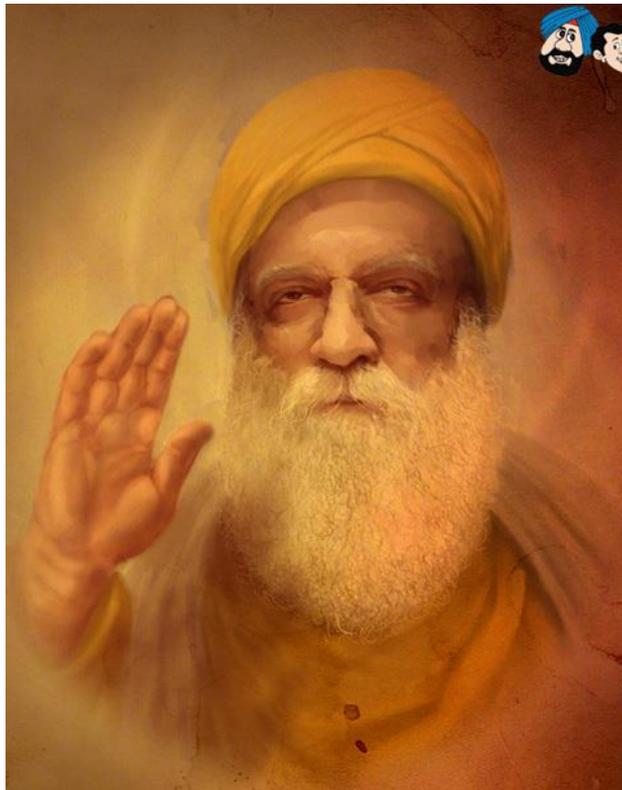


# Guru Nanak and His Teachings: A Biographical Study

by  
Sant Kirpal Singh Ji Maharaj



Those who have communed with the Word,  
Their toils shall end.  
And their faces shall flame with glory,  
Not only shall they have salvation, oh Nanak,  
But many more shall find freedom with them.  
(Jap Ji, Finale)



# Contents

Introduction = 1 - 4

A Great Preacher of Peace and Harmony = 4 - 7

Guru Nanak – God-Intoxicated = 7 - 9

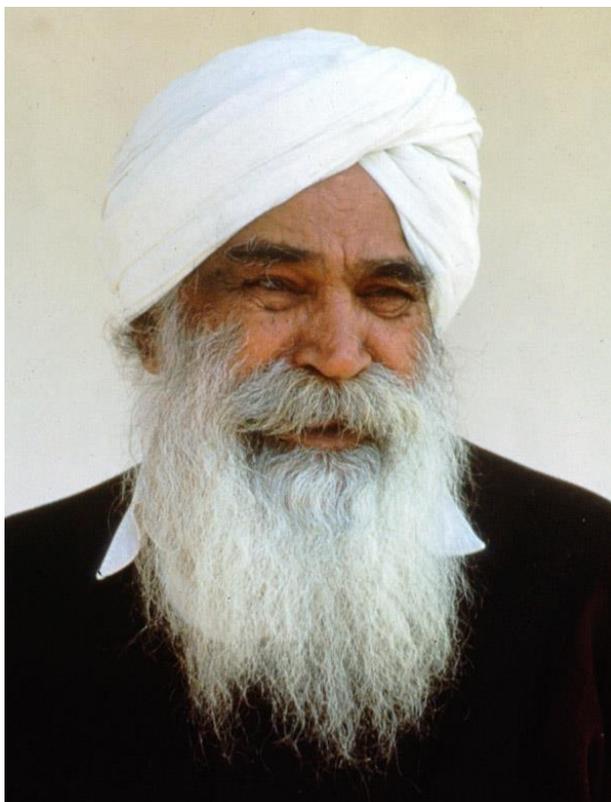
An ideal Farmer = 9 - 10

The Way of Life = 10 - 11

Last Days = 11 - 12

The article, “Guru Nanak: His Life and Teachings” was written by Sant Kirpal Singh at the request of the Indian Government on the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Guru Nanak’s birth, and originally appeared in newspapers and magazines all over India. The article also appears as part 2 in *The Jap Ji: The Message of Guru Nanak* by Sant Kirpal Singh.

“According to Sikh traditions, the birth and early years of Guru Nanak's life were marked with many events that demonstrated that Nanak had been marked by divine grace. Commentaries on his life give details of his blossoming awareness from a young age. At the age of five, Nanak is said to have voiced interest in divine subjects. At age seven, his father enrolled him at the village school as was the custom. Notable lore recounts that as a child Nanak astonished his teacher by describing the implicit symbolism of the first letter of the alphabet, resembling the mathematical version of one, as denoting the unity or oneness of God. Other childhood accounts refer to strange and miraculous events about Nanak, such as one witnessed by Rai Bular, in which the sleeping child's head was shaded from the harsh sunlight, in one account, by the stationary shadow of a tree or, in another, by a venomous cobra.” ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guru\\_Nanak](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guru_Nanak))



Sant Kirpal Singh Ji Maharaj  
“The Beloved Master”  
1894-1974

## Introduction

Guru Nanak (1469-1539) is not the sole monopoly of the Sikhs nor of India alone. He belongs to all mankind. He belongs to the world and the world belongs to him. He bore witness to the glory of one God, one brotherhood, one law, the law of human fellowship and love. He came to reconcile all religions and all faiths. He came to harmonize all the scriptures of the world. He came to announce the ancient truth in the common man's language, the one wisdom that is so eloquent in the teachings of all the prophets, the apostles, the sages and the seers; and to show that one flame of love shone in all the temples and shrines and sacraments of man.

The love of God and the love of man were the very core of the message of Guru Nanak. We need to learn to serve the poor gently, quietly, unostentatiously, and to have reverence for all the Saints of the past. This is the first great teaching of the Guru. When he went to Multan, the land of pirs and fakirs, the latter sent him a bowl brimming over with milk, implying that the place was already full of saintly souls and there was hardly any room for more. Nanak, who knew the implication in the offer made, just took a jasmine flower and placing it on the surface of the milk returned the bowl, meaning thereby that he would float as lightly as the flower and give fragrance to all of them. The true Saints, as a rule, have no quarrel with anybody. They talk gently and work quietly in the service of God and man.

He traveled far and wide unlike any other prophet who trod the earth before him. He undertook four long and arduous journeys on foot, each extending over a number of years: one, to the north into and across the snow-capped Himalayas where he met the Lamas, the Sidhas and the Nahts, the Tibetans and the Chinese; the second, eastward into the modern states of United Provinces, Bengal and Burma; the third, to the south as far as Sangla Dwip or the modern Ceylon; and the fourth, to the middle-east countries of Baluchistan, Afghanistan, Persia, Arabia as far as Mecca, and Jerusalem, Turkistan, Egypt, Turkey; all these journeys covering well nigh 30 years in times when there were no satisfactory communications and transport worth the name.

Guru Nanak's teachings revolutionized people in diverse ways. His teachings are of great interest today as they were in his own time. The nascent Republic of India needs his inspiration in the task of rebuilding the nation on a sound footing, for India is still bristling with many problems and its freedom is yet far from complete.

Guru Nanak came at a crucial time in the history of India. The country, torn as it was by factional fights, was fast slipping into the hands of the Mughals. We get a glimpse of the chaotic conditions prevailing at the time from the words of no less an authority than the Guru himself:

*"Kings are butchers. They treat their subjects with gruesome cruelty. The sense of duty has taken wings and vanished. Falsehood is rampant over the land as a thick veil of darkness, darkness darker than the darkest night, hiding the face of the moon of Truth."*

The Hindus and the Muslims were bitterly opposed to one another. The very semblance of religion had degenerated into formalism, and the spirit in man was stifled and suffocated by rites and rituals and by creeds and ceremonies. Too much importance was attached to the outer husk and shell at the cost of the kernel within. Casteism and untouchability were waxing like anything. The people were losing faith in themselves. The political and the social conditions in the country had reached the lowest ebb. The chaotic conditions could not be more chaotic. In the blessed name of religion, all kinds of atrocities were being perpetrated by those in power,

swayed as they were by incontinence, greed, lust and immorality. Mistrust and hatred were the order of the day. Both the rulers and the ruled had lost all sense of shame and decorum.

In such a dark hour of history, Nanak appeared to set the house in order and to shape the destiny of millions of Indians. He went about preaching in the Name of God, asking nothing for himself, but anxious only to serve the people and save them from degradation and downright damnation.

Nanak saw the deep tragedy that was menacing the country. He saw the world caught in the pernicious web of suffering and woe. Moved by the piteous cries of the helpless and the afflicted people in their deep agony, he prayed for the grace of God:

*“Oh Lord, the whole world is being consumed in the in visible flames of fire. Oh save the world in this hour of darkness. Raise all unto Thee. Raise them in whatever and however a way Thou mayest.”*

On coming in contact with Babar, the Mughal king requested the Guru to ask for some favor. He politely and yet firmly declined the offer saying:

*“Hear, oh King! Foolish would be the fakir who would beg of kings, for God is the only giver munificent beyond all measure”*

significantly adding:

*“Nanak hungers for God alone and he asks for naught.”*

Babar had great respect for all men of piety. Once, when he came to know that Nanak had been put behind bars, he ordered his immediate release. On request from the king, the Guru gave his advice, called Nasihat Nama, in which he counseled the king to worship God every day and to be just and kind to everyone. He told him that the Naam, the Sat Naam, the Holy Word of God or the Kalma, was a panacea for all ills of life, here and in the hereafter. It was Kalam-e-kadim, the most ancient Song of God, singing in the heart of all, and could be heard only by the pure ones.

*“Be pure,”* said the Guru, *“and Truth would reveal itself to thee. Have love of God uppermost in thy heart and hurt not the feelings of His creatures.”*

Once, this great soul, great in humility and love of God, asked a school teacher: *“Sir, what have you learned?”* The school teacher replied: *“I am proficient in all branches of knowledge. I have read the sacred lore of all the religions. I know quite a lot of everything.”*

Then Nanak humbly enquired of the school master what he had actually gained thereby. In a passage of exquisite beauty and wisdom, Nanak sang of the secret of true education:

*“Burn worldly thoughts and their ashes rub, and of these ashes make thine ink, and let the paper on which ye write, be the paper of faith; and write thou the Name of God.”*

When put to school, he told Gopal Pandhe, his teacher to *“make the heart your pen, and with the ink of love write again and again the Name of the Lord.”*

The current system of education in India ignores the vital injunction *“make the heart your pen”*, and *“make an ink of the worldly intellect.”*

Worldly attainments, of whatever type, are not sufficient in themselves if one does not know God. We need a system of education which includes in its curriculum the eternal values of life. We have instead a commercialized course of cramming books and texts-made-easy, just for securing diplomas and degrees and getting jobs. The number of schools, colleges and universities has increased in India and elsewhere but the moral fiber of the so-called educated people has not grown by a millimeter. What does it profit a man if he gains possession of the whole world and loses his own soul?

Democracies have failed, but a democracy can live, survive and triumph when two conditions are fulfilled: (1) When sectarianism and fanaticism perish; and (2) when states bow in reverence to a superior law, the law of fellowship and human sympathy, and above all to the Infinite whose voice rings from end to end: "*Children of the Earth, ye all are One!*" Nanak came to proclaim this two-fold truth.

The real and lasting freedom cannot be achieved without faith in solidarity and freedom of humanity. How? By:

1. Faith more than mere knowledge of books;
2. Solidarity more than schemes of reform;
3. Service of humanity more than anything else.

Guru Nanak found the basic remedy for true solidarity and the integration of man in the love of God and in the love and service of God in man. Once when he came out of a trance in the water, he explained: "*There is no Hindu and no Musalman,*" meaning thereby that there was no basic difference between the two.

God made man with the same privileges all the world over. All men are born equal. They come into the world in the same way after a fixed period of gestation. All men have the same outer and inner construction in the matter of limbs and various instruments and organs like hands and feet, lungs, liver and stomach and the like. Every day the human machinery throws filth out of the body. One is first man and then takes on the outer badge of one or the other specific social order or formation in which he is born and brought up and these he accepts and adopts as his own – Hinduism, Sikhism, Islam or Christianity; Buddhism or Jainism, or any other "ism" – and tries to solve the mystery of life, each in his own way.

A man is man first and man last, besides anything else in between. He belongs to universal religion of God with the hallmark of man based on birth and surroundings. The entire mankind consists of embodied beings like so many beads on the string of a rosary. All, being equal in the sight of God, enjoy God's gifts equally and freely. None is high or low by birth alone. Further, he is soul, a conscious entity which enlivens the ocean of all-consciousness, is of the same essence as that of God. As such we are all brothers and sisters in God, irrespective of our social badges. And then the same Power, the Naam or Word or Kalma, keeps in order the entirely disparate constituents of the body and then the soul; the one material and the other ethereal. On account of this Controlling Power, we cannot run out of the wonderful house of the body in which we live, however hard we may try. The outgoing breath is pushed back and cannot remain outside for any length of time. Our body works as long as the Life-Principle runs in the body. This process goes on as long as the Controlling Power keeps the body and the Life-Principle together. When that is withdrawn, the spirit in us has perforce to leave the body.

So the whole machinery of the body is being run by the indwelling spirit that we are. If we could learn to withdraw at will from the body, while remaining in the body, we can then know the nature of our real self, the animating life-impulse in us. This has been the teachings of all the rishis and munis of yore and the spiritual teachers of the East and the West. It is all a matter of practical self-analysis. And it can be experienced directly and immediately with the active help and guidance of an Adept or a Master of Para Vidya or the knowledge of the beyond – the knowledge that lies beyond the senses, mind and intellect. It is a regular science of soul, knowing which, everything else becomes known and nothing remains to be known. We can then become a master in our own house, able to direct it as we like.

The same Naam, the Sat Naam, the Word or the God-into-Expression-Power is keeping the whole creation under its control. When this is withdrawn, the result is dissolution or grand dissolution as the case may be.

This body is verily the temple of God in which we reside and in which God also dwells. The whole universe is the abode of God and God dwells therein. All this can be experienced at the level of the spirit with the grace of a competent spiritual guide or mentor.

As long as we do not perceive this unity of man, physically, mentally and spiritually and by the same Controlling Power within all of us, there can be no true integration and solidarity of humankind.

### A Great Preacher of Peace and Harmony

One day, the Guru went into the river Ravi for a bath. A voice came to him from the music of the waters saying, *“Oh Nanak! I am with thee. I have given thee my Name. To this Name be thou dedicated. Repeat my Name – Sat Naam. Mingle thou with men uncontaminated by the world. Worship my spirit and power. Meditate on my glory. And serve the poor and the needy as thyself.”*

No sooner had he heard the call, he, like Buddha and Mahavira, left his hearth and home to bring men nearer to God so that they might enjoy in fullness the ecstatic bliss lying untapped within. People wondered why he was forsaking his wife and children. To their taunts the Guru replied: *“I am leaving them to the care of Him who cares for all of us. The world is in the grip of deadly flames, and I go to extinguish the invisible fire which is enveloping all mankind.”*

If we look critically with the eye illumined by the Master, we will find that we are living in the holy hill of God. All places of worship have been made on the pattern of the human body, the God-made temple for our worship. The Hindu temples are dome-shaped at the top in the likeness of the human head. The mosques besides the central and side domes have arches in the shape of foreheads. The churches and synagogues have steeples, tapering upward in the formation of a nose.

Again, the faithful in the various religions believe that God is Light and Sound. The symbols of this Inner Light and Sound adorn all our places of worship in imitation of the Reality within. But the true worship lies in opening the Inward Eye, the Single Eye or Shiv Netra to see the Divine Light and in unstopping the Inner Ears to hear the Divine Music, the Akash Bani or the Bang-e-Ilahi.

The outer performances, without having a glimpse of the Spirit and Power of God – the Light and Sound Principle, are just like a blind man saying, “*God is Light*”, though he has never known what light is. The manifestation of the Jyoti or Noor within is a vision of God, or having a darshan, as it is called. All this and much more comes through the grace of a competent Master.

With this right perception and right understanding there follow right speech and right actions all on their own. The Kingdom of God for which we so fervently pray, day in and day out, will then actually come on the earth-plane. “*It comes not by observation, lo! it is within thee*”, say all the sages and seers.

Guru Nanak wanted to reform religion – to lift it from the formal and conventional to the simple and the practical. Etymologically the term religion comes from the roots, re (back) and ligio or ligare (to bind). Religion then is something that binds and unites the soul to Oversoul or God. When Masters come, those who meet them and come into their close contact, derive the maximum benefit of getting their souls linked with the manifested Light and Sound of God.

The social religions come into being after the Masters pass away. They are made, no doubt, with a noble purpose, the purpose of keeping the teachings of their founders alive. As long as practical men remain in the social orders, the followers continue to get the benefit as before. Later on, for want of such practical men, these social orders acquire rigid formations and the very institutions set up with the noblest intentions and the best of motives, become iron-clad prison houses and begin to stagnate and stink with hair-splitting polemics in which the spirit gets lost under the mass of dead verbiage.

The purpose of religious education is to draw out the best in man and make him an integrated whole, physically, emotionally, intellectually and spiritually. That religion is best which turns out more and more ideal persons with a harmonious development in all their parts. The highest objective of Sikh religion is to turn out Khalsas. A Khalsa is one who witnesses within him the Pooran Jyoti (the supreme Light of God in full effulgence).

Similarly, a Hindu is one who makes manifest in him the Jyoti of Ishvara and listens to the Unending and Unstruck Music of the soul (Anhad and Anahat Nad), the symbols of which he adores and worships outside in his temples and shrines by lighting candles and striking bells. A true Muslim is one who sees the Noor of Allah or the Light of God and hears the Kalam-e-Kadim (the Voice of God, the most ancient music or song ceaselessly going on within him.) A True Christian likewise is one who bears testimony to the Light of God and hears the Sound of God which transforms him into an awakened spirit at the mount of transfiguration.

Nanak put great emphasis on direct experience of the divinity that lies within us; for mere reading of the scriptures and observing the rites and rituals of worship cannot take the place of the Reality. These are the elementary steps but not enough in themselves. Nanak was a poet-Saint and a bard of the open secret, a preacher of the Spirit and Power of God enlivening the humankind. He went from place to place, chanting the Sacred Name and preaching the love of God. He visited Hindu places of pilgrimages, the Muslim shrines, and other holy places. “*Closer is He than the very life-breath and nearer than the hands and feet.*”

As Lao-tse said: “*Without going out of doors, we may yet know (the essence) of the world.*” This essence is called the Naam, the Sat Naam, the Eternal Word. His life was dedicated to preaching the practice of the Holy Word. He taught the people that in the Holy Word was hidden a great healing power which healed all the ills of life.

He loved the Hindus and the Muslims alike. Speaking to the Hindus, he said: *“Praise and glorify God five times, as the Muslims offer prayers to Allah five times a day”*. Speaking to the Muslims he said: *“Make the will of Allah your rosary. Be ye a Real Musalman after renouncing your little self.”* At this, quite a few Muslims involuntarily cried aloud: *“God is speaking to us in Nanak.”* Even when in Mecca he taught the doctrine of strict monism or the unity of Godhead.

Interpreting the wisdom of the Prophet, he uttered the name Allah with the same reverence as he did the name of Hari. On seeing him, Shaikh Farid greeted Nanak with the words: Allah Hu or *“Thou art Allah.”* The Guru replied: *“Allah is the only aim of my life. Oh Farid! Allah is the very essence of my being.”* All call on the one God by different names, may be Ram, Rahim, Allah, Wah-e-guru and the like.

There are many lovers of God, and He is the life-giving force to all of them. Although bearing the badge of different religions, all have the same ideal before them – to worship the indwelling spirit called by so many names.

*“There is no caste”* said the Guru, *“for we claim brotherhood with all.”* Each one of his followers was lovingly addressed as a Bhai or a brother. All are Bhai (brethren), whether kings or slaves, the rich or the poor. *“No caste and creed counts in the Court of the Lord. He who worships Him is dear unto Him”* said the Guru.

He mingled freely with the poor, the down-trodden, the outcaste and the neglected. He accepted the invitations from the poor in preference to those of the rich, who, he knew, invited him for self-glorification, and whose earnings were anything but righteous.

He considered that there was no sin greater than the spirit of separateness which went against the solidarity of life in the brotherhood of man and worked for disruption in society. This prophet of unity and oneness saw the higher harmony in all the faiths in the Religion of Man – the worship of God and the service of God in man. He wanted the followers of all faiths to sit together as seekers after Truth, seeking communion with the Almighty. The highest religion teaches us to reverently study and experience in full consciousness the living presence of God, as like-minded students in a class.

When questioned at Mecca as to whether he was a Hindu or a Muslim, he frankly and fearlessly declared that was neither the one nor the other in particular because he discerned the spirit of God in both. When asked which of the two religions, Hinduism or Islam, was superior, he said: *“Without good acts, the professors of both the religions shall perish.”* In one of his hymns, he says: *“To him whose delusion of the mind is gone, Hindu and Muslim are alike.”*

At Baghdad, the people questioned him as to which sect he belonged; he replied, *“I have renounced all sects. I only know the one True God, the Supreme Being Who is on the earth, in the Heaven and in between, and in all directions.”* On being further pressed as to who he actually was, he replied: *“This body, compounded as it is of the five elements, is being illumined by the Light of God and is just addressed as Nanak.”*

Again and again, he warned his disciples against the sin of separateness. In a beautiful passage he declared: *“Numberless are Thy worshippers and numberless Thy lovers, numberless Thy Bhaktas and Saints, who lovingly fix their thoughts on Thee. Numberless the musical instruments and the sound thereof and so are Thy musicians.”*

In the course of his travels, he had with him two attendants, one a Hindu and the other a Muslim: Bhai Bala and Bhai Mardana. He poured his love to all, setting at naught all conventions, creeds, castes, and color bars. He was a brother of the poor, the criminal and the persecuted. His socialism was vibrant with love born of God and not atheistic in character. Growing out of a vision of God's love, it flowed into the hearts of men as brothers in God.

A new Indian nation can be built even now, but not in blind imitation of the West. We must accept the vital message of the seers, the prophets and the Saints of the East who are well conversant with the conditions of our society, and have a rich spiritual heritage behind them.

## Guru Nanak – God-Intoxicated

From a very early age, Nanak was fond of meditation. He would go to a forest and for long hours sit there in rapt silence. He would meditate on the great mystery of life – a mystifying mystery indeed. Where does life come from? How does it work in us? How does the Great Controlling Power sustain us from day to day? Is it possible to contact this Power? These were the vital questions that he posited for himself.

Nanak's father tended to regard his son as insane. One day he called a physician to attend upon him. As the latter felt the pulse Nanak said, *"Oh physician! I am not mad. I am only smitten with the pangs of love for God. They call me mad, but I am not. I am simply God-intoxicated."*

Nanak was overflowing with the love and glory of God. He radiated love of God to all who came in contact with him. He was verily Word made flesh and dwelt amongst us. He opened the Inner Eye of those who came to him and enabled them to witness the Light of God within them. He was the Light of the world as long as he remained in the world.

The Light manifested itself in him and he guided the tottering humanity with that Light. This Light never vanishes but always remains in each one of us. We have to break the stone walls of our passions and prejudices, of separateness and sectarianism, in order to have a vision of the Divine Light in full splendor. The Guru, like all other Masters, advised: *"Kindle the Light which is within you. Ye are the children of Light. Be ye lamps unto yourselves."*

India and all other countries of the world need heaven's Light for their guidance. This was the universal call of Nanak to the whole humanity. He offered the Water of Life and the Bread of Life – the Light and the Nad – as food to the starving souls of the people, having which, nothing else remained to be had.

God is love, and love is God, and the way back to God is also through love. He was love personified, and inspired love in everyone. He always sang:

*"Teach me how to live immersed in Thy meditation, day and night. Grant, oh Lord, that I may never think of aught save Thee, and that I may sing of Thee ever and evermore."*

Again: *"Oh my heart! Love God as the lotus loves the water, the more it is beaten by the waves, the more its love enkindles; having received its life from water, it dies without water, oh my heart! Love God as the chatrik loves the rain drops, who even when fountains are full and the land green, is not satisfied as long as it cannot get a drop of rain."*

And again: *“Whichever side I cast mine eyes, there Thou art! Parted from Thee, I crack and die.”*

To reach God, teaches Guru Nanak, one must walk the way of love. Love God alone, and if you love others - your children and friends and relatives - love them for His sake. Yearn for Him. Develop within you an intense longing for Him. And when you feel restless for Him, know that it will not be long before He will reveal Himself to you.

He was the prophet of the Inner Life, and urged that the inner should be expressed, not in creeds and dogmas, rites and rituals, but in humble service of the poor and the lowly. And this service must be inspired by the love of God and Naam – the Spirit and Power of God.

Nanak says:

*“Oh Man! How canst thou be free without love? For the Word of God – the Naam will reveal to thee the Lord within thee, and grant thee the treasure of love, love-filled, let the seeker become the Bridegroom’s bride! Filled with Bhakti, the disciple be dyed in the true color of love. Such a bride shall never be a widow! For she abideth in the Satguru. On her free head is the jewel of love! And except the Bridegroom she knoweth none. Awake! Awake, oh seeker, awake! Renounce the little wisdom of the , “ego”. Love-filled, think ever of His Lotus Feet! Surrender thy body and thy soul to Him! Surrender thyself, so mayest thou meet thy Lord!”*

Guru Nanak was a true mystic, in communion with God, and perceiving His all-pervading munificent grace. He exclaimed *“Nanak sees the Lord in all His Glory.”* Intoxicated with the love of the Lord, he remained in a state of perpetual ecstasy.

Once Babar offered Nanak a cup of hemp. The Guru politely declined, saying: *“Oh Emperor, the intoxication of this substance is just of an ephemeral nature, but I am ever in a state of divine inebriation under the powerful influence of the Holy Naam.”*

For meditation, Nanak prescribed a regular course of spiritual discipline, for without it one could not progress on the path. The first is devotion to Naam. In the opening lines of *Jap Ji*, the daily morning prayer of the Sikhs, the God-Power is termed as Sat Naam, or the Eternal Truth. It is in the Name that the life of religion is rooted. *“Sow the Name. Now is the season to throw away all doubts and misgivings. Burn to ashes all your silk and velvet fineries, if they take you away from the Name of the Lord.”*

The Guru then sums up the qualities required of a devotee on the spiritual path.

Purity of thought, speech and deed is the first prerequisite for the dawn of Higher Life. Christ too said: *“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”* Purity is verily the key that unlocks the door of meditation, leading to the mansion of the Lord.

Secondly, one must develop patience and perseverance to bear cheerfully whatever good or evil may befall, as a reaction to our actions.

Thirdly, one must have control over one’s thoughts, casting away all desires so as to ensure equilibrium of the mind.

Fourthly, a steady practice every day of the presence of the Living God by communion with the Word in full faith in the Master-Power above.

Fifthly, one must live in holy awe of His presence, stimulating one to untiring effort to achieve ultimate union with Him.

And above all, one must love God with such an intensity as may burn up all dross in us, leaving us free to proceed unhampered to His Kingdom.

## An Ideal Farmer

A lover of freedom, Guru Nanak spent his early days in the freedom of the farm and the open air of the countryside. As he grew older, he traveled far and wide, exhorting the people to free their minds of conventional thoughts and convivialities of life.

On his return from his far flung travels, he settled down at Kartarpur as a farmer. He was a true son of the soil, a passionate peasant who had cultivated much harder things than earth – the mind and intellect, etc. After man-making and man-service, he engaged himself in land-service, for to grow a blade of grass and to raise a stalk bearing an ear of grain was to him much better than the work of a mere priest or a preacher.

He set an example of hard labor by bringing under cultivation the barren lands of Kartarpur for feeding the poor and the needy on the produce thereof. He also set up at Kartarpur the institution of langar or a system of free community feeding, where both bread and broth were distributed freely to all according to the needs of each. *“Bread was the Lord,”* the Guru declared, and *“the bread which the Lord gave was His parshad (God-given).”* *“Bread and water belong to the Guru,”* echoed the followers. And the Guru said that the Beloved was in the people.

His disciples came from far-off places like Baluchistan, Afghanistan and Central Asia and included, among others, the Brahmins and the Sufis, the high-caste Kshatriyas and the low-caste Chandalas, the Sidhas and the Naths. Thus his following was a conglomeration of all sorts of people, knit together in the bonds of loving devotion to the holy cause and vying with each other in the labor of love for the fallen and the downtrodden.

Nanak, their spiritual father, now advanced in age, moved on foot every day, laboring in the farms and singing hymns of Naam and breathing the benediction of love. The Guru was a picture of humility, and his followers, in a spirit of dedication, worked as humble servants of the Lord, worshipping God without any pomp and show, in the stillness of nature.

From Kartarpur spread the fire of the love of God and love of man, all over the Punjab. Guru Nanak's face shone with the simplicity and serenity born of the saintliness in him. He was a laborer, a tiller of the soil, a servant of the poor and lowly. The life at Kartarpur was a blend of willing work and worship, love and labor, silence and song.

On being asked by his father as to what was real farming, Nanak replied: *“The body is the field, the mind is the ploughshare, and modesty is the life-giving water for the field. I sow the seed of the Divine Name in the field of the body, leveled and furrowed by contentment, after pulverizing the encrusted clods of pride into true humility. In a soil prepared like this, the seed of love will prosper and, seated in the abode of Truth, I behold the glory of God in the rich harvest before me. Oh Father! Mammon accompanies no man. The world is just deluded by the glamour of riches. It is just a few who escape the delusion with the aid of discriminating wisdom.”*

Guru Nank had a deep-rooted penchant for silence. He frequently merged himself in the silence of God, the Sat Naam, the Eternal Word; in the silence of Nature, the silence that shines in the starry sky and dwells in the lonely hillside and murmurs in the flowing waters; and in the silence of Sangat sewa or unostentatious service of the community of the faithful and of the sewaks – servers – alike, who stayed with the Guru and whom he always addressed as Bhais – brothers.

## The Way of Life

He prescribed a methodology for achieving success in life. Absorbed in the Lord of Love the disciple grows in the sewa of Sat Sangat, the selfless and loving service of all. In such supreme and selfless service, many a Koda Rakhshas and Sajjan thug were redeemed during his ministry.

He exhorted the people to earn their living through honest and fair means. This was a rule not for the disciples and the laity only, but even for real teachers and preachers. He went to the length of saying: *“Bow not unto him who, claiming to be a Godman, lives on the charity of others. He who earns his living with the sweat of his brow and shares it with all, can know the way to God.”*

That which belongs to another is not to be wished and craved for, much less grabbed, for it is as odious and noxious as pork is to a Muslim and beef to a Hindu.

He forbade people from encroaching upon the rights of others. Those who thrive on ill-gotten gains can never have a pure heart.

Time and again he stressed the purity of heart through virtuous deeds performed in the love of the Lord. It is only the deeds that count and not the religious hallmarks that one may bear.

The chanting of the Name of the Lord was a necessity but with a pure heart and a clean tongue, for without these all our prayers, however loud and long, would never bear any fruit. *“It is the deeds alone that are weighed in the divine scales and determine one’s place in relation to God.”* It is with the alchemy of God’s love that one can transform hardened criminals into men of piety.

Nanak never advocated ostentatious renunciation as a means of God-realization. He taught that salvation was possible for a householder, as for any other person, through proper rendering of his duties and obligations with faith in God. He believed in the efficacy of prayers not only for all mankind, but for animals, birds and all other creatures. He himself always prayed for peace unto all the world under the Divine Will.

Nanak emphasized developing the life of the spirit for all true men and women. Such persons live not for themselves alone but for others.

*“To live for others is the highest norm, he alone liveth who liveth for others.”*

He defined a truly great man as one who renounced all his desires and cared not for the fruits of his actions.

The seeker after God was enjoined to cultivate purity of heart above anything else. *“He who is so much identified with the body and is engrossed head and ears in the lusts of the flesh, could never be picked up by the Lord as His own.”*

He who blesses others is blessed in return. A seeker after happiness must make others happy.

The Guru stressed the need of prayer. Where all human efforts fail, there prayer succeeds. Sit in silence each day and pray to God, or God manifested in man, to draw you nearer to Him from day to day and grant you the company of those who are dear to Him.

## Last Days

The day came when Nanak was about to depart. In humility and love Nanak bowed to his devoted disciple Angad, who had by now become a very part of his being, as the name indicates. The latter was one in spirit with his Master and the two were blended together in Him. The Guru then asked for his blessings and he sang a song of vijay or victory at the hour of his departure, asking all who were around him to join him in the chorus.

*“Sing ye my comrades! Sing ye all! Sing now my wedding song. Sing ye the song of His praise. May I be a sacrifice to Him – the Beloved. The blessed day hath dawned, the hour of consummation draweth nigh. Come ye, my comrades, come! And consecrate me with your blessings. Behold ye the Bride uniting with the Bridegroom.”*

Many of the disciples shed bitter tears of sorrow and grief. With deep agony in their hearts, they inquired: *“Leaving us, you go! What rites should we perform? Shall we light the customary earthen lamp when you depart? Should we cast your ashes and charred bones in the sacred waters of the Ganges, according to the prevailing custom?”*

To all these queries, the Guru characteristically replied:

*“Yes, light ye the lamp! the Lamp of the Name of God. Let my funeral rites be the remembrance of the Name of God. Know ye that He, the Lord above, is my support, here and in the hereafter. Sing ye the Name of God! That shall be my Ganga and my Kashi. Let my soul bathe in the water of His Name! For that alone is the True Bath. And offer unto me the Grace of God, and sing ye the Glory of God, night and day.”*

The Hindu disciples asked: *“Shall we cremate your body?”* And the Muslim disciples: *“Shall we bury your body?”*

The Guru replied, *“Quarrel not over my remains. Let Hindus and Muslims bring flowers and place them on each side of my body. And then let each do what they like. But see that the flowers remain fresh and green.”*

The Guru was indifferent to ceremonial disposal of the body either by cremation or burial. He only asked that the flowers should remain fresh and fragrant. What then were these flowers? The flowers of faith and love.

It is in vain that the people look for the Guru in a tomb or on the cremation ground. The Living Guru is ever in the hearts of those who keep the flowers of faith and love fresh and fragrant. He came for all. He lived for all. His teachings remain for all.

He founded no new sect. He revered all religions. He respected the Saints of all times and places. He taught no new creed. He preached love, faith and noble deeds. For him all the people were of God. In the Hindus and in the Muslims, he saw the Vision of God in Man. In all the nations of the world, he beheld an endless procession of the race of man. To all countries and to all people, he sang the song of Naam or the Holy Word.

Nanak was the prophet of peace and good will, harmony and unity. He was the prophet of Light and gave Light to all for seventy long years (1469-1539). His work of loving service to humankind, as manifestation of the Unmanifest, was carried on vigorously by his successors.

Guru Arjan, the fifth in the line of succession to Nanak, compiled the sayings of the Gurus in the Holy Granth, the Bible of the Sikhs; including therein the sayings of several other Saints of other religions as well as could easily be collected for the purpose. Thus in the holy book, he laid the foundation of a great banquet hall and offered therein choice and dainty dishes of divine wisdom coming down through the ages. This in a way serves as a model for the World Fellowship of Religions.

Love knows no reward. It is a reward in itself. Service and sacrifice characterize love. The last two Gurus – Guru Teg Bahadur and Guru Gobind Singh – sacrificed their all in the service of mankind for the love of God.



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