

# CONSCIOUSNESS AND GURBANI

Dr Avtar Singh Dhaliwal, MD, FACS  
3606, Honeywood drive, Johnson City, Tenn.37604,

## ABSTRACT

*After thousands of generations, humans have reached the highest level of conceptual intelligence. With the further passage of time and advancing technology, man will hopefully achieve methods of reaching and sustaining higher consciousness. According to the Gurbani, an achieved higher state of consciousness enables a person to realize the oneness and to sense the presence in and through it of the Creator. To comprehend the complexities of achieving a higher consciousness, one has to possess following three essential components: (1) an exalted personality, where the mind is in total equipoise, (2) a pragmatic intellect; and (3) the ability to withstand the impact of a higher consciousness because consciousness and sensory perceptions cannot independently exist. One has to co-ordinate mind and body with the thought process to stabilize mind in and for genuine introspection. Thoughts and all the thought waves put together is part of the consciousness, the environments and its values, economic pressures and our inheritance.*

*Thought expresses itself in words or gestures, through looks or bodily movements. Thought is a common factor of all mankind. The intellect is that part of thought process in mind that knows the moral nature as it feels, such as a wheel possesses the rotation. Finally, while confronting the physical, emotional and mental burdens and pleasures of earthly life, one has to accept the elation of being able to recognize and truly experience God in both an impractical and practical manner.*

## INTRODUCTION

Consciousness in Gurbani according to revelations of the Gurus is a higher form of awakening that the blessed person possesses. This higher state of consciousness enables a person to realize the oneness of the universe, and to sense the presence in it and through it of the Creator. Usually, ordinary persons have self-awareness or self-consciousness—a faculty upon which rests all of their life. Whatever it is when it is accomplished, personality is permanently altered. One's cruel and violent instincts and egotism depart, and skepticism and sorrow are removed. One experiences everlasting happiness in the Universe that the standard scientific explanations of perception cannot account for. One has reached higher consciousness, when a person with blessings of the God, is in the state of exaltation, an indescribable feeling of elevation, elation and joyousness, and a quickening of moral sense, which is fully as striking, and more important than is the enhanced intellectual power.

## CONSCIOUSNESS

To comprehend the complexities of achieving higher consciousness, one has to possess:

- (i) an exalted human personality; where **Mind** is in total equipoise,

- (ii) pragmatic **Intellect**, and
- (iii) ability to withstand the impact of **Higher Consciousness**.

To elaborate on these statements according to Gurbani, we will take each of the concepts separately.

**Mind:** The 'Mind' is the originator, processor and activator of emotions. A person's sensory organs perceive external and internal stimuli while the brain records these perceptions, and transforms them into 'inferential knowledge'. Perceptions developed by the human mind can trigger emotional responses, such as pain and pleasure, sadness or happiness, making us conscious of daily life events. From the inferential knowledge and emotional perceptions, intuition, introspection and consciousness have emerged. For instance, when a child sees a beautiful flower, his emotional response is to touch it, expecting pleasure. Nevertheless, when his hand reaches for the flower, and he feels only thorns, his concurrent response is pain. Thus, sensory perceptions and emotional responses coexist and simultaneously create consciousness. Consciousness and sensory perceptions cannot exist separately. Biological triggers activate the sensory organs, creating a response inseparable from the perception.

The thinking process is function of the brain and is the source of all thoughts and thought waves. Thus, the mind, an attribute of the brain, is the fundamental physical component where thoughts originate and responses are processed. Learning and memory are the tools that allow individuals to modify their behavior through experience by encoding, storing and retrieving information. These processes occur in stages that proceed serially and in parallel, and involve multiple brain regions and systems.

The “limbic system” of the brain structure is common to all mammals, comprising the old cortex and its primary related nuclei. The cerebral cortex is the dominant blessed portion available to humans only. It is associated with discriminative senses for smelling, vision, hearing, taste, touching and involuntary functions. The fundamental attributes of human behavior (fight, flight, food, and fornication) are claimed to be the functions of the multi-nodal limbic system. The limbic system, in turn, is controlled by cerebral cortex. The left side of the brain in most people is relatively specialized for acquisition of ‘verbal’ material and the right side of the brain for the acquisition of ‘nonverbal’ material. There is an inherent problem making the transition back from a pictorial to a verbal format of thought. The experience itself probably results from a change in hemispheric dominance, such that the right cerebral hemisphere commonly characterized, as lacking language, is more active during the experience, which would naturally result in problems of literal communication.

The deeper the mind penetrates into its own thought process, the more clearly it understands that forms of thinking are conditioned; therefore, the mind is spontaneously very still, which does not mean that it is asleep. On the contrary, the mind is very alert, no longer being drugged by the repetition of words, or shaped by discipline. This state of silent alertness is also awareness; and if you go into it, still more deeply you will find that there is no division between the person, who is aware, and the object of, which he is aware.

**Nature of the Mind:** The three inherent faculties influencing the nature of Mind are:

- (i) goodness or purity (*Satva*),
- (ii) energy or passion (*Rajas*), and
- (iii) darkness or inertia (*Tamas*).

In this materialistic world, these three faculties impact decisions in every human life. The forces of fundamental elements or *Gunas* (Lust, Greed, Anger, Passion, and the Ego) condition human existence and obscure the way to realization. Various *Gunas* are

further influenced by the senses (sight, smell, listening, tasting and touching). The senses are so strong and impetuous, that they forcibly carry away the discriminative mind of a man who is endeavoring to control them.

*Satva*, the mode of goodness, being purer than the others, is illuminating, righteous, satisfying and full of contentment. According to Gurbani:

iqQVGVIAsriq miq min biD]

AGGS, JAP 36, P 8 [1].

*There the intuitive consciousness, intellect and comprehension of the Mind are molded.*

*Rajas*, the mode of passion or energy, where desires and longings are hyperactive and enhanced labor for materialistic fruitions. The mind is engulfed in materialistic enjoyments and sensual gratifications, as stated by Guru Teg Bahadur:

mn mieAw mYPiD rihauibsire g|b|t| n|mi]

AGGS, M 9, P 1428.

*The mortal Mind is entangled in Maya (illusion); and has forgotten the name of Lord of the Universe.*

*Tamas*, the mode of darkness or inertia, keeps the mind ignorant in darkness and deluded from reality. The Mind in this mode is mad, indolent, and zealous. Guru Arjan has written:

miq biD sriq n|h|l|c|q|r|e|]

AGGS, M 5, P 804.

*One has neither intelligence nor wisdom nor consciousness.*

Do we think certain states of mind as superior because of what we know concerning their organic antecedents? No, it is always for two entirely different reasons:

- i) It is either because we take an immediate delight in one or the other; or
- ii) because we believe one or the other will bring us beneficial fruits for life.

Interestingly, the mind is never still in any of the modes at any given moment. The mode of goodness may be prominent over the modes of passion and ignorance, or the mode of passion may be defeating the modes of goodness and ignorance, and at other times ignorance dominates and defeats the other two modes. Making such observations of sufferings in humanity Guru Amar Das narrated the following verse:

q|g|x| mieAw m|h|h|g|rmiK caQ| pd|p|ie]

AGGS, M3, P 30.

*The three fundamental modes of Nature hold people in attachment to Maya (illusion). The Guru-oriented attains the fourth state of higher consciousness (where he achieves illumined mind and everlasting happiness).*

Thoughts are instantaneously fleeting and so are our introspections, whether conscious, subconscious or unconscious. Even the most devout worshipper may slip and think of a materialistic daily task in the middle of a prayer. The same is true of a person's introspective and conscious thoughts. The Mind is its own Master; it can think, process, deliberate and perform whatever comes to it, whether we are awake, alert or asleep. Comprehending the fleeting nature of mind, Guru Arjan wrote:

inmK miih cir klt iPir AwV]

AGGS, M 5, P 277.

*In an instant, the mind wanders around the four corners of the world and comes back.*

In Aad Guru Granth Sahib, similar sabds by other Gurus and Bhagats are written throughout the Gurbani. By realizing the wandering nature of mind, Guru Amar Das queried the ways to control mind:

ieh mriAw ikaikir vis AwV]

AGGS, M 3, P 426.

*How can this mind be controlled?*

Then he provided the following methods to control it:

gr prsidi TnkIAIigAm mql Gir AwV]

AGGS, M3, P 426.

*By Grace of the Guru, it is held in check; instructed in spiritual wisdom, it returns to realization.*

Can we really hold our mind in complete stillness if in such stillness; the mind is transformed into something else that has its own creative understanding? It is possible. Nevertheless, the mind cannot find stillness through any means, practices or disciplines and trying to concentrate. True stillness comes when one understands the ways of mind. It is the mind, which created stone image to worship. It is the mind, which created organized religions, and innumerable beliefs. However, one must go beyond the creation of mind to find out what is real. For example, the philosophers believing in yoga are firmly convinced that just by mere yogic exercises they cannot comprehend introspection to achieve higher consciousness. However, a major portion of meditation and the blessings of God had to be incorporated as well. In other words, they followed a disciplined way of life, that some people called 'a religion.' The significance of religion lies with the waking awareness experiences of the individual. One does not have to torture body with any kind of penance, charity, wearing particular kinds of clothes etc, or abandon living and run away into jungles, instead Gurbani stresses the fact that one should be able to achieve higher consciousness at home by enjoying routine life:

j gūn Bgvl kpVI j gūn mī yvjs]

AGGS, M 3, p 1420.

*Yoga is not obtained by wearing saffron robes, nor obtained by wearing dirty robes.*

nink Gir bITAw j gūpielAIsiqgr k'lapdjs]64]

AGGS, M 3, p 1420.

*Nanak says! Yoga is obtained by following the teachings of the True Guru while residing at home.*

Usually, a person views half of the world in physical form. He can become entangled in his ego, believing "I am the doer of everything around me." With a selfish view of the Universe, this type of person thinks that the world is based on his/her thoughts alone. However, such an ignorant viewpoint fails to realize that thoughts may originate from an unknown, greater source than a person's own mind. What is it that places an idea or a thought in our heads? Guru Nanak explains it as follows:

gr sūkl j iq prgtuhie]

AGGS, M 1, p 13.

*Through the Guru's teachings, the light of wisdom (enlightenment) is realized.*

Guru Arjan wrote of the significance of God's blessing. By providing human with flashes of ideas, the God makes us aware, to develop consciousness, and experience the highest level of intellect. The Guru says:

j ohir l Mysokryse l j lA krlln]

AGGS, M 5, p 134.

*Whatever the Lord wants us to think or do, accordingly we perform.*

When the mind reaches equipoise, and is settled, one can begin to understand this phenomenon of higher consciousness. As a plastic surgeon, it is very hard for me to understand how an engineer can think of making space stations, but his other colleagues equally qualified can understand every word of his plan and even correct or modify his methods. In some senses, one has to be equally at that level of intellect to comprehend what others are saying in certain contexts. Just as Guru Nanak said in *Jap*:

eyf alt hū'kie, iqs alt'koj w'sie]

AGGS. Jap 24, p 5

*One has to be as knowledgeable and experienced as God to understand and know God.*

Knowing God is as important as having one's mind in the same wavelength and in complete unison with Him, to comprehend His creation of ideas in the human mind. The significance of this union lies with the experience of the individual. In Gurbani, several quotations identify the union of the two. For example,

AwqmynllAwqmydl plql hie qū Gr hl prcū piie]

AGGS, M 3, p 87.

*When the individual soul has faith in the Supreme Soul, only then it shall obtain realization within its own self.*

j qI j iq iml wElA'srql sriq sJ] gU]

AGGS, M1, p 21.

*When one's light merges into the Divine light, only then one's intuitive consciousness is joined with the intuitive consciousness of the Lord,*

girmik ij suhir min vsI iqsuim] ygru sJ] gU] 2]

AGGS, M 1, p 21

*The God abides within the mind of that Gurmukh, who merges into God, through the Guru.*

By analogy, water has properties that are not explicable by the properties of Hydrogen and Oxygen separately. Water dissolves salt, but neither hydrogen nor oxygen does so separately (nor does hydrogen dissolve part of salt and oxygen the rest). A water molecule does have hydrogen and oxygen as parts, but it also has various relations among these atoms as other parts. The physical relation of bonding, for instance, is as necessary for water as the atoms are, and so is the union of body, mind and consciousness. Some philosophers believe that the mental ingredients of phenomenal consciousness must be present in the tiniest bits of matter capable of comprising brains, and claim that phenomenal consciousness is a fundamental part of nature- perhaps along with subatomic mass and charge {Nagel, 1979 [2]; Chalmers 1996, ch.8 [3]}.

**Intellect:** A Human starts life as an ignorant being only capable of intrinsic functions. Over time one learns prevalent knowledge available about life and people based on direct (innate or intuitive) intellect as well as indirect (acquired or inferential) intellect. What the mind does not know, the eyes do not see and the ears do not hear. This is a common understanding that applies to most humans. One gathers waking awareness or indirect knowledge by means of teachers, schools, books, scriptures, and personal experiences via sensory organs. However, consciousness or direct knowledge of human experiences at different levels of Spiritual Intellect can also exist alongside waking awareness. One experiences an evolution of transient, passive mystical state of mind from which the intellect itself may be derived.

The faithful understands the limitations of inferential knowledge in spiritual intellect; but can remain confused within the entanglements of Maya (illusion). The analogy of a drunken elephant is very befitting the mind bloated with *five gunas* and inebriated in the mode of *Tamas*; running bewildered in complete confusion without direction. The mind neither reaches anywhere particular nor achieves conclusive realization. Guru Nanak mentioned the state of such

mind as:

mn kl miq mqugl umqu]

j oikCubil A'sBuKqoKqU]

j hl qllmiq djh qhl kopwV]

qDuAmpyBwV iqv'cl wV] 3]

AGGS, M 1, p 351.

*The intellect of the mind is like a drunken elephant.*

*Whatever one utters is false, the most false of the false.*

*As is the understanding and intellect which you bestow O' Lord, so does one receive.*

*As it pleases Your Will, so You lead us.*

Forces of nature are all beyond human control. We are powerless over the sun, moon, stars, day and night etc. etc., and we do not have any control over our internal organs, which are vital to sustenance of life. All these faculties are being controlled by and in particular order by some mysterious force. Achieving higher Consciousness, a person may be able to realize the Truth behind such force.

Most of a person's life is wasted in efforts trying to follow nature's three modes of existence (*Rajas, Tamas, and Sattas*). Unless the faithful transfers his/her understanding capabilities towards the Lord, and humbly admits his limitations, he cannot find peace of mind and stability. In one of the several sabds of Gurbani, Guru Arjan mentioned:

ikCUn j w w miq mrl QrI]

AGGS, M 5, p 388

*I know nothing, and my intellect is inadequate.*

Guru Arjan further elaborates the human limitations in the following Sabd:

sriq miq cqrwel qrl qll] w w ieth j w w rwm]

AGGS, M 5, p 779

*You are my consciousness, intellect and knowledge. I know only what You caused me to know O' Lord.*

A person seeking higher consciousness must possess a discriminative sense to differentiate between inferential knowledge and spiritual intellect. That is where a person can achieve capability of not only 'observing', but also becoming the observation. Guru Nanak, however, describing various states of mind to achieve higher consciousness in Jap explains that in the realm of humility or surrender (*Saram Khand*), one is speechless of the beauty of the wondrous creation, where the intuitive consciousness, intellect and understanding are shaped:

iqQYGVIAI'sriq miq min biD] iqQYGVIAI'srw isDw kl siD]

AGGS Jap, p 8.

*Here is inner consciousness molded, intellect fashioned and mind illumined; and improving the Understanding, the Vision of godly is trained.*

Then the intellect becomes part of the mind, which knows the moral nature as it feels, as the wheel possesses rotation.

That kind of intellect, when it surpasses the subconscious state of mind, reaches the realms of higher consciousness.

**Consciousness:** The word 'conscious' derives from the Latin words 'cum' (together with) and 'scire' (knowing). In the original sense, two people who know something together are said to be conscious of it 'to one another'. The Latin conjunction of 'cum and scire' also has a use in which the prefix is merely emphatic, so that being 'conscious of' something simply means knowing it, or knowing it well. In this sense the word 'conscious' can also be used as an adjective: a 'knowing' being such as a normal person is a conscious person, while an 'unknowing:' being such as a plant or sleeping person is an unconscious being.

Human beings, having adopted, developed and applied various intellectual faculties made great progress in unfolding some of the mysteries of this universe; still there is lot more to be done before he/she can touch the concepts of higher consciousness. The transmigration of inferential knowledge and spiritual intellect into higher consciousness is an evolutionary phenomenon.

It is necessary for the successful achievement of consciousness that an exalted human personality should exist. For achieving such perfection of the intellectual and moral faculties, evolutionary excellence is necessary in all cases. Guru Amar Das wrote:

ਜ ਚਲਿ ਹਲਪੁ ਬੁਝਿ ਪਦਿ ਭਨ ਸਿਗਰਿ ਬਲੁ ਨ ਪਾਇ

AGGS. M 3, p 35.

*Through His Divine light, God is revealed. Without the True Guru, understanding is not accomplished.*

In keeping with the universal laws of love and compassion for the humanity, where Lord does not discriminate one from the other, Guru Nanak reveals the following truth

ੴ ਸਰਿਕੁ ਜਿ ਪ੍ਰਯੋਗਿ ਆ

AGGS. M 1, p 24.

*There is One Awareness among all created beings.*

ਸਰਿਕੁ ਭਵਿਕੁ ਕੀਏ ਨਿ ਆ

AGGS, M 1, p 24

*None have been created without this awareness.*

In the next few lines, Guru Nanak deliberates individuality of their awareness depending upon their destiny and accountability. He says:

ਜਿਹਿ ਸਰਿਕੁ ਚਹਿ ਭਨਿ ਰਹਿ

AGGS, M1, P24.

*As is their awareness, so is their way.*

ੴ ਭਵਿਕੁ ਆਵਹਿ ਚਹਿ

AGGS, M 1, p 24.

*Accordingly, there is only One way that the creation finds its awareness.*

As the most advanced living entity, humans are capable of past, present and future thought. From early thoughts of only survival, the mind has developed over centuries to think of feelings and emotions, religion and philosophy of existence. Every new generation of humanity evolves in how to improve the capabilities to have much more improved states of performance in all the different aspects: creatively, artistically, scientifically and in technology. We have capabilities to store and utilize most of the information at enormously greater potential than most humans ever use. All forms of animal life, starting from the simplest organism to the most complex, have developed some sense of consciousness. There seems to be some organization controlling this whole universe and that organization has become increasingly complex as this universe evolves. The scriptures revealed by Gurus have similar descriptions of the meaning of higher consciousness.

ਸ੍ਰੀ ਸਰਿਕੁ ਨਿ ਜਿ ਆਇ ਨਿ ਜਿ ਆਇ ਆਇ

AGGS. M 5, p 218.

*I have not understood the Wisdom of serving (God), nor have I worshipped (God) in meditation.*

ੴ ਚਰਿ ਜਿ ਗੁਰਿ ਭਵਿ ਮਯਿ ਟਕਿ ਆਗਿ ਆਗਿ

AGGS. M 5, p 218.

*But You are the Support, controlling Life of the World, O my Lord and Master, inaccessible and incomprehensible.*

For all practical purposes, a person supplicates to God as an external entity. We pray each day, focusing on an external Being outside of ourselves. Yet, we are also repeatedly reminded that God is within us and that is why we must follow the saying "Know thyself." To do this, a person must assimilate and utilize information, both externally and internally, to develop a higher level of consciousness. Guru Nanak instructed it well in the following sabd:

ਸਰਿਕੁ ਸਰਿਕੁ ਰਿ ਆਇ ਆਇ

ਗੁਰਿਕੁ ਚਹਿ ਭਵਿ ਆਇ ਜਿ ਆਇ

ਆਇ ਆਇ ਆਇ ਆਇ

ਆਇ ਆਇ ਆਇ ਆਇ

AGGS.M 1, P 878.

*Focus your consciousness in deep absorption (on the God).*

*Make your body a raft to cross over the materialistic world of Maya (Illusion).*

*Deep within keep the fire of higher consciousness and memory (of the God) burning;*

*Then the Divine Light will burn day and night unceasingly.*

The spiritual prophets, Moses, Jesus, Mohammed, Buddha, and Guru Nanak, lived and performed their

obligations like every other human being. They also did some astoundingly superb events in their lives. These prophets transcended daily life and spread the word of God. They preached about His mystic creation and developed fundamental building blocks to live and enjoy daily life through Him and with His blessings. Additionally, these prophets created scriptures to follow in order to understand and achieve higher consciousness in the mortal state of human life. The Gurbani provides vivid instructions on how to access (*Gyaan* - wisdom), store information (*dhyaan* – attention/awareness), development through disciplined life (*dharma* - Duty), and humility (*saram*) to achieve higher consciousness. In addition, the authors in the Aad Guru Granth Sahib have proved it during their lives, that the higher consciousness is achievable by blessed individuals.

### CONCLUSION

Consciousness is a gift bestowed on humans through God. Some may attempt to separate the mind from the body, the soul from the mind. However, by characterizing the mind, body and soul as one functional unit eliminates much of the confusion of which part is responsible for the higher intellect. To “know thyself” is to understand that the sensory perceptions trigger emotional responses, which are shaped in part by the culture and generation we live in. However, there is also a timeless quality captured in the Gurbani allowing (Gurmukhs), to achieve higher consciousness and realize the Truth, while enjoying their daily life. Each person in his/her own generation is capable of achieving higher consciousness. The mind has enormous capacity to learn, invent, imagine, speculate; must not this capacity be put aside so that the mind is very clear and very simple?

Because it is only the innocent mind, that has experienced vastly and yet is free of knowledge, it is only such a mind that can discover that which is more

than brain and mind. Otherwise, what you discover will be colored by what you have already experienced. The mind reacts to various external stimuli and is always evaluating, judging, comparing or condemning. Most of the time, awareness stops at a certain point. Guru Nanak has written an excellent sabd that advises the best way to deliberate on consciousness:

ਜੀਵਿ ਮਨੁ ਗਿਸ ਮਸੁਕਿਰਿ ਮਿਥੁ ਕੀਯੁਕਿਰਿ ਸੁਰਿ ॥

ਮਨੁਕਿ ਮਿਰਿ ਚਕੁਰਿ ਕੀਰਿ ਗੁਰਿ ਪਿਠਿ ਚਿ ਕੀਰਿ ॥

AGGS. M 1, p 16.

*Burn emotional attachment, and grind it into ink. Transform your intelligence into the purest of paper.*

*Make the love of God your pen, and let your consciousness be the scribe. Then seek the Guru's instructions, and record these deliberations.*

Our consciousness is our whole existence. Man keeps wondering if there is anything hereafter, anything beyond time, beyond thought and if there is anything Eternal. That question seems to be the content of the consciousness of every human being in whatever part of the world he lives. A conscious person should be able not only to account for the qualities of inner life available to beings more primitive than we should, but also to extrapolate to higher forms of awareness not yet experienced by human beings. The content of higher consciousness is the common ground of all humanity.

### REFERENCES

1. AGGS: Aad Guru Granth Sahib. 1983 (Reprint). Pp1430. Publisher: Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, Amritsar. (M=*Mahla*, i.e., succession number of the Sikh Gurus to the House of Nanak, p=Page of the AGGS.)
2. Nagel, T. (Reprint 1979) ‘What is it like to be a bat?’ in *Mortal Questions*, Cambridge: University Press, pp 165-180.
3. Chalmers, D. 1996. *The Conscious Mind*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Please Join

## INSTITUTE FOR UNDERSTANDING SIKHISM

A Charitable Educational-cum-Religious Organization – Federally Incorporated in Canada  
For

Understanding Gurbani & Sikhism in their real perspective

Donations are accepted in any denominations

Please write cheque in the name of  
Institute for Understanding Sikhism  
4418 Martin-Plouffe, Laval, Quebec, Canada H7W 5L9  
Phone: (450) 681-1254; Fax: (760) 281-8061  
E-mail: sikhism@chahal.info