

# BANI, GURU, AND GOD

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## INTRODUCTION

The word Gurbani consists of two roots - **Guru** and **Bani**. The word "**Guru**" means "spiritual teacher" and here refers to the ten Gurus of Sikhism. The word "**Bani**" refers to the utterances and writings in holy Guru Granth. In addition to six gurus, the compositions of the other Hindu and Muslim bhagats (holy saints) and Sufis is also found as part of bani in the Guru Granth Sahib (often called **Aad Granth** –Aad/Adi means first or original). The selection of saints by gurus for inclusion of their bani in Guru Granth Sahib was done solely on the basis that the basic principles in their bani were same as those in the bani of all the gurus. Most of the introductory bani in the Granth Sahib is written by the Sikh Gurus. The Guru Granth Sahib starts with Guru Nanak's composition, Mool Mantra (that defines characteristics of Ek 'O', ੴ, the one God) followed by Jap Bani (the morning prayer), Rehras (the evening prayer), and Kirtan Sohila (the night prayer). This introductory gurbani occupies the first thirteen pages of the total 1430 pages of Guru Granth Sahib. The complete volume falls under 3 categories: (1) **Introductory Gurbani-page 1-13** (2). **Gurbani set to the Ragas-page 14-1353** (3). **Miscellaneous Gurbani-page 1353-1430. Mahla** number in the text refers to the Guru's number of succession to the House of Nanak, **Ghar**, number refers to the tune and musical notation number, and **Rahao** means 'pause' when reciting. It is written in Sant Bhasha, a language used by medieval Indian Saints throughout India. Besides various forms of Punjabi, it has hymns in Hindi, Marathi, Persian, Prakrit and Sahaskrite.

Present Granth Sahib was declared Guru

by Guru Gobind Singh in 1708 includes hymns, *pauris* and slokas of six of the ten Sikh gurus--**Guru Nanak** (974 hymns, *pauris* and slokas), **Guru Angad Dev** (62 slokas), **Guru Amar Das** (907 hymns, *pauris* and slokas), **Guru Ram Das** (679 hymns, *pauris* and slokas), **Guru Arjan Dev** (2218 hymns, *pauris* and slokas), **Guru Teg Bahadur** (59 hymns and 56 slokas). And according to some writers Guru Gobind Singh in Aad

*All Sikhs are ordered (by Guru Gobind Singh) to accept Guru Granth as the Guru (Sabh Sikhian ko hukm hai, Guru maneo Granth). But are not the ten human Gurus our Gurus or Bani is our Guru (bani guru, guru hai bani; AGGS, M4, p 982) or Sabd is our Guru (Sabd Guru, Surat dhun chela; AGGS, M 1, p943)? Gurbani/Bani/Sabd is believed to be revealed to Sikh Gurus as message of God. Some Sikh scholars consider gurbani as a place to meet God (Pothi Parmeshar ka Thaan; AGGS, M 5, p1226). Although Guru Granth Sahib (AGGS) is the eternal Guru and there is no more human Guru in Sikhism after Guru Gobind Singh, but the bani/Sabd or message in it is what leads us to realization of God. That is why Bani/Sabd is Guru right from the time of Guru Nanak (Sabd Guru, Surat dhun chela; AGGS, M 1, p 943) much before Guru Gobind Singh declared AGGS as the Guru. There is no prophet in Sikhism. God according to Gurbani is pervading everywhere in all forms as well as formlessness (sargun as well as nirgun which is matter and energy in science).*

**Note:**

**AGGS = Aad Guru Granth Sahib. M = Mahla**

Granth added one sloka to the slokas of Guru Teg Bahadur: ਬਲੁ ਹੋਆ ਬੰਧਨ ਛੁਟੇ ਸਭੁ ਕਿਛੁ ਹੋਤ ਉਪਾਇ ॥ ਨਾਨਕ ਸਭੁ ਕਿਛੁ ਤੁਮਰੈ ਹਾਥ ਮੈ ਤੁਮ ਹੀ ਹੋਤ ਸਹਾਇ ॥ AGGS, M 9, p 1429.

*My strength has been restored, and my bonds have been broken; now, I can do everything. Nanak: everything is in Your hands, Lord; You are my Helper and Support.*

(Editor's note: Many theologians believe that this sloka is also of Guru Teg Bahadur.)

The holy Guru Granth Sahib is the eternal Guru and there is no more human Guru in Sikhism. It's important to understand that the holy book or its content known as Bani/Sabd is the Guru that leads us to realization of God.

## DISCUSSION

The holy Guru Granth, the human Gurus, the bani/sabd are all important part of a Sikh's life. We sing a couplet (*dohera*) after 'Ardaas' (supplication) compiled by Giani Gian Singh that all Sikhs (by Guru Gobind Singh) are ordered to accept Granth as the Guru:-

ਸਭ ਸਿਖਨ ਕੋ ਹੁਕਮ ਹੈ ਗੁਰੂ ਮਾਨਿਓ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ ॥  
*Sabh Sikhan ko hukm hai, Guru Maneo Granth.*

But **who is the Guru for a Sikhs?**

Are not the ten human Gurus our Gurus?

Yes they are, through Guru Granth Sahib. We invoke their spirit whenever we do the Ardaas. They were different human forms but with the same Guiding Light of Guru Nanak, which received universal message for humanity in Gurbani, the Guru's Word, called by many the Revealed Word. For that reason, the essence of the message of Sikhi is in the everlasting Gurbani in Guru Granth Sahib. Therefore, Guru Granth Sahib represents all Gurus' personalities and their teachings which is our everlasting/eternal Guru.

**Was the idea of the Aad Granth becoming the Guru the initiative of our tenth Guru Gobind Singh?**

Although Guru Gobind Singh ended the human guru-ship and declared Guru Granth as the eternal Guru, the idea of holy Granth as the Guru did not start with Guru Gobind Singh. It

was pre-ordained right from Guru Nanak who mentioned the **sabd** or **bani** (meaning the holy Word) is the Guru and my mind in reflective meditation, the disciple. (*Sabd Guru, Surat dhun chela*; AGGS, M1, p943; for detail see Chahal, 2004 #2). Guru Nanak then used to note the verses down which he wrote into a book came to be called the **Pothi Sahib**. The Pothi Sahib was added to, by our second to fourth Gurus. Our fifth Guru, Guru Arjan extended Pothi Sahib that carried basic message of Guru Nanak to **Aad Granth** compiled in 1604 and included bani of first five Gurus and inspirational writings of pre-Nanak saints (such as Sheikh Farid and Bhagat Kabir) and of saints and poets who lived in the times of Gurus (such as Mardana and Bhikhan). This Aad Granth was adopted by Guru Gobind Singh after he had inserted the bani of ninth Guru, Guru Teg Bahadur, in 1708. Now Aad Granth becoming the final Guru, commonly called **Guru Granth Sahib** or Sri Guru Granth Sahib (SGGS) or Aad Guru Granth Sahib (AGGS).

The holy book Guru Granth Sahib is the eternal Guru and there is no more human Guru in Sikhism. Guru Granth Sahib or more appropriately the bani/sabd or message in it leads us to God without the middle man. That is why bani is Guru and Guru is bani (*bani guru, guru hai bani*; AGGS, M4, p 982). There is no prophet in Sikhism.

For Sikhs, bani or the compound Gurbani (Guru's bani) is the revealed word. Revelation is defined as the way God discloses and communicates itself to humanity.

There are different views on how God communicates with humanity. The Hindu belief is that God occasionally becomes incarnate as an avatar and thus communicates

itself through his word and action while living on this Earth. For the Muslims the revelation consists in actual words in the form of direct messages conveyed from God through an angel Gabriel, to the Prophet Muhammad. Another belief is that God communicates not in the form but the content of the words, i.e. knowledge, to man. A related view is that, as a result of the mystic unity they achieve with the Universal Self, certain individuals under Divine inspiration arrive at truths which they impart to the world.

The Gurus did not subscribe to the incarnation theory "*The tongue be burnt that says that the Lord ever takes birth*" (AGGS, p 1136), nor did they acknowledge the existence of angels or intermediaries between God and man. They were nevertheless conscious of their divine mission and described the knowledge and wisdom contained in their hymns as God given.

"*As the Lord's word comes to me, O Lalo, so do I deliver it,*" says Guru Nanak (AGGS, p 722). Guru Arjan: "*I myself know not what to speak; all I speak is what the Lord commandeth*" (AGGS, p 763). It is in this literal sense that bani is revelation for the Sikhs. Faithful consider it God's Word mediated through the Gurus or Word on which the Gurus had put their seal. The bani echoes the Divine Truth as said Guru Nanak (*Ad sach jugad sach*; AGGS, M 1, p 1); or the Formless Lord Himself, as said Guru Amar Das (*vahu vahu bani nirankar hai tisujevadu avaru na koi*; AGGS, M4, p 515).

The content of the bani is God's praise and the clue to God realization (as explained later in "Concept of God in Sikhism"). *Hukm* or the Divine Laws of Nature is the fundamental principle of God's activity. The bani, which is Guru in

essence, brings this enlightenment to us humans. It shows the way. Listening to, reciting and becoming absorbed in bani engenders merit and helps one to overcome *haumai*, i.e. finite ego or self-love which hinders understanding and realization.

The bani is all in the spiritual key. It is poetry of pure devotion, love and compassion. It is the ultimate guide to the spiritual and moral path pointed by the Gurus. Its language and symbolism drawn from everyday life makes it easier for a devotee to understand and follow its message. But in our gurdwaras, bani in the holy book is worshipped more as an idol; neglecting its message (babd guru) altogether in our Life.

### CONCEPT OF GOD IN SIKHISM

In various religions, God has different names and prophets are sent by God to eradicate evil from this world. In Christianity, for example, it's God, in Islam it's Allah. Jesus is the last prophet in Christianity and is considered as the beloved son of God. Similarly, Hazrat Mohammed is the last prophet in Islam. In trinity concept of Hindu God *Brahma* (creator), *Vishnu* (sustainer) and *Mahesh/Shiva* (destroyer) are carnations that came to Earth. Sikhism does not believe in the concept of incarnation of God. God does not come on Earth in human incarnation as is believed in other religions. Sikh Gurus made it very clear that they were not God or image of God and should not be worshipped. Tenth Guru Nanak, Guru Gobind Singh, even put it in harsh words and said, "Those who call me God will fall into the pit of hell." The Sikh concept is fiercely opposed to any anthropomorphic conceptions of the Divine. For Guru Nanak there is one and only one God (Ek "O" ਓ) who is limitless and is in the creation; and it's us who give him different names. He is described both as immanent and

transcendent. He is the creator of all things, yet He does not remain apart from His creation. When we say that God is both Transcendent and immanent, it does not mean at all that there are two parts or phases of God. It is the Transcendent God who is everywhere, in each heart, place and particle. It is He who is both *sargun* and *nirgun* which is matter and energy in science. All matter is a form created from formless Energy.

We can have scientific explanation for the 21<sup>st</sup> century new generation about concept of God. God is explained by Guru Nanak as the 'Jot', which is scientifically 'Energy'. As explained in detail by Dhillon [2007#3], scientifically everything in this universe came from this one 'Energy' and will go back to this 'Energy'. 'Everything' means all matter including human beings and all other beings. According to law of thermodynamics, this energy can neither be created nor be destroyed. (ਵਡਾ ਨ ਹੋਵੈ ਘਾਟਿ ਨ ਜਾਇ] - *The Creator neither increases nor decreases in totality.* AGGS, M 1, p 9.)

I realize these concepts make many of us feel uncomfortable but Nanakian philosophy or philosophy of Guru Nanak is not at odd with the scientific explanation.

ਸਭ ਮਹਿ ਜੋਤਿ ਜੋਤਿ ਹੈ ਸੋਇ॥ ਤਿਸ ਕੈ ਚਾਨਣਿ ਸਭ ਮਹਿ ਚਾਨਣੁ ਹੋਇ॥

(AGGS, M 1, p 663-8)  
*The Divine Light is within everyone; You are that Light. Yours is that Light which shines within everyone.*

Guru Nanak still goes further that this 'Energy' came from 'Sunn.' The 'Sunn' means 'Nothingness' and 'Nothingness' means 'Everything'.

ਅਗਨਿ ਪਾਣੀ ਜੀਉ ਜੋਤਿ ਤੁਮਾਰੀ ਸੁੰਨੇ ਕਲਾ ਰਹਾਇਦਾ॥੨॥

ਸੁੰਨਹੁ ਬ੍ਰਹਮਾ ਬਿਸਨੁ ਮਹੇਸੁ ਉਪਾਏ॥ ਸੁੰਨੇ

ਵਰਤੇ ਜੁਗ ਸਬਾਏ॥

(AGGS, M 1, p 1037-12)  
*Your Light pervades fire, water and soul; Your Power rests in the Primal Void. From this Primal Void, Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva issued forth. This Primal Void is pervasive throughout all the ages.*

Alike God, the Self (or Soul) is also formless. Form is possible to the limited entity only. In order for something to possess a form, it must be conditioned by something else. Self being beyond the body-mind-intellect apparatus is deconditioned from everything, and therefore this Unconditioned Self can only be formless. Thus, in his essential nature, as the Divine Consciousness, man is said to be the True Image of God. But we have to recognize it.

ਮਨ ਤੂੰ ਜੋਤਿ ਸਰੂਪੁ ਹੈ ਅਪਣਾ ਮੂਲੁ ਪਛਾਣੁ॥

AGGS, M 3, p 441-3.

*O my mind, you are That — the true image of the Divine Light — know your Reality.*

Characteristics of God defined by many religious scriptures and by the concept of energy are more similar than different. Energy of the Universe is the Doer Force or Creator/ *karta purkh* and self-creation is the law of nature. And according to law of thermodynamics, this energy can neither be destroyed nor be created (eternal without birth and death/ *ajooni*). This is also called the law of conservation of energy. So energy can convert into matter and matter can convert into energy but the total energy stays the same, and can neither be created nor be destroyed. We can refer to this Divine Power as He, Him or His. He is Universal God (The Energy of the Universe), the Supreme Being or the Lord of the Universe.

He (Energy of the Universe) is everywhere in all forms as well as formlessness (*sargun* as well as

*nirgun*). All matter and all space is Him (energy). He has been and will be there forever (*akal moorat*). He creates, maintains and destroys anything. That is all living things take birth, grow and die. He is Life. He is Self-Creating (*saebhang*).

Energy is creator and matter created from energy is creation including humans. Therefore, creator/creation or energy/matter is inter-convertible. Sikh religious scripture says the same that creator is in the creation and creation is in the creator (*khalik khalak mein khali*, AGGS, p1350)

So we are created out of universal energy and now at the time of death become part of universal energy. Religions say the same when life is imagined as a wave arising from the ocean and merging back into it. Viewed this way, reincarnation is a fancy name for recycling. All living organisms get recycled. That's the law of nature and no one can avoid it. The balance of ideas between science and religion is provided as much impartiality as humanly possible.

God is not a theoretical concept in Sikhism. We should be able to experience God within us. Sikh scriptures hold that all humans are capable of achieving union with God while still alive by realizing the Divine within. That's how man can become one with God and experience it. In other words, the essential part of being a Sikh is meeting God, having *darshan*, living with God 24 hours a day. Giani Gian Singh wrote in "Panth Parkash" that Sikhs routinely pray during ardas: Consider the Guru Granth as an embodiment of the Gurus. Those who want to meet God, can find Him in its gurbani hymns (*Guru Granth Ji manyo pargat Guran ki deh. Jo Prabhu ko milbo chahe khoj shabad mein le.*)

Guru Granth Sahib (AGGS) – Sikh Holy-Scripture points towards self-realization to attain spiritual state of mind. In the AGGS, the Commencing Verse, which is commonly called Mool-Mantra (*Manglacharan*), describes attributes of God, who is addressed as the one and only one infinite, ultimate truth, the creator/creation (*Ik 'O' ੴ, Satnam, Karta Purakh*). If we accept God as a spirit that exists in each and every person, then it describes attributes of spiritual state of mind/ soul/self. "That state of mind is without fear (*Nirbhau*), without enmity (*Nirvair*), immortal without the fear of death or birth (*Ajooni*), complete within itself (*Saebhang*)-- timeless, ageless, and formless (*Akal Murat*)". A few blessed ones realize that state of mind (*Nirbhau, Nirvair, Akal Murat, Ajuni Saebhang, Gur Parsad!* Mool-Mantra or Basic Principle in Jap, AGGS, p 1). Nanakian philosophy expects human beings to comprehend and practice these attributes of God in their life so that they could become God-oriented (*gurmukh*). We know that only physical body ages, spirit is not affected by time or age or birth or death. Sikh scriptures hold that all humans are capable of achieving union with God while still alive by realizing the Divine within. That's how man can become one with God.

*"Man is the goal of creation. He has come into this world to display those Attributes of God that are reflected within himself."*

Sufi Giyani Jallaluddin Rumi [from Dhillon # 4]

Therefore, God is not "there yonder", or at "some other time", or after death phenomena, or sitting somewhere in the sky outside this world watching our actions. In truth, God is ever present in us, waiting to receive us, "here" and "now". Therefore, in reality we all are God-

realized "now", but we do not know it! The process of transition of *Jeeva* (individual being) from its deluded or materialistic consciousness (egoism) to the spiritual consciousness is truly the religion. Therefore, to enjoy the Divine Bliss, Eternal Freedom and Boundless Love by becoming one with the homogenous oneness is the ultimate goal of religion. So long the realization of this ultimate goal remains incomplete within ourselves; we are liable to create havoc in the God's creation.

The spiritual wisdom in religious texts reveals to us very important concepts. The first is that God has made man in true image (*Joti Swaroop*), hence, the man's real nature is essentially divine. Second, the main aim of human life is to realize the essence of this divinity which is ever present within. Third, the soul (individual self/*atma*) is immortal, and the experience of the oneness of the soul with the Universal/Supreme Soul (*paramatma*) is to Realize God or to become one with God.

ਬਾਹਰਿ ਢੂੰਢਿ ਵਿਗੁਚੀਐ ਘਰ ਮਹਿ ਵਸਤੁ ਸੁਥਾਇ॥

ਮਨਮੁਖਿ ਰਹਿਮੈ ਕਰਿ ਮੁਸੀ ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਪਲੈ ਪਾਇ॥  
AGGS, M 1, p 63.

*Searching outside of themselves, people are ruined; the object of their search is in that sacred place Within the Self. The Manmukhs (ego-beings), in their ego, miss it; the Gurmukhs (spiritual beings) receive it in their laps.*

The above philosophy of Guru Nanak has been confirmed by the other Sikh Gurus:

ਸਭ ਕਿਛੁ ਘਰ ਮਹਿ ਬਾਹਰਿ ਨਾਹੀ॥  
ਬਾਹਰਿ ਟੋਲੈ ਸੋ ਭਰਮਿ ਭੁਲਾਹੀ॥

AGGS, M 5, p 102.  
*Everything is Within the Self; there is nothing outside of It. One who searches outside is deluded by*

doubts.

ਪੁਹਪ ਮਧਿ ਜਿਉ ਬਾਸੁ ਬਸਤੁ ਹੈ ਮੁਕਰ ਮਾਹਿ  
ਜੈਸੇ ਛਾਈ ॥

ਤੈਸੇ ਹੀ ਹਰਿ ਬਸੇ ਨਿਰੰਤਰਿ ਘਟ ਹੀ ਖੋਜਹੁ  
ਭਾਈ ॥

AGGS, M 9, p 684.

*Like the fragrance which remains in the flower, and like the reflection in the mirror, the Lord dwells deep within; search for it within your own heart, O Siblings of Destiny.*

Furthermore Kabir rejects the concept of Hindus and Muslims that God dwells in South and West but suggests us to look deep within:

ਦਖਨ ਦੇਸਿ ਹਰੀ ਕਾ ਬਾਸਾ ਪਛਿਮਿ ਅਲਹ

ਮੁਕਾਮਾ॥

ਦਿਲ ਮਹਿ ਖੋਜਿ ਦਿਲੈ ਦਿਲਿ ਖੋਜਹੁ ਏਹੀ ਠਉਰ

ਮੁਕਾਮਾ॥

AGGS, Kabir , p 1349-13.

*Hindus say their God is in the south direction, and the Muslims say their God is in the west. Search in your heart — look deep into your Heart of hearts Within; this is the Home and the place where God lives.*

In reality, as the Self is always present within, *Jeeva* (individual being) is never apart from it. In other words, it is not the matter of realizing the Self, but of realizing that we never were not the Self! Thus, if we stand completely in spirit's world, where time has no meaning, the whole process of spiritual union never even occurred! *Jeeva* was the part of Soul and God all along, only without knowing it! It was the false ego sense that had temporarily intervened. Once the false ego is eliminated, it takes only split second for the spiritual linking to take place — one split second completely divorced from the past, and entirely free from mental slavery of the future is all that is needed to peep over the veil of ignorance and realize for ourselves

eternally thereafter the True Nature of the Self, the Timeless Godhood (*Akaal Purakh, paramatma*).

ਆਪੁ ਪਛਾਣੈ ਬੂਝੈ ਸੋਇ॥

AGGS, M 1, p 25-4.

*He who realizes his Self comprehends God.*

*"If you know your Soul you know your God."* Sufi Giyani Jallaluddin Rumi [from Dhillon # 4]

Upon realizing our essential nature as Self, we also discover this is the Self of all, meaning that we are one with others. There is only one Self, one common Self which appears as many and different because of the different names and forms superimposed on it. There is one common being who is mistakenly supposed to be many — a mistake which has cost man dearly in the sense that it is responsible for his dualistic behavior (*Doojaa Bhaav*): Love and hatred, mercy and bloodshed, union and separation, pleasure and pain, death and rebirth, and so on. Self-realization is none other than knowing that we are one in spirit. When this truth dawns upon one, notions such as "I, mine, me, your" arising out of ego-ignorance, fade away like glowworms in the sun. The wise and true person, thus, sees One God in himself and in all creation. If you love this One God, you cannot hate others. If you can't hate others, you can't see enmity in others and if you don't see enemies, you have no fear. Fear is the product of others. It is this sense of Oneness that is the only possible basis for individual and collective harmony and peace.

Irrespective of one's faith, today's modern world expects religion to provide freedom at both spiritual and secular level. Although we preach as God of love; in fact the God of faith/blind faith without logic is the

cause of religious wars. It is the God of logic, which is the God of love and spirituality. That, in my humble opinion, was the God (in terms of concept) of Guru Nanak. Guru Nanak preached religion of logic.

## CONCLUSIONS

Bani/Sabd is Guru right from the time of Guru Nanak much before Guru Gobind Singh declared AGGS as the Guru. The essence of the Gurbani message starts with *Mool Mantar* (root or basic principle) which is the expression of *Japuji* in as few words as possible and summarizes attributes/characteristics of God. The philosophy of our founding Guru Nanak is expressed in *Mool Mantar* and *Japuji Sahib* which is extended into the entire 1430 pages of Gurbani in AGGS. There is no prophet in Sikhism.

The central theme of Gurbani is that there is only one God (*Ik 'O'* ੴ), who is not outside the world. It is pervading everywhere in all forms as well as formlessness (*sargun* as well as *nirgun* which is matter and energy in science).

God is not a theoretical concept in Sikhism. We should be able to experience God within us. All humans are capable of achieving union with God while still alive by realizing the Divine within. Gurbani points towards self-realization to attain spiritual state of mind and see God in all. It is this God of love and spirituality that bani/sabd teaches us and can save those who follows blind faith and start wars in the name of religion.

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