

# GURU NANAK'S PATHWAY TO SPIRITUALITY

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## ABSTRACT

*It is natural for us, the human beings, to ask two fundamental questions. Why are we here? What is the purpose of life? We feel a spiritual vacuum inside ourselves, and are, therefore, longing to become enlightened so we can find meaning and purpose of the life. We yearn for a supernatural connection to some superior divine power. We want to be at peace with ourselves. To accomplish this goal we try to seek out the most effective and the best available philosophical path so that we may be able to lead mentally and spiritually satisfying life. This communication describes a simple, convenient, effective, and divinely inspired pathway of right philosophy for righteous living, spiritual growth, and inner Enlightenment, as delineated by Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikh religion.*

## INTRODUCTION

In spite of all the worldly comforts and luxuries of life people in general are feeling a sort of vacuum in their lives. They are hungering to find a meaning of life and existence on earth. Many of us are yearning for a natural connection to some divine power. Many are searching for a bond to hold on to some entity for peace of mind, personal security and stability. However, when we look around, we see signs of moral and spiritual decay, and of conflicts and contradictions, even within one's own life. We tend to turn a blind eye to the problems of prejudice, racism, violence, exploitations, superstitions, moral and ethical degeneration. Many of us thrive on showing off, on self-glorification, on egotism and love-of-self. When we examine our present-day culture and society all over the world, we notice that a great majority of us are devoid of the fundamental virtues for righteous and truthful living. This in turn leads many of us to commit evil and sinful deeds. This surely deprives us of our peace, our happiness and our health. No wonder, there is a moral crisis in the world. Statistics after statistics point to painfully disturbing and escalating ethical and moral lapses in our personal, social and professional lives. Thus, today, most people believe it is okay to tell lie, and it is okay to tell lie to get what you want. This is self-sabotaging behavior. Can we actually feel good about gains made through deceit and unethical means? If we can lie to others we can easily lie to ourselves. This scenario looks pretty grim, and our becoming better is crucial - not just for our own survival, but for the general welfare of the world community.

During the 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century Guru Nanak propagated a divinely sanctioned mission of 'Truth' and 'Truthful

Living' for everyday life. His objective was to lay the foundation of religious and scientific philosophy of 'The Truth'. This philosophy has been further developed and elaborated by the successors of Guru Nanak, who had acquired the divine spirit of Guru Nanak and, therefore, had become one with Guru Nanak. This divinely revealed Truth is now contained in the *Aad Guru Granth Sahib* (AGGS) in the form of holy hymns (*Sabd, Naam* or word). Indeed, it is the greatest source of wisdom on all aspects of life and living. It is loaded with real practical advice on how to lead a holy, happy, and healthy life (the three-H of life). Its righteous philosophy is as relevant today as it was when it was originally revealed. The hymns of different Gurus in the AGGS are assigned under *Mahla* with their succession number to the House of Guru Nanak. Thus, *Mahla* 1 is for Guru Nanak, *Mahla* 2 is

**Our Guru instructs us that we become pure and holy only after the filth of five evils is completely eliminated from our mind.**

for Guru  
A n g a d ,  
*Mahla* 3,  
for Guru  
Amar Das,  
*Mahla* 4 is  
for Guru  
Ram Das,

and *Mahla* 5 is for Guru Arjan.

## DISCUSSION

### Is Our Mind Healthy or Sick?

We, it seems, are becoming a society where most people have essentially killed their conscience. We are behaving like wild animals. We are, therefore, facing an epidemic of sick mind. Such a situation is aptly described in the following hymn:

ਕਰਤੂਤਿ ਪਸੂ ਕੀ ਮਾਨਸ ਜਾਤਿ ॥ ਲੋਕ ਪਚਾਰਾ ਕਰੈ ਦਿਨ ਰਾਤਿ ॥

AGGS, M5, P 267

*"(One is) of human species, but acts like an animal  
(And one) deceives people day and night."*

Tragically, our culture and our society appear to thrive on sick mind, whose only motto is to destroy the very fabric of our civilization. Many of us pose as virtuous people, but our mind is full of filth. This is depicted in the following hymn:

ਬਾਹਿਰ ਭੇਖੁ ਅੰਤਰਿ ਮਲ ਮਾਇਆ ॥ AGGS, M 5, P 267.

*"Outwardly one has (religious) garb, but inside is (filled) with worldly possessions (attachments)."*

### Causes of Our Sick Mind?

Indeed, excessive greed and insatiable desire to accumulate worldly possessions and wealth, whether needed or not, through all possible means, including at times vicious and violent attacks on innocent people, is partly if not wholly, responsible for our sick mind. One hatches evil acts by killing ones conscience. One then becomes a victim of self-conceit, self-glorification and plain sheer selfishness. Many of us indulge in a life-style full of petty rivalry, jealousy, insensitivity to others, an arrogant attitude and a plain rude behavior. We observe these laxities clearly spelled out in the following hymn:

ਬੈਰ ਬਿਰੋਧ ਕਾਮ ਕ੍ਰੋਧ ਮੋਹ ॥

ਝੂਠ ਬਿਕਾਰ ਮਹਾ ਲੋਭ ਧਰੁਹ ॥

AGGS, M 5, P 267.

*"(one is living a life of) enmity,  
strife, lust, anger, lust, lies,  
sins, extreme greed and deceit."*

The above hymn clearly points to the important root causes of our sick mind and, therefore, of our sick society. This is nothing short of self-destruction. Something terribly is wrong. Life is, thus, presenting us with challenges that appear to defy our strongest efforts to overcome them. The question is, can our sick mind be cured, and can this trend be reversed? I firmly believe that it can be done. In the AGGS we are constantly reminded of the five evils controlling our mind. Thus, the following additional hymns from the AGGS reinforces the key features that make our mind filthy and therefore, sickly:

ਸਾਕਤ ਲੋਭੀ ਇਹੁ ਮਨੁ ਮੂੜਾ ॥ AGGS, M 1, P 415

Guru Nanak says, *"The foolish mind is greedy and headstrong."*

ਅੰਤਰਿ ਲੋਭੁ ਮਨਿ ਮੈਲੈ ਮਲ ਲਾਇ ॥

AGGS, M 3, P 1002.

Here the Third Nanak, Guru Amar Das tells: *"Greed*

*inside makes mind filthy and induces (rubs) filth to others."*

ਮਨ ਮੇਰੇ ਹਉਮੈ ਮੈਲ ਭਰੁ ਨਾਲਿ ॥ AGGS, M 3, P 35.

Now, the Third Nanak, Guru Amar Das states: *"O, my mind thou are filled with the filth of ego."*

ਮਨਿ ਹਿਰਦੈ ਕ੍ਰੋਧੁ ਮਹਾ ਬਿਸ ਲੋਧ ॥ AGGS, M 4, P 445.

Here the Fourth Nanak, Guru Ram Das points: *"Within the mind and heart,  
anger is most poisonous."*

ਮਨ ਮਹਿ ਕ੍ਰੋਧੁ ਮਹਾ ਅਹੰਕਾਰਾ ॥ AGGS, M 5, P 1348.

*"Within the mind are anger and extreme ego."* States the Fifth Nanak, Guru Arjan.

ਇਸੁ ਦੇਹੀ ਅੰਦਰਿ ਪੰਚ ਚੋਰ ਵਸਹਿ ॥ ਕਾਮਿ ਕ੍ਰੋਧੁ ਲੋਭੁ ਮੋਹਿ ਹੁੰਕਾਰ ॥  
AGGS, M 3, P 600.

*"In this body reside five thieves (evils);  
lust, anger, greed, worldly attachments, ego."*  
Says the Third Nanak, Guru Amar Das.

ਪੰਚ ਚੰਡਾਲ ਨਾਲੇ ਲੈ ਆਇਆ ॥ AGGS, M 5, P 1348

*"The five enemies (each one of us) brought with oneself (inherited at birth)."*

Guru Nanak in the following hymn succinctly summarizes the role of these five debilitating evils:

## During the 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century Guru Nanak propagated a di- vinely sanctioned mission of 'Truth' and 'Truthful Living' for everyday life.

ਅਵਰਿ ਪੰਚ ਹਮ ਏਕ ਜਨਾ ਕਿਉ  
ਰਾਖਉ ਘਰ ਬਾਰੁ ਮਨਾ ॥  
ਮਾਰਹਿ ਲੂਟਹਿ ਨੀਤ ਨੀਤ ਕਿਸ  
ਆਗੇ ਕਰੀ ਪੁਕਾਰ ਜਨਾ ॥  
AGGS, M 1, P 155.  
*"Five enemies (but) I am  
one (mind), how can you  
(mind) protect your home  
(body)."*

*These enemies are always robbing (you, the mind), to whom shall I narrate my wailing."*

### Medicine for Our Sick Mind:

From the afore-mentioned hymns it is obvious that our mind is constantly under attack from the inside enemies of ego, lust, anger, greed and worldly attachments. When our mind becomes slave to the powerful influences of these vicious enemies, our mind becomes resistant to all the good our mind is inherently capable of performing. What is needed, is purification of our mind through taming and disciplining of our mind. In the AGGS we are constantly reminded that our mind must be over-powered so that its unhealthy dictates can be overcome as explained by the Third Nanak, Guru Amar Das:

ਮਨ ਮਰੈ ਧਾਤੁ ਮਰਿ ਜਾਇ ॥ ਬਿਨ ਮਨ ਮੁਏ ਕੈਸੇ ਹਰਿ ਪਾਇ॥  
AGGS, M 3, P 665.

*“(When) mind is controlled, its wandering cease. Without control of mind, how can God be realized.”*

The crucial question is how can the mind be tamed? The answer is in the following hymn of the Third Nanak:

ਮਨੁ ਸਬਦਿ ਮਰੈ ਬੁਝੈ ਜਨੁ ਸੋਇ॥ AGGS, M 3, P 665.

*“Mind is conquered through Sabd (Word), only the person (who experiences this) knows that.”*

We know from *Gurbani* in the AGGS that *Sabd* is the root source of *Naam*. This is clear from the hymn of the Third Nanak:

ਸਬਦੇ ਹੀ ਨਾਉ ਉਪਜੈ ॥ ਸਬਦੇ ਮੇਲਿ ਮਿਲਾਇਆ॥

AGGS, M 3, P 644.

*“Through Sabd is born Naam, and through Sabd (one is) united with God.”*

Clearly then *Sabd* and *Naam* are intimately interwoven. We again observe this relationship in the following hymn of the Third Nanak:

ਉਤਮ ਉਚਾ ਸਬਦ ਕਾਮੁ॥ ਨਾਨਕ ਵਖਾਣੈ ਸਾਚੁ ਨਾਮੁ॥

AGGS, M 3, P 1176.

*“Sublime and lofty is the task (function) of Sabd, Nanak utters the True Naam.”*

Since *Sabd* and *Naam* are so much mutually inclusive, both are described in the AGGS as sublime (sacred) and supreme.

### Management of Our Sick Mind

Thus, the problems involving our sick mind will undoubtedly overwhelm us, and might even seem insurmountable. The situation is not really that hopeless, once we realize the weakness and fragile nature of our mind. The mere realization of this fact, that this problem exists is sufficient to convince us to do something so we may have a life of physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. We must begin with the result, the goal, in mind. Then we should persist until we accomplish it, working each day to achieve that part of the plan that builds on the previous part and lays the foundation for the next. “Easy said than done”, most people would say. But we must remember that success is not always easy. In fact, true success is seldom easy. What is easy, everyone has. What is difficult, nearly everyone cherishes. With a definite system, a logical and methodical plan of attack, we can make the difficult easier. We can find ways around or through the holdups, hang-ups, and obstacles. This, therefore, calls for a serious commitment on our part to review all of our behavior, our beliefs, our attitudes

and our actions. We thus need an action plan, a plan which will successfully fight the five evils of ego, anger, lust, love of worldly possessions, and greed within our mind. We need to completely empty our mind of these corrupting and polluting influences, and refill our mind with the noble qualities of humility, contentment, truth, love, kindness and justice. We need to propel our mind in the direction of *Sabd* [2] and *Naam* [3], the divinely inspired Word. We are instructed in the AGGS to first dye our mind with *Naam*. This is to be accomplished through prayer, and by seeking God’s Grace. The following hymn of Guru Nanak beautifully illustrates this point:

ਕਾਇਆ ਰੰਗਨ ਜੇ ਥੀਐ ਪਿਆਰੇ ਪਾਈਐ ਨਾਉ ਮਜੀਠਾ॥

ਰੰਗਨ ਵਾਲਾ ਜੇ ਰੰਗੇ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਐਸਾ ਰੰਗ ਨ ਡੀਠਾ॥

AGGS, M 1, P 722.

*“When the body becomes vat, o dear, and put the dye of Naam inside;*

*(then) the Lord, the Dyer, fixes the dye, the color (thus) obtained is not to be seen elsewhere.”*

(Elsewhere implying that the color is most unique and stunningly beautiful.)

This marvelous hymn calls for God to be the Dyer of *Naam*. How can you make this happen? This is where divine grace and blessing of *Naam* comes in, as is depicted in the hymn of the Third Nanak:

ਨਾਮ ਅਮੋਲਕੁ ਨ ਪਾਇਆ ਜਾਇ॥ ਗੁਰ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ ਵਸੈ ਮਨਿ ਆਇ॥

AGGS, M 3, P 663.

*“The priceless Naam is not obtained, (but only through) the grace of God it comes to reside inside the mind.”*

### How to Acquire Divine Grace

It is absolutely essential that you seek Divine Grace, for this is a prerequisite for successful control of your sick mind. When you first put your unwavering faith in God and offer yourself at the door of the Guru-God, then the attempts you make and steps you take are certain to succeed. That this is pathway *Gurbani* advises us to follow as is clear from the following hymn:

ਕਾਮ ਕ੍ਰੋਧ ਅਰੁ ਲੋਭੁ ਮੋਹ ਬਿਨਸਿ ਜਾਇ ਅੰਹਮੇਵ॥

ਨਾਨਕ ਪ੍ਰਭ ਸਰਣਗਤੀ ਕਰਿ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ ਗੁਰਦੇਵ॥

AGGS, M 5, P 269.

*“Lust, anger, greed, worldly attachments and self-centeredness (ego) are eliminated; Nanak is at God’s refuge and praying for Guru’s (God’s) grace.”*

Thus, with God’s power working within you and with you, you are destined to win the battle against five evils (enemies).

Let us, therefore, start with a very intense personal prayer, recited with a completely focused mind, in order to seek divine intervention, and petition Almighty in a most humble way for the gift of divine grace. Only then will our mind become receptive to receiving God's love and God's grace. Furthermore, while seeking God's grace, we also pray intensely for divine mercy, as instructed in the following hymn of the Fifth Nanak:

ਹਰਿ ਕਰਹੁ ਕ੍ਰਿਪਾ ਜਗ ਜੀਵਨਾ ॥ ਗੁਰੁ ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਮੈਲਿ ਦਇਆਲੁ ॥

AGGS, M 5, P 1315.

*"O, God, life-giver of the world, be benevolent, (and let me) meet the gracious Guru, the True Guru."*

The combined effect of divine grace and mercy is to rekindle our mind, so that we get a re-awakening of the ever-present divine-life-current in our mind. Such an effect produces in us a deep sense of gratitude, and steers us to become humble. This is all the result of one's heart-filled prayer. The prayer is thus the single most important factor, in first initiating, and then sustaining a warm relationship with God. It is understood that prayer is offered most sincerely from one's mind and one's heart. Above all, the prayer must flow spontaneously and naturally from within, and be laced with humility (free from any ego). It is important that while praying you have an unwavering faith in God, be up-beat and have a firm determination clearly focused on your desired goal. Remember that there is a divine power in faith working for you, and therefore you are not alone. These are unforeseen spiritual magical forces that will keep you focused on your objective. So don't give up on your darkest moments. Be persistent, and rekindle the flame of your purpose to keep guiding you. Remember, "it is always darkest before dawn". So keep your vision clear and focused, and your faith un-wavered. Only then you will be blessed with the mental, physical, emotional and spiritual energy to accomplish your goal. Only then the prayer will have its intended effect on building mind-power within. There are many different prayers one may be able to recite. But the ideal prayer is divinely inspired which represents truth and truth alone. Therefore, any rhyme from the AGGS that makes a special appeal to your psyche and touches the core of your heart may be recited to accomplish this goal because all the rhymes are divinely inspired. Thus, we read:

ਹਰਿ ਉਤਮ ਹਰਿ ਪ੍ਰਭ ਨਾਮ ਹੈ ॥ ਗੁਰ ਬਚਨਿ ਸਭਾਰੋ ਲੀਤ ॥

AGGS, M 4, P 1317.

*"The Almighty is Supreme, so is the Almighty's Naam (Name), the fortunate one utters It through the rhymes*

*of the Guru."*

### **The Magic that Prayer is**

It should be pointed out that prayer in its simplest form constitutes simple recitation, remembering, singing, reflecting, and listening to divine hymns. It must involve a total involvement of one's tongue, one's mind and one's body. It may be recited in a low, sweet and melodious tone, preferably without interruption of any kind. However, the hymns recited through singing may be high pitched, and may be accompanied with musical instruments, as would be the case with "kirtan". Further, listening to kirtan also provides a very soothing and calming effect on our mind and mental faculties. It is, however, necessary that when reciting, singing, and/or hearing the hymns, your mind should be totally focused on the message contained in the hymn(s). It is only then that you will feel truly immersed in the hymns. It is at this time that every cell in your body experiences the divine touch of God-power through prayer power, and you will experience celestial bliss. This is finely illustrated in the hymn:

ਸਭਿ ਗਾਵਹੁ ਗੁਣ ਗੋਬਿੰਦ ਹਰੇ ਗੋਵਿੰਦ ਹਰੇ

ਗੋਵਿੰਦ ਹਰੈ ਗੁਣ ਗਾਵਤ ਗੁਣੀ ਸਮਉਲਾ ॥

AGGS, M 4, P 1315.

*"Ye all sing the praises of Lord God, Lord God, Lord God: through singing the praises (of Lord) one merges in virtuous God."*

One may ask why praise, admire and adulate God? To seek answer to this question let us, for a moment, examine the role of praising. Amongst we human beings, the showering of praises on the other human being(s) usually brings in a feeling of inferiority, insecurity and selfishness to gain something from the person being praised. One wonders then why so much emphasis in recitation and/or singing of hymns praising God, who is most certainly free from any pride or vanity which afflicts us, the mortal human beings. The question arises, why praise God, or why even worship God? God certainly does not need them. God only wants us to become immaculately clean, pure, truthful and holy inside. Our Guru instructs us that we become pure and holy only after the filth of five evils is completely eliminated from our mind. It is only then, through divine grace, that we adopt a righteous and truthful way of living. This is beautifully summarized in the following hymn:

ਉਪਦੇਸ਼ ਗੁਰੂ ਸੁਣਿ ਮਨਿਆ ॥ ਧੁਰਿ ਮਸਤਕਿ ਪੁਰਾ ਭਾਗ ॥

AGGS, M 4, P 849.

*"Hearing Guru's advice and acting (on it), (when) it is fully destined on one's forehead through Lord's*

(court).”

### Guru Nanak's Spiritual Exercises

One may now ask what specifically are our Guru's instructions, herein described as “Spiritual Exercises” for brevity. These are disseminated throughout AGGS. Some of the selected, more representative ones, but by no means exhaustive, are as follow:

ਅਵਲਿ ਸਿਫਤਿ ਦੂਜੀ ਸਾਬੁਰੀ ॥ ਤੀਜੀ ਹਲੇਮੀ ਚਓਏ ਖੋਰੀ ॥  
ਪਜੰਵੈ ਪਜੰ ਇਕਤੁ ਮੁਕਾਮੈ ॥ ਏਹਿ ਪਜਿੰ ਵਖਤ ਤੇਰੇ ਅਪਰਪਰਾ ॥  
AGGS, M 5, P 1084.

“First (prayer) is praises (of Lord), second is contentment, third is humility, fourth is charity, fifth is restraint of five (evils) from one's place (mind): these are (your) sublime five times of the prayer.”

ਉਸਤਤਿ ਮਨ ਮਹਿ ਕਰਿ ਨਿਰਾਕਾਰ ॥ ਕਰਿ ਮਨ ਮੇਰੇ ਸਤਿ ਬਿਉਹਾਰ ॥  
AGGS, M 5, P281.

“(Express) the praises of the formless Lord in your mind: O, my mind, carry out righteous deeds (activities).”

ਸਤ ਸੰਤੋਖ ਦਇਆ ਧਰਮ ਸੀਗਾਰ ਬਨਾਵਉ ॥

AGGS, M 5, P 812.

“Decorate (beautify) yourself with truthfulness, contentment, compassion and righteousness.”

ਮਿਠਤ ਨੀਵੀ ਨਾਨਕਾ ਗੁਨ ਚੰਗਾਈਆ ਤਤ ॥

AGGS, Mahla 1, P 470.

“O, Nanak, sweetness (of tongue) and humbleness are the essence of virtues and merits.”

ਸੁਵਨੀ ਸੁਨਉ ਹਰਿ ਹਰਿ ਹਰੇ ਠਾਕੁਰ ਜਸੁ ਗਾਵਉ ਸੰਤ ਚਰਣ ਕਰਿ  
ਸੀਸੁ ਧਰਿ ਹਰਿ ਨਾਮੁ ਧਿਆਵਉ ॥

AGGS, Mahla 5, P 812.

“With (your) ears hear the Lord God's Word, (and) sing the praises of the Lord. Put your head at the feet of the Sant (saint), and meditate on God's Naam.”

ਊਤਮ ਸੰਗਤਿ ਊਤਮੁ ਹੋਵੈ ॥ ਗੁਣ ਕਉ ਧਾਵੈ ਅਵਗੁਣ ਧੋਵੈ ॥

AGGS, Mahla 1, P 414.

“(It is) through noble association (that one) becomes noble. (Thence) one pursues virtues and washes off one's sins.”

In order for these spiritual exercises to become part of your daily life-style, it is most important that you must first visualize, and then totally believe that God is with you and within you at all the times, and not just during the prayer time. It is only then that you will experience the urge to follow these guidelines and, thus, be steered to a righteous living. That God is within us and with us is repeatedly emphasized in AGGS. This is finely

illustrated in the following hymns:

ਗੁਰੁ ਮੇਰੇ ਸੰਗ ਸਦਾ ਹੈ ਨਾਲੇ ॥ AGGS, Mahla 5, P 394.

“The Guru is always with me and near me.”

ਪਾਰਬ੍ਰਹਮ ਨਿਕਟਿ ਕਰ ਖੇਖ ॥ AGGS, M 5, P 295.

“Visualize supreme Lord near you.”

### CONCLUSIONS

In our highly technological and most competitive society the pressure to succeed socially and professionally is enormous. No wonder, we are constantly being subjected to physical and mental strain. Our mind is always vacillating between what is right and what is wrong, but is always looking for worldly gains. During this process we forget God, forget all blessings, and hanker only after earthly attachments and worldly comforts. When medication for our diseased mind is in the simple, yet very effective, spiritual exercises as prescribed by Guru Nanak. The more important of these as described in this paper are:

1. Seeking divine grace and divine mercy through an intense, passionate personal prayer.
2. Praising God through singing and recitation of hymns, and contemplation on *Naam* (*Sabd*, word).
3. Leading a righteous and truthful living to be contented.
4. Be god-centered instead of self-centered to renounce ego.
5. To be kind, generous, compassionate and sensitive to the needs of others, and to share worldly blessings with others.

The daily practice of these spiritual exercises on a regular basis will help you acquire eternal peace of mind and inner Enlightenment. You owe it to yourself to give them your best try. Surely then, through God's grace, the blissful experience you enjoy will be most rewarding.

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