



# MY GURU & I

Sab Sikhan ko hukam hai Guru Manyo Granth  
All Sikhs are commanded to take the Granth as Guru.

Inside are a series of articles by a wide variety of personages  
who have penned in commemoration of the Tercentenary (1708  
- 2008) of the investiture of Guru Granth Sahib as our eternal  
Guide and Teacher.

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# Boundless Scripture of Guru Granth Sahib

The Guru Granth Sahib is a sacred scripture of the world and is the Eternal Guru of the Sikhs. Because it is a scripture suitable of a universal religion, many world class philosophers and holy men consider it a unique treasure and a noble heritage for all humankind. Because, it is the Guru of the Sikhs, its adoration or veneration is an article of faith with the Sikhs. In the year 2004, the world celebrated the Quad-Centennial of the Granth's First Compilation. In 2008, the Sikhs are celebrating the Tercentennial of the Canonization of the Granth as the Sri Guru Granth Sahib.

The sacred verses of Sri Guru Granth Sahib are called Gurbani, which means the Guru's word or the song messages enshrined in Sri Guru Granth Sahib. In Sikhism, the Guru is the 'Wisdom of the Word' and not a human or a book. God revealed the Word through the holy men and women from time to time, and the most recent revelations were entered in the text of Sri Guru Granth Sahib. To the Sikhs, any scripture not included in the Guru Granth is unacceptable as the Guru's word or authority behind their theology, and it is not allowed to be recited, sung, or discussed in Sikh congregations with only exception for the compositions of Guru Gobind Singh, Bhai Gurdas and Bhai Nand Lal. These were considered to elucidate the Guru Granth verses. Those who explain the scripture or teach the doctrines contained in the scripture are respected as teachers, granthi, missionaries, saints or enlightened souls in the Sikh religion.

The Sikhs regard Sri Guru Granth Sahib as a complete, inviolable and final embodiment of the message for them. There is to be no word beyond the Word. And that's how their last guru, Guru Gobind Singh, spoke to the congregation on October 20, 1708 shortly before his ascension.

*“Those who desire to behold the Guru should obey the Granth Sahib. Its contents are the visible body of the Guru.”*

Sri Guru Granth Sahib contains hymns of 36 composers written in twenty-two languages employing a phonetically perfected Gurmukhi script on 1430 pages in 511,874 words, 1,720,345 characters, and 28,534 lines. It has been preserved in its original format since its last completion by Guru Gobind Singh in 1705.

It is well known that religious institutions protect themselves from erosion by enshrining their tenets and doctrines in some tangible form. The best and the most modern form of preserving the doctrinal purity today is the use of printed media and electronic storage. At the time of the Granth's compilation, the Sikh gurus could make use of only handwritten books, and they used this medium wisely. If available, all of the founders and the followers of great religions would have liked to compile one volume of their scriptures, as the Sikh gurus did, to preserve their scriptures for posterity.

Guru Granth was composed in poetry perhaps to both prevent alterations or adulterations, and to reach out to human heart. According to some writers, “its power is the power of the puissant and winged word, and no exegesis or commentary or translation can ever convey

the full beauty of its thought and poetry.” Further, poetry can be left to the culture and the times that follow to best interpret the message.

Thus the Guru Granth incorporates all of the features to place it alongside the world's greatest scriptures. Besides, this is the only scripture which in spite of its interfaith nature was dictated, edited, proof-read, and signed for authenticity by the founders of the faith in their life time. These unique features helped preserve the Sikh religion throughout the numerous onslaughts it endured over the period of five centuries. The Granth proved to be a sufficiently foolproof means for continuously providing safeguard against adulteration and extinction of the Sikh religion for centuries to come.

The fifth Sikh Guru, Guru Arjan Dev first compiled the Guru Granth in 1604 in the city of Amritsar. Guru Gobind Singh prepared the second edition, which he completed at Damdama, a town in the State of Punjab in India in 1705. Since then, his authorized version has been transcribed and printed numerous times; it always conforms to the Damdama edition in every respect. More recently the text in its original font is available electronically on many web sites for every one to have free access. In addition to the edition in original Gurmukhi script, the Guru Granth on the web is available in Hindi, Sindhi, and roman English transliterations. Whereas translations in English, French, Spanish, Punjabi, Hindi, Sindhi and German are already available, those in Thai, Urdu, Hebrew and many Indic languages are in preparation.

The Granth compiled by Guru Arjan contained the hymns of the first five Gurus along with most of the saints and holy men of medieval India and the Far East. He installed this scripture in the Sikhs' central shrine, Hari Mandar, at the City of Golden Temple in 1604. Later, this copy was taken into possession by guru's rivals who would not wish to share it freely with the mainstream Sikhs. Guru Gobind Singh took upon himself to recreate the entire Granth. He dictated to a Sikh scholar, Bhai Mani Singh, all verses he considered revealed including the hymns written after Guru Arjan. It took him nearly five years at Anadpur Sahib and Damdama Sahib to complete this project in 1705. He founded Damdama town to immortalize this occasion.

On October 20, 1708 Guru Gobind Singh gave his final sermon that conferred permanent gurudom on the Damdama version of the Granth. He selected town of Naderh several hundred miles away from Damdama for this event. Since that day, the Granth has come to be known as Sri Guru Granth Sahib.

Sri Guru Granth Sahib contains 5894 hymns. Guru Arjan contributed the largest number of 2216 hymns. Besides the hymns of other Gurus, he also included 937 hymns of fifteen other saints and eleven poet laureates of the Guru's court whose compositions tallied with the gospel of the Sikh faith. Here, the Hindu, the Muslim, the Brahmin, and the untouchable, all meet in the same congregation of holy souls to create a truly universal scripture for our world.

From the linguistic point of view, Sri Guru Granth Sahib is a treasury of the languages of its times that communicated well with every segment of the society. The language principally employed is the language of the saints, evolved during the medieval period. Based upon the local dialects, it was leavened with expressions from Sanskrit, Prakrit, Persian, Arabic, Bengali and Marathi etc. This language allowed for variations and still

enjoyed wide currency in Southeast Asia. Its appeal is found in its directness, energy and resilience. In addition, the Guru designed a phonetically complete gurmukhi font to meet the need of inscribing the multi-linguistic scripture that is also musical.

The poetry of the Granth is in itself a subject worthy of the highest consideration. Music forms the basis of the rhythms and classification of the hymns. They follow a definite metrical system called raags. A raag in Indian classical music means a pattern of melodic notes. This form is not only used to preserve the originality of the composition, as the poetry written in this form is difficult to imitate, but more so to provide the divine experience through the medium of music and the sounds of God's creation. The total number of ragas is 31. The gurus themselves invented some of those. Under each Raag, the hymns are arranged in different meters as Chaupadas and Ashtapadas; long poems include Chhands, Vars, and Bhagat verses.

Another outstanding feature of the Guru Granth is the rescission and beauty of its prosody. Whilst a great deal of it is cast in traditional verse forms (e.g. shlokas and paudis), and could best be understood in the context of the well-known classical raags, several hymns and songs make use of popular folklore and meters (e.g. alahanis, ghoris, chands, etc.). The inner and integral relationship between music and verse has been maintained with scholarly rectitude and concern. The complete musicalization of thought was accomplished in a scientific and scholarly manner so that it makes for the unusually vigorous yet supple discipline of the Granth's own metrics and notations.

The Guru Granth verses are often sung in a process known as kirtan. In this process true meaning is revealed directly to the Surat (consciousness and awareness) through cosmic vibrations. The body's energetic vibrations from our voices bond us to the spiritual light of universal intelligence. As we chant the Granth's verses the universe speaks to us in metaphoric images. The physical body of the singer experiences the essence of each word through the lightening energy in the brain and the calming vibrations in the body, all caused by the sound currents. They keep the mind to stay focused on the Word. They heal the physical body and cleanse inner thoughts. The sound waves of the Gurmat Raags connect the mind, body, and spirit by alignment of the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual entities. They implant in the psyche the basis for both spiritual and mental growth. To see a Sikh congregation chant the sacred hymns in unison is to see massed spiritual energy bubble before your eyes. This is how the ordinary words change into the logos and become auspicious.

Reading of Sri Guru Granth Sahib, known as Gurbani paath, is a sacred rite for every Sikh that permits a connection to the Guru for spiritual guidance. It is more than a simple ritual or a complex scholarly endeavor; intellectual deliberation is engaged to seek wisdom while faith is cultivated in the process to receive the inner light. Reading the rhythmic poetry of Guru Granth is considered by some as healing in itself. Its chant is frequently prescribed to patients for relief of their symptoms and to reduce illnesses. It seems to facilitate understanding of pain and pleasure by "mindfulness" or "being in the moment".

In mystic literature of Guru Granth the appeal of the numinous becomes ineffable, if not inexplicable. And yet the great Sikh scripture is not a knot of metaphysical riddles and

abstract theorizing. For the most part it employs the idiom of the common people, and draws its imagery and metaphors from the home, the street and the work place. The hymns of the Guru Granth show an admirable use of the current figures of speech apart from their metrical richness and sweetness. Imagery was taken from everyday life and common occurrence to simplify subtle thoughts and profound concepts. The Gurus were keen lovers of nature and as such, have written glowing descriptions of panoramic environmental beauty, changes in the times of day, and the changes of seasons to inculcate love for the One Creator. Thus they made Guru Granth poetry an extraordinary breed of divinity, mysticism, immediacy, concreteness and urgency with which it touches the human heart.

One of the greatest glories of the Guru Granth is its all-embracing character. It is a scripture completely free from bias, animus and controversy. Indeed, the uniqueness of the Granth in this respect is all the more astonishing when we think of the obscurantism, factionalism and religious fanaticism of the periods in which it was composed. They were all counterbalanced by inclusion of the songs and verses of a wide diversity of holy men, saints, savants and bards. Of course, their hymns and couplets rendered in their own language and idiom were so dovetailed as to find a complete correspondence with themes or motifs in the compositions of the Sikh Gurus.

The Guru Granth, then, is unique in that it formed the first interfaith and still universal scripture. It is indeed a magnificent compendium of the religious, mystic and metaphysical poetry written or recited between the 12th and 17th centuries in different parts of the Mid-Eastern and Far-Eastern continents. It is also at the same time a reflection of the sociological, economic and political conditions of the day. The satire on the reactionary rulers, the obscurantist clergy, the fake fakirs and the like is uncompromising and telling. In showing the path to spiritual salvation, the Guru Granth does not ignore the secular and creative life of living beings. In addition to its mysticism and spiritual depth, the poetry of the Gurus throws light on their contemporary situations. It lays bare the corruption and degradation of the society of those times and underscores the need of social reform and economic uplift. Guru Granth verses advocate a spiritual soul for their otherwise inhumane administration of the then rulers.

Obviously, the idea of Guru Arjan Dev was to celebrate the diversity in all religions and mystic experiences, and, at the same time, establish the fundamental unity of spirituality and faith through the scripture of Sri Guru Granth Sahib. In this scripture he founded an integral congress of all minds and souls operating on the same spiritual vibration. He elevated the songs of the saints, the Sufis and the bards to the elevation of the logos to salute the power of the Word whatever form it might take to reveal the glory of the One Reality.

The Sikhs in particular and the religious world in general must be congratulated to be the recipients of the unique scripture of Sri Guru Granth Sahib. We, the Sikhs, must be humble and grateful to be chosen by Guru Gobind Singh who assigned us the task of the keepers of the light of Sri Guru Granth Sahib on this Day of October 20, 1708. ❖

# My Guru & I

by Pashaura Singh

This year, we are celebrating the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the investiture of the Sikh scripture as the living embodiment of the Guru.

It is an occasion that offers us an opportunity to reflect on our relationship with the most revered Guru Granth Sahib.

Like any other child born in a Sikh family, my first exposure to Sikhi came from my mother. She sowed the seed of Gurbani (“Guru’s Utterances”) within me in my early childhood.

I was about seven years of age when she instructed me to learn one stanza (*pauri*) of the *Japji Sahib* by heart within a day or two. After learning that stanza, I would recite it to her from memory to receive a reward of one *paisa* (Indian penny) for each stanza I subsequently recited.

It took about two months to memorize the complete *Japji Sahib* and my mother gave me a rupee and a quarter to celebrate the acquisition of my richest possession.

Since then, *Japji Sahib* has remained embedded in my memory.

Following the same process, I learned the other banis of *Nitnem* (“daily routine”). I was simply following the example of my mother who had learned these sacred compositions, including Guru Arjan’s *Sukhmani Sahib*, by heart by the age of thirteen.

She used to compare the memorization of Gurbani by heart with the acquisition and possession of money (*Gurbani kanth paisa ganth*), in that it is readily available for use in every act of reflection, moral deliberation, as well as in times of personal crises. Her living relationship with Gurbani touched my heart, mind and soul in the most intimate ways in my formative years.

Occasionally, I saw my mother reciting *Sukhmani Sahib* even during her sleep.

I was in the seventh grade at Guru Hargobind Khalsa Higher Secondary School, Gurusar Sudhar, when my father died from surgical complications at the Dayanand Hospital, Ludhiana, on 14 April 1962.

At the conclusion of the *Sahaj Paath* (“Reading of the Guru Granth Sahib”) in his memory, Granthi Inder Singh encouraged me to come to the gurdwara every evening. He began tutoring me along with other boys from my village in the reading of the Guru Granth Sahib through the traditional mode of *santhia* (“Lessons”) of Gurbani.

We used to gather in a circle at the gurdwara to recite five to ten pages of a two-volume set of the Sikh scripture in each sitting after Granthiji explained to us the correct enunciation of the passages of Gurbani. We were required to repeat those pages eight times before the next sitting on the following day.

We would absorb and rehearse those lessons until Granthiji was completely satisfied. This process went on for more than six months to complete the reading of the Guru Granth Sahib.

I participated in my first *Akhand Path* (“Unbroken Reading”) to celebrate the birth anniversary of Guru Nanak in November of 1962. It was a joyous occasion when I graduated as an *Akhand Pathi*.

Granthi Inder Singh was a most learned man, with a remarkable command of languages, including Persian and Sanskrit. His understanding of the deeper aspects of Gurbani had a magnetic effect on my learning process. Previously a teacher at a local school, he left his job to become a Granthi at our village gurdwara.

I also learned to perform kirtan at that time. The following year, I stood first in the middle standard examination and won a scholarship. I ascribe my academic success that year to my relationship with the Guru Granth Sahib.

My teachers at school, Master Jaswant Singh, Master Gurbax Singh, Master Gursevak Singh, Master Joginder Singh, and Principal Bhagwant Singh, took a keen interest in my education and always encouraged me to excel in my studies. These individuals were my role models as dedicated Sikhs who taught Sikh history and Gurbani, all the while teaching me Mathematics, English and other subjects.

Our school day always began with a morning assembly prayer at the historical gurdwara commemorating Guru Hargobind’s stay at our village. It consisted of *keertan*, *ardaas* and *vaak* (“Order of the day”) from the Guru Granth Sahib, followed by instructions by the Principal. The environment at the school was so conducive that it strengthened my love for devotional singing of Gurbani.

Most of my school teachers were active associates of Bhai Randhir Singh. They used to perform *rehan sabaai* kirtan (“all night devotional singing”) with him when he was alive. After him, they frequently organized kirtan programs in the neighbouring villages and cities, and I eagerly participated in them.

Our School *jatha* (“group”) was well known in the surrounding areas for performing Sikh weddings (*Anand Karaj*), kirtan programs and Gurparab celebrations on a voluntary basis.

After completing a B.Sc. degree at the G.H.G. Khalsa College, Gurusar Sudhar, I joined the Government College, Ludhiana, to do an MA in Mathematics.

Something here changed the course of my life.

On 10 January 1971, my mother instructed me to start a reading of the Guru Granth Sahib, to complete within a week. I was asked not to go to college during that week. I would read the Guru Granth Sahib and my mother would listen with perfect concentration. In the evening, my mother would tell me about her life experiences and would advise me to focus my attention on the study of the Guru Granth Sahib.

On the final day, before completing my reading of the Guru Granth Sahib, she gave me a number of instructions, including a specific one that no one should be allowed to cry at her death. I just listened to her conversation without even considering that it would be her parting request.

On the morning of Sunday, 17 January 1971, I started devotional singing of *Asa di Var* and then completed the *Bhog* ceremony of the Guru Granth Sahib. After the congregational prayer, I took the *Vaak* (a verse picked at random) and read Guru Ram Das's hymn in *Jaitsiri* mode that ended with the line:

“At Dharamraja's portal, the records of the devotees are torn, says Nanak, and their reckoning is closed” (*dharamrai dari kagadu phare jan nanaku lekha samajha*).

At the time of giving *karah prashad* (“sanctified food made of flour, sugar and butter, and water, and prepared in a large iron dish”) to my mother, I told her that her reckoning is closed. She smiled and bowed her head in gratitude. Then we all shared in the communal meal of *langar*. My mother enquired from me whether everyone had eaten.

My friends came to seek her blessings as they left, and I went outside to see them off.

The moment I left her, she called my sister-in-law and bade her final greeting (“*Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa/ Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh*”) and passed away.

We started doing *kirtan* again and urged everyone not to cry at all, but instead to celebrate the gift of her life. This was the moment when I realized the power and authority of the divine Word (*Vaak*) taken from the Guru Granth Sahib.

My fatherly teacher, Master Jaswant Singh, took me to Patiala to meet with Professor Harbans Singh, the editor-in-chief of the celebrated *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*. He was Masterji's student at Khalsa School Muktsar and held him in great regard.

Prof. Harbans Singh inspired me to join Guru Nanak Institute, Gurmat College, at Patiala in 1971 to pursue my interest in the area of Sikh Studies.

The two years spent at that premier institution constituted the most productive period of my intellectual life. I had the rare opportunity to listen to the views of such distinguished scholars as Dr. Taran Singh, Dr. Ganda Singh, Principal Satbir Singh, Professor Sahib Singh, Giani Lal Singh, Professor Piara Singh Padam, Professor Gurbachan Singh Talib, Dr. Avtar Singh, including some visiting Professors of Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist and Christian traditions.

They all provided different approaches to study the various dimensions of the Sikh scripture. At no point did I ever feel that my personal relationship with the Guru Granth Sahib was in jeopardy. Rather, each new perspective added to my close relationship with my Guru.

At Gurmat College, we frequently listened to the discourses of Sant Gurmukh Singh

of Patiala in rustic Punjabi. In one of his sermons, he made the distinction between two approaches of reading the Sikh scripture; one with just reading it as a sacred book (*Guru Granth Sahib* “*nu parrhna*”) and the other was reading “from” the Guru (*Guru Granth Sahib* “*ton parrhna*”).

Accordingly, the first approach builds intellectual pride (*haumai*) while the second one makes one humble. He made the point that the real understanding of Gurbani could take place only when we approached it with complete faith in it as the living embodiment of the Guru.

Let me conclude this piece with my ongoing relationship with my Guru.

Each day, I record the Vaak of the Guru Granth Sahib in my journal and try to understand the meaning of life in its light. Often, it provides a divine clue to look at the trials and tribulations of life with equanimity.

After listening to the Vaak from the Darbar Sahib, I go for my morning walk and complete my daily routine of banis (*Nitnem*) from memory. I have always felt that the Divine Word (Shabad) is an intimate companion in my heart, mind and soul.

This is the spiritual treasure that I inherited from my mother, and this is the inexhaustible wealth that I have already passed on to my children. I have frequently heard the voice of the Eternal Guru, speaking directly to me when I needed the guidance at moments of personal crises.

When I listen to my daughter performing kirtan in the original ragas of the Guru Granth Sahib, accompanied by her brother on tabla, I bow my head in gratitude. This way, I pay my tribute to my Beloved Guru for the countless blessings that I have received in my life.

Indeed, an active engagement with the Divine Word amounts to a one-on-one conversation with the Guru. This spiritual dialogue is the only sure means to self-discovery.

I see the Guru Granth Sahib as the clearest mirror through which we see our “true self”, the core of our being.

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# The Journey Together

by I.J. Singh

Let me tell you a story! How a book, too voluminous to prop up in bed to read, written in languages that I barely understood, became, for me, first an object of admiration, and then adoration and veneration.

I must have been slow!

For as long as I can remember, my father's take on our religion - Sikhi - was primarily analytical. My mother, on the other hand, encountered Sikhi as something to be experienced, felt and lived, rather than to be analyzed and parsed.

Consequently, our home had books galore on Sikhs and Sikhism. My father had esoteric stuff on history. He had the existing, and barely passable translations of Gurbani, as well some excellent stuff on Sikhi by Sir Jogendra Singh, Teja Singh, Kahn Singh (Nabha), Duncan Greenlees and C.F. Andrews, Max McAuliffe, even some by the widely derided Ernest Trumpp.

My mother's collection, too, was eclectic, but it was almost entirely in Punjabi and weighted to favor the works of Bhai Vir Singh, of which we had a complete and growing collection.

Both my parents were fond of classical Indian music and keertan; I, too, had inherited a little of the gene. I had learned a little of Sikhism, largely by osmosis, as most Sikhs in India did then, and perhaps still do. My way of finding a middle ground between the approaches to Sikhi of my father and my mother was to largely ignore both.

So when I came to this country, almost half a century ago, I was not inimical to Sikhi; I just didn't know much about it and perhaps cared a little less. My interest in it developed as a direct result of living for many years where there was almost no other Sikh presence near me, and because when non-Sikhs asked me questions, I had little or nothing to say that made sense to me, much less to others.

Yet, unknown to me but deep within, the aura at home had sowed the dormant seed

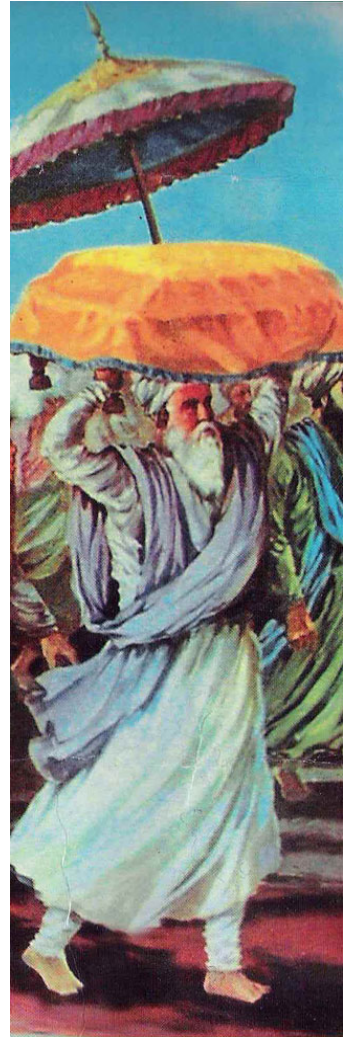


Image depict the 1604 Carried by Baba Buddha ... procession taking the Adi Granth into the then new Harmandar for the first time.

of Sikhi.

When I came to this country, I had brought along a few books on Sikhi. Some years later, my father sent me the UNESCO publication, *Sacred Writings of the Sikhs*. It was but a brief selection, largely, but not entirely, from the Guru Granth; but it was an eye-opener, and remains one, forty years later.

I still find it the best translation, bar none, that captures the magic of Gurbani and its poetry, even though the language is now somewhat arcane.

In 1974, my parents came to visit us. By that time, I had developed an embryonic, but serious, interest in Sikhism. My mother brought with her a small portable rescension of the Guru Granth.

She needed the appropriate ambience for it and not much was available in the marketplace. So I fabricated a small *palki* in plexiglas for the Guru Granth. The traditional *palki* was formed either in wood or in brass. Mine was thus extremely low-tech and not at all ornate, but it was ultramodern - the only one of its kind as far as I knew.

When, a few months later, the time came for my parents to return to India, and my mother started packing the Guru Granth, I realized how used I had become to listening to it, and that I would sorely miss it when it was gone.

She said a little over 350 pages remained in her reading of the Guru Granth that she had started on arriving here. Despite her protestations that I couldn't even read the script, I promised her that I would finish the reading if she would leave it here with me.

She did, but it took me a good few years to fulfill my promise.

In order for my reading not to become pointless prattling, it demanded a methodical semi-serious pursuit of both the language and the content of Guru Granth through the eight-volume translation of it by Manmohan Singh - parts of it had just appeared by then.

It presented on each page a column of the original Gurbani, a second column of



With Guru Arjan...

translation in hackneyed but serviceable English, and a third column of Punjabi translation.

Some years later, I graduated to the four-volume *Shabdarth* that only presented translations in Punjabi of difficult words as well as some explanations of esoteric mythological and historical information.

I then acquired the English translations of Gopal Singh, Trilochan Singh and Gurbachan Singh Talib, as they became available.

And, with the passage of time, I learned to love the exegeses of Professor Sahib Singh and Bhai Vir Singh, the mysticism of Professor Puran Singh, the rigorous intellect of Kapur Singh, as also the intricate Gurbani-laced style of Professor Darshan Singh, among others.

I always had more than a passing interest in Indian classical music.

The keertan of Bhai Avtar Singh, Bhai Mohan Singh and their ilk, found in me an avid fan. This was, of course, years before recordings and CD's were widely available. Certainly, it was a lifetime before there was anything called the Internet with its freewheeling discussions and sites like Sikhi-to-the-Max, Kulbir Singh Thind's monumental work that provided the whole Guru Granth on a single CD with research tools, and the availability of Gurmukhi fonts, Sikh history, culture, music, and a plethora of research tools and sites, as well.

Now that I look back, I was driven, more than anything else, by the fact that in North America I lived in an entirely non-Sikh milieu, and by the innumerable invitations to churches, synagogues and Bible study groups that came my way.

There, I found that I knew almost nothing about the tradition that I called my own, and now, years later, has come to define me. Sometimes the experiences were raw, even painful, but as they say, "No pain, no gain". I reckon that, among other things, this is how I came to terms with the meaning of the line from Guru Granth that goes: "*Dukh daroo sukh roag bhayaa*".

My wife at that time was a non-Sikh, and our marriage didn't last. Some years later, I married a Sikh woman from Delhi who was visiting the States. I was overjoyed that she could recall from memory so many lines of Gurbani, and was equally dismayed days after the wedding that she could not read the Gurmukhi script.

But by then, however, this was not an insurmountable hurdle. She learned to read the Guru Granth in days where it had taken me months and years.

Sometimes I wonder if I would have developed the interest in Guru Granth had I lived much or all of my life within the cocoon of a Sikh community in India. Perhaps one does not value something until he has been deprived of it.

I wish I could tell you the time and date of my epiphany. There was no "Aha" moment. But there was a magical process when I realized that Guru Granth speaks

of a reality that the senses cannot perceive and the intellect cannot fathom, but with which our inner self can commune. This reality transcends anything what science and technology can measure.

If one does enough of anything, one then begins to believe in it and then it generates its own meaning. The book is now no longer just a Granth. In becoming the Guru, it defines me and directs my life. To kneel in its presence, to bow to it is a natural reflex now, as basic as breathing or eating.

Guru Granth is both timeless and universal, so it speaks to me today as it did to countless Sikhs centuries ago. It deliberately shies away from historical events. It, also, absolutely refrains from dispensing specific edicts on particular moral choices, such as abortion, reproductive rights or other bioethical issues.

The idea is not a God who micromanages our existence. In life, many dilemmas will test us and new issues of life and death will demand our attention. Our response will evolve with time and technology in a changing world.

Guru Granth does not provide me a sin quotient for every infraction committed or contemplated. It gives me not cut-and-dried solutions as in a catechism or an easily-swallowed pill, but an ethical framework rooted in spiritual values within which to navigate my way.

Some may think this to be a weakness - a chink in the teaching. I find it our strength because it demands responsibility and accountability from each of us.

And now I see that *darshan* of Guru Granth really means engagement with the “Word” therein, and then it has to be accosted by the dual lenses of faith and reason; either lens alone is insufficient. “*Ditthay mukt na hovayee jicchar sabd na(n) karay vicchar*“ [GGS, p 594].

Even though the best prayer is honest self-effort, the results are pure grace (*nadar*), like manna from heaven.

Faith, to some, is a balm; to others it is a placebo. In the final analysis, to me it is embracing the uncertainty that is life, while knowing in the gut a visceral universal



With pomp...

presence and oneness. This, then, becomes walking in the shadow of God, or a life in “*hukam*”.

Many times, I marvel at the powerful imagery and the longing of the heart in the romantic poetry of Guru Arjan when he reaches out to the Infinite within each of us with: *Khamb vikaandrey jay lahaan q(h)inna saveen tole, tan jarayee(n) aapnay(n) lahaa(n) so sajjan ttoal*” [GGS, p 1426].

“If wings were sold in the marketplace, I would buy them equal to my weight, attach them to my body and soar in search of my soul mate”.

And then he speaks of this beloved who rules the hearts; whose nearness ennoble us:

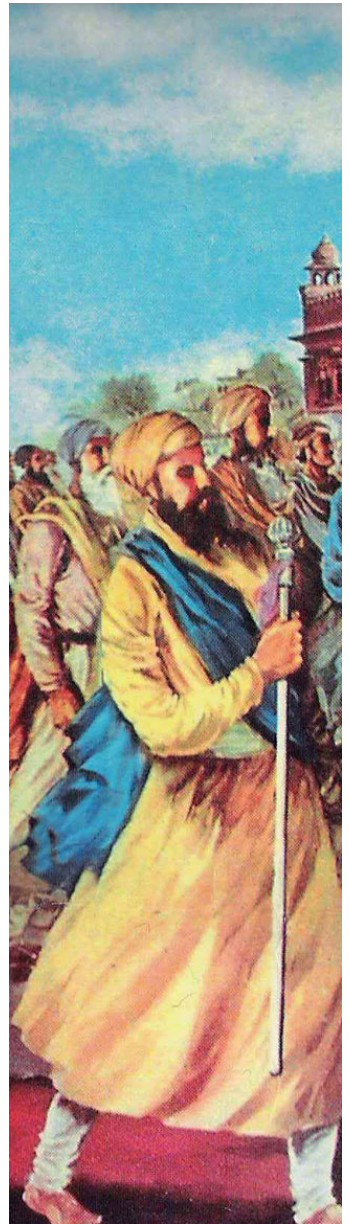
*Sajjan saccha patsah ... jis pass baithyaan soheeye ...*

His longing for a reality greater than the self brings tears to the eyes.

To me, Guru Granth has moral clarity and the vocabulary to express it without maudlin oversimplification or an iota of self-righteous hubris. It gives my life an inner satisfaction, reverence, reason, faith as well as hope, and an unmistakable calmness in action.

My faith and engagement with the Guru in the Granth seem at best semipiternal - with a beginning, but no end. Guru Granth is now inseparably integrated into everything I think, I do or feel, at work or at play.

Now, the most precious times are those when, for a trice or for the day, a word or a phrase from the Guru Granth reverberates and resonates within and then, time stands still. ❖



With ceremony...

# My Guru's Chardi Kalaa

by Ek Ong Kaar Kaur Khalsa

I remember when I first left home for college.

The insecurity of making new friends. The longing for connection. Searching to tell a story about myself that would capture people's interest, create the relationships. Age eighteen, wandering through the dorms, knowing no one, seeking to invent an identity different from what I had as a child - an identity that would work in this boundless and unknown new life.

Slowly, over time, the conversations began. And I remember that so many people found connections with each other, not necessarily by what they loved, or enjoyed; but by sharing their pain with one another. What they had experienced as a child. What injustices they felt in their own lives, and in the world.

Through the months and years, some bonds formed from shared interest. But other bonds formed from the opposite - from what people felt angry about. What they rebelled against. What they wanted to see altered in themselves or in society.

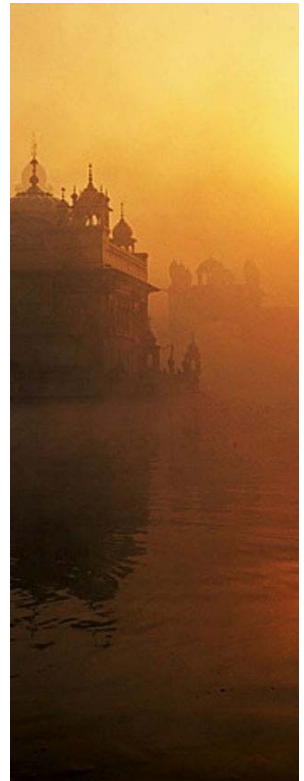
A few years later, a window began to open up inside of me.

A small little glimmer of a voice said, "It is not my wounds that make me beautiful". I began to resist my own self-definition that was rooted in painful memories of the past, or anger at the state of the world. I could feel something else inside - something that didn't need any of that anger or pain - to be worthy, to be special, to be strong, to have friends and create connection.

There was another Identity deep within - pure, happy and light.

Eventually, the *Shabad Guru* came into my life. And this feeling of defining myself by my inner negative feelings versus defining myself by my inner positive Light took on a whole new dimension.

What I have found by meditating on the *Shabad Guru* as manifested in the Guru Granth Sahib is that the Guru does



not relate to the negative at all. In fact, there's been many a time when I've come across a line and said to myself, "The Guru can't say that, can He?"

The Guru's sayings totally challenge the way I think about the world.

A couple of examples:

The one whose touch pollutes the world,  
Even he knows Your mercy.

[Ravdas, GGS, p 1106]

*So many are  
Continually beaten down  
By endless pain and hunger.  
Even these  
Are your Gifts to us,  
O Great Giver.*

[Guru Nanak, Japji: 25]

*This poisonous world  
That you behold  
Is really simply  
The Divine  
In form.*

[Guru Amar Das, Anand: 36]

In my journey since my college days, I have been able to redefine "me" to myself in much more positive terms. But the teachings of the *Shabad Guru* challenge me to go even further.

The *Shabad Guru* asks me to see the positive aspect of every and any situation. That no matter how negative it may appear or seem on the surface, the Light of the Divine is at the heart of it. The hand of the Creator is guiding it. It has purpose beyond what my mind can know or imagine.

We see a lot of ugliness in life. We see a lot of pain. And what happens is that when we see this ugliness, somehow our mind decides to live there. To wallow in it. To think that happiness, peace, and bliss rests outside of ourselves. We complain bitterly, or feel victimized when the physical environment does not act the way we want. Or worse - when the environment harms us.

But the Guru's wisdom is a defense against that. The Guru's words ask us to enter into a direct, transcendent experience that the Divine lives in the essence of all things. And whatever is happening is happening by the hand of the One, which





"Singing the Guru Shabad",  
from a photo by  
Gurumustuk Singh.

guides all and does all. It's a difference of horizon. The mind can have a very finite, limited horizon. This moment. This lifetime. What I want. What I don't want. Constantly measuring every person and event against an idealized fantasy of what would serve "me".

Or the mind can have an infinite horizon. One that sees this life in the context of a vaster, much larger play. One that sees all things, including oneself, being carried along. Even the ugliest, most terrible, awful experiences can be re-framed in a positive way.

That is what the power of the *Shabad* gives, so that the mind can feel genuinely positive even in the face of the worst situations. That is victory. That is Fateh! And that is a human life worth living.

So, as we celebrate the 300<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Guru Gaddi, we learn and re-learn to appreciate the Guru's message of Chardhi Kalaa!

May the songs of Guru Granth Sahib transform our thoughts so that we may leave every negative feeling behind and bask in the bliss. ❖

# Friends & Lovers

by Sanmeet Kaur

Ours is an unending love story.

It transcends worldly measures of time and distance,  
and exists beyond births and deaths.

My words cannot encompass the presence of my Guru.

Yet His Word is my lifeline.

I have encountered Him in all conventional forms; my  
forehead has touched His Threshold many a time -  
proof that my head ... nay, my heart, mind and soul ...  
all belong only to Him.

I struggle with this reality every day.

Yet He graces my life through many forms - father,  
mother, brother, sister, friend, stranger, husband,  
daughter...

He takes on many roles in my life - shield, staff, pillow,  
mirror...

I am  
His bride,  
His beggar,  
His daughter,  
His mother,  
His work-in-progress,  
His Sikh.

He constantly remains  
My Friend and Lover! ❖



# ᳚ Spiral Journey

by Ravinder Singh Taneja

Spiritual journeys are never ending, and rarely progress in a straight line. They are more like a meandering spiral into the core of one's being, bringing us back to the same spot again and again, only to reveal a deeper shade and meaning of the Truth that is ever present. The Truth is already homogenized in us, much like butter in milk and flint in wood. It takes constant "churning" to draw it out.

Such, indeed, has been my journey with the Guru - so far.

My first awareness of Sikhi came as a seven-year-old listening to my father trace the family history and learning that one of our ancestors became a Khalsa during the time of Guru Gobind Singh, quite possibly at the Baisakhi of 1699. Although I cannot vouch for the accuracy of this story, it made a powerful impression on me. The connection to the 10<sup>th</sup> Master was a special source of pride.



In Singapore, where I spent my early childhood, Sunday Gurdwara was a weekly ritual. We kids had to sit through Punjabi class, which at the time felt like undeserved punishment. But the pain of having to endure *oorraahs* and *airraahs* was considerably eased by the prospect of *jalebis* during *langar* and the afternoon at the beach that would follow.

Although I did not pay much attention in class, the constant repetition (*muhamni*) of the alphabet must have made an impression on my brain somewhere. Years later, this rudimentary knowledge of the Punjabi alphabet enabled me to teach myself Gurmukhi, opening the door to the many-splendoured and wondrous world of Gurbani.

It was not until I came to Delhi to live with my grandparents that I had my first encounter with Sikhi which came through an accidental meeting with Sant Sujan Singh, a well known exponent of *kirtan* and *katha*. He possessed a mellifluous and forceful voice and performed kirtan accompanied by a large *jatha* playing on traditional instruments like the *dilruba* in a style that was a unique blend of classical, qawwali and folk elements. The *sangat* sang along. Kirtan was interspersed by eloquent and moving sermons on Sikh teachings and the life of the Gurus - delivered in beautifully spoken, chaste Punjabi.

I was barely fourteen, impressionable, and becoming vaguely conscious of an inner yearning. Sant ji and his *jatha* was a captivating presence in their *gol puggs* (round turbans) and *cholias* (robes). The ambience of the *sangat* just blew me away and I became a regular - and eager - participant in the *sangat*. This association lasted until Sant ji's death a couple of years later in 1970.

I did not know this then, but much of what I absorbed - Sikh ideology, belief and practice - had strong *Nirmala* antecedents that could be traced to Sant ji's relationship with his mentor, Baba Nand Singh ji, better known as the founder of the Nanaksar movement. Baba ji - as he was always referred to - was a product of *Nirmala Akharas*, having spent time under the tutelage of *Nirmala sants* like Baba Wadhawa Singh and Baba Harnam Singh Buchowale.

The association with Sant Sujan Singh was transforming. I became a practicing Sikh, arising early, doing my *nitnem* and *simran* before heading off to school. At every opportunity, I would show up at his establishment in Karol Bagh for an opportunity to chat with him. From him, I imbibed a lifelong love for kirtan, and an intensely devotional approach to Sikhi. Above all, he connected me to Baba Nand Singh ji in a mystical relationship that remains central to my life.

When I ponder over how blessed I am to own Nanak as Guru, I cannot but help thinking of Sant Sujan Singh and Baba Nand Singh ji as links in that spiritual lineage.

At the same time, my schooling in Delhi and later in America (where I arrived in 1976) exerted a different - and opposite - pull on me. Reason became the altar of worship and questioning the mode of inquiry. The influence of Western thought and philosophy encouraged me to be audacious, to question authority, to free myself of self-imposed immaturity.

The clash of Faith and Reason led me into a blind alley for years to come, causing me considerable angst. To make matters worse, there was no *sangat* around me, making it easier to drift away from the moorings of the traditional Sikhi I had learnt in Delhi.

I shed my Sikh identity and dropped the daily *Nitnem* regimen.

Marriage in 1983 was the turning point and the start of my journey back.

Unlike me, my wife grew up in a home where all the *banis* had to be committed to memory and the *Japji* recited as the minimum daily requirement. Her mother would withhold breakfast until this requirement was met by all the children.

My wife brought with her a *BiR* of the *Guru Granth Sahib* which she installed in the only bedroom in our apartment. Sleeping on a raised surface (bed) in the presence of the *Guru Granth Sahib* was unthinkable to her, so she slept on the floor instead. My suggestion that the *Guru* would not be offended if she slept on the bed was met



Sketch of Guru Nanak, by Bobby Singh Sandhu.

with a scowl.

I might add that my wife is a devout Sikh, very rooted in the Punjab. She is also very blunt and will call a spade a bloody shovel. She was not impressed by my “western” mode of thinking and put me on notice, telling me in no uncertain terms that I needed to show the right measure of respect to the Guru Granth Sahib. She also made it clear that I had gone astray and needed to mend my ways. (“*bandeh baNo!*”). That was shorthand for telling me to adopt the Sikh identity again. After years of freewheeling, that message was shock therapy.

But her devotion also rekindled feelings that had gone dormant. Listening to her read bani every day inspired me. With her help, I began to learn Gurmukhi and started a daily practice of reading.

That was twenty-five years ago.

Learning to read Gurbani was no ordinary process. The language was very foreign to me, quite unlike the colloquial Punjabi I was used to. The idiom, rooted as it is in the agricultural landscape of the Punjab, was just as unfamiliar. The correct enunciation (*ucharan*) was also a challenge.

I relied (still do) on commentaries (*santhiyas*) in Punjabi, English translations, and any recorded katha I could lay my hands on. In order to get the articulation right, I listened to recorded readings of Gurbani. Gradually, I came to understand the text (*akhri arth*).

Gurbani beckons me, like a lover, to look beyond text into the mystical meaning hidden behind the words; to go past the literal to the allegorical interpretation of bani. The Guru’s poetic expressions and captivating melody compels me to read - and re-read - the text over and over again, in an effort to find the “key” or the spiritual sense (*antreev bhav*). Yet with every reading, something remains unsaid, making me conscious of the transcendence and mystery of Waheguru.

Sounding the words through different modulations and speed of reading, with pauses at the prescribed place and identifying with the different moods transports me out of myself to an experience that is timeless (*Ekstasis*). The reverberation connects me to the Divine through the medium of “Nanak, the Guru”, because, by his own admission, these words were spoken to him by God (*Jaisee me aaveh khasam ki bani*). It leaves me with a heightened sense of awe and wonder (*vismaad*).

My engagement with the Guru is devotional, exegetic and mystical. Mysterious are the ways of the Guru.

Somewhere along the way, I began to feel inside of me the pull of the Khalsa Rehat and the desire to embrace it. I had sported a “clean shaven” look for close to twenty years, but being mistaken for a non-Sikh (Hindu, Hispanic or Arab) or called *lalaji* by the hard core Khalsa branch of my family (and I do have a Hindi-speaking

branch as well) had always irked me. The trauma of Operation Bluestar made me want to assert my identity. But I did not act on those feelings.

But now, through some magic, a mystical pull and an inner voice that only grew stronger, urged me to become a Khalsa. Towards the end of 1995, another happenstance and chance meeting provided the impetus to make the transition.

One evening in December 1995, I found myself seated across from a recognizable Sikh on a commuter train in New York, both of us heading home to Long Island. During the conversation that ensued, I learnt that he had recently published a book on Sikhi, a collection of essays entitled *Sikhs and Sikhism: A View with a Bias*.

I entertained a rather dim view of most Sikh writers in English. I felt that they were, for the most part, self-styled scholars (usually retired from other professions) of Sikhi, writing sloppy and archaic English and interpreting Sikhi in an idiom that made no sense and connection to contemporary life. I suspected this book to be from the same genre. My response, as I recall, was unnecessarily snooty.

But Dr. I. J. Singh, gentleman that he is, graciously invited me over for a cup of tea, handed me a copy of his book, and asked me to write a review. Perhaps it was his way of telling me that if you think Sikhs can't write English, how about showing us what you can do!

This was a turning point and the start of a friendship that I cherish.

Dr. Singh was the catalyst I needed to pull the trigger on becoming a Khalsa. He nudged me, ever so gently, to move in that direction. I remember surprising him by becoming a Khalsa on Baisakhi day, 1996. He was expecting the conversion to happen, but not with the alacrity I showed.

Dr. Singh also introduced me to writing. By inviting me to collaborate with him on essays and book reviews, he helped open a new creative dimension in my life. For a while, I hesitated, thinking that it was a bit presumptuous of me to write about Gurbani, especially when I was critical of other non-scholars. Nor did I know that I could string a sentence together. But writing, like reading and *vichaar*, is another way of creating meaning.

An authentic Sikh life is truly a lifelong apprenticeship to the Guru. This journey is best described by the Guru himself in Japji Sahib: it is an alchemic process of self-transformation where psychological lead (*manmukh*) is converted to spiritual gold (*gurmukh*).

In this process, the Guru is indeed the Philosopher's Stone (*paras*). ❖



"Sangat", from photo by Bhupinder Singh and Gurvinder Kaur.

# Mind Voices

by Balbinder Singh Bhogal

When I talk to my mind, I talk to myself through others.

I thought I'd share some of the things I say to myself as the things others say to me.

The voice of a Sikh Guru does not merely receive the power of the Voice of God in *baanii* (mysticism), but this revealed voice is also the voice of speaking truth to power (politics). It is not quietist. As Guru Nanak speaks against Babur, so does Guru Gobind Singh speak against Aurangzeb. The Sikh Guru is not meek and mild, he is humble and just - but in a way that is as extraordinary as it is "natural".

If, then, revelation is as much about *gaining* a voice as it is *receiving* a voice, then the writing of my Guru, the Guru Granth Sahib is intimately connected to a *politico-mystical* subjectivity deep within me yet to be born.

If a Gurmukh is not only facing-the-Guru but becoming faceless, then walking the path of Sikhi is as much a path of self-discovery than it is a following of the Gurus. I walk to the Guru, walking backwards into myself. But becoming faceless means there is no inside nor outside. The Name is within and without. I also walk to the Guru when I walk with the true *sangat* in the world of suffering and justice.

I walk truth when I enter the event of each moment without I.

If God and *haumai* are mutually exclusive when it comes to love, then meeting my Guru demands the death of my ego; uniting with the Guru is as much a loss of a self I have grown addicted to as it is meeting a Being within my being that I have overlooked and neglected.

If walking in His will, as it is written, is a code beyond formulation (since it involves the uncountable details of everyday life, in complex relations to all beings and things, a code that may be unveiled in any and every lived moment, then I cannot know how to walk it. Walking itself becomes a metaphor. Being and becoming speak more to the reality of such a "walking". I move without moving; to be without being - this is not Shakespeare's dualistic either-or choice.

*Sahaj* is not "going with the flow". Nor is *Sahaj* flow itself; it is an unforeseen falling, not knowing when the landing will arrive. The ego trips and falls, for there are always things the ego cannot see nor foresee. That free fall is usually arrested immediately. Too much freedom is hell for the ego. How to accustom the ego to visit this hell more?



One cannot set out to *achieve* this fall by the ego, since the ego is addicted to calculation and willful behavior. Nor can one be care-free, for so long as the ego maintains centre-stage, being carefree slips into being careless. From one extreme of stubborn self-will to the other of a laissez-faire acquiescence is the world of *haumai* bound: walking His Will is not a matter of standing by a self-assertion, nor is it letting things be. Walking in His Will is often a mist of love, where visibility is rare but the presence of soft rain invigorates as it soothes.

That mist is a sacred cloud of unknowing in which The Unpredictable and Unexpected circle. To enter the mist - one has to be willing to sacrifice all things, objects, but most difficult of all, ideas - especially about who one thinks one is. Sikhi is not a rulebook of clear and distinct ideas yielding black-and-white injunctions, but a song that enraptures and transports one into a mist of love and insight.

One cannot be rigid and absolutist, for God does not obey human desire. No. There is a surprise essential to life, a mist that blinds. Have you noticed it?

*Sahaj* is by accident. The beatific moment comes to you despite your practice, it does not come as the culmination of any practice: It finds you, you do not find It. One trips. And then we see that tripping, that slipping, that fall as instigated by the hand of God. There was something I kept overlooking, until someone or something made me slip. Luckily, I did not curse nor judge, but entered the moment of the fall without thought. Then I saw something unexpected.

*Then* I saw something unexpected. And tears roll down my face.

Like in a dream.

Little wonder dreams are more real than life - we have them in a dark mist of surprise.

I cannot fall by pretending to slip over, for slipping over stops the habituated mind and thus falling cannot be consciously enacted, for one cannot be consciously unconscious. The fall is unpredictable. The out of the blue is out of God. The mist truly blinds the ego and humbles it.

Tripping out of the ego is not something the ego knows how to do. In fact it is the only knowledge the ego will not and cannot master nor entertain - the ego's clumsy attempt fashioning a fall is tripping in the drug sense - which takes us on a false journey only to return us two steps behind where we started, burnt out. *We need the Guru to surprise us out of our conscious minds through the unpredictable events that make up our lives.*

That's why the Guru does not say this is the truth listen to me, but rather, just mind your step and listen - be awake when you fall, for all beings fall, but few listen without imposing fearful judgments. Absorb the trip and where it takes you: listen to what life is telling you, and you will be shown a world you had not thought



possible. But the surprises in dreams, as those rare events in life, are hard to interpret. Interpretation requires maturity of character and a skill that cannot be taught apart from the events of everyday life.

When the accident is listened to without judgment then the slip is fortuitous - it yields a treasure. But this treasure is often contrary to what the ego imagines as treasure; hard to see a treasure in a broken leg, in a broken spine, in a death. Hard indeed. The ego has great difficulty with failure, violence and suffering, needs someone to make the enemy, someone to blame and crucify. Secularism, rationalism are such comfortable blankets for the ego - the trouble is they often come with disguised resentments which do not resolve inner doubt and pain, for blaming the other for one's own myopia never really satisfies.

But when the fall is entered without thought then the Accident becomes the Voice of the Guru.

The Guru arrests the *haumai*-mind through the event of a fall the ego cannot predict.

The Guru, the Event are before choice arises.

The Word is the surprising turn of events that we cannot write ourselves.

The events I did and did not listen to - that is the backbone to my life. How many events I completely missed, how many I miss-interpreted and how many I half-interpreted. And how odd that when an interpretation is insightful and true, it rarely yields a law beyond the context of one's own life-world.

We move in an unknowable but oddly familiar narrative written by our past actions (*karam*) "and" the hand of God (*nadar*). When we look forward, we see only what the ego can imagine (desire). When we look back, we see the unimaginable events of our life, the writing of a mysterious Hand, a great unpredictable narrative that is utterly remarkable, lest we judge and resent the cards dealt us.

But how not to resent our fates? Even so, is it not telling that so many when asked to look back reply "I wouldn't change a thing"?

If His ways, or in short, life, cannot be calculated, then reason is a severely limited tool to forge truth, a small torch in the mist of life. If He cannot be counted and His ways, our events, are beyond rational structure, then I am, at root, a story that cannot be told, a stranger to myself that I can never name. Can I rest in the Unknown and Unknowable, the Incalculable? Can reason countenance the unpredictable as a higher principle? Can the ego come to terms with not knowing? Can I will the death of my own ego without committing suicide? Can the self forget itself by an act of will? Can an ego escape Life's law (*hukam*)?

How, then, to be true?

How to break the Wall of Falsehood?

How to fall freely and listen?

How to enter each moment as an Event of unforeseeable possibility?

How to enter the mist?

Walk in His Will as it is Written. If the unwritable is written, then we can have some access to His Ways. We have the pages of an untellable and unfinishable string of experiences from and within and about the Mist. We're caught and lost somewhere in the middle, always in the middle of the Guru Granth Sahib - a book that has only a middle.

What if the Guru Granth Sahib is such a Book of Mist? Unfinishable. Deep beyond measure - where page 1 is not page 1 and page 1430 is not 1430? What if His Word does not live in words comfortably? What if the Word is too big to be told in words? What if His Name is the World but otherwise - the World we cannot measure and grasp? What kind of world is it when one cannot name it?

Is the world as Name then pure imagination? Where is the Guru talking to me from if not on my reciting and singing tongue? How does the Guru speak to me if not through my own mind? Which voices of my mind are the Guru's? What is the nature of this mist?

What if the Mind is what calculates? Then the mind is that which needs to be sacrificed to hear the Word Name God. One has to leave the mind at the door of the mist - but the entrance is hidden - hidden in the surprise of the event of the everyday - hidden in the quality of one's engagement.

How to listen without the mind?

Like a child, better still, an animal.

The animal, the plant, the elemental is the Mist in raw beauty.

How to love? What to love? Who to love?

Love the Creation as the miraculous work of the Creator, like a fish "loves" the water: without water a fish cannot be, nor is water an object to the fish that it admires or can have likes or dislikes about; *the sufferings and challenges that come as the events of our lives are the very stuff that breath life into our lungs*. Life is

suffering and so much more.

The Khalsa is that being that thrives on this recognition: Life is Death, Live to Die! The very things that most of us try to avoid are the very things that would give us life. How many run after happiness and become grey with abundance of material wealth, and those that suffer daily poverty still share their food, color and conviviality.

Loving life for what it is (storm and calm sea) is not a matter of acceptance, it is not an ideology, nor a thought-system: it involves a severely dashed and broken heart wherein dwells only the love of a fish gasping for water: water is not an object; water is life. God is not a choice; God is the event of renewal.

*O mind, love the Lord, as the lotus loves the water.*

*Tossed about by the waves, it still blossoms with love.*

*In the water, the creatures are created; outside of the water they die.*

[Sri Rag, Guru Nanak]

Love God without thought. Feel.

What if the ego that claims respect, only speaks for the body? What about the body of the Name? The body of the Word? The Body of the Guru? The body of the Fish, the Animal, the Child? To remember the elemental body. The body that feels, senses, absorbs.

If I am not (only) my body, for I have emotions, and I am not only my emotions for I have a mind, and I am not only my mind for I have a soul, and I am not only a soul for I am inseparable from That which is, for there is no other nor second (*avar-na-duja*), then I am not what I think I am and can never be what I think I am. Does this not then make me a permanent stranger to myself?

But this strangeness within me is blissful, fearless, formless, and sovereign - it permeates the animal kingdom in subconscious state. And it is only strange from the perspective of the wounded and dying ego, otherwise it is home. I want to be at home with the animal that I am. I am mystery unfathomable.

If my nature truly is without limit then I am possibility, I am life, I am the force of Nature. I am strength. I am beauty. I am carefree. I am unmovable like a mountain and shapeless as water. I am elemental. I am unimaginable. I am mist. I am beyond morality. I am beyond the human. I am dedicated to being without question. I am a sublime animal - never walking out of line with Natural Law, the writing of Nature, the Body of God functioning unpredictably.

How to recover the animal I already am?



Get the ego to sing of Him, so much so that when the singing no longer has a singer, there is only the song, then I return to the song, the universe in all its petals sings, because singing has no audience, for singing *is* life. The leaf only sings. The animal only sings. Sky, sea, land sing - nature, creation is a singing.

Have I sung this song yet, the song that Guru Nanak and others sang without thought, without desire to represent some truth? This song that is not an argument but the natural sound of form, that comes freely and touches those capable of hearing, the song that is not sung by a singer, but comes as a Gift to all, like the mist? And has this authorless song evaporated my human self? No.

But do I believe it can? Yes.

Why? Because I know when I am loving I sing, and I disappear momentarily.... and the world blossoms from the dew of my engagement....



Balbinder Singh.



This is how I've been talking to myself through others lately. It will change as relations of love always change. I'd like to read, sing, recite a little more of these middle pages of my life, of this dimension-less writing, this incalculable book of unfinishable *rasa* and mist, my elemental Guru.

My guru and I are not two in the event of life's unpredictable moments - we meet in the mist of surprise, for my Master is perpetually new, and ever and ever the Giver.

*Saahibu meraa niita navaa sadaa sadaa daataaru. GGS:660,  
Dhanaasarii M1, 1.1*

[Dr. Balbinder Singh Bhogal is Associate Professor in Religion and holder of the Bindra Chair in Sikh Studies at Hofstra University, Long Island, New York, U.S.A.] ❖

# Getting to know You

by Manjyot Kaur

The terms by which I often think about my Guru are not Father, Mother, Husband, or even Friend and Lover. While undeniably beautiful and more easily graspable by us mere mortals, these characterizations frequently seem a bit too anthropomorphic to me.

Instead, contemplating the Guru as a Divine Place - a True Abode of perpetual sanctuary, safety, shelter and support - greatly appeals to my mind and heart.

Many words corresponding to this concept can be found in Gurbani, such as *adhaar*, *saran* and *duaar*. They convey to me the unconditional acceptance and comforting succor my soul constantly craves, the feeling the poet Robert Frost evoked when he wrote, "Home is the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in".

I came upon this way of relating to the Guru quite early along my path of becoming a Sikh, when I started to familiarize myself with the *banis* of *nitnem*.

My initial exposure to doing *paatth* came not through Japji Sahib, as might be expected, but Rehraas Sahib, the bani recited at dusk, my favorite time of the day, customarily one of homecoming and rest.

Lines like *Ham keeray kiram satgur sarnaabee kar daiaa naam pargaas* ("I am an insect, a worm; O True Guru, I seek Your Sanctuary, please be merciful and bless me with the Light of Naam") and *Sagal duaar kau chhaadh kai, gaiho tuhaaro duaar* ("I have abandoned all other doors/shelters and have come to Your Door") leapt off the page the very first time I encountered them and deeply penetrated my heart, where they have been ensconced ever since.

Every time I recite them, they and many other such phrases fill me with a sense of security and Divine protection.

I am only on my maiden journey through the universe of Guru Granth Sahib, as I am still in the midst of my first *sehaj paatth*, which will take me several years to complete at the pace of a page or two a day.

This process was delayed by a recent six-month period of serious illness. During that time, when I did not always have the stamina to read and study Gurbani in conventional paper-and-ink form, I would often log onto a website which allows one to take a "cyber-hukam" of Guru Granth Sahib.



The most memorable and soul-satisfying of these online experiences, to date, came by means of a *vaak* from a *Shabad* written by Guru Arjan, found on page 290 of Guru Granth Sahib.

Part of Sukhmani Sahib, it contains these lines:

*Sarab kalyaan sukh nidh naam*  
*Boodat jaat paa-ay bisraam*  
*Sagal dukh kaa hovat naas*  
*Nanak naam japahu guntaas*

“All joys and comforts are in the treasure of the Naam  
Even the drowning can reach the place of rest and safety  
All sorrows shall vanish  
O Nanak, chant the Naam, the treasure of excellence”  
*[translated by Dr. Sant Singh Khalsa]*

This Shabad’s powerful message will always be immensely meaningful to me. But on the pain-filled night when I saw it for the first time, it arrived as a veritable rescuing lifeline.

It could be said that beyond “word-pictures” painted by definitions, language generates “sound-pictures” evoked by vibrations. The impact of the ones created when we recite or listen to Gurbani help heighten our consciousness of the Divine.

This is one of the reasons why I learned to read Gurmukhi script. Although I constantly try my utmost to pronounce the words aloud as correctly as possible, my main effort, at this stage, is aimed towards trying to obtain maximum comprehension of the words’ meanings. While uncaring sloppiness would indeed be highly intolerable, inadvertent mispronunciations are, in my opinion, not at all disrespectful to the Guru but rather a natural and normal part of learning and improving.

For the Guru in Guru Granth Sahib to come truly alive, one must be able to not only read its words but also understand the significance of its teachings and incorporate them into one’s life. I have accepted that I will probably never be able to do this without reliance, to one degree or another, on English translations and commentaries.

I have no problem or guilt about doing this, as I believe there is no such thing as a holy language. So I presently use a four-volume version of Guru Granth Sahib that provides a translation in addition to the original script, along with the aid of several dictionaries and other reference tools. As I know that no translation, no matter how adeptly done, could ever totally replace an original text, I continually try to stretch my mind and ask myself, “What is the Guru really saying to me here?”

Since the Divine Word of the Shabad is itself the *saroop* of the Guru, I feel it is just

as valid to read the words and study the message of Guru Granth Sahib using a computer.

For these purposes - please note I am not referring to formal congregational worship here - Guru Granth Sahib online (or in a multi-volume print version that includes translation) is as much of a saroop for me as the traditional format.

When precious moments of Grace arrive and Ambrosial Nectar rains down, I perceive the essence of the Shabad and taste its ethereal sweetness just the same.

This is my Love Story so far between my Guru and I: the first steps of what is very much a work-in-progress.

I could not feel more blessed that this is the path I have been led to, through Divine Grace. Although I cannot know what peaks and valleys it will take me to, I walk on it faithfully trusting that it will be exactly the way The One wills it to be! ❖

Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji was given the Guruship by the last of the living Sikh Masters, Guru Gobind Singh Ji in 1708. Guru Gobind Singh said before his demise that the Sikhs were to treat Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji as their next Guru. Guru Ji said "*Sab Sikhian ko hukam hai Guru Manyo Granth*" meaning " All Sikhs are commanded to take the Granth as Guru".

The Guru Granth Sahib is a sacred scripture of the world and is the Eternal Guru of the Sikhs. Because it is a scripture suitable of a universal religion, many world class philosophers and holy men consider it a unique treasure and a noble heritage for all humankind. Because, it is the Guru of the Sikhs, its adoration or veneration is an article of faith with the Sikhs. In the year 2004, the world celebrated the Quad-Centennial of the Granth's First Compilation. In 2008, the Sikhs celebrate the Tercentennial of the Canonization of the Granth as the Sri Guru Granth Sahib.

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