

# PROMOTING SABD GURU GLOBALLY FOR THE GOOD OF MANKIND

Prof Balbir Singh, PhD  
101 Alma Street, Unit 406, Palo Alto, CA 94301-1005 USA

## ABSTRACT

*Sabd Guru's universal truths can avoid the global sectarian conflicts of our day and bring about social justice to all mankind. Because Sikhs now reside in most countries of the world, they have a new opportunity to propagate these principles to the entire world. For this effort, five approaches are presented here.*

## INTRODUCTION

Sabd Guru is unique, universal and timeless. If presented under the right circumstances, in a language people can understand, no promotion of Sabd Guru may be needed as Sabd Guru shines on its own. Here are a few of the tenets from Guru Granth to illustrate this point:

"No one is to be considered bad (AGGS, M 1, p 473) or inferior to other human beings since we were created by the same God using the same substance and spirit (AGGS, M 1, p 62) [1]. God resides in all His Creation. Hence, we should not cause unnecessary harm to animal life, plant life, the planet or its environment.

Even in the darkest moments, no person should feel lonely or helpless, as God is with each of us all the time. It is incumbent on us to ponder on Him and to contemplate on His virtues often. Sharing need not be in one direction only, it can be mutual. Besides sharing our gifts, we can also recognize others' virtues and make them our own. We can also learn from the company of the wiser and of the more saintly people.

Selfless deeds elevate us spiritually and ennoble us. An ennobled person can create his own heaven wherever he finds himself. A Sikh ideal is *Nishkam Sewa*. Hence, history is replete with struggles and sacrifices made by Sikhs to ensure social justice and the dignity for the helpless.

People were weak and meek when Mogul Emperor Babar invaded India during Guru Nanak's time. Two hundred years later, transformed by the ten human gurus, Sikhs became known as the Lions of Punjab for their bravery. Each Sikh was considered equivalent to "*sawa lakh*" (125,000) soldiers of the enemy. Mogul empire dissipated and the British were forced to make a treaty with the Sikhs as all attempts to subdue them failed. Historian Toynbee in late twentieth century considered Sikhs as among the most ardent about their

religion and predicted a great future for them in modern times.

Now Sikhs find themselves on the world stage. They reside in countries all around the globe. They have neighbors that have a different culture, and who speak, in their homes a language different from the familiar Punjabi. Since September 11, 2001, Sikhs have become frequent victims of 'mistaken Identity'. They are often targeted as Arab terrorists, because of their beards and turbans. Also, Sikh practices in their daily lives are now often inconsistent with the teachings of Sabd Guru.

How can Sabd Guru be properly understood and properly propagated to Sikh children and the others for the common good of mankind? I propose the following five avenues -- logic, scientific attitude, technology, education and participation in government, for this purpose.

## 1. Logic

Mathematical truths are also generally regarded as unique, universal and timeless. Having taught college mathematics for over forty years, I often wondered if there is any common ground with Sabd Guru. My conclusion is that they are both founded on logic. Although there have been some secret societies such as Pythagoreans, mathematics like Gurbani has been, by and large, democratically open to all -- rich or poor. Just because one is rich and powerful, access to mathematics is not denied to him. In fact, US President Garvey developed an original proof of the Pythagorean Theorem. US founding fathers, too, remembered from their school geometry that axioms and postulates are self-evident truths that do not require proof. They declared, ". . . we hold these truths as self evident . . ." They held that all human beings are endowed with certain inalienable rights. For example, one has a right to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness. They then framed a constitution to safeguard these rights. Just by being born a human, one enjoys certain protections in the US constitution. State cannot hang him without due process of law. Nor can his liberty be curtailed by

imprisoning him without a due process. He is allowed to make a living in any legal way of his choosing. Subsequently, UN also made a similar declaration of Universal Human Rights. Many other countries now adopt similar principles.

Axioms and postulates, statements accepted without proof, have been applied in other fields as well. About a decade ago, a German philosopher, Wittgenstein, then a school principal in England, tried to organize the entire Western Philosophy based on about a dozen postulates. Similarly, theorems can be constructed in Sikhism as well, e.g. "If God has created all human beings, then they are all entitled to equal justice regardless of their status at birth." Such theorems can be false, so unlike axioms and postulates, they do require a proof before they become acceptable. However, this degree of rigor is not what I am proposing here. As a bare minimum, Sikhs should examine all their religious practices logically before adopting them.

Guru Nanak opposed idol worship, repeated recitations, rituals and blind faith. Just as Greeks thought that an unexamined life is not worth living, Guru Nanak advocated that we do not accept an unexamined religion as valid (AGGS, M 1, p 1410). He wanted us to use intellect and rationality and not be swayed by emotion, superstition, custom or convenience.

## 2. Scientific Attitude

Science and religion both try to get at the truth. They have complementary roles and may even have a symbiotic relationship. During a round the world tour, last year, I came across a book in Dubai that gives seven examples from Quran to show that St. Gabriel made revelations to Hazrat Mohammed about some facts that became known to science only centuries later. Greek philosopher, Aristotle did study chicken eggs but did not progress far. Human embryo was first examined through a microscope only, when it became available in 1799. Before that the common belief was that embryo was a miniature human form that becomes bigger with time. Development stages were not known then. Quran, on the other hand, describes at least two developmental stages: *alaqah* and *mudghah*. *Alaqah* has three different meanings: a leech, a suspended matter, and a blood clot. In the first stage an embryo resembles these three objects at different times. Like a leech, for example, it sucks blood from the mother. To confirm this, the book contains color pictures from a modern Anatomy Textbook by Dr. Keith Miller of Toronto. It also verifies that in the second stage, the embryo due to its rudimentary spinal development looks like a pink piece of chewing gum of today, removed from the human mouth, after chewing, with the dental impressions intact. "Chewed up," is the meaning of the word

"*mudghah*," assigned to this second stage of an embryo in Quran. Quran also says that the sky and the earth were created from the same swirling gaseous matter, much as stated in modern cosmology books. Before this, "heaven" and "earth" were believed to have been created independently.

As we know from what happened to Galileo, Christianity regarded dawn of science as subversive. Now even the Vatican has a department of astronomy and follows space explorations and new theories of cosmology avidly. Christians now claim that Bible was not meant to be taken literally. The world may not have been created in six days. So science and religion can exist peacefully. Buddhist leader, Dalai Lama, an amateur scientist since his childhood, has said that if there were a conflict between science and religion, he would favor science. Some people think Guru Nanak described the Creation as emerging from a Big Bang, a term scientists first used only in the 1930s, centuries after Guru Nanak.

We must understand that findings in sciences are seldom final. They are stated tentatively in terms of probabilities at different levels of confidence, based on statistical analysis. As in mathematics, scientific truths may come from trial and error, induction, experiments or intuition. Deduction is applied in later stages of theoretical formulations. In a publicly open process, others can replicate the experiments to confirm or refute earlier results after further investigation. But they must convince the scientific community of their peers, about the validity of their data. Any publication of results is scrutinized, beforehand, by fellow experts in the field acting as referees. If a result is deemed wrong, rigged or a hoax subsequently, it is retracted publicly again after due public investigation. Scientists are happy if some data do not fit an accepted theory. This can only lead to new knowledge and new theories. I am not proposing that all Sikhs must master all the scientific knowledge and its methods. I recommend that problem solving; data analysis, communication skills, transparency and a scientific attitude toward our religion would go a long way in spreading Sabd Guru in a scientific age.

## 3. Technology

A laptop computer with a color screen, color camera and a wireless internet connection is available for \$200 at Amazon.com among other places. It has a choice of power sources, such as charging by pulling a string or through solar cells. In another two years, it may be available for \$100 since the cost of production then is estimated at \$84. This was the vision inspired by an MIT professor. He wants every child in the world to have one, through the government grants or through private charity partnerships if a child's parents cannot

afford it. It can be used for computing, communicating via email and video chats, file sharing and web-surfing for merchandise, knowledge or entertainment. Children may, of course, also want to play video games on it. This may not be all bad. According to some research, some video games lead to more precise surgical skills among the young doctors. During the Beijing Olympics last year, when Bindra won a Gold Medal, a video game based on Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's life of tribulations and triumphs was being released in Delhi to inspire the young to succeed.

Children in the developed countries are already becoming adept in using online search engines such as Yahoo or Google and on-line encyclopedias such as Wikipedia for their homework. Google among others, seeks to digitize books, journals and newspapers -- in fact, all of human knowledge and make it available free on the Internet, while enhancing its own earnings through ads. Its realistic maps of the world, space and oceans have encouraged further explorations.

Many Sikhs have installed Dr Kulbir Thind's Gurbani CD on their laptops. Others use it on the web for accessing Gurbani in Punjabi or in translation to do research on Gurbani. New Websites and internet resources on Sikhism are being added daily. It is already possible to transfer all the hymns of Granth Sahib, sung by Raagis, to a Smartphone. One can then listen to them while simultaneously studying the text in Punjabi, Hindi or English. All this is available around the clock at almost no cost.

In future we may not even need full fledged notebook computers. Newer, cheaper "net-books" have much longer battery life. There is no need to purchase software because of cloud computing, on the web. One only needs some sort of inexpensive web-pad with a screen and a wireless connection to the internet. On the Web, one has free access to word-processing, spreadsheet, multimedia editing and presentation programs such as Google Docs. Free storage space is also available for one's files through the internet. With EU proposing universal broadband access, rich media such as music, video or TV in full fidelity and 3-D will become common on computers. Access to Gurbani and other Sikh literature is as close as a portable device such as a Smartphone.

#### 4. Education

Some twenty years back, The Teaching Company in the US started commercially videotaping world famous scholars who were also successful presenters. Subjects from Art to Zoology are now available internationally from this effort. Since many public libraries invested in

these programs, anyone knowing English can get a quality education by checking these out for home study. About four years ago, MIT made all its courses available free on the internet. With a functional knowledge of English any one can get free university education without a qualifying entrance exam, if a formal degree is not the goal. Harvard, last year, has similarly put its videotapes of class lectures on the Web, also free. Stanford annually invites scholars and professionals for lectures as a public service to the community. It now makes these lectures available through Apple's iTunes store under a program called iPod University, as free downloads to phones etc. So cost or convenience is no longer an issue in getting a very liberal education.

Free Course Management software, rivaling the commercial programs such as Black Board, is now available to schools or individual educators, from companies such as Moodle. Course portals based on such software have already proved to be a boon in attracting teens away from streets and crimes in England. They get engaged in a more immersive educational experience using cameras, video-chats and social networking etc. through these portals and enjoy it.

With all these newer opportunities emerging, what type of education should we focus on? Our Gurus tell us: That education is worth which is applied to the welfare of the humanity (AGGS, M 1, p 356). They also tell us that a task suitable for everyone's status in life is available as an avenue for service to the others. So one can design his/her education around a battery of one's own skills, attitudes and talents. These can be identified through assessment tools available on the internet.

An advisory council may be needed to catalog all the free internet resources suitable for the education of laymen and the clergy in Sikhism. It could meet periodically, even online, to evaluate success, feedback, new materials and recommend "best practices." It could establish minimum standards in the understanding of Gurbani, local languages, culture, history, biographies of the Gurus and knowledge about Punjab and India etc. it considers desirable. Its purpose would be to ensure continuing improvement in education about the Sikh religion.

#### 5. Participation in the Government

If Mr Manmohan Singh can be the "Kinng" in India, possibly even for a second term, and Barack Obama can be the "Kinng" in the US, why not a Sikh in each of the countries Sikhs live in? We need not resurrect even a benevolent sovereign like Maharajah Ranjit Singh. But if *Raj Karega Khalsa* -- Rule of the Pure -- is to

materialize, then Sikhs imbued in Sabd Guru must participate in the governments of their countries.

Democracy may be the best form of government but it is not perfect. It would not permit private armies or even private arms such as swords for religious militia that were prominent in our proud history in India. Our new weapon has to be a popular vote. Sikhi goal is the betterment of all mankind. There are still many needs not being met -- of the homeless, of the battered women, of the abused children, of the people with no adequate housing or access to education or medical care and of the other segments, currently "invisible" to the governments. Without "affirmative action," and the empowering legislation of 1960s in the U. S., an Obama may not have arrived on the scene today. We need to keep enlarging and improving such empowering legislation. For the universal social justice, Sikhs face many new challenges in Diaspora but are fortunate to have the needed abiding resources in Sabd Guru.

Our gurus have declared this life to be our "dharamsaal. They wanted the greatest success to us in it. To all of us, "Chardi Kala!"

## CONCLUSIONS

Sabd Guru envisions a new way of life that treats all humans, as children of God, and worthy of equal dignity. It brings rationality to our belief systems for common good. Sikhism originated in Punjab and mostly remained there because Gurmukhi was not much understood outside. Now that Sikhs are present in most countries and are becoming familiar with other world languages as well, the tenets of their religion can be presented to a wider world. Sikhism was born at the dawn of science and is the youngest among the major religions. It reflects modern scientific thinking. Sikhs' appearance on the world stage coincided with the birth of newer technologies of computers, video and the internet. These technologies have significantly brought down the cost of education and communication. Rich media content is available around the clock. They can all be used for the common good of mankind if properly grounded in the tenets of Sabd Guru.

## REFERENCES

AGGS = Aad Guru Granth Sahib. 1983 (reprint).  
Publishers: Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, Amritsar. (M = Mahla, i.e., succession number of the Sikh Gurus to the House of Guru Nanak, but M is replaced with the name of Sufi or Bhagat, p = Page of the AGGS).

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Brahminical rituals carried on in daily practice of Sikh faith. Brahminical practice has all this time influenced these traditions, there by superstitiously coloring the Sikh way of life. Sikh hierarchy over time either deliberately or unconsciously made decisions as to what should be emphasized or ignored. The only way to learn is by understanding the message given by the Guru:

ਮਨ ਬਚ ਕ੍ਰਮ ਜਿਹ ਆਪਿ ਜਨਾਈ ॥

ਨਾਨਕ ਤਿਹ ਮਤਿ ਪ੍ਰਗਟੀ ਆਈ ॥

*Those whom the Lord Itself instructs in thought, word and deed - O Nanak, their intellect are enlightened.*  
AGGS, M 5, p 259.

ਜਿਸਰਿ ਬੁਝਾਏ ਨਾਨਕਾ ਤਿਹ ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਨਿਰਮਲ ਬੁਝਿ ॥

*One who is made to understand - O Nanak, that Gurmukh obtains immaculate understanding.*  
AGGS, M 5, p 252.

Emphasis has to be placed on earning spiritual knowledge as a prerequisite to spiritual elevation through understanding the message contained in Sabd Guru and following it honestly, truthfully by selfless service of the humanity. There will always be some tension between those committed to finding the truth in a reasonably understanding scholarly way and those with inherited wrong understanding, who wants to preserve their blind religious way. This challenge has to be dealt with human maturity in a constructive and creative way.

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