

The Gift of Guru Granth

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Our Gurus gifted the Guru Granth to us to inspire us and to inculcate certain philosophic principles in our lives. Let us then ask ourselves these questions. Are Sikh communities in the world truly inspired to comprehend and cherish the principles which our Guru Granth beckons us to live by? Secondly, are we prepared to share the universal message of our Guru with our neighbors?

Scripture as Guide:

Our Gurus invented the term Gurmat for a way of life and belief that is based on the Guru's teachings. In our Punjabi vernacular, we also refer it as Sikhee. The Guru Granth was then compiled to articulate Gurmat. Infinite Wisdom (Vahaguru) revealed the Gurmat concepts to the founders of Sikh religion and they are manifested eternally in Guru Granth Sahib. The Gurmat concepts, particularly those to which the present society could relate, are destined to benefit the emerging global village. Sikhs are there only to demonstrate the realistic benefits of their faith and, thereby, to invigorate an urge among their neighbours to learn Gurmat or Sikh theology.

The Guru Granth Sahib's teachings are ecumenical. Among other things, we believe that the Guru Granth is God's gift to humanity in the global village. That our Guru spoke to individuals and about specific historical events, but the Guru's wisdom is for all times and all dispositions. All doors lead to the Divine and all entrants are exalted irrespective of the door through which they select to enter. Third, all human beings are created equal and deserve the same opportunities of learning and serving in the court of our Guru. Fourth, our Guru will come thousand steps to receive the one who takes the first step towards Him. Any faith or religion will survive in the future only when its teachings are proven beneficial to the present and the future society. This prediction is equally applicable to Sikhee. Thus, it is incumbent upon every Sikh to seek and realize the beneficent vision of spiritual aspirations contained in Sri Guru Granth Sahib. Further, every Sikh must make all efforts to continually realize and define in today's communication media those areas of Sikhee that he or she experiences personally in the new world.

The Sikhee experiences must be subject to verifiable research and demonstration. This should not be a problem in the Sikhee tradition. Granted that most of the Gurmat beliefs fall in the invisible realities, they are mostly life affirming. Thus, there are many beliefs whose benefits were demonstrated clearly and beneficially by the committed Sikhs as they are illustrated in history.

Some examples of those beliefs include (listed alphabetically): Altruistic predisposition, Freedom from animosity, Freedom from fear, Freedom from lust and greed, Charity, Compassion, Creativity, Earning truthful living, Environmental concerns, Forgiveness, Gratitude, Humility, Impact of knowledge and technology on spiritual growth, Identity derived from transcendent truth, Love, Meditation, Prayer, Promotion of Intellect, Scope of divinity in life, Spirit of Invention, Sharing, Thanksgiving, Truthfulness in living, and Worship. Sikhs in history inculcated these spiritual and social teachings of the Guru Granth in their lives.

Identity with Gurbani:

In the words of Sikh theologian, Bhai Gurdas, it is the fundamental identity of a Sikh to imbibe the teachings of the Guru in life. Otherwise our claim to be a Sikh will be hollow:

mY jyhw n dubwjr w qij gurmiq durmiq ihqkwrw] nwau murld n sbid vlcwrw]

[Bhai Gurdas, Vaar 37, Pauri 29]

' There is no one as selfish and double-faced like I am. I discard path of the Gurus, Gurmat, and readily accept paths of my smutty mind. Further, I call myself a Sikh without reflecting on the words of the Guru.

According to Bhai Gurdas, the seeker comprehends the values and lives by the tenets of his faith:

kyvf sq sMqoK hY dXw Drm qy ArQ vlcwrw]

[Bhai Gurdas, Vaar 8, Pauri 3]

The Guru oriented person realizes the meaning of truth, contentment, mercy, and faith through

contemplation on the Guru's teaching. A prominent exponent of Sikhism Kesar Singh Chibbar, who spent considerable time with the Tenth Guru's family, and with prominent Sikhs like Bhai Mani Singh and Taru Singh, wrote that a Sikh who turned away from the Guru Granth Sahib's teachings actually turned away from Sikhee. He wrote:*

sbdo muVy isKlau muVy ByK isKI dw Dwry

Turning away from Guru Granth's teachings is like turning away from Sikhee. This Sikh turns into an imposter by continuing the Sikh look.

Source of Knowledge:

Guru Granth Sahib is our Scripture. Knowledge of the meaning of the verses of Guru Granth Sahib is crucial. First of all, we need to comprehend their literary meaning. Then to follow them by contextual meaning and interpretations, and their implication in life that make sense to each one of us. The true meaning of the Scriptures is difficult to standardize because the actual meanings must touch the hearts and lives of a seeker who may comprehend the concepts specific to personal situations. Thus, over time, one expects the meaning to be a continuum of actual meanings to different cultures.

We have many schools that employ various approaches to the translation of the Guru Granth (Gurbani) verses. Gurbani contains knowledge about relationship between Divine and humans, creator and creation, and, between infinite wisdom and the human mind. They may not be so easily understood or described in human language. As Guru Arjun said,

pRB kl Agm AgwiD kQw] sunIAY Avr Avr ibiD buJIAY bkn kQn rhqw] [SGGS: 498]

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

Guru Nanak said it this way.

rUVo Twkur mwhro rUVI gurbwxi] [SGGS: 421]

Universal is my God and, therefore, his Lingua Franca is universal. His word is written in the Book of T i m e .

While translating the Guru Granth Sahib's verses one must be cognitive of one important reality; Guru Granth Sahib's verses teach mostly in metaphors, allegories, similes, and fables, spoken in natural languages of the time. Thus many terms in its natural language acquire different meanings in different contexts. Metaphorical processes allow natural languages to transcend many of the limitations of a formal language resulting in greater flexibility of expression.

The Sikh Gurus lived and travelled in both Hindu and Islamic worlds, so they used the metaphors of their time and places. This is not unique to Sikhism. Jesus was a Jew and spoke about Moses, Abraham and Isaac. And Buddha was born a Hindu and he referred to Hindu symbols and gods in his teachings as well. But it isn't those parts of what Nanak, Jesus or Buddha said that gave birth to Sikhee, Christianity or Buddhism, respectively. Rather these religious leaders were preaching universal reforms and doctrinal breakthroughs. They preached a new way for their times.

So what if the Gurus spoke of Hindu gods in poetry, or if Buddha was born from the seed of Ganesha or Christ thought himself the Jewish Messiah? They and their students were speaking in the poetic metaphors of their times.

It is for these reasons that translation of Gurbani using mere literary grammar and literary meaning often do not suffice. Liberal use of metaphors, similes, and fables were used purposely in the Guru Granth Sahib's verses to allow the literary meanings and structures to alter with time. These expansions are often beyond the alterations possible within only the literary meaning.

To comprehend the Guru's verses, these must be first analyzed in formal languages, and then must follow its metaphoric meaning or the intrinsic meaning that transcends time and history. This is a very critical consideration while disseminating the Guru Granth Sahib's teachings in the new world.

Conclusion:

Guru Gobind Singh installed the Granth as the Guru in 1708, three centuries ago. Guru Arjun compiled the first edition in 1604. We are preparing to celebrate centennials to commemorate these important dates. The purpose of our conferences and celebrations of the forthcoming centennials is for something more than making claims and pronouncements.

The purpose of our enthusiasm to celebrate is that we might come to understand the concept of the Word as the Universal Guru and its associated implications in our life, and that we might be fuelled in our

actions by our own resources of depth and intelligence to share God's gift with others. We may enthuse ourselves not to serve the pronouncements but to make those pronouncements come alive.

In the next few years, you must all be leaders in the centennial celebrations, and you cannot lead what you are ignorant of. Therefore, those of us who are a little behind in understanding the Guru must endeavor to not only catch up, but also significantly advance the divine mission.

Signs of advancement are when organization of religion is less important than the Truth it propagates, when guards are less important than the treasures they are guarding, and, finally, when prescription paper is less revered than taking of the medicine it prescribes.

