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Guru Nanak: Life, Lessons & Relevancy

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Guru Nanak:
Life, Lessons, & Relevancy

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
of Bard College

by
Rajdeep Singh Dosanjh

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*They feel sad that life's slipping
G-d laughed:
"Sad It's slipping? That's the whole point!"*

℘

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Introduction

We will be focused on a human being named Nanak. Nanak is often referred to as Guru or Baba, one meaning great teacher, the other old man. He was born in 1469 and died in 1539. He is the founder of a religion known as Sikhism. A Sikh is one who professes the faith that has its foundation in Nanak's teachings, and which was subsequently built upon by nine successive Gurus. The last human Guru, Gobind Singh, transferred the Guruship to the *Adi Granth* a collection of hymns from Nanak, the 2nd-5th, and 9th Gurus, two Sufis, and 28 Hindu Bhakti poets. Before he died Gobind Singh installed the Book as Guru, through sanctification it took on the name *Guru Granth Sahib*. The foundation of the faith is the 974 poetic hymns written by Nanak. These poems were passed to the second Guru, Angad, in the form of a *poti* (book).

The only writing Nanak left us are his 974 hymns. No expositions, no prose, nor even anything that could be considered a note about his life; there is nothing from Nanak but the poems. Nanak's poetic hymns are the basis of the Sikh faith. Some like *Japji*, the central hymn of the tradition, are recited daily in solitude before sunrise. Others are sung aloud in *gurdwaras* (Sikh temples), with many in the congregation singing along. These poetic hymns are meditated on by individual practitioners. *Granthis*, ceremonial readers of the *Guru Granth Sahib*, provide congregations with exegesis and sermons. We should be aware that *Granthis* do not act as intermediaries between the One and lay people, they are not priest. In Sikhism everyone has equal access to the One for It lays within each of our beings.

Soon after Nanak died a tradition of texts known as *Janam-Sakhis* (literally birth evidence)¹ began to be written in order to preserve his memory and teachings. The first of these texts has its

¹McLeod, W.H. *Gurū, Nānak and the Sikh Religion*. Bombay: Oxford UP, 1996. Print. 8

origin in Nanak's original group of followers, who likely began to collect stories shortly after Nanak died. These texts exist in the form of manuscript books. In their contemporary form when sold on the market they are a hodgepodge of the various traditions of *Sakhis*. I grew up with such a text, a book filled with miraculous stories and colorful pictures. These are not biographical texts, they are hagiographical. It is important to keep in mind when thinking about these texts that we do not place them in a category with company like the Gospels of Jesus nor the Hadith tradition in Islam. Rather, these texts are reminiscent of the Punjabi folk tradition and similar texts exist about Hindu bhaktis and Islamic Sufis saints.

Nanak's thought is important to engage with because he offers us a valuable lesson, one that remains underappreciated. It is an emphasis on G-d's immanence; this focus is central to and informs the rest of Nanak's thought. Even though he's aware of G-d's transcendence Nanak recognizes that we will remain forever woefully ignorant of that state. G-d in transcendence remains a complete mystery that will never be grasped, except perhaps in death. There has been continual effort to explain Nanak as a humanist,²³ which is one way to describe him, but this is a lacking label. Indeed, Nanak recognized little difference between Hindus and Muslims when he stated, "There is no Hindu there is no Muslim." But his message is more encompassing than humanism. What should be taken away from Nanak is that every distinction that we draw in our lives, male-female, outside-inside, high-low, Hindu-Muslim, are false and only appear to us because of our ego, that part of us that says "I am me," since there is no I. There is I and You and both of us are filled with the power, beauty, and truth of life.

²³Singh, Jogendra, and Daljit Singh. *The Great Humanist Guru Nanak*. Punjab: Language Dept., 1988. Print.

³ Singh, Wazir. *Humanism of Guru Nanak: a philosophic inquiry*. Delhi: Ess Ess Publications, 1977. Print.

This project consists of three chapters. Chapter one involves exploring how Nanak has been situated in critical scholarship. In order to unpack this we must deal with the work of WH McLeod who was a leading scholar of Nanak. There are some shortcomings in McLeod's work that reverberate today causing misunderstanding. We witness these reverberations when we see Nanak being continually included in the category of Hindu Bhakti poets, such is the case in John Hawley and Mark Juergensmeyer's 2010 work, *The Songs of the Saints of India*.⁴ Within which Nanak is described as a *Nirguna* (meaning G-d without attributes) Bhakta. Moreover, we will not be able to get to Nanak's important contributions if he remains regulated to this label, which limits the scope of his thought. To understand why this is not the case I aim to establish a better grasp of the historical Nanak. This task requires grappling with the *Janamsakhis* to clear up misconceptions about Nanak's view towards organized religion. Finally, a brief foray into his poetry at the end of the chapter will explain how Nanak collapses the distinction between *Nirguna* and *Saguna* (meaning G-d with attributes).

In chapter two we turn our attention to Nanak's poetry. Although there is important knowledge to be gleaned from the *Janamsakhis* we must also recognize their limitations. This why it is absolutely necessary to reflect on the poetic hymns composed by Nanak. Here, we gain insight into the mind at work. The second chapter alerts us to the emphasis Nanak places on immanence within his work. This chapter functions as a commentary on *Japji* Nanak's most enduring work and the most concise distillation of his thought.

Chapter three lets us see the ramification of Nanak's thought. It fleshes out his ethical system and expands on his understanding of human perception and the limits of our knowledge. We

⁴ Hawley, John Stratton., and Mark Juergensmeyer. *Songs of the Saints of India*. New Delhi: Oxford U Press, 2010. Print.

will also discuss the five thieves lust, anger, attachment, greed, and pride. And explain what exactly they are stealing.

Chapter 1: O Religious Scholar!: An Analysis of WH McLeod's Work

We explore the trouble of knowing a historical Nanak, especially through *Sakhi* scholarship. We will discuss W.H. McLeod at great length in this chapter. McLeod was a pioneer in the western academic study of Sikhism dedicating his life to the study of the religion. McLeod established the basis of *Janamsakhi* academic scholarship with his book *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion (1969)*, in his book we are walked through the various *Sakhi* traditions and the common stories between them. McLeod attempts to sort out the historical veracity of these stories by placing them into four categories, “possible”, “probable”, “improbable”, and “impossible”. It is a noble effort which deserves praise. But it also requires an almost equal measure of detangling. McLeod's deeply held assumptions about Nanak caste a shadow on the whole project.

A number of issues need to be addressed in McLeod's work, some issues are simply related to the limited amount of scholarship and knowledge available to McLeod when he was writing in 1969. New discoveries of manuscripts have allowed us to date *Sakhis* more accurately and earlier than McLeod. However, some issues are due to misinterpretation, such as his preference for the *Miharban Sakhis*. *Miharban* was written by an offshoot sectarian group that is now extinct, *Miharban* is mistakenly preferred over the *Puratan Sakhis*. This is the oldest tradition of *Sakhi* having its roots in the original Nanak *Panth*, (the community that built up around Nanak). The *Puratan* is now considered the most reliable of the various traditions due to its earlier dating. Meaning it was more likely written or received input from people who actually knew Nanak, its origin are also from within the tradition, and there is a continuity in the creation of texts in this

tradition. McLeod's reason for preferencing the *Miharban* over the *Puratan* is due to another one of his assumptions. This assumption would not allow him to accept statements made within the *Puratan* regarding the establishment of a village.

This village, known as Kartarpur (Creator's Abode), is a place of extreme importance and McLeod's dismissal of the *Puratan's* statements about its establishment make us aware of McLeod's misunderstanding of Nanak's thought and goals. Kartarpur was a village established by Nanak, the goings on of the village gives us insight into what Nanak was really trying to do. Kartarpur was the physical space where Nanak's teachings could be realized in the flesh. It was an egalitarian, communal village, and it did not carry out day-to-day operations like other villages in India at the time. This was a village that had dismantled any notion of traditional Hindu caste hierarchy; it was also town of gender equality. It contained a place called a *Langar* which is a free communal kitchen in which all diners ate together on the floor. This manner of eating would be outrageous to certain Hindus who observed rituals and rites which would not allow higher caste Hindus to eat with lower caste ones. *Langar* continues to be a hallmark of *gurdwaras* to this day. Anybody of any creed is allowed entry and will be given food.

All of this is important because it refutes one of McLeod's main assertions about Nanak which is that Nanak was not interested in organized religion. McLeod spends most of his time concerned with trying to figure out where Nanak traveled, because of this McLeod is mostly interested in the stories related to the *Udasis* (journeys), but these are consistently the least reliable aspects of Nanak's life. McLeod hardly touches upon Kartarpur except for the fact that he confirms that it was founded. McLeod's assertion causes him to dismiss the *Puratan-Sakhi's* claim that Nanak founded Kartarpur after his first *Udasi*. Nanak made five such *Udasis* and McLeod spends most of

his work discussing the stories that grew up during Nanak's travels, which often became embellished and were filled with miracle stories which function as didactic tools for conveying Nanak's message. The other less reliable traditions state that Nanak established Kartarpur after completing all five *udasis*.

McLeod's assertion about Nanak not being interested in religious organization caused him further missteps in his understanding of Nanak. Most notably McLeod claimed that Nanak exhibited little original thought and that the religion he preached was essentially the same as what the Hindu bhakti saints at the time were preaching. McLeod aligns Nanak most closely with the Bhagat Kabir. McLeod also dismissed any Sufi influence as marginal.

To refute McLeod's claims about Nanak's thought require us to fully explore what was happening at Kartarpur and why what Nanak did was different from the Bhagats he is often lumped together with. At the end of the chapter we turn away from the *Janamsakhis* which offer us some historical insight mostly during the Kartarpur period and turn to Nanak's poetic hymns. Through analysis of Nanak's poems we come to an understanding of how he sees himself in relation to the bhagats and what sort of theological departure Nanak makes from them.

Chapter 2: Commentary on *Japji*

This chapter is solely concerned with Nanak's poetry. This focus allows us to better grasp Nanak's intellectual, moral, and spiritual contribution to the world. We concentrate on *Japji*, the central Sikh hymn, through a commentary. *Japji* is the most concise distillation of Nanak's thought and outlines his conceptual understanding of G-d and by extension existence. Through the commentary we become acquainted with a glossary of important terms that Nanak deploys, such as: *Maya*, *Haumai*, *Naad*, *Suniai*, *Mannai*, *Mann*, and *Hukam*. We also explore how grace functions in

Nanak's thought, the importance of recognizing impermanence, and the necessity of being aware of G-d's immanence in the world. The commentary on *Japji* provides us with the theoretical framework of Nanak's thought from which his ethics are derived.

Nanak did not preach a religion that focused on ritual, nor on asceticism, both of which Nanak explicitly critiques. Instead Nanak promoted a religion that does not turn its back on the world, but instead, one that demands intense engagement with it. Nanak does not teach a theological system separate from his practical system of ethics rather they are fused into a reflective praxis. The praxis relies on recognition of G-d's immanence through keeping immanence in mind every daily action is informed.

Chapter 3: Approaching the Name: Realization of the One Being

Nanak has an important message. We are in fact one being, we lose sight of this fact because our senses are limited. It is the job of our ego to keep our individual self alive. People forget that everyone's life comes to an end this leads us, human beings, into the task of preserving the self at the cost of any being that is not the self. The cost that is accrued to everything that is not the self is the denial that those beings are selfs. This causes us to view subjective beings as objective things, this is process of objectification. Nanak makes us realize why objectification, reducing a thing to an object is wrong. It is because each thing we observe is actually a subject and this is so because of G-d's presence within it. Nanak is often praised for his humanism but this is limited, Nanak is not just interested in human beings. Nanak's "humanism" in fact extends to every being within Creation. Although there is an anthropocentrism in Nanak's thought when we consider his views on

reincarnation and the human body being the most precious form, his message is one of compassion and love for all beings.

O Religious Scholar!

An analysis of the work of WH McLeod

We will begin our overview of Nanak through a review of critical scholarship on the topic of hagiographical collections known as *Janamsakhis* (literally “birth evidence” or “evidence of his life”).⁵ The first major western academic study of the *Janamsakhis* was by W.H. McLeod. McLeod laid the groundwork for *Janamsakhi* study with his revised thesis *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion* submitted to the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London in 1969.⁶ The *Janamsakhis* remain an unexplored field ripe with space for further study with W.H. McLeod being the most distinguished, and exceptional scholar of its investigations up to this point.⁷ McLeod’s exploration of the *Janamsakhis* is indispensable for establishing many aspects of Nanak’s life. The *Janamsakhis* are secondary accounts of Nanak’s life the first of which, (according to McLeod) were written, “toward the end of the sixteenth century.” Other *Sakhis* like Mani Singh’s, a scholar, martyr and member of Guru Gobind Singh’s (the tenth and last human Guru) court, were written between 1675-1708.⁸

McLeod’s work has been considered controversial by many Sikhs⁹ in view of two important claims. First, he claims the *Janamsakhis* are mostly mythic and ahistorical.¹⁰ Second, he positions Nanak as an intellectual/philosophical successor to Kabir in particular, and the Bhakti/Sant tradition in general.¹¹ The second claim will be referred to as the Sant Synthesis from here on out. These are

⁵ McLeod, W.H. *Gurū, Nānak and the Sikh Religion*. Bombay: Oxford UP, 1996. Print. 8

⁶ *Ibid* ix

⁷ Singh, Nikky-Guninder Kaur. “The Myth of the Founder: The Janamsākhīs and Sikh Tradition.” *History of Religions*, vol. 31, no. 4, 1992, pp. 329. www.jstor.org/stable/1062798.

⁸ McLeod, W.H. *Gurū, Nānak and the Sikh Religion*. Bombay: Oxford UP, 1976. Print. 25

⁹ “WH McLeod | Authority on Sikh history | Obituary.” *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, 03 Sept. 2009. Web. 06 Jan. 2017.

¹⁰ McLeod, W.H. *Gurū, Nānak and the Sikh Religion*. Bombay: Oxford UP, 1976. Print. 8-9

¹¹ *Ibid* 151-158

bold claims that marginalize the cultural memory of Sikhs, most notably by denying the validity of Nanak's religious experience which some Sikhs take as an incident of revelation. By doing so McLeod downplays the original viewpoint Nanak carved out. In terms of cultural memory Nanak's life story as illustrated in the *Janamsakhis* constitute a model to be followed within the tradition. Nanak is the Sikh moral exemplar *par excellence*. McLeod's conclusion about the *Janamsakhis* being mostly mythic and ahistorical cause him to question whether or not Nanak did the deeds claimed in these texts which undermines the message of participating in praxis. Perhaps most importantly, McLeod presents Sikhism, an independent tradition · believed by some in the tradition to be the result of knowledge handed directly to Nanak by God · as a retooled extension of Bhakti devotional practice.

There has been consistent reassessment of McLeod's work within academia such as the Special Issue of the University of California Santa Barbara Journal of Punjab Studies, that dedicated their 2010 journal to appraising McLeod's work after his death in 2009.¹² In contrast, there are ideologues and fundamentalists who have complete disdain for McLeod and all of his work. Many have gone to great lengths to tarnish McLeod's name.

A notable example are those who subscribe to a "Khalsacentric" ideology derived from the Khalistan movement. The Khalistan movement is a nationalist, sometimes militant, movement that wants to see the formation of a separate Sikh State that would secede from India. The complicated history of the movement is entirely out of the scope of this project; however, the Khalsacentric ideology's reception of McLeod's work is important for us to establish the varying opinions on him. Some members of the movement have actively worked against McLeod through the curious

¹² *Journal of Punjab Studies: Special Issue: WH McLeod: Assessing His Legacy 17* (2010): n. pag. *UCSB Global*. Web. <http://www.global.ucsb.edu/punjab/sites/secure.lsit.ucsb.edu.gisp.d7_sp/files/sitefiles/journals/volume17/JPS_17_nos_1-2_2010.pdf>.

maneuver of psychoanalyzing him through brief personal encounter and reading his autobiography.¹³ It is through psychoanalyzing strange claims are made, for example, McLeod was codependent upon his wife as well as “I (Dr S.S. Sodhi) found him a bit anxious, at times confused, dependent, fearful, melancholy, self-conscious, unappreciated, unfulfilled, suffering from wishy-washy obsessive-compulsiveness with linear one-dimensional thinking.”¹⁴ Due to scripturalist readings of the *Janamsakhis*, those involved in the Khalistan movement have responded strongly to McLeod.

These groups see any sort of critical discussion of “their” history as dangerous. They want to see an ethnically homogenous Sikhism, and understand any influence from the West as bad. Discussing them has little to do with this project, but they are responsible for a large backlash against McLeod. The reason it is important to discuss them is because some of these groups hold political power within Sikh communities. They are also responsible for the lack of critical academic study of Sikhism. Such groups have instigated charges of blasphemy against an *amritdhari* (baptized Sikh), educated in the West, for his claim that Guru Arjan, the fifth Guru, edited his poems because this suggested that the hymns were not the direct word of G-d.¹⁵

This project challenges, while building upon, McLeod’s work. McLeod’s claim about the limitation of knowing a historical Nanak is valid. It should be realized, however, that this stance is not particularly useful for understanding how Nanak is imagined within Sikh cultural memory. McLeod makes some recognition of this, when he says that the “fundamental question to ask of myth should concern not its historical truth but its functional utility.”¹⁶ We should ask then why

¹³ Sodhi, S. S., and J. S. Mann. “Psychoanalysis of Dr. W. H. McLeod Based on “Discovering The Sikhs —Autobiography of A Historian.” . [Http://globalsikhstudies.net/](http://globalsikhstudies.net/), n.d. Web.

¹⁴ Ibid 3

¹⁵ McLeod, W. H. “Discord in the Sikh Panth.” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 119, no. 3, 1999, pp. 381–389., www.jstor.org/stable/605931.

¹⁶ McLeod, W. H. *Early Sikh tradition: a study of the janam-sākhīs* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980. Print. 10

does McLeod not attempt to get at their functional utility instead of just labeling the *Sakhis* as, “highly unsatisfactory sources” and deems his mission to sort out, “how much of their material can be accepted as historical.”¹⁷

Nanak’s life is a source of inspiration and a model for how Sikh’s should live their lives. Sermons are given that draw upon the hagiographical tales of Nanak in order to teach how one should live. This is important to draw out because although Nanak outlines a specific theology in his poetry, he also preached the need for practice and being involved in the world. This is explained explicitly in his dialogues with the Yogis on the mountain or Sidh Gosht.¹⁸ In this dialogue we find Nanak debating with Natha yogis. He chastises them for living up in the mountains while the world below them descended into chaos. He asks them what good is their spiritual undertaking if it is simply used to insulate themselves against the reality of the world. In this chapter we will use McLeod’s work to provide a sketch of Nanak, after establishing a basis of Nanak’s life we will critique aspects of McLeod’s method, as well as his conclusions.

First, let me explain the function of the *Janamsakhis*. *Janamsakhis* are not scripture and they cannot in anyway be thought of as canonical, these stories are not analogous to either the Gospels or the Hadith tradition. There is no evidence of critical study of the Sakhis within the tradition. The way one is exposed to these stories now is simple. One buys a book such as the one read to me by my parents as a child, the stories contained within are the product of *Janamsakhis*. These days there is much mixing and it will often be the case that one could be reading stories that were taken from different collections.

¹⁷ McLeod, W.H. *Gurū, Nānak and the Sikh Religion*. Bombay: Oxford UP, 1976. Print. 8

¹⁸ "Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji :- Ang : 938-946 :-ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਜੀ." *Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji :- Ang : 72 :-ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਜੀ :- SearchGurbani.com*. N.p., n.d. Web. 04 Jan. 2017.

Life of Guru Nanak

W.H. McLeod does a lot of the heavy lifting in terms of sorting through the raw material of the *Janamsakhis*. He breaks down the *Sakhis* into 4 traditions, *Puratan* meaning ancient or old (1635, the following dates proposed by McLeod); *Miharban*, named after its actual author (1640-1650), *Bala/Bhai Bala*, named after its supposed author (1871), and *Gyan-ratanvali/Mani Singh*, named after the actual author (1675-1708).¹⁹ This classification system still stands today for the most part with some exception to the last category which involves the blending of multiple traditions.

McLeod claims that the *Bala Sakhi* is the least reliable but emphasises that it has had wide influence. This opinion holds up today. Bala is portrayed within the account to have been a living follower of Nanak. There is little evidence to support this as true especially since he is left out of Bhai Gurdas's list of chief followers. Bhai Gurdas was the chief scribe of the Guru Granth Sahib (GGS), and is remembered with the utmost respect in the Sikh community today, for his 40 Vaaran poems which is where we find his list of followers. Even to this day Bala is believed to have traveled with Nanak by Sikhs, including my own grandparents.

McLeod asserts that the *Puratan* and *Miharban* *Sakhis* are the most reliable.²⁰ The *Gyan-ratanvali* was a *Sakhi* written by Bhai Mani Singh a Sikh in the court of Guru Gobind Singh (10th and last human guru); the problem with relying on it heavily is "the version... which we now possess is certainly not the work of Mani Singh."²¹ McLeod dismissed the *Gyan-ratanvali* and *Bala* traditions as the least reliable, and asserted that the *Puratan* and *Miharban* *Sakhis* are the most

¹⁹ McLeod, W.H. *Gurū, Nānak and the Sikh Religion*. Bombay: Oxford UP, 1976. Print. 13

²⁰ McLeod, W.H. *Gurū, Nānak and the Sikh Religion*. Bombay: Oxford UP, 1976. Print. 13-14

²¹ *Ibid* 25

reliable.²² There is, however, a problem with the *Miharban* Sakhi, McLeod mentions it but does not view it as problematic. The *Miharban* was a collection written by an off shoot sectarian group the *Minas*.²³ McLeod doesn't see this as problematic because sees the *Minas* as "schismatics, not heretics,"²⁴ meaning they share a common origin point in the Sikh Panth. Further investigations show this is not exactly the case, seeing as how they believed Nanak to be a reincarnation of Raja Janak (a king from the Hindu Ramayana epic), which Nanak never claimed. *Miharban* and his text was ultimately concerned with asserting his own authority in order to claim successor status away from the 6th Guru.^{25 26}

We also have updated scholarly dating on the earliest creations of some these collections which is most important when speaking about the *Puratan* now dated at 1588. This earlier date places the oldest manuscript 47 years before previously thought. This makes it much more likely that *Puratan* was composed and compiled by someone who either knew Nanak personally or gathered stories from those who knew Nanak personally. The updated years are *Miharban* (1651) and *Bhai Bala* (1658)²⁷. The 63 year gap between the *Puratan* (1588) and the *Miharban*(1651) has shifted primary focus onto the *Puratan*.

In summary the *Puratana sakhi* is the most reliable meaning it was written by people who likely lived close to Nanak in both space and time. The author(s) probably lived within Kartarpur and had direct knowledge of how the village operated. We can reject *Miharban* tradition for both its schismatic and heretical intervention. The *Bala Sakhi* can be dismissed because the author derives

²² McLeod, W.H. *Gurū, Nānak and the Sikh Religion*. Bombay: Oxford UP, 1976. Print. 13-14

²³ Ibid 19

²⁴ Ibid 20

²⁵ Ibid 18-21

²⁶ Mann, Gurinder Singh. *The Janam Sakhi Literature*. N.p.: n.p., n.d, 2017. Print.13 (An unpublished paper provided to me by Professor Mann)

²⁷ Ibid 7-8

their authority from the false claim of being a travel companion of Nanak; it is also the tradition with the most fantastical stories. Finally the *Mani Singh* tradition cannot be relied upon due to corruption of the original text by subsequent editors.

Even with the varying levels of legitimacy there is some agreement among the collected *Janamsakhis* we know that Nanak was born in 1469. This is an agreed upon year among the majority of *Sakhis*, however, the particular date is questioned. Some *Sakhis* place it as April 15th others at October 20th. There is a protracted debate within the faith due to conflicting *Sakhis* although the *Puratan* asserts April 15th date. This is an interesting date because it would align Nanak's birth with the harvest festival Vaisakhi also the traditional New Year's Day of Punjab. Vaisakhi holds special significance for the Sikh community for another reason, which is something McLeod fails to mention. Vaisakhi 1699 is the day Guru Gobind Singh established the Khalsa, the collective body of all initiated Sikhs, through which Gobind initiated a new form of baptism and established the 5 K's. Which was a mandate to wear five articles of faith, *Kara* a steel bangle, *Kanga* a comb, *Kesh* uncut hair, *Kachera* undergarment, and *Kirpan* a dagger.

Regarding Nanak's birth date the *Miharban* and *Puratan sakhis* suggest April 15th, while the *Bala Sakhi* suggest the October 20th. McLeod points to another *Sakhi*, the *Mahima Prakas Kavita*, which suggests that Nanak was born the previous year 1468 but "this third date must be an error."²⁸ Although there is debate over the April or October date, the year 1469 has reached general consensus. Just as there is controversy over the birthdate of Nanak there is controversy over his death date; these are long standing debates and it is not the place of this project to weigh in on

²⁸ McLeod, W.H. *Gurū, Nānak and the Sikh Religion*. Bombay: Oxford UP, 1976. Print. 94

them. For our purposes it is enough to know that “Guru Nanak probably died on the tenth day of the dark half of Asu, S. 1569, a date which corresponds to 7 September, A.D. 1539”²⁹

Nanka’s place of birth is less of a mystery, “all of the janam sakhis except that of *Miharban* specify Rai Bhoi di Talwandi as the place of birth.”³⁰ This is traditionally believed to be the birthplace of Nanak and it is certainly where the young Nanak grew up. The ambiguity in *Miharban* has led some to believe that Nanak was born at his maternal grandparents (*nankey*) home. The biggest piece of evidence for this claim is Nanak’s name. In Punjabi *Nana* means maternal grandfather, and *nani* means maternal grandmother. According to Khushwant Singh there was also a “custom of returning to the maternal home for confinement.”³¹ This is just an aside, for our sakes we are in the right considering Talwandi as Nanak’s place of birth, and subsequent hometown.

Important People in the Nanak’s life:

The Janam Sakhis make frequent reference to family members and other important people in Nanak’s life. His father’s name, clan and cast: “Kalu, a bedi, Khatri,”³² pointing to the fact that Nanak came from a family of good standing, Khatri is a Punjabi cognate for Kshatriya, and it is likely his Father Kalu was the “village land accountant.”³³ Nanak’s mother’s name is Tripata, and he also had a sister named Nanaki, although she remains nameless in earlier *Sakhis*. McLeod suggests that her name was fabricated to sound similar to Nanak. Nanaki’s role in the contemporary imagination of the community is of high importance, it is recognized within the community that Nanaki was

²⁹ Ibid 101

³⁰ Ibid 98

³¹ Singh, Khushwant. *A History of the Sikhs*. Vol. 1. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1963. Print. 30

³² McLeod, W.H. *Gurū, Nānak and the Sikh Religion*. Bombay: Oxford UP, 1976. Print. 146

³³ Ibid 103

Nanak's first follower and is oftentimes referred to as the first Sikh. Nankai married a man, Jai Ram "all of the janam sakhi agree that... employed as a modi, or steward, by Daulat Khan Lodi of Sultanpur."³⁴ Jai Ram was able to procure Nanak a position, likely as an account like his father, in Daulat Khan Lodi's government. This prompted Nanak to move to Sultanpur with his wife and children, "Sulakhni (wife) and two sons, Lakhmi Das and Siri Chand."³⁵ .

Two more people must be introduced. The first is Rai Bular, the son of Rai Bhoi mayor of Rai Bhoi Talwandi. Rai Bular is portrayed as guardian of sorts to Nanak in his youth seeing divinity in the young boy before others did. However, "the puratan references to Rai Bular are to be found in sakhis which are manifestly unhistorical (meaning specific stories involving miracles), thirdly, Bhai Gurdas makes no mention of him in his list of Guru Nanak's more important followers."³⁶ This shows the limited reliability of even the *puratan* in reconstructing Nanak's childhood.

Perhaps the most important person in Nanak's life was his follower Mardana. Mardana is sure to have existed for one "Bhai Gurdas refers to him explicitly as one of the Guru's prominent followers."³⁷ In Bhai Gurdas' collections of poems, not included in the GGS although praised by Guru Arjan (the 5th) as the key to the Guru Granth Sahib (GGS), he states. "Mardana, the bard and witty person and a good player of Rabab in assemblies was a disciple of Guru Nanak."³⁸ Mardana plays a prominent role in the story of Guru Nanak, it's been suggested by Trilochan Singh that Nanak met Mardana before Nanak married Sulakhni.³⁹ Mardana was the Guru's faithful bard,

³⁴ Ibid 104

³⁵ Ibid 146

³⁶ Ibid 106

³⁷ Ibid 106

³⁸ "Vaaran Bhai Gurdas: Vaar 11-Pauri 13-ਸਿੱਖ ਨਾਮਾਵਲੀ-Inventory of the Names of the Sikhs of Guru Nanak ਦਾਰਾਂ ਭਾਈ ਗੁਰਦਾਸ :-SearchGurbani.com." N.p., n.d. Web. 01 Dec. 2016.

³⁹ Singh, Trilochan. *Guru Nanak Founder of Sikhism (A Biography)*. New Delhi: Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, 1969. Print. 44-46

Nanak would compose his poems to different ragas (indian musical scales/moods) and Mardana would accompany him on his rebab a plucked chordophone. Mardana also accompanied Nanak on his many long journeys known as udasis.

After Nanak married he moved to Sultanpur and began working for Daulat Khan Lodi. Shortly after Nanak moved Daulat Khan was promoted from chief of Sultanpur to governor at Lahore. Nanak probably could have remained in the administration and gone to Lahore but instead he decided to take his family back to Talwandi and set about on his travels.⁴⁰ It is understood that while living in Sultanpur Nanak had his religious experience at the local river. This experience is presented in the *Sakhis* as what motivated him to travel. Nanak also held a low opinion of the Lodi dynasty due to the rampant corruption he saw in the administration this likely influenced his departure from government work as well.

Concerning the experience the *Sakhis* report that he sat at the bottom of the river for 3 days rapt in meditation while his followers scurried above the water searching for him. Nanak mentions an ascent to the realm of Truth, *Sach Khand*, in stanza 36 of *Japji* the central hymn. It is traditionally understood that Nanak is referring to his experience at the river although he never makes this explicit in his poetry. Neither does he claim to have sat at the bottom of a river for three days.

According to the narrative found in the *Sakhis* while Nanak is sitting at the bottom of the river his soul is whisked to the heavenly court here is the story as translated by Nikky Guninder Kaur-Singh. “According to the Puratan Janamsakhi: ‘As the primal being (G-d) will, Nanak the devotee, was ushered into the Divine Presence. Then a cup filled with *amrit* (nectar) was given him

⁴⁰ Mann, Gurinder Singh. *Bābā Nānak and the Founding of the Sikh Panth* N.p.: n.p., n.d., 2017. Print.18 (unpublished)

with the command, ‘Nanak, this is the cup of Name-adoration. Drink it... I am with you and I do bless and exalt you. Whoever remembers you will have my favour. Go, rejoice, in My Name and teach others to do so... I have bestowed upon you the gift of My Name. Let this be your calling.’”⁴¹

This story functions to show from where Nanak’s authority is derived, G-d Itself. Nanak is given a prophetic commissioning and is told to spread the message of the One’s name. It is important to recognize that both nectar and Name, when deployed in Nanak’s poetry, refer to G-d’s immanence in the world. This idea of immanence seems to lie at the core of Nanak’s message in his poetry. So it is telling that it is spoken of here as well. Nanak also make some reference to a commissioning in his poetry.⁴² The role of the water here should also be noted upon. In Sikhism there is an emphasis on purity this comes across in Nanak’s use of the word *isnan* meaning bathing water is also used in the contemporary baptismal ceremony and there is evidence that Nanak included the use of water in his baptismal ritual. So there is an association with rebirth both within the story and in the ritual context. Mircea Eliade in *Sacred and Profane* explains that water in the case of immersion within it relates “regression to the preformal, reincorporation into the undifferentiated mode of pre-existence... immersion is equivalent to a dissolution of forms.”⁴³ This formlessness comes across in this story Nanak comes into contact with the transcendent Other as formless. “Nanak does not see G-d in any “form” -whether it be physical or cosmic... rather, he experiences the presence of the Formless One.”⁴⁴ Nanak comes into contact with a formless Other

⁴¹ Singh, Nikky-Guninder Kaur. “The Myth of the Founder: The Janamsākhīs and Sikh Tradition.” *History of Religions*, vol. 31, no. 4, 1992, pp. 332. www.jstor.org/stable/1062798.

⁴² “Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji :- Ang : 150 :-ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਜੀ.” *Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji :- Ang : 72 :-ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਜੀ* :- SearchGurbani.com. N.p., n.d. Web. 04 Jan. 2017

⁴³ Eliade, Mircea. *The Sacred and the Profane; the Nature of Religion*. Translated from the French by Willard R. Trask. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1959. Print. 130

⁴⁴ Singh, Nikky-Guninder Kaur. “The Myth of the Founder: The Janamsākhīs and Sikh Tradition.” *History of Religions*, vol. 31, no. 4, 1992, pp. 336. www.jstor.org/stable/1062798.

but he is given the gift of Its Nectar (immanence) to bring back to the world. This interplay between transcendence and immanence and the role they both play will be further discussed in the later chapters.

In any case it is after this religious experience Nanak begins to travel. Unfortunately, it is nearly impossible to say how far Nanak traveled, because the travel tales are the most miraculous section of the *Janamsakhis*. There is evidence that he did indeed travel to Mecca from consensus of the *Sakhis*, Bhai Gurdas, as well as evidence from Muslims. Trilochan includes in his books 10 plates of inscriptions documenting Nanak's presence in Mecca as well as Baghdad.⁴⁵ He certainly walked throughout India in a southern direction and there are some claims that Nanak traveled as far north as Tibet. Nanak probably stopped traveling around 1520.⁴⁶

According to McLeod, after Nanak's journeys he returned to Punjab and settled in the town of Kartarpur. He had gained a large following and "at some stage a wealthy follower evidently donated land on the right bank of the Ravi (river) and there the village of Kartarpur was built."⁴⁷ McLeod finds no compelling reason to reject the *Janamsakhis* that assert that Nanak "actually founded the village, or that it was founded for him."⁴⁸ However, McLeod spends no time discussing what occurred at Kartarpur he's most simply interested in figuring out when the village was founded. There are competing narratives in the *Sakhis*. The *Puratan* tradition places the founding after Nanak's first journey. The *Miharban* suggest that the village was founded after the completion of all of his travels. McLeod preferences the *Miharban* because it is "more satisfactory in that a sustained period of travel seems more likely than two such periods broken by an interlude of settled

⁴⁵ Singh, Trilochan. *Guru Nanak Founder of Sikhism (A Biography)*. New Delhi: Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, 1969. Print. 388-395

⁴⁶ McLeod, W.H. *Gurū, Nānak and the Sikh Religion*. Bombay: Oxford UP, 1976. Print. 146

⁴⁷ Ibid

⁴⁸ Ibid 139

life at Kartarpur.”⁴⁹ McLeod’s misreading due to orientalist ideologies at play in his time that Nanak was treated as a traveling mystic with complete disdain for organized religion that this scenario seems more satisfactory. McLeod fails to consider that Nanak was a married man and a father who conceivably would like to have spent time with his family. And any attempt at organizing is deemed entirely impossible by McLeod.

This brings us to the last major point of Nanak’s life as related to us through the *Sakhis*. He chose a successor while living in Kartarpur. Nanak likely made a point of explicitly choosing a successor because of the fact that he had two sons neither of which were chosen, although one Siri Chand eventually led a religious group of his own. His appointment likely resulted in sustaining a more unified community. One day a man named Bhai Lena arrived at the Kartarpur looking for the great master he had heard so much about. Once he met the Guru his intense devotion was made known. Lena did whatever Nanak asked to point of complete submission and humiliation from retrieving a cup out of a muddy river bank to coming inches away from consuming a human corpse. Bhai Lena showed such devotion to Nanak that he chose him as his successor and gave him the name Angad meaning limb. The referent limb is of importance because when Angad took up the Guruship he was no longer Lena but rather Nanak II.⁵⁰ Nanak’s choosing of a successor is what distinguishes him from other Bhaktas like Kabir and Namdev both of whom had followers but did not take steps to formalize or organize them, and in specific case of the Kabir-panths, they “came into existence much later, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.”⁵¹ Nanak died most likely in September of 1539.

⁴⁹ Ibid 139-140

⁵⁰ Ibid 146

⁵¹ Grewal, J. S. “W.H. McLeod and Sikh Studies.” *Journal of Punjab Studies* 17 (2010): n. pag. Web. 119

Critique of Method

There are two aspects of McLeod's work which require interrogation. The first is, his method. McLeod explored the historicity of Nanak, this is not an easy task with a religious figures. Many within the tradition perceived his method as a direct attack on the teachings and authenticity of Nanak, due to the discrediting of many central stories. For McLeod most stories within the *Janamsakhis* cannot be relied upon in any historically accurate way. This is problematic because Nanak's philosophy is explicitly action oriented. It is a necessity for Sikh's to be engaged in the world and the *Janamsakhis* are taken as the evidence that Nanak practiced what he preached, a praxis. In fact this likely why Nanak's son was not chosen as a successor Siri Chand preached asceticism and denouncing the world.

McLeod prided himself as western scholar whose "primary objective had been to communicate and understanding of the Sikh people and their religion to educated Western readers."⁵² The dominant conception of history for 1960's educated Western readers was much like McLeod's own one which is "firmly rooted in the Enlightenment."⁵³ McLeod "came to be known as a 'rational empiricist' or 'positivist historian' who rigorously followed a skeptic approach in his analysis."⁵⁴ There is nothing intrinsically wrong with this approach to history. In fact we should praise McLeod's initial hagiographical endeavour, the problem arises with his positioning as a "sceptic" in relation to "traditionalist." According to McLeod the traditional historian have "'the certainty of faith' and a 'closed mind.'"⁵⁵ Grewal sees McLeod position as a "'complete opposition' between the

⁵²Ibid 136

⁵³ Ibid 136

⁵⁴ Singh, Pashaura. "Revisiting the "Evolution of the Sikh Community"." *Journal for Punjab Studies* 17.1/2 (2010): n. pag. Web.47

⁵⁵ Grewal, J. S. "W.H. McLeod and Sikh Studies." *Journal of Punjab Studies* 17 (2010): n. pag. Web. 136

Western historian and the traditionalist historian.”⁵⁶ This becomes very interesting when McLeod begins to extend this distinction to his contemporaneous historians whose work was indebted to the Singh Sabha Movement.

The Singh Sabha Movement was a 19th century reform movement mobilized in response to Christian and Hindu proselytizing. The movement was interested in asserting the distinctness of Sikhs because Hindus kept claiming Sikhism as a branch of Hinduism. The Singh Sabhas were also interested in cultural production and ran a campaign against illiteracy in order to educate people on their political rights. Due to a campaign for literacy and political rights the Singh Sabha Movement stressed the importance of receiving a western education, a point McLeod prided himself on while simultaneously claiming that traditionalist had no appreciation of this.⁵⁷

Here it is necessary to draw out McLeod’s distrust of “traditionalist” scholar. This view can begin to illuminate the subconscious orientalism in McLeod work. I’d like to make a caveat, I do not believe that McLeod was a racist or an imperialist as earlier orientalist were, rather he too was victim of an ideology which led away from truth. That being said there are elements of the orientalist ideology in McLeod’s thought. This is made clear when we compare it to Said’s description of French scholar Massignon who according to Said gave undue attention to al-Hallaj an Islamic mystic, in order to argue against Islamic orthodoxy.⁵⁸ In a similar way McLeod sees Nanak as a mystic totally invested in “ineffable union with G-d, the formless one.”⁵⁹ Although Nanak is interested in union with the One, Nanak explains that true union is alone possible in death. McLeod seems to understand Nanak as a travelling mystic uninterested in organized religion bent on

⁵⁶ Ibid 136

⁵⁷The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica. “Singh Sabha.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., 19 Oct. 2007. Web. 22 Feb. 2017.

⁵⁸Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage , 2004. Print.272-273

⁵⁹ McLeod, W.H. *Gurū, Nānak and the Sikh Religion*. Bombay: Oxford UP, 1976. Print. 150

exploring ways to achieve union in this life. McLeod like Massignon also butted heads with the orthodox practice of the religions they each studied. Both attempted to shed light on the more “real” aspects of the faith.

This all points to McLeod dismissing important information or accounts because he viewed such accounts as “traditionalist.” Grewal underscores the fact that even though “the ‘historical method’ was evolved in the west in recent centuries it is not culturally rooted.”⁶⁰ In fact some text from within the Sikh tradition such as biography written on Guru Gobind Singh nearly a century ago met the demand of “rational explanation on the basis of empirical evidence,”⁶¹ the sort of historical imagining that Collingwood calls for. McLeod should be commended for his attempt at understanding a biographical Nanak, however, he does not have a monopoly on certain methods, and he is historically confined by the ideological trappings of his day. As for his findings it is safe to wager that many of the tales in the *Janamsakhis* are indeed ahistoric and mythic, however this does not help in establishing what Nanak was like or the importance of these stories within the Sikh community.

McLeod himself recognized the importance of engaging with *Janamsakhi* stories for their mythic qualities, Kaur Singh quoting McLeod “‘a myth is a construct of the human imagination, developing of an actual situation and seeking to give meaning to that situation.’ He points out that the ‘fundamental question to ask of a myth should concern not its historical truth but its functional utility.’”⁶² Kaur Singh attempts to do this, she offered an analysis of the ascension story, in her article which we received the translation from when we discussed it above. McLeod dismisses such

⁶⁰ Grewal, J. S. “W.H. McLeod and Sikh Studies.” *Journal of Punjab Studies* 17 (2010): n. pag. Web. 137

⁶¹ Ibid 137

⁶² Singh, Nikky-Guninder Kaur. “The Myth of the Founder: The Janamsākhīs and Sikh Tradition.” *History of Religions*, vol. 31, no. 4, 1992, pp. 330. www.jstor.org/stable/1062798.

an account chalking it up entirely to the mythic, however, this story justifies Nanak's authority within the tradition. It is used to establish Nanak's relationship with the Divine. Dismissing a story like this is akin, although not entirely analogous, because the *Sakhis* do not hold the same sanctification as the following texts, to dismissing the story of Muhammad's ascent the Isra/Mi'raj, which is claimed in the Qu'ran, or dismissing the resurrection of Christ discussed within the Gospels. Dismissing a central story such as this does not increase understanding but in fact has the opposite effect it diminishes understanding of a tradition.

What is strange about McLeod's positivistic approach to understanding the Janam Sakhis is that he realizes that they mostly function as myth. If this is the case, which it is, then it makes little sense to scrutinize these stories as if they were date logs. Which is exactly how he treats them with his four categories of "possible," "probable," "improbable," and "impossible." Rather, one should recognize that these texts are the product of cultural memory and that they are first and foremost literary products. The *Janamsakhis* are the product of cultural memory this fact also makes it clear why the *Miharban Sakhis* must be dealt with differently from the *Puratana Sakhi*. The Minas who composed the *Miharban Sakhi* saw themselves as outside of the Sikh fold, and subsequently became extinct. It is also known that the *Janamsakhis* were written by people, whether it be Miharban or "Bala", who were familiar with the epic tradition of India. Texts such as the Ramayana blends aspects of "mythology, history, philosophy and geography,"⁶³ this method of composition is also seen in these texts. In addition to being influenced by older Hindu traditions the *Janamsakhis* were in direct competition with stories about Muhammad and Sufi Saints, being circulated by Sufi orders.

⁶³ Singh, Nikky-Guninder Kaur. *Sikhism: an introduction*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2011. Print. 2

These stories are known as *mu'jizat* and are very different from the *hadith* tradition which is a long standing critical examination of what Muhammad said through tracing genealogies.⁶⁴

Critique of McLeod's Conclusions

McLeod's main conclusion in *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion* involves what has been termed the Sant Synthesis, Sant referring to the poets and spiritual leaders within the Bhakti movement, such as Kabir, Namdev, and Mirabai. The Sant Synthesis consist of blending elements from different religious movements/groups during Medieval India, "a compound of elements drawn mainly from Vaisnava bhakti, and the *hatha-yoga* of the Nath yogis, with a marginal contribution from Sufism."⁶⁵ This blend of traditions provided a deep pool of concepts and vocabulary from which poets like Kabir, Namdev, and Ravidas could pull. Such as contemplating on the Word, and Name, as well as embracing a practice of devotion toward God. Nanak does indeed pull some of this vocabulary and conceptual thinking while simultaneously expanding upon them. McLeod takes the commonality between Nanak and the other Bhaktas to an extreme and asserts that "he (Nanak), faithfully reproduces these doctrines setting him firmly within the Sant tradition, effectively destroying any claims to significant originality."⁶⁶ This claim has drawn much attention and often caused anger within the community. Although Nanak certainly "did not operate in an intellectual or cultural vacuum,"⁶⁷ McLeod's claim does require further scrutiny.

⁶⁴Ibid 2

⁶⁵ McLeod, W.H. *Gurū, Nānak and the Sikh Religion*. Bombay: Oxford UP, 1976. Print.152

⁶⁶McLeod, W. H. *Sikhs: history, religion & society*. Place of publication not identified: Columbia U.P., n.d. Print.p 16

⁶⁷ Singh, Nikky-Guninder Kaur. "The Myth of the Founder: The Janamsākhīs and Sikh Tradition." *History of Religions*, vol. 31, no. 4, 1992, pp. 343. www.jstor.org/stable/1062798.

McLeod's misunderstanding can be explained through two factors. One, he believed Nanak to be entirely opposed to organized religion. Two, he situates Nanak with other Bhaktas in a dichotomy of *Nirguna* and *Saguna*. The first assumption can be complicated through further examination of the *Purtana Sakhi* which do explain Nanak's endeavours at Kartarpur. The second, through turning to Nanak's poetry within the Guru Granth Sahib (GGS) as well as looking at who was in the GGS. Through exploring these facets of McLeod's argument we will begin to see that Nanak was indeed a progenitor of original conceptions, and propelled an original community.

Gurinder Singh Mann in his article, *Guru Nanak's Life and Legacy: An Appraisal*, an examination of McLeod *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*, delves into some of the problems we have identified. Important points of difference, Mann dates the Janam Sakhis differently than McLeod. In his paper *Guru Nanak's Life and Legacy* Mann opts for when the stories were being formulated and passed along in an oral tradition. In this paper he identifies similar dates as McLeod in terms of manuscripts but Mann views their composition at an earlier point. The "Puratan (pre 1600), Miharban (pre-1620) and Bala (1648-1658)."⁶⁸ Mann relies heavily on the *Puratan* just as McLeod does, although Mann rightly assign it more credence than McLeod, "The dates of the puratan are suggestive of an early period in the history of the community, when the people who had met the Guru and had the opportunity to hear his message from himself may still have been around."⁶⁹ Mann also views the *Puratan* as an account that comes from within the community whereas the Miharban is viewed properly as sectarian/heretical and from outside the community. McLeod addresses this concern and notes that the "Minas (group which wrote the Miharban Sakhi) were schismatics, not heretics, and although they have they bore enmity towards Guru Arjan

⁶⁸ Mann, Gurinder Singh. "Guru Nanak's Life and Legacy." " *Journal of Punjab Studies* 17 (2010): n. pag. Web. 7

⁶⁹Ibid 7

(5th)... no evident reason why they should have sought to malign Guru Nanak.”⁷⁰ It is not a question on whether they sought to malign Nanak what matters is they proclaimed Nanak was a reincarnation of Raja Janak a king from the Ramayana which was never claimed by Nanak. This would not seem offensive to McLeod though if he was working under the assumption that Nanak was essentially a Hindu Bhakta.

The competing views on which *Sakhi* to rely upon make a big difference when speaking about Kartarpur. McLeod with his sceptical approach marred by orientalism questions the *Puratan* tradition and its claim of the founding of Kartarpur occurring toward the beginning, after his first journey, of Nanak’s mission. Instead he opts for the other sources which claim it was founded after all of Nanak’s travels were complete. Mann prefers the *Puratan* and the detail it provides about the happenings within Kartarpur.

In Kartarpur is where Nanak’s most radical positions were realized and where his ethics came to life. The dismantling of caste distinctions, gender equality, and providing for the needy. Nanak wore the plain clothes of the Punjabi folk while living in the village. No longer did he don his traveling mixed Faqir/Yogi clothing. He established his langar halls (Free kitchen), and the “priestly class was eliminated. Any Sikh, man or woman could conduct services, if they were competent to do so.”⁷¹ It is necessary to underscore how radical these positions were at the time. Nanak was calling for gender equality over four hundred years ago in a patriarchal society. Nanak was working against the society at large. This point of gender equality also helps us to delineate Nanak from Kabir. Who was himself certainly not a proponent of gender equality as evident in poems such as the following: “Woman ruins everything when she comes near man;/Devotion, liberation, and divine knowledge no

⁷⁰ McLeod, W.H. *Gurū, Nānak and the Sikh Religion*. Bombay: Oxford UP, 1976. Print.20

⁷¹ Singh, Trilochan. *Guru Nanak Founder of Sikhism (A Biography)*. New Delhi: Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, 1969. Print.

longer enter his soul.”⁷² In contrast Nanak says this “From woman, man is born; within woman, man is conceived; to woman he is engaged and married./Woman becomes his friend; through woman, the future generations come.”⁷³

The langar halls also have large implications, the way langar functions is a kitchen based entirely on service and charity. It is a free kitchen and all it requires is for one to take off their shoes and to sit on the floor alongside everyone else, no one is higher or lower. This was unheard of in Hindu society which had strict food laws that stipulated certain castes could not eat food with other castes. Feet are also considered unclean in Hindu thought because they are associated with the lowest caste as they were made from the *Purusha* (the cosmic man).

The congregation at Kartarpur was involved in a number of daily activities they “gathered at the Guru’s house (dargah), recited his compositions as part of their daily prayers (kirtan), listened to his exposition of the ideas therein (katha), and shared a community meal (parsad/rasoi/langar).”⁷⁴ These are important details and ones that McLeod makes little mention of, due to the fact that he represents Nanak as a figure antithetical to organized religion, due to his understanding of Nanak as extension of the Bhakti movement. However, Mann suggest that Nanak was much more interested in organizing the community that was gathering around him. Mann cites two important details that he claims McLeod and his contemporaries overlooked. One Nanak’s creation of the Gurmukhi script, two the collections of his poems in the form of a book (poti).⁷⁵ Nanak gave the task of fleshing out and codifying the script, and the continuation of hymn writing to his Successor Guru

⁷²Kaur Singh, Nikky-Guninder. *The Feminine Principle in the Sikh Vision of the Transcendent (Cambridge Studies in Religious Traditions)*. Vol. 3 . N.p.: Cambridge U Press, 2008. Print. Cambridge Studies in Religious Traditions. pp. 114–116.

⁷³ “Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji :- Ang : 473:-ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਜੀ.” *Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji :- Ang : 72 :-ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਜੀ :- SearchGurbani.com*. N.p., n.d. Web. 04 Jan. 2017

⁷⁴ Mann, Gurinder Singh. “Guru Nanak’s Life and Legacy.” *Journal of Punjab Studies* 17 (2010): n. pag. Web. 8

⁷⁵ Ibid 9

Angad. Guru Nanak's emphasis on daily recitation, the importance of a burgeoning, though not yet sanctified, Holy Book, the communal living of a community, and the role of a singular leader all point to an investment in a distinct practice beyond anything propounded by other Sants. We should also reiterate that Nanak's son Siri Chand was invested in becoming leader of the congregation. In *Sakhi* literature Siri Chand is described as arrogant and entitled but from what we know about the *Udasi* the order Chand founded which has followers to this day. Chand was more interested in asceticism and renunciation which Nanak could not accept. This seems to me a more compelling reason for his rejection of Chand as the second guru and suggest that Nanak did indeed have a specific vision for his *Panth*.

Mann also points to three organizational steps Nanak took on his journey. Initiating "people into the Sikh fold through the use of the ceremony called the "nectar of the feet" (*charanamrit*), organized Sikh congregations in distant places, and assigned *manjis* ('cots,' positions of authority) to local Sikhs, who were given authority to oversee the daily routine of their congregations."⁷⁶ This takes on heightened importance if there was already an operational center at Kartarpur as the *Puratan* suggests.

Through establishing these points it is clear that Nanak was not "entirely opposed" to organized religion. This doesn't, however, account for McLeod's claim of a lack of originality. Nanak could have been interested in establishing an organized approach to the conceptions of the Sant Synthesis. To understand why this is not the case we must now turn to questions of theology and identity. We ask how is Nanak's conception of God different from the Bhaktas he's often grouped with, and does Nanak group himself with these Bhaktas?

⁷⁶ Ibid 8

We will turn to the question of identity first. Nanak does indeed believe in the important power of *Bhakti* (as devotion) which appears 142 times in his poetry. He also recognizes Bhaktas as group of people appearing “32 times (singular:3; plural 19; others: 10).”⁷⁷ Mann points out that the preference for the plural suggest Nanak thought of them as a discrete group that stand in opposition to *sansaris* or regular folk. Nanak never refers to himself as a Bhakta and instead sees himself as an “ordinary human named Nanak” (GGS 350:3 & 721:7) and he further refers to himself as “crazy, “lost,” a “helpless being,” “an inspired bard,” “a drummer who announces the divine truth,” but most importantly and often as “Baba” meaning an old man.⁷⁸ Nanak also creates an original word for an ideal human and that is *Gurmukh* (meaning turned to G-d) which is used 411 times over the 32 of *Bhakta*. Mann suggest that it is important that Nanak does not self-identify as Bhakta but this does raise the question which Mann does not answer do the other Bhaktas refer to themselves as such?

Now the question of theology must be tackled, first we must deal with two Sanskrit words, *Nirguna* and *Saguna*, meaning without attributes and with attributes respectively. These words refer to two different understandings of God. One is *Nirguna*, the formless, without any physical body, no color and completely indescribable. This kind of thinking can be reflected most prominently in figures such as Kabir and Ravidas⁷⁹ The second, *Saguna*, is more common in Hinduism and is exemplified by Bhaktas such as Surdas and Mirabai. *Saguna* includes attributing many aspects to God such as gender, colors, identity, seeing a god like Siva as the ultimate Godhead. Mirabai does

⁷⁷ Mann, Gurinder Singh. *Beyond Bhakti: Protest and Power in the Founding of the Sikh Community* N.p.: n.p., n.d, 2017. Print. 6 (unpublished)

⁷⁸ *Ibid* 9-10

⁷⁹ Hawley, John Stratton, and Mark Juergensmeyer. *Songs of the Saints of India*. New York: Oxford UP, 1988. Print.

this by paying homage to Krishna identifying herself as one of his many gopis, and writing explicitly about his body.⁸⁰

This question of theology is necessary in order to correct McLeod's misstep in labeling Nanak as a Bhakta who participated in a Sant Synthesis. It is important to realize that Nirguna and Saguna are not important words in Nanak's writings; he mentions Nirguna only 4 times and two of those "connote the absence of good qualities among human beings."⁸¹ Mann also points out that one of the times it is used in talking about God Nanak is discussing with Nath Yogis and is likely using similar vocabulary so that they would grasp his ideas.⁸² The only time he uses Nirguna for himself it's paired with Saguna. "Avigatho Niramaaeil Oupajae **Niragun** Thae **Saragun** Thheaa" (Guru Granth Sahib (GGS) 949),⁸³ "From Its state of absolute existence, It assumes the Immaculate Form; from formless It assumed the Supreme Form." It is obvious that Nanak understands the One as both Nirguna and Saguna, we will see in the next chapter that these concepts can be mapped onto transcendence and immanence.

Another place to turn in deciding whether or not Nanak is a bhakta is to look at who is included within the GGS. There are Nirguna bhaktas such as Kabir and Ravidas as well Saguna bhaktas such as, Surdas and Parmanand. McLeod himself recognizes the fact that for Nana "God, the One, is both *nirguna* and *saguna*, both absolute and conditioned, both unmanifest and manifest."⁸⁴ It is also important to note that McLeod recognizes the potential "danger of misunderstanding. The term saguna is generally used in connexion with Vaisnava bhakti and in this

⁸⁰ Ibid 132

⁸¹ Mann, Gurinder Singh. *Beyond Bhakti: Protest and Power in the Founding of the Sikh Community* N.p.: n.p., n.d, 2017. Print. 12

⁸² Ibid 12

⁸³ "Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji :- Ang : 940 :- ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਜੀ :- SearchGurbani.com." *Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji :- Ang : 940 :- ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਜੀ :- SearchGurbani.com*. N.p., n.d. Web. 17 Nov. 2016.

⁸⁴ McLeod, W.H. *Gurū, Nānak and the Sikh Religion*. Bombay: Oxford UP, 1976. Print. 167

customary sense it implies a belief in divine avatar. This is certainly not the meaning which is to be attached to the word in Guru Nanak's usage."⁸⁵ The more general 'connexion' McLeod refers to is certainly how those like Surdas and Parmanand understand saguna. So why does McLeod consider Nanak to be a recapitulation of other Bhaktas? Nanak was definitely aware of Bhakti concepts but Nanak himself wrote very little about the concepts of Saguna and Nirguna mentioning Saguna once in over 900 hymns, and Nirguna 2 times in the context of God without attributes. Nanak seems to recognize the limitations of these categories and this leads to radical new formulation and completely collapses the category of Nirguna and Saguna. Nanak does so by placing emphasis on God as both Transcendent and Immanent. It is not so much God with or without attribute but rather God within or outside of attributes. This redefinition lies at the core of his philosophy and thrust us into an intimate relationship with The One.

⁸⁵ Ibid 167

Commentary on *Japji*

In this chapter we are concerned with Japji. It is the most concise distillation of Nanak's thought and holds prime importance as the central hymn in Sikhism. It is the first of the five *banis* (prayers) to be recited by *Amritdhari* (Baptised Sikhs), and the Mool Mantar (the first 8 words of Japji) is memorized by even the most casual practitioners of the faith. Japji is the first hymn of the Guru Granth Sahib (GGS) pages 1-8. Japji's importance is best illustrated by a commonly reported incident involving the 5th Guru, Guru Arjan Dev Ji. Some disciples complained to Arjan that the Japji was too complicated and required elucidation, Arjan replied "The entire Adi Granth (or Guru Granth Sahib) is but an elucidation of Japji."^{86 87} Seeing as how it holds a position of prime importance, it is appropriate to focus our discussion of Nanak's poetry with a commentary on Japji.

In reference to the form of the poem, it consist of 38 stanzas followed by a one stanza, a Shalok or epilogue. Jap means recitation, which informs why it is to be recited daily and Ji is an honorific suffix. Japji is a work of supreme poetry that makes great use of anaphora and "is designed with numerous inbuilt changes of pace. Different meters and rhyming patterns are used in different stanzas (*pauri*), short stanza alternate with much longer ones, and several sets of stanza are marked by the repetition of their closing verses."⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Nānak, and Khushwant Singh. *Hymns of Guru Nanak*. New Delhi: Orient Longmans, 1969. Print.

⁸⁷ Puri, J. R. *Guru Nanak, His Mystic Teachings*. Dera Baba Jaimal Singh, Dist. Amritsar, Punjab, India: Radha Soami Satsang Beas, 1982. Print.

⁸⁸ Shackle, Christopher, and Arvind-pal Singh. Mandair. *Teachings of the Sikh Gurus: selections from the Scriptures*. New York: Routledge, 2005. Print.2

The *Janamsakhis* agree that Nanak composed the hymn after returning from his religious experience in the river near Sultanpur. Scholarship on and analysis of Japji suggest that the poem's mature style indicates it was written later in Nanak's life, probably during the Kartarpur period.⁸⁹ This reinforces the point made in the previous chapter that the Kartarpur period was the more important, and perhaps productive, part of his life.

In order to understand the ritual significance of *Japji* recitation we should see how it is conceptualized by current Sikh authorities. The Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) is the governing body of Gurdwaras in the states of Punjab, Haryana, and Himachal Pradesh, and administers Harmandir Sahib (the Golden Temple). The SGPC is the highest centralized authority in Sikhism. In 1945 the SGPC ratified the *Sikh Rehat Maryada*, a code of conduct and conventions for Sikhs. It goes through definitions of a "Sikh," "Sikh Living," and "A Sikh's personal life," which includes three aspects, *Nam Japo*, *Kirat Karo*, and *Seva*.⁹⁰ *Seva* is service and *Kirat Karo* is vowing to live life in accordance with the teachings of the Gurus. *Nam Japo* includes the ritual recitation of *Japji* during the ambrosial hour, defined as the three hours before sunrise, followed by the recitation of four more hymns and two separate occasions of prayer, in the afternoon and before slumber. Recitation serves two functions, the banishment of the five thieves: wrath, lust, greed, attachment, and pride,⁹¹ and to promote remembrance of the One. The SGPC explains the ritual of recitation in these terms, "*Simaran* (remembrance, a synonym for *Japo*) is the practice of the presence of G-d. It is G-d-vision."⁹² We can clearly see from this statement that

⁸⁹ Nānak, and Khushwant Singh. *Hymns of Guru Nanak*. New Delhi: Orient Longmans, 1969. Print. 41

⁹⁰Shiromani gurdwara parbandhak committee. "Sikh Reht Maryada." *Sgpc.net*. N.p., n.d. Web. <http://old.sgpc.net/rehat_maryada/section_one.html>.

⁹¹Shiromani gurdwara parbandhak committee. "Duties of the Khalsa." *Sgpc.net*. N.p., n.d. Web. <<http://sgpc.net/sikhism/duties-of-the-khalsa/>>.

⁹²Shiromani gurdwara parbandhak committee. "Basic Articles." *Sgpc.net*. N.p., n.d. Web. <<http://sgpc.net/sikhism/basic-articles/>>

recitation of Japji is meant to raise the consciousness of the reciter and bring about awareness of The One's presence in our reality. We should also point out that even though Nanak gave to us *japo/simran* to lead us to union with the One during brief moments in this life, however, ultimate reunion cannot occur until death.

Japji function as ritual serve to remind reciters of the presence of G-d in existence and the impermanent nature of life. Through recitation, one partakes in a unified ritual with the community of baptized Sikhs, who are also participating in recitation. Recitation, in the words of the SGPC, provides G-d vision.

Before we begin with the commentary, it is important to introduce Victor Turner's concepts of liminality and *communitas* in order to better understand Nanak's thinking. *Communitas* is described as "society as an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated *comitatus*, community, or even communion of equal individuals who submit together, to the general authority."⁹³ Turner also cites Martin Buber's concept of community to further flesh out how he, Turner, is thinking about *communitas*, "community is the being no longer side by side (and, one might add, above and below) but *with* one another of a multitude of persons. And this multitude, though it moves towards one goal, yet experiences everywhere a turning to, a dynamic facing of, the other, a flowing from I to Thou. Community is where community happens." These two passages explain a situation in which a community is defined by its close knit nature in which all members saw themselves invested in each other, not just themselves or own family. Nanak's founding of Kartarpur consisted of a community such as the ones described in these passages. One invested in minimizing distinctions between individuals, treating them equally and characterized by a living

⁹³ Turner, Victor, and Ronald L. Grimes. "Liminality and *Communitas*." *Readings in Ritual Studies* Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1996. Print. 513

with, not just living near. People at Kartarpur relied on one another for food which they farmed in land held together in common. In Kartarpur everyone worked toward the same goal of being *gurmukh* (turned towards G-d), and they submitted to Its *Hukam* (divine command). Turner describes liminality as the place from where the attributes of *communitas* derive from.

Turner describes liminality as a phase within a rite of passage, when initiates are drawn out from the status society in order to participate in an event together. A liminal event is characterized by its betwixt and between nature, which results in conferring a new status onto initiates once the ritual is completed. For example, college is a form of liminal ritual through which humans are drawn out of the larger society as they pass between childhood and adulthood. Upon completion of the ritual, participants are conferred with the new status of “college educated.” Turner offers a list of attributes of the liminal period which are based around equality, minimization of distinctions, and unity. Turner explains that “the monastic and mendicant states in the great world religions,” are the result of religious entities investing in the “institutionalization of liminality.”⁹⁴ Nanak can be understood to be a liminal thinker in the fact that he recognizes life as impermanent marking it as a transitional state. Instead of institutionalizing liminality in a *communitas* that functions as a monastic order, Nanak attempted the experiment of *communitas* in a village based around householders, regular people. This is notably different from the monastic communities in which participants usually reside in one building and members typically take vows of celibacy. In Kartarpur people were allowed separate house and raised families.

While Turner states that “liminality is frequently likened to death,”⁹⁵ Nanak suggest the opposite, life is liminal. Nanak’s concept of life mirrors general Indian concepts of love. Love is

⁹⁴Ibid 514

⁹⁵Ibid 512

thought to follow a cycle of union-separation-reunion, and this is seen in the organization of love poetry in both secular and religious contexts.^{96 97} Nanak alludes to this conception in stanza 29; “*union and separation work in rhythm,*” although he speaks about the liminality of life more explicitly in other poems. The goal of human life is to find a path that will reunite the soul to the One. “*It is the source of bliss, the Greatest Sovereign; through the True Guru, we are united in Its Union.*”⁹⁸ Nanak’s project suggest that in this existence we should live united in *communitas* alongside the plethora of other beings, our connection based on our Union within the One.

For Nanak, life itself is a rite of passage. We can see in Nanak that if one lives in accordance with virtues turned towards undifferentiation, like the liminal attribute Turner describes, the human being will pass into complete union with the One in death. If, however, recognition of the transitional and impermanent nature of life is not achieved, then the human being will be stuck to cycle of *Sansara*, a Punjabi cognate of *Samsara*, and cycle through the existence of 8.4 million beings. It is not made explicit where this number comes from but Nanak cites it consistently, “People wander lost, staggering and stumbling through 8.4 million incarnations.”⁹⁹ “They will pass through 8.4 millions species; this number does not decrease or rise.”¹⁰⁰ and “The faithless cynic has to endure 8.4 million hellish incarnations.”¹⁰¹ Living through these various types of beings is not seen as a positive which explains why one would wish to attain union rather than continue in the cycle of existence.

⁹⁶Dimock, Edward C., and Denise Levertov. *In praise of Krishna: songs from the Bengali*. Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1981. Print.

⁹⁷Alexander, Meena. *Indian love poems*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005. Print. Everyman’s Library Pocket Poets.

⁹⁸Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji : Ang : 505 : ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਜੀ.” *Search Gurbani*. N.p., n.d. Web. 05 Apr. 2017.

⁹⁹Ibid 1344

¹⁰⁰Ibid 936

¹⁰¹Ibid 1028

It is necessary to clarify Nanak's concept of reincarnation. For Nanak, the highest form of physical being is the human being (ref stanza 4). Being human allows us two paths to follow in death. One leads to salvation from *sansara* and reunion with G-d. The other is to remain in the cycle and to repeat existence as the 8.4 millions beings, none of which have the potential for salvation, except the human form. Human beings have the ability to recognize G-d's immanence and the impermanence of life and this allows for liberation. When we think about the behavior of non-human life, particularly animals, we realize that those forms of being are actually more inline with the attributes assigned by Turner to the of the status/hierarchical society, those based on individuation, inequality, preservation of the self, and competition. Human beings have a unique opportunity to transcend these hierarchies and live in a more equal way.

A note on the commentary below: Everything italicized is poetry and everything else is commentary. The translation of Japji is provided by Shackle and Mandair. Modifications of the translation: All gendered pronouns of G-d have been changed by me to neutral ones, except where it is explicit gendered in the Punjabi. All instances of Lord translated from the word Sahib have been changed to Sovereign.¹⁰² The One, One Reality both serves as referents to G-d. All He's have been changed to It's with a capital I.

Japji

ੴ Ek Omkar

¹⁰² Singh, Nikky-Guninder Kaur. *The name of my beloved: verses of the Sikh Gurus*. New Delhi, India: Penguin, 2001. Print. 40-41

We can approach the first word in a number of ways. First let us break this first “word” into two. Ek, the first half, is literally the number 1, the second half is omkara. Omkara has a relationship to the Hindu Om, or primordial sound.. Ek Omkar functions as the primordial sound from which all of infinity emanates. Notice the auditory aspect of Omkara which will be discussed further. The symbol for Omkar is a modified version of the first letter in the gurmukhi alphabet ਐੴ. This symbol demonstrates the oneness of G-d’s being in Nanak’s belief. Nanak’s use of Om is marked departure from the six orthodox Hindu schools of thought. Although there is, in more than once case, a belief in a Ultimate Reality. Nanak differs in his explicit oneness. We should think of Ek Omkar as One Reality Is. Ek Omkar is ultimately the symbol for G-d’s unity and for the unity of all being.

One (Ek Omkar), Manifest as Word, True of Name, Creative Being, Without Fear, Without Enmity, Whose Form is Infinite, Unborn, Self-Existent, through the grace of the guru.

This is the mool mantar, or root mantra. This covers all of the One’s basic attributes, Its oneness, Its manifestation in this existence through immanence, Truth’s accordance to It, Its creative power, Its lacking of fear and hate, Its infinity, Its aseity, and Its interactions with humans through grace.

Jap

Chant and remember. This is an imperative, it is the human’s duty is to remember the One.

Shalok

Repeat

True in the beginning, True before time began, It is True, Nanak, and ever will be True.

This is a short epilogue to the beginning 8 words. Nanak is aligning the One with Truth, and is claiming the One is both before and after existence. This fact will always be true.

I

No idea of It can be conceived through thousands of thoughts,

A critique meaning rationality cannot lead to complete comprehension of The One. This is a common thread in Nanak’s thought. Rationality is limited because human knowledge is limited, which is in partly due to our limited sense perception.

Ultimate silence evades the most deep meditation.

Perhaps a critique of Yogic and Buddhist meditation. Nanak suggest that silent meditation is not the most effective means to understanding the One. Nanak is offering a different approach here instead of silence, recitation and singing.

To heap up the wealth of the world does not lessen man’s hunger,

No amount of wealth allows knowledge of the One. Wealth is a cheap pursuit that cannot satiate the most basic desire to know G-d. Material possessions often lead one away from G-d because we

often become attached to them and objectify them, leading us to forget G-d's presence within the "object."

And multiple cleverness will not assist us hereafter.

Similar to the first line, but instead of critiquing rationality, this is aimed at those who are involved in trickery, such as the sorcerers of the time. In both cases, it suggests to not tie the ego to intellect.

Nanak says: How to be cleared? How to break down the wall of the ego? -

Nanak is asking if none of these paths, which are promoted by so many, work, then how can a human come to an understanding of The One Reality.

Follow Its will and command, from the first written out.

There is a mode of being that concurs with the One Reality and this way of being has existed since the beginning. If one follows this way, realization follows. The word here for "will and command" is *Hukam*.

Hukam can be understood as "the divine imperative, which is the basis of the natural order."¹⁰³ This involves, but is not limited to, participating in cultivating the five virtues: Truth, Love, Compassion, Humility, and Contentment, and shunning the five thieves: Lust, Anger, Attachment, Greed and Pride. A philological note, *Hukam* comes from the Arabic *Ahkam* whose plural is rendered *Hukm*. *Ahkam* refers to commandments issued by Islamic jurists in the field of *Fiqh* or mortal understandings of *Sharia* which is the divine law. Furthermore, *Ahkam* shares its roots *hkm* with the Hebrew word *Hokhmah*, meaning wisdom.

This first stanza explains some of the pitfalls of the different approaches to understanding the One. Nanak then assures the readers that true knowledge is attained through following the One Reality's *Hukam*.n stanza 2 Nanak lays out what the function of *Hukam* is.

2

By the command, forms are produced,

Hukam is the producer of forms, meaning the creation of various beings.

But the command cannot be defined.

A common theme throughout Japji is the ultimately indefinable nature of *Hukam* and the One Reality. This does not mean it cannot be understood at all, but rather complete knowledge of It can never be grasped.

By the command, creatures exist,

It brings creatures into being, similar to the first line but this line refers to plants and animals, or "biological" life

By the command, greatness is gained.

By the command, men are made high and made low,

Status is only rendered by the Sovereign's command. Here we can see where some of Nanak's critiques of status seekers are rooted. It becomes meaningless to define oneself by status because we

¹⁰³Shackle, Christopher, and Arvind-pal Singh. Mandair. *Teachings of the Sikh Gurus: selections from the Scriptures*. New York: Routledge, 2005. Print 145

are born into our current lives because of past Karma. According to Nanak, the human life is the greatest gift, and because of that, we all have equal status. We have all achieved human existence, which as discussed is characterized by the meaninglessness of status, due to recognition of life's fleeting nature.

By the command, sorrows and joys are received.

It is the source of the negativity in life and the positive because everything falls under its command.

By the command, some are granted Its favour,

Through Hukam some are provided with the grace of the One Reality

By the command, some must forever revolve.

Referring to those individuals who will forever participate in *Sansara*.

All are within the command,

Everything is under the sovereignty of Hukam.

Outside of it no one can live.

There is no way to transcend Hukam if there was no Hukam there would be no being.

Nanak, to grasp the command

Is to renounce ego-sense.

In order to see and hear the *Hukam*, one must first abandon their *Haumai*, here translated as ego-sense. The word *Haumai* is a compound word made up of *Hau* and *Mai* meaning I and me respectively, so it literally translates into I-Me. McLeod suggest that Ego is a limited approach to the word, thinking it carries too much baggage from its Freudian and philosophical definitions, although the colloquial connotations of ego are apt. McLeod suggest the term "self-centeredness" for translation.¹⁰⁴ I suggest the best way to conceptualize *Haumai* is to juxtapose it with *Maya*. *Maya* refers to creation without realization of G-d's immanence. *Haumai* refers to the *Mann*, a complex term which encapsulates the human-self as mind-soul-body united, without recognition of G-d's immanence. *Maya* is the Creation in totality; *Haumai* is the discrete being as a creation. The *Haumai* sees itself as an ultimate end but the *Haumai* is impermanent. *Maya* is the Creation but it too is impermanent so it cannot be the ultimate end. A *Haumai* is an individual that is attached to *Maya*, the world that is defined by hierarchies and the pursuit of wealth. It is important to note that *Maya* is increasingly becoming understood colloquially as "money." What we see in this stanza is that one should follow the *Hukam* of the One Reality, which transcends impermanence. This quality of G-d's transcendence distinguishes Nanak's thought from the Buddhist concepts of impermanence. Nanak also implores that we renounce ego-sense, which conveys that we participate in self-centered living until we realize that there is another path.

3

Some sing of Its power, for they have the power,

Those who sing of G-d's power do so with knowledge of the indwelling of that power.

Some sing of Its bounty, for they know its signs.

¹⁰⁴ McLeod, W.H. *Gurū, Nānak and the Sikh Religion*. Bombay: Oxford UP, 1996. Print. 182

When beings recognize what a gift Creation is, they sing in praise.

*Some sing of Its virtues, greatness and acts,
Some sing of Its knowledge, so hard to imagine.*

G-d's knowledge is greater than can be conceived. The One is also described as an actor.

Some sing of Its making, the body, then dust,

The One is the Creator of discrete beings and it is the Destroyer of the same beings.

Some sing of Its taking, and giving back life.

This too refers to Its power as Creator and Destroyer. In traditional Hindu thought, both of these aspects of the One are separated out into Brahma the Creator and Shiva the Destroyer.

Some sing that It seems and appear far away,

The One Reality is described as transcendent.

Some sing that It sees all, present and here.

The One Reality is described as immanent.

*In its description, no shortfall is found
As millions try over and over again.*

No deficiencies are discovered, no matter how many try to describe It.

It never stops giving, the takers get tired,

The One Reality provides so much for everyone that its abundance tires us, living beings, the takers.

Throughout all the ages, they feed and they feed.

For all eternity, beings are sustained by G-d.

Through the command, it is the command that lays out the way.

Becoming attuned to the One Reality's Hukam is part of Its Hukam. Recognition of both the One and Its Hukam leads to liberation and unification. It is through Hukam that recognition of the fact of our One Being, Ek Omkar, occurs.

Nanak, free from all care It rejoices.

It has no worries and because of this, it participates in delight. This is reminiscent of the primal attribute "Without Enmity" as explained in the Mool Mantar.

This stanza overall communicates various aspects of the One Reality; Its, power, bounty, virtue, greatness, knowledge, Creator, Destroyer, transcendence, and immanence. The stanza recognizes that beings are constantly singing about It. Singing means, but is not limited to, the literal singing of human beings. Recognition of human singing shows Nanak believes others, ie Hindus and Muslims, sing about the same One, even if they would argue their G-d or gods are different. More important than human singing is the singing of the *Naad*. The *Naad* is the cosmic sound current/unstruck sound. This the background hum of existence. For Nanak all of Reality is humming. This is another way to explain the Om within Ek Omkara. All of reality emanates from the sound of Om. This sound is evidence of the One, the fact that all beings, that all of reality makes sounds is taken as evidence of G-d's immanence. The universe can be listened to according to Nanak.

We will see this in stanzas 8-11 that listening leads to an expansion of consciousness and understanding.

If we introduce some of our current understandings of physical reality it can be shown that everything is singing, or at the very least vibrating. In Steven Goodman's *Sonic Warfare*, he outlines an ontology of vibrational force, it "begins with some simple premises. If we subtract human perception, everything moves. Anything static is so only at the level of perceptibility. At the molecular or quantum level, everything is in motion, is vibrating."¹⁰⁵ This has large consequences when we begin to think about the self as an independent entity, because as Goodman points out, this "vibratory nexus exceeds and precedes the distinction between subject and object, constituting a mesh of relation in which discrete entities prehend each other's vibrations. Not just amodal, this vibrational anarchitecture, it will be suggested, produces the very division between subjective and objective."¹⁰⁶ Singing or in Goodman's term vibrating is how a part of creation distinguishes itself from other parts of creation, and how an object comes to be apprehended by a subject or asserts its subjectivity. When something sings it changes its vibration from the natural vibration of *Naad* to whatever vibrations it chooses to project. Think about the globe revolving in circles, we consider it standing still, and it is only when we move our legs we are considered in motion. The concept here is similar; we assert our subjectivity when we perform an action through our own will. But we were already participating in the action, be it moving or vibrating, in accordance to *Hukam*.

4

The Sovereign is True, and True in Name,

Truth and the One Reality are one and the same. This is a reiteration of the primal attribute Satnam or True Name/True in Name. Name is how Nanak's describes the One's immanence.

Whose speech is love that has no limit.

G-d is constantly dealing in love and It does not limit its love towards anything. Again we see the importance of sound. It is through Its speech that Its love is known. The sound is evidence of Its love.

They beg and ask, 'O give, O give'

The Giver then Bestows Its bounty.

Beings are always asking and pleading to It and It provides without fail.

What can be offered in return

To gain the prospect of Its court?

Nanak asks the question: how can I repay such a benevolent Sovereign?

What words to be expressed are there,

To cause It to bestow Its love?

Another question: Is there anything one can do to gain grace?

Before the dawn reflect upon

¹⁰⁵ Goodman, Steve. *Sonic warfare: sound, affect, and the ecology of fear*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012. Print. 83

¹⁰⁶ Ibid 82

The greatness of the Name that's True.

Nanak suggests to wake up early and to reflect upon the One Reality in all Its splendor, with recognition of the One's presence within all beings. These lines inform the nature of Japji as a ritual which should be participated in during the ambrosial hour.

Through deeds we've done we get this garment.

Here Nanak uses a Punjabi variant on Karma and explains it is through our past actions that we gain this "garment," the human body. Karmic deeds can lead one to the garment of the human body. But, this is not all that it takes to be released from *Sansara* a Punjabi cognate of *Samsara*.

Through grace we reach salvation's gate.

Ultimately it is only through grace that one can achieve *Mokh* or *Moksha* "salvation" or "liberation." Salvation's gate in the metaphor stands for the escape from the cycle of *Sansara*.

Nanka, it must be realized

That of Itself It's All and True.

In order to reunite with the One requires grace and the realization that the One is. We are estranged from the One Reality when we forget that we move through It and It inhabits us. We are blessed with grace when we remember that fact. Nanak sings the praises of G-d in this verse and ask the important question of how to achieve complete unification with G-d. Nanak's answer is a mixture "good works" and grace. "Good works" in the form of remembrance of the Name and cultivation of the five virtues.

5

It cannot be established, nor can It be made,

The One is not something that comes into being, it simply is. This is a statement of G-d's aseity.

Of Itself It exists, quite free from all stain.

This is a statement emphasising transcendence. Nanak uses the word *Niranjan*, which is sometimes translated as immaculate, and it shares the prefix of *Nirgun*. *Niranjan* is similar in the sense that it means without blemishes or without bad attributes. G-d is not stained by Its creation even though it permeates through it, It is transcendent in the fact that it is not affected by *Maya* and It does not have a *haumai*.

Through serving It truly, great honour is found,

Here serving is the Punjabi word *Seva* which as we saw earlier is one of the 3 aspects of "A Sikh's personal life" according to SGPC. *Seva* refers to being in the service of other beings as well as the One for the One is within all other beings.

O Nanak, sing praise of the store of all virtue.

Nanak is serving It by singing just as others have before, similar to stanza 3.

Sing praises and listen, feel love in your heart,

Nanak implores us to sing too, as well as listen. Singing and listening constitute a way to serve because it awakens love in the heart.

Let sorrow be banished and joy take its place.

Singing and listening brings about joy and dispels sorrow.

Through the guru the Word and its wisdom are shown

“The Word” here is *Naad*. Nanak’s concept of *Naad* is important because it suggests that all of existence is singing (ref stanza 3) and that is why understanding *Hukam* comes through listening.

Through the guru awareness of immanence.

Through recognition of Word or Name, the immanence of *Naad* or *Naam* is realized.

The guru is Shiv, It is Vishnu and Brahma

The guru is Parvati, known as the Mother.

All of these deities praised by Hindus are here understood as aspects of the One Reality. Notice the One contains both male and female aspects the distinction of gender collapse within the One.

If I knew It, I still could not say what It’s like,

Its description is something that cannot be told.

Here, Nanak admits that he himself does not know It, at least not in totality. More importantly, even if he did know all there was to know about the One Reality, he would not be able to communicate that knowledge. The One cannot be adequately explained.

O guru, teach me only this:

Let me not forget

The One who gives to all.

The lesson of this refrain is to never forget that G-d is present and that It constantly provides for all. The guru refers to the One. Nanak is asking G-d to teach him how not to forget G-d.

6

Its pleasure is my pilgrimage,

What use is bathing otherwise?

Nanak explaining that the only pilgrimage worth taking is service of G-d. The referent to bathing explains the importance of rivers as sites of pilgrimage within India.

One lesson from the Guru fills

The Guru here is not Nanak but rather the One.

The mind that hears with precious gems.

Even just one lesson fills the entire mind with important insight into what the *Hukam* is.

O guru, teach me only this:

Let me not forget

The One who gives to all.

The refrain from the previous stanza is repeated.

7

If one could live for all four ages,

Or even ten time longer still,

The four ages refer to the different *Yugas*, *Satya Yuga*, *Treta Yuga*, *Dvapara Yuga*, and *Kali Yuga*. The first age is the golden age and each successive age sees a degradation of quality of life. In the first age Humans would live for 1000’s of years. Nanak is saying ‘if you could live almost forever...’

The Kali Yuga is the dark age, the most degenerate which is the age we currently occupy according to Nanak.

If one were known in all nine realms,

It is unclear what the nine realms are, the word is *khand*, which Nanak uses later to describe ascending the levels to *Sat Khand* or the realm of truth, the heavenly court. Here realms seems to suggest an ambiguous area, this passage is sometimes translated as “the nine continents”^{107 108}

*Enjoying universal admiration,
If one acquired great reputation,
Great fame and glory in the world -
Yet who would pay the slightest notice,
Without that look of favor from It?*

Nanak asserts, through asking a rhetorical question, that a near eternal life paired with great fame and admiration would be meaningless if G-d’s grace is not bestowed upon you. Here we have the condemnation of pursuing fame, a common theme throughout Nanak’s thought. Nanak’s critique is twofold, one is against wanting to live forever. The second is the desire of gaining admiration from many. The desire for eternal life runs counter to Nanak’s recognition of impermanence as an ultimate fact of *Maya*. Fame is a dead end because it is in the service of inflating *Haumai*.

To worms that wretch would be a worm,

Having fame would not change the fact of being a living organism, a human among humans, the individual is not transcendent in anyway.

Whom even sinners would condemn.

With your fame you would not be above criticism even the sinners would find something to critique about your conduct.

*To those who lack and those who have them,
O Nanak, virtues come from It.*

If you are without virtue it can be granted by G-d and if you have virtue it is only because of G-d’s indwelling within the self. With realization of It more virtue can be gained.

*On It, though, virtue cannot be
Conferred by anyone that’s here.*

Anything within G-d’s creation, which is everything, cannot grant virtue upon the One. It is perfect and there is no way we could add to Its perfection.

Stanzas 8-11 explain that power of listening, *Suniai*, which is that reveals a path towards liberation. *Suniai* is translated in many ways but it is clear that Nanak is talking about audible perception. “Through hearing It” and “By hearing the Word”¹⁰⁹ capture what Nanak is trying to

¹⁰⁷Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji :- Ang : 2 :- ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਜੀ." Search Gurbani. N.p., n.d. Web. 05 Apr. 2017.

¹⁰⁸Singh, Nikky-Guninder Kaur. *The name of my beloved: verses of the Sikh Gurus*. New Delhi, India: Penguin, 2001. Print 54

¹⁰⁹ Nānak, and Khushwant Singh. *Hymns of Guru Nanak*. New Delhi: Orient Longmans, 1969. Print 47

communicate the best. The One Reality is made up of singing parts as explained in Stanza 3. This is the sound of things existing, the rubbing of tree branches, the rush of a river, the sound of cloth stretching as you bend, as well as the bird's song or meaningful conversation. Listening is a way to perceive G-d's immanence in the world, the fact of sound makes G-d's presence explicit. Nanak's emphasis on sound also reveals to us his opinion on human perception as a valid way of knowing, while at the same time recognizing its limitations. Listening allows insight into the nature of the One Reality and Its *Hukam*. It is 'Through hearing It' that knowledge is gained. Listening to the *Naam/Naad* reveals G-d's immanence in the world. Listening bestows upon the listener the knowledge of "the pools of virtues' depths," listening is akin to "bathing in all sixty-eight" by listening to something it becomes interiorized.

8

Through hearing It: the Siddhs and Pirs and sages.

In a footnote Shackle & Mandair explain that this opening line can be rendered more fully as "Through listening to the Name, one attains the awareness of the greatest spiritual adepts, and fathoms the mysteries of the universe."¹¹⁰

Through hearing It: the earth and bull and heaven.

The bull is a reference to the bull that supports the world.

Through hearing It: the zones and worlds and underworlds.

Through hearing It: death has no power to menace.

Death is overcome here, although not literally, you will die. Rather it is understood that one should not fear death. If remembrance is constant then union with G-d can be achieved in death.

Nanak, the saints gain bliss forever,

Through hearing It: the end of pain and sin.

This refrain is seen in the following three stanza it explains that listening allows realization of the blessing of the Name. It is through listening that the bliss of union is gained because listening brings us into contact with other beings, in which the One dwells, and by extension the the One Itself.

9

Through hearing It: Isar, Brahma, Indra.

Through hearing It: wicked mouths are filled with praise.

Through hearing It: yoga and the body's secrets.

Through hearing It: Shastras, Smritis, Vedas.

Nanak, the saints gain bliss forever,

Through hearing It: the end of pain and sin.

Understanding of all the deities and scriptures will be gained through listening.

10

Through hearing It: truth, contentment, wisdom.

Through hearing It: bathing in all sixty-eight.

¹¹⁰ Shackle, Christopher, and Arvind-pal Singh. Mandair. *Teachings of the Sikh Gurus: selections from the Scriptures*. New York: Routledge, 2005. Print 145

Referring to visiting the sixty eight great pilgrimage sites throughout India, most of which are rivers.

Through hearing It: recitation brings great honour.

Through hearing It: attention comes quite easily.

The Punjabi here is “Suniai Laagai Sehaj Dhhiaan” *Sehaj* is related to the Sanskrit *Sahaja* which is an important term in Tantric Buddhism and Hindu teachings where it often means the innate, coemergent¹¹¹ and also refers to “spontaneous bliss.”¹¹² It is immediate knowledge of the Other, an insight of Ultimate Reality.

*Nanak, the saints gain bliss forever,
Through hearing It: the end of pain and sin.*

II

*Through hearing It: the pools of virtues' depths.
Through hearing It: the Shaykhs, the Pirs, the kings.
Through hearing It: the blind can find their way.
Through hearing It: the bottomless is plumbed.
Nanak, the saints gain bliss forever,
Through hearing It: the end of pain and sin.*

I2

The state of acceptance is not to be told,

The word translated here as acceptance is *Mannai*, it is sometimes rendered as faith¹¹³ or remembering.¹¹⁴ Shackle and Mandair suggest that it has a “sense of reverent mindfulness and remembrance.”¹¹⁵ In this line and the one below Nanak explains just as the One cannot be adequately defined neither can the process of remembering It. This is important to draw out because it influences the discussion of how grace operates. As we saw in stanza 4 grace is obtained by realization of the One’s existence and further bestowed by remembering that fact. However, this stanza suggests the ability to remember G-d’s existence cannot be explained. This does not mean one cannot cultivate this acceptance/remembrance just that it cannot be taught. Which is interesting because it begs the question, is this not the task Nanak has given to himself by writing this hymn?

We can get at this question through a discussion of the Indian aesthetic theory of *rasa*. *Rasa* theory has its roots in the vedic texts and was later fleshed out by treatises by the six schools of orthodox Hindu philosophy. Nanak is clearly aware of the vedas as we have seen in this text and there is evidence for his knowledge of the six schools, “*People recite from memory the wisdom of the*

¹¹¹ “Sahaja.” *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*. Encyclopedia.com, n.d. Web. 05 Apr. 2017.

¹¹² Shackle, Christopher, and Arvind-pal Singh. Mandair. *Teachings of the Sikh Gurus: selections from the Scriptures*. New York: Routledge, 2005. Print 145

¹¹³ Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji : Ang : 3 : ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਜੀ.” *Search Gurbani*. N.p., n.d. Web. 05 Apr. 2017.

¹¹⁴ Singh, Nikky-Guninder Kaur. *The name of my beloved: verses of the Sikh Gurus*. New Delhi, India: Penguin, 2001. Print 55

¹¹⁵ Shackle, Christopher, and Arvind-pal Singh. Mandair. *Teachings of the Sikh Gurus: selections from the Scriptures*. New York: Routledge, 2005. Print 145

*six schools of philosophy.*¹¹⁶ *Rasa* literally means taste and it involves inducing the essence of a piece of art which should rouse an emotion in the audience. This is achieved “when generalized objects and situations are presented in poetry they awaken the generalized emotions which are felt in an impersonal and contemplative manner.”¹¹⁷ Nanak is telling us that *Mannai* cannot be told only felt so in order to do this art is required. This explains Nanak has chosen the poetic/musical form. Nanak is clearly someone who is moved by the nature of reality and its many sublime qualities. As discussed earlier Nanak understands the One as something that is constantly singing. Through listening we can realize the existence of It. Nanak participates in this singing with his hymns. So it is through his poetics and music that he attempts to induce the feeling of *Mannai*, rather than teach it.

*If anyone tries, they will later repent.
With pen on the paper, no hard-thinking writer
Can capture the slightest idea of acceptance.*

In the above two lines Nanak makes an important point about the nature of *Mannai*. It is not something that can be approached by “hard-thinking” it is also not something that is part of the sphere of ideas. These lines suggest that *Mannai* is a feeling instead of a concept. Nanak is trying to convey the essence of *Mannai* through poetics.

*Such is the Name which is free from all stain,
To be known to the mind through acceptance.*

This refrain which repeats until stanza 15 recapitulates the immaculate nature of G-d, and Its immanence (name). In the last line Mandair and Shackle have decided to translate *Mann* as Mind. This is a limited translation, discussed in stanza 2, because *Mann* is more than Mind. More aptly *Mann* is the human-self understood as a unified whole of mind-soul-body. It encapsulates the thinking/decisions making aspects of the mind, the feeling of the heart, and the imperishable quality of the soul. *Mann* is not solely the mind because this would run counter to the critique of rationally attempting to approach *Mannai* as we see earlier in the verse.

13

Through acceptance, awareness envelops the mind.

Just as we saw in stanzas 8-11 the many benefits of *suniai*, in stanzas 13-15 we are treated to an explanation of the benefits of *Mannai*. When *Mannai* is felt awareness develops. We can understand all of japji as working to develop the feeling of *Mannai*.

Through acceptance, the universe comes to be known.

When *Mannai* is felt, Hukam can be grasped.

Through acceptance, all slaps on the face are avoided.

When *Mannai* is felt, suffering and humiliation will no longer occur.

Through acceptance, there is no departure with death.

¹¹⁶ 98

¹¹⁷Chaudhury, Pravas Jivan. “The Theory of Rasa.” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 24, no. 1, 1965, pp. 146., www.jstor.org/stable/428204.

When *Mannai* is felt, one realizes that death does not mean losing this world but rather it is the potential to be reunited with G-d.

*Such is the Name which is free from all stain,
To be known to the mind through acceptance.*

14

*Through acceptance, no obstacle stand in our way.
Through acceptance, we're given distinction and honour.
Through acceptance, we keep to the road we should travel.
Through acceptance, right action stays closely connected.*

When *Mannai* is felt, unethical behavior is impossible to carry out.

*Such is the Name which is free from all stain,
To be known to the mind through acceptance.*

15

*Through acceptance, we come to discover the gate of salvation.
Through acceptance, support is provided to us and our kinsfolk.
Through acceptance, the guru is saved, and he saves his disciples.
Through acceptance, O Nanak, none need to keep begging.
Such is the Name which is free from all stain,
To be known to the mind through acceptance.*

16

The saints are approved, the saints are supreme,

Here “saints” does not refer to *Sants* or *Bhagats*. Nanak is not pointing toward venerated people but rather people who perform correct ethical actions and have been blessed with grace.

*The saints receive honour, as they stand in the court.
The saints are exalted, as kings at the gate,*

They escape the cyclical existence of *Sansara*.

The saints' thoughts are fixed on the guru alone.

Their minds are always focused on the remembrance of G-d.

*Although one may speak and try to describe them,
The works of the Maker cannot be counted,*

Just as G-d is infinite so are Its creations and an infinite amount of Its creations are saintly. This shows Nanak's attitude toward human beings. Nanak remains perennially optimistic about Humanity and all the beings of the Creator.

The bull that is righteousness, offspring of mercy,

The mythological bull named *Dhharam*, or *Dharma*, that holds up the world. Nanak is emphasizing that this world is the realm of *Dharma*.

Is tethered in place with the rope of contentment.

Nanak is exalting Contentment as a virtue. One of the five central virtues, the other four are Truth, Love, Compassion, and Humility.

*If we can see this, we indeed must acknowledge
What the burden must be which lies on the bull.*

Even though the weight of the Earth is heavy on the bull it does its job diligently and with contentment, for this reason it should be praised!

*There are many more world beyond earth, they yet more,
What strength must the one who's beneath them possess?*

Nanak explains how our world is not the only one and is awestruck by the power of the One Reality to sustain them all.

*The names of the creatures, their kinds and their colours,
Are all written down by the flow of Its pen.*

All beings are preordained creations of the One.

*Supposing that someone knew how to record them,
How long an account would then have to be written!*

The list of all the creations would be infinitely long.

*How great is Its power, how lovely Its beauty!
How great is Its bounty, which cannot be priced!*

Praising the One's power, beauty, and giving nature.

With a single command this vast world was created,

Speech is the act of creation. This is again showing the importance of the audible.

On which hundred and thousands of currents emerged.

“Literally, rivers, taken to refer to the multiple manifestations of life.”¹¹⁸

To describe You is beyond me,

Nanak explains his limited ability to communicate what the divine is.

Your quite unworthy offering.

Nanak showing his humility through recognizing his existence as being contingent on the power of G-d.

That deed is good which pleases You,

Good actions are ones that please the One. G-d is please by actions that are good. Being ethical means being in accordance with Its *Hukam*.

O formless One, secure forever.

A restatement of the *Nirguna*, transcendent reality of the One which is the only permanent.

Stanza 17 and 18 consists of a long list of the number of infinitely created creations. This means that an infinite amount of discrete beings are created an infinite amount of times. This produces an effect of smallness and wonder in the reader, akin to looking at a star filled night sky. It is in a moment like this where *Mannai* is felt. Stanza 17 is specifically the infinite amount of good creations. Stanza 18 is

¹¹⁸Shackle, Christopher, and Arvind-pal Singh. Mandair. *Teachings of the Sikh Gurus: selections from the Scriptures*. New York: Routledge, 2005. Print 146

the infinite amount of bad creations. Stanza 19 list the aspects of the One Itself. The bad creations are attached to Maya and have not recognized the One. Verses 17-19 include the refrain from above.

17

*Countless the prayers, and countless the reverence,
Countless the worship, and countless the penance,
Countless the scriptures and readers of Vedas,
Countless the yogis whose minds are detached,
Countless the saints who think on Its virtues,
Countless the pious, and countless the givers,
Countless the heroes who boldly face steel,
Countless the silent absorbed in devotion.*

*To describe You is beyond me,
Your quite unworthy offering.
That deed is good which pleases You,
O formless One, secure forever.*

18

*Countless the fools who are totally blind,
Countless the thieves who live off their crimes,
Countless the tyrants who issue commands,
Countless the cut-throats who murder and kill,
Countless the sinner who sin till they die,
Countless the liars who go round in lies,
Countless the outcastes who eat and speak filth,
Countless the slanderers burden by spite.*

The lowly Nanak says: I am

A variant line; instead Nanak refers to himself as lowly to emphasis humility is required to approach the One. Nanak here is showing that humility is required to abandon attachment to *Maya*. He is also showing himself to be lowly like the other countless bad creations, which conveys his compassion and empath towards other beings.

*Your quite unworthy offering.
That deed is good which pleases You,
O formless One, secure forever.*

19

*Countless Your titles, and countless Your places,
Countless and far beyond reach Your domains.*

Two lines describing the infinite names of G-d as well as all the places in which It dwells.

Calling them countless increases the burden.

Referring to them as countless is itself an attempt to limit and make conceptual that which is ultimately non-conceptual.

Through words comes the Name, through words come the praises,

It is through a speech act that G-d's immanence (Name) becomes imbued in the world. The praise of G-d comes through words as seen in this poem.

Through words come both wisdom and songs to Your virtues.

Through words come reciting and writing the Word,

The Word being synonymous with Name, both convey immanence.

Through words on the forehead, our fate is described.

Our destiny is a part of us whether through past or current Karmic actions.

The writer has no words upon It,

The One is outside of destiny.

As It commands, so they receive.

We operate in accordance to the *Hukam* which includes while also transcending *Karma*.

Its Name is great, as is creation.

There is no place without the Name.

Nothing can exist without the immanence of the One within it.

There is no place where the One is not present.

To describe You is beyond me,

Your quite unworthy offering.

That deed is good which pleases You,

O formless One, secure forever.

In the transcendent form the One exist permanently.

20

When dust falls on our limbs and bodies

It can be washed away with water.

We have the ability to clean our bodies when they become dirty.

When urine makes a garment foul

It can be washed away with soap.

Just as we can clean our bodies we can also clean our possessions.

The colour of the Name will clean

The mind that is befouled by sins.

Through recognition the Presence within humans can clean themselves of evil thoughts and deeds.

The record of your deeds goes with you,

'Saint' and 'sinner' aren't just names.

It's you who sow, and you who reap,

We human beings are responsible for our lives and by extension our actions. This explains that humans have the freewill to experience cause and effect, or the fruit of their action.

O Nanak, birth and death are as decreed.

The Sovereign is responsible for giving and taking our lives. Both coming into life and leaving it are out of the free will of human beings. So while human beings are allowed some level of free will there are also instances of determinism in Nanak's thought.

Here Nanak is describing that it is the responsibility of the individual to participate in right conduct. It is our duty to keep clean our bodies. With remembrance of the One correct conduct will be known and supported. We cannot escape the Karma of our actions. The final line also makes mention of reincarnation and how it functions as part of *Hukam*.

21

*Hardly the tiniest grain's worth of honour
Comes through bathing, austerity, pity and charity.*

Nanak is critiquing the activities of pilgrimage, austerity, pity, and charity. He suggests that merit from these activities is minimal because they are expressed outwardly and can be observed by others. Meaning that some go on pilgrimage and give to charity for the boost they will accumulate to their status due to appearances of piety.

*Hearing, acceptance, love in the heart
Show the place for true bathing and cleansing within.*

Instead of those actions Nanak suggests participating in *Suniai*, *Mannai*, and love in order to reveal the true way to worship and remove sin.

All virtues are Yours, in me there are none.

Virtues are all under the sovereignty of G-d. Virtue is only attained obtain and enacted if it is carried out with the remembrance of the One.

Without practising virtue, there is no devotion.

One cannot be devoted to the One Reality if they are not committed to participating in ethical conduct. The word for devotion here is *bhagath* which is the word for one who participates in *bhakti*. This line shows that in Nanak's thought *bhakti* is based on virtue, not virtue on *bhakti*.

*I salute You, Creator, the World and the Word,
The True and the Lovely, delight of my heart!*

Praising the One through recognition of It as transcendent Creator, of Its Creation, and Its immanence, truth, and love which reside in the *mann* translated here as heart.

*What was the time, what was the hour?
What was the date by moon and by sun?*

Nanak is asking: what was the calendrical date?

*What was the month, what was the season?
When did the world come into being?*

All of these questions are asking the same question. When was cosmological genesis?

*The time was not found by the Pandits,
For it to be in the Puranas.*

The Hindus could not point to a specific time.

*The hour was not found by the Qazis,
For the Koran to record it.*

The Muslims could not point to a specific time.

*The date is unknown to the yogis,
None know the season or month,*

Nobody knows when existence was created.

*The One who created this world,
The creator alone knows the time.*

Only the One knows when It created existence.

*How can I speak, how can I praise?
How can I tell, How can I know?*

Nanak is asking a series of questions that involve him wondering. He ask if cannot have total knowledge how then can he praise the One Reality. It seems that these are empty questions which have no bearing on proper praise and knowledge.

Plenty pretend they can tell,

Apparently there were many who claimed they could place the birth of existence through calendrical measurement.

Nanak, they claim to be smart.

These people claimed deep wisdom about the nature of reality.

*Great is the Sovereign, great is Its Name
Whatever It does come to pass.*

This stanza begins with reminding us that without ethical conduct one does not participate in true devotion. Things like pilgrimage and charity mean little if those are the only acts which serve to bring closer to the One because they are all outward displays that can serve to inflate ego. A true relationship with the divine is based off proper ethical conduct or participating in G-d's Hukam. Nanak then attacks the various religious leaders around him who claimed to know the official date of the the beginning of existence. Nanak then asserts just as G-d in totality is unknowable so to the beginning of existence is unknowable.

22

Lower worlds below each other,

Here Nanak is referring to the Hindu *Patalas* or the various levels of the underworld in Hindu cosmology.

Heavens thousand-fold above:

Likewise these are the *Urtha lokas* or the different levels of the overworld or heavenly realms.

*That search for limits is exhausting
Is the Vedas' sole conclusion.*

According to Nanak the Vedas conclude that the universe continues forever both upwardly and downwardly.

*All Purana and the scriptures
Agree there is one basic source.*

In Nanak's readings of various scripture his conclusion is there is only One.

*It would be written if they could,
But it can't be written down.*

The true nature of the One Reality cannot be written down. This suggests the limitation of scriptures as sources of knowledge, it likewise is referring to his own composition as being incomplete knowledge.

*Nanak, simply call It great.
It's It who knows how great It is.*

It cannot be written down so Nanak decides again to praise the One.

23

*The praises which praisers express
Do not gain them sufficient awareness.*

This looks to be a denunciation of purely Bhakti or devotional path putting Nanak at odds with the claims we saw McLeod make in Chapter 1. As we've seen from above verses true awareness requires the participation in proper ethical conduct, living in accordance with the *Hukam*.

*Once rivers and channels flow into the sea.
They no longer remain distinct.*

Nanak uses the analogy of the rivers flowing to the ocean and becoming one with the ocean to explain that just as all beings die they will eventually reunite with G-d and will cease being distinct.

*Ruler and kings may possess
Oceans and mountains of wealth,
But are less than the tiniest ant
In whose mind It is never forgotten.*

Wealth is a worthless pursuit in relation to praise and acting in accordance with It's *Hukam*. Even the ant who is always attuned to the Name is more honorable than the one who has amassed great wealth but forgotten the Name.

24

*There's no end to Its praise, no end to its telling,
There's no end to Its works, no end to Its giving.
There's no end to Its seeing, no end to Its hearing,
There's no end that is known to what's in Its mind.
There's no end that is known to the world that It made,
There's no end that is known to Its limits.*

Nanak is once again emphasising the infinite and unknowable status of the One Reality. Nanak explains that It praises, tells, works, gives, knows, creates, and more but Nanak cannot explain how

much It does any of those things. This is because the One is constantly doing all of them in a myriad of ways. Many instances of these of the One's actions are unknown to Nanak.

*Though many may yearn to determine them,
Its boundaries cannot be found.*

Many people want to comprehend all of G-d's wonders but Nanak knows that it cannot be done.

*None can discover this limit,
Which always exceeds its description.
Great is the Sovereign, and high is Its place*

This is referring to G-d as transcendent resting in Its heavenly court.

And higher than high is Its Name

This is referring to the One as immanent. The form of these two lines mirrors the formulation of a line that appears later in the GGS 62. "*Truth is higher than everything; but higher still is truthful living.*"¹¹⁹ The line quoted is perhaps one of Nanak's most well know utterances. The quoted line explains that realization of the abstract Truth is great but higher and even more meritorious than knowing Truth is living and conducting oneself in accordance with Truth. Likewise, these two line explain that realizing G-d as an abstract transcendent being is meritorious. But an even more honorable way of living is with the knowledge that G-d is immanent.

*Only if we were as high as It is
Could we hope to determine Its height.*

We will never know how great the One is in transcendence.

Only to It can Its greatness be known,

In transcendence It only knows Itself.

Nanak, the glance of Its grace is our gift.

But through receiving grace (ref stanza 4 & 12) we are reminded of the existence of the One Reality as both transcendent and immanent.

In this stanza we have an explicit statement that emphasizes G-d's immanence over Its transcendence in relation to us living in Maya. However, Nanak makes clear the One Reality in its transcendent state is the truly supreme form and wholly unknowable. In some sense what Nanak asserts is similar to Otto's *Mysterium* "which is a mystery inexpressible and above all creatures."¹²⁰ Nanak ties this formulation of the relationship between transcendence and immanence into how grace operates. The first instance of grace is the recognition of the One Reality as transcendent, but then recurring instances of grace and how one relates personally to the One Reality is through constant remembrance of Its immanence.

¹¹⁹"Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji : Ang : 62 : ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਜੀ." Search Gurbani. N.p., n.d. Web. 05 Apr. 2017.

¹²⁰Otto, Rudolf. *The idea of the holy: an inquiry into the non-rational factor in the idea of the divine and its relation to the rational.* London: Oxford U press, 1923. *Archive.org.* Web.
<<https://archive.org/details/theideaoftheholyyoottouoft>>.

25

*Great is Its kindness, which cannot be written,
Great is the Giver, who has no grain of greed.*

G-d is without greed, meaning if one acts out of greed which is one of the five thieves, the other four being lust, attachment, pride, and anger, they are not in accordance with G-d's *Hukam*. We will explore why in the next chapter.

*So many, the crowds of the heroes who beg,
So many, their numbers cannot be reckoned.*

The numerous strong become like weak beggars when they ask for The One's help.

So many, are wasted and ruin their gift,

Many received the ultimate karmic gift, their human garment, but have done no good with it.

So many, keep getting, but deny they've received.

Many are blessed with grace but then deny that grace has ever been bestowed upon them. They also deny having received the gift of being

So many, are fools who just keep on consuming,

There are those who participate in mindless consumption which is a variant of greed and attachment. This means unreflective consumption is not in accordance with *Hukam*.

So many, keep suffering sorrow and hunger.

Unreflective consumption is a problem because there are those who have nothing to consume and have not been graced with realization of the One.

These also are gifts which You gives us.

However, suffering is also the working of *Hukam*. Nanak does not explain why suffering, sorrow, and hunger are gifts. It likely has to do with his view on Karma and seeing the human body and human existence in any form as a gift.

Your will determines release from our bondage,

It is only through the grace in the form of realization and remembrance of G-d which releases us from *Sansara*.

No one else has a say about this.

G-d's sovereignty is the ultimate.

*Any loud-mouth who speaks up should know
He'll be shamed and his face will be slapped.*

Anyone who attempts to displace the sovereignty of G-d will suffer great shame and humiliation.

*The Knower and Giver are one and the same,
Though this is acknowledge by few.*

This is likely a stab at Hindus who Nanak saw as people who broke up the different aspects of G-d into discrete beings, thus leading them into ignorance. These two lines can also be interpreted as, the Knower, human beings, and the Giver, G-d are the same. Meaning that G-d resides inside each individual which is a theme we consistently see in Nanak's thought.

Those granted the gift of offering praise,

Nanak says, will be kings over kings.

Those who have the ability to show devotion will enjoy more honor than kings, through reunion with the One.

26

*Priceless Your virtues, priceless Your dealings,
Priceless Your traders, priceless Your treasures,
Priceless Your comers, priceless Your buyer,
Priceless Your lovers, priceless Your mergers,
Priceless Your justice, priceless Your court,
Priceless Your balance, priceless Your weights
Priceless Your bounty, priceless Your seal,
Priceless Your mercy, priceless Your order.
Priceless, so priceless, You cannot be told,
Though the effort absorbs us in love.*

Nanak talks about how infinite all the aspects of G-d are as well as the infinite aspects of creation. G-d is full of virtue, justice, love, balance, mercy, and order. We recognize that speaking of G-d becomes futile but it does not stop us from attempting.

*The Vedas, Puranas and scriptures all tell,
The commentaries and the great scholars all tell,
The Brahmas all tell, and the Indras all tell,
The Gopis all tell, the Govindas tell too,*

Gopis is a reference to the 108 cowherd maidens who fall in love with Krishna and shower him with devotion.

The Isars all tell and so too do the Siddhs,

Isar is another name for Shiva

The numbers created of Buddhas all tell,

Nanak is making an explicit reference to Buddhism further evidence of his attempt to diminish distinctions between all existing faiths. Even the various buddhas and bodhisattvas are emanations of the One.

The demons all tell, and so too do the gods,

Evil beings as well as good ones explain the Hukam of G-d. This could be a teaching influenced by the *Bhagavata Purana*, one of the 18 puranas, and was highly influential in the formation of vaishnava bhakti. It is a story that stresses Bhakti or devotion, it is important for this line because of the fate of Kamsa the Demon enemy of Krishna. Kamsa is killed by Krishna at the end of the story but in the *Bhagavata* retelling through being killed Kamsa is liberated and achieves Moksha. It is explained that Kamsa spent his entire life obsessed with Krishna even if it was for the negative reason of wanting to kill him. Kamsa achieved liberation for his constant remembrance of Krishna.

The sages all tell, and so too do the yogis.

*So many are telling and trying to tell,
So many while telling rise up and depart.
You could make many more than all these,*

Nanak explains that everyone is telling and talking about the One constantly. In the last line Nanak is explains the world could house even more who are telling of It. Nanak also points out that demons also tell. Even those who operate in falsehood and evil show the power of G-d. The demons will reap what they have sown just as G-d's *Hukam* has foretold.

*It's as great as It chooses to be,
As is known to the True One Itself.*

Only the One truly knows the One and its power is unbridled.

*Any loud-mouth who dare to describe It,
Should be branded 'most stupid of fools'.*

Here Nanak admonishes himself, which is not uncommon the most notable example is on page 24 of the GGS when he takes on the voice of the lowly. Even though he has spent much of the hymn discussing how unknowable and indescribable the Sovereign is, Nanak has been describing how to become closer to G-d and how Its *Hukam* function.

27

How great is that gate, and how great is that house,

This stanza is important in Sikh daily prayer practice as it is included separately for recitation during the evening. The word here for gate is *Sodar* which is a specific reference to the tenth gate. The tenth gate is in many ways analogous to the Hindu third eye. The other nine gates refer to the eyes, ears, nostrils, mouth, urethra, and anus.

Where You sit and take care of all things!

This tenth gate is the place where G-d rest inside the human being. It is also explained that it is with the tenth gate that the *Naad* can be heard. This is made evident with the imagery in the next two lines which invoke further instances of song and singing.

*So many instruments, so many players,
So many, rags and so many singer!*

Infinite things participate in the singing of the *Naad*.

To You sing the wind and the water and fire,

The elements sing the *Naad*.

To You sings the Judge at the gate,

The Judge is the Hindu deity Dharmaraj or the one who makes rulings on Karma. Dharmaraj falls under the One's sovereignty.

To You sing the writers called Chitra and Gupta,

ChitraGupta is a Hindu deity tasked with keeping a log of every individual's actions. It's function is similar to Dharmaraj's.

Whose record assists the Judge to decide.

Nanak understands Chitra and Gupta as two separate deities that assist Dharmaraj in the act of final judgement.

*To You sing Isar and Brahma, adorned
In their glory along with the Goddess.*

Shiva, Brahma, and the Goddess all sing the praises of the One Reality.

*To You sing too Indras enthroned on their seats
Along with the gods at the gate.*

*To You sing the Siddhs in profound meditation,
To You sing the saints in their deep contemplation.*

To You sing the true, the content and the celibate,

To You sing the warriors, the fiercest of heroes,

To You sing the pandits and greatest of rishis,

Reciting the Vedas throughout all the ages,

To You sing the fair ones who capture the heart

In heaven, on earth, and down in the underworld.

To You sing the jewels which You have created

Along with the sixty-eight places of bathing.

The Sixty-eight pilgrimage sites across India most of which are or are near rivers.

To You sing the fighters whose strength is heroic,

To You sing the quadruple orders of being,

It is unclear what 4 orders of being are.

To You sing the realms and the spheres and the worlds,

Nanak recognizes other realities and planets all which participate in the One Reality.

Which You have created and You have preserved.

The One Reality is the Creator and Sustainer.

To You sing all those in whom You delight,

All of those beings in accordance with *Hukam* sing. In fact it is through their accordance that they are singing.

The saints who are steeped in the Joy of Your love.

To You sing so many I cannot remember,

Says Nanak, how can I conceive them?

Not only is the One infinite but all of the ones who offer it praise are infinite in number.

It is You, it is You who always is True,

The Sovereign who is True, and True is Its name.

Here again we seen Nanak establishing a relationship between the One Reality and Truth as being one and the same.

It is and It will be, never departing,

The One Reality will never stop existing. This is similar to form of the beginning shalok.

The one who created the whole of creation.

It fashioned the spectacle this world presents

This refers to Maya and all its trappings.

In its multiple colors and various kinds.

It makes and It watches what It has created

The One Reality fashioned the world and made it beautiful. In fact it is so beautiful that the One watches what It has created.

As fully accords with Its infinite greatness.

It always will act in the way that It pleases,

No order can ever be issued to rule It.

Creation is perfect because it was created by the One. Because it is perfect it will always be in accordance with *Hukam* and nothing from within creation can overthrow this ruling, and there is nothing besides the One outside of creation.

It is You who is sovereign, the king of all kings,

The One's sovereignty is ultimate and none can combat it.

Nanak says, to whose pleasure all life must be subject.

All of creation and the discrete beings within it participate in fulfilling the pleasure of the One.

Nanak spends much of this stanza describing the various things that participate in the singing of the *Naad*. It is important to note that none of the creatures mentioned in stanza 18 make an appearance here this suggest that things only sing when they follow *Hukam*. We also see in this stanza that various Hindu deities are present meaning that their existence is possible but if so they too are regulated by the *Hukam* of the One. Their inclusion in this stanza means there is not a complete denial of their function and being but they are subjected to the Sovereign and are merely a part of Its creation.

28

Let contentment be your earrings, modesty your pouch,

Nanak is explaining the importance of contentment, and modesty as virtues to be cultivated and "worn" on the body.

Let meditation be the ashes smeared upon you.

Meditation is also here exalted.

With fear of death as cloak to wrap your virgin body

One should keep death and by extension impermanence constantly in one's mind.

Make faith your yoga, let it be the staff you wield.

With all humanity belonging to your order

A statement of universal humanism. A statement of inclusivism, as we've seen earlier Nanak sees Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists all as singing the same song for the One.

Let conquest of the mind bring conquest of the world.

The process of discipling the self makes living in the world easier.

*All hail, all hail to It,
The primal, untouched, unstarted, unchanging,
Throughout all the ages the same!*

The One Reality remains unchanged since the beginning and it will remain the same until the end. This refrain repeats until stanza 31.

In this stanza Nanak uses a familiar form which he has employed when speaking to Muslims particularly (140 GGS) and when he criticises the *Upanayana* (Hindu sacred thread) ritual (471 GGS). In these three passages Nanak implores his audience to abandon whatever article of faith he is criticizing, in this case he is calling out ascetic yogis, and replace it with a virtue. Typically he invokes contentment, compassion, faith and in all three instances he stresses modesty.

29

The food of wisdom is dispensed by mercy,
Knowledge of the One is given through grace.

The mystic music sounds in every heart.
The Naad resonates in each being and is evidence of G-d's immanence.

G-d is the Sovereign who has complete control,
No one else has authority beyond the One.

Beyond all riches and all magic powers.
Wealth, power ,and status are nothing compared to knowledge of the One.

Union and separation work in rhythm,
Union and separation are important concepts as we discussed before the commentary. This rhythm is the way that Love works and through extension how the One works. Before existence there was union among all constituent parts of reality. During existence all beings become separated from one another. In the end, after existence all things will reunite.

And all receive the fortune which is written.
You will reap what you sow

*All hail, all hail to It,
The primal, untouched, unstarted, unchanging,
Throughout all the ages the same!*

30

One the mother, made according to design,
The Divine feminine was made in accordance with the One's *Hukam*.

*Three the disciples who meet with acceptance:
Creator, provider, and holder of court,*

The three disciples refer to Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, or the Creator, Sustainer, and Destroyer.

Each set to work as It commands and wills,
All three of these aspects work under the commandment of the One's *Hukam*.

Who sees, unseen, how wonderful this is!

Knowledge of the One requires being able to see the unseen, the light behind the eyes. It requires seeing all beings as sharing a common source, the light/power of the Sovereign.

*All hail, all hail to It,
The primal, untouched, unstarted, unchanging,
Throughout all the ages the same!*

31

Its seat and Its stores are in every world,

The One is present on every planet and every version of reality. All worlds and realities are dependent on the One Reality.

Whatever is found there was placed all at once.

Everything was created all at a single moment.

The Creator first made, and then It beholds,

The One created the world and now watches over it.

Nanak, the works of the True One are true.

This is another instance of equating G-d with Truth.

*All hail, all hail to It,
The primal, untouched, unstarted, unchanging,
Throughout all the ages the same!*

32

*If this one tongue became a hundred thousand,
If they in turn were multiplied by twenty,
They would take a hundred thousand times
To praise the one Name of the Sovereign.*

All the might that could possibly be mustered would not be enough to make adequate praise to the One.

*This is the way to climb the stairs
That lead to union with It*

Nanak is sharing with us the way to ascension and reunion with the One.

*By hearing such accounts of heaven
The humblest worms are roused to act.*

Nanak is explaining his religious experience. His task is to explain how great his approach to union was. If he tells how great it was then all beings will be roused towards achieving union. Nanak does not say explicitly although he may be suggesting that singing to the worms is part of our duty.

*Through grace alone is It attained,
Not through those liars' idle boasts.*

Knowledge of the One can only come through grace and if that is attained then a path toward reunion can be cultivated.

33

Saying and silence are not in our power,

We cannot control when things will speak or when the world will remain silent.

Begging and giving are not in our power,

Living and dying are not in our power.

Birth and Death are preordained.

The gaining of riches and empire, which causes

Such mental distraction, is not in our power.

Attempting to gain power, wealth, and the action of nation building all only serves to distract from remembrance of G-d. Success in these endeavors is outside of our power anyway.

True awareness and wisdom are not in our power,

True awareness and wisdom are the products of grace.

Escape from the world is not in our power.

Moksha is achieved through grace.

Power rests with the One who makes and who watches -

Nanak, the high and the low are as nothing before It.

All things are the one and the same to the One. All things are Its creation and it is the One that is the Sovereign.

34

Nights, seasons, weekdays, lunar dates,

Winds, water, fire and lower worlds,

And in the midst of these lies Earth,

Fixed as the place of righteous action,

Nanak paints a picture of night, the seasons, wind, water, and other things as typically associated with living on Earth as discrete concepts themselves. Earth is just one place where those things are present, rather Earth's primary characteristic is as a realm of "Righteous action" *Dharma*. Earth is defined as a stage for moral action.

Containing different kinds of creatures,

Whose names are many and untold.

They are judged according to their deeds,

All of the different organism which are infinite are judged according to their own actions.

As It is true, so is Its court.

Just as Truth is the One the heavenly abode is also Truth.

Approved, the saints are glorified,

For they receive Its mark of grace.

Those who work in accordance with G-d's Hukam will receive an indication of grace.

There bad and good will stand revealed,

The metaphor used in Punjabi here translates literally to the Ripe and the Unripe. Nanak is saying on Earth the bad and good will be known and morality is of prime importance on our planet.

On going there, this will be known.

At the beginning of this stanza Nanak seems most interested in physical phenomena. The realm of Dharma is the one we all occupy together, it is the physical world. Recognition of *Hukam* as a force in the world is the first step on the ladder to Truth.

35

Such is the realm of righteous action,

The previous realm described the realm of *Dharma* which is analogous to Earth.

Now to describe the realm of wisdom:

Now it is time to describe the second realm of ascension towards Union with the One. The word used here for wisdom is *Giaan* sometimes translated as knowledge or intellect.

*So many winds and fires and waters,
 So many Krishnas and Maheshes,
 So many Brahmas are created,
 Of varied shapes and forms and colour!
 So many peaks and earth to act in,
 So many Dhruvs to give instruction,
 So many Indras, moons and suns,
 So many spheres there are and countries!
 So many Buddhas, Siddhs, and Naths,
 So many goddesses incarnate,
 So many demons, gods and sages,
 So many jewel-bearing oceans!
 So many kinds of life and language,
 So many emperors and kings,
 So many mystics and attendants!
 O Nanak, there's no end, no end.*

It is in the realm of Wisdom that the plethora of existence is known. Here we see Nanak invoking multitudes of what are typically thought of as discrete beings. As the realm of Dharma is associated with the physical world the realm of *Giaan* is more associated with the interior of human being. The types of beings seen here are mostly mythic or larger than life characters such as kings and emperors. Recognizing the *Hukams* work interiorly provides the second step.

36

In that realm, wisdom reigns supreme

A reference to the previous stanza.

With music, song, delight and joy.

There is explicit mention of the *Naad* in this line which is not made obvious from translation.

The realm of bliss is forged so finely

Saram Khand is translated here as realm of bliss, although it has also been translated as realm of humility, modesty, and beauty.

That beauty is its only language.

This realm is dominated by the aesthetic feeling.

It cannot be described at all.

This is the first realm to be described as indescribable; Nanak did not mention that this was a problem for either the realm of wisdom or Dharma.

Whoever tries must soon repent.

We've seen Nanak express this feeling before when explaining why it is foolish to describe the One. We are ascending closer to the Sovereign in this realm.

Forged here are wisdom and perception

The previous realm relies upon this realm. This is important because it is giving us structural information on Nanak's cosmological order. Even though Nanak is describing a path through which human beings would ascend. The levels actual descend from the One to being. These realms emanate down from the Source found in the final realm. Knowledge and physical sense perception are based on the necessity of this aesthetic realm.

The insight of the Siddhs and sages.

In whatever way *Saram* is translated, a clear association with the aesthetic is obvious from this stanza. This is the realm where music, art, and beautiful things are housed. This is the source of the *Naad*. Nanak makes an important ontological claim here, the aesthetic comes before wisdom which comes before the ethical realm of Dharma. Ethics is contingent on Wisdom which is contingent on Beauty or sense perception. In fact the second to last line in the Punjabi also mentions the *Mann* suggesting that this realm holds the origin of the *Mann*.

37

It's power and nothing else which is

The language of the realm of action,

The word action here is *Karam* and Punjabi cognate of *Karma* it is has also been translated as grace.

Its warrior, those mighty heroes,

Are strengthened by the force of Ram,

These are the heroes who have attained the Grace of the One.

In glory there are many Sitas,

Whose beauty cannot be described.

Here again there is beauty beyond description. But important to note form still exists in the fourth realm. This is still a existence that is manifest.

Those in whose minds Ram's Name resides

Can neither die nor be deceived.

Those who recognize the immanence of the One within cannot be wronged nor will they die because the part of them that resides in the One or the part of the One that resides in them is existent forever.

*There many worlds of saints rejoice
To have the True One in their hearts.*

Recognition of the internal relationship one can have with the One brings immense joy and delight.

The realm of truth is where the Formless

We have entered the final realm, interesting form note this final realm do not receive an individual stanza. The One has finally become Formless in this realm, truly transcendent. The Punjabi for Truth is *Sach* which as far as I've seen is always translated as Truth.

Resides and, watching all creation,

The Formless One lives in a realm of Truth and this is where It observes Its creation.

Makes happy by a look of favour.

It is from this realm that grace is bestowed upon discrete beings. The favor of Truth falls upon them. These three lines are all that are devoted to the final realm which is actually the first in from which the others emanate. It is on Truth which all other aspects of The One follow.

These universes, realms and spheres

Surpass all efforts to describe them.

Nanak confesses all of the things that he just attempted to describe do not do justice to the reality of the situation.

There worlds on worlds and countless forms

Another iteration of the Infinity of existence.

All operate by Its command.

It watches, pleased as It regards them.

Everything is governed by the One's *Hukam*. It watches the *Hukam* unfold and is made happy by its observance.

Nanak says: To tell of this is hard as eating iron.

38

With restrain as the furnace, persistence as goldsmith,

With awareness as anvil, true knowledge as hammer,

With fear as the bellows, with penance as burner,

In love as the vessel, the Name is dissolved,

This line includes the word *amrit* which translates into nectar. It is a symbol of G-d's essence in the world and is important in later the Sikh baptism ritual established by the tenth guru. It is called *Amrit Sanchar* and those who have been baptized are referred to as *amritdhari*, those who have taken nectar. It is through the grace of love that immanence is known. Grace and love work in a similar manner, both are given neither can be taken. You cannot force another to love you nor can you force the One to bestow you with grace. Grace in our life is Love.

Producing the Word in the mint that is true.

This is what those who are favoured perform.

Blessed by Its glance of kindness and grace,

This stanza resembles stanza 28 in form and is a favorite form of Nanak's. In this stanza Nanak is describing the process of Human awareness of the One through the metaphor of coin minting. Nanak makes it clear that this awareness comes only with hard work. It requires disciplining oneself, constant (persistence) remembrance (awareness) of the One. Remembering the fact of the One is true knowledge. Recognizing the awesome power of the Sovereign and making sure to act in accordance with Its *Hukam*. However, the form of all beings is Love and in all beings the One is present. Through all this the One's immanence is made evident in the world and those who have been blessed with grace will hold this to be true.

Shalok

Epilouge

Air is the guru and water the father, great earth is the mother,

The One is like air flowing through all of material existence. The masculine aspect of the universe flows through all discrete organisms like water. Through the divine feminine a form is given. The interplay of all three is life

Day and night are the nurses who dandle the world.

We go through the existence through cycles of day and night which bless us with care. This life is like the playful exploration in which a baby participates.

In the court Death recites all our deeds, good and bad,

When we die all of our actions good and bad will be relayed to us. Not to suggest that we do not know which deeds were bad and good when perpetrated but rather all actions will be laid out as a whole and it will be made explicit the morality of our actions.

Which decide who is close, who is far from the Presence.

The rap sheet shows who lived with the Presence of the One in their being.

Some think on the Name and depart having worked well,

How bright are their faces, with them how many are freed!

Some remembered the One's presence and took heed of Its *Hukam*. They will be freed from the bonds of *Sansara*. They came to death and were not afraid and held no enmity. They knew that they lived well and in accordance with truth because of that they will be remembered fondly.

In review *Japji* provides us a grasp of important terminology and concepts. We should review some now.

Terms:

Name, Word/*Naad* these two words are important because they refer to the One's immanence. The *Naad* is also known as the unstruck sound. All things sing and participate in perpetuating the *Naad* the fact that beings make sound is taken as evidence of G-d's indwelling.

Hukam this is the One's will, Its commandments. This is the natural order of existence when one is in accordance with *Hukam* they are participating in proper ethical conduct and remembrance. The world operates in accordance to *Hukam* and the one affects this reality with it. It is with *Hukam* that creation was fashioned.

Maya is the Creation improperly understood. Creation is the One's gift to us, but it becomes corrupted when we forget the One's immanence within it. It is during existence in *Maya*, the life we are experiencing now, that we are separated from G-d. We are separated when we forget G-d's immanence, *Naam*. This is not pantheism because G-d is the Creator outside of the world but G-d is imbued and immanent within Its creation. *Maya* is the cause of evil. When objects within *Maya* are taken as ends specifically, wealth, beauty, and power, this is when evil arises. Evil also occurs when subjects are objectified, more on this in the second chapter.

Mann this is a referent to a being that includes its body-mind-soul as one. When speaking of *mann* there is no division of the self.

Haumai was translated here as ego-sense. It's literally translation is I-Me, this is the part of the self that is invested in self-preservation and distinguishing the self from others. When *haumai* is inflated it leads to a *mann* failing to recognize the One's immanence within it.

Suniai is listening. Listening plays an important role in recognizing the One and Its *Naad*. Listening helps one to understand the One and by extension get to Truth.

Mannai is mindful remembrance, acceptance, and reverence. *Mannai* is a feeling which Nanak attempts to induce through his poetic mastery he is likely drawing on the Hindu aesthetic theory of *Rasa*. *Rasa* theory holds that the goal of art is to induce feelings through composing art in various mode or moods that imitate aspects of emotion attempting to be communicated.

Now we present a review of some of the concepts. First we will explore further the five realms through which Nanak ascends through the last of which was Truth, where the One resides in formless being, we will start there. Truth is considered the realm of the One in its transcendent being. This propounds that like G-d ultimate Truth is not graspable. The pairing of the realm of Truth and the realm Power suggests that from Truth power is gained. The one is manifest in all the various creations from the realm of Power down through to the realm of Dharma. The realm of Power is *Karma* which reminds the power is contingent on the One, on Truth. The realm of Bliss or Beauty precedes Power and is in a separate stanza 36. The realm of bliss is explained to be the origin of wisdom and perception meaning that perception and thought are tools which assist in getting closer to Truth but neither of them are synonymous with Truth. From Bliss emanates Wisdom as the 2nd realm which is the home of many mythic beings, as well as concepts like countries and organized systems like language. From Wisdom emanates Dharma or our Earthly existence which is primarily defined as being a field of ethics. The way to Truth is through proper ethical action, wisdom, sense perception/beauty, which assists in apprehending Truth. Power is contingent on Truth. The sharing of stanzas suggest that from Truth Power is gained.

We also saw above how grace functions. Grace can be gained but it is also freely given. It is through grace that realization of the One's being is revealed. From there it is the individual's duty to remember that fact. Through grace one is constantly reminded when coming face to face with any

being because of the One's immanence. Whenever one participates in unethical conduct it is taken as forgetting the fact of the One. Grace from the One can also be obtained randomly as a blessing. Ultimately, one only gains grace in the form of salvation if the One wills it. We should take the time to explicate grace in relation to love. Grace is something given freely to beings from G-d. When one is showered with grace they receive knowledge about the One. Love, one of the five virtues, works similarly, love is the grace I can receive from a being such a you. When you allow someone else to love you, you are allowing them to relate closer to you which increases their knowledge about you. This is why love is one of the virtues it makes you more like the One.

With these important concepts and terms understood we can move onto the next chapter which explains why it is imperative to follow *Hukam* and recognize the Name within *maya* and our *mann* in order to subdue our *haumai*.

Approaching the Name:

Realization of the One Being

Nanak's approach to understanding the One through immanence lies at the core of his thought. We saw the importance of immanence being drawn out multiple times in *Japji* most notably in stanza 24, "*Great is the Sovereign, and high is Its place/And higher than high is Its Name.*" We must keep in mind that the words Name, and Word, function to communicate immanence, refer to stanza 5 "*Through the guru the Word and its wisdom are shown/Through the guru awareness of immanence.*" Immanence serves to remedy the issue of objectification. Our lives are characterized by objectification, meaning the reduction of subjective beings into objective things, or objects. This occurs because there is a gap between how things appear and how they actually are. Nanak is well aware of this gap between how a being appears and the infinity that exist within it. This objectification of subjects is a primary cause for mistreatments of beings.

We should approach this problem through another thinker, Kant. In his work the *Critique of Pure Reason*¹²¹ Kant posits the gap, which Nanak is privy to, between sense perception and ultimate reality. This gap between our sense perception of a thing and how it truly is leads us to mistake the phenomenal, a thing as it appears, as the noumenal, the thing in-itself. When we treat a thing as it appears we are reducing and objectifying it. In contrast when we treat something in awareness of its total being, as it is in-itself, when you are not thinking how something is good for you but rather what is good for said being you are conferring to it its proper status as subject. We know that reducing humans to utility and objectifying them is wrong in Kantian term. This was also

¹²¹Kant, Immanuel, and Werner S. Pluhar. *Critique of Pure Reason*. Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co., 1996. Print.

made apparent by Kant in his *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*¹²² with his second formulation of the categorical imperative. “Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of another, always at the same time as an end and never simply as a means.”¹²³ Nanak is often praised for his own form of universal humanism but there is more to his thought than that. Nanak succeeds where Kant falls short. Where Kant sees the clear evil of treating human being, or rational actors simply as means, Nanak extends treating all living beings as ends because the One dwells within them. “You Yourself are the bumble bee, the flower, the fruit and the tree.”¹²⁴ This indwelling is the basis for Nanak’s ethics.

*“The defect of the body which leads to sin is the mud puddle, and this mind is the frog, which does not appreciate the lotus flower at all./The bumble bee is the teacher who continually teaches the lesson. But how can one understand, unless one is made to understand?”*¹²⁵

In this passage we can begin to see how Nanak overcomes the gap between the way things appear and what they are like in the One Reality. The lotus flower is the One sitting atop of maya, the mud puddle. The mind is the frog relishing the sensuous feeling of mud upon its body in an almost lustful way. This points to human beings mistaking our world, as perceived by our senses, as ultimate Reality. This betrayal by the senses is also seen in this short passage *“The five bulls, the senses, pull the wagon of the body around./By the Lord’s power, one’s honor is preserved./But when the axle breaks, the wagon falls and crashes.”*¹²⁶ Nanak acknowledges that through our senses there is little hope of appreciating the One.

¹²² Kant, Immanuel, and James W. Ellington. *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993. Print.

¹²³ Driver, Julia. *Ethics: the fundamentals*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2014. Print.

¹²⁴ Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji -: Ang : 1020 : ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਜੀ." *Search Gurbani*. N.p., n.d. Web. 05 Apr. 2017.

¹²⁵ Ibid 24

¹²⁶ Ibid 879

But hope does come, in the form of the bumble bee. The bumble bee understands that there is important nectar within the lotus. In many other places in his poetry Nectar is associated with the Name, or the One's immanence "In the crucible of love, melt the Nectar of the Name,"¹²⁷ and "They alone sing, who are pleasing to Your Will. Your devotees are imbued with the Nectar of Your Essence."¹²⁸ The frog stands in mud and enjoys the sensual feelings; the bee discovers the nectar and is satisfied. Just as the bee will go on to spread the pollen of the lotus onto other beings the One is dispersed among the plethora of beings.

This passage suggests there is something to beings which cannot be perceived via the senses. Seeing as how Nanak understands the One to be interiorized within the human "The True Name is contained within it."¹²⁹ "The Treasure of the Naam, the Name of the Lord, is within them."¹³⁰ And "It dwells within the *Mann*."¹³¹ It stands to reason that this extends to other beings especially when considered alongside a passage like this "You Yourself are the bumble bee, the flower, the fruit and the tree."¹³² This interiorized aspect of being is infinite because that mode of being is contingent on the One Reality. The interior which Nanak is pointing to begins to give us the inkling of what we would consider subjective experience.

To further get at how Nanak solve the issue of objectification we should point out a resonance between Nanak and the Jewish philosopher/theologian Martin Buber. Both offer us a vision of reality that emphasizes the relationship between G-d and self which is realized through interactions with people and the whole of Creation. Both help us to overcome the gap between

¹²⁷Ibid 6

¹²⁸Ibid 8

¹²⁹Ibid 15

¹³⁰Ibid 17

¹³¹Ibid 18

¹³²Ibid 1020

sense perception in order to help us get to a place of appreciating the thing-in-itself. Where we can connect Nanak and Buber is in their appeals to pay attention to the One's immanence. Buber explains how he sees immanence functioning in his book *I and Thou*.¹³³ Even though Nanak does not use the language of I, It, You, subject, object and Thou (Buber's referent to G-d) we have marked points of intersection in their thought.

Buber presents us with two basic word pairs, "I and It" or "I and You." Every "I" implies either an "It" or a "You." This is because everything exists in relation to another, there could be no "I" alone. This is in direct contrast to the separated Cartesian thinker. This idea of a "thinker" apart from the body would be an abomination to Nanak in which he continually uses the word *Mann* to refer to the human self in reference to Body-Mind-Soul. "These basic words" says Buber "do not state something that might exist outside them; by being spoken they establish a mode of existence."¹³⁴ Every Time one says "I", a "You" or an "It" is implied, every time one says "It" or "You", an "I" is implied.

What distinguishes these two basic word pairs. The I-It relationship is characterized by objectification, of thinking of an "It" as object not as a subject. "It" is also a finitude that borders upon other finitudes. "It" is a means or can be subjected to the "I's" vision of how an "It" is useful to an "I." "It" has a teleological existence in relation to an "I." "Its" are concrete and fixed. Buber also conceives of I-it as "the word of separation."¹³⁵

"You(s)" are boundless "You" has no borders. "You" is not subject to the whims of an "I" but is recognized as another "I." An "I" does not experience a "You" but rather stands in relation to a "You." You's are not contingent on space and time, rather they are infinite. A "You" is not a

¹³³Buber, Martin. *I and Thou; a new translation by Walter Kaufmann*. New York: Touchstone, 1996. Print.

¹³⁴Ibid 53

¹³⁵Ibid 75

means for any end that “I” am pursuing, but “You” is an end in and of itself. The status of “You” is not regulated to Humans or even animals whom we might suppose possess consciousness, but rather a “You” can be anything.

Buber brings in a fourth piece different from I, It, or You and this is the Eternal You or the One. Buber states “every single You is a glimpse of that. Through every single You the basic word addresses the Eternal You.”¹³⁶ Every “You” is contingent on the Eternal You of which all other “Yous” are as aspects or emanations of. In fact the I’s, It’s and You’s are all emanations of the Eternal You. But when we think about something as an “it” we have lost the awareness of the connection to the Eternal You.

From Buber’s concepts of “I”, “You”, “It”, and the Eternal You, we can draw points of intersection in Nanak’s thought through his understandings of *Haumai*, *Maya*, the One and his theory of reincarnation. *Haumai* (ref pg 5-6 Chapter 2), is that part of human being, *mann*, which is involved in self preservation, and distinguishing itself. A *haumai* is also a human being that does not recognize the One dwelling within its being. *Maya* (ref pg 36 chapter 2), is the creation without recognition of the One’s indwelling. This is when creation is perceived as profane. Nanak explains that the One permeates the creation “You are totally pervading everywhere; You love and cherish all.”¹³⁷ *Haumai* and *Maya* are mirror concepts which explain how humans relate to the cosmos. When a human being fails to recognize the indwelling of the One in Creation then they are cut off not only from the One but from their environment and fellow beings. When human beings have forsaken their personal connection to the One they have severed their connection from the whole of

¹³⁶ Ibid 123

¹³⁷ Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji :- Ang : 350: ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਜੀ." *Search Gurbani*. N.p., n.d. Web. 05 Apr. 2017.

creation including themselves. Nanak sees forsaking the Sovereign as lacking awareness of It, in addition to forsaking in a more tangible way through dealing in improper conduct.

Maya is analogous to the world of it(s) in Buber's thinking. A world of objects that are only important in relation to me, the ultimate object in the worldview of the self-centered human. The world of You, in Buberian thought, is the same as Creation properly understood in Nanak's thought. Both rely on awareness of the One's immanent nature. It is easy to follow why it would be imperative to care for existence when the One is so explicitly described as being within all of it. "You yourself link each and every person to their tasks. You Yourself are the air, water and fire; You Yourself unite in Union. You Yourself are the moon, the sun, the most perfect of the perfect You Yourself are the male, and You Yourself are the female. You Yourself are the water, the desert, the ocean and the pool."¹³⁸

Through placing the One within all things Nanak is able to relate to finitude objects as infinitude subjects. Through the fact of immanence Nanak can overcome the problem of duality. Even though as we see above there is recognition of dualities such as female and male, these collapse in reference to the One within which there are no distinctions. Nanak is not so much talking about philosophical dualism although this is included, rather when he uses duality what is actually being implied is distinction. Nanak sees duality as a source of estrangement that causes pain to the one who perceives duality. This is not only estrangement from beings outside oneself but forgetting G-d's presence within also causes alienation. "Yogi, remain seated, and the pain of duality will run away from you.../You sing the songs, but you do not understand your own self."¹³⁹ From this we can see that the *Haumai* or an I without awareness of the interiorized One, is estranged from itself. Just as

¹³⁸ Ibid 1020

¹³⁹ Ibid 903

one cannot relate to another without the presence of the One, an individual cannot relate to the self without the presence of the One. This is because ultimately we are the One or at least a part of It. You are It, It is I, I is You, You is Chair, Chair is Tree, Tree is You, Dog is It. There is nothing else beside the One.

We have established how Nanak's vision of relating subject to subject is contingent on relating through the One. Whereas relating to things subject to object involves forgetting the presence of the One in other beings. The final and most degenerate form of being is as object to object. The objectified self is the "I" whose separated and estranged from the Sovereign as well as themselves. "Those who separate themselves from the Lord wander lost in misery. The self-willed *manmukhs* do not attain union with Him."¹⁴⁰ *Manmukhs* are human beings who are turned toward their own *mann* in contrast to *Gurmukhs* who are turned to the One. Notice the prefix to both words *man-* relating to mann and *gur-* relating to Guru.

We should further discuss why Nanak has little faith in the senses leading us to recognition of the One. It is because the purpose of our senses is to provide us with distinctions in our environment. Nanak believes these distinctions are false to a certain degree and that our senses can only fulfill this task because they are limited. This explains why ultimately G-d is unknowable for Nanak, a fact he constantly laments and celebrates.

Our senses serve our bodies in the task of distinguishing our bodies from the body of another. Surprisingly we can point to the limitation of the senses in how we sense ourselves. We can hardly taste or smell ourselves unless we begin to sweat. We can see our body well enough. But our vision has difficulty sorting out our own face when we stare at it in the mirror for a prolonged

¹⁴⁰Ibid 887

period of time, the so called “strange-face-in-the-mirror” illusion. We sound different to ourselves than to everybody else because of the increased resonances of hearing our voice in our body. We are tactically aware of ourselves but we always feel ourselves twice. When I touch my hand with my arm, my hand feels my arm, but my arm also feels my hand.

We have established sense limitation in terms self-perception, but we still manage to get around the world, they work well enough. It does, however, put a hitch in our assumed distinction from the world. This has little to do with Nanak’s gripe. The real issue is when we perceive an “object” we do so only sensuously and this leads to the gap we discussed earlier. We know our specific senses are limited as shown above. That is just the beginning to recognizing how limited we are. Recent discoveries have only reinforced this concept of our limited self perception, there are forms of light we do not perceive, x-ray, ultraviolet, infrared. There are sounds we do not hear because our ears only pick up vibrations of 20Hz to 20kHz. In fact, our bodies emit things we are not aware of, such as black body radiation. This is thermal radiation that can only be seen in the infrared although we can pick up on it as warmth. We posit objects when we perceive them. But our perception of things are always limited, because of this we view beings in the world as limited and cut off from one another. We perceive things as *maya* because of the gap between our perception of a being and how it actually is.

We should revisit a concept introduced on page 9 of chapter two which is Goodman’s Ontology of Vibrational Force. Goodman reminds us that everything is constantly moving. He suggests we subtract human perception to imagine this but that is a mistake. We didn’t discover quarks and atoms through rejecting our senses but rather through enhancing them. Likewise, Nanak does not flat out reject our senses as we saw in *Japji* listening is rather important in understanding

the One. Nanak is suggesting that we do not give our sense blind allegiance for they can lead us astray. Rather than subtracting sense perception I'd like for us to instead, imagine being able to perceive the world with the perception of everything. This includes the tick's ability to only smell butyric acid, the bat's sonar and the communication between tree and fungi. Being able to see all aspects of the electromagnetic spectrum, being able to hear all vibrations. Being able to see on the microscopic level where we realize our body is made of a billion organisms that are "not me." But at the same time we need to keep a bird's eye view of the earth. As well as behold the universe as simply as we do the words on this page. If we can imagine this sort of perception then we are on our way in realizing our existence as One. This is the perception of the One which is the perception of all things. "*You have thousands of eyes, and yet You have no eyes. You have thousands of forms, and yet You do not have even one./You have thousands of Lotus Feet, and yet You do not have even one foot. You have no nose, but you have thousands of noses. This Play of Yours entrances me.*"¹⁴¹ Through understanding all this we come to the unity of all being which is the first word of *Japji* Ek Omkar, One Reality Is.

At this point we should enter into a discussion of the five thieves: lust *kaam*, anger *krodh*, attachment *moh*, greed *lobh*, and pride *ahankaar*, and how they contribute to objectification. All five of these attributes are considered thieves because in participating in these actions one steals or forgets the fact of G-d's immanence from beings. "Sexual desire and anger steal the wealth of the self within."¹⁴² In this instance Nanak cites only lust and anger. But the stealing of the wealth within can be extended to all the thieves. There is an ambiguity in this line; it does not make clear whether one is stealing from the self or from another. It seems the ambiguity is intentional because it should

¹⁴¹Ibid 13

¹⁴²Ibid 352

conceivably apply to both. Stealing the wealth within and forgetting immanence is the process by which something becomes objectified.

We will explain why these thieves lead to objectification. First we deal with lust, which reduces a being to the level of tool for one's sexual gratification, this is something well understood in our time. It reduces another's body for the gain of the self in terms of pleasure, the other being's body has been turned into an object useful to the self. Make no mistake even though this problem is well understood in our time does not mean that it has been solved.

Anger is more complicated because of this we should turn to a literary example. Let us turn to the writings of Sholem Aleichem. In Aleichem's story *Tevye the Dairyman*, specifically the story *Chava*. Tevye enters into a rage when the local priest tells Tevye that Chava, Tevye's daughter, is now in the custody of the priest. Tevye runs home to search for Chava and when he cannot find her he becomes upset with himself but lashes out at others. "I could have punched myself in the nose instead of which I went about shouting at my daughters and taking it out on my wife."¹⁴³ After this, Tevye went and beat his horse which, he admits after the fact, was innocent of any fault. Tevye's anger caused him to lose touch of reality and inflict pain on innocent beings. He was upset with himself for losing Chava, and he was also upset with Chava. His other daughters, his wife, and their horse instead became objects for his perverted self-expression, he did not consider their experience of the situation or even the fact that they were innocent of Chava being missing.

Attachment's role in objectification is more obvious. Attachment is entirely based on objectification. When lovers become attached to their love, as a concept, instead of cherishing the interaction between their two subjective beings they have reduced their love to the level of object.

¹⁴³Aleichem, Sholem. *Tevye The Dairyman and The Railroad Stories*. New York: Schocken, 1987. Print.75

Their love has become something to possess. When one is attached to a material thing such as Pooh Bear is to honey, the result is Pooh attempting to procure honey at any cost. In some instances Pooh puts himself in dangerous circumstances due to his attachment. Here are other instances of attachment, such as attachment to alcohol leading to deterioration of the liver and personal relationships, attachment to television resulting in a life of unproductive vicarious living. When one relates to a being through attachment that being becomes something that must be owned, and consumed. Attachment to objects will lead to shutting out the rest of the world. One may become aware of the infinite nature of the object of desire but only in relation to one's self and at the expense of the infinity of the rest of creation.

Greed works much in the same way as attachment and can be seen as an extension of attachment. Where attachment only implies a relationship of the self to the thing attached to, greed implies attachment to a thing at the expense of others. The greedy self thinks only about its own stomach and not the stomach of others. The greedy self reduces beings to their wealth status and has no reason to interact with one poorer than itself because it stands nothing to gain. Nanak explains in *Japji* stanza 25: "*Great is the Giver, who has no grain of greed,*" we see that greed is not an aspect of the divine whereas there are "*So many, are fools who just keep on consuming.*" This is a *manmukh* totally blinded by self-preservation without even thinking about what it is doing.

Pride is perhaps the most dangerous thief because it inflates the *haumai*. This causes one's self to increasingly become the center of their universe. A large share of pride is the result of taking oneself as the ultimate end of existence, preserving the self at any cost. Pride causes the reduction of all other beings as objects in relation to one's self. All people and beings are merely tools for one

filled with pride. In the most extreme versions of pride cause one to assert the self's will over G-d's sovereignty and *Hukam*, like Lucifer in Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

Nanak alerts us to these five thieves and is completely aware of their detrimental effect on both the individual participating in the actions, and of those who suffer as a consequence of them. Nanak calls for purging these negative ways of relating to beings from one's self. Even with this recognition there are times within Nanak's poetry he conveys himself struggling to participate in actions that combat the thieves.

"I am not celibate, nor truthful, nor scholarly. I was born foolish and ignorant into this world./Prays Nanak, I seek the Sanctuary of those who have not forgotten You, O Sovereign! ||2||3||"
I have not practiced meditation, self-discipline, self-restraint or righteous living./I have not served the Holy; I have not acknowledged the Sovereign, my Ruler./Says Nanak, my actions are contemptible!/O Sovereign, I seek Your Sanctuary; please, preserve my honor! ||2||4||¹⁴⁴

This excerpt is suggestive of the fact immanence is sometimes forgotten and this inevitably leads one to participate in negative behaviors. Nanak also points out that he "was born foolish and ignorant into this world." This claim shows that one needs to be made aware of the One. It also acknowledges that the objectifying mode is in a way the default programming of human beings. Nanak offers up a way to mend slipping back into the perception of *manmukh* through keeping the company of other who recognize immanence while also offering a plea to G-d for Its assistance. In another poem Nanak offers these words *"I have not appreciated what You have done for me, Sovereign; I take from others and exploit them./What face shall I show You, Sovereign? I am a sneak and a thief./Nanak describes the state of the lowly."*¹⁴⁵ Through taking on the voice of the lowly Nanak is identifying himself with them and is extending them empathy. Even the *manmukhs* have G-d within them and denying them the chance of realization involves us objectifying them.

¹⁴⁴Ibid 12

¹⁴⁵Ibid 24

Nanak constantly writes the phrase “forgetting the name,” placing special emphasis on it. He also writes other phrases which convey the problem of forgetting the One in any capacity. This points to the idea that Nanak is concerned about forgetting immanence. If this is not a concern for himself then it is for others. In either case he is aware of forgetting as a problem. Otherwise he would not be so consistent in reminding us not to forget. This shows us the difficulty of constantly remembering G-d and its immanence. The problem of forgetting also informs why one can achieve only a limited level of union with G-d in this life, and why true union cannot be attained until death. This problem of forgetting results in everyone at some point or another returning to the state of *amanmukh* and objectifying, the default mode of a human. It is only through the diligent hard work of remembering the One Reality that one be called *gurmukh*.

In review we have asserted the prime importance of immanence in Nanak’s thinking. How he uses immanence to solve the issue of the gap between our limited sense perception and ultimate Reality. Our limited perception makes us think of things as cut off from one another and distinct, this ultimately leads to us objectifying beings, considering them apart from us. Through further investigation of sense perception we recognized that there are a variety of ways of perceiving. We attempted to imagine having access to all forms of perception leading to realization of the inherent unity of being. Overcoming the process of objectification is done through constant remembrance of the Name, the One’s immanence, which makes one aware of G-d’s presence within things. G-d’s indwelling in all of Creation means the things we typically take as separate distinct are in fact one and share in a common source, One Reality Is. This explains to us the dangers and evils of objectifying and why Nanak refers to actions of objectification as thieves which steal from things their proper situation as part of a whole. Nothing exists solely for the use of a self. Rather

everything is here for the perpetuation of the unity of being. The water and sun provide everything with sustenance. The dirt feeds the plants, plants feed herbivores, the carnivores feed on the herbivores limiting populations so that all the plants do not die. Everything remains in balance and nothing is dominated, all things live and die except the One

The ocean rolls along peacefully and a wave begins to form. It grows beyond the surface of the ocean. The wave sees so far, out into the distance, the horizon. In every direction all it sees is ocean and sky. Another wave begins to grow. The first sees this, and not one to be outdone, it roars and grow taller. The wave stands tall. It cannot see its own bottom. How can it tell it's a part of the ocean? Its form is grand and unmatched, so it takes all that it wants. Our wave worries that other waves will grow taller than it, so it takes more from the ocean, from the ocean it takes more, until it reaches unspeakable heights. Suddenly dark clouds move in. Thunder crashes and lightning fills the sky. The wave is filled with pride; none is taller than it. It takes from the ocean all that it wants. All the smaller waves in its path fall and are subsumed as they add to its tremendous strength. Then something funny begins to happen. It begins to rain. Small drops fall from the sky and pierce the wave's very form, the one that stands so grand. Shocked that what falls from above is the same that supports it from below, the wave pauses, horrified and falls back into its home.

Conclusion

Now that we have an idea of an overview of the project let us revisit our discussions on the reliability of the *Janamsakhis*. McLeod recognizes that most of these texts are unreliable with two exceptions, the *Miharban* and the *Puratan Sakhis*. McLeod was correct in disregarding most of these texts for sake of historicity. What we have come to learn is that McLeod was being generous in including the *Miharban* in his list. It is becoming clearer that the only reliable tradition we have is the *Puratan Sakhi*, which we can date as early as 1588. Nanak died in 1539 which is a gap of roughly 50 years. It is likely someone within the community began collecting stories of Nanak shortly after his death; these are the earliest products of Sikh cultural memory. The *Puratan* tradition is still not perfectly reliable in terms of its historical content. Contained in it are miracle stories, and Nanak meets with saints both Hindu and Islamic whom he could not have if our current life and death dates for these figures are correct such Bu Ali Shah Qalandar (d 1324).

We cannot have full confidence in the *Puratan*, but it does not need to be completely rejected. What information it shares about Kartarpur is reliable because it is probable that this text was compiled by people who lived at or near Kartarpur. It makes sense that McLeod did not take seriously what is claimed in the *Puratan* about the creation and operation of the village. These details contradicted one of his base assumptions about Nanak. Instead of investigating his assumption of Nanak as a figure entirely opposed to organized religion, McLeod decided to reject the most the *Puratan* in favor of less reliable *Sakhis*. McLeod also refused to accept that Nanak established Kartarpur after his first journey. The other traditions of *Sakhis* claimed Nanak established the town after all his journey were complete. But as we've shown the reliability of these other traditions are suspect in comparison to the *Puratan*. It is important to distinguish that even

though Nanak was not a fan of the religious institutions of his time he was not anti-institutions in general.

Nanak disagreed with orthodox Hinduism in theology and practice. And even though he saw bhakti (devotion) as an important part of religious life it was subordinated in relationship to *isnan* (literally bathing, figuratively purity), *dan* (giving), and *nam* or remembrance of G-d's immanence in Creation. *Nam* intuitively held the highest position in this hierarchy of four. Nanak also had his issues with the Muslims in his time, he believed they had lost the original meaning message expressed by Muhammad and saw that their institutions were riddled with corruption and the pursuit of worldly ends.

This shows that indeed, Nanak was outside of the fold of both Hindus and Muslims. Yet he was not opposed to religious organization, he sang his compositions to crowds of people and the *Puratan* alerts us to the fact that on his 2-5 journeys he began to establish manjis (cots), or seats of authority. Nanak gained followers on his journeys and initiated them through a baptismal ceremony and followers began to lead congregations.

There is also poetic evidence that Nanak was not a recapitulation of Bhakti Hinduism. One, he recognized bhaktas as a group and did not identify himself with them. Two, he collapses the common bhakti distinction of Nirguna and Saguna meaning G-d without attributes, and G-d with attributes respectively. Nanak understands that the One is both Nirguna and Saguna, unmanifest and manifest. In fact in Nanak's thinking this would better be understood as transcendent and immanent. Three, McLeod most closely identifies Nanak with the bhakta Kabir the hitch in this understanding is the Kabir is a documented misogynist, when this was the norm, Nanak was not and he pioneered gender equality over 400 years ago.

Let us review some of the more important terms in Nanak's vocabulary here at the end.

Maya is the world understood as profane. This is Creation when an ego has forgotten G-d's immanence in it.

Haumai is the part of the self invested in self-preservation and distinguishing itself. Literally it means I-Me.

Manmukh is a human being that is focused on their *Haumai* as the ultimate end. A *manmukh* has become deluded in the status of their own self and forgotten G-d immanence within their self.

Naad this is the cosmic sound, or the unstruck sound. This is the constant hum of creation because as we know now nothing stands still and everything vibrates. *Naad* is sometimes translated as Word.

Suniai is a command to listen Nanak recognizes that listening pays great dividends in this world. When we listen to the *Naad* we hear G-d's presence in the world. When we listen to a friend we recognize the divine spark within them.

Mannai is acceptance of the supreme fact of G-d. *Mannai* suggests a sense of reverent mindfulness and remembrance.

Mann this is the word Nanak uses to at time to describe the human self as Body-Mind-Soul. There is no distinction between the mind and body no distinction between the soul and the two.

Nanak's ascension through the five realms of dharma, wisdom, bliss, power and Truth explain to us Nanak's ontological hierarchy. Truth and the One are synonymous, when one holds knowledge of Truth they have gained power. Accessing Truth requires uses of our sense perception

and intellect but both of these things are limited and this is why direct access to the Truth or the One is an impossibility.

It is important to expand on Nanak's understanding of our sense perception. Things are not what they seem and Nanak knows this. He does not flat out reject our senses he is aware that they provide us data about the world around us. But Nanak is privy to a gap. A gap which was identified formally by Kant in his *Critique of Pure Reason* in which he posits that there are phenomena, things as they appear and noumena, things as they are. When we perceive things as phenomena we treat them as objects which are finite and limited. This leads us to believe we have the right to manipulate them to our whims because we are deluded into thinking they exist for our benefit. Kant recognize that other human beings are subjects and do not exist for our personal gain. This is why he presents the second formulation of the categorical imperative. Nanak takes this further and this why the label humanist is inadequate for him. Because G-d dwells within each and every being, everything we typically think of as an object is in fact a subject. All of us beings are experiencing the One Reality together. The tree has a different understanding or experience of existence but it shares in the same being just as much as we do. We are all one being experiencing itself subjectively.

After recognizing this we were led into a discussion of the five thieves which all contribute to the process of objectification which is the cause of pain for beings, because their needs are trumped by the needs of myself. The only cure for the five thieves is to remember G-d immanence, beings subjectivity, and to practice the five virtues. If we do this we will be freed from the cycle of *sansara* and achieve union with the One.

Epilogue

It is only after concluding my research that I can offer my understanding of practicing Nanak's path. This is not communicated as researched analysis but rather as a hint to the lived praxis. If the five thieves obstruct our understanding of beings as subjective, then the five virtues assist us recognizing the subjectivity of other beings.

Practicing contentment allows us to be satisfied with our material possessions. When our *haumai* runs amok it's telling us subconsciously, "collect more resources or else you will starve. Copulate with another being or you will not pass on your genes." Contentment is recognizing we have enough to live and that is all we really need. Without contentment we will suffer from greed, attachment, and lust. Without contentment we will exploit beings for gain of resources and will be surrounded by the inanimate.

Practicing humility allows us to be satisfied with our status. When our *haumai* runs amok it's telling us subconsciously "increase your status or else society will abandon you." Humility is recognizing that we are trying our best and our community will not ostracize. Without humility we cannot listen to beings we deem unworthy and this causes us to turn your back on G-d which resides in all things. Without humility we will suffer from pride.

Practicing compassion allows us to be satisfied with our community. When our *haumai* runs amok it's telling us subconsciously "be indifferent and cruel, turn your back on your fellow beings or else you will be dragged down." Without compassion, the sick, the poor, and the helpless will remain that way. Without compassion we will suffer from anger.

Practicing love allows us to be satisfied with our *mann*. When our *haumai* runs amok it's telling us subconsciously "turn your back on your *mann*, do not communicate honestly." Without

love we will remain unknown and we will not know each other. Without love we close ourselves off from grace, from other beings, and we refuse to give grace to others.

Practicing truth allows us to be satisfied with Reality. When our *haumai* runs amok its telling us subconsciously “turn your back on Creation it is better reside in *maya*.” Without truth we will suffer in delusion.

Through practicing these five virtues we allow the One’s *Hukam* to move through us. We will begin to approach Truth through interactions with other beings and we will come to death with the gift of knowing what the One is.

Our egos tell us to live, be separate, make our mark, but eventually we shall die and there will be a day when history is finished or forgotten. We exist to share this reality. Through reflecting each other we recognize that we are the universes aware of the fact that we are the universe.

The songbird wakes up early in the morning. It chirps ushering in the new day. It sings salutations to all its fellow creatures. It flies, looking here, looking there, looking for seeds and fruit. It returns to the nest to feed babies. Once it is full it foragers no more. The songbird finds a puddle to quench its thirst, tossing in water it bathes. It soars through the sky enjoying the wind. Through defecation it plants new seeds. The chicks grow large and leave the nest. Singing, the songbird laments separation. But it carries on its life until one day strife. Lying in the grass with no breath. The worms have their turn, the high are now low, and union with all is achieved.

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