

## ETHICS OF THE SIKHS

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### ABSTRACT

*Aad Guru Granth Sahib (AGGS) the revealed Bani, our scriptures, explains Sikh ethics or virtues and their indispensable need in our lives and for salvation. It teaches us how to be virtuous by understanding some of the elements such as Wisdom, Truth, Temperance, Humility, Courage, Justice, and Contentment and practicing them in our day-to-day lives and avoiding cardinal sins such as lust, anger, greed, attachment and conceit.*

### INTRODUCTION

**E**thics is a branch of philosophy dealing with values relating to human conduct, with respect to the rightness and wrongness of our actions and to the decency and wickedness of the motives and the ends of such actions. Ethical-spiritual precepts of the Sikh Gurus are for the Human improvement, Brotherhood of human beings and Union of *Atma* with *Parmaatma*. The Aad Guru Granth Sahib (AGGS) [1] is the prime repertoire of the ethics taught by the Sikh Gurus. The Gurus show us the way to achieve our objectives through their utterances or Gurbani. Moral conduct or praxis is stressed at each and every step. Gurus were men of vision and the AGGS is replete with ethical-spiritual insights. The Gurus were perceptive and intuitive to the socio-natural milieu of man.

### DISCUSSION

Max Arthur Macauliffe said in his lecture in England, "I am referring to you a religion that has God and Soul, which presents no mysteries and has an ethical system that has never been excelled, if indeed it has ever been equaled, I mean the Sikh religion." Virtues (good qualities, merits, excellences (*Guna, sift, sheel*) are not merely words but must be in action. *Gun, Augun* (bad deeds) and *Vingun* (without good deeds) have also been used in Gurbani. Virtue in Sikhism is defined by Guru Nanak as:

ਮਨੁ ਹਾਲੀ ਕਿਰਸਾਣੀ ਕਰਣੀ ਸਰਮੁ ਪਾਣੀ ਤਨੁ ਖੇਤੁ ॥

ਨਾਮੁ ਬੀਜੁ ਸੰਤੋਖੁ ਸੁਹਾਗਾ ਰਖੁ ਗਰੀਬੀ ਵੇਸੁ ॥

ਭਾਉ ਕਰਮ ਕਰਿ ਜੰਮਸੀ ਸੇ ਘਰ ਭਾਗਠ ਦੇਖੁ ॥

AGGS, M 1, p 595. [1]

*Make your mind the farmer; good deeds the farm, modesty the water, and your body the field. Let the Lord's Name be the seed, contentment the plow, and your humility is the fence. Doing deeds of love, the seed shall sprout, and you shall see your home flourish. Cultivate Virtues as mentioned herein are contentment, humility, and love.*

Guru Nanak further says:

ਵਿਣੁ ਗੁਣ ਕੀਤੇ ਭਗਤਿ ਨ ਹੋਇ ॥

AGGS, Jap, 21 p 4.

*Devotion without virtues is impossible.*

Guru's teachings are replete with stress on moral principles. Guru Nanak says again:

ਗੁਣ ਕਾਮਣ ਕਾਮਣਿ ਕਰੈ ਤਉ ਪਿਆਰੇ ਕਉ ਪਾਵੈ ॥

AGGS, M 1, p 725.

*She charms her Beloved with her virtues, and so obtains Him.*

The virtues may be cultivated and nurtured through contact with the virtuous congregation. Guru Nanak says:

ਉਤਮ ਸੰਗਤਿ ਉਤਮੁ ਹੋਵੈ ॥

ਗੁਣ ਕਉ ਧਾਵੈ ਅਵਗਣ ਧੋਵੈ ॥

AGGS, M 1, p 414.

*In the inspiring society, one is uplifted. While chasing virtue, he rids off his vices.*

He said again:

ਗੁਣਾ ਕਾ ਹੋਵੈ ਵਾਸੁਲਾ ਕਢਿ ਵਾਸੁ ਲਈਜੈ ॥

ਜੇ ਗੁਣ ਹੋਵਨਿ ਸਾਜਨਾ ਮਿਲਿ ਸਾਝ ਕਰੀਜੈ ॥

ਸਾਝ ਕਰੀਜੈ ਗੁਣਹ ਕੇਰੀ ਛੋਡਿ ਅਵਗਣ ਚਲੀਐ ॥

AGGS, M 1, p 766.

*One who has a basket of fragrant virtues, should enjoy its fragrance. If my friends have virtues, I will share in them. Let us form a partnership, and share our virtues; let us abandon our faults, and walk on the Path.*

Virtues have social implications besides being personal qualities of the possessor. Guru Nanak says:

ਮੁਲਿ ਅਮੋਲੁ ਨ ਪਾਈਐ ਵਣਜਿ ਨ ਲੀਜੈ ਹਾਟਿ ॥

ਨਾਨਕ ਪੂਰਾ ਤੋਲੁ ਹੈ ਕਬਹੁ ਨ ਹੋਵੈ ਘਾਟਿ ॥

AGGS, M 1, p 1087.

*Virtues are Priceless and are not for sale for any price at any store. O Nanak, their weight is full and perfect; it*

*never decreases at all.*

Bhai Gurdas, a contemporary of Gurus and scribe of first recension of the AGGS, explicated the moral virtues and values as cherished by our Gurus. He reiterated steering clear of ego, nurturing of humility and altruism. He illustrated humility by the rivers flowing downwards and fruit laden trees bend down while Silk-cotton tree stands tall but remains with scentless flowers, tasteless fruits and useless leaves. He also emphasizes controlling various motives and praxis such as concupiscence, ire, avarice, cupidity, mirage, attachment, rage and conceit. He really combined religious ideals with human ethical precepts.

*Janam Sakhis* anecdotes illustrate practical lessons and lead to a moral, do well and avoid a bad act. It is through these parables from Guru Nanak's life that the lay folks are nurtured and introduced to the ethical precepts of Sikhism. Here one learns the ethics of altruism, social service, dignity of labor, and absurdity of the claim that rich or high castes are better than poor or the low castes. It is here that ascetism and renunciation are rejected and social responsibility is stressed.

Clearly, Sikhism is about living (way of life) householder's life with development of character, discipline, knowledge and the most important ACTION. To achieve spiritual progress for self- realization (ਮਨ ਤੂੰ ਜੋਤਿ ਸਰੂਪੁ ਹੈ ਆਪਣਾ ਮੂਲੁ ਪਛਾਣੁ ॥ AGGS, M 3, p 441. - *O my mind, you are the embodiment of the Divine Light - recognize your own origin.*), the ideal self (*Sachiara*) must replace narrow egoistic perspective. This is moral creativity. The three aspects, *Jat*, *Mat* and *Bhau* (Conation, cognition and affection.) have to be realized. The spirit of surrender and humility integrated with valor (fearlessness) and absence of animosity (without rancor) (*Nirbhau* and *nirvair*) are essential for the seeker to attain the status of Gurmukh (*Sachiara*). Make no mistake humility is not cowardly humiliation. Conation, cognition and affection are essentials of ethico-spiritual philosophy.

Conation or the part of mental life having to do with striving, including desire and volition, cognition, the act or process of knowing; perception; the product of such a process; something thus known, perceived, etc. or knowledge; and affection the emotional realm of love or dedication.

#### ELEMENTS OF ETHICS

Wisdom, Truth, Temperance, Humility, Courage, Justice, and Contentment.

**Wisdom:** (*Gian, Mat, Mun, Budh or Bebek Budh*)

It is sense of judgment. Guru Nanak shows wisdom to be "a comprehensive point of view as indicated in the actions of man". He lays down three steps for its cultivation and those are: *Suniye* (hear), *Manne* (reflection), and *Ek dhyān* (concentrate, assimilate or synthesize). Let us analyze these three steps.

*Suniye* (hearing) is initial step of acquiring knowledge. What must be heard?

ਸੁਣਿਐ ਸਿਧ ਪੀਰ ਸੁਰਿ ਨਾਥ ॥

ਸੁਣਿਐ ਧਰਤਿ ਧਵਲ ਆਕਾਸ ॥

ਸੁਣਿਐ ਦੀਪ ਲੋਅ ਪਾਤਾਲ ॥

ਸੁਣਿਐ ਪੋਹਿ ਨ ਸਕੈ ਕਾਲੁ ॥

ਨਾਨਕ ਭਗਤਾ ਸਦਾ ਵਿਗਾਸੁ ॥

ਸੁਣਿਐ ਦੁਖ ਪਾਪ ਕਾ ਨਾਸੁ ॥

AGGS, Jap 8, p 2.

*Listening to the spiritual teachers, the heroic warriors, the yogic masters and various aspects of the universe. In the second stanza, listening to Gods and His mysteries. Hearing leads to the expansion of the consciousness and it lifts him above evil and suffering. In the next stanza, Guru Nanak advises listening to the moral principles such as wisdom, fulfillment and purification. A Gurmukh must cultivate these virtues. Lastly, the seeker hears practical application by many leaders who live wisely and guide others during their duress.*

#### Manne (Reflection)

After hearing from multiple sources, Guru Nanak recommends reflection on learnt knowledge. Process of reflection cannot be stated completely otherwise one will repent. Possibilities in reflection are infinite, so Guru Nanak says:

ਮੰਨੈ ਸੁਰਤਿ ਹੋਵੈ ਮਨਿ ਬੁਧਿ ॥

ਮੰਨੈ ਸਗਲ ਭਵਣ ਕੀ ਸੁਧਿ ॥

ਮੰਨੈ ਮੁਹਿ ਚੋਟਾ ਨਾ ਖਾਇ ॥

ਮੰਨੈ ਜਮ ਕੈ ਸਾਥਿ ਨ ਜਾਇ ॥

AGGS, Jap 13, p 3.

*It is through reflection that awareness; mind and intellect are created and formed. The seeker develops discrimination and differentiation of evil from noble. This Babek Budh avoids transmigration.*

And finally this man of reflection attains salvation and he engages in altruism.

ਮੰਨੈ ਪਾਵਹਿ ਮੋਖੁ ਦੁਆਰੁ ॥

ਮੰਨੈ ਪਰਵਾਰੈ ਸਾਧਾਰੁ ॥

ਮੰਨੈ ਤਰੈ ਤਾਰੇ ਗੁਰੁ ਸਿਖ ॥

ਮੰਨੈ ਨਾਨਕ ਭਵਹਿ ਨ ਭਿਖ ॥

AGGS, Jap 15, p 3.

*By reflection one gets salvation for one's self and Family and for other guru-oriented and he needs no begging.*

Let us get to the third aspect of this knowledge:  
ਪੰਚਾ ਕਾ ਗੁਰੁ ਏਕੁ ਧਿਆਨੁ ॥

AGGS, Jap 16 p 3.

*The nobles concentrate with single-minded meditation.*

This single-minded meditation indicates the assimilation and synthesis of the knowledge acquired through listening and reflection. The need to synthesize knowledge is stressed in this third step.

The attitude of the seeker of wisdom must be that of tolerance and receptivity. Guru Nanak says: knowledge and self-examination is possible only when one slays ego within him:

ਗਿਆਨ ਧਿਆਨ ਸਗਲੇ ਸਭਿ ਜਪ ਤਪ ਜਿਸੁ ਹਰਿ ਹਿਰਦੈ ਅਲਖ ਭੇਵਾ ॥

AGGS, M 1, p 356.

*All wisdom and meditation, all chanting and penance, come to one whose heart is filled with the Invisible, Inscrutable God.*

### Truth: (Veracity)

Conformity with indisputable fact or principle, 'Truth is an agreement of one's word with one's thought or conviction and action' and truth is the end of the whole ethico-spiritual endeavor. Guru Nanak says:

ਸਚੁ ਓਰੈ ਸਭੁ ਕੇ ਉਪਰਿ ਸਚੁ ਆਚਾਰੁ ॥

AGGS, M 1, p 62.

*Truth is high, higher still is truthful living.*

Again he declares:

ਸਚੁ ਬੋਲੈ ਬੋਲਾਵੈ ਪਿਆਰੁ ॥

AGGS, M 1, p 1344.

*Love inspires one to speak the truth they speak the Truth, and lovingly inspire others to speak it as well.*

### Justice or Social Equality

Respect for the rights of others and non-exploitation of others are the characteristics of the justice. Guru Nanak declares:

ਹਕੁ ਪਰਾਇਆ ਨਾਨਕਾ ਉਸੁ ਸੁਅਰ ਉਸੁ ਗਾਇ ॥

ਗੁਰੁ ਪੀਰੁ ਹਮਾ ਤਾ ਭਰੇ ਜਾ ਮੁਦਾਰੁ ਨ ਖਾਇ ॥

ਗਲੀ ਭਿਸਤਿ ਨ ਜਾਈਐ ਛੁਟੈ ਸਚੁ ਕਮਾਇ ॥

AGGS, M 1, p 141.

*To take what rightfully belongs to another, is like Muslim eating pork, or a Hindu eating beef. Our Guru, our Spiritual Guide, stands by us, if we do not do such things. By mere talk, people do not earn passage to Heaven.*

Socrates says, "Justice is the excellence of the soul and injustice the defect of the soul."

A just man would not exploit others even if he has the means and opportunities to do so.

### Temperance (ਸੰਜਮ) (Self control):

It is moderation and regulation of the lower by the higher instincts. Nature of the temperance. Guru Amardas says:

ਕਿਆ ਦ੍ਰਿੜਾਂ ਕਿਆ ਸੰਗ੍ਰਹਿ ਤਿਆਗੀ ਮੈ ਤਾ ਬੁਝ ਨ ਪਾਈ ॥

AGGS, M 3, p 1234.

*What should I grasp? What should I gather up or leave behind? I do not know.*

And then he clarifies:

ਸਚੁ ਸੰਜਮੁ ਕਰਣੀ ਕਿਰਤਿ ਕਮਾਵਹਿ ਆਵਣ ਜਾਣੁ ਰਹਾਈ ॥

AGGS, M 3, p 1234.

*They practice truth, self-restraint and good deeds; their comings and goings are ended.*

He again reiterates:

ਸਚੁ ਸੰਜਮੁ ਕਰਣੀ ਹੈ ਕਾਰ ॥

AGGS, M 3, p 841.

*He practices truth and self-restraint.*

### Courage

Man without courage is man without courage authenticity. It exemplifies both stamina and bravery (valor). Fortitude appears earlier but it must have valor. Valor response has the necessity of the situation. Courage tempered with poise is the proper moral response:

ਸੂਰਾ ਸੋ ਪਹਿਚਾਨੀਐ ਜੁ ਲਰੈ ਦੀਨ ਕੇ ਹੇਤ ॥

ਪੁਰਜਾ ਪੁਰਜਾ ਕਟਿ ਮਰੈ ਕਬਹੂ ਨ ਛਾਡੈ ਖੇਤੁ ॥

AGGS, Kabir, p 1105.

*Spiritual hero, who fights for the principle, is recognized. He may be cut apart, piece-by-piece, but he never leaves the battlefield.*

ਸੂਰਬੀਰ ਬਚਨ ਕੇ ਬਲੀ ॥

AGGS, M 5, p 392.

*They are so brave; they are men of their word.*

ਨਿਡਰੇ ਕਉ ਕੈਸਾ ਡਰੁ ਕਵਨੁ ॥

AGGS, M 1, p 221.

*Who can frighten the fearless one?*

### Humility

Humility may be reflected in man's attitude towards himself, towards social relations and towards the moral ideal. Various words are in the scriptures e.g. *garib*, *neech*, and *nirmaan*. Bhai Gurdas used *nimrata* and *nitana*. Guru Ramdas Ji says:

ਹੋਇ ਨਿਮਾਣੀ ਢਹਿ ਪਵਾ ਪੂਰੇ ਸਤਿਗੁਰੁ ਪਾਸਿ ॥

ਨਿਮਾਣਿਆ ਗੁਰੁ ਮਾਣੁ ਹੈ ਗੁਰੁ ਸਤਿਗੁਰੁ ਕਰੇ ਸਾਬਾਸਿ ॥

AGGS, M 4, p 41.

*In deep humility, I fall before you the Perfect True Guru. The Guru is the Honor of the dishonored. The True Guru brings approval and applause. Thus guru gives*

*precedence to humility so we could emulate our guru.*

ਗਰੀਬਾ ਅਨਾਥਾ ਤੇਰਾ ਮਾਣਾ॥

AGGS, M 5, p 98.

*You are the Nobility of the modest and the humble.*

ਨਿਮਾਨੇ ਕਉ ਪ੍ਰਭ ਤੇਰੇ ਮਾਨੁ ॥

AGGS, M 5, p 266.

*To the defiled, You, O God, are privilege.*

To cultivate humility, one has to follow in the footsteps of our gurus:

ਕਿਸ ਹੀ ਜੋਰੁ ਅਹੰਕਾਰ ਬੋਲਣ ਕਾ ॥

ਕਿਸ ਹੀ ਜੋਰੁ ਦੀਬਾਨ ਮਾਇਆ ਕਾ ॥

ਮੈ ਹਰਿ ਬਿਨੁ ਟੇਕ ਧਰ ਅਵਰ ਨ ਕਾਈ ਤੂ ਕਰਤੇ ਰਾਖੁ ਮੈ ਨਿਮਾਣੀ ਹੇ ॥

AGGS, M 4, p 1071.

*Some speak in egotistical power. Some have the power of authority and Maya. I have no other Support at all, except the God. O Creator God, please save me - the meek and humble.*

#### **Contentment (Santokh)**

It is cultivated state of mind that our Gurus have underscored, as it is one of the three most important elements, *sat*, *santokh* and *veechar*.

ਬਾਲ ਵਿਚਿ ਤਿੰਨਿ ਵਸਤੂ ਪਈਓ ਸਤੁ ਸੰਤੋਖੁ ਵੀਚਾਰੋ॥

AGGS, M 5, p 1429.

*Three things have been placed upon this plate, Truth, Contentment and Contemplation.*

ਸਤ ਸੰਤੋਖਿ ਰਹਹੁ ਜਨ ਭਾਈ ॥

ਖਿਮਾ ਗਹਹੁ ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਸਰਣਾਈ ॥

ਆਤਮੁ ਚੀਨਿ ਪਰਾਤਮੁ ਚੀਨਹੁ ਗੁਰ ਸੰਗਤਿ ਇਹੁ ਨਿਸਤਾਰਾ ਹੇ ॥

AGGS, M 1, p 1030.

*Abide in truth and contentment, O humble Siblings of Destiny. Hold tight to compassion and the Sanctuary of the True Guru. Know your soul, and know the Supreme Soul; associating with the Guru, you shall be emancipated.*

The nature of contentment does not mean accepting ones' condition with evil, lethargy, or non-action or no attempt towards spiritual advancement. That is not contentment. It does not mean acquiescence, despondency or conciliation with evil. A contented person is free of fear or anguish. Guru Amardas declares a pure person is embodiment of truth and contentment:

ਸਤੁ ਸੰਤੋਖੁ ਸਭੁ ਸਚੁ ਹੈ ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਪਵਿਤਾ ॥

ਅੰਦਰਹੁ ਕਪਟੁ ਵਿਕਾਰੁ ਗਇਆ ਮਨੁ ਸਹਜੇ ਜਿਤਾ ॥

ਤਹ ਜੋਤਿ ਪ੍ਰਗਾਸੁ ਅਨੰਦ ਰਸੁ ਅਗਿਆਨੁ ਗਵਿਤਾ ॥

ਅਨਦਿਨੁ ਹਰਿ ਕੇ ਗੁਣ ਰਵੈ ਗੁਣ ਪਰਗਟੁ ਕਿਤਾ ॥

ਸਭਨਾ ਦਾਤਾ ਏਕੁ ਹੈ ਇਕੋ ਹਰਿ ਮਿਤਾ ॥

AGGS, M3, p 512.

*The Gurmukh is totally truthful, content and pure. Deception and wickedness have departed from within him, and he easily conquers his mind. There, the Divine Light and the essence of bliss are manifest, and ignorance is eliminated. Night and day, he sings the Glorious Praises of the Lord, and manifests the excellence of the Lord. The One Lord is the Giver of all; the Lord alone is our friend.*

#### **CONCLUSIONS**

These are some of the ethics or virtues (Wisdom, Truth, Temperance, Humility, Courage, Justice, and Contentment) as mentioned in the AGGS; the list is not exhaustive, nevertheless whatever I could learn with my meager cognition. Let us accept them as Guru's grace and try to emulate them. Let us pray for The Khalsa spirit of forward-looking optimism and victory for affluence and righteousness may remain our outlook and practice.

#### **REFERENCES**

1. 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 Nanak, M is replaced with the name of Bhagat/ Bhatt for their Bani, p = Page of the AGGS).

