

How to Spiritualize “Karma”

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“**Karma**” is a Sanskrit word meaning action, which then simply becomes an originator of a **cause**. A famous Physics law states that, “**for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction**”. Thus, every action you carry out in your daily life is followed by a reaction, the later being simply the effect (result) of the original action. Clearly then, all **thoughts you contemplate, all feelings you experience, and all deeds you do are simply the causes, and result will be just their effects**. It is obvious, then, that **every cause you set in motion will surely bring about its corresponding effect**.

Since each and everyone of us in this world is thinking, feeling, and acting all day long, we are setting, in the process, causes which are bound to have their effects. This brings us to one of natures most remarkable law governing the **relationship between the cause and its effect**. This law may be thought of as the **law of Karma**, which is really synonymous with Law of **Cause and Effect**. The former is frequently cited in SGGS as an integral part of our life and living. This law is really nothing but **God’s supremely elegant way of ensuring that justice is carried out in the world**. We may like to think of it as a **law of Divine Justice**, which is universally operational in the life of each and everyone of us. We see this beautifully illustrated by Guru Nanak Dev in the following hymn:

ਗਾਵਹਿ ਚਿਤੁ ਗੁਪਤੁ ਲਿਖਿ ਜਾਣਹਿ, ਲਿਖ ਲਿਖ ਧਰਮੁ ਵੀਚਾਰੇ [ਜਪ ਜੀ, ਪਨਾ ੬]

“(In singing Thy praises) latent images (of one’s actions) are recorded, Dharma Raja supposed angel of justice, then reflects on them, and renders justice”.

This thought is reflected in the following hymns:

ਕਰਮੀ ਕਰਮੀ ਹੋਇ ਵੀਚਾਰ, ਸਚਾ ਆਪਿ ਸਚਾ ਦਰਬਾਰੁ [ਜਪ ਜੀ, ਪਨਾ ੭]

“Justice is done after deliberations on one’s actions, God is True and His court is just”.

ਚੰਗਿਆਈਆ ਬੁਰਿਆਈਆ ਵਾਚੈ ਧਰਮੁ ਹਦੂਰਿ

ਕਰਮੀ ਆਪੇ ਆਪਣੀ ਕੇ ਨੇੜੈ ਕੇ ਦੂਰਿ

ਜਪ ਜੀ, ਸਲੋਕ, ਪਨਾ ੮

“Dharam (Rai) deliberates on (one’s) good and bad deeds. Through (this) justice based on (one’s deeds), some (people) come near to God and others stay far away”.

That Dharma Raj is under divine order to carry out the justice is illustrated in the hymn:

ਧਰਮੁ ਰਾਇ ਨੋ ਹੁਕਮੁ ਹੈ, ਬਹਿ ਸਚਾ ਧਰਮੁ ਬੀਚਾਰਿ

[ਸਿਰੀ ਰਾਗ ਮਹਲਾ ੩, ਪਨਾ ੩੮]

One often wonders whether the **human body is in itself subjected to divine justice, or is it the mind/soul, which has to render account on behalf of one’s**

life, and thus be judged by the angel of justice. We find answer to this important question in the hymn:

ਜਿਥੇ ਲੇਖਾ ਮੰਗੀਐ, ਤਿਥੇ ਦੇਹ ਜਾਤਿ ਨ ਜਾਇ

ਸਾਚਿ ਰਤੇ ਸੇ ਉਬਰੇ, ਦੁਖੀਏ ਦੂਜੈ ਭਾਇ

[ਪ੍ਰਭਾਤੀ ਮਹਲਾ ੩, ਪਨਾ ੧੩੪੬]

“Where one is called to give account (of one’s life), there the body and the caste do not go. Those imbued in truth are liberated, others (who have been attached to worldly possessions) keep suffering”.

It is thus clear that at the end of one’s life it is **one’s inner self, the mind/soul, which has to render the account of life’s activities.** It is most beneficial here to point out that the real devotees of Guru-God, through their truthful lifestyle in their present life, are able to acquire such a lofty spiritual state of mind that Dharam Rai stays away from them. This is aptly described in the hymn:

ਧਰਮ ਰਾਇ ਹੈ ਹਰਿ ਕਾ ਕੀਆ, ਹਰਿ ਜਨ ਸੇਵਕ ਨੇੜਿ ਨ ਆਵੈ [ਸਲੋਕ ਮਹਲਾ ੩, ਪਨਾ ੫੫੫]

“Dharam Rai is God’s creation, and does not come near God’s servants and devotees”.

It thus makes sense that in accordance with *Karma* the **effect of our thoughts, our feelings, and our actions, good or bad, ugly or beautiful, will result in shaping our character and our destiny.** Let it be clearly understood that no one can escape the effect of one’s doings. It is thus easy to recognize how our present birth is the result of justice rendered on all our good and bad deeds from our previous birth. **As you sow, so shall you reap is a well-known universal edict.** This is reflected in the following hymns:

ਆਪੇ ਬੀਜਿ ਆਪੇ ਹੀ ਖਾਹੁ

ਜਪ ਜੀ, ਪਨਾ ੪

“As you sow, so shall you reap”.

ਮੰਦਾ ਚੰਗਾ ਆਪਣਾ, ਆਪੇ ਹੀ ਕੀਤਾ ਪਾਵਣਾ

[ਸਲੋਕ ਮਹਲਾ ੧, ਪਨਾ ੪੭੧]

“(One) obtains the fruits of (one’s) good and bad deeds”.

ਕਰਣੀ ਕਾਗਦ ਮਨੁ ਮਸਵਾਣੀ, ਬੁਰਾ ਭਲਾ ਦੁਇ ਲੇਖ ਪਏ

[ਮਾਰੂ ਮਹਲਾ ੧, ਪਨਾ

੯੯੦]

“Actions (conduct) is paper, mind is ink, bad and good deeds are thus recorded (thereon)”

From the above-cited hymns it is easy to see the great applicability of the principle of, **“as you sow so shall you reap,”** in your life. For you as an individual, it is now clear that what you had sown in your immediate past life, you are reaping its results in your present life. Therefore, what you are sowing now, you will surely reap its result in a future life. This, then, brings us to the concept of birth and rebirth, frequently described as the **doctrine of reincarnation. Reincarnation is based on the belief in life after death,** when your soul is reborn into a new physical form. It is simply a rebirth of your soul. One may wonder, what is soul. Simply stated, **soul is the non-material essence, or the spiritual divine principle, of all living beings, and that, it is immortal.** Your soul is progressively elevating spiritually to become

perfect. And when that happens, the soul finds union with the Supreme Soul (God). It is now obvious, how the law of **“Karma” is an essential and indispensable part of the principle of reincarnation.** In SGGS we observe the result of this *LAK* as a **writ (destiny) recorded on our forehead.** The following hymns succinctly describe this concept:

ਜੈਸਾ ਬੀਜੈ ਸੋ ਲੁਣੈ, ਜੇਹਾ ਪੁਰਬ ਕਿਨੈ ਬੋਇਆ [ਸਲੋਕ ਮਹਲਾ ੪, ਪਨਾ ੩੦੯]

“As you sow so you reap, just as (you) are reaping now what you sowed in past (life)”.

ਜੇ ਮੈ ਕੀਆ ਸੋ ਮੈ ਪਾਇਆ, ਦੇਸੁ ਨ ਦੀਜੈ ਅਵਰ ਜਨਾ [ਆਸਾ ਮਹਲਾ ੧, ਪਨਾ] ੪੩੩

“Whatever I did I have obtained the result of that, (so) don't blame other person(s) “.

ਮਸਤਕਿ ਲਿਖਿਅੜਾ ਲੇਖੁ, ਪੁਰਬਿ ਕਮਾਇਆ ਜੀਉ

ਲੇਖ ਨ ਮਿਟਈ ਪੁਰਬਿ ਕਮਾਇਆ, ਕਿਆ ਜਾਣਾ ਕਿਆ ਹੋਸੀ [ਧਨਾਸਰੀ ਮਹਲਾ ੧, ਪਨਾ ੬੮੯]

“Destiny is recorded on your forehead, (based) on deeds of past (life): The writ of past deeds cannot be erased, what do (you) know, what will happen”.

ਦੇਸੁ ਨ ਦੀਜੈ ਕਾਹੂ ਲੋਗ, ਜੋ ਕਮਾਵਨੁ ਸੋਈ ਭੋਗ [ਰਾਮਕਲੀ ਮਹਲਾ ੫, ਪਨਾ ੮੮੮]

“Do not blame other people, whatever you have sown that you are reaping”.

ਜਨਮ ਮਰਨ ਦੁਖ ਫੇੜ ਕਰਮ, ਸੁਖ ਜੀਅ ਜਨਮ ਤੇ ਛੁਟੈ [ਰਾਗ ਆਸਾ ਬਾਣੀ ਭਗਤਾ ਕੀ, ਪਨਾ ੪੭੫]

“The pain of birth and death is the result of one's deeds, peace comes when the mind-soul is freed from birth (and death)”.

That Naam is an important key to peace is illustrated by the hymn below:

ਗੁਰ ਕੈ ਭਾਣੈ ਚਲੇ ਦਿਨ ਰਾਤੀ, ਨਾਮ ਚੇਤਿ ਸੁਖ ਪਾਇਦਾ [ਮਾਰੂ ਮਹਲਾ ੩, ਪਨਾ ੧੦੬੨]

“Day and night staying in divine Will, one obtains peace through remembering Naam”

How “Naam” Spiritualizes “Karma”

The word **“Naam” appears thousands of times in SGGS.** It is therefore helpful and meaningful to reflect on this word briefly. In Holy SGGS this word, **“Naam”**, is used synonymously for the following precepts:

As God, the Creator, Love of God: meditation, contemplation, and remembrance of God Word, Shabad (Divinely inspired hymns, or Divine revelations) Inner Enlightener, Benefactor, and Savior Earnestly seeking Divine Grace

To adore, glorify and praise God Reciting, hearing, and singing of hymns Accepting divine Order (Will, Command) Altruistic service, and goodwill towards all the people Truthful and righteous living

The absolute creative power of Naam is admirably stated in the hymn:

ਨਾਮੇ ਹੀ ਤੇ ਸਭ ਪਰਗਟ ਹੋਵੈ, ਨਾਮੇ ਸੋਝੀ ਪਾਈ [ਰਾਮਕਲੀ ਮਹਲਾ ੧, ਪਨਾ ੯੪੬]

“Everything is manifested from Naam, it is in Naam that one obtains understanding”.

It is no wonder, then, that you are advised in SGGs that **all your efforts, duties, and responsibilities should be directed towards acquiring Naam in your life.** The following hymns succinctly advocate this:

ਸਗਲ ਉਦਮ ਮਹਿ ਉਦਮ ਭਲਾ,
ਹਰਿ ਕਾ ਨਾਮੁ ਜਪਹੁ ਜੀਅ ਸਦਾ

[ਗਉੜੀ ਸੁਖਮਨੀ ਮਹਲਾ ੫, ਪਨਾ ੨੬੬]

“Of all the efforts the most fruitful effort is to remember God’s Naam all the time”.

ਸਰਬ ਧਰਮ ਮਹਿ ਸ੍ਰੇਸਟ ਧਰਮ

ਹਰਿ ਕੋ ਨਾਮੁ ਜਪਿ ਨਿਰਮਲ ਕਰਮ

[ਗਉੜੀ ਸੁਖਮਨੀ ਮਹਲਾ ੫, ਪਨਾ ੨੬੬]

“Of all duties, the loftiest duty is to worship Naam, (so you can) do righteous deeds”.

Spiritual Elevation of “Karma”

We, human beings, are emotional people who are easily and readily influenced by feelings of arrogance, self-centeredness, greed, anger, lust, worldly things, and material possessions. When our feelings become very dominating they turn into passion. And passion is deeply stirring, and, if not controlled properly, it can become ungovernable. **When your passion becomes dominating, where, you are unable to reason, then you are encouraging yourself to indulge in a habit from which it may not be easy to break.** It is for this reason that you want to control the violent, intense, or overmastering passion at the very outset. That is to say, **nip the evil in the bud.** Let us examine some of these passionate feelings in little more details with a specific example. Suppose you get angry or annoyed with someone, your anger forces you to make some hurtful comment, which you later regret, and tell yourself that you should have controlled yourself by restraining from the violent bursts of anger. This is a sound reasoning, and you must remember to use it in a later similar situation. However, when the next provocation comes along, you inadvertently forget your regret, and again respond in a hurtful manner. But this time you regret a little more, and may be even become mad at yourself for not controlling yourself. Soon, when another similar situation arises where you feel annoyed or angry, you check yourself quickly, and let the situation cool itself. By so doing you have made a significant progress by controlling your urge to respond at being annoyed. This is half the battle won. The other half of the battle is won when you won’t even let the feeling of being annoyed bother you, or affect you at all. Congratulations, you have now **won the battle by completely keeping your feelings under your control.** This is the start of a virtuous lifestyle. You must now apply this same technique to curb other evil instincts. In SGGs we are repeatedly instructed on **the need, and great importance, of controlling our evil instincts and passions.** This is illustrated by the hymn below:

ਕਾਮ ਕ੍ਰੋਧ ਅਰੁ ਲੋਭ ਮੋਹ, ਬਿਨਸਿ ਜਾਇ ਅਹੰਮੇਵ

ਨਾਨਕ ਪ੍ਰਭ ਸਰਣਾਗਤੀ, ਕਰਿ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ ਗੁਰਦੇਵ

[ਗਉੜੀ ਸੁਖਮਨੀ ਮਹਲਾ ੫, ਪਨਾ ੨੬੬]

“Oh, Nanak, seek refuge in God and pray for God’s grace, (so that) lust, anger, greed, worldly attachments, and arrogance can get eliminated”.

A profoundly **beneficial effect** resulting from complete control of evil passions from your mind, and therefore from your life, would be the easier **acquisition of the virtuous qualities of truth, contentment, compassion, kindness, helpfulness, selfless service and a righteous lifestyle**. Such a mode of living is truly a great character builder, and enables you to lead a life of truth, integrity, and justice. You will now be following the message contained in the following hymns both in spirit, and in action.

ਸਚਹੁ ਓਰੈ ਸਭੁ ਕੋ, ਉਪਰਿ ਸਚੁ ਆਚਾਰੁ [ਸਿਰੀ ਰਾਗ ਮਹਲਾ ੧, ਪਨਾ ੬੨]

“Among all (virtues) truth is higher, (but) higher still is doing truthful deeds”.

ਸਤ ਸੰਤੋਖ ਦਇਆ ਧਰਮ ਸੀਗਾਰ ਬਨਾਵਉ [ਬਿਲਾਵਲ ਮਹਲਾ ੫, ਪਨਾ ੮੧੨]

“Beautify (decorate yourself) with truth, contentment, compassion and righteousness”.

ਕਰਿ ਮਨ ਮੇਰੇ ਸਤਿ ਬਿਉਹਾਰ [ਗਉੜੀ ਸੁਖਮਨੀ ਮਹਲਾ ੫, ਪਨਾ ੨੮੧]

“O, my mind, carry out truthful dealings (activities, deeds, actions, affairs)”.

ਬੋਲਹੁ ਸਾਚੁ, ਪਛਾਣਹ ਅੰਦਿਰ [ਮਾਰੂ ਮਹਲਾ ੧, ਪਨਾ ੧੦੨੬]

“Speak the truth, realize (God) within”.

Reflections on these hymns clearly demonstrate that the integrity of character, and the faithful practice of life of truth and truthful living is the key to spiritual enlightenment, and to acquiring perfect state of mind in your present life. It is **this state of mind that, then, becomes your spiritual investment account for liberation, and for union with God in this life**.

The question arises **what happens if you do not achieve this perfect state of mind?** Does that mean that you are doomed forever? The answer is emphatically no, for you will get another chance, and you will be reincarnated. In what form you will come back to a new life will depend upon the account of good versus bad deeds of your present life. We see this reflected in the hymns below:

ਜੇਹੇ ਕਰਮ ਕਮਾਇ, ਤੇਹਾ ਹੋਇਸੀ [ਸੂਹੀ ਮਹਲਾ ੪, ਪਨਾ ੨੩੦]

“The kind of deeds (actions) one does, so one becomes”.

ਜੇ ਮੈ ਕੀਆ ਸੇ ਮੈ ਪਾਇਆ, ਦੇਸੁ ਨ ਦੀਜੈ ਅਵਰ ਜਨਾ [ਰਾਗ ਆਸਾ ਮਹਲਾ ੧, ਪਨਾ ੪੩੩]

“Whatever I did, I have obtained the result of that, there is no one else to blame”.

It is important to realize that **human birth is an incredibly rare gift of life** since it represents the highest form of life, and comes only after many previous births of different forms of life. This precept is expressed in three hymns below:

ਕੋਟਿ ਜਨਮ ਭਰਮਿ ਆਇਆ ਪਿਆਰੇ, ਅਨਿਕ ਜੋਨਿ ਦੁਖ ਪਾਇ [ਸੋਰਠ ਮਹਲਾ ੫, ਪਨਾ ੬੪੦]

“After going through myriads of birth and suffering, the human being comes into the world”.

ਭਰਮਹਿ ਜੋਨਿ ਅਸੰਖ, ਮਰਿ ਜਨਮਹਿ ਆਵਹੀ

ਪਸੁ ਪੰਖੀ ਸੈਲ ਤਰਵਰ, ਗਣਤ ਕਛੁ ਨ ਆਵਏ

[ਜੈਤਸਰੀ ਛੰਤ ਮਹਲਾ ੫, ਪਨਾ ੭੦੫]

“(One) goes through innumerable existences, dies and is born again; (one) passes through lives of animals, birds, stones (inner creatures), and trees, whose number cannot be known”.

ਫਿਰਤ ਫਿਰਤ ਬਹੁਤੇ ਜੁਗ ਹਾਰਿਓ, ਮਾਨਸ ਦੇਹ ਲਹੀ

[ਸੋਰਠ ਮਹਲਾ ੯, ਪਨਾ ੬੩੧]

“Grown weary of going through many ages (in different incarnations), human body is obtained”.

Following the methodology of controlling the activities (thinking, actions, deeds) of your mind it would thus be possible to acquire a holier and spiritually uplifting lifestyle. This way you will also be able to create circumstances, which will provide you with more opportunities to do good work (deeds and actions) in your present life in a selfless manner. Therefore, **starting from now onwards if you devote yourself earnestly to doing all the good work within your reach, then you are destined to eventually reach your goal of God realization in your present life.** It should, however, be remembered that **in your present life you may not be able to completely nullify the effect of a very bad past action in its entirety, but you may be able to modify its effect, or even almost completely offset its major effect, by sincerely regretting about it, and by carrying out newer, more worthier deeds.** This way, what you are really doing is essentially **intercepting the effect of a very bad deed with a newer good deed of equal or better power. By fully trusting in a supreme power, God, you can successfully erase almost all the effect of your past bad deed(s).** But, first, you must **not waiver in your firm faith in your Guru-God,** and second, you must **completely believe that your Guru (God) is your cure-all doctor, guide, protector, savior, and constant companion.** This way you are putting all your hopes, all your aspirations, all your needs, and all your wants in the hands of a supreme, all-encompassing, divine power. You are thus making a very heartfelt and earnest appeal to God, with deep humility and with profound reverence, for seeking divine medication for all your ills. This earnest and humble appeal is directed straight to your Guru-God, as a cure-all superb Master, in accordance with the hymn.

ਮੇਰਾ ਬੈਦ ਗੁਰੂ ਗੋਵਿੰਦਾ

ਹਰਿ ਹਰਿ ਨਾਮ ਅਉਖਧੁ ਮੁਖਿ ਦੇਵੈ, ਕਾਟੈ ਜਮ ਕੀ ਫੰਧਾ

[ਸੋਰਿਠ ਮਹਲਾ ੫, ਪਨਾ ੬੧੮]

“Guru-God is my physician, (who) puts the medicine of God’s, Lord’s Naam in my mouth, which breaks apart death’s knot”.

Thus, the magical divine power, associated in **remembering/reciting God’s name, imparts in your heart and mind the virtues, which enables you to do righteous deeds, which then nullifies the effect of your past deeds.** Another portion of the above hymn describes the eradication of afflictions (sufferings) associated with your past lives.

ਜਨਮ ਜਨਮ ਕੇ ਦੁਖ ਨਿਵਾਰੇ, ਸੁਕਾ ਮਨ ਸਾਧਾਰੈ

[ਸੋਰਿਠ ਮਹਲਾ ੫, ਪਨਾ ੬੧੮]

“Pains and sufferings of many past lives are eliminated, and the dried up (evil) mind is rejuvenated (purified)”.

It is now clear, how **remembrance, recitation, reflection, contemplation, and meditation on God coupled with an intensely, heartfelt prayer, will enable you to bring about a very positive and healthier change in the working of your mind.** This in turn will trigger a much more righteous and truthful lifestyle in you, so that your mind will sustain a positive attitude and a divinely sanctioned behavior. This, then, will lead you to God realization, and union with God and in God, in your present life. On the other hand if your inner self, your mind, is filthy, but you have only outward superficial clean appearance, then you are bound to lose the life’s game both in this world and hereafter. This is well illustrated by the hymn:

ਬਾਹਰੁ ਧੋਇ ਅੰਤਰੁ ਮਨੁ ਸੈਲਾ, ਦੁਇ ਠਉਰੁ ਅਪੁਨੇ ਖੋਏ [ਆਸਾ ਮਹਲਾ ੫, ਪਨਾ ੩੮੧]
ਬਹਿਰੁ ਦਹੋਓ ਓਨਟੁਰੁ ਮੁਨੁ ਮਓਲਿਓਓ, ਦੋਓ ਟਹਉਰੁ ਓਪਨਓ ਕਹੋਓ ਓਸਓ ਮਓਹਓਲਓ ੫, ੫
੩੮੧

“With outward wash, but filthy inner mind, one loses in both places (here and hereafter)”.

Clearly then, it is only the cumulative **effect of listening and practicing on the divine message that will provide you the divine nectar necessary for inner purification.** It is only then that a beneficial change in your lifestyle will occur and you will acquire eternal peace and bliss. Remember, mere listening or reciting hymns just with your tongue, as a routine, will not produce any significant beneficial effect, because the essence of the message has really not penetrated deep into your heart to motivate you to practice on it fully. It is necessary that **the hymns, holy discourses, and the divine instructions become part of your daily living, so that the resulting divine ambrosial nectar will flow into different parts of your body to bring you serene and eternal peace.** It is only through such **pristine state of mind that you can successfully eliminate ego-willed, egocentric, self-willed, and arrogant attitude and behavior from within yourself.** When you reach that elevated state of perfection, through judicious control of your mind and through total surrender of yourself, that you reach a state of everlasting divine bliss. This is beautifully described in the hymn:

ਸਤਿ ਸੁਹਾਣਿ ਸਦਾ ਮਨਿ ਚਾਉ [ਜਪਜੀ, ਪਨਾਂ ੪]

“The mind (of a person), which is truthful and beautiful, is always elated (blissful, state of uplifting spirit)”.

The Five Principles can be summed up as:

1. **Seek** earnestly divine assistance and divine direction at every step of your life, **so you will be strong enough to be true to yourself in order to practice Guru’s teachings faithfully;**
2. **Seek** divine inner and outer strength, **so you will be brave enough to be strong enough to be true to yourself and commit to follow Guru’s message completely;**
3. **Seek** divine wisdom, **so you will be wise enough to be brave enough to be true to yourself, and thus be able to shape your own destiny (future)**

through truthful living under divine guidance. It is only then that the **divine grace will spontaneously flow into every part of your body to elevate you to Eternal Bliss and Eternal Peace;**

4. **Sustain an unwavering faith in God.** Faith is more than just intellectual belief. **It is surrendering your self completely to God's way over your own way.** True faith, therefore, involves not just giving lip service but using your heart, your abilities, your talents, and your life in selfless service to God and His people with utmost humility. True faith, then, also requires that your deeds be acts of love, service, compassion, care and concern for all the people of the world, and not just chosen few. Let **truth, and only truth, guide and direct your life;**
5. **Show** your total loyalty to God not just in words but also in deeds. Your acts must not be directed at desperately trying to win favor from God, though they will come. **God has blessed you with priceless gift of human life. Therefore, use your life to serve God out of profound gratitude, and not from compulsion or desperation.** You must earnestly seek, and acquire a deep personal relationship with God (through His creation) so that it can provide you with the means to **talk to Him, not just talk about Him.** Recall, **God touches you through His creation and created things, and you can surely touch Him back with and through your altruistic deeds of service to His created human beings and other created things. This will be union with God in the real sense.**

