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SEEKING SUSTAINED MENTATION ON SABAD PARMAAN

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ABSTRACT

Sustained mentation on *Gurubani* is a daily routine of every Sikh. Although various vernacular terms are employed to express the practice, it is meant to contemplate on the Guru Granth verses in order to reflect, introspect, meditate, and to focus on the qualitative knowledge of the Divine. It is a discourse between the human mind and Gurbani where concentration of mind and intellect are spent to the spiritual understanding. It is certainly not any type of worship connected to any physical form of the deity Guru. Traditionally the Guru is both looked up to as a guide for spiritual knowledge and as a deity to worship. When the Guru is not in the human form, but it is in the form the Word, the verses, the teachings, and the inspirations, it will require entirely novel types of the religious practices, procedures for worship, and above all, the channels of communications. The purpose of this paper is to illustrate unique ways that the Sikhs have evolved to worshiping their Word Guru.

I. REHAT OF PAATH DEEDAR DA DHYAN

1. Sikh Code on Ardaas

According to the Sikh Rehit Maryada (SRM) (Sikh Code of Conduct) [7], the daily Sikh prayer known as *ardaas* must contain a recitation inclusive of the "prayer that seeks the grace of God for "contemplation on the *Paath* of Guru Granth." In the vernacular vocabulary, it is stated as put dy dldwr dw iDAwn (*dhyan*

of paath). The exact phrase is:

″iskt gurugko∑ swihb dýpwT dldwr dw iDAwn Dr kybolojl ∨wihquru″

A gathering of the largest conference of the Sikh scholars and Sikh holy men convened half a century ago formulated the present Sikh Code of Conduct that prescribed the above invocation. They were so aware of the deep meaning of the contemplation on the Guru Granth paath i.e. sacred readings of the Guru Granth, that they made the Sikh commitment to paath deedar as a part of the most important portion of their prayer and the daily declaration. In the first supplication of the prayer, each of the ten Gurus is remembered according to their most memorable worship of God. The last and eternal living Guru, the sacred Guru Sabd, is then remembered with respect to its paath deedar. It may be remembered that the prayer paraphrase is definitely not darshan deedar" which some Sikh priests and cantors have begun to recite in recent years, as that would promote idol worship not consistent with the Sikh teachings.

2. Daily *Paath* for the Order of the Day: Its preparation and Practice

Besides the concept of *paath deedar* in the practice of the Sikh prayer, there is also a tradition of *paath* deedar practiced during the daily routine of taking the order of the day. This is also done through the Sabd *Deedar.* Every Sikh or a seeker is urged to practice paath deedar every morning and every evening. In this practice, one goes through the routine of paath deedar of Gurbani. Gurbani is a term used by the Sikhs for verses contained in the Guru Granth. There is a built in practice of prayer for this routine, which is another way of experiencing the paath deedar. In this practice the Guru Granth is opened for a formal reading. However, the ritual of the opening is preceded by a sequential practice for getting into the receptivity of the Sabd Parmaan. The term Sabd Parmaan here is used for Gurbani verses which serve as a testimony that is used as a means of valid knowledge cognate and which is complementary with reason and perception but has a scope that extends beyond them.

One prepares one's mind in receptivity of the *Sabd deedar* before opening the Granth. Before the covering cloth is lifted of the Guru Granth to begin reading it is customary to perform a formal prayer followed by another silent prayer from the deep of the heart. The silent prayer is something like this:

I am seeking the grace of Guru; I am seeking the Word that came out of the mouth of my Guru. I know not what to pray for, so I do not pray for anything of this

world. I long to listen for Thy voice. I wait for Thy Word.

A passage from Guru Granth that I use in my daily prayer for *paath deedar* and that is recited by many others is:

drmudy TwFy drbwir] qu/ ibnu suriq krY ko myrl drsnu dljY Kil@ikvwr]1] rhwau] qun Dn Dnl audwr iqAwgl sRynn@snlAqu sij su qunwr] mwgau kwih rNk sB dKau qun@ hl qymyro insgwru] AGGS, Kabir, 856 [1].

"I stand humbly at Your Court. Who else can take care of me, other than You? Please open Your door, and grant me the Blessed Vision of Your Deedar. You are the richest of the rich, generous and unattached. With my ears, I desire listening to Your Praises. From whom else should I beg? I see that all are impoverished and deficient. My salvation must come only from You."

Through this routine, we, first attempt to achieve quiescence of mind. Then, our object is to develop a state of receptivity to receive the Order of the Day from our spiritual mentor, Guru Granth. We turn within as described below. Then we follow it with the silent prayer described above and wait and wait and wait and wait. We wait for one, two, three, four, or five minutes. If, at the end of that waiting, we have not felt a response within ourselves, most of us go ahead with rest of the routine. We then practice the exercise of initiating receptivity the next day and a day after. This silent form of prayer is repeated several times until the heartbeat is felt to be slowing down, and until one's desire to Sabd deedar is intensified. It is likely that those effects are not evident to the beginner but often they are evident within a month of continued persistence on a regular basis. The idea is to turn to the inner center, and to recognize that we, of our own self, can learn nothing or experience nothing; we are seeking the grace within. We are seeking true humility, true prayer, and an acknowledgment of the nothingness of human wisdom, human ability, or human right. It is acknowledging that wisdom comes from the Grace of Infinite Invisible. These periods of silent prayers create an atmosphere in which the grace of the Guru, without our knowing it or having any awareness of it, is invoked within us to make our heart receptive of Guru's wisdom of that day.

Here are additional verses that are usually practiced for continuous prayer to achieve receptivity. We not only repeat these statements over and over again, we also take their sense into our consciousness and dwell on the verses like one of the several given below.

hau FwFl hir pB Ksm kw hir kYdir AwieAw] hir Abdir soklpbkwr FwFl miK IwieAw] hir puCAw FwFl sid kYikquAriQ qWAwieAw] inq dyvhudwnudieAwl pB hir nwmu iDAwieAw] hir dwqY hir nwmu jpwieAw nwnku pYnwieAw]AGGS,M4,P91[1].

"I am a humble minstrel of the Lord God, my Lord and Master; I have come to the Lord's Doorsteps. The Lord has heard my sad cries from within; The Lord has called me, the humble minstrel, into the Presence. The Lord called the minstrel in, and asked, "Why have you come here?" "O Merciful God, please grant me the gift of continual meditation on the Lord's Name." And so the Lord, the Great Giver, inspired Nanak to chant the Lord's Name, and blessed him with robes of honor."

snhu ibnkhil Twkur myjiA jkhiqyry Dwry] rwKu pyinum Apuny ki krn kruvnhwry] 1] pB jlau Ksmunu kir ipAwry] bury Blyhm Qwry] rhwau] suki pkwr smrQ suAwmil buDn kwit svwry] pihir isrpwau syvk jn myly nwnk pkgt phwry] AGGS, M 5, P 931.

"Hear my prayer, O my Lord and Master; all beings and creatures were created by You. You preserve the honor of Your Name, O Lord, Cause of causes. O Dear God, Beloved, please, make me Your own. Whether good or bad, I am Yours. The Almighty Lord and Master heard my prayer; cut away my bonds, and has adorned me. The Lord dressed me in robes of honor, and blended this servant with the Cosmos; Says Nanak, the Lord is revealed in glory throughout the world."

Soon you will sense that you are in *dhyan* mode of receptivity that is required for sustained mentation on the *Sabd Parmaan*. The meaning of receptivity and *dhyan* would be revealed to some of us in one way, and to others in an entirely different way; but to both, it may come with a force to open the passage to the consciousness of Guru Sabd. The force may be such that there may not be room enough to receive it. Then through the same reading, to each one something different will unfold from that which is given to anyone else. Every seeker will continue with this process.

II. CONCEPT AND PRACTICES OF DHYAN OF PAATH

1. Dhyan

The term, sustained mentation, is coined to describe what is termed as contemplation or *dhyan*. The *dhyan* on the *Paatth* of Guru Granth has deep meaning for the spiritualists today. The term pwT dy dldwr dw iDAwn (*dhyan* of *paath*) means to have sustained focus of consciousness on the sacred reading or listening to the *Sabad Parmaan* contained in the verses from Gurubani. The theological and pragmatic meanings of the *paath* have been discussed in a previous paper [4, 5,6]. *Dhyan* is a Sanskrit term that is derived from the root *dhyai*, the term derived from the root *dhi*, which denotes a vision, while the corresponding verb means, "to have a vision." In the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, it may be rendered as "thought "or mentation," which is "enduring," "sustained," and "stabilized"; so the two terms together etymologically suggest, "stabilized and sustained mentation." The term is explained in the Sikh scriptures through many examples and metaphors. For example, Guru Nanak says as follows:

iDAwn rlip hie AwsxupwvY] AGGS, M 1, P 877.

"Becoming the embodiment of dhyan, one attains the true Yogic posture."

2. Paath Dhyan or Gurbani Mentation

The actual process of the *paath deedar* is the sustained mentation on the discourse between the human mind and Gurbani where concentration of mind and intellect are spent to the spiritual understanding through the vehicle of *Sabd Parmaan*:.

gr klbcin irdliDAwnu Dwrl] rsnw jwpujpau bnvwrl] AGGS, M 5, P 740.

"Within my heart, I meditate with sustained mentation on the Word of the Guru's Teachings. With my tongue, I chant the Song of the Lord."

Through the sustained mentation and reverberation of Sabd Parmaan, a Sikh invokes many forms of spiritual practices including mentor worship or meditation. In this process, spiritual theology and its life applications are instilled into the consciousness through the light of the Guru's teaching. Through this process, we make the Gurbani alive in our mind. When we keep the Word alive in our consciousness by dwelling on it during our prayers, we shall find that we are worshiping in the highest form. We are letting the Word of truth abide in us and Guru becomes the activity of our consciousness. According to Sikh theologian, Bhai Gurdas, the actual mentation process is to seek the vision of Guru and then equip ourselves to conquer all of the mind's evils. Thus, Bhai Gurdas describes sustained mentation on the Guru as:

slgør drs iDAwn slgør sbd igAwn [ssqRsnwh plc dlø

bis Awey hy [Bhai Gurdas, Kabit 135 [2].

"To focus on the Guru's portrayal is to dwell on the comprehension of Guru's sabd. This comprehension of the Sabd Parmaan becomes a powerful weapon to conquer the five evils."

This practice of *paath deedar* begins with pondering over a scriptural quotation for our mindfulness and meditative mentation. It can be practiced by ways not too difficult for a beginner or too simple for an advanced student. In the beginning, a verse with a central thought or quotation is brought to mind in a manner to reverberate on its inner meaning. To start with, some character of the verse is practiced through the tongue in silence as a line of poetry or as a metaphysical cliché. Use this as an exercise in a simple form of meditation of mindfulness in which we begin with a central idea, theme, or quotation and ponder towards revealing its inner meaning. Then it is replaced by its inner meaning that is revealed to us from within the inner depths of mind. The Guru described this practice as:

rsnw hir rsuplj Yswc sbid blcwrl]

Aldir Klhtw Alimitq BirAw sbdy kwiF plAYpinhwrl]

AGGS, M 3, P 570.

"Taste with your tongue the subtle essence of the Lord by dwelling on and contemplating the True Word of the Sabd. Deep within, the well of the heart is overflowing with the Lord's Ambrosial Nectar; as the water-carrier you may draw and drink the nectar of the Lord through the Sabd."

If we are earnest, this practice of *paath deedar* shall mean to take one or the other verses from Gurbani and use them for the act of *dhyan* into consciousness. Then, we will practice to abide in that statement of truth so that we shall be meditating on it. Soon we will be in the state of sustained mentation. We will be exhilarated and grateful for achieving mindfulness of our meditation with one of the most important teachings that has ever been given to the human race. We will appreciate the Guru's saying as:

hauvwrljlauvwrlgurklbwxlmWnvswvixAw]

Aljn mwih inrljnupwieAwjqljiq imlwvixAw]

AGGS, M 3, P 112.

"I am a sacrifice; my soul is a sacrifice, to those who enshrine the Word of the Guru's verses within their minds. In the midst of the darkness of the world, they obtain the Immaculate One, and the human light merges into the Cosmic Light."

Another verse from Gurubani says: inrml Alimitgugir qypwieAw] ivchu AwpumAw iqQYmhun mwieAw]

inrml igAwnuiDAwnuAiq inrmluinrml

buxl mlin vsuvixAu] AGGS, M. 3, P. 121.

"The Immaculate Ambrosial Nectar is obtained from the Guru. When selfishness and conceit are eradicated from within, then there is no attachment to Maya. Immaculate is the spiritual wisdom, and utterly immaculate is the meditation, of those whose minds are filled with the Immaculate Verses of the Word."

Essentially the Guru is saying that, if your efforts in

paath deedar lead you in the *paath deedar* so that your consciousness abides in the Word, and the Word abides in you, you shall be on the heights that are most exhilarating. All of this is achieved through the grace of the Guru:

hkmukir kln@inhwl]

Apnysyk kauBieAw dieAwlu]1]

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gir plrysBuplrw klAw ]
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Alimiq numuird mih dlAw]1] rhwau]

krmuDrmumyrw kCun blcwirE]

p**i**B kwit mluinrml kry]

g**r** pl**r**ykl srxl pry]3]

Awip krih Awip krxhwry]

kir ikrpw nwnk aDwry]

AGGS, M 5, P 1184.

"By Divine Will, the Lord makes us happy. The Lord shows Mercy to us servants. The Perfect Guru makes everything perfect. Guru implants the Amrosial Naam, the Name of the Lord, in the heart. My Guru does not consider the karma of my actions, or my Dharma, my spiritual practice. Guru has rid me of my filth, and made me stainless and pure. I have sought the Sanctuary of the Perfect Guru. God does, and causes everything to be done. By God's Grace, O Nanak, Guru saves us."

III. PAATH DEEDAR AS MEDITATIVE WORSHIP

1. Meditation of Mindfulness

Meditation is an important practice in most religions. It was given a central place in the Sikh practices. We have previously described the *paath* of Guru Granth as a form of meditation. The process of meditation usually is based upon practices that lead first to the quiescence of mind, then its mindfulness with the Divine attributes, and then to receptivity for divine vision. When we faithfully wish to undertake the practice of meditation or contemplation, and wish to start its practice with relatively simpler forms, the *paath deedar* with the help of inner sound, and the resulting mentation will be one such form. Guru Ram Das said.

gr kybcn krn sin iDAwy'Bv swgrupwir pr']

AGGS, M 4, P 1263.

"One, who listens to the Guru's teachings and practices a sustained mentation on them, is carried across the ocean of this life."

The *paath deedar* form of meditation is a meditation of mindfulness. We will discuss the subject, meditation of mindfulness, elsewhere. Here it is sufficient to say that this type of meditation is very divinely and it still holds

our hand to lead us every step of the way. The meditative practices along these lines are aimed at shifting one's attention away from the mundane concerns of this life to one's long-term welfare even beyond this life. They cultivate mindfulness in the quiescence of the mind. They inculcate introspection, the functional monitoring of the meditating awareness, and the divine interactive-ness in the meditative processes. The function of this form of mindfulness is to assist in attending to the object of meditation without distraction. The purpose of this form of meditative practice using the method of Sabd deedar is to round up the thoughts away from other directions, and gradually arrive at the actual experience of hearing the inner voices which provide divine guidance from within. Guru Arian says:

AsiQr rhhufd humq kbhUgr kVbcin ADwir]

AGGS, M 5, P 678

"Oh my mind, Remain firm and steady, and do not ever waver; take the Guru's Word as your Support."

Similarly, Guru Ram Das says:

"gır kyben siqjlA Durhu] muxsjnmu dyh insmerhu] AGGS, M. 4, P. 1401.

"True are the Words of the Guru's teachings. Enshrine them in your soul. Emancipate your body, and redeem this human incarnation."

IV. GURSABD-WORSHIP

1. Worship in Sikh Tradition

The paath deedar is related to the practice of worship. Worship is defined as those practices that invoke the Spirit of the Deity. According to Ungar [8] "a good worship is when the Spirit is seen in front of you and touches your passions. Passions are touched when we dare to admit the truth, when we opt for the depth of love over the little lies (of ego) that seek not to rock the boat. Passion lets loose when ideas come together, when someone says something that you knew, but couldn't articulate, when the separate pieces fall into places. Passion lets loose when people are called to remember their truest selves, when we .. break out of the little boxes that define and separate us. And, of course, passion lets loose when we sing. Really sing, not reading ahead for the words sung".

The concept of Guru worship is the most basic of the Sikh tenants today and is one of those tenants of Sikhism, which make this revealed religion distinctive. The very prescription of the *paath deedar* in the Sikh Code of Conduct implies that the most significant worship of his/her holy mentor must be through the *paath deedar* and this is a must conduct for a committed Sikh.

2. Gursabd-moorat As Target of Meditative Worship

Various religious traditions prescribe many accounts of a wide range of worship objects suitable for the cultivation of quiescence, receptivity, and mindfulness during the meditative processes. They prescribe detailed rituals and their explanations with regards to focusing on physical and spiritual qualities of a deity. It is under the influence of these practices that many Sikh devotees are found to focus on either physical or mental images of the Guru's body. More recently, they began to focus on the book in which Guru's verses are inscribed or the Gurbani verses printed on the posters.

The teachings of Guru Granth promote the tradition of worship but rejects physical forms of the deity Guru as objects of worship or meditation. They, rather, promote a novel idea of the *paath deedar* meaning mentation of Sabd parmaan. To begin with, we must stress a clear distinction between the meditative vision of Sabd Parmaan contained in the Guru Granth and the physical forms of Guru Granth as the objects for the meditative practices. No doubt, there are some clergy who suggest use of the physical form of Guru Granth or its decorations, a statue or painting of the Guru's portraits, or similar other objects displayed in the Sikh places of worship as aids in the preliminary stages of focusing on meditation. Many self styled gurus in human form even go as far as asking their followers to look into their eyes for meditation or fix their sight on the mentor's images in photographs or paintings. They argue that these tools are meant to gain initial familiarity with the features of the Guru's body or the body of their human mentors; but during the actual meditation, one would focus purely on a mental image of that form. This form of mindfulness in worship is rejected in the Sikh practices. The image of Guru Granth for the purpose of worship or meditation must not be any physical structure or any image formed either as a product of the imagination, or formed in any other way. Rather, when a seeker brings an actual image of the Guru to mind, it always means attention and recall of some adjectives the seeker recalls regarding the compassion, contemplation or meaning of the Guru's verses that touch one's heart at that very moment, or other qualities of the Wonderful Lord as being imminently present. Thus, the Sabd parmaan or Gurubani are the objective of meditation and not any physical form of the Guru. This is emphasized and reemphasized in the Guru Granth in many places. Let us examine some of the verses in this light:

gur klmn/riq mn mih iDAwnu] gur k¥sbid mkkµlumnumwn] AGGS, M 5, P 864. "Meditate on the image of the Guru within your mind by letting your mind accept the Word of the Guru's Sabd, and His Mantra."

Because of the significance of considering Guru's Word as the Guru's body, Bhai Gurdas took great pains to explain the concept of Guru Sabd as either the object of sustained mentation or that of worship. Below are given a few citations from this theologian of highest repute in Sikh history:

gr ml/q kr iDAwn sdw hj l/r hl] gr ml/ Sbd igAwn n/V n dl/r hl] Bhai Gurdas, Vaar 3, Pauri 10 [3].

"You should practice sustained mentation (dhyan) on the Word of the Guru, and consider it alone to be the image or statue of the Guru who is always with you. People who are Guru-oriented possess the knowledge of the Guru's Word. This way they do not have any distance between them and the Guru."

It is evident that there is a definite distinction between a traditional worship or meditation promoted in ancient India and the Guru Granth *paath deedar* introduced by the Sikh school. Whereas, the former brings the mind to concentrate on some physical form of a deity, the later is to focus on the qualitative knowledge of the Divine and on freedom from the sense of duality. Further, it brings to mind what brings enlightenment and adoration of the One Creator.

3. Reverberation of Paath Deedar

With seeking of mentation on Sabd Parmaan, we begin to reverberate the paath deedar and the concepts learnt thus far as truths. To have experienced any statement of truth from the depths of our own being is an evidence that we have had a degree of realization of the divine truth; peace and quiet descend upon us; and a sense of well-being and assurance well up within us. This *paath deedar*, if practiced faithfully and regularly, opens our consciousness to permit the divine consciousness to function in our life, and to permit Guru to live in our heart. But it must be continually practiced. It is necessary, therefore, to return to this process at our first opportunity after the Morning Prayer, and to repeat the process in the middle of the day and again in the evening. We may find that we are unable to sleep continuously throughout the night. In the middle of the night, the demand comes, "Wake Up To Meditate."

Most of us are familiar with many verses from Gurbani. We can recite them by heart. But it will be of little or no significance in our lives unless their inner meaning is revealed through continuous dwelling on the verses. Only then do these verses live for us and become the Word. When we wake up in the morning, we should consciously bring to remembrance the verses. We should not just repeat them over and over again, as a vain repetition or affirmation; rather we must take their meaning into consciousness and dwell on them. Hours later, again we should bring the verses to conscious remembrance. This time we may recall that we were considering certain theology and life philosophy. It will not be long before that we will begin to realize that we have heard the verses described as the gift of God. The gift that comes from God without our hearing it, deserving it, or laboring for it; it is something which comes without personal effort. This *paath deedar*, which is to be our sufficiency in all things, becomes an activity of Guru within us.

We may get up and go about our customary duties. An hour or two later we may again meditate on *paath deedar*, waiting silently, waiting until the voice of Guru resounds itself within us. The thoughts that race through our mind may not concern us; we should not be interested in them. We should be waiting until we feel the echo of Guru Granth verses stirring within us. If we do not feel the touch of the Guru within three or four minutes, we may return to our daily tasks, but some time later we should try to bring to mind the *paath deedar* again. If it is necessary, we may continue this practice for years; but if we are persistent, the day will come when there will be an inner response, which will give us the assurance that there is that within us, which we contemplate as *Vaheguru*.

V. CONCLUSIONS

There is a set tradition of doing the path and seeking its *deedar*. It is a symbolic way but with deep meaning. It is done with both the heart and the mind or as is said in modern science with both left and the right brains, both our logical and intuitive sides of brain. First of all we seek a sacred space to do the *paath*. There we read the words of a passage in the Aad Guru Granth Sahib. Then we learn its literal, symbolic and metaphorical meanings; we combine this with the history and culture of the time when it was written in order to gather further insight. There we stop and meditate on the symbols, metaphors and meanings of the passage and pray from our heart for the divine guidance. In prayer we create a space to open in within our consciousness for the real meaning to unfold. When it does, it gives us a metaphysical interpretation that usually includes a practical lesson for us to use in our lives today and for the time to come.

Paath is neither a simple ritual nor a complex scholarly endeavor. The Guru Granth *paath* is a sacred rite to

connect to the Guru for the spiritual guidance. The *paath deedar* is contemplation on Guru Granth verses during our formal prayer and during our meditation throughout our day. These are the periods of silence, reflection, introspection, meditation, and finally communion to prepare us to receive the inner nectar. The Guru will be an actual presence in your consciousness to enlighten it; it will be a power, an influence, and a being. Do not look for any picture or painting, any sign or symbol; do not look for any coverings or entity outside. Look only to the Guru's voice and vision. From the moment that awareness is yours, it is yours for ever, and you have demonstrated potency of Guru's statement below:

g**r** kw bcnubs¥j IA nwly]

jil nhl f1bYqskrunhl lyvYBwih n swkYjwly]

AGGS, M. 5, P. 679.

"The Guru's Word abides within my soul. It is never lost. It does not sink in water; thieves cannot steal it, and fire cannot burn it."

gur kybcin imitAw myrw Brmu]

gr kybcin piKE sBubhmu]

AGGS, M. 5, P.239.

"Through the Guru's Word, my doubts have been removed. Through the Guru's Word, I see God everywhere."

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