

GURU GRANTH PAATH: THE SACRED READING

Dr (Bhai) Harbans Lal, PhD, D.Litt (Hons)
 Professor and Chairman, Department of Pharmacology,
 University of North Texas Health Science Center at Fort Worth, Fort Worth, Texas 76016

ABSTRACT

The objective of this paper is to describe the real meaning of the *paath* in the Sikh tradition. For this paper verses of the Aad Guru Granth (AGGS) [1] are considered consisting of *Sabd-Parmaan*. The later means a written testimony from the Guru as a means of valid knowledge cognate, which is complementary with reason and perception but has a scope that exceeds beyond them on account of its subject matter. *Paath* of the Guru Granth is described not as a ritual but, rather, a process of recitation to seek wisdom. Intellectual deliberation to seek wisdom while keeping faith in the process is required to pursue the reading process. Whereas considering the knowledge contained in the *Sabd-Parmaan* as dogmas will be dupe, extreme skepticism will be a mental affliction. The seeker of the *Sabd-Parmaan* would do well in pursuing a middle way: to place one's faith and trust in the authority and enlightenment of the Guru, and yet continue to question one's own understanding of the Guru's teachings. After convincing oneself of the validity of a certain aspect of the teaching by means of the reading processes, discursive reading, concept formation and belief stabilization one brings the reality in the message repeatedly to consciousness so that one may merge that belief with the consciousness on daily basis. The test for a success in the reading process would be its impact staying on life behaviors and its power to refrain the reader from performing any undesirable act during the post reading time.

INTRODUCTION

The reading of the Guru Granth is not like a reading of any book or even any scripture. Traditionally the term *paath* is used to distinguish this reading, which is somewhat akin to another term recitation. The later term still does not describe the real process of *paath*, but for lack of a more suitable alternate in English language we will continue to use the term Guru Granth reading to describe the spiritual Sikh practice of The Guru Granth recitation. Actually, the Guru Granth reading is more of a personal experience with the Guru in the form of Gurubani verses.

The Guru Granth reading requires an appropriate motivation and a proper skill to be the Guru-oriented. Both of these are beyond a mechanical reading or doing ritualistic *paath*. To obtain any benefit one has to know why to read and how to read. The Guru censures those as the self-oriented who read without possessing the skill of the sacred reading.

ਪੜ੍ਹਹਿ ਮਨਮੁਖ ਪਰੁ ਬਿਧਿ ਨਹੀ ਜਾਨਾ ॥ A GGS, M 1, P. 1032.

"The self-oriented people recite the scriptures, but they do not possess the proper skill to do so."

The objective of this paper is to describe the real meaning of the *paath* in Sikh tradition.

PURPOSES OF PAATH

A seeker reads The Guru Granth for more than one reasons. Some of those are discussed below.

A. Paath As Code of Conduct

Traditionally, every Sikh or seeker is urged to engage in formal reading of the Guru Granth at least once a day as a pre-breakfast routine. It is so documented by Sikh theologian, Bhai Gurdas, and accordingly formalized in the Sikh Code of Conduct that was accepted by the Sikhs' premier organization, the *Shiromani Gurdawara Parbhandhak Committee*. Bhai Gurdas said,

ਗੁਰਸਿਖ ਭਲਕੇ ਉਠ ਕਰਿ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤ ਵੇਲੇ ਸਰੁ ਨ੍ਹਾਵੰਦਾ॥

ਗੁਰੁ ਕੈ ਬਚਨ ਉਚਾਰਿ ਕੈ ਧਰਮਸਾਲ ਦੀ ਸੁਰਤਿ ਕਰੰਦਾ ॥

Bhai Gurdas, Vaar 40, Pauri 11 [3].

"Bhai Gurdas reported that the Sikhs of the Guru woke up early in the morning, took bath and read the verses of the Guru before proceeding towards the house of congregation."

Similarly, it is suggested in the Sikh Code of Conduct that:

ਹਰ ਇਕ ਸਿਖ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤ ਵੇਲੇ ਪ੍ਰਸ਼ਾਦਿ ਛਕਣ ਤੋਂ ਪਹਿਲਾਂ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਗਰੰਥ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਜੀ ਦਾ ਹੁਕਮ ਲਵੇ । ਜੇ ਇਸ ਵੇਲੇ ਉਕਾਰੀ ਹੋ ਜਾਵੇ ਤਾਂ ਦਿਨ ਵਿਚ ਕਿਸੇ ਨ ਕਿਸੇ ਵੇਲੇ ਪਾਠ ਕਰੇ ਜਾਂ ਸੁਣੇ ।

"Every Sikh should read a passage from Sri Guru

Granth Sahib daily before breakfast. Should this be missed on any day, the sacred reading or listening to a passage from the Granth may be done any other time of the day."

There should be hardly any one who is serious about *Gurmat* or the Guru's path and still should find this routine too difficult to follow. Everybody goes to bed and everybody gets up in the morning. So, everybody can spare a few extra minutes for the Guru Granth reading in the morning and, then, possibly at night, out of the twenty-four hours we are given every day. For more serious seekers, there will always be another interval sometime during the day to seek the Guru's vision through reciting the Guru Granth. Once we begin on this path, gradually, the reading periods begin to become a regular feature of our existence, and, if we are fortunate, we are silently contemplating on the Guru's verses at any or every hour of the day. This way we learn to open our consciousness, if it is but for a moment, and find ourselves in a state of receptivity to the Guru's vision. In the Sikh tradition, this state is considered worthy of praise.

ਕੁਰਬਾਣੀ ਤਿਨਾਂ ਗੁਰਸਿਖਾਂ ਗੁਰਬਾਣੀ ਨਿਤ ਗਾਇ ਸੁਣਦੇ ॥

Bhai Gurdas, Vaar 12, Pauri 2 [2].

"Bhai Gurdas says that he is sacrifice to those seekers who engage in singing and listening to the Guru's verses at all the time."

According to Bhai Gurdas, besides the Sikhs, the recitation of the Guru Granth was also employed to propagate the Guru's views to all others in the world. ਕਰਿ ਪਾਠ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ ਜਗਤ ਸਭ ਤਰਿਓ॥

Bhai Gurdas, Vaar 41, Pauri 21 [3].

"The whole world may undertake the sacred reading of The Guru Granth to sail through the sea of temptations in the human existence."

Formally, the Gurbani reading is done privately as well as in an environment of a congregation or any other public or private place especially prepared for this purpose. We will limit ourselves to a discussion of the situation in which an individual seeker wishes to engage in one to one conversation with the Guru Granth Sahib.

B. Paath is Not a Ritual

Both, a mere ritual of reading and, in contrast, a mental gymnastic of scholars are considered worthless in the Sikh traditions. Rather, the Guru Granth reading is a discourse with consciousness where concentration of mind and intellect are spent to the spiritual understanding through the vehicle of *Sabd Parmaan*. Through this reading, the theology and its life applications are understood in the light of the Guru's

teaching. This is illustrated in the following description of ritualistic and scholastic reading by Bhai Gurdas.

ਬੇਦ ਪਾਠ ਕਰਿ ਬ੍ਰਹਮਾਦਿਕ ਨ ਜਾਨੇ ਹੈ ।

Bhai Gurdas, Vaar 21, Pauri 2 [3].

"By mere reading of the scriptures, scholars have not been able to comprehend the God."

Futher, Bhai Gurdas says,

ਬੇਦ ਪਾਠ ਪੜਿ ਪੜਿ ਪੰਡਤ ਪਰਬੋਧੈ ਜਗੁ । ਸਕੇ ਨ ਸਮੋਧ ਮਨ ਤ੍ਰਿਸਨਾ ਨ ਹਾਰੀ ਹੈ । ਪੂਰਨ ਬ੍ਰਹਮ ਗੁਰਦੇਵ ਸੇਵ ਸਾਧਸੰਗ । ਸਬਦ ਸੁਰਤਿ ਲਿਵ ਬ੍ਰਹਮ ਬੀਚਾਰੀ ਹੈ । Bhai Gurdas, Kabit 457 [2].

"By repeated reading of the scriptures scholars win others, but they neither can bring their mind to any control nor can they satisfy their greed. Only through serving the Guru (following the Guru's teachings) in the company of holy men, one may dwell the Word of the Guru in the consciousness and contemplate on the Timeless."

One may mention here that to "experience" the verses is different from a comprehension of the philosophy imbibed in the verses. This difference forms the real backbone of the seeker's religious life. In the seeker's case, as opposed to a scholar or a philosopher, the experiences influence philosophical and religious theories. It is also true that "philosophical beliefs" shape our religious modus operandi, provide specific expectations, and thus have a formative influence on the kinds of experience that are actually produced. These will be illustrated in the following sections.

C. Paath is Belief, Acquisition and Stabilization

There is a great deal of emphasis in Sikh religion on forming a belief system and its inculcation into the consciousness. For example, Guru says that none of the rituals are of any avail until one come to believe the teachings that promote cleansing of mind and insight into the self.

ਤੀਰਥੁ ਤਪੁ ਦਇਆ ਦਤੁ ਦਾਨੁ ॥ ਜੇ ਕੋ ਪਾਵੈ ਤਿਲ ਕਾ ਮਾਨੁ ॥ ਸੁਣਿਆ ਮੰਨਿਆ ਮਨਿ ਕੀਤਾ ਭਾਉ ॥ ਅੰਤਰਗਤਿ ਤੀਰਥਿ ਮਲਿ ਨਾਉ ॥

AGGS, Jap 6, P 4.

"Pilgrimages, austere discipline, compassion and charity - these, by themselves, bring only an iota of merit. First listening and then forming a belief system in the mind that gives insight into the Self while bathing at the sacred shrine deep within."

A belief is acquired from knowledge that is gained from reading of the scripture. It corresponds roughly to the modern philosophical notion of conceptual construct. Such conceptual identification often, but not invariably, entails a reification of the entity, such that it

is apprehended as existing independently of the conceptual designation of it.

ਪਰਥਾਇ ਸਾਖੀ ਮਹਾ ਪੁਰਖ ਬੋਲਦੇ ਸਾਝੀ ਸਗਲ ਜਹਾਨੈ ॥

ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਹੋਇ ਸੁ ਭਉ ਕਰੇ ਆਪਣਾ ਆਪੁ ਪਛਾਣੈ ॥

ਗੁਰ ਪਰਸਾਦੀ ਜੀਵਤੁ ਮਰੈ ਤਾ ਮਨ ਹੀ ਤੇ ਮਨੁ ਮਾਨੈ ॥

ਜਿਨ ਕਉ ਮਨ ਕੀ ਪਰਤੀਤਿ ਨਾਹੀ ਨਾਨਕ ਸੇ ਕਿਆ ਕਥਹਿ ਗਿਆਨੈ ॥

AGGS, M 3, p 647.

"Great men speak the teachings by relating them to individual situations, but the whole world shares in them. One who becomes Guru-oriented knows the Order of God, and realizes his own self. If, by Guru's Grace, one remains dead while yet alive, the mind becomes content in itself. Those who have no faith in their own minds, O Nanak - how can they speak of spiritual wisdom?"

ਕੋਤੇ ਕਹਹਿ ਵਖਾਣ ਕਹਿ ਕਹਿ ਜਾਵਣਾ ॥ ਵੇਦ ਕਹਹਿ ਵਖਿਆਣ ਅੰਤੁ

ਨ ਪਾਵਣਾ ॥ ਪੜਿਐ ਨਾਹੀ ਭੇਦੁ ਬੁਝਿਐ ਪਾਵਣਾ ॥ ਖਟੁ ਦਰਸਨ ਕੈ

ਭੋਖਿ ਕਿਸੈ ਸਚਿ ਸਮਾਵਣਾ ॥ ਸਚਾ ਪੁਰਖੁ ਅਲਖੁ ਸਬਦਿ ਸੁਹਾਵਣਾ ॥

AGGS, M 1, P 148.

"Some speak and expound, and while speaking and lecturing, they pass away. The scriptures speak and expound on the Lord, but they do not know God's limits. Not by reading for studying, but through understanding, is the Lord's Mystery revealed. There are six pathways described in the Shaastras, but how rare are those who merge in the True Lord through them. The True Lord is Unknowable; through the Word of His Sabd, we are embellished."

The scholars treat the reading as only the scholarly activity when they are the self-oriented people. This way they miss the boat.

ਪੰਡਿਤ ਵਾਚਹਿ ਪੋਥੀਆ ਨਾ ਬੁਝਹਿ ਵੀਚਾਰੁ ॥

ਅਨ ਕਉ ਮਤੀ ਦੇ ਚਲਹਿ ਮਾਇਆ ਕਾ ਵਾਪਾਰੁ ॥

ਕਥਨੀ ਝੂਠੀ ਜਗੁ ਭਵੈ ਰਹਣੀ ਸਬਦੁ ਸੁ ਸਾਰੁ ॥ AGGS, M1, P 56.

"The pandits, the religious scholars, read their books, but they do not understand the real meaning. They give instructions to others, and then walk away, but they deal in Maya themselves. Speaking falsehood, they wander around the world, while those who remain true to the Sabd are excellent and exalted."

The objective of a seeker of the Word of the Guru is to persevere and continue the practice of reading the Guru Granth as *Sabd-Parmaan*. Their aim would be to merge their knowledge of *sabd-parmaan* into their belief system. When this is achieved the belief system of the seeker will be stabilized. Further pursuit of the continuous acquisition of additional knowledge would further strengthen the belief system and its stabilization. Those who aspire for stabilization

continue to investigate the limitless types of specific beliefs; a few reach the level of realization.

ਅਨਹਦ ਬਾਣੀ ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਜਾਣੀ ਬਿਰਲੋ ਕੋ ਅਰਥਾਵੈ ॥

AGGS, M 1, P 945.

"The Gurmukh knows the unstruck sound current of the Bani; how rare are those who understand."

Stabilization of belief during reading of the Guru Granth involves the simple placement of the attention on a chosen subject and concept derived from the reading. In order for the mind to be radically transformed by insight into some aspect of reality, the attention must be repeatedly stabilized in that concept. Let us take an example of one such object of attention. The concept is that I can of mine own self do nothing; the creative soul (ਕਰਤਾ ਪੁਰਖ) of my creator within me is the doer. The meaning of the first part is immediately apparent; but what does the statement mean that the Creator within me does the works? What is the Creator within me? We know that when Gurbani makes that statement it refers to *Karta Purakh*, Divine God or Waheguru all referring to God. It must mean, then, that God within me does the works. There is a God power-something within us that is revealed. The life, intelligence, and wisdom that are within us are only God's reflection.

ਗੁਰ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤੁ ਭਿੰਨੀ ਦੇਹਰੀ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤੁ ਬੁਰਕੇ ਰਾਮ ਰਾਜੇ ॥ ਜਿਨਾ ਗੁਰਬਾਣੀ ਮਨਿ ਭਾਈਆ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤਿ ਛਕਿ ਛਕੇ ॥ AGGS, M 3, P 449.

"The Guru's body is drenched with Ambrosial Nectar; He sprinkles it upon me, O Lord King. Those whose minds are pleased with the Word of the Guru's Bani, drink in the Ambrosial Nectar again and again."

ਹਉ ਵਾਰੀ ਜੀਉ ਵਾਰੀ ਸਬਦਿ ਸੁਹਾਵਣਿਆ ॥

AGGS, M 1, P 109.

"I am a sacrifice; my soul is a sacrifice, to those who are adorned with the Word of the Sabd".

By continuous reading and practice of the resulting concepts in the Guru's verses, one's belief system is stabilized and doubts are reduced. One's state of mind is engaged with quiescence and leads to insights. The interested seekers should then explore the means of cultivation of insight. Although thousands of different kinds of insights are taught in the Granth, they are contained within the twofold classification of quiescence of mind and consciousness followed by insight into the Divine. So, an aspiring reader of the Guru Granth is advised to explore these two disciplines, for they provide the key to the vast array of contemplative practices taught in Sikhism. During reading, a seeker entails conceptual analysis or reflection in order to bring forth a specific insight or other virtue such as love or kinship of humankind, etc. After convincing oneself of the validity of a certain

aspect of the teaching contained in the Sabd-Parmaan by means of reading, discursive practices, concept formation and belief stabilization one brings the reality in question repeatedly to consciousness so that one may merge that belief with the consciousness.

D. Paath as Spiritual Witnessing

As has been discussed in the section on the Gurbani reading as a faith practice, through the Guru Granth reading, a stage of mental concentration is reached when one is able to witness the Guru in the consciousness. This stage is beyond the realm of intellectual understanding. As Guru Says, ਬੁਧਿ ਪਾਠਿ ਨ ਪਾਈਐ ਬਹੁ ਚਤੁਰਾਈਐ ਭਾਇ ਮਿਲੈ ਮਨਿ ਭਾਣੇ ॥

AGGS, M 1, P. 436.

"One does not obtain the essence through intellectual recitations or immense shrewdness; the essence is obtained through faith and adoration."

Prior to reaching this stage, one has earlier

been convinced intellectually of the theoretical character of the experience as a step in the direction of evoking the Guru within oneself. Intellectual acceptance is necessary and is an in-escapable prerequisite for this experience as is the faith in the person of the Guru. Then the testimony of the scripture leads to an affirmation of an otherwise un-affirmable identity between one's consciousness and the Word of the Guru. This state may be termed as the witness consciousness. At this stage, one witnesses the Guru reflected in the consciousness in stages like the reflection of moon on the lake water; first on a wave, then on ripples, and finally on a clam and unruffled expanse of water. This state is described in many ways as if illustrated from the verses of Guru Amar Das and Guru Ram Das.

ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤ ਬਾਣੀ ਗੁਰ ਕੀ ਮੀਠੀ ॥ ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਵਿਰਲੈ ਕਿਨੈ ਚਖਿ ਡੀਠੀ ॥

ਅੰਤਰਿ ਪਰਗਾਸੁ ਮਹਾ ਰਸੁ ਪੀਵੈ ਦਰਿ ਸਚੈ ਸਬਦੁ ਵਜਾਵਣਿਆ ॥

AGGS, M 3, P. 113.

"The life-giving word of the Guru is very sweet. Rarely some Guru-oriented seekers may witness and taste it. If they do, they the Divine Nectar shines within their heart and they drink the supreme essence. They are at the gate of the Truth, which vibrates to them like a musical instrument."

ਹਰਿ ਗੁਣ ਗਾਵੈ ਸਦਾ ਦਿਨੁ ਰਾਤੀ ਮੈ ਹਰਿ ਜਸੁ ਕਹਤੇ ਅੰਤੁ ਨ ਲਹੀਆ ॥ ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਮਨੁਆ ਇਕਤੁ ਘਰਿ ਆਵੈ ਮਿਲਉ ਗੁੱਪਾਲ ਨੀਸਾਨੁ ਬਜਈਆ ॥ ਨੈਨੀ ਦੇਖਿ ਦਰਸੁ ਮਨੁ ਤ੍ਰਿਪਤੈ ਸ੍ਰਵਨ ਬਾਣੀ ਗੁਰ ਸਬਦੁ ਸੁਣਈਆ ॥ ਸੁਨਿ ਸੁਨਿ ਆਤਮ ਦੇਵ ਹੈ ਭੀਨੇ ਰਸਿ ਰਸਿ ਰਾਮ ਗੋਪਾਲ

ਰਵਈਆ ॥ ਤ੍ਰੈ ਗੁਣ ਮਾਇਆ ਮੋਹਿ ਵਿਆਪੇ ਤੁਰੀਆ ਗੁਣੁ ਹੈ ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਲਹੀਆ ॥ ਏਕ ਦ੍ਰਿਸ਼ਟਿ ਸਭ ਸਮ ਕਰਿ ਜਾਣੈ ਨਦਰੀ ਆਵੈ ਸਭੁ ਬ੍ਰਹਮੁ ਪਸਰਈਆ ॥ AGGS, M 4, P. 833.

"I continuously sing the Glorious Praises of the Lord, day and night; singing the Lord's Praises, I cannot find the limits. The mind of the Guru-oriented returns to its own home; it meets the Lord of the Universe, to the beat of the celestial drum. I see the Divine with my eyes, then my mind is satisfied; with my ears, I listen to the Guru's Bani, and the Word of His Sabd. By listening, my soul is softened, delighted by the realization of subtle essence, chanting the Name of the Lord of the Universe. In the grip of the three qualities, they are engrossed in love and attachment to Maya; only as Guru oriented do they find the absolute quality, absorption in bliss. With a single, impartial eye, look

upon all alike, and witness God pervading all."

This stage of perceiving the Sabd-Parmaan is difficult but is

essential to derive full benefit of the reading practice. It is to actually witness the truths of the Guru's teachings within the consciousness. To repeat, what it means is that during the practice of the Gurbani reading when one achieves the mindfulness with the truths of spirituality, one is able to readily employ deep introspection to experience the Divine Truth. The darkness of ignorance disappears.

ਦੀਵਾ ਬਲੈ ਅੰਧੇਰਾ ਜਾਇ ॥ ਬੋਦ ਪਾਠ ਮਤਿ ਪਾਪਾ ਖਾਇ ॥

ਉਗਵੈ ਸੂਰੁ ਨ ਜਾਪੈ ਚੰਦੁ ॥ ਜਹ ਗਿਆਨ ਪ੍ਰਗਾਸੁ ਅਗਿਆਨੁ ਮਿਟੰਤੁ ॥

AGGS, M 1, P. 791.

"When the lamp is lit, the darkness is dispelled; reading the Vedas, sinful intellect is destroyed. When the sun rises, the moon is not visible. Wherever spiritual wisdom appears, ignorance is dispelled."

Within the context of witnessing the verses of the sacred writings, you must bring forth a clear image of the verses. Until one knows how it is achieved several methods must be employed to learn the skill of promoting the achievement. Although it is difficult to describe something, which is a prerogative of the practitioners only, it is sufficient to say that the skill comes from the company of enlightened co-seekers or enlightened clergy. The main difficulty in the way of achieving this state is mental obscurations, lack of faith, and actual motivation. They are removed in the company of other seekers and holy congregations.

Through the practice one learns that one's own mind is in reality none other than the embodiments of the whole game. To cut through deceptive appearances stemming from ignorance, one practices a merger in the verse, in which one assumes the "divine role" of being a doer and the witness, and regards all visions as pure expressions of the Guru's teachings. This includes imagining one's own body in an idealized, enlightened form, the embodiment of enlightened wisdom, or the embodiment of enlightened compassion. Before employing such extensive communicative imagination, it is essential that one recognize the conceptually contrived nature of one's ordinary experience of reality-including one's own identity, one's body, mind, and the environment. For without an understanding of the emptiness of inherent nature of all phenomena-including those imagined in the practice of the witness exercises the practice of the meditation on the Gurbani reading may be reduced to an absurd fantasy. Bhagat Kabir expresses the witness experience as:

ਅਪੁਨੇ ਹਰਿ ਪ੍ਰਭ ਕੀ ਹਉ ਗੋਲੀ ॥ ਜਬ ਹਮ ਹਰਿ ਸੇਤੀ ਮਨੁ ਮਾਨਿਆ
ਕਰਿ ਦੀਨੋ ਜਗਤੁ ਸਭੁ ਗੋਲ ਅਮੋਲੀ ॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥ ਕਰਹੁ ਬਿਬੇਕੁ ਸੰਤ
ਜਨ ਭਾਈ ਖੋਜਿ ਹਿਰਦੈ ਦੇਖਿ ਢੰਢੋਲੀ ॥ ਹਰਿ ਹਰਿ ਰੂਪੁ ਸਭ ਜੋਤਿ
ਸਬਾਈ ਹਰਿ ਨਿਕਟਿ ਵਸੈ ਹਰਿ ਕੋਲੀ ॥ AGGS, M4, P. 168.

"I am the maid-servant of my Lord God. When my mind was convinced and submitted to the Lord, it brought everything in my control. Be wise and consider this well, O Saints, O Siblings of Destiny - search your own hearts, seek and find. The Beauty and the Light of the Lord, Omnipresent, is present in all. In all places, the Lord dwells near by, close at hand."

E. Discursive Practice in Reading

Many seekers of spirituality when begin to read the Guru Granth often find themselves in a situation where they are incapable of resuming (or ever adopting) a critical outlook on some verses. Therefore, they feel incapable of obtaining understanding and making it available to others. This is often not a question of ignorance of Gurbani grammar or otherwise its transliterate meaning. But, rather it is confronting an aspect of theology, which, if accepted, would unsettle the inherited thoughts of the reader. The scholarship is irrelevant here. One would learn later on the path of the Guru that the doubts that we entertain with respect to very unfamiliar theology are largely the outcome of prejudices shaped by our experiences with more familiar theology. Although one will be forced to not be objective here, one must realize that it is always due to our dogmatic biases on the relevance of religion, philosophy, and ethics to the mystical experiences. The Guru says,

ਪੰਡਿਤ ਪੜਹਿ ਸਾਦੁ ਨ ਪਾਵਹਿ ॥

ਦੂਜੇ ਭਾਇ ਮਾਇਆ ਮਨੁ ਭਰਮਾਵਹਿ ॥

ਮਾਇਆ ਮੋਹਿ ਸਭ ਸੁਧਿ ਗਵਾਈ ਕਰਿ ਅਵਗਣ ਪਛੋਤਾਵਣਿਆ ॥

AGGS, M 3, P 116.

"The Pandits, the religious scholars, read but they cannot taste the essence. They are attracted by the theology of duality and Maya, their minds wander in doubts and unfocused. The attachment to Maya has displaced their understanding; making mistakes, they live in regret."

In such a case, these seekers may often continue to proceed on their path of seeking spirituality from the Guru by initially accepting the verses uncritically. There is a strong tendency not to wait and make a big issue of what transiently does not conform to human reasoning. So we act on the most probable hypothesis to explain situations that we do not comprehend, trusting that our animal intellect would prove us wise. The fact is that only a faith on our Guru will fill our hearts in our quest for salvation or enlightenment. We should keep the faith because only faith is considered a wellspring of insight into the Divine mysteries. Guru Arjan states it this way.

ਬੀਸ ਬਿਸਵੇ ਗੁਰ ਕਾ ਮਨੁ ਮਾਨੈ ॥

ਸੋ ਸੇਵਕੁ ਪਰਮੇਸੁਰ ਕੀ ਗਤਿ ਜਾਨੈ ॥ AGGS, M 5, 287

"One who obeys the Guru's Teachings one hundred per cent - that selfless attendant comes to comprehend the nature and knowledge of the Transcendent Lord."

Too much doubt at the outset will hold us back and prevent us from entering the spiritual domain. It is the task of the Guru-oriented seeker to distinguish between valid instructions into a practice, such as contemplative meditation, which can hardly be learned in any other way. The religious or philosophical superstructure, which is added, is often not equally meaningful to a seeker. They are just religious and moral paraphernalia, which are more important only to a scholar or a fundamentalist, rather than to a seeker. On account of these and other consideration, it is best to suspend doubt for the time being if we wish to continue learning from the Guru. At this stage one must be conscious of the fact that such an early stage will not last forever if we persevere in our objective. At a later and more advanced stage, we will be able to resort to analysis and critical evaluation, and not stay into the domain of continuing to sleepwalk without gaining any significant knowledge or understanding.

Another phase of this training in discursive reading is designed to cast light on the unsatisfactory nature of any state of existence. Regardless of the nature of one's existence, as long as it is conditioned by one's mental afflictions, one remains vulnerable to all manner of pain and grief. By focusing on the pervasiveness of

suffering, one's disillusionment becomes complete, leaving only one priority: to attain higher consciousness, in which there is a total and irreversible freedom from all suffering, physical or mental.

ਗਾਵੀਐ ਸੁਣੀਐ ਮਨਿ ਰਖੀਐ ਭਾਉ ॥

ਦੁਖੁ ਪਰਹਰਿ ਸੁਖੁ ਘਰਿ ਲੈ ਜਾਇ ॥ AGGS, Jap 5, P 2.

"Recite and listen, with keeping faith in your mind. Your afflictions shall be sent far away, and peace shall come home."

ਗੁਰੁ ਬਾਣੀ ਕਰੈ ਸੇਵਕੁ ਜਨ ਮਾਨੈ ਪਰਤਖਿ ਗੁਰੁ ਨਿਸਤਾਰੇ ॥

AGGS, M 4, P 982

"When the humble servant accepts and acts according to the Words of the Guru, then the Guru emancipates this seeker in person."

This shift in understanding occurs directly as a result of one's sustained experience with apparent unsatisfactory nature of the verse and the benefits of attaining enlightenment from the Guru. Each of us achieves this by diverse ways of attending to things, the sort of a universe one believes to inhabit. With their emphasis on the vanity of mundane things, a sense of sin, and a fear of being stupid, a beginner in seeking seems to be aiming at inducing the state of the "sick soul" eloquently discussed in James's (1902/1982) *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. Far from condemning the sick soul, James claims that this mind-state images over a wider scale of experience than that of those who avert their attention from evil and live simply in the light of good. The "healthy-minded" attitude of the latter, he says, is splendid as long as it will work; but it breaks down impotently as soon as melancholy arises. Moreover, the evil facts that the "healthy-minded" individual refuses to acknowledge are a genuine part of reality, which, he suggests, may after all be the best key to life's significance, and possibly the only openers of our eyes to the deepest levels of truth.

F. Paath is Conceptual Analysis

There is a difference between a reading the verses as a traditional meditation and a study of the verses as Sabd-Parmaan to learn spiritual concepts. Today's seeker would know the degree of difference that separates meditation from concept analysis just as the religion differs from the scientific mentality. Sikh theologian, Bhai Gurdas describes the encounter between a Sikh and the Guru as:

ਸ੍ਰੀਗੁਰ ਦਰਸ ਧਿਆਨ ਸ੍ਰੀਗੁਰ ਸਬਦ ਗਿਆਨ ।

ਸਸਤ੍ਰੁ ਸਨਾਹ ਪੰਚ ਦੂਤ ਬਸਿ ਆਏ ਹੈ ।

Bhai Gurdas, Kabit 135 [2].

"To focus on the Guru's portrayal is to dwell on the comprehension of Guru's sabd. This comprehension of the knowledge becomes a weapon to conquer the five

evils."

Further, Bhai Gurdas accepts only that person as worth of the Guru's religion that is Guru oriented and who obeys the Guru's will as according to the deep consideration of the Guru's verses.

ਗੁਰਮੁਖ ਮਾਰਗ ਆਖੀਐ ਗੁਰਮਤਿ ਹਿਤਕਾਰੀ॥

ਹੁਕਮ ਰਜਾਈ ਚਲਣਾ ਗੁਰ ਸਬਦ ਵੀਚਾਰੀ॥

Bhai Gurdas, Vaar 9, Pauri 2 [3].

"The Way of Guru-Oriented is defined as adoption of the wisdom of the Guru; also to live in the way of the Lord and to contemplate upon the Word of the Guru."

Formation of conceptual constructs must be an aim of reading of the verses from the Guru Granth. It corresponds roughly to the modern philosophical notion of conceptual construct. Such conceptual identification often, but not invariably, entails a reification of the entity, such that it is apprehended as existing independently of the conceptual designation of it to form a belief.

Although a conceptual analysis of belief is far too vast a topic to treat adequately in the present context, it may be worthwhile to note James's perspective on this matter. In his essay entitled "Faith, and the Right to Believe", James [4] identifies two kinds of intellectuals. Rational intellectuals "lay stress on deductive and 'dialectic' arguments, making large use of abstract concepts and pure logic. Empiricist intellectuals "are more 'scientific,' and think that the order must be sought in our sensible experiences which are found in hypotheses based exclusively thereon." In this light, a seeker more inclined to mysticism would seem to bear the earmarks of an empiricist intellectual, while more traditional seeker would appear to be a rational intellectual. Both are accepted in Sikh tradition. Intellectualism alone is inadequate when it thinks that one can gain knowledge best by a mind merely receptive passively. The faithful admirer seeks qualities of the objective of the faith with a sense of appreciation or even adoration. For a seeker, such a faith is especially focused on the qualities of enlightenment, and adoration is felt towards those who embody the enlightenment. Further, the faith of yearning entails the conviction that it is possible to realize in oneself the excellent qualities that one admires, and with such faith one aspires to do so. Uncritical grasping of dogmas is dupe, while extreme skepticism is simply a mental affliction. There is a middle way that is advocated for a reader of the Guru Granth. It is to place one's faith and trust in the enlightenment of the Guru, and yet to continue to question one's own understanding of the Guru's teachings. Without faith, there would be no inspiration

to enter the path to enlightenment; but without using one's critical faculties, it would be impossible to progress along that path. One must keep in mind that, while the enlightenment from the historical Guru took place in the past, one's own enlightenment lies in the future.

The above sketch of the paath of our tradition certainly bears some traits in common with religion as it is conceived in the modern West, and yet in some important respects it profoundly diverges from a classical model of religion. Certain elements of this approach appear to be scientific; and yet it differs from modern natural science. While the empirical element is largely contemplative and introspective, scientific approach is dominantly scholastic and extrospective. The Guru leads the following way.

ਜਿਨਿ ਕਹਿਆ ਤਿਨਿ ਕਹਨੁ ਵਖਾਨਿਆ ॥

ਜਿਨਿ ਬੁਝਿਆ ਤਿਨਿ ਸਹਜਿ ਪਛਾਨਿਆ ॥

ਦੇਖਿ ਬੀਚਾਰਿ ਮੇਰਾ ਮਨੁ ਮਾਨਿਆ ॥

AGGS, M. 1, P. 221.

"One, who speaks, merely describes speech. But one, who understands, intuitively realizes. Both, by first inspecting and then reflecting upon it, convince my mind."

CONCLUSION

When you begin to read you may either set a number of pages to read or go on reading for as long as you wish to. If I have opportunity, I like to read until I feel that I obtained some thing that I would like to dwell on within my heart for a period of time. There is no fixed ritual as to how much should one read. You may read only one paragraph, or you may read several pages before some particular thought attracts your attention. When this occurs, you may close your eyes and take that thought into your contemplation. Think about it; hold it right in front of you; repeat it to yourself. Ask yourself: Why did this particular verse come to me? Does it have an inner meaning for me? What is its significance to me at this time and how will it touch my life in near future?

As you continue contemplating and brooding on a verse another thought may come to your attention. Consider both of these thoughts: Is there any relationship between them? Is there any coherence? Why did this quotation follow the first one? By this time probably a third idea and then a fourth could have come, and all these thoughts could have come out of your awareness, out of your consciousness. In this short period of the Guru Granth reading that may have been of only a few minutes' duration, you could have experienced spirituality revealing itself; you could have opened yourself to divine Intelligence and Love. This is the Word of God, which is quick and sharp and powerful. You now would realize that, for a seeker, the Guru

Granth reading is just not an ordinary reading but a lot more; something that only ritualistic reading cannot accomplish. Bhai Gurdas describes this process of reading The Guru Granth as:

ਰੁਖਹੁੰ ਘਰ ਛਾਵਾਇ ਬੰਮ ਬੰਮੁਆਇਆ ॥ ਸਿਰ ਕਰਵਤ ਧਰਾਇ ਦੇੜ
ਘੜਾਇਆ ॥ ਲੋਹੇ ਨਾਲ ਜੜਾਇ ਪੂਰ ਤਰਾਇਆ ॥ ਲਖ ਲਹਿਰ ਦਰੀਆਇ
ਪਾਰ ਲੰਘਾਇਆ ॥ ਗੁਰ ਸਿਖਾਂ ਭੈ ਭਾਇ ਸ਼ਬਦ ਕਮਾਇਆ ॥ ਇਕਸ ਪਿਛੈ
ਲਾਇ ਲਖ ਛੁਡਾਇਆ ॥

Bhai Gurdas, Vaar 14, Pauri 9 [3].

"Trees serve as pillars and roofs for the houses. They are sawed and nailed to make boats for people to cross the rivers and myriads of other waves. Likewise, the Sikhs of the Guru, in love and discipline of the Lord, practice the Words of the Guru. They urge numerous others to do the same and help them liberated from bondage."

Another point is that paath will continue to affect life behaviors during rest of the day and rest of the life. This is the object of a seeker. Only a visionless person would read without meaning it to incorporate its knowledge in other aspects of life.

ਪਾਠੁ ਪੜੈ ਮੁਖਿ ਝੂਠੇ ਬੋਲੈ ਨਿਗੁਰੇ ਕੀ ਮਤਿ ਓਰੈ ॥

AGGS, M. 1, P. 1013.

"One reads the scriptures, but still tells lies; such is the intellect of one who has no guru or vision."

This is a test of the success in the reading process that its impact stays with the reader all the times and prevents one from performing degrading, polluting or other undesirable acts during the post reading time.

REFERENCES

1. AGGS = Aad Guru Granth Sahib, 1983 (reprint). Publisher: Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, Amritsar. (M = Mahla, i.e., succession number of the Sikh gurus to the house of Nanak, P = Page of AGGS).
2. Bhai Gurdas, see Bhai Gurdas, In: Onkar Singh, Kabir Sawayye Bhai Gurdas, p. 36, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1993.
3. Vaaran of Bhai Gurdas, see Vaaran Bhai Gurdas, Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, Amritsar, taken from Gurbani CD. The English rendering is not a translation or transliteration, but it is meant to convey the central meaning in the context of the subject matter being discussed.
4. James, William, Faith and the Right to Believe, in Some Problems of Philosophy, New York, Longman's Green, 1948, p. 735. as quoted by B. Alan Wallace, The Bridge of Quiescence, Carus Publishing Co. 1998. Also see, William James, "Faith and the Right to Believe," in Some Problems of Philosophy (New York: Longman's, Green, 1948 (1911). Posthumous, ed. by Henry James, Jr., pp. 221-231. Also in The Writings of William James: A Comprehensive Edition, pp.735-740.
5. James, William (1902/1982). The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature. New York: Penguin.