

# On the Three Spiritual Viands of Guru Granth Sahib

## Abstract

Guru Granth Sahib, Holy Book of the Sikhs has 1430 pages containing 6,000 verses. The *Gurbani*, as the divine message in the Guru Granth Sahib, deals with every conceivable aspect of human life, temporal as well as spiritual, and envisages a comprehensive whole-life religious system. Guru Arjun Dev has compared it with a salver of spiritual food which contains, *inter alia*, three viands, viz., Truth, Contentment and Wisdom, besides *Naam*. In the present piece of work, an effort has been made to highlight these three core aspects of the message being disseminated by Guru Granth Sahib.

**Keywords:** Guru Granth Sahib, message, 'Sat', 'Santokh', 'Vichar', 'Naam'.

## Introduction

The words at our command are not sufficient enough to sum up the message of Guru Granth Sahib. It is a unique religious scripture, which embodies not only the revolutionary thought process initiated by Guru Nanak Dev ji and followed by his successors, but also the wisdom bequeathed by outstanding Indian sages of the previous five centuries, coming from different schools of spiritual thought. The *Gurbani*, as the divine message in the Guru Granth Sahib, deals with every conceivable aspect of human life, temporal as well as spiritual, and envisages a comprehensive whole-life religious system called Sikhism. It is the youngest among the major scriptures of world religions. Coupled with the facts that it is authenticated by the Guru himself and that it enjoys the status of Guru Eternal of the Sikhs, it becomes a unique scripture.

During the last two centuries, a number of indepth studies have been done on Guru Granth Sahib, by various scholars. We have recently celebrated the fourth centenary of its compilation, in 2004, and we celebrated the third centenary of its anointment as 'Guru Eternal' of the Sikhs, in 2008. In these events organized in India as well as abroad, a series of papers dealing with different aspects of the teachings of Guru Granth Sahib or its contents have been presented. Guru Granth Sahib, Holy Book of the Sikhs has 1430 pages containing 6,000 verses. Besides the *Bani* of six sikh Gurus, it also includes the *Bani* of *Bhagats & Bhats*. It is divided in 39 parts according to 39 *ragas*. It was got compiled in the present form by the tenth master and given the status of 'Guru' emphasizing the manifold significance of Guru Granth Sahib in human life.

Firstly, Guru Arjun Dev, himself got compiled this great scripture (1604), by Bhai Gurdass gave an indication as to its contents in the epilogue as follows:

"In this salver are lying three viands –truth, content and contemplation. Also lying in. it is the Lord's ambrosial Name, sustenance of all existence. Whoever, partakes of it, consumes it, saved shall be. This substance no way can be discarded – ever in heart cherish it. The world, darkness enveloped, by touch of the Master's feet, is crossed Thus, sayeth Nanak, all that is visible, is seen as manifestation of the Supreme Being."<sup>1</sup>

The Guru compares the Granth with a salver containing spiritual foods, carrying viands of *Sat* (Truth), *Santokh* (contentment) and *Vichar* (contemplation), besides *Naam* (the immanent Lord). These constitute the major components of the Guru's message, and are, therefore, briefly discussed below:

*Sat* is a Sanskrit word, which literally means a reality or something that exists. According to Guru Granth Sahib, the ultimate reality is God Himself. He was in the beginning; He was, when the *yugas* started; He is now; and ever He shall be.<sup>2</sup>

According to earlier religious traditions in India, the world was considered *mithya* or *maya*, which in fact did not exist, and all we, see is an illusion. Guru Granth Sahib rejects this view, and says that the universe is



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God's creation, and is, therefore, real.<sup>3</sup> 'It is the abode of the True Lord. He dwells in it',<sup>4</sup> and that it has been created as a place to practise *dharmā*<sup>5</sup> in the midst of air, water, fire and nether regions. Guru Granth Sahib, however, makes a distinction between God and the universe. While the former is the Creator, eternal without beginning or end, the latter is His creation which is transient, ever changing, becoming, and subject to beginning and end in time under His Will.

According to Guru Granth Sahib, it is not enough to know or understand Truth. It must be practised in life, as stressed in the following verses:

"Realization of Truth is higher than all else – higher still is truthful living."<sup>6</sup> The Guru elaborates truthful living: "Ever do they see and speak truth: Thus are their body and mind rendered holy. Their teaching, their preaching is truth; Through truth comes to them noble repute. Those disregarding truth depart this life wailing and crying."<sup>7</sup> "He, who is true here, is true hereafter too; The true mind is imbued with the True word; He, who serves the Truth, practises the (Lord's) Truth, And earns he nothing but the Truth, Sacrifice, O Sacrifice am I unto those, Who enshrine the True Name in their hearts, And serve the True One and merge in Him, And sing the praises of the True One."<sup>8</sup>

"True should be known such a one as in heart bears truth – His impurity of falsehood cast off, His person should be washed clean. True should be known such a one as to truth is devoted, in love. Should a person on listening to the Name Divine feels joyful, The Door of liberation he attains. True should be known such a one as knows the device of union of the self with the Absolute. Preparing soil of his body, the Creator in it should he sow. True should be known such a one as truthful instruction receives; Should be compassionate to creation and something in charity give away. True should be known such a one as at the bathing-spot of the self takes abode; Seeks the holy Preceptor's guidance and takes his fixed abode there. Truth is the universal remedy, washing off evils. Nanak lays his supplication before such as to Truth hold on."<sup>9</sup> "Speak ever what is truthful and pure; shun what is false Let the disciple tread the path shown by the Master."<sup>10</sup> "To bear Truth in heart is purest doing. All else is fraud, whose worship ignominy entails."<sup>11</sup> The Guru adds that truth must be spoken, when the occasion demands.<sup>12</sup> One should not shirk this responsibility. Falsehood is decried and compared to eating a carrion.<sup>13</sup>

'*Santokh*' means a state of being satisfied with what God in His grace, gives us. It is the opposite of greed or covetousness, which is decried in the Guru Granth Sahib as one of the five major vices that afflict humans.

Lured by temptation, people run after wealth and objects of worldly pleasure. These, however, do not quench one's thirst. The endless struggle for acquisition of more and more wealth continues. In the following verses the Guru explains the futility of these

pursuits and the need for *santokh* for ultimate peace of mind:

"Maya of many hues in numerous aspects have I seen; I have seen much wisdom too by pen on paper recorded. Status of chief, king and lord too have I beheld; None of these to the mind brings fulfillment. (1) Holy devotees ! tell me of that joy, Whereby may desire be annulled and the mind's hunger be satisfied. (Pause I) Riding steeds fast as wind and elephants; Fragrance of *attar* and sandalwood; couching with beautiful females; Musical and dramatic performance in theatre – In none of these does the mind find satisfaction. (2) In splendid assemblies to sit on thrones with carpets *spread*; Enjoying gardens with all manner of fruits laden; The spectacle of chase by kings; None of these to the mind brings joy: All false shows appear. (3) The holy in their grace have declared this truth, Where in lie all joy and bliss: In holy company chant Divine praise! Saith Nanak : This by great good fortune is attained, (4) Happy is one having such Divine wealth. By Divine grace is found union with the holy."<sup>14</sup>

There are numerous references to '*Santokh*' in Guru Granth Sahib. We may reproduce one of these to conclude that craving will not end without *santokh*:

Man earning thousands, in pursuit after millions goes – By accumulation of wealth not satisfied, runs after these. Should man enjoy innumerable poison-delights, He still is unsatisfied, and after these dies hankering. In contentment alone lies satisfaction – All other actions are worthless as resolves and actions in dream. By devotion to the Name come all joys – This state by rare ones by great good fortune is attained. The Lord is the sole Doer of all. Saith Nanak : Ever the Lord's Name thou utter.<sup>15</sup>

In '*Japu ji*' Guru Nanak Dev ji explains that the traditional bull believed to support the world, is, in fact, *dharmā* (the practice of righteous deeds), which leads to *santokh*.<sup>16</sup>

The term has been variously translated by scholars as 'wisdom', 'contemplation', or 'meditation'. It also means thought or view. In any case, it involves the use of intellect and concentration. The Guru gives his own views on practically every subject dealing with life. For example, in the *japu ji* he gives a beautiful description of Nature. He mentions all the good as well as bad things, and concludes, sharing his wisdom:

"How may I contemplate and express His might, I that am unworthy even once to be made a sacrifice to Him! Whatever Thou willst is good, Thou Formless one! Immutable, ever-perfect art Thou."<sup>17</sup>

The Guru, however, does not favour blind faith. He advocates use of brain or intellectual faculties, to see the merit of one's actions and to discriminate between good and evil:

"By wisdom is the Lord served, by wisdom is attained honour, By wisdom are books interpreted, By wisdom is dispensed charity, Saith Nanak : There is one sole path to God. All else is Satan's prompting."<sup>18</sup>

He warns, however, that intellect should not be wasted in needless controversies:

"Those without truth and modesty in the hereafter honoured shall not be. To indulge in disputation is to lose sense – Such is not the way of wisdom."<sup>19</sup> "...In the remaining seven quarters must one love truth, practise goodness, And seek company of the enlightened. Therein is discriminated good from evil; The false are found losers; The spurious are cast off; The genuine given approbation. Saith Nanak : Suffering and happiness from the Lord comes; All argument is of no avail."<sup>20</sup>

The Guru commends learning, since "it induces in the mind service of mankind."<sup>21</sup> The Guru decries ignorance. He says:

"If the night be black, what is white shall so remain; In the blazing light of the day, the black remains black; Those blind of sight, ignorant, without enlightenment, Who see not, shall nowise be honoured in the Court Divine."<sup>22</sup>

Wisdom or learning should be used in practical life. Knowledge for its own sake alone does not do any good. Kabir says:

"Saith Kabir: The mind aware of everywhere, yet does evil. What weal when holding lamp in hand, still into the well falls."<sup>23</sup>

The Guru adds that learning should be used for a noble purpose, and condemns its use for betraying one's own people:

Deer, falcons and state officials are given training That in snares spread around, Their fellows they get entangled – In the hereafter shall they find no rest. Such are truly learned, well-taught and wise, As live in accordance with holy pretty. Only that which has roots to grow from, Can cast a shade from above."<sup>24</sup>

"Concept of '*Naam*' is fundamental to the gospel of Guru Granth Sahib and the entire structure of its theology. In fact, Sikhism has often been called *Naam Marg*, or the way of *Naam*."<sup>25</sup> The word *Naam*, as used in Guru Granth Sahib, has a distinct and more significant meaning than that of mere name. Often it has been used as synonymous with God. *Naam* is unfathomable. According to *Gurbani*, "It sustains all regions and universes, all thought, knowledge and consciousness, all skies and stars, all forces and substances, all continents and spheres. *Naam* emancipates those who accept it in their heart. He, on whom is His Grace, is yoked to *Naam*, and he reaches the highest state of development. *Naam* permeates the entire creation. There is no place or space where *Naam* is not."<sup>26</sup>

In *Asa di Vaar*<sup>27</sup>, the Guru says that God created Himself (*nirgun* or formless) and himself created *Naam* (the *Sargun Sarup*). Later He created the universe, and permeated it in immanent form. For practical purposes, we may, therefore, assume *Naam* as God Himself in the immanent form.

The subject of *Naam* is too vast to be discussed in the limited scope of this paper. It must be stated, however, that all Sikhs are seekers of *Naam* which is regarded as the greatest gift. They pray:

"Lord, to seek other than You is the greatest of afflictions. Confer on me the *Naam*, the bringer of content, Wherewith the mind's thirst may go."<sup>28</sup>

It is necessary to understand what the gift of *Naam* means. It certainly does not mean merger with God. For, God is the Creator, and man is His creation. So gift of *Naam* means link with God or His Will which is also synonymous with *Naam*. He prays:

"O that someone to the Lord were to unite me! Of such a one shall I grasp the feet, Utter him fine workds, Dedicate life to him"<sup>29</sup>

The purpose is to identify His Will and to become an agent or instrument in the execution of the benevolent Will of God. That is the goal of life.

As pointed out in the beginning of this paper, it is impossible to sum up the comprehensive message of Guru Granth Sahib. Guru Arjun Dev has, however, compared it with a salver of spiritual food which contains, *inter alia*, three viands, viz., Truth, Contentment and Wisdom, besides *Naam*. God is the ultimate Truth. The universe is His creation, and is, therefore, also real and not an illusion. It is not enough to realize the truth. It should be practiced in life. Greed or the unending craving for worldly possessions and pleasures, is decried, since ultimate peace is attainable only through contentment. The Guru also stresses the need for contemplation and wisdom in order to discriminate good from evil, for in the ultimate evaluation only good deeds lead to deliverance. The aim of life is link with *Naam* or the immanent God, to recognize His will, and to be an instrument in its execution. Lastly, we should not forget the message that *Sabad* is the real guru, and there is no place for a personal guru in corporal form in the Sikh religious thought. It must also be noted that the message of the Guru is universal, and addressed the entire mankind, and not Sikhs alone or any other particular community.

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