

## FEATURE ARTICLES

# INTERFAITH DIALOGUE AND THE AAD GURU GRANTH SAHIB\*

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### ABSTRACT

*Guru Nanak promoted Interfaith Dialogue five centuries ago. Guru Arjan followed and compiled the first world scriptures, the Aad Guru Granth Sahib (AGGS) [1], in which he incorporated the philosophies of Bhagat, Sants, Sufis, and also Swayiaes (praises of the first five Sikh Gurus written by Bhatts (bards). He employed a language which allowed for diversity, and which enjoyed wide currency in whole of Southeast Asia and Mid-East. He provided in a true sense the Light for a Pluralistic Age. The new ecological age will consist of a worldwide community where many cultures and religions will live as close neighbors; where science and technology will season the faith practices of all. This will obligate us into intense interfaith dialogues to before accepting that each faith is inspired by a unique vision of the Divine and each has developed a distinct ethnic identity. The Aad Guru Granth Sahib may lead these dialogues. Incorporation of philosophy of other religious sages promote appreciation of diversity in formulating the spiritual philosophy of the One Truth. They tell us that a vision of the healing light of spirituality overcomes the social and ideological issues that underlie much of the conflict among religions and between religion and the exploitation of illusionary materialism. In launching the Quadricentennial of Compilation of the AGGS (year 2004) there is a need to create cooperative multi-level networks between members of every global faith and tradition.*

### INTRODUCTION

**T**he Aad Guru Granth Sahib (AGGS) [1] was compiled in the city of wonderful traditions. The holy city of Amritsar was founded four centuries ago to overcome the conflict among various religions, and between heaven and earth, the sacred and the secular, and the human and the Divine. This conference is to launch celebrations of that event and that discourse on the light contained in this unique composition of the AGGS. To highlight the universal application of its teachings I chose to speak on this subject starting with the following verse from the AGGS:  
ਮਨਿ ਯਗੁਨਿ ਚਿ ਯਪਦੁ ] ਮਨਿ ਯਦਮ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਸਨਬਦੁ ] AGGS, Jap 14, P 3 [1].

“The believer may neither adopt the rigid paths nor follow the religiosity of any religion. The faithful

steadfastly connects to the essence of the all-sustaining spirituality.”

### HISTORY OF RELIGIONS AND SPIRITUALITY

Among the four innate tendencies [2] of human beings the first is to conform to a worldly discipline, the most prevailing such discipline in the history has been the religion. Religion here means a human construct to relate to the Divine through cultural practices. A religion is discovered by a founder and promoted by followers who often encrust it with rituals and rules over time, and which periodically needs to be "cleaned up" often leading to birth of a new religion or a new variety of the same religion.

\*The Keynote Address presented at the First International Conference 2001 on Sri Guru Granth Sahib (World's First Interfaith Scripture) held at the Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, February 25-28, 2001- a modified version. (Original will be appearing in the Proceedings of the above conference.)

Starting from the beginning of human history, religions were evolved to promote the spirituality, which meant a practical understanding and practice of a relationship between the human being and the Creative Soul, *Karta Purakh*:

gurmik mnu smJielaI Aiqm nnu blwir ] AGGS, M1, P 18.

*“Those who are oriented to the Divine teachers, their minds were tutored for the discourses on Cosmic Soul.”*

According to Guru Nanak, the subject matter of the religious lessons is:

kwieAw mhl umdruGruhir kw iqsumih ruki j iq Apur ] AGGS, M1, P 1256.

*“The body is a mansion, a temple, the home of the Creative Soul, the Karta Purakh, who has infused His Infinite Light into it.”*

The second purpose of a religion was to rescue the human mind [4] from Maya and images of Pseudo-Self [3] formed under its influence. Maya is the materialism that is deceptive and illusory and that lures human souls away from the Divine reality. Under its influence the Creator is forgotten, worldly attachments take root and the duality becomes the object of interest. Guru Amardas tells us in the AGGS as follows:

eh mwieAw ij qu hir ivsrI mhu apj I Bwau dji I wieAw ] AGGS, M 3, P 921.

*“This is Maya, by which the Karta Purakh is forgotten; emotional attachments and love of duality sprouts up.”*

Guru Nanak tells in the AGGS that one is born with an innate tendency to seek four life objectives. But soon after the birth, one finds oneself trapped in the house of Maya, the great illusion of a Pseudo-Self. So blinded, one misses the objective and is led away from the Reality.

cwir pdwrQ I Yj ig AwieE 0

isv skql Gir vnsu pwieE 0

ekivsriryqu ipV huryADi Ynnumivsrw hy ]

AGGS, M1, P 1027.

*“The humans are born with an inborn drive to secure four life objectives (dharam, arth, kam, mokh); thus, they start living within the walls of Maya (illusion). In addition, as they are blinded by the darkness of Maya, they forget about the nomenon NAAM and lose contact with the Cosmic Creative Self leading to a defeat in the purpose of this life.”*

In today's world emerging technologies are creating materialistic abundance; our experience with the culture of illusions is increasing. In every moment of the waking hours, we witness the make-believe world

of the mega accomplishments of modern materialism. Here it becomes so easy to forget who we are and where we came from. Instead of the search for reality, we look in the mirror at our designer clothes and our celebrity turbans to define ourselves. We are like the female elephant that gets so absorbed by the desire for attraction of the illusionary male that she loses her freedom in the hands of captors. Bhai Gurdas, the scribe of the AGGS, describe it as follows:

mAxw mhl mptnl kil kl vnl I SB Brmwel ]

Bhai Gurdas, Vaar 1, Pauri 7.

*“Like the intoxicated in sensuality the female elephant loses freedom in the hands of captors so has the entire civilization in this age has succumbed to intoxication of Maya and lost out to the delusions.”*

Today's average citizen is losing spiritual freedom in becoming a competitive and wealth-accumulating machine. The heart of today's human being may be never touched by spirituality. This situation is coming a full circle from what was five centuries ago according to Bhai Gurdas:

auI gl in j gq ivc hamI Adir j I yI kwel ]

kæl n ikspjI dw alt nlc sB giq ibsrwel ]

BeyibAdI I puqSih kil kwql amrw ksweI ]

rihAw qpivs iqhu j gl cDj j g j idje supweI ]

krm BSt sB Bel I kwel ]

Bhai Gurdas, Vaar 1, Pauri 7.

*“Hatred has sprung up in this world and the people are being consumed in ego. No one respects any one else or their deities. The emperors are tyrants and their satraps are butchers. The justice has become extinct. Whosoever can bribe buys the justice. The humankind has become wanting in dexterity of action.”*

The purpose of the religion was to help us take off the distorting glasses that we have grown accustomed to wearing, and look at what is happening from a spiritual perspective

## SOURCES OF DIVERSITY

**(a) Religions and Culture:** Throughout the history of humankind, objective of the founder of every world religion including our own has been to take people out of the illusions of Maya and imprisonment of ego by teaching spirituality to people. Spirituality was defined as the knowledge of oneself and one's relationship to the Cosmic Soul. Only what was varied from time to time was the medium of transmittal to the faithful. These ways were varied to suite specific communities; these ways were termed as religions. This variation was imperative to make a religion suitable for the people of different periods in the earth's history. Guru Gobind Singh supported this hypothesis by saying that:

mīns sb'ek p'Ank kōBrmīauhī [   
 Akal Ustat Chhand 86.1.2.

*“All human being are one and the same although there is a deception of differences (due to multitude of environments and societies).”*

Guru Gobind Singh again said that the religious and cultural diversities that are observed are only imprints of geographical diversifications.

d̥yq̥ Ad̥j j C̥ g̥D̥b̥ q̥rk̥ ih̥D̥U̥ in̥Ḁw̥r̥j̥ in̥Ḁw̥r̥'̥d̥sn̥ ky̥ B̥s̥   
 kōp̥B̥īau̥h̥ī [

Akal Ustat Chhand 86.1.3.

*“Many are gods or demon, or celestial musicians. There are heavenly tribes and the learned people or the artists. They may be seen as Muslims (citizens of Islamic nations) or Hindus (natives of Indian subcontinent). They all look and act differently, but their apparent differences are due to the influences from their countries and cultures, or in the clothes, they wear.”*

**(b) Mythology and Religion:** Scenarios are the same for the origin of mythology. In the beginning, it was customary to evolve the mythical stories in order to explain every religious belief. It became traditional to answer questions by the best stories a wise man could invent in an effort to give order to their religious system. Thus, the mythical stories of all religions deal with the life issues of a period, and they often arrive at the logical conclusion that there must be a God responsible for the order. In the primitive times, this type of logic given by clergy made sense as is illustrated by a Hungarian story re-paraphrased below:

Peasants living in the tiny hamlets of the Hungarian plains were proud to tell visitors: "Did you know that our village is the center of the world? You can check it out for yourself easily enough. All you have to do is go to the square in the middle of the village. In the middle of the square is the church. If you climb its tower, you can see the fields and forests spreading out in a circle all around, with our church in the center." The fact that the neighboring villages also thought they were at the hub of the world didn't matter--after all, what did foreigners living on the periphery of the universe know? Such delusions were taken seriously. These traditional peasants based their views on perfectly sensible bits of information: When they were looking down from the church spire, the village did in fact look as if it stood at the center of the world. All traditions based on these observations they learned in infancy from their elders. Thus, they held a stronger truth-value than anything they learned later. From their isolated vantage point, the reality they knew made perfectly

good sense.

Unfortunately, every wise men must teach the same locally plausible yet ultimately erroneous hypothesis to his/her local population. This did not change over time except the vernacular of stories and their promises were evolved to suite the new age. Don't we hear every day from our churches that their scriptures were much more originated from the lips of the God than any one else's? "After all," they say for a proof, "everyone knows that their prophet was sent by the one God Himself assigning a special position higher than any other prophet." It does no good to point out to them that in such a case every one in this world would have heard the same exclusive commandment from one God. It only irritates them so that they begin to invoke to ex-communicate those who ask questions.

The scenarios may vary from one to the other but the claims and the consequences of non-conformity are the same. Every human group not only is being led to believe itself to be at the center of the universe, but also that it has unique virtues that make it somehow superior to any other group. Every narrowly organized religion instills a similar prejudice in its members. We ourselves are certainly not immune to such myopia. Some of it is just amusing.

Over time when populations expanded to different lands and there was a breakdown in communication due primarily to great distances that separated people, many local or ethnic religions sprang up. They utilized their own vernaculars and histories to evolve the mythical stories of their own. The purpose was to develop their own rules for living that allowed people to lead a coherent existence in their own limited environment. In time, these rules became ingrained in the respective societies and they were adopted as the foundation of many ancient cultures. The relationship between local cultures and the respective religions began to play irrevocable role in our religious history. It survived and was nurtured because it played a useful role. We would be a very different kind of animal if our ancestors had failed to imagine a purposeful relationship with anthropomorphic cosmos. The phenomenal success of the religion in establishing an order in the past will be the reason that most people of the next century would opt for a religion over any other alternative to furnish the life-discipline in their society.

**(c) When Prophets are Replaced By Cleric Caretakers:** We are grateful for many prophets who appeared and promoted religions to teach us spirituality. However, history takes its own toll on every blessing. In religions, it is the development of a

cleric or priestly class that must be installed as caretakers once the prophet leaves the scene. The underlying purpose was to protect and promote the culture of religion that propagated spirituality. However, our experience is in the contrary. Whereas founders of the most religions meant to connect human beings to the Universal Divine on a cosmic basis, many caretakers of the religious treasures considered religion as a commodity of commerce or a trade for profit. They found it profitable to prescribe rules that promoted exclusivity and thus were divisive. Often the clergy would ill define a unique deity to worship and to elevate themselves as the exclusive interpreters of the message. There are several examples from many religions throughout the world to support such observations.

Often our clerics and priests condition us to derive self-esteem from them as opposed to the enlightened souls who have achieved the contentment but not looking for new converts to build their wealth. We are taught that we must pay heed to their instructions in order to even grow up in our religious traditions. From them we should learn how to dress, read, and even think. We are taught, first to desire the worldly fulfillment as a solution to happiness, and then go to their institutions to gain those goods. For example, we can hear their insertions in their loudly expressed prayers for numerous gifts to be granted to us. They brain wash us to ask for ordinary needs of our daily life and success of our business ventures, our sense of both social and religious belonging or recognition, our sense of prominence or our invincibility, and our place after this life on earth. Then they set us up to pay them for prayers

No matter how naïve or how illusory their promises may be our clergy make it most convincing nevertheless that one should go to them for fulfillment of our erroneously perceived and acquired desires. Who would not be elated with the promises of every worldly desire fulfilled by a touch of some one's hand or by eating the left over from a cleric? Who would not feel good to be at the center of the universe or belong to a world religion most suitable to this age? Who would not feel good to be a member of the nation of the chosen people or reborn into the nation of the pure? Don't the people from India forget their numerous faults of political corruption and disgusting violations of human rights simply on account of the deep sensitivity of their souls for belonging to the land of Buddha and Nanak, and the culture of non-violence and religious tolerance? I admit that this and other examples are only stereotyped generalizations, but then much of religious behavior is ruled by stereotypes that are founded by clerics who are always the identity

constructionists based on ethnicity or regional considerations.

**(d) Religious Fundamentalists:** In the process of its promise of saving us from the evil and death by becoming religious, a religion begins to make its own claims on the members of our society. Just as genes use the body as a vehicle for their own reproduction, a religion also uses individuals as vehicles for its survival and propagation. This is done by inventing religious viruses to infect our psyche in a way to bring human minds under blind controls.

We are taught erroneously that a good religious person is someone who is willing to sacrifice even his or her life for the cause of his ethnicity in the name of his religion and in the name of the land where adherents of his religion were born. A religious person is someone who intuitively knows that the hills and waters around his places of pilgrimage are more beautiful, the sanctified food more fulfilling, the songs from his ancestors more melodious, and ideas of his ascetics more wise. He/she knows that the language of his/her scripture is perfect and "other" languages are barbaric; the mode of his worship most logical and those of others as long outmoded; his/her rituals most rational but habits of the followers of other religions are ridiculous or repulsive. Through inculcation of these beliefs, the blind clergy traps the adherents in the psyche of the specific traditions irrevocably. Further, the psyche and cultural traps of traditions and rituals once implanted in the mind never let die because the religious adherents so tailored live without their wisdom and senses. They are told that they are the one chosen to keep traditions alive; without them, their faith would be in a state of constant danger and they would soon lose their well-deserved identity, and losing this identity would be not less than a death.

In the promotion of tangible perpetuation, the religious loyalists are taught to convince others of their superiority and recruit them to swell their ranks. Often they are pushed to act violently and without regard for life or the freedom to worshiping the sacred, or even to gain any benefit to their own society. It is difficult to see how the continuing saga of mutual animosity between Serbs and Croats of Yugoslavia, between Catholics and Protestants in Ireland, between Hindus and Sikhs in India, between Hindus and Muslims every where, or the various warring factions of South Africa either fulfill any purpose of any religion or even benefits the involved parties. How far the Moguls went to take innocent lives of our Gurus and their families? Even as recent as in 1984, the armed forces of India were ordered to plunder Sikh holy places and butcher Sikh population only in religious hatred. Here again

our Guru's teachings showed the way. A perusal of the martyrdom of Guru Teg Bahadur only will bring us home to the principle of fighting for the rights of others to practice their faith with immunity. He gave his life in fighting for the rights of others to practice their religious beliefs according to their own traditions.

**(e) Glorification of Ethnicity in the Name of Religion:** We are entering the civilization of the next century in which we will inherit the world inhabiting much greater religious and political diversity than in the time of Jesus, Mohammad, or Nanak. For example, a wide variety of Christians, Sikhs, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Jains, Native tribes, and all of the various combinations thereof will inhabit the next world. Each group will emphasize its own needs and its own point of view about the function of a religion in a pluralistic society. This emphasis may be misplaced and lead to destructive divisions. The world today is already plagued by religious violence all over. With the collapse of communism and the real needs of people in poverty, the danger in the rise of religious triumphs will become much more serious.

In those conditions, the objective of the faith people will have to be that they bring in spirituality that does not threaten ethnicity or diversity. Rather the presence of diversity in religion strengthens the religious cooperation and faith in the spiritual values that will govern the new society. The spirituality that is foreordained to form the soul of religious cooperation is distinct from religious ethnicity. This spirituality transcends all boundaries of ethnic religions. If prevailing religious thoughts continue to be divisive, it is our failure of translating our expressed faith in the spiritual dimensions of human nature. That dimension is only to seek Truth. Guru Nanak says in the AGGS as follows:

ੴ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਜੀ ॥ ਅਗਸਤ ੧੧ ॥ ੧੧੮੮ ॥

“There is only one law of religion; every one must imbibe the Truth.”

The interfaith spirit of our Guru calls for the destruction of the divisive boundaries. It calls for creation of cultures, rituals, laws and institutions that incorporate diversity in faith and still does not lose sight of the one reality behind everything. We should listen to the vision that Guru Ram Das provided centuries ago as follows in the AGGS:

ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਜੀ ॥ ਅਗਸਤ ੧੧ ॥ ੧੧੮੮ ॥

ੴ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਜੀ ॥ ਅਗਸਤ ੧੧ ॥ ੧੧੮੮ ॥

ਜੀ ॥ ਅਗਸਤ ੧੧ ॥ ੧੧੮੮ ॥

ਜੀ ॥ ਅਗਸਤ ੧੧ ॥ ੧੧੮੮ ॥

AGGS, M 4, P 366.

“People form alliances in the false love of duality.

*They indulge in downgrading others for their faults, while their own self-conceit only increases. As they plant, so shall they harvest? Nanak has joined the Lord's alliance of spirituality, which system shall triumph everywhere.”*

## AUTHORS OF THE AAD GURU GRANTH AND INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

**(a) The Interfaith Scripture:** The Aad Guru Granth Sahib was compiled by Guru Arjan in 1604. It contains 5894 hymns. The interfaith nature of this scripture is evident from the fact that Guru Arjan contributed only one third of the hymns (2216). And there are hymns from other Gurus composed over a period of two centuries and also the hymn of nineteen leaders of other religions of several centuries plus eleven poet laureates of the Guru's court (Bhatts) totaling in all 36 authors. A record of this many authors for a scripture of a world's major religion is still to be matched by any one. Here the Hindus, the Muslims, the scholars and the untouchable peasants, met in the same congregation of holy souls. The selection of language for principal use is the language of the holy men evolved during the medieval period. This language allowed for diversity, and still enjoyed wide currency in whole of Southeast Asia and Mid-East. Based upon the local dialects, it was leavened with expressions from Sanskrit, Prakrit, Persian, Arabic, Bengali and Marathi etc. Guru Granth's language policy was meant to demolish the claim of any human language to be the language of gods. The spiritual language of the Granth meant to communicate with every segment of the society at its own turf and in its own mother tongue. Therefore at least ten linguistic systems of Indian sub-continent, South East Asia, China, and Middle East were employed. To meet the need of inscribing the multi-linguistic scripture the Guru had to design the *gurmukhi* font especially for this purpose. (For more information on the languages of the AGGS and Punjabi language see Prof Chahal's article: *Bhai Sahib Dr Vir Singh*, in this issue on pp 24-29).

**(b) Model of Gurus' Life Style:** In their life spans, the Gurus made every effort to demolish the walls that were erected between people of different faiths. Further, all Gurus themselves maintained a fluid personal identity. It will be too long to describe the case of all of Gurus here. Thus, let me take example of only the founder of our faith here for illustration.

Guru Nanak permitted his image to be always transforming and he was mixing with people of all identities. He was born of a Hindu mother but was raised by a Muslim midwife. In one account during his sacred journeys, he is represented as an ascetic who

lives on sand (a gurdwara built to immortalize this style is popularly known as “*roori sahib*” meaning Guru’s bed of pebbles). In another identity, he became a householder who toiled for a living, as was evident from his life in the town of Kartarpur that he founded and where he lived for the last 18 years of his life. Yet, in another mode he was a spiritual savant discoursing with religious elites of all religions like *Sidhas*, *yogis*, *Hindu Pundits*, and *Mullahs*. One time, he is described undertaking pilgrimage to Mecca in the garb of a Muslim *haaji*. During his Mecca visit, the Guru conducted daily dialogues with clergy of that land and pilgrims from other lands. It is in one of those dialogues that he was asked which of the existing religions was superior and more suitable for humanity. His response was recoded by Bhai Gurdas and was typically that of an interfaith activist:

pCn gl elmin dl kuzl ml WiekTyhæl]  
 vfv slg vrgvievA I K n skykdrig kæl]  
 pCk Kd ikqib nllvfv ihlUkl msl mmlæl]  
 bwb AukyhziA W SB Aml W bWJodv ræl]  
 ihlUmsl min die drgih ADr I k n Fel]  
 kcW rly ksB k W paxl DqYiOr n rhæl]  
 krn bKll I Amp ivc rim rhlm kQvie Kl æl]  
 rth Shjml dnlA gæl ]

Bhai Gurdas, Vaar 1, Pauri 33.

“*Muslim scholars, the Qazi and the Maulvi congregated around Guru Nanak and began to inquire on matter of faith and religious commitment. They said to the Guru that he had created a great mystery with his external attire and the deep knowledge of all religions. Could you open your book and search for the answer whether a Hindu or a Muslim is superior or distinguished? Baba Nanak responded to the pilgrims and their leaders that without good deeds both would repent. One is not accepted in the court of the Lord by only claiming to be a member of a religion whether it is Hinduism or Islam. As the color of safflower is transient and is easily washed away in water, likewise the color of religiosity is only momentary. You are busy only denouncing deity of your opponent’s religion. In the process, the whole world is following the ways of Satan.*”

The Guru is then seen giving discourses at Hindu holy places such as Haridwar wearing external appearance of a Hindu ascetic. There too he dialogued with many sects of Hindu religions. His dialogues with *Sidhas* and *Yogis* have been canonized in the AGGS. Nanak is described as a holy man who took delight in wearing clothes in styles of Muslim *pirs* and Hindu ascetics. He chose companions and disciples whose castes and religions did not match; his first Sikh was a Muslim, Rai Bullaar, and the second too was a Muslim, Bhai Mardana. His life long companion was a Hindu Bhai

Bala. (**Editorial Note:** There are some controversies, whether Bhai Bala was a companion of Guru Nanak). In his social transactions he paid no heed to spatial or dietary religious taboos. It was not without reason that historians, besides calling him Guru, identify him as *shah* or king, *pir*, *sadh*, *acharya*, *bhagat*, *faqir* and *darves*. The underlying logic of these varied terms of salute was to convey the overtly non-conforming personality of Nanak.

It was also not a coincidence that after years of propagating a revealed spiritual mission, establishing numerous religious centers and attracting large followings, when Guru Nanak left his human body for heavenly abode, his followers were unable to decide on Nanak’s religion. They were at a loss whether they should cremate his body as Hindus do, or if they should bury him following the Muslim customs. This indecision was witnessed in a town where he lived for the past 18 years, held daily congregations, selected and crowned his successor, and constantly spread his divine message. Is it not amazing that it is here that people should not be able to name his religion and no one thought of this cross road so unusual? Even his successor, Guru Angad, who was present there, would elect not to come to their help in resolving the dilemma. Was it not because the universe of Guru Nanak was free of rigid religious identities and no one thought of this event so extraordinary?

### ( c ) Guru’s Spirituality Is Distinct From Ritualistic Religions:

Besides his compellingly clear practices, Guru Nanak spoke equally persuasively to distinguish between religions defined by their rituals in contrast to the religions that were source of spirituality. In the scripture the former he referred as *karam -dharam* in contrast to *sach-dharam* meaning an eternal religion (religion of truth). *Karam-dharam* consists of a mixture of prescribed duties and the moral or cultural codes. The successors of the prophets and the supporting clerics or clergy often formulate them. The later usually ignore the Divine Reality or ineffable Cosmic Consciousness that prevails in all humanity. Guru Nanak called it a parenthesis that puts limits around every one.

bDn krm Drm haukIA W ]

AGGS, M1, P 416.

“*All the deeds I perform according to the religion of the rituals imprison me.* ”

Kabir considers it a prison of ego as is given in the AGGS:

krm Drm krqybhussJ m AhlbID mnij wirE ry ]

AGGS, Kabir, P 335.

“*Those who practice religious rituals and strict self-*

*disciplines – they acquire egotistical mind which shall consume their consciousness. “*

The Gurus made special efforts to awaken people to the futility of cultural bonding disguised under the name of a religion and said thus.

krm Drm siB bDnW pWp pth snbDw ]

mmqW mhUsu bDnW pqrkl qRsuDw ]

j h dKw qh j yrl mwieAw k w snbDw ]

nwnk scynm ibnUvrqix vrqVADw ]

AGGS, M 3, P 551.

*“Religions of rituals are all just entanglements; their bondage is with bad and good. Those things done for the sake of children and spouse, in ego and attachment, are just more bonds. Wherever I look, there I see the noose of attachment to Maya. O Nanak, without the True Name, the world is engrossed in blind entanglements.”*

Guru Gobind Singh rightfully pointed to the numerous cultural influences that distract human beings from their divine unity and which mold the human behavior into a variety of differences:

khw BXo jo dael lcn mth kl bIT rhE bk iDAwn  
l gwieE ]

ntq iPirE l leysiq smaln l k gXoprl k gwieE ]

bws kie ibiKAwn sobT kVAsyhl AhsybS ibqwieE ]

swcukhl sn l hwsBl ij n pln kie iqn hl pB pwieE ]

Tav Prasad Swayiae

*“For what are sitting here with closed eyes and in a yogic postures. It is like attentiveness of the crane bird. You are running around the world to take a dip in holy waters. As a matter of fact, you are wasting your opportunities here and thereafter. You live in the woods, sins and waste your life. I want to reveal a truth to you. Only those will reach the Almighty who love the Lord.”*

His conclusion was that:

kl ikAw ariJE sB hl j g sl Bgvwn koBdun pwieE ]

Tav Prasad Swayiae

*“The world is consumed in a mass of religious rituals and ceremonies, but has failed wholly to comprehend the true spirit of God.”*

Similarly, another contributor, Bhagat Kabir, in the AGGS rejects the path of the priestly class who advocated any sort of *karam dharma*:

kblr ij h mrig plfq geypiClprl bhlr ]

iek AvGt Grl rnm kl iqh ciV rihE kblr ]

AGGS, Kabir, P 1373.

*“Crowds of people are following the path that is laid down by the clergy and religious scholars. However, Kabir selected a unique path that directly leads to the*

*Divine.”*

I have described the distinction between the religion and spirituality in great deal in another article [6]. Here it is sufficed to say that the AGGS emphasizes again and again the following:

It is not the source of a belief or even how one acquires it, it is actually the ways in which an adherent formulates a sum-total of his/her faith practices and the way in which one actually let the practice of one's belief impact one's own daily life, that one will get the most wanted results.

These results will be potent in determining the well being of one's material and spiritual world, which will be the goal of people in the next century. The task of the faith people today is to separate the genuine insight of religion for a vision of true reality from the inevitable errors of ritualism and materialistic culture that crept into the religious practices. To practice or preach a religion in order to practice or promote any sectarian divisiveness is to advocate a serious contradiction.

## CONCLUSIONS

Five centuries ago the founder, Guru Nanak, of our faith began to enlighten the world with a universal message. That message is as true today as it was then. Now a new ecological age is giving birth to a worldwide community of an increasingly close-knit "global village"; cultures and religions, which were once isolated from one another will not be so any more. Beliefs, which once were ignored as foreign, will become well transparent and will be actively projected for acceptance of others. At the same time, new ideas and insights from science and technology will season the interaction between, and among faiths and between faith and daily life of its adherents. Further, unprecedented freedom of choice, which will become available on account of material prosperity, will impact the selection of faith and its practices by the new generations.

All this will confront the world religions with perhaps the greatest challenge that they have ever encountered. They will have to learn that each faith is inspired by a unique vision of the Divine and also has developed a distinct ethnic or cultural identity. Each perceives the Divine as the source of unity and peace but each may preserve its religious and cultural uniqueness in a way that causes narrow and divisive sectarianism. To take advantage of the human tendencies, clerics and clergy will promote sectarianism through their newly converted fundamentalists. Only new generations and interfaith groups may bring home the fact to promote

sectarianism is actually a contradiction between the vision of the unity and the peace their religion claims to preach.

All of this will result into turmoil; the seeker will be confronted with an array of questions. Is there a basic problem with perception of myself in this cosmos that can be remedied by my faith? Is there some common underlying reality, which is incompletely realized by the religious traditions I practice? Should I prefer one of these traditions, and reject the others as false? Or do they all point to truth, each in a different way that is better understood by the culture of its adherents? Are the teachings of my religion specific injunctions or they are metaphors left by the founder to be interpreted by new generations? Could new scientific ideas and insights persuade the traditions of religions to be considered as metaphors? Is there a single way most suited to my environment? Can I seek the truth from a religious tradition without adherence to its ethics or rituals requirements? Can I combine elements from many of these traditions in my own unique way, or must I simply accept one tradition, and close myself to all others?

Any institution of organized religion will have to go through a large-scale process of creative ferment to survive the turmoil of the new age. Each traditional approach to religious truth will have to accept a challenge from another tradition. The entire process will be seasoned by new ideas and insights from science and technology.

The mode in which the Aad Guru Granth Sahib was compiled four centuries ago tells us that encounters and dialogues such as those described above create a deeper understanding of spiritual thoughts in the mind of a religious seeker. We hope that the dialogues initiated by Guru Nanak centuries ago will permeate in every tradition. The Bani of Sikh Gurus, Bhagats, Sants, Sufis in the AGGS tell us that a vision of the healing light of spirituality overcomes the social and ideological issues that underlie much of the conflict between religions. I believe that the institution, we call the Aad Guru Granth Sahib, will impact on these processes or questions as it did at the time of its creation four centuries ago.

We call upon every scholar to speak out on these issues to constructively deal with the religious challenges of the new age. The approach should be "multi-level", in that one is able to accommodate within its framework a variety of attitudes from inter-religious community. As the AGGS has taught us, we respect all global traditions on their own terms, and have no desire to divert anyone away from their present tradition. We recognize unquestionable validity in many global

traditions, and believe that the Cosmic Spirit can operate fully and faithfully through almost any of them. We see no need to develop one universal religion that is common for all of humanity. Yet it seems clear to us that the global confluence of religions will revive a universal sense of spirituality. This spirituality will incorporate perspectives and insights from all traditions. The philosophy in the AGGS has led the way in this movement four centuries ago and will do so for all the time to come.

In the beginning of the AGGS Guru Nanak says:  
 Aṁd scūj gūid scū] h'BI scūnūnk hōl BI scū]

AGGS, Jap 1, P 4.

*"The Truth was The Primal Beginning. The Truth was Throughout The Ages. The Truth is Here And Now. O Nanak, the Truth will be Forever And Ever Eternal."*

The AGGS gives highest allegiance to the power and grace of the Truth and its healing energy that operates through every one and through all ages. The AGGS created a philosophical system based on "unity in diversity" that celebrates the unique merits of each particular approach to the Divine energy, yet also provides a way that each of these approaches can be welded into a cohesive common framework.

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