

# 'Mehtar' - The Concept of Grace

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THE CONCEPT OF GRACE is one of the basic postulates of Sikh philosophy. Grace denotes Divine favour shown by God spontaneously. It is a unique gift. It is neither earned by self merit nor by force obtained. The merciful God casts his glance. The word *bhave* (BwvY) stands for God's Will. In this regard the longing and yearning on the devotee's part, is strongly emphasized.

There are other synonymous words: *prasad, nazar, mehar, bakhshish, kirpa, daya* used in *Gurbani*.

*Nadar Karam, bakhshish* (all of Persian origin) mean bestowing largesse or gratuity. It also stands for forgiveness of one's transgression, or sin. Guru's Grace washes the filth of sin. *Gurbani* justifies it as under:

God washes off man's filth. - or:

One who has Divine grace does not face the heat of sin again. (SGGS: 197)

In Sikh theology Grace of God means a favourable disposition on the part of the divinity without reference to merit. Grace is unbounded generosity of God. It is a quality of God.

The idea of Grace is integral to the total thought and doctrine in Sikhism. It is integral to man's relationship with the Creator. God is the source of grace He bestows through the Guru. Grace is concerned with deeds, transmigration, salvation, jiva, Hukam-Grace covers the all aspects of human life:

Through His grace we serve the Guru.

Through His grace we serve the humanity.

Through His grace the mind can be controlled.

Through His grace the mind becomes pure. (SGGS: 558)

**God and Grace:** The aim of human life is to get reunion with God. This is possible by the grace of God. Human endeavour on the path of God realization is futile. On one whom He showers His grace, finds his real abode (SGGS: 930)

My God is one, there is none other

He is realized by His grace (SGGS: 357)

Grace is prerogative of God. None is redeemed without His grace. On whom He looks on His grace falls

through His grace this attachment ceases.

And one merges in the Lord. (SGGS: 356)

One God dwells with in all

But He is revealed to him who receives grace. (SGGS: 931)

The Lord resides in every Jiva and does not take

Advice of any person for bestowing His grace.

Merciful God enables egoistic (mnmuk) to overcome his state of sinfulness and inadequacy through Guru's grace. All the sins of those who love the God are forgiven through grace.

In all four directions God manifests his might.  
And over our head places His hand.  
With His glance of grace all sorrows  
Of his devotee annulled.

**Guru and Grace:** Guru is equally gracious like God. God bestows his grace through Guru. By Guru's grace praise the name, thus the fire of ego is quenched. (p. 60). Grace of Guru leads to fellowship with the congregation (sangat).

Devotion is a basic requisite for grace. The law of Karma operates, and Divine will is supreme, yet through loving devotion this law may be transcended.

Grace overflows like rain from heaven.  
Divine grace operates, in main, to guide the devotee towards God.  
By grace is obtained devotion to Name:  
By grace then is obtained liberation. (SGGS: 358)

The grace of Guru is assured on whom the holy Guru affirms his grace; none can efface it. (SGGS: 749)

God bestows his grace not only on the pious and religious one, or the wise and the pure. He bestows his grace, love on all, without any discrimination, on some it is small, on others great.

*Jiva* in the present form under the effect of duality is defiled, without merit, ignorant, only God is source of all faculties full of merits, bestower of grace.

**Jiva and Grace:** Jiva takes its birth in the world on account of his past deeds, but the final salvation is possible only through the grace of God. With the grace of God one attains the highest state of bliss and reveals the indescribable story. Jiva is the creation of Creator, it has no power of its own. Guru says:

The body takes its birth because of karma.  
But the salvation is attained through the grace of God (Japji Sloka)

The humble submission made by the jiva in distress and full of demerits, says:

Lord bestower of bounty on the humble  
Do not count my merits and demerits; (SGGS: 882)

**Grace and Karma:** Grace is not antagonistic to Karma. Gurbani lays great emphasis on good deeds. Gurbani believes in the ethics of love, in the ethics of forgiveness and compassion. God's goodness overflowing in blessings and gift of grace. Grace is opposite of law just as mercy is opposite to justice. Grace is free and loving choice of God. It does not depend upon birth, riches, wisdom, penance. The devotee should be submissive, egoless being the recipient of His grace.

The cup of love belongs to the God  
And whosoever God wants  
He gives this cup to him.

Gurbani accords an important place to karma.

The doctrine of karma is modified by the principle of grace, good deeds are necessary for improving our condition and favourable acceptance by God.

Jiva cannot achieve the highest state of bliss unless he comes under the fold of God's grace. Without the grace of God he is helpless. Gurbani does not postulate a belief in the indestructibility of karma; by ceaseless remembrance and contemplation of Name we can counteract the effect of past karmas. Even destiny can be changed by prayer and by invoking grace:

Destiny cannot be effaced, O friend.  
What has been ordained by God  
But the Almighty, who is the Cause of everything  
May bless mercy.

Grace is a divine mystery, the Lord's blessings cannot be forced out of his hand, some even while awake attain them not' on others He confers this shaking them awake. (Farid)

No amount of virtues, austerities, no amount of wisdom, intellect, performance of ritual, or any ceremony, can force it out of God's hand. The path to attain it is not easy; without prayer, humility, wakefulness in the way of God, grace may not come. It is hard, long and yet the result is God's hand, grace does not come by calculations of good deeds.

How does it come, hints are given in Gurbani, by divine mercy to engage in devotion. On whom-so-ever God showers mercy, in his self he lodges the holy name. (SGGS 541).

To seek God's shelter in humility inspires the man to prayer that opens the gate of grace. He grants realization to one who throws himself on the Lord's mercy (571). Where the Lord is meditated in devotion there He comes as friend. (p. 527). The devotee's endeavour never goes waste.

ਜਾ ਕੈ ਸਿਮਰਣਿ ਸਭੁ ਕਛੁ ਪਾਈਐ ਬਿਰਥੀ ਘਾਲ ਨ ਜਾਈ [SGGS: 617]

ਪਤਿਤ ਪਾਵਨੁ ਹਰਿ ਬਿਰਦੁ ਸਦਾਏ ਇਕੁ ਤਿਲੁ ਨਹੀ ਭੰਨੈ ਘਾਲੇ ॥ [SGGS: 784]

**The Necessity of Grace:** God being the Creator and omnipotent, beyond error; man being His creation, is full of errors. He is *patit*, God is '*patit pawan*'. This gulf can only be bridged by His Grace.

Man is sinful by his egostic deeds done under the effect of *maya*. Since jiva is weak and helpless, he must pray before the Almighty. The repentance of jiva shows the acceptance of his sinful nature. Jiva says:

As the sea is brimful with water  
So are my sins without count.  
Take pity, O Lord, and in thy grace  
Let his stone also swim across (SGGS: 156)

Devotion to God is the root source of grace. The deep mystery of devotion, expressed by Bhai Gurdas, the great savant, and the first commentator of Gurbani, in one of his *Kabits* is given here, as translated by Gurbachan Singh Talib:

'Whoever takes one step to seek grace of the Guru's holy feet,  
the Guru comes forth a million steps to escort him.

We can sum up that Grace has many shades, like the word Gur-Prasad used frequently. At certain places Gur-Prasad denotes fear of God. This fear is an outcome of grace. (*dyalu*) is derived from Sanskrit and highlights *Prasad*. When Guru becomes merciful desires are fulfilled. The bhau (Bau) as a mark of grace is different from fear (fr).

Devotion to God is a gift of Grace. The gift of salvation is obtained by the devotional service to God. The Gur-kripa is identical. Through Guru's Grace, sorrowful feeling does not come. Through Guru's grace, enjoyment and bliss come. Through Guru's grace all desires are fulfilled. Through Guru's grace, Nine Treasures are obtained. Through Guru's grace is the eternal Truth realised.

