is dominant in them. There is no loss and no defeat here. Only the finest of the fine reside in this realm. Their might, their resplendence, their energy–force is beyond description because they are blessed with the Grace of *Naam*.

### Sach Khand

*Sach Khand vasey Nirankar*

In the realm of Truth, the Formless Creator abides (SGGS p. 8)

**Sach Khand** is the abode of the Truth.

The Beloved dwells here and watches over the entire creation and rejoices. *Sach Khand* is the realm of the highest consciousness. True bliss is found here.

This realm is untouched by sorrow, unmoved by change, unfettered by ego. Victorious souls who have overcome temptations by staying on the path shown by the Gurus and Masters reach here after achieving complete ascension over *maya*.

*Naam*, *nitnem*, *kirtan*, *vichar*, and virtues lit up their passage and steered them to *Sach Khand*.

They are adorned in the court of the highest order. Knowledge of the entire universe, and understanding of the all–pervasive *Hukam* prevails here. The celestial melodies of this realm are enchanting.

With *Gurprasad*, the natural impulse of the soul to go back to the home of the Beloved is realised here.



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# ਮੈਸਾਨਾਮੁਨਰਿੰਜਨੁਹੇਇ

S. Chetandeep Singh on

## Awakening To Naam



*Naam is by far the predominant and primary message of Guru Granth Sahib. However, as practitioners of Gurbani, we have distorted our understanding of Naam to fit the mould of an organised religion and limited its practice to fit a transactional lifestyle. We will look at what Naam is, what Naam is NOT and how we can awaken to Naam through the lens of Guru Granth Sahib.*

I grew up in the city of Jalandhar in Punjab. I went to a Sikh school, where the morning assembly was singing of a shabad and zero period was recitation of Japji – for all kids in the

school. I took part in Divinity exams and usually stood first in Punjab. Divinity which was my thing.

My parents gave Sikhi to me at virasat. Both my parents are Gursikh. We were brought up with all the Sikh values that we are now trying to pass on to our kids. I took *khande di pahul* at age 22 and headed out into the corporate world. For the next almost 10 years, at the peak of my youth, I did *nitnem baaniya* and *Naam simran* every morning – and evening – looking for something: Divinity was my thing, remember. I was living it. Without





questioning anything. I remember keeping Sikh Rehat Maryada with me and check marking every line on it – yes I follow this line – yes I conform to this Sikhi standard. In my eyes, I was a Puran Gursikh.

But thus far, my engagement with Gurbani was mostly at an outer level. I would do Nitnem while traveling to work or bathing in the morning. If I missed Nitnem, I would feel guilty. I had check marked all the boxes but practical application was missing. I realised that I was doing these things just to satisfy a code of conduct.

When I got married, my wife prodded me, nudged me, and helped me look past the outer Sikhi standards. She questioned my biases and understanding of Gurbani. She helped me move from outer Sikhi to a Sikhi that was very personal where Gurbani was not written for the world outside but for me, to be applied in my own life, in the first person. That's when I started engaging with Gurbani on a very personal level. I fell in love with Gurbani and started to engage with Gurbani, whenever I could, wherever I could, on my laptop, mobile phone, trying to read and understand across the breadth of Guru Granth Sahib Ji. I stopped treating Guru Granth Sahib as a Guru to be worshipped and instead adopted Guru as my guide, full of messages, and teachings that I needed to apply in my life, in the here and now, rather than in some mystical afterlife. And since then the quest has been to live Gurbani rather than marking all the checkboxes.

So I would say my engagement with *Naam*, starting with a life full of repetition and mindless reading to now, when I want to live *Naam*, has changed. And so has my understanding. Everyone engages with and understands Gurbani in a different manner. This paper is my perspective, born out of my journey so far and I request the reader to read with an open mind.

## Naam

There is an old fable of six blind men and the elephant, each of trying to touch a different part of the elephant and explaining their own ideas.

One felt the elephant was a pillar, another that the elephant was like a brush, the other felt it was sharp. No one was able to describe the elephant in its totality and even if they could, an elephant is much more than the sum of its parts.

Trying to describe or define *Naam* is very similar to those blind men describing an elephant. We can try to define *Naam*, in that *Naam* is a label or identification of Akal Purakh. We can try to categorise *Naam* as in *Kirtam Naamvs Karam Naam*. However, *Naam* is indescribable and cannot be defined.

There is another way that Gurbani tells us and that is to experience *Naam*. To awaken to *Naam*. *Naam* is an experience. From that perspective, *Naam* is like honey. Again, I can try to explain to you what honey tastes like, how does it look and so on. But unless we taste it ourselves, we haven't known honey at all.

And Gurbani is very clear on this:  
*Jinee Chaakhiaa Thinee Saadh Paaeiaa Bin Chaakhae  
Bharam Bhulaae ||  
Anmrith Saachaa Naam Hai Kehanaa Kashhoo N  
Jaae || [SGGS, Mehla 3, Pg.33]*

That said, Gurbani does give us many hints, indicators or markers on what is *Naam*.

In Baani Japji, Nanak says:

*Jaethaa Keethaa Thaethaa Naao ||  
Vin Naavai Naahee Ko Thhaao || [SGGS, Jap, Pg. 4]*

ਨਾਮੁ is all around us. You, me, this room, this air, this construct that we see around us, all is *Naam*. We are eating, breathing, and living ਨਾਮੁ. There is no existence without *Naam*: ਵਿਹੁਨਾਦੈਨਾਗੀਵੇਥਉ॥

We are like that fish, and *Naam* is like the water that fish is swimming in. Fish has no idea that there is something called water. *Naam* is an experience.

So, if Gurbani says that *Naam* is all around me, then I often ask myself the question: why am I not experiencing *Naam*? Why is my own life is full of misery and suffering and mental agony? Why in spite of being such a Gursikh, who does *Nitnem* and *Naam simran* and everything else that our religion prescribes, am I not happy? Where is *Khera* in my own life? Where is *Vigaas*?

## What is missing?

Is it because *Naam* is all around me but I am not able to see it because my eyes are closed? My eyes are closed, is it possible that I am sleeping?

*Gourree Guaaraeree Mehalaa 5 ||*  
*Nainahu Needh Par Dhriatt Vikaar ||*  
*Sravan Soeae Sun Nindh Veechaar ||*  
*Rasanaa Soee Lobh Meethai Saadh ||*  
*Man Soeiaa Maaeiaa Bisamaadh ||1||*  
*Eis Grih Mehi Koe Jaagath Rehai ||*  
*Saabath Vasath Ouhu Apanee Lehai ||1|| Rehaao ||*  
*Sagal Sehalee Apanai Ras Maathee ||*  
*Grih Apunae Kee Khabar N Jaathee ||*  
*Musanehaar Panch Battavaarae ||*  
*Soonae Nagar Parae Thagehaarae ||2||*  
[SGGS, Mehla 5, Pg. 182]

So what does it mean to be “sleeping”?

Gurbani explains: Not only our ਮਨ is sleeping, each of our body senses, eyes, ears, tongue are sleeping too. They are sleeping under the influence of *Maaya*.

But it still does not make sense to say, my eyes, and ears are sleeping. What am I talking about?

Fortunately, Gurbani gives us a baseline: how does an awakened being look like? Take an example of seeing, when we see the world around us, what do we see: people who are separate from us, people who can benefit me, people with money, do I see me vs them or do I see only ONE in everybody.

When I hear, what do I like to hear, do I like to hear the failings and deficiencies of other people or I see and hear the ONE in everyone around me?

Guru Amar Das says in the *Bani Anand*:  
*Eae Naethrahu Maeriho Har Thum Mehi Joth Dharee*  
*Har Bin Avar N Dhaekhahu Koe ||*

And

*Eae Sravanahu Maeriho Saachai Sunanai No*  
*Pathaaeae ||*  
*Saachai Sunanai No Pathaaeae Sareer Laaeae Sunahu*  
*Sath Baanee ||*

What we do not realise is that if we engage in negative behaviour, we are slipping deeper and deeper into bondage.

Guru Nanak says:

*Nanak Aougun Jaetharrae Thaethae Galee Janjeer ||*

This is what Guru Nanak means when he tells us that we are sleeping. Oblivious to the reality of the ONE around us. The reality of *Naam* around us.

So, the question is, how to awaken to this reality? And that is Gurbani's most fundamental question:

*Kiv Sachiaaraa Hooeai Kiv Koorrai Thuttai Paal ||*

## But what does not work!

Before we look at how to awaken, we must understand how NOT to awaken! Rather what does not work? Gurbani tells us in detail on what methods were tried, what works and what does not.

Let us look at two shabads from Guru Granth Sahib.

*Kaaneiaa Saadhhai Ouradhh Thap Karai Vichahu*  
*Houmai N Jaee ||*

*Adhhiaatham Karam Jae Karae Naam N Kab Hee*  
*Paee || [SGGS Mehla 3, Pg. 33]*

And

*Paath Parriou Ar Baedh Beechaariou Nival Bhuangam*  
*Saadhhae ||*

*Panch Janaa Sio Sang N Shhuttakiou Adhhik*  
*Ahanbudhh Baadhhae ||1||*

*Piaarae Ein Bidhh Milan N Jaee Mai Keeeae Karam*  
*Anaekaa ||*

*Haar Pariou Suaamee Kai Dhuaarai Dheejai Budhh*  
*Bibaekaa || Rehaao ||*

*Mon Bhaeiu Karapaathee Rehiou Nagan Firiou Ban*  
*Maahee ||*

*Thatt Theerathh Sabh Dhharathee Bhramiou*  
*Dhubidhhaa Shhuttakai Naahee ||2||*

*Man Kaamanaa Theerathh Jae Basiou Sir Karavath*  
*Dhharaaeae ||*

*Man Kee Mail N Outharai Eih Bidhh Jae Lakh Jathan*  
*Karaaeae ||3||*

[SGGS, Raag Sorath, Pg. 642]

If we understand both of these shabads in totality, they go on further and list all the spiritual actions that we undertake in order to “get *Naam*”.

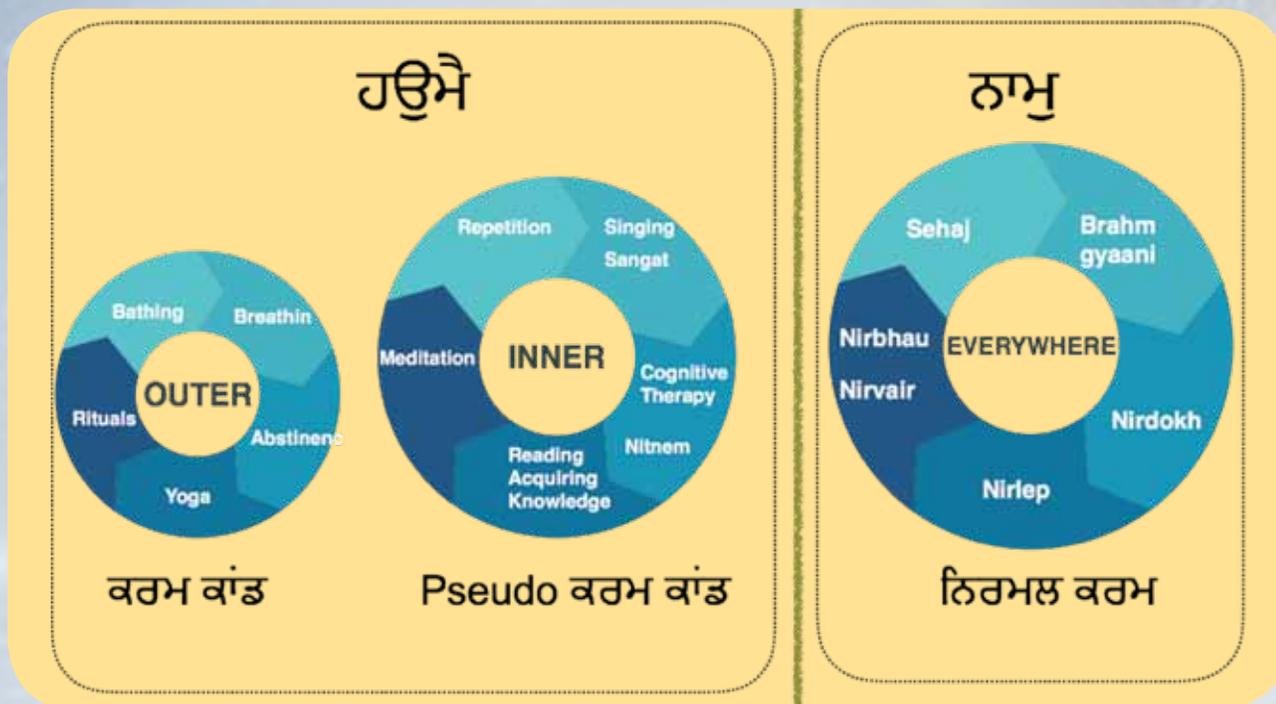
This is exactly what many of us engage in all our lives: meditation, repetition of *paaths*, singing, going to gurdwaras, just doing these things for the sake of doing, does not work!



## Ritualistic and spiritual actions

The first category is all the outer rituals that people did in the past and we still do, bathing in holy places, fasting, doing x number of *Paaths* in

– everything. While doing all these, I was under the impression I am doing *Naam simran*. That by doing all these activities I was getting into and engaging with *Naam*.



y number of days, breathing exercises and so on. This is one category that we easily understand as *Karam Kaand* but still treat our Gurdwaras and especially historical Gurdwaras as *Teraath*.

Then the second category is all the spiritual actions we do, like repeating a word early in the morning that we call *Naam Simran*, doing *Paath*, *Nitnem*, singing hymns, that we call *Kirtan*, some concentration techniques, reading books and gaining wisdom, which gives us a temporary sense of being one with the world around us. These are all the actions that I call *Pseudo Karam Kaand*. These are mostly actions undertaken to work on our inner self.

*Karam kaand* and *pseudo karam kaand*, and all these things that we do, are done in the domain of *Huamai*. In the domain of an “I” existing and doing these things.

I want to pause here and take you back to my own story. I have done every single *karam kaand* and actions categorised into, *pseudo karam kaand*, *amrit vela simran*, *nitnem*, *kirtan*, *katha*, *sangat*

Not for a minute am I suggesting that we should not engage in these activities. These are exactly our starting points. Our entry points. We should for sure do repetition, meditation, kirtan and engage with Gurbani at every level possible. Gurbani is so inspirational and divine, it instantly teleports us into a different realm altogether.

The actual point I am trying to make is that Guru Sahib did not call all these activities as *Naam*. *Naam simran* or *Naam japna*. *Naam* really and truly begins when the dream is over, when the *bharam* is over. That is when the journey of *Naam* truly begins. Using *Naam* for all the *karma kana* and pseudo *karma* and activities is a huge misnomer.

So what Gurbani really calls *Naam Japna* – or *Nirmal Karam* – is beyond all the outer or inner ritualistic or spiritual endeavors. That *Naam* or *Naam Japna* is when we are fully awake, when *Naam Japna* begins. So all these spiritual actions of *karam kaand* and *pseudo karam kaand*, are like ਬਿਨੁਬੁਝੇਕਰਮਕਮਾਵਣੇ, we haven’t understood or seen the reality, and we are doing something in the domain of *Huamai*.





## The process of awakening

As far as my understanding goes, the process of awakening should have all of the following characteristics:

- It should be the same for all human beings irrespective of their race and religion, ethnicity, caste or gender. It cannot be different for Sikhs and different for people from other religions.
- The process has been valid for as long as human beings have been in existence. This process of awakening was not invented by Guru Nanak alone. It has existed as long as human beings have been there. After all, the process of awakening is embedded into us  
ਕਿਵਸਚਿਆਰਾਹੋਈਐਕਿਵਕੂੜੈਤੁਟੈਪਾਲਿ॥ਹੁਕਮਿਰਜਾਈਚ  
ਲਣਾਨਾਨਕਲਿਖਿਆਨਾਲਿ॥੧॥
- This is written into us, as a species. And since this is written into us, the process should be accessible to all, here and now. It is not like we will be awakened after death or after some time by doing certain actions. It is something that all of us, right now can access, here and now. After all, it is just waking up from sleep!

## How to awaken to Naam

Given these conditions, let us ask Guru Granth Sahib Ji, as how to awaken to *Naam*?

Gurbani tells us, at all these and many other places  
*Naam Amolak Rathan Hai Poorae Sathigur Paas* ||  
*Sathigur Saevai Lagiaa Kadat Rathan Dhaevai*  
*Paragaas* || [SGGS, Mehla 4, Pg. 40]

*Jinee Sathigur Saeviaa Thinee Paaeiaa Naam Nidhhaan*  
|| [SGGS, Mehla 3, Pg. 26]

*Kis Ho Saevee Kiaa Jap Karee Sathagur Pooshho*  
*Jaee* ||

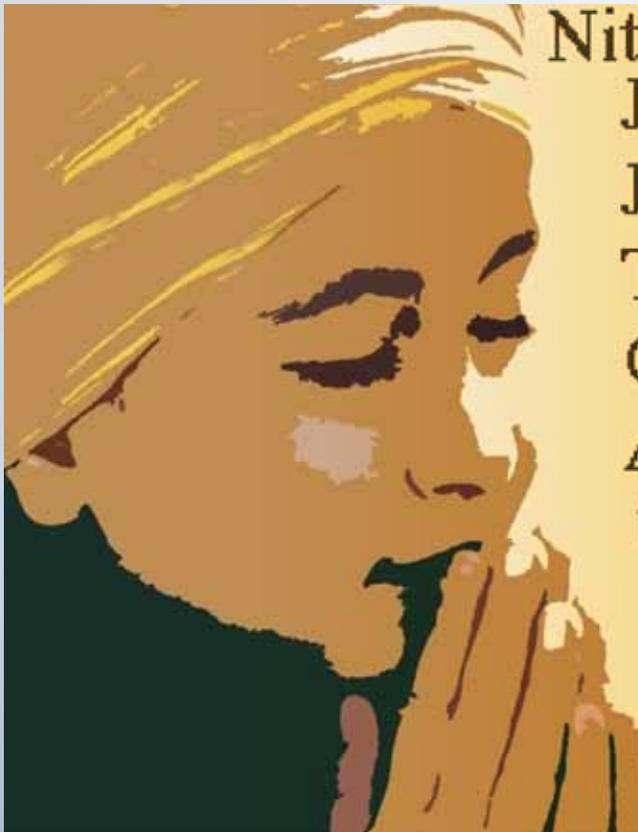
*Sathagur Kaa Bhaanaa Mann Lee Vichahu Aap*  
*Gavaae* ||

*Eaehaa Saevaa Chaakaree Naam Vasai Man Aae* ||  
[SGGS, Mehla 3, Pg. 35]

That the selfless service of the Satgur will awaken us to *Naam*.

From these shabads, it becomes completely clear that Satgur absolutely holds the key to *Naam*. There is no other way of awakening to *Naam* without serving the Satgur.

So, it seems like selfless service of Satgur is a universal and the only way of awakening.



Nitnem Bani-Morning  
Japji Sahib  
Jaap Sahib  
Tav Prasad Savaiye  
Chaupee Sahib  
Anand Sahib

ਨਿਤਨੇਮ ਬਾਣੀ-ਸਵੇਰੇ ਲਈ  
ਜਪੁਜੀ ਸਾਹਿਬ  
ਜਾਪ ਸਾਹਿਬ  
ਤਵਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ ਸ੍ਰੀਯੇ  
ਚੌਪਈ ਸਾਹਿਬ  
ਅਨੰਦ ਸਾਹਿਬ

What is Satgur and what is Satgur ki Seva?

First let us look at Satgur,

Gurbani tells us

*Sathigur Maeraa Sadhaa Sadhaa Naa Aavai NJaae ||  
Ouhu Abinaasee Purakh Hai Sabh Mehi Rehiaa  
Samaae || 13 || [SGGS, Mehla 4, Pg.759]*

That the Satgur is that entity that has always been there. And is present inside of each one of us, all human beings. The Sikhs do not have exclusive claim on the Satgur. Satgur is engrained in each one of us. Satgur is A Binasi, never to be destroyed.

So, what helps me understand Satgur is that we can view Satgur as that frequency or channel inside us, that if we tune into that frequency/wavelength or channel, that we start listening to Satgur. We could see it as underlying universal awareness that is the source of *gyaan*: wisdom and realisation.

### Seva

Gurbani requires each one of us to do this *seva*, one that of:

*Aap Gavaae Saevaa Karae Thaa Kishh Paaeae Maan  
|| [SGGS, Aasa Di Vaar, Pg 474]*

What does that mean? Let us look at this:

ਆਪੁਗਵਾਇ means to lose the notion of one's own separate identity.

Consider the example of a rainbow; we all see rainbows, but what is the rainbow? Is it the clouds, is it the moisture, is it the colours, and is it the shape of a rainbow? A rainbow arises when a certain set of conditions occur at the same time. There is the right sunlight, moisture and all that in the sky. Similarly, is there really an 'I' inside of us, the self that is most important to us, that we attach everything back to: *my* house, *my* kids, *my* family, *my* job, *my* watch, *my* turban, *my* Sikh identity.

This is the *seva* Guru ji is talking about, ਆਪੁਗਵਾਇਸੇਵਾਕਰੇਤਾਕਿਛੁਪਾਏਮਾਨੁ॥, to lose my 'I' and be in service of that universal awareness, 'satgur' that is everywhere.

There is another way of understanding *Seva*: ਗੁਰਕੈਸਬਦਿਜੀਵਤੁਮਰੈਹਰਿਨਾਮੁਵਸੈਮਨਿਆਇ॥੧॥

To be ਜੀਵਤੁਮਰੈ, to be dead while living, so when there is no 'I' that is ਜੀਵਤੁਮਰਨਾ. How does this happen in real life? ਜੀਵਤੁਮਰਨਾ to me seems like living in a non-reactionary way, not

to have any preferences, like or dislike, when we stop generating all the reactions to the things happening around us. We stop labelling all the good and bad, that is ਜੀਵਤੁਮਰਨਾ and that is the *Seva* in the context of awakening to *Naam*.

So how do we tie in everything we have discussed so far? To make this paper functional, I have come up with a few guidelines that we could start adopting in our lives, here and now.

### Practical guidelines

- In my mind, we could start by acknowledging that we know nothing! The more we think we know, the deeper we are in *Huamai*. However, there is a difference between looking at directions on maps and actually navigating through the roads to reach a destination. We need to start this journey by acknowledging that unless I travel myself, I am ignorant.
- Next thing we could do is unlearn and uncondition all the religious knowledge we have amassed in this lifetime. We need to take a fresh look at our own paradigms and mental models. To share an example: whenever I would see someone in turban and long beard, I used to think what a Gursikh person he is! And whenever I would meet someone with shorn beard or hair, I would not pay attention to what he was saying, and my mind would go, what the hell dose he know. I know everything. But now, I am unlearning and unconditioning my own mind by reflecting into my own mental models.
- Once we are open minded and ready to accept, we could start by bringing our minds to the present moment. Our mind seemingly runs and feeds on auto pilot. Thoughts after thoughts have imprisoned our minds and created this illusion and bondage. If we have to go on this journey of awakening to *Naam*, we need to bring our mind to a somewhat quiet place – take out time to reflect, take out time to investigate and deep dive into our own minds. Get away from the addictions of cell phones, social media and every other distraction that comes in the way.





- Now, here is the big one: always, at any given moment, work with the moment's reality. Not a fraction of a second in the past, and not a fraction of a second in the future. The companion of my journey to *Naam* is the present moment, the given reality of a moment. Accept every moment's reality as it is.
- Next can we be aware of what's going on in our mind and body: thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations, in any given moment. Guru Sahib tells us, *ਇਸੁਮਨਕਉਕੋਈਖੋਜਹੁਭਾਈ॥ਮ ਨੁਖੇਜਤਨਾਮੁਨਉਨਿਧਿਪਾਈ॥੧॥ਰਹਾਉ॥* This is *Mann Khojat*, observe your own mind, what is going on inside. What am I thinking at given point in time, is my mind running on auto pilot? Am I just reacting without taking a pause? What is happening on my body, if I am angry, my heart is beating faster. If I am standing here in front of you, I am sweating. Just observe what's going on inside!
- And once we have acute awareness of what's going on inside our mind and body, the next step is to remain equanimous towards those feelings and thoughts. Let me understand that these feelings, thoughts and reactions that are arising in me are temporary and will pass away.  
In *Sukhmani*, Guru Sahib says, *ਪ੍ਰਭਕੀਆਗਿਆਆ ਤਮਹਿਤਾਵੈ॥ਜੀਵਨਮੁਕਤਿਸੇਉਕਹਾਵੈ॥ਤੈਸਾਹਰਖੁਤੈਸਾਉਸੁ ਸੇਗੁ॥ਸਦਾਅਨੰਦੁਤਹਨਹੀਬਿਓਗੁ॥*
- If someone praises me in public, let me not attach to the pleasant feelings that arise in me. And if someone demeans me in public, let me not attach to the depressing feelings that arise in me. They arise due to certain conditions. And they will pass away. Let me not react to these. By doing this, we can slowly break the habit pattern of our own minds.

To conclude, I would offer that it is very important to have a personal 1:1 relationship with Gurbani and the Satgur inside us. Gurbani – in its written form – in the way of reading, singing, inspires us and keeps us on the path.

However, the real effort is inside. We need to have that desire inside of us, to meet our creator and awaken.

But this desire cannot be isolated. It has to be accompanied by a sense of surrender.

As Gurbani reminds us time and again:

*Haar Pariou Suaamee Kai Dhuaarai Dheejai Budhh Bibaekaa || Rehaao || [SGGS, Mehla 5, Pg. 642]*

And

*Dhaevan Vaalae Kai Hathh Dhaath Hai Guroo Dhuaarai Paee || [SGGS, Mehla 3, Pg. 33]*



*The writer, Chetandeep Singh works as a software engineer in Silicon Valley. Apart from being a reputed technologist, he is on a personal quest of being 'Jeevan Mukat'. He loves listening to and doing Kirtan. He moderates a weekly online discussion on the panels of Khoj Gurbani – an online crowdsourcing platform that aims to provide Sikhs with educational resources.*

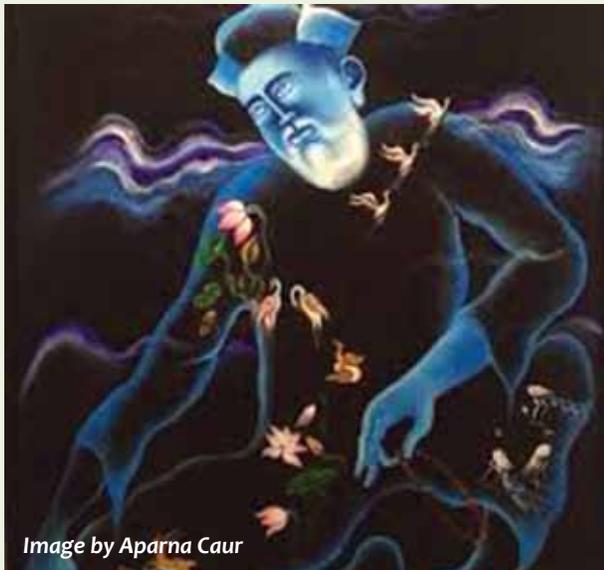
*He also runs an online podcast – 'Talk with Aasa' – a talk show devoted to exploring the more practical aspects of Gurbani. He also loves to run and participated in the San Francisco Half Marathon in July 2019.*

*He resides in Pleasanton, California with his wife Ashmeet Kaur and their son Guransh Singh and daughter Nimaani Singh.*

*(Images from the Internet)*

Dr. Kuldeep Singh in wonderment of

# The Delightful Wit of Guru Nanak's Lessons



When we think of spirituality and religion, our minds often conjure up serious and austere personae; many of us tend to think of disciplined and stoic personality types. In fact, most of our visual depictions of Guru Nanak, the first Guru of our Sikh faith, is in keeping with the notion that sainthood is synonymous with solemnity. Guru Nanak is presented in portraits as a very old man with a white beard, who seems quiet and reserved. The most prevalent portrayals reflect Guru Nanak as a meditative elder showering a blessing of silent grace with the gesture of his hand. While these depictions are in alignment with the common conception of what a spiritual teacher should look and act like, they may overlook numerous facets of Guru Nanak's personality and spiritual lessons. My hope is to reframe our previous subconscious associations of strictness with religion to one that encompasses freedom and joy by imparting the lesser known magnanimous power of Guru Nanak's more jovial and light hearted ways of teaching.

My purpose in conveying Guru Nanak's most natural and wonderful delightful nature, is that we too will be inspired to live blissfully; that we may begin to let go of our fixed branch mentality of spirituality and exchange that with a bending tree or lively free flowing concept as modeled by our Guru Nanak Sahib.

To be cheerful, smiling and laughing is an art. Laughing eliminates our tension and stress. It makes our mind and body blossom with radiance. Humour is another kind of reflection of the delighted soul. It is also good human nature. Humour can be reformed and elevated if it is well intentioned and gracious. When humour is gentle and subdued it decreases anger, bitterness of failure, and blundering. If it is exalted it can be revelatory of higher truths.

A sense of humour is used to beautify and impact the message. If humour is used with the right intention, it has the potential to easily pierce the soul and, thus, the message behind the humour is well delivered. In contrast, when any instruction is given harshly and directly, it often does not create the desired result upon its delivery. Guru Nanak utilised a melodious and witty manner to convey his lessons with the love and care needed to promote a lasting and transformative impact. His playful and incredibly ingenious teaching methods were such that he purposefully put himself in varying situations in order to reveal the folly of one's character or actions. His ultimate goal was to uplift all of humanity to that higher state of being and he did so in the most creative and innovative way.

In Japji, Guru Nanak expresses that devotees of divine should always remain smiling, cheerful and in the state of blissfulness.

ਨਾਨਕ ਭਗਤਾ ਸਦਾ ਵਿਗਾਸੁ ॥ nānak bhagatā sadā vigāsu. (GGS-2) God is also blissful, true, and beautiful.



ਸਤਿ ਸੁਹਾਣੁ ਸਦਾ ਮਨਿ ਚਾਉ ॥ sati suhāṇu sadā  
mani chāu. (GGS-4) So, ecstasy and joy are really  
our most authentic states. Guru Nanak wanted  
to help all mankind return to their most natural  
way of being and he used real life scenarios to  
transport people into a state of mind where they  
were able to recognise and correct their erroneous  
ways of being. Guru's wit was aimed to instigate  
deep soul searching for the purpose of converting  
mindlessness and malevolent wrongdoing into  
freedom from the wiles of *maya*.

Guru Nanak's wit was evident at the very  
onset of his youth. His birth was even a sentiment  
to the kind of teacher Guru Nanak would be.  
At his birth, he arrived smiling. His nurse who  
had seen a multitude of births was shocked, then  
amazed, and forever changed upon her vision of  
this baby whose smile lit up her soul. She knew  
he would brighten the world with this cheer and  
joy. When Guru Nanak's father presented this  
otherwise destitute nurse with money for her  
midwifery service she replied, "I now have all  
the wealth of the world upon seeing your son;  
no money can replace that kind of prosperity!"  
Guru Nanak arrived into this world with a smile  
reflective of his ultimate bliss. His very existence  
was a selfless dedication to enlightening the world.

ਬਹੁ ਸਿਸ ਜਨਮੇ ਮਮ ਕਰ ਮਾਹੀ। ਯੇਹ ਅਚਰਜ ਕਬ ਦੇਖਿਓ ਨਾਹੀ।  
ਦੀਰਘ ਨਰ ਜਿਓ ਬਿਲਾਸ ਮਿਲੈ ਹੈ। ਤਿਉਂ ਇਨ ਕੀਤੇ ਸ਼ਬਦ ਭਲੇ  
ਹੈ। (ਗੁਰ-ਪ੍ਰਤਾਪ ਸੂਰਜ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ)  
bahu sis janamē mam kar māhī. yēh acharaj  
kab dēkhiō nāhī.  
dīragh nar jiō bilās milai hai. tium in kītē shabad  
bhalē hai. (gur-pratāp sūraj granth)

When Guru Nanak was seven years old, he  
was sent to school to study language. Guru asked  
his teacher, "please tell me the meaning of the  
letters that you are teaching me" and the teacher  
replied, "Nanak one letter has no meaning." Guru  
then said, "if these letters are meaningless then  
why are you teaching them to me?"

On that momentous day, the Guru uttered  
one composition, *Patti Likhi*, which gave the  
meaning of each letter in his *Bani*. The teacher was.

Guruji's seemingly simple question about letters  
inspired a profound reflection within his teacher  
into the depths of spirituality. At the innocuous  
age of seven, Guru Nanak was able to instigate  
a tremendous deliberation into the difference  
between fruitless learning and life-giving wisdom.  
The irony is that even when a teacher was aiming  
to instruct Guruji, it was the instructor himself  
who ended up being the one learning the true  
lesson!

Delving deep into historical accounts and  
*sakhis* of Guru Nanak, there are open pathways for  
us to continue to learn from his astute and witty  
techniques. What is so beautiful and evident from  
these stories is that Guruji did not discriminate  
against anyone. He had love for all, in every facet  
of life. Whenever an opportunity presented itself  
for him to help his fellow humans, he did so  
without any reservation or an iota of prejudice.  
People of every profession, gender, religion and  
creed benefited and were uplifted from their  
interactions by this most benevolent saint.

In the Hindu religion, it is mandatory tradition  
to have a *Jeneu* (ceremonial thread) put around the  
neck. To mark the event, Guru Nanak's family  
arranged a big gathering to celebrate such a thread  
ceremony. All his relatives, neighbours, and the  
officiant, Hardial Pandit, gathered for this purpose.  
The young Nanak sat on a small cot and watched  
as Pandit Hardial read vedic mantras and prepared  
the *Jeneu*. Nanak observed all of these undertakings  
without interruption. At climax of the ceremony,  
when the time came for the Pandit to put the  
ceremonial thread around Guru Nanak's neck,  
Guruji refused, holding off the Pandit's hand. This  
act was deemed as extremely disrespectful and  
Hardial was astonished by this. He questioned as  
to why Nanak didn't want to put the ceremonial  
thread on his neck, the Pandit insisting it was  
mandatory for a religious true Hindu. Guruji  
smiled lovingly and said "Do you think religion  
is mandatory for everybody?" The Pandit replied  
"Of course, yes." Guru then uttered "then please  
put this *Janeu* on my sister; she is five years older  
than me." Astonished, the Pandit retorted that  
women were not allowed to wear the ceremonial



thread. Then Guruji said, “Ok, I have my best friend, Mardana, please put it on his neck.” The Pandit again responded by saying that being a low caste person, Guru Nanak’s friend had no right to wear it. Finally, Guruji said, “Ok then please put your *janeu* onto my neck?” Perplexed and now quite agitated, the Pandit countered “No you cannot have mine because it is special and only for Brahmins.” Guruji thenceforth asked, “Ok if you will put this *janeu* on me will it remain with me always? Will it never burn or wear off? ”

Flabbergasted and quite fatigued the Pandit responded, “No you need to put it on again when it is worn out. “Guru finally proclaimed, “Oh honoured Pandit! I would like that one thread that will neither break nor get soiled, burnt or lost.” The Pandit thought this was a strange demand of Guru Nanak. With the Brahmin unable to provide such a *janeu*, Guru Nanak proclaimed the kind of *janeu* that one should wear:

ਦਇਆ ਕਪਾਹ ਸੰਤੋਖੁ ਸੂਤੁ ਜਤੁ ਗੰਢੀ ਸਤੁ ਵਟੁ ॥  
 ਏਹੁ ਜਨੇਊ ਜੀਅ ਕਾ ਹਈ ਤ ਪਾਡੇ ਘਤੁ ॥  
 ਨਾ ਏਹੁ ਤੁਟੈ ਨਾ ਮਲੁ ਲਗੈ ਨਾ ਏਹੁ ਜਲੈ ਨ ਜਾਇ ॥  
 ਧੰਨੁ ਸੁ ਮਾਣਸ ਨਾਨਕਾ ਜੇ ਗਲਿ ਚਲੇ ਪਾਇ ॥  
 daiā kapāh santōkhu sūtu jatu gaṇḍhī satu vaṭu.  
 ēhu janēū jī kā haī t pāḍē ghatu.  
 nā ēhu tuṭai nā malu lagai nā ēhu jalai n jāi.  
 dhannu su māṇas nānakā jō gali chalē pāi.  
 (GGS-471)

“Make compassion the cotton, spin the knot of contentment and modesty, twist it with truth, such is the sacred thread O’ Pandit; endow me with that thread if you have it!”

This parable demonstrates the manner with which Guru taught the divine universal message to all, despite social rank. It is also very revealing of Guruji’s commitment of love to all living beings. He was saying that everyone was deserving of that everlasting eternal divine thread. The message clearly imparted by Guru Sahib is the *janeu* which everyone needs is, the one of divine virtue, the one that everyone has the right to wear, the *janeu* of compassion, modesty, and contentment. The *janeu* that is only for the Hindu, divides society even

amongst its own as it contributes to delineation among castes. Guruji said that he did not want a *janeu* of separation but rather one of connection. The *janeu* is a thread : what is the function of a thread? A thread is not for division. A thread connects beads together. So Guruji saw the *janeu* as a connector not as a divider.

Guruji’s subtle wit continued through every circumstance of his life, discretely imparting his wisdom. Once, when Guruji lay silently without eating or drinking for several weeks, his family grew extremely concerned and called a physician, Haridas, to check on their son. The doctor reached to check the pulse of Guru Nanak when Guruji laughed affectionately at the physician and uttered “Oh Physician, why are you checking my pulse? O’ physician, pain is not in my body! It is in my soul (the pain of yearning for God).”

Guru Nanak was helping the physician to recognise that we too are not well when we are feeling (either consciously or subconsciously) the separation from Wahe Guru. The wit of this lesson opened eyes of the physician that pain is not always related to the body and cannot always be diagnosed by feeling a pulse or by checking just the body. Ego, pride, jealousy are also pain which cannot be diagnosed by a doctor.

ਵੈਦੁ ਬੁਲਾਇਆ ਵੈਦਗੀ ਪਕਰਿ ਢੰਢੇਲੇ ਬਾਂਹ ॥  
 ਭੇਲਾ ਵੈਦੁ ਨ ਜਾਣਈ ਕਰਕ ਕਲੇਜੇ ਮਾਹਿ ॥੧॥  
 vaidu bulāiā vaidagī pakari ḍhaṇḍhōlē bāh.  
 bhōlā vaidu n jāṇai karak kalējē māhi. ੧.  
 (GGS-1279)

At every passing stage, Guru Nanak masterfully imparted significant messages for his beloved fellow beings, that to grow and flourish in Divine Grace. One extremely powerful message occurred during his first job at Sultanpur Lodhi as a store keeper at a public granary. Guruji was weighing his merchandise and counting the items aloud “one, two, three (in Punjabi *ikk, do, teen*) and so on until he reached the number thirteen, *tera* which also means *yours* in Punjabi. As Guruji uttered the word *Tera* (or yours) he became completely absorbed in the ecstasy of YOU, Wahe Guru. Every time he



uttered *Tera* (You), Guruji went deeper into bliss. *Janam Sakhi* records that while counting money and saying *tera*, Guruji saw the One in everyone and distributed his merchandise to all the needy, yet in his masterfulness nothing was lost, everyone benefited. So while Guruji was doing his job dealing with merchandise and counting money, he connected his mind with *Tera*, Waheguru.

Guruji imparted the lesson for us to connect with the divine even when we are doing business in the world. He wanted us always to practice the presence of remembering Waheguru in all circumstances, at every moment. Unfortunately, in contrast, many just count their money while supposedly doing prayers. This is why Guruji reminded us to not always think of ourselves, our desires, or our own needs but also think about the world, to give back to society, to always remember the Divine.

Guru Nanak loved rivers. It is written in Gurbani that Gursikhs make friends with the rivers because they are also like rivers: always fresh, pure flowing for altruistic deeds; they irrigate the land and distribute water to the world. ਤਿਨਾ ਦਰੀਆਵਾ ਸਿਉ ਦੇਸਤੀ ਮਨਿ ਮੁਖਿ ਸਚਾ ਨਾਉ ॥ *tinā darīāvā siu dōsatī mani mukhi sachā nāu.* (GGS-146)

In Sultanpur Lodhi, Guruji would bathe daily in the Bein river early in mornings. One day he went into the river for his bath but didn't come back. There were rumours and news spread that Guru Nanak had drowned but, on the third day, he re-emerged and very fresh, which had everybody amazed. After receiving *Mool Mantra* from Wahe Guru, Guru uttered the words: *Na ko Hindu na Musalman* ("There is neither Hindu nor Musalman")

Most people thought of this as some elaborate joke and thus did not take Guru's words seriously. But Guru's words re-iterated the multi-faceted truth that all humanity is One, before anyone was a Muslim or a Hindu. His concern was that, first, before anything else, we should be good human beings. In fact, few Hindus or Muslims were following true tenets of their religion. Rather, in the name of Rama and Allah, both were quarrelling with one another. There was corruption and hatred

prevalent in the name of religion. Guruji was bold and brave and when asked to choose between a Muslim or a Hindu, especially in times of such heightened disparity, Guruji did not favour either, but said whoever has good deeds, he is good whether he is Muslim, Hindu or anyone else. "Without good deeds both will repent."

Guruji's aim was for all to live harmoniously.

The Guru's delightful wit never discriminated amongst anyone, even the ruling and dominating class, Maulvis or Pandits or local rulers.

His teachings made their way into all hearts no matter of their wealth or status. Once Guruji was asked by a Muslim if he felt any difference between a Hindu and a Muslim, and Guruji replied, "I love all the names of God." So the Qazi invited him to pray alongside him and, to his delight, Guruji obliged. When Guruji entered the mosque, both Qazi and the ruler were praying, bowing their heads again and again but Guruji remained standing and smiling. When others finished their namaz, they said sternly, "O Nanak you are a qafir, impure one, you broke your promise to perform Namaz with us!", to which Guru replied "With whom should I perform the prayer? You both were not praying. Tell me the truth: were your minds present in the prayer?" Both men became silent, because the qazi was actually thinking about his new pony while at Namaz and the ruler was mentally buying horses in Kabul during his prayer. Guruji's remark rendered the men speechless, a great lesson on real faith, devotion, and concentration, while praying.

Guru Nanak fully participated in the world around him so when the opportunity presented itself, he could carefully impart great lessons in dramatic way to deeply impact people's minds. He helped people understand that mindless and ritualistic actions did not improve their spiritual journeys.

Another instance of Guruji's effective teaching strategies was when he went to Haridwar. People there were throwing water towards the Sun as an offering to their ancestors. Guru joined the group of ritualistic enthusiasts but started throwing water in the opposite direction, towards



the west. The people were curious as who was this strange man throwing handfuls of water towards the west? People finally approached the strange man throwing water in the opposite direction. Guruji explained that he was a farmer with a farm in the west, suffering from drought, that he was throwing water to nourish his crops. The people then asked Guru how far his farms were and he replied 250 miles away.”

“Are you foolish, mental, O Nanak?!”

“Why?” Guru replied.

“Because how can water travel that far?!”

So, “If your water can reach the Sun, which is so many millions miles away, then why can’t mine?”

People became speechless and many realised their foolishness. Guruji made the people whom he loved much to ponder and reflect on their fruitless actions, he never scolded, chastised, nor belittled.

During his journey to Hindu shrines, Guruji went to Jaganath Puri where some ‘saints’ were exploiting innocent people. Guruji observed this decided to help the ignorant people. One false saint in particular (Kalyug) was sitting in an asana and crowded by his disciples, claimed to know all of the Cosmos, Vishnu, Brahma and Shiva. His donation box was placed right in front and as he was professing his powers, would often look at his donation box to ensure people were putting their hard-earned money into it. Guru Nanak asked Bhai Mardana to take Kalyug’s donation box away and hide it behind him. When Kalyug opened his eyes and saw his donation box missing, he unleashed into a frantic frenzy, got so mad that he started cursing his disciples enquiring as to who had stolen his donation box. He threatened them saying he would destroy whoever did that. The innocents were extremely frightened and cried “We didn’t steal your box! Please don’t curse us!” Then Guru Nanak appeared and said, “Oh dear saint you were just professing that you are an inner knower who knows all the cosmos. It should be easy for you to find such a small box with that kind of knowledge. Why can’t you find your box with your miracle power?” The followers then began asking him the same questions. Speechless

with shame, Kalyug had no choice but to reveal his hoax. This enabled people to realise their foolishness and understand the saint’s motives which was only to loot innocent people.

ਅਖੀ ਤ ਮੀਟਹਿ ਨਾਕ ਪਕੜਹਿ ਠਗਣ ਕਉ ਸੰਸਾਰੁ ॥੧॥  
ਰਹਾਉ ॥

ਆਂਟ ਸੇਤੀ ਨਾਕੁ ਪਕੜਹਿ ਸੂਝਤੇ ਤਿਨਿ ਲੇਅ ॥

ਮਗਰ ਪਾਛੈ ਕਛੁ ਨ ਸੂਝੈ ਏਹੁ ਪਦਮੁ ਅਲੇਅ ॥੨॥

akhī t mīṭahi nāk pakarāhi ṭhagaṇ kau sasāru. १.  
rahāu.

āṅṭ sētī nāku pakarāhi sūjhatē tini lō.

magar pāchhai kachhu n sūjhai ēhu padamu  
alō. 2. (GGS-662)

During his third udasi to Islamic places of worship, Guru made his way to Mecca, wearing Muslim garb. Tired after the strenuous travel, he lay down with his feet toward Mecca. The Muslim qazi started screaming obscenities, as to why Guruji did the unpardonable act of pointing his feet toward Mecca. Guruji explained to the frazzled Muslim qazi that he was so tired and didn’t know where God did not reside, so requested him to kindly place his feet where God was not. The qazi realised that God was everywhere for wherever he turned Guru’s feet he saw God in all directions! Guru had helped the qazi realize that God was omnipresent. Guru’s actions opened the eyes of this blessed Muslim qazi.

Guruji’s life from birth through adulthood brought joy to closed hearts. He never tried to turn people to his own ideology, but simply helped people awaken to the love that existed within themselves, even the most tormented and closed of persons.

However, there was resistance to Guruji throughout his travels. One such instance was in Achal Vatala in Multan which inspired a lesson which carries masterful significance. Guru Nanak entered Achal Vatala where numerous Sidh and Pir saints were gathered. Many of them resisted Guru Nanak’s presence at this gathering and to show their disapproval metaphorically sent a cup full of milk as symbolic that there was no room for Guru Nanak there. However, this act was seen by Guru



Nanak as an opportunity and responded by gently placing a jasmine flower on top of the cup to signify that he would never be a burden nor take space, but be like a flower, fragrant and soft blooming. He wanted people to learn to live like the flower floating on milk, with detachment and giving a beautiful sublime fragrance. Guruji imparted that when one joins others, the aim should be fragrant with saintly and humble presence.

There are endless stories on Guruji's witty way of preaching. One is when Guruji converses with Bhai Lehna along with his own sons to determine the next Guruship. Guruji asks them if they know what was in his hand. Sri Chand, his elder son, said "no doubt you have a coin." His other son, Lakhmi Das answered the same as Sri Chand. When the same question was asked to Bhai Lehna and he said "Oh my dearest Baba, how can I fathom what is in your hand? It contains all Godly wisdom. All the worldly and spiritual treasures are in your palm. It contains the entire Universe and God as well."



Guruji knew as to who could see beyond physicality, Bhai Lehna was able to realise Guru Nanak's greatness. Guruji gave his Divine Light to Lehna and named him as Angad, "made from his own body".

Guru Nanak could melt with his wit, those who were arrogant always imbued with sublimity, humility, love, and care. Guruji always bestowed mercy and beneficence on social judgments, arguments Resistance yielded spontaneously to

the genial influence of his benevolence. Guru Nanak's delightful wit had unseen power which overcame resistance of those whom Guruji sought to change. These were never frivolous but always clear messages sent by his merciful heart. Guru Nanak's wit was never to demoralise or belittle, but always to spread the message of divine joy and bliss.

Such witty manner is powerful, conveys the right message at the right time for the right purpose. Guruji had human destiny in mind and is upliftment, in every one of his lessons. His ways of teaching was transformative and experiential, caring and loving; putting himself in place of the student, not as a teacher. He always felt the pain of humanity and used the best manner to convey his messages in the transformation of life.

He loved all religions, all ways of life which instilled purity, truthfulness, and righteousness. Guruji's smile was magnetic and radiated from his presence.

He wanted to share that magnetism with all, and inspire mankind.

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*He currently serves as a curricular designer on a forthcoming Punjabi language programme for the University of California system. His present research focuses on the Sikh diaspora and cross-cultural adjustment. Above everything, his passion is to inspire everyone he meets with the love and light of Sikhi. Dr. Singh has an MA in comparative religious studies and a Ph.D. in Sikh literature from Punjabi University in Patiala. He is currently residing and working at the Sikh Gurdwara Sahib, San Jose in California, USA.*



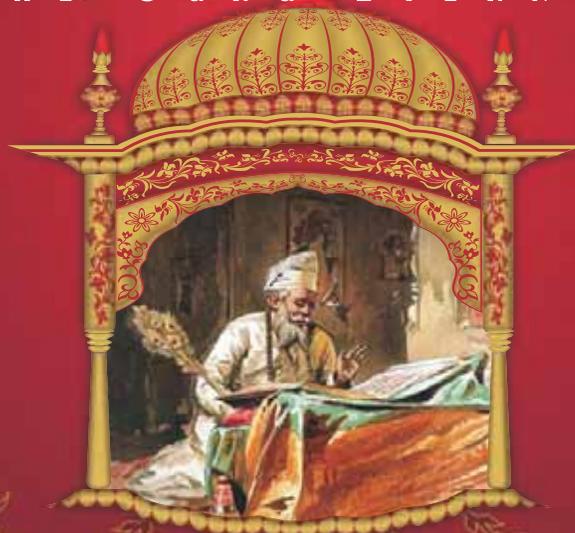


ਪੋਥੀ ਪਰਮੇਸਰ ਕਾ ਥਾਨੁ ।।

*The Book is the Abode of God.*

# Guru Granth Sahib

THE GURU ETERNAL



With Message from Dr. Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister of India  
Dr. Mohinder Singh

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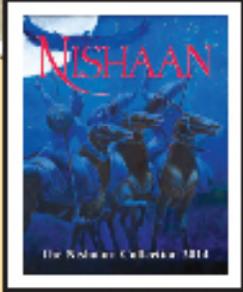
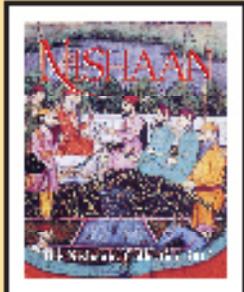
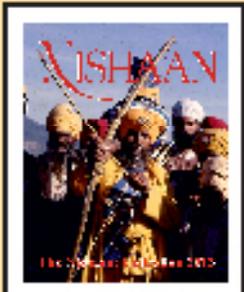
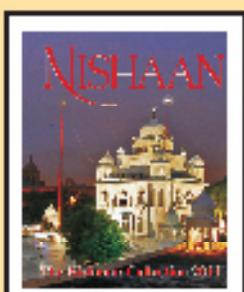
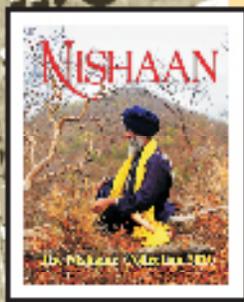
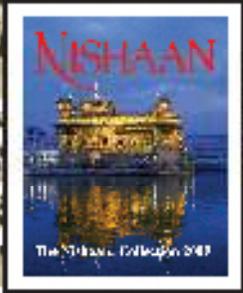
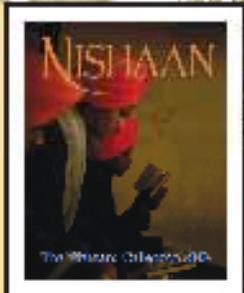
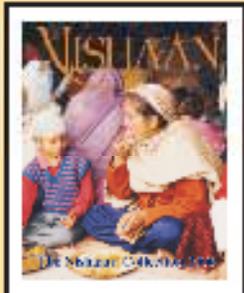
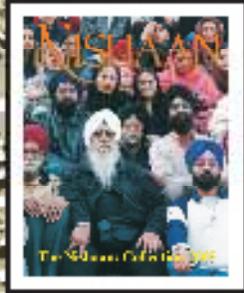
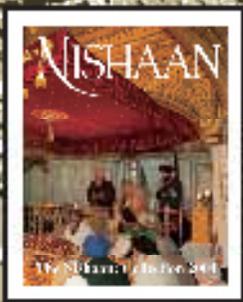
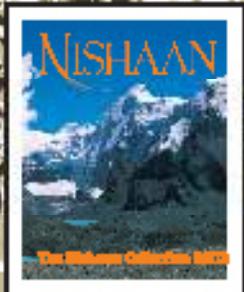
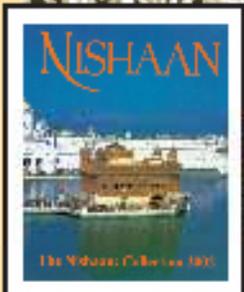
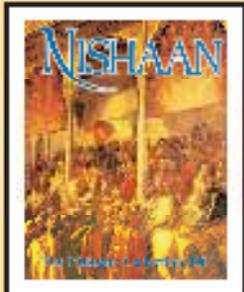
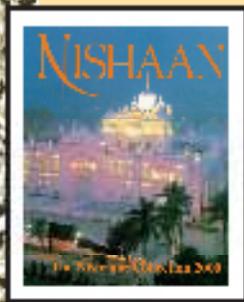


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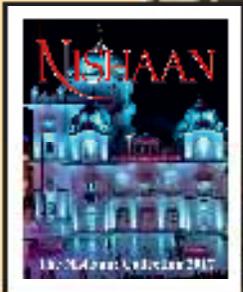
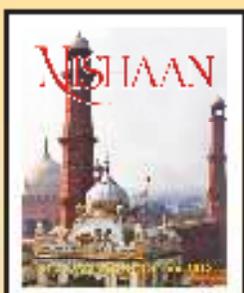
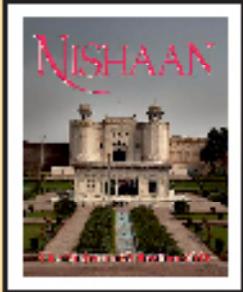
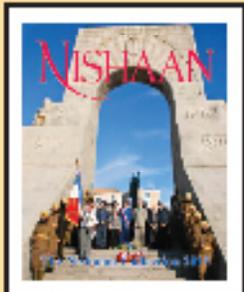
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