

Foundation of a Universal Way

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Guru Nanak's plain message: "*Kirat karna, naam japna te wand chhakna*" forms the basis of the Sikh way of life. Guru Nanak had a *rationalist* and scientific approach to life. His teachings appeal to a scientific mind and hold sense for modern times. The order in which it has been said is of utmost importance. He could have told, "*Naam japna, kirat karna te wand chhakna*" or he could have said "*wand chhakna, naam japna te kirat karna*." But he did not say so. Translating literally, it would mean: "Doing work, meditating and consuming by sharing."

The order in which he said so indicates the three stage of life which starts from *Kirat Karna* and emerging through *Naam Japna*, revolves to *Wand Chhakna*. It is a cycle which has to be repeated practically day in and day out, not only applicable to a Sikh but for all human beings on earth!

God has given us hands to work with and a mind to think, plan and execute. We have to utilise both the faculties, physical as well as mental, i.e. both the hands as well as the mind have to be utilised in order to earn a living and to sustain, both ourselves as well as our dependents. We are not to depend like parasites upon anyone for anything, whether it for food, necessities, luxuries, etc. And this holds true for both the sexes - men as well as women. It is not that Guru Nanak's saying was meant for the males or his male followers but his saying was for the fair sex too!

So, the first stage or the first step in living is that one has to work in order to live. In other words, Guru Nanak denounced the age old tradition of the *Ashramas* of the Hindus, that of *Vanaprastha* and *Sannyasin*, in which one renounces family life and goes into seclusion in order to attain salvation. A Sikh has to live the life of a house-holder till his or her death. For a follower of Guru Nanak there is one and only *Grihastha* mode of life which he or she has to lead.

When we start earning and are able to sustain ourselves and our family, then only we can think of meditation or *Naam* or about God or Ram or Allah or Jesus or Buddha or Waheguru! With an empty stomach one will not be able to meditate on God's name or do "*naam japna*"! With an empty stomach our mind would only be obsessed with food and it would be impossible to think of anything else. Even when one does fasting, say for seven days, in the back of the mind the thought which shall predominate would be "on the eighth day morning I shall eat like a hog." Do not believe me. Try it and see for yourself. Life is an adventure - experience it. The act of fasting is an act of repression. And in such a situation as in fasting, when one represses oneself, then in that repression, concentrating on *Naam* or on God's name, or upon anything else, would be next to impossible.

With our hunger needs taken care of, and our necessities of life also taken care of, both due to *Kirat Karna*, then only does one enter into a capacity to do "*Naam Japna*." And Guru Nanak has rightly said, *Kirat karna, naam japna...* "*Japna* means to meditate or something in order that one does not forget it. We have jap - *Naam*. A question arising in everyone's mind would be - what

exactly is *Naam*? Is *Naam*, Waheguru for Sikhs? Is *Naam* Allah for Muslims? Is *Naam* Ram for Hindus? Is *Naam* Jesus for Christians? Is *Naam*, Buddha for Buddhists? Or is *Naam*, Mahavira for Jains?

If *Naam* was that easy, then one has to repeat endlessly during the day when awake, "Waheguru, Waheguru, Waheguru.... or one may repeat, "Ram, Ram, or one may utter, "Allah, Allah."

But by repeating in such a manner one cannot attain God. *Gurbani* says "*Ram Ram sabh ko kahié Ram na hoey*"[SGGS: Page 491, Guru Amardas.]

"*Ram Ram karta sabh Jag phiraai, Ram na paaia jaey*".... [SGGS Page 555, Sloak of Guru Amardas.]

Was this the *Naam japna* that Guru Nanak gave to his Sikhs or to the whole of humanity? If *Naam japna* would have meant only the repetition of "Waheguru, Ram, Allah or Jesus," then was Guru Nanak would not have composed so many hymns in so many *raags*? Gurus were all scientists of the highest order! They were great thinkers that humanity has ever come across. Guru Nanak said, "*Naam japna!*"

Naam is, "the sum total of all the positive qualities or virtues which creates a perfect human being or an ideal person."

Whatever message we get from the hymns of Guru Granth Sahib are to be remembered in our day to day living! This is the *Simran* that we Sikhs have to do. This is the *Naam japna* that we Sikhs have to do.

If one hears someone doing "*ninda* - speaking in malice - of somebody, then immediately a hymn from Guru Granth Sahib would come to our minds -

Karaai nind sabh birtha jaavaai

Sadh ka nindak kaaisey taraai

Sarap jaanoh narak hee paraai

[SGGS, Page 875, Bhagat Ravidas]

Or, if someone is rude towards us, instead of reacting negatively, immediately a hymn from Guru Granth Sahib would come to our minds -

Nanak phikaai boleeaai

tan mun phika hoey.

phiko phika sadeeaai

phikey phikee soey.

phika dargeh sateeaai

muh thuka phikey paaey.

Asa di Vaar, Guru Nanak

And in that remembrance, one would immediately be reminded that one is not to speak rudely with anyone, nor is one to speak ill of anybody. Whenever any negative emotion starts to crop up in one's mind or action, or speech or behavior, that negative emotion would automatically subside and disappear if the hymns from Guru Granth Sahib have been heard, read and understood earlier, provided one is able to recollect them at that moment of time. By daily reading and contemplating upon the hymns so read, they become so much embedded in our psyche, that it is but natural for recollection to take place. Since it is important to understand what we read, so much of importance is given to "*shabad vichar*" by almost all who explicate the Holy Granth.

And in that recollection, one would be immediately transformed into a witness, and the doer would stand or vanish or cease to be. In the witnessing, the negativity which starts to erupt would automatically subside and die of its own without any efforts on our part. A negative emotion cannot remain for long if we don't support it. When we grasp or hold onto the negative emotion, it is then that the trouble starts.

We are only to become witnesses and not doers and then see what happens. The negativity would convert into positivity - the hatred would turn into love; the enmity would turn into friendliness; the jealousy would turn into contentment; the anger would turn into compassion; the lust would turn into transcendence of sex; the greed would turn into sharing; the pride turn into humility. This is the Law of Nature - energy always changes its' form! What is negative energy now would change into positive energy provided some time is given in the shape of inaction. And see the results. The creativity that Guru Nanak showed in his hymns is a glaring example of the accumulation of an abundance of positive energy inside him. Just as water harnessed in dams create or produce electricity, positive energies, if harnessed, result in the birth of genius, or "*virala*" as Gurbani says.

Once this practice of witnessing becomes a part of our life, then there would no vices left in us and virtues would become a part of our very nature - not out of compulsion but out of it's own - "*Sehaj Subhai*"- as is mentioned in Gurbani. Once the stages of *Kirat karna* and *Naam japna* becomes a part of our lives, then it is but natural that one would enter the third stage - that of sharing, i.e. *Wand chhakna*.

When one is full of virtues like love, compassion, humility, forgiveness, etc. it is but natural that one would like to share what one has - whether it be money, wealth, possessions, ideas, concepts, knowledge, etc. In other words, sharing would become our nature. Gurbani says, "*Tot na aavai, wadhdo jaaye.*"

A flower which is full of fragrance would give its fragrance to all. It cannot be choosy. The sun which shines and gives its warmth, its radiance to all. It cannot be choosy. In the same way, when one is full of love, one would shower love on all. Whether the person deserves it or not is irrelevant.

To set the example of *Wand chhakna*, Guru Nanak started the concept of *langar* - of pooling in the resources, or the money earned through work, into the community kitchen for the benefit of all. What better way could have been of developing a feeling of brotherhood than by starting the *langar*? Share your earnings and eat together - whether the person is rich or poor, of low or high caste becomes irrelevant. The concept of *langar* had another great impact - it removed the feeling of superiority or that of "*chhot* or *achhoot*."

Please note that this stage of *Wand Chhakna* is a natural outcome after the stages of *Kirat karna* and *Naam japna*. If one does not do *kirat*, then how can one *Naam japo* and if one does not do *Naam japna* then how can one do *wand chhakna*? If *Naam japna* is not done and one takes a short-cut to *wand chhakna*, then there is a cent percent possibility of one's ego becoming so much inflated that one shall develop the feeling that "I" am doing it. The "I" has not to prevail. One should not come up with the idea that one is donating. "I" should be nowhere. Gurbani says,

Haumaai Naavai naal virodh hai, dooi na vaseh ik thai

[SGGS, Page 560, Guru Amardas]

Whenever one does *Wand chhakna*, there is 99.9% probability that one's *Haumai* would be boosted and increased ten-fold. But, where *Wand chhakna* is the outcome of *Naam japna*, then this boosting of the ego would not take place and neither shall our ego be pampered and allowed to inflate.

Hence the order in which Guru Nanak has said, "*kirat karna, naam japna te wand chhakna*" is not without significance. This foundation is not only meant for Sikhs but it is for all of humanity. Never once did Guru Nanak say that he belonged to Muslims or to the Hindus or to the Sikhs. His teachings were and are still now universal.

It is very unfortunate that Sikhs have become so possessive of Guru Nanak or, for that matter, all the Gurus that Sikh scholars have coined the phrases - Sikh Way of Life or The Foundations of Sikhism. Whereas, "*kirat karna, naam japna te wand chhakna*" was -and is - and shall ever remain in the times to come - The Foundation of the Universal way of live of all human beings on earth.

