

SIMRAN AND SEWA: THE GATEWAY TO EMANCIPATION

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Abstract

The paper discusses the significance of remembering God and putting his teachings into practice, such as by engaging in selfless service. In order for man to give God the highest appreciation, he must acknowledge that God is the Universe's Creator and Sustainer. After discovering his Lord, man encounters a tempest that compels him to submit to the all-powerful God. A heartfelt recall is the most important of all works in God's sight since it is the ultimate manifestation of God's magnificence and might and man's helplessness. As a result, one is able to decipher and comprehend the love of God. Sewa, or service, has no restrictions and is provided to all regardless of their race, caste, or religion. There is a chance to show affection and devotion through the self-services held in Gurudwaras. It serves as an example of the ideas of equality, fraternity, and love. In the same manner that flowers give forth an unwavering aroma, so does a Sikh when performing his service.

Keywords: Sewa, Simran, Remembrance, Serving, Inner Peace

Introduction: The importance of remembering God and putting his teachings into practice is emphasised throughout the paper. This is done by emphasising the necessity of performing acts of selfless service. Man cannot give God all his thankfulness unless he recognises Him as the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe. When a man discovers who his Lord is, a tempest ensues that compels him to submit to the all-powerful God. A heartfelt remembrance is the most priceless deed in God's eyes because it is the pinnacle illustration of God's might and magnificence as well as of man's powerlessness. The act of service, or sewa, is rendered to everyone regardless of their caste, race, or religious affiliation.

Role of Religion

Religion plays an important role in a believer's life. It starts with discovery and culminates with ritual discharge. Man develops a religious spirit when he recognises the unity of God and his place in the vastness of the cosmos. The highest human goal should be to become a man of principle since it provides life with its fundamental principles and a life without them is one of total depravity. This idea shakes him to the very core of his being. His mind was made more enlightened, and his inner soul was moved. This notion of the Oneness of God and realisation of it profoundly transforms his life. Except for man, no other creature in the entire universe is able to acknowledge God. All natural phenomena are subject to the laws of

nature, which they always follow. No flexibility to make decisions exists. On the other hand, God has granted freedom to man. Misuse of this freedom leads to undesirable social environments and promotes unfavourable feelings. Therefore, being a member of society implies that everyone would experience certain negative occurrences and consequently have grievances against his fellow citizens. It is also true that one cannot express gratitude to God from a complaining heart.

Only someone with a heart full of gratitude and positive emotions may really thank God for His blessings. Therefore, the prerequisite is becoming a giving member of society, which will aid in gaining the skill of controlling unpleasant emotions. To start, you must control your negativity and ill feelings and thoroughly cleanse your heart. One needs to be full of positivity and gratitude so that he is able to realise the blessings and is able to reflect on them. Reflection is only possible in a pure soul, and only those who reflect may properly express gratitude to God. Faith is the consequence of man's discovery; it is not the result of merely paying lip service or saying a few words.

Man must comprehend God at the conscious level. A man ought to discover God. Being "humble" in prayer has to do with spirit, not form. Therefore, if a man does not think, he will just follow the form and will consider form to be worship. It is only the thinking which fathoms the real meaning and does not reduce the worship to a mere form of expressing his gratitude. The deep feelings of man should be invoked. True contemplation is when one prays with understanding the true meaning requires thought alone, it brings in more introspection which helps in comprehending the blessings of Waheguru. Therefore, it implies that when a being is blessed should take care of it and preserve and cherish it. If someone gives you a diamond, he will want to make sure it is kept safe and not misplaced. Similarly, the blessings of God should be appreciated and contemplated. It is only the contemplation which brings forth the true form of remembrance of God and worship is not limited to mere performing the outer form. This teaches us the principle that when God bestows a blessing in the shape of religious doctrines, it is the followers' duty to uphold them.

Remembrance of God leads to communion with Creator

Simran is more than just repeating words that have been learned, which would later bring mysterious effects. In actuality, having such a view of it is the same as underestimating it. It is not just a sporadic expression, but rather the manifestation of a significant intellectual process. The only way a person can get to realize God as the universe's sustainer is by living in constant remembrance and glory of God. One begins to feel God's presence when one reflects on His signs. Such circumstances bring about communion with God.¹

The starting point is to realise God is Simran and feel his presence. It is with the remembrance one feels the existence of God. When a person feels close to God, he or she realizes that God is the Creator and human and the world around i's the creation. A true prayer only emerges after this realization that God is the Giver and we are the Takers. It is an

expression to acknowledge God rather than merely seeking the fulfilment of one's material needs or desires. To establish our status as a creature in relation to our all-Powerful Creator. It causes an

emotional storm, and when this ongoing reflection expresses itself in words as an outpouring of emotions, it becomes a Simran.

There should not be a mechanical prayer that has been uttered sans appropriate consideration as God has created man as a thinking being. It is important to realize that nurturing the authentic spirit of prayer requires conscious effort. First and foremost, we need to cultivate modesty within ourselves since it is a prerequisite for sincere prayer. Without humility, praying is useless. Although most individuals lack it, it is a very valuable quality. So, in order to sense God's closeness and establish our humility and state of helplessness before His all-powerful existence, we must engage our intellect. A living prayer can only be spoken by a mind that is awake. The key to obtaining divine guidance is to acknowledge our powerlessness in the face of God's omnipotence. When there is modesty and humility then there are no disputes; ego conflicts only arise when modesty is lacking. Therefore, modesty is such a source of wisdom that it transforms one into a reservoir of boldness, fortitude, and most importantly, optimistic thinking.

Unconditional Surrender leads to liberation

Simran is complete submission; it goes far beyond superficial rites and rituals. If someone worships Waheguru, they completely devote themselves to their Lord, fearing, loving, and placing all of their trust in them, they focus solely on their Lord. Worship of God requires complete self-surrender; it goes far beyond sporadic conformity with formalities. The building of a positive personality in accordance with the Creator's spiritual principles, also known as God-oriented living, begins when a person is able to develop their intuition to the level of God-realization.

Man seeks fulfilment of his desires through man-made rewards, such as owning a large house, having money in a bank account, and other items associated with civilization. Each of these material objects has flaws and drawbacks. On the other side, we are blessed with God-made bounties which are all around us. The material world has a limitation and yet there is a search for fulfilment in man-made things. Real satisfaction can be achieved only when God-made bounties are realised fully and do not have any limitations whereas the man-made world has limitations which bring frustration and stress.

People who build a big house after living in a small one, for instance, do not feel happy once they have the big house which they had earlier desired. Rather it can be said that achievement of the material world has limited charm and satisfaction. Whereas remembrance of God brings everlasting comfort and satisfaction which is Naam Simran of God. The development of form and spirit together and the realisation that they are intertwined are brought about by the Principle of Worship. The form is worthless without the spirit rather without the spirit the

form is only like an outer covering. Man's activities are nothing more than rituals unless he makes God the only priority in his life.

Man must therefore begin living a God-centered existence by remembering God. He starts to sense God's presence. He is constantly being reminded of Akal Purakh. He spends his mornings and evenings as though he were a resident of God's community. He continually dwells in the memory of God, just as rain refreshes the fields.

Serving Others: A Core of Sikh Religion

Another aspect that one should contemplate is the idea of serving mankind, which is intertwined with the notion that nature needs to be awakened. It is the harbinger of peace and comfort to man. The Sikh Gurus revealed this aspect of the human psyche and helped people understand that growing into a higher being is a result of helping others.

It aids in the development of humility and patience, and its use cultivates self-control in trying situations. It is a quality that allows someone to move forward with noble goals despite challenging circumstances or persistent provocation. He will always be in communion with *Akal Purakh* if he allows himself to become irritated by opposition or other unpleasantness.

He will merely become mired in unimportant details. In actuality, patience is a man's greatest virtue. It is the law of nature, not just a philosophical or religious notion. When one focuses and concentrates, he is blessed with the power of patience because when a person surrenders he is not bothered by the outcome. This is utter surrender to the creator and one accepts everything as the will of God.

A crucial component of a Sikh's spiritual life is *sewa*, which is service to others. It is serving humanity. It yields the greatest merit. *Sewa* is the result of the love of God leading to serving humanity. Service is one of the cardinal principles of Sikhism. The service should be out of concern for and well-being of humanity and not for personal gains or with a motive to earn fame but rather is obligated on a Sikh. The service is conducted as a devotional wherein it is considered a part of daily worship. It could be sweeping the floor, or cleaning utensils in the Gurudwaras, they all aim to bring humility.

Self-assertion and self-sacrifice are two essential human qualities. Service is the antidote for ego, which is self-assertion and brings pride. *Sewa* necessitates the surrender of ego and enables character purification. It promotes mental steadiness and makes it possible to overcome vices. Guru Nanak Dev says "*Bin sevā fal kabahu na pāvas sevā karṇī sārī*" (SGGS P 992) This explains that in order to get the reward in God's court, one must perform unselfish service.

Sikh history is a witness to this act of practical demonstration of serving others. Once when Ahmed Shah Abdali's camp was pillaged by the Sikhs during the return to Kabul. It illustrated the importance the Sikh place on sharing one's possessions. When Ahmed Shah was intrigued about the Sikhs' way of life. They said that this community's greatest strength is its commitment to service and sharing. Whenever they bake bread they exclaim joyfully,

"Gurus Langar is ready, Is there anyone who needs bread?" Even if an opponent responds to this call, he will also be given bread. Then they divide up whatever is still left among themselves.ⁱⁱ²

When one lives a life of faith, courage, and kindness, truth is achieved. In the Sikh system of values, virtue and altruism are of utmost importance. The Rahitnama, a code of conduct, also provides a life principle: one should lead a righteous life and assist the less fortunate. An act of service to the Guru would be for the Sikh to earn his living honestly and to aid the less fortunate. One needs to engage in charitable work and give selflessly if he wants to understand the concept of universal brotherhood.

It was a teaching of Guru Nanak Dev that "*vidiā vīchārī tān parupkārī.*" which means that altruism is said to lead to the essence of knowledge. (SGGS P 356). A person's socialisation results in the realization of Truth and communion with their higher selves. A pious man wants the well-being of others, whereas an impious man is selfish and unconcerned about others. Bhai Gurdas describes the qualities of a good man. (Bhai Gurdas Variations Stanza 12, Verse 20) The requirement for altruism and service is that they must not be performed out of a sense of self-pity or for personal glory but rather for the sanctification of God. Service does not just benefit the recipient; it also helps him in ego-defeating and mental tranquilly.

Forms of Sewa

Sewa can take the forms of Tan (Body: manual labour), Man (Mind: thought), and Dhan (material form i.e cash). Serving the hungry, caring for the sick, sharing grief and joy, and cleaning Sangat members' shoes are all made possible through manual service.ⁱⁱⁱ³ All Sikhs are required to perform the service of Tan, which is regarded as the highest. "Cursed are the hands and feet that are not engaged in Sewa," writes Bhai Gurdas. (Varan, Bhai Gurdas, 27.1)

Once Guru Gobind Singh was offered water by a young man with soft hands, he refused because he had never toiled and had never performed community duty. He stated:

"Hands which do not serve humanity are worthless.

Hands which serve more are sacred than the lips that pray."^{iv4}

The Sikhs are also required to give away one-tenth of their income for charitable causes and social welfare. Its tenets are '*Nam Japna, Kirat Karna, and Vand Chakhna*'. Vand Chakhna indicates giving money to those in need. The precept, which states that one-tenth of income should be used for the general good, was given concrete arrangement in the form of Dasvandh. It accomplishes two goals: serving the needy and giving offers a chance to clean up one's finances.

The Dasvandh unites the community because it gathers everyone to serve the community because it is not an individual which serves rather it's the entire community which serves together. Guru Arjan Dev ji says "*Sevā karaṭ hoe nihkāmī. Fis kao hoṭ parāpaṭ suāmī.*" (SGGS P 286) i.e., the Lord and Master will bestow his blessings onto those who serve others without seeking personal gain.

Sewa, which is another word for serving, can also be accomplished by physical labour, devotion, and singing songs of thanksgiving to God. Guru Arjan Dev clearly mentions that "*Tan man arap karao jan sevā rasnā har gun gāvao.*" (SGGS P 533) that the obedient servant of the Lord serves with devoted body, mind, and tongue as well as by singing the praise of the mighty Lord. One is liberated from its own vices and develops a commitment to serve the Lord as a result. One serves the creation out of love for the Lord. But one cannot perform acts of service if they are driven by ego; selfless service provides humility whereas selfish service fuels ego and pride. Without empathy and altruistic desire, the endeavour would be fruitless and will waste God's gifts, the body and the mind. A Sikh expresses thanks for all the benefits they have received by doing this.

Practical examples from the life of Guru Nanak Dev

There are numerous instances where Guru Nanak Dev has given practical examples of how to assist the less fortunate. It was a strong desire to help those who were in need. His father once handed him some money when he was young to start a business. When asked about his business enterprise on the way home, he narrated where he met a group of saints who were hungry and who needed to be fed since they were starving. So, he spent the money in feeding them as he felt that there was no better deal than this. He referred to the transaction as Sacha Sauda, which means that it will be advantageous in the Lord's court. This also prompted the establishment of the langar or communal kitchen.

As the most honourable religious practice, the Gurus emphasized the dignity of labour. The Gurus sanctified the practice of Langar but also gave it a shape of an institution, namely, Guru Ka Langar (Guru's community kitchen), and served in Sangat (holy congregation).^{v5}

The value of Sewa has been stressed by the Sikh Gurus time and again. When the Mughal army and Sikhs engaged in combat at Anandpur Sahib in 1705, Bhai Kanhaiya served the people in battle and this practice to date is followed by Red Cross. It was a scorching summer evening, and Bhai Kanhaiya was observed providing water and attending to the wounds of the injured on both sides. The following day, this continued as well. The Sikh army was infuriated and approached Guru Gobind Singh, recounting the entire affair and pleading with him to call Bhai Kanhaiya back. Bhai Kanhaiya when he was brought before the Guru, remarked "Satguru, when I treat the wounded and give them water I see your picture. You are present everywhere." This was the commitment that the Gurus instilled in the followers and

the significance of stressing the idea of Sewa as a moral precept in the religion's adherents is followed till today.^{vi6}

Tenet of Sewa – followed in Contemporary times

We have always seen how the Sikhs have always stepped up to assist everyone when a disaster strikes. A recent Covid-19 outbreak, floods, and earthquakes are just a few examples. Sikhs have emerged as a community that has assisted everyone. The creation of the oxygen langar, which provides free oxygen to Covid patients in times of emergency, has demonstrated that the community upholds the religious teachings in text and spirit. The message of langar is known worldwide and everybody is well aware that if there is a calamity or natural disaster then the Sikh community would be forthcoming to help. This holds for anybody who is hungry or stuck in natural disasters or needs help he knows if there is a Sikh community around he can seek help and would be helped with dignity and good faith.

The activities of the Sikhs are a reflection of their adherence to the teachings of the Gurus and to the principles of '*Naam Japna, Kirat Karna, and Vand Chakhna.*' While upholding the Sikh code of conduct, the community has taken inspiration from the Gurus. The Sikh Rehat Maryada, often known as the Sikh code of conduct, was established in 1945 and describes how Sikhs should live their lives in accordance with^{vii7}

- Meditation on Naam
- Living life as per Guru's instructions
- Performing altruistic voluntary service.

(p 238, Searched in Sikhism)

Sewa is said to be a significant part of religious rites. Sikhs should live life of benevolence while remembering their Lord while leading charitable lives. A sincere act of service should be performed without any personal interests—benefit (Nishkam), humility (Nimarta), or ulterior motives (chit lae). This kind of service will open the door to emancipation (Mukti). The ideal of Sikh Sewa is therefore service to humanity.

Conclusion

Therefore, remembering God and serving his creation are the two important principles of Sikhism which lead to the emancipation of a Human. Remembrance liberates one from the shackles of the material world and though a person is living in this world but is freed from the glamour of this ephemeral world which has limitations. Similarly, when one serves the poor, he realises that he is serving not only the creation of God his fellow being but it also helps

one to shed his ego. Ego is the biggest hindrance to achieving peace. Hence, it is serving others which helps one to shed ego and realise that all are equal and the creation of God.

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