

The Heart of it All

*Bhai Harbans Lal Ph.D. D.Litt (Hon)**

** Dr. Bhai Harbans Lal is a Penalist on the SR Editorial Board. He is ex Professor and Chairman, Department of Pharmacology University of North Texas Health Science Center, at Forth Worth : 3500 Camp Boulevard, Fort Worth, Texas 76016. USA*

How could it be that actually the helper is being healed while helping others? How could it be that the mere act of helping others profoundly heals the physical and mental ailments of the helper? This is an intriguing phenomenon that does not make sense on the basis of the cause-and-effect relationship. It does not make sense on the basis of religion either as an atheist benefits the same.

A conference was held in New York to ask similar questions in 1988. Many scientists participated. All of them agreed that there was in deed a significant phenomenon of the helper being healed so that it was reasonable to make a hypothesis. However, they felt that there was probably no one single hypothesis to explain the intriguing relationship.

Now that the basis for the healing effect of altruism cannot be understood by physical sciences, a spiritual mechanism may be hypothesized. Further, because the Guru Granth gives altruism a spiritual endorsement, its benefit may be constructed through the spiritual science.

Our first hypothesis is that altruism is a basic motivation of human species and its execution is gratifying, and the gratification is always healing. That is why the humanoids are urged from within to be altruists.

Secondly, altruism is intimately related to the eternal desire to be in peace, and to the yearning for connecting to the Cosmic Soul. The author of Sri Guru Granth Sahib, Guru Arjun, cites these urges as :

ਜੀਅ ਜੰਤ ਸਭਿ ਸੁਖਿ ਬਸੇ ਸਭ ਕੈਮਨਿ ਲੋਚ ॥

ਪਰਉਪਕਾਰੁ ਨਿਤ ਚਿਤਵਤੇ ਨਾਹੀ ਕਛੁ ਪੋਚ ॥

(SGGS: M-5, p.815.)

Jee-a jant sabh sukh basay sabh kai man loch. Par-upkaar nit chitvatay naahee kachh poch.

All beings and creatures may dwell in the pain free state; the minds of all yearn for this aspiration. Then they continually think and plan of altruism and helping others. They harbor no ill will towards anyone.

Bhai Gurdas further describes the innate urge as very intense and it is satisfied through altruism.

ਤਪਦਾ ਪਰਉਪਕਾਰ ਨੇ

ਠੰਡੇ ਪਰਉਪਕਾਰ ਵਿਹਾਣੀ ॥

ਅਗਨਿ ਬੁਝਾਏ ਤਪਤਿ ਵਿਚਿ

ਠੰਡਾ ਹੋਵੈ ਬਿਲਮੁ ਨ ਆਣੀ ॥

(Bhai Gurdas, *Vaar* 29, Pauri 13.)

A seeker gets fired up with an urge about altruism but then is chilled down by indulging in the altruistic actions. The altruistic activity extinguishes the fire and the heart cools down immediately after.

Bhai Gurdas went as far as saying that the occupation of altruism is the most satisfying occupation; this is a conclusion reached after acquiring education on all specialties:

ਚਉਦਹ ਵਿਦਿਆ ਸੋਧਿ ਕੈ ਪਰਉਪਕਾਰੁ

ਅਚਾਰ ਸੁਖਾਣਾ ॥

(Bhai Gurdas, *Vaar* 29, Pauri 13)

After acquiring fourteen educational skills, I found the occupation of altruism as the best and the most satisfying.

Our next hypothesis is that altruism is a type of meditation; from it you derive all benefits of a true meditation. We find support for the meditation hypothesis in the Sikh scripture:

ਏਹਾ ਭਗਤਿ ਸਚੇ ਸਿਉ ਲਿਵ ਲਾਗੈ

ਬਿਨੁ ਸੇਵਾ ਭਗਤਿ ਨ ਹੋਈ ॥

(SGGS: M3, p. 506.)

The meditation is to connect the mind with the Truth; without serving others one cannot be a meditating devotee:

ਪ੍ਰਭ ਕਉ ਸਿਮਰਹਿ ਸੇ ਪਰਉਪਕਾਰੀ ॥

(SGGS: M5, p. 263.)

Those who meditate upon the Eternal One are altruists.

ਹਰਿ ਗੁਨ ਗਾਵਤ ਪਰਉਪਕਾਰ ਨਿਤ

ਤਿਸੁ ਰਸਨਾ ਕਾ ਮੇਲੁ ਕਿਛੁ ਨਾਹੀ ॥

(SGGS: M5, p. 824.)

Those who sing the Glorious Praises of the Sustaining ONE while engaged in the acts of altruism, their words of praises are priceless.

Since *Gurmat* (the path of the Guru) is about active meditation, the meditation means many sequential steps, such as getting ready, getting in the mood, and finally engaging in the experience of one's cosmic self in the Absolute Divinity. What this requires is actually letting go of distractions, stress, and pain. It also means to give up hatred, duality, and, above all, ego from the depth of one's mind. It means, rising about the animalistic instincts and reaching the Cosmic Consciousness. All of these can be seen being achieved during the practice of altruism. If so, then no one can deny that these creeds will not lead to peace of mind and physical health.

Sri Guru Granth Sahib tells us that altruism goes hand in hand with reduction in the ego of the self. Without reduction in ego, altruistic behavior cannot be sustained, Guru Ram Das says:

ਵਿਚਿ ਹਉਮੈ ਸੇਵਾ ਥਾਇ ਨ ਪਾਏ ॥

ਜਨਮਿ ਮਰੈ ਫਿਰਿ ਆਵੈ ਜਾਏ ॥

SGGS: M4, p. 1071.

Vich ha-umai sayvaa thaa-ay na paa-ay janam marai fir aavai jaa-ay.

One who serves in egotism is not accepted or approved. Such a person is born, only to die again, and come and go in reincarnation.

Further, Guru Arjun says that those who engage in service, their ego are destroyed:

ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਕੀ ਸੇਵਾ ਸੋ ਕਰੇ

ਜਿਸੁ ਬਿਨਸੈ ਹਉਮੈ ਤਾਪੁ ॥

(SGGS: M5, p. 45.)

Satgur kee sayvaa so karay jis binsai ha-umai taap

People can perform the service ordained by the True Guru only when their illness of egotism has been eradicated.

Bhai Gurdas explains this aspect of the Guru's teachings by saying.

ਪਰਉਪਕਾਰ ਕਮਾਂਵਦਾ ਉਨ ਆਪ ਗਵਾਯਾ ॥

(Bhai Gurdas, *Vaar 9, Pauri 20.*)

Those who practice altruism lose the sense of their pseudo self, meaning that they develop their sacred creative self:

ਕਟਿ ਵਿਕਾਰ ਹਜਾਰ ਲਖ

ਪਰਉਪਕਾਰੀ ਸਦਾ ਹਜੂਰਾ ॥

(Bhai Gurdas, *Vaar 40, Pauri 1.*)

By eliminating thousand of bad habits, an altruist lives in the presence of the Divine.

ਗੁਰਮੁਖ ਜਨਮ ਸਕਾਰਥਾ

ਪਰਉਪਕਾਰੀ ਸਹਜਿ ਸੁਭਾਈ ॥

(Bhai Gurdas, *Vaar 16, Pauri 4.*)

The Guru-oriented people are fulfilled in their life by practicing altruism and thus maintaining the life of equipoise.

Altruism remained a strong drive among the Sikhs throughout the ages because it helped them achieve what they want from life. Others may be attracted to Sikhism for the benefits they observed Sikhs deriving from their practice of altruism;

ਧਾਵਨ ਪਰਉਪਕਾਰ ਨੋਂ

ਗੁਰ ਸਿਖਾਂ ਨੋ ਖੋਜ ਲਹੰਦੇ ॥

ਦੁਬਿਧਾ ਪੰਥ ਨ ਧਾਵਨੀ

ਮਾਯਾ ਵਿਚ ਉਦਾਸ ਰਹੰਦੇ ॥

(Gurdas, Bhai, *Vaar 6, Pauri 13.*)

People seek opportunity for altruism and locate those seekers engaged in similar pursuits. They do not run after the paths that create duality or hatred. Rather, they remain untouched by the illusions of *Maya*.

Acts of altruism reveal the hidden tranquility. People who search for tranquility elsewhere are a bit lost. Tranquility is *within* but hidden under the pressures of materialistic life. We insist on

searching for it outside only in ignorance. Altruism opens the inner door so that the tranquility can enter into our life; then our lives manifest an Inner Light out of a previously hidden Vision. If we serve, we cannot hate; we connect to Creative Soul, *Karta Purakh*, within. Experiencing Divine is a purpose for all, for people and for self.

The spiritual quest in altruism involves the renunciation of hatred and the surrender of the ego, self. Mind is reoriented. Mind cannot be subdued, only reoriented. God cannot be ordered or bribed; we depend on grace obtained through serving God's creation. Altruism is one way to achieve all of those. This may be the ultimate mechanism underlying all of the benefits we receive by helping others.

