

Moral challenges in our times

Every now and then, philosophers and scientists in the west stridently question the existence of God and proceed to preach their own brand of atheism. Their denial invariably wears a veneer of scientific argument, mainly rooted in biology. Currently, the American scientist professor Richard Dawkins leads this debate. His pet contention is that human brain-imaging illustrates - in technicolor - the physical seat of the will and the passions. As such, he challenges the religious concept of “a soul independent of glands and gristle.”

How does the Sikh scripture deal with the questions of faith and reason? Wisdom in Man is a divine gift that is commended as a tool for self-discovery and self-realisation. Times without number Guru-bani exhorts us to discover our ‘true self’ that links us with God’s creative power. As for the universe, to comprehend it is beyond mortal man’s wildest imagination. We are like a spec of sand on the sea-shore wanting to fathom the ocean - a thought that has been echoed by the 20th century astronomer Sir James Jeans in “The Mysterious Universe”.

According to Guru Granth Sahib, all human beings are governed by the will of God – the pervasive but incomprehensible Reality that is ever true and immanent that can be discovered within everyone of us. Every generation is, by nature, impatient and therefore volatile. The Gurubani counsels patience and sincerity for a build-up of moral power. In so far as early Sikhism passed through difficult periods of political strife, anarchy and social injustice, most students of world religions bypass – if not ignore - the philosophical underpinning of the faith that the illustrious Guru Nanak founded. Few care to study the ideological and scientific underpinnings of the holy Guru Granth. While the basic religion struggled to survive the vagaries of unfriendly regimes, the eternal verities that inspired the Scriptures have mostly remained unexplored.

Now it is a challenge - as well as an opportunity - for the new generation to discover the dynamic philosophy and the ethos of Guru Granth Sahib, which remains as the repository of profound and timeless truths enunciated by the Gurus and saints. This divine wisdom calls for patience as well as devotion. How many of our youth are ready to sail on such a voyage of discovery? Even as amateurs we can benefit enormously from the study of Gurubani. All that is needed to make a beginning is the conviction, loyalty and a degree of discipline – as required by the pursuit of any learning, and – more importantly – by the observance of time-tested ethical norms. Only a sound mind in a wholesome body can aspire to be blessed with the Divine light. Let us not be faint hearted. Even adversity and pain must be borne cheerfully to achieve the goal of a true Sikh - literally, a learner.

ਸਗਲੇ ਦੁਖ ਐਮਿਤੁ ਕਰਿ ਪੀਵੈ ਬਾਹੁੜਿ ਦੁਖੁ ਨ ਪਾਇਦਾ ॥

[SGGS:1034]

Moral discipline is the *sine qua non* of this voyage of discovery. The modern society is, however, increasingly losing its soul to materialism and consumerism. As the electronic media come flooding in to break the barriers of distance, life-styles are fast yielding to trivia. Reckless self-indulgence is slowly robbing the new generation of its moral security and spiritual solace. The problems of drug abuse and promiscuity have assumed alarming proportions. The goal of a healthy mind in a wholesome body is receding. Moral and physical standards among youth have to be re-cultivated.

The holy Guru Granth - and the basic Sikh doctrine - anticipated such a cycle of declining moral values: ਮਨਮੁਖ ਵਾਪਰੈ ਸਾਰ ਨ ਜਾਣਨੀ ਬਿਖੁ ਵਿਹਾਝਹਿ ਬਿਖੁ ਸੰਗਹਹਿ ਬਿਖੁ ਸਿਉ ਧਰਹਿ ਪਿਆਰੁ ॥ [SGGS:1091] - unequivocally warns the society, the families and individuals against over-indulgence of sensual pleasures and obsessive material attachment. In one of the most powerful verses

Guru Nanak rings the warning bell and shows the highway: ਨਾ ਸਤਿ ਸੁਖੀਆ [SGGS:952] - The grim warnings essentially call upon the seekers of truth to follow the basic principles of physical and moral health, to desist from tampering with Nature. Guru Granth encourages us to walk the narrow path of devotion in order to experience the glow and glory of truth: ਮਨ ਤੂੰ ਜੋਤਿ ਸਰੂਪੁ ਹੈ ਆਪਣਾ ਮੂਲੁ ਪਛਾਣੁ ॥ [SGGS: 441] 'O my mind,

You are Spirit born, Know your true Self and discover God's Light within.'

The rewards for following the enlightened moral path are instantaneous and abundant. At the collective level, for society as a whole, the respect for moral principles and obedience of natural law are basic postulates. Just as a nation is best governed by a constitution, a people's faith also calls for a broadly untrammelled observance of the moral code - which opens the doors to enduring spiritual peace. Moral discipline as well as restraint in diet and sensual indulgence keep the body healthy at an optimum level. Such equipoise and reverence for life are virtues that help overcome anger, tension and conflict.

In short, *Gurubani* is a metaphor for wholesome life: ਸੁਸਤਿ ਬਿਵਸਥਾ ਹਰਿ ਕੀ ਸੇਵਾ ਮਧੁਤ ਪ੍ਰਭ ਜਾਪਣ ॥ [SGGS:682] i.e. a holy mind and healthy body, living in reverence and devotion to the pervasive Divine principle can best serve God's purpose and bring joy to our troubled planet. Ordinary Sikhs may not be paragons of virtue, but she/he ought to strive for this goal, while guarding against negativity that destroys peace and harmony in the individual, as well as in the society to which we belong. Let us re-discover God's majesty and elegance through Gurubani.

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