



ARTICLE

Dr Devinder Singh Sekhon

Canada

sekhonds@hotmail.ca

INTRODUCTION

ੴ pronounced as “Ikk Onkar” “Ek Onkar” or as “Ekunkar” is the most fundamental belief of Sikhism, and the contents of the whole Aad Guru Granth Sahib revolve around it. It signifies that there is only one Supreme Being in the universe, which is also the creator of the universe. The numeral “1” of the Symbol emphasizes that there is only “1” Supreme Being. The openness of the letter “Oora” in ੴ signifies that the Supreme Being, which is popularly addressed as Waheguru, Akalpurakh, Kartar, or by many other names, is omnipresent and fills the entire universe, and is not restricted to certain places. Its other forms, “Ikk Onka” and “Ekonkar or Ekunkar,” could have been misinterpreted by some vested interests as the word “Omkar,” which had been in use in Hindu holy books long before Guru Nanak Sahib, who coined this unique name for the Supreme Being, and described His unique traits in the so-called Mool Mantra.

PRONUNCIATION

It has not been clarified in the Aad Guru Granth Sahib (AGGS) how to pronounce this holy symbol, but the word “Ekunkar” has been used many times in AGGS. A few Sabds are given below for your consideration.

ਧਨਾਸਰੀ ਮਹਲਾ 1 ਛੰਤ (687)॥

----- ਆਰਾਧਿ ਏਕੰਕਾਰੁ ਸਾਚਾ ਨਿਤ ਦੇਇ ਚੜੈ ਸਵਾਇਆ॥

ਗਤਿ ਸੰਗਿ ਮੀਤਾ ਸੰਤ ਸੰਗਤਿ

ਕਰਿ ਨਦਰਿ ਮੇਲਿ ਮਿਲਾਇਆ॥

ABSTRACT

ੴ is the symbol in Sikhism which is used to represent the single Supreme Being. In this article, we will examine the origin of the Symbol, its pronunciation, and its deep meaning in Sikhism. Not all Sikh scholars will agree with the following pronunciation and its interpretation, but we will use sabds from the Aad Guru Granth Sahib (AGGS) to support the origin and pronunciation of the holy symbol.

Aaraadh(i) Ekunkar(u) Saacha, nit dayay churrai y swaaya.

Gut(i) sung(i) meeta Sant sungut(i), kur(i) nedr(i) mayl(i) milaaya.

AGGS, Mahla 1, p 687

Worship (recite the Naam of) the Eternal Supreme being who provides more and more all the time. One attains a high spiritual state in the company of the holy men (Satguru) when Waheguru connects him with Him with His grace.

ਬਿਲਾਵਲੁ ਮਹਲਾ 1 ਬਿਤੀ (838)॥

ੴ ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ॥

ਏਕਮ ਏਕੰਕਾਰੁ ਨਿਰਾਲਾ॥

ਅਮਰੁ ਅਜੋਨੀ ਜਾਤਿ ਨ ਜਾਲਾ॥

Ekonkar, Satgur Persad(i). Ekum Ekunkar(u) niraala

Amar(u), ajoani, jaat(i) na jaala.

AGGS, Mahla 1, p 838.

On the day of the new moon (or on the day of the full moon), remember the Supreme Being, which is fully detached from the universe (is above the effects of

Maya, is immortal, never takes any life form, has no clan, and no worldly bonds.

ਮਾਰੂ ਮਹਲਾ 1 ਸੋਲਹੇ (1040)॥

----- ਤੂ ਏਕੰਕਾਰੁ ਨਿਰਾਲਮੁ ਰਾਜਾ॥

ਤੂ ਆਪਿ ਸਵਾਰਹਿ ਜਨ ਕੇ ਕਾਜਾ॥

ਅਮਰੁ ਅਡੋਲੁ ਅਪਾਰੁ ਅਮੋਲਕੁ ਹਰਿ ਅਸਥਿਰ ਥਾਨਿ

ਸੁਹਾਇਆ॥ -----

----- Tu Ekunkar(u) niraalum Raja

Tu Aap(i) svaareh(i) jun kay kaaja.

Amar(u), adaal(u), apaar(u), amoluk(u), Har(i) usthir
thaan(i) soohaaya.

AGGS, Mahla 1, p 1040.

You are the emperor of the universe but are fully detached from it, oh Waheguru.

You cause all the tasks of your devotees to be successful.

You are immortal, never yield to any pressure, are limitless, and cannot be acquired with any amount of wealth, and the whole world is attractive with Your presence, oh the Supreme Being.

ਗਉੜੀ ਸੁਖਮਨੀ ਅਸਟਪਦੀ 16 (284)॥

----- ਨਾਨਾ ਰੂਪ ਨਾਨਾ ਜਾ ਕੇ ਰੰਗ॥

ਨਾਨਾ ਭੇਖ ਕਰਹਿ ਇਕ ਰੰਗ॥

ਨਾਨਾ ਬਿਧਿ ਕੀਨੇ ਬਿਸਥਾਰੁ॥

ਪ੍ਰਭੁ ਅਬਿਨਾਸੀ ਏਕੰਕਾਰੁ॥

----- Nana roop, naana Ja kay rung.

Naana bhaykh kureh(i) ikk rung.

Naana bidh(i) keeno bisthaar.

Prubh(u) Abinashi Ekunkar(u).

AGGS, Mahla 5, p 284.

The immortal Waheguru appears in countless forms and colours.

He alone appears in countless (religious) garbs and has expanded (created) the universe in countless forms.

All the above sabds unequivocally prove that the word “*Ekunkar*” represents the Supreme Being for which the symbol ੴ is used.

Etymologically, the word “*Ekunkar*” is made up of two syllables – *Ek* and *Onkar*. So, the correct pronunciation of the symbol ੴ is “*Ikk Onkar*” or

“*Ekunkar*.” Dr Devinder Singh Chahal [1] does not seem to agree with this.

Origin of the Symbol

The word *Onkar*, ੴ or *Omkar* (but not ੴ, *Ekonkar*) has been used even by Bhagat Kabir Ji in the following sabd:

ਗਉੜੀ ਬਾਵਨ ਅਖਰੀ ਕਬੀਰ ਜੀਉ (340) ॥

ੴਕਾਰ ਆਦਿ ਮੈ ਜਾਨਾ॥

ਲਿਖਿ ਅਰੁ ਮੇਟੈ ਤਾਹਿ ਨ ਮਾਨਾ॥

ੴਕਾਰ ਲਖੈ ਜਉ ਕੋਈ॥

ਸੋਈ ਲਖਿ ਮੇਟਣਾ ਨ ਹੋਈ॥ 6॥

Onkar, aad(i) mein jaana.

Likh(i) ur(u) maytaiy, taah(i) na maana.

Onakr lukhaiy juou koyee.

Soyee lukh(i) maytna na hoyee.

AGGS, Kabir, p 340.

I recognize only the Supreme Being (God or Prabhu) as the origin of everything and do not acknowledge anybody else whom God creates and then destroys him.

If someone comprehends God (gets connected with Him), his unity with God cannot be broken by anyone.

It has been a tradition with the Bhagats, whose holy compositions have been included in Aad Guru Granth Sahib, not to change the names of gods or goddesses used by the common man or to replace them with a single name for the Supreme Being. They continued to use names such as Ram, Krishan, Bishan (Vishnu), Shiva, Keshav, Kahn, Narayan, Mohan, Damodar, Prabhu, etc., so as not to turn them off as it would have been too big a change too quickly, and the people would not have listened to their message of a single Supreme Being.

Keeping with the tradition, Kabir Sahib used the word “*Onkar*” which is also written as “*Omkar*” for the Supreme Being, which the Hindus had been using for the god Shiva for some time. However, all the Bhagats strongly disapproved of the worship of any god or goddess. Pay attention to the following Sabds:.

ਰਾਗੁ ਗੋਡ ਨਾਮਦੇਉ ਜੀ (874) ॥

ਭੈਰਉ ਭੂਤ ਸੀਤਲਾ ਧਾਵੈ॥

ਖਰ ਬਾਹਨੁ ਉਹ ਛਾਰ ਉਡਾਵੈ॥1॥

ਹਉ ਤਉ ਏਕੁ ਰਮਈਆ ਲੈਹਉ॥

ਆਨ ਦੇਵ ਬਦਲਾਵਨਿ ਦੇਹਉ॥1॥ ਰਹਾਉ॥

ਸਿਵ ਸਿਵ ਕਰਤੇ ਜੇ ਨਰੁ ਧਿਆਵੈ॥

ਬਰਦ ਚਢੇ ਡਉਰੁ ਢਮਕਾਵੈ। 2॥

ਮਹਾ ਮਾਈ ਕੀ ਪੂਜਾ ਕਰੈ॥

ਨਰ ਸੇ ਨਾਰਿ ਹੋਇ ਅਉਤਰੈ॥ 3॥

ਤੂੰ ਕਹੀਅਤ ਹੀ ਆਦਿ ਭਵਾਨੀ॥

ਮੁਕਤਿ ਕੀ ਬਰੀਆ ਕਹਾ ਛਪਾਨੀ॥ 4॥

ਗੁਰਮਤਿ ਰਾਮ ਨਾਮ ਗੁਰੁ ਮੀਤਾ॥

ਪ੍ਰਣਵੈ ਨਾਮਾ ਇਉ ਕਰੈ ਗੀਤਾ॥ 5॥2॥6॥

Bhairon bhoot, Seetla dhaavaaiy.

Khur baahn, oh chhaar oodaavaaiy.1.

Huoun tuou ek Rumuyya laihoun.

Aan dev budlaavan(i) dayhoun. Ruhaou

Shiv, Shiv kertay jo nur(u) dhiyaavaaiy.

Berd chudhay, dauroo dhumkaavaaiy. 2.

Maha Maayi kee pooja kuraiy.

Nur say naar(i) hoyay auraiy. 3.

Tu kahiut hee aad(i) Bhavaani.

Mookut(i) kee buriya kahaa chhapaani. 4.

Gurmut(i) Ram Naam guhou meeta.

Pernvaiy Naama iyoun kuhaiy geeta. 5.

AGGS, Nam Dev, p 874.

A devotee who worships god Bhairon (an incarnation of Shiva who has ugly and frightening looks) with fervour will begin to look like a phantom, and the one who worships goddess Seetla (who is responsible for smallpox and rides a donkey) will also ride a donkey and spread-out dust. 1.

I will wish only for the Supreme Being and trade all other gods for Him. Pause.

A person who worships Shiva (who rides an ox and beats a tambourine, will only be able to ride an ox and beat a tambourine. 2.

A male individual who worships the Great Goddess (an incarnation of Parvati), will reincarnate as a female.

Bhavani (another incarnation of Parvati) is not visible when one wishes for emancipation (she has no power to emancipate her devotees).

Nam Dev respectfully suggests that take shelter in God with the Advice of the Guru and sing His praise, oh my friend.

Kabir Sahib also has a similar assessment of the spiritual level of the popular gods. He expresses his thoughts about them in the following sabd:

ਕਬੀਰ ਜੀਉ (1158)॥

ਮੈਲਾ ਬ੍ਰਹਮਾ ਮੈਲਾ ਇੰਦੁ॥

ਰਵਿ ਮੈਲਾ ਮੈਲਾ ਰੈ ਚੰਦੁ॥

ਮੈਲਾ ਮਲਤਾ ਇਹੁ ਸੰਸਾਰੁ॥

ਇਕੁ ਹਰਿ ਨਿਰਮਲੁ ਜਾ ਕਾ ਅੰਤੁ ਨ ਪਾਰੁ॥ ----

ਮੈਲਾ ਸਿਵ ਸੰਕਰਾ ਮਹੇਸ॥ ਮੈਲੇ ਸਿਧ ਸਾਧਿਕ ਅਰੁ ਭੇਖੁ॥ ----

॥3॥

Maiyla Brahma, maiyla Ind. Ruv(i) maiyla, maiyla haiy chund(u).

Maiyla multa, eh(u) sunsar(u).

Ikk(u) Har(i) nirmul(u) ja ka unt(u) na paar(u). -----

Aiyla Shiv Shankra, Mahesh. Maiylay Sidh saadhik ur(u) bhaykh(u)

AGGS, Kabir, p 1158..

Impure (attached to Maya) are the gods Brahma and Indra, and so are the sun and the moon (Hindus also worship them as gods).

The whole world deals in impurity.

Only God is pure (above the effects of Maya) whose limits cannot be found.

----- *Impure are the three forms of Shiva, including Shankar and Mahesh.*

All the Sidh yogis and ascetics of different faiths are impure. -----

Guru Nanak Sahib also did not believe the popular gods had any spiritual powers. In fact, He maintains that they are all beggars at the door of Waheguru and earn respect only if they obey Him. Otherwise, they simply suffer death (humiliation) if they ignore Him.

ਭੈਰਉ ਅਸਟਪਦੀਆ ਮਹਲਾ 1 (1153) ॥

---- ਬ੍ਰਹਮਾ ਬਿਸਨੁ ਰਿਖੀ ਮੁਨੀ ਸੰਕਰੁ ਇੰਦੁ ਤਪੈ ਭੇਖਾਰੀ॥

ਮਾਨੈ ਹੁਕਮੁ ਸੇਰੈ ਦਰਿ ਸਾਚੈ ਆਕੀ ਮਰਹਿ ਅਫਾਰੀ॥

----- Brahma, Bishan, rikhi, moonie, Shanjar(u), Ind (u), tupaay, bhaykhaari.

Maanaay Huqam(u), sohaiy Dur(i) Saachaiy, aaki muraiy afaari.

AGGS, Mahla 1, p 1153

Gods like Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, and other sages are all beggars at Waheguru's (God's) door.

They earn respect in Waheguru's Court only if they obey His Huqam (Command); the rebels suffer spiritual death (humiliation).

ਮਾਰੂ ਮਹਲਾ 1 (992) ॥

----- ਰੋਗੀ ਬ੍ਰਹਮਾ ਬਿਸਨੁ ਸਰੁਦ੍ਰਾ ਰੋਗੀ ਸਗਲ ਸੰਸਾਰਾ॥
ਰਹਿ ਪਦੁ ਚੀਨਿ ਭਏ ਸੇ ਮੁਕਤੇ ਗੁਰ ਕਾ ਸਬਦ
ਵੀਚਾਰਾ॥॥

----- Rogi Brahma, Bishan, Sroodra, rogi sugul
sunsaara.

Har(i) pud(u) cheen(i) bhuyyay say mooktay, Gur ka
Sabd veechaara.

AGGS, Mahla 1, p 992.

*Like the rest of the world, which is mentally sick
because of its attachment to the short-lived Maya,
gods like Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva are also
(spiritually) sick (cannot rise above the spiritually
damaging effects of Maya).*

*Only those who attain emancipation acquire high
spiritual knowledge about Waheguru by pondering
over Guru's Sabd.*

Omkaara, Omkar, or Onkar, means the creator of Om.
The Hindu American defines "Om" as follows: *The
word Om is defined by Hindu scripture as being the
primordial sound of creation. It is the original
vibration of the universe. From this first vibration, all
other vibrations are able to manifest.*

While returning from Lanka (now Sri Lanka) in His
second odyssey, Guru Nanak Sahib visited the
Omkareshwar temple on River Narbada's banks in
Madhya Pradesh [2,3]. The Temple is situated on the
island of Madhanta. According to Wikipedia [4], It is
one of Shiva's 12 revered Jyotirlinga shrines.

Guru Nanak Sahib observed that the people at the
Temple worshipped the idol of Shiva, believing it to
be the Omkara (the Supreme Being), and the
Paandha (teacher) there taught the same thing to his
pupils. Guru Nanak Sahib advised the teacher and
the people there that the idol of Shiva is NOT the
Supreme Being. He explained the Supreme Being to
them in the first Paurri (stanza) of His long
composition, named "Onkar(u)" in Raag Ramkali. It is
given below:

ੴ ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ॥ ਰਾਮਕਲੀ ਮਹਲਾ 1 ਦਖਣੀ॥ ਓਅੰਕਾਰੁ
(929)॥

ਓਅੰਕਾਰਿ ਬ੍ਰਹਮਾ ਉਤਪਤਿ॥

ਓਅੰਕਾਰੁ ਕੀਆ ਜਿਨਿ ਚਿਤਿ॥

ਓਅੰਕਾਰਿ ਸੈਲ ਜੁਗ ਭਏ॥

ਓਅੰਕਾਰਿ ਬੇਦ ਨਿਰਮਏ॥

ਓਅੰਕਾਰਿ ਸਬਦਿ ਉਧਰੇ॥

ਓਅੰਕਾਰਿ ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਤਰੇ॥

ਓਨਮ ਅਖਰ ਸੁਣਹੁ ਬੀਚਾਰੁ॥

ਓਨਮ ਅਖਰੁ ਤ੍ਰਿਭਵਣ ਸਾਰੁ॥1॥

Onkar(i) Brahma ootpoot(i). Onkar(i) keeya jinh(i) chit(i).

Onkar(i) saiyl joog bhuyyay. Onkar(i) Bayd nirmuyay.

Onkar(i) Sabd(i) oodhray. Onkar(i) Gurmukh(i) turay.

Onam ukkhur soonhou beechaar(u). **Onam** ukkhur(u)
tirbhuvun saar(u).

AGGS, Mahla 1, p 929.

(You are treating the idol of Shiva as the Omkar(u) (or
Onkar), and worshipping it as the Supreme Being; oh
Pundit. You also believe that Brahma is the creator of the
universe and who also created the Vedas). But this idol is
not "Onkar(u)."

*The true Onkar(u) is the one who created even Brahma,
who enshrined Him in his memory.*

*The true Onkar created the universe and the eons, and it
was with His benevolence (who enabled Brahma) that the
Vedas were created.*

*It is by the recitation of His Naam that people find
salvation in the shelter of the Guru.*

Listen to the deep meaning of the word Onkar(u).

This word (His Naam) is the supreme in the universe.

Keeping the tradition of the Bhagats not to change the
popular names of the gods whom the people worshipped,
believing them to be the Supreme Beings, Guru Nanak
Sahib did not change the name "Omkar(u)" for the
Supreme Being, but changed its meaning and the basic
concept. He added the numeral "1" before it and called it
"EK-ONKAR" meaning that there is only one Supreme
Being - and not many - and gave it the symbol, ੴ. As
explained earlier, the openness of the letter "Oorra"
implies that the Supreme Being is not closed in (limited to)
certain fixed area; it is omnipresent and fills the whole
universe.

The numeral "1" is special and cannot be misinterpreted.
Simple words like *Ek-Onkar(u)* or *Ek-Omkar(u)* would not
have conveyed the same meaning without the emphasis
on "ONE" because they could be subject to
misinterpretation. The numeral "1" clearly emphasizes that
only one Supreme Being, ੴ, has become the symbol of

the Sikh faith, and the Aad Guru Granth Sahib begins with this holy symbol for Waheguru. It also appears at the beginning of each Raga and its subcategories.

So, even though the origin of the holy word “*Ek Onkar*” may lie in “*Omkar*” Guru Nanak Sahib gives it a different pronunciation and a completely different meaning – that the word “*Omkar*” stands for Ek-Onkar which means there is only one Supreme Being.

CONCLUSIONS

With the support of sabds from Aad Guru Granth Sahib, the paper explains the meaning of “*Ek-Onkar*” and its origin. Even though this holy word, “*Ek-Onkar*,” has been derived from the word “*Om*” used in Hindu Granths, it has a completely different meaning in Sikhism.

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Wikipedia. Hinduamerican.org>five things to know about Om.