

# The Story of Guru Nanak's *Japuji*

OSHO RAJNEESH\*

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THE JAPUJI'S 38 PAURIS ARE THE very first words uttered by Nanak after self-realisation: Nanak sat on the bank of the river, in total darkness, with his friend and follower, Mardana. Suddenly, he removed his clothes and walked into the river.

Mardana called after him, "Where are you going? The night is so dark and cold!" Nanak went further and further, he plunged into the depths of the river. Mardana waited.... but Nanak did not return.

Mardana ran back to the village and woke up everyone. It was midnight, but a crowd collected at the riverside because everyone loved Nanak... They ran back and forth the whole length of the river bank but to no avail.

Three days passed. By now it was certain that Nanak had drowned. The people imagined that his body must have been carried away by the swift current or perhaps eaten by wild animals. The village was in mourning. On the third night Nanak appeared from the river. The first words he spoke became the *Japuji*.

So goes the story - and a story means that which is true and yet not true. It is true because it gives the essential truth; it is symbolic or untrue in the sense that it is only symbolic. And it is evident that the more profound the subject matter, the greater the need for symbolism.

When Nanak disappeared in the river, the story goes that he stood before the gate of God. He experienced God ... God spoke to him, "Now go back and give unto others what I have given unto you". **The *Japuji* is Nanak's first offering after his God-experience.**

Unless you lose yourself completely, until you die in God, you cannot hope to meet God. Your annihilation becomes his being. As long as you are, he cannot be. This is the symbolic meaning of drowning in the river.

You too will have to lose yourself, you too will have to drown. Death is only completed after three days, because the ego does not give up easily. The three days in Nanak's story represent the time required for his ego to dissolve completely. Since the people could only see the ego and not the soul, they thought Nanak was dead.

The one who is lost invariably returns, but he returns as new. He who treads the path most certainly returns. While he was on the path he was thirsty, but when he returns he is a benefactor; he has left a beggar, he returns a king. Whoever follows the path carries his begging bowl; when he comes back he possess infinite treasures.

To appear before God, to attain the beloved, are purely symbolic terms and not to be taken literally. There is no God sitting somewhere on high before whom you appear. But to speak of it, how else can it be expressed? When the ego is eradicated, when you disappear, whatever is before your eyes, is God Himself. God is not a person - God is an energy beyond form.

To stand before this formless energy means to see Him wherever you look, whatever you see. When the eyes open, everything is He. Ego is like the mote in your eye; the minute it is removed, God stands revealed before you. And no sooner does God manifest, than you also become God, because there is nothing besides Him.

Nanak returned, but the Nanak who returned was also God himself. Then each word uttered became so invaluable as to be beyond price, each word equal to the words of the Vedas.

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## ***Japuji: A Theo-Cosmocentric Prayer***

***DR. S.S. SODHI\****

*\* Dalhousie University, Halifax, NS, Canada.*

IN THIS ARTICLE I WOULD share with readers some concepts that I have internalized after extensive reading and reflection on Japuji Sahib written by Guru Nanak Dev Ji, under inspiration.

Japuji attempts to help the believer to integrate and evolve his/her understanding of the universe and the cosmocentric Reality. It is a unique outpouring of Guru Nanak's discovery of the Creator that he encapsulated in the term '*Ek Onkar*.' Guru Nanak uses many metaphors wherein he attempts to explain the metaphoric universe to a mind still operating at linear (left brain) reality. Guru Nanak urges us to "come to our senses by being rid of our myopic minds." In Japuji, the sage 'passiveness' of Guru Nanak makes him the seer and the seen and helps him develop "awareness without comparison, mental silence and choiceless attention."

Indeed, while uttering the Holy text, Guru Nanak had reached an oceanic stage of at-one-ment, and beatitude. He proclaimed that the true, pervasive power of God gets manifested in the ways of "*Kudrat, Bhânâ, Hukam* and Grace (Guru Prasad)". Guru Nanak provides glimpses about the "actions" of Wondrous Lord", His methods and His "misunderstood", perceived arbitrariness as it affects the non-evolved human mind. "The goal of every mortal is to attempt to reach Sach-Khand through enormous exercise of (*saha*), meditative prayers and self-realization."

Guru Nanak's concept of the universe and the planet earth is of an evolving place given to living beings as Sat Guru's gift, which should not be exploited for narcissistic gains. He radicalizes our psyche by urging us to participate in social and moral concerns facing humanity. He helps us to get rid of our "motivational paralysis". Passive renunciation should be replaced by righteous action, the great Guru urges.

**God is the primordial Truth which is unknowable and beyond the comprehension of linear minds. By hearkening to the Guru's inspired words one can intentionally dissolve one's ego, pride and achieve indescribable bliss (*ananda*).**

In Japuji, Guru Nanak urges us to respond to Nature's impact on our lives by praying and saying: 'whatever be thy wish I accept'. Meditative prayer thereby purifies the ego and the soul. Righteous actions manifested by evolved individuals benefits the whole humanity.

“By subordinating the fancy and chastising and subduing our minds, we can win the world. While doing so our mind should still be filled with God’s gratitude”, says Guru Nanak.

Even as the “creator, preserver and destroyer” of ancient Indian philosophy, He is omnipotently unique. True knowledge takes human beings to the realm of bliss (*Gyankhand*) through reason, beauty, effort and action. In the “Mind of Truth” metaphor, Guru Nanak feels the name of the Lord, True knowledge and reason collated in a meditative prayer (Name) takes the person to Sachkhand. In the analogy “man as a babe”, Guru Nanak tells us that our actions either brings us near to God or get us cast away from Him.

Guru Nanak’s God is “impersonal” as it is difficult to describe Him. But Truth is HIS description, because truth is limitless and so are His powers with which He has a hold on us. God of Guru Nanak is a being, merciful, filled with grace, shows concerns about humanity and can’t be bribed. His grace alone helps man/woman attain salvation, but the person must really desire His grace. He must experience a “spiritual need deficit” and ask for help to fill this deficit.

Guru Nanak asks us to look beyond our “shallow self” which is isolated in the prison house of the exaggerated ego. To know God one does not have to parade his ego. According to Guru Nanak, God is not grabbed, he is received through intimacy which comes through total self-giving praise, recognition that one’s life is dependent upon Sat Guru.

In Japuji, we are told Truth and God are “two in one” (*Ek Onkar*). “In the realm of action - effort is supreme”.

Japuji takes us to the path of three Ds: Devotion, Dedication and Deliverance. Devotion makes us realize the presence of a higher reality. Dedication involves the commitment. Deliverance means a solution to the enigma of human life and its meaning. Deliverance comes through devotion, dedication but God’s grace is an imperative.

In Japuji, Guru Nanak explains his “one word theory” (Big Bang?) of the creation of the Universe. The *Ek-Onkar* according to him has sounds of cosmic harmony and tonality of celestial music. After saying the “word”. God placed its creation in an “order of hierarchy” - (in time) (*jug*) and space (*khand*). When one identifies with Nirbhau and Nirvair, Peace of Mind (*Santokh*) is the end result. For Guru Nanak freedom consists of “awakening our intelligence” so that we can get rid of our “separation anxiety and ego claims” and become cosmocentric. Three aspects of psyche (cognitive, conative and affective) have to be transcended for this awakening.

In the Perennial Philosophy of Japuji, the harmonious growth of human personality takes place not through agitated energy but through calm, unhurried creative effort (*Sahaj*). By using “trying not try (*Sahaj*)” method of reaching Him one finds Him through True Master. Guru Nanak’s concept of Guru is air (vital for life - *Prana*) benefactor, epitome of peace, lamp to enlighten the Earth, ladder, yacht, raft, ship, mighty river of nectar, dispeller of darkness, God-conscious guide, enlightened preceptor, link between Man and God, Guru’s word is the supernatural symphony - the mystic sound (NÂD).

Let me close this analysis with a statement of the famous thinker, Sirdar Kapur Singh:

“The Japuji has thirty-eight Pauris, i.e. the stairs containing a systematise and complete statement of the basic philosophy of Guru Nanak. All the hymns of the Japuji are metrical - in the pattern of Rig Veda, with a severity of expression and economy of words, making the stanzas related brothers of the ancient Sanskrit Sutras.”

