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## Condition of the Self to Attain Self-Realization in Sikh Religion

By

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### Definition

Almost every thinker has tried to define the ultimate goal of human life. Some people hold that the most developed state of mental ability is the sign of realization. Yet according to the others if one inculcates the best of human behavior while living in a specific social set up, that is the realized state of human self. The thinkers with spiritual inclination are of the view that when the human self comes back to its original primordial form that is the real state of the self. This is called in other words: self-realization. For this purpose the self has to reach its original form from where once it had started. This is called the coming back home for the self or becoming that what it has

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originally been. In other words, it may be called the most developed form of the self. In this state the self gets liberated from the bondage of individual human relations and passions and attains its original free and blissful state. This is the state of self where it attains the ultimate knowledge, bliss and stillness and does not roam about in the circles of birth and death.

### Self-Realization in Indian and Semitic Traditions

In different religious traditions thinkers have explained the state of self-realization in different manners. According to Indian religious tradition the soul has to transmigrate into eighty-four lakhs of births. It had to suffer the infliction of countless births and deaths, whereas birth and death are the most painful infliction related to life. But the liberation of the self from the circles of transmigration or birth and death is the last destination of the self. Yet for Semitic tradition the entry of human soul into heaven is the final destination. Whatever deeds one does in one's life-time he or she has to bear the fruits of that. Due to good deeds in life one gets heaven and for bad deeds one goes to hell. This is the eternal state of the self, according to the Semitic tradition.

### Self-Realization in Sikh Philosophy

According to Sikhism the individual self is part of God, the Divine Self. Whatever we perceive in this world is the creation of God in which He himself resides as its real element or as its inner-self. The whole universe is not only made of five basic elements yet they are also replete with the divine essence in them. Originally the five elements which become the source of the forms of the world have come from the self of the formless God Himself. And the inner soul of the creation is none else than God Himself. Thus the realization of the self is realization of itself as the real being of divine single Reality i.e. God.

While being separate from its original source the individual soul never rests in peace until and unless it reaches its real state which exists in the being of God. However, due to ignorance human mind never realizes the real reason for its sufferings. The separation from its original source makes it restless all the times but it never realizes the reason for its restlessness. That is why it suffers many types of mental, physical and spiritual pains. While passing through these pains an individual self wants to get liberated from those shackles of pains and sufferings. Thus liberation from the spiritual, physical

and mental pains on the one hand and transmigration of soul on the other becomes the absolute aim for the human life. That state of self may be called salvation, self-realization or completeness of the individual self. This liberation is further given many names of like ultimate knowledge and becoming one with the Divine Self. That is why in the Sikh religion individual self gets liberated from the cycle of transmigration on the one hand and goes back to its original source to mingle into the Divine Soul on the other. The final realized stage of individual soul is so developed that it turns into the Divine Soul and becomes the permanent part of it as the drop becomes the part of ocean while leaving its own individual identity. Here, soul becomes God. There remains no difference between soul and God.

Sikhism holds that the individual soul is part of the Divine Soul. Still the individual soul suffers sorrows and pleasures according to its bad or good actions. The deeds of the individual soul become the deciding factor for the condition of the soul. The transmigration of the individual soul into different births and deaths that can be numbered as eighty-four lakhs is based upon the account of their actions. Yet still the most important factor is that only the human soul is capable to attain liberation from bondage of transmigration. According to the Gurus while roaming in the circles of births and deaths the individual soul is replete with marks of its deeds upon it and attains the next births and suffering accordingly. Those bad deeds put dirty curtains upon it which further hinder it from meeting its real state that is meeting with God, who is its real self and final destination. After removing those dirty curtains or layers it realizes itself and mingles with its real self; God. But this whole process is not as easy as it seems to be. To attain this state one has to pass through various stages of physical, mental and spiritual growth.

### Importance of Human Existence for Self Realization:

To tread on the path of self-realization first of all it is considered that human existence is very important. Sikh philosophy teaches that only human life is such a state of self where it can attain liberation. Almost every religion of the world has accepted the truth that human existence is more important than any other form of existence. Being mentally, socially and spiritually a more conscious being it is more capable to realize its real existence. The human beings are conscious about their inner and real existence and the purpose of their being. Sikh philosophy considers human existence as the master of whole lot of creatures. Man is the only being in the whole of creation who is capable to attain the knowledge of God and who can attain the passage to the

love of God. To clear this view the Gurus have time and again stressed upon the importance of the birth of self as human person. The Gurus taught that this human body is the abode of God.

Sikh philosophy also considers that even gods are craving to attain the human body because it is only human body through which the passage to self realization can open up to its real destination. It is considered that the self transmigrates in the circle of eighty-four births and deaths before it actually and finally comes in the form of human body. It is all the way a very painful and a long passage. Human form or human birth is the only opportunity to get liberated from the circle of rebirth and death on the one hand and to reach its real abode on the other. That is mingling in the existence of God like a drop of water mingles into the ocean. In human life one has nothing else to do except worship of God and doing good deeds that lead the soul to the real path of self-realization. If one does not attain his real goal in this human life one loses one's golden opportunity and again starts the same old painful and long journey of transmigration. That is why the Guru says human birth is most precious and it should not be wasted in vain. We get many references for the importance of human life to realize itself. This is the only time when the human self can realize God and make best use of the time given to it. This is the ultimate truth about the aim of human life according to the Gurus.

### Role of the true Guru

The Guru has said that even if human mind has thousands of its own wisdoms but can never reach the ultimate goal of its spiritual life until and unless it follows the teachings of the true Guru. One can not attain one's goal with one's own egoistic thinking. One has to shun one's ego and go in the obedience of the true Guru to attain the real knowledge of the ultimate Truth. Until and unless the soul shuns its ego and dedicates itself to the obedience of the Guru, one cannot be able to tread on the real path of religion. The true Guru in fact is a person who knows the ultimate Truth and has become one with It. Only he who knows and is one with the ultimate Truth can lead the people to the real path to that Truth. Gurbani time and again stresses upon the need of the true Guru.

After ten Gurus in the Sikh religious tradition Guru Granth Sahib is considered as the true Guru because it contains and leads to the knowledge of God. A true Guru gives the knowledge of spiritual existence of the universe which is God and that is real existence of the universe. The Gurus tell us that the whole existence of the universe is replete with the very existence of God,

who is equally present everywhere. That is why there is life in this universe. Gurbani holds that God created this world in such a way that it has come actually from the existence of God Himself. Every thing and being of this universe is created with five basic elements i.e. air, water, fire, earth and ether. These five elements actually came from the being of God Himself, who Himself is formless. The life force or individual self is the light of God's essence. This means, all are part of God's existence in the real internal and ultimate form. To realize this Truth with the help of the true Guru is the goal of our spiritual life. Originally individual soul was one with God. According to the play of God it was separated from Him, and due to that separation it was caught in the clutches of Maya and suffered the consequences of separation. To get liberated from bondage of illusion and get back to its real and primordial self, God became the ultimate goal of the individual soul. While living in separation one considers self as independent entity and suffers in the world of illusion created by God Himself. However, when one gets conscious about one's real existence and surrenders to the will of the true Guru then it reaches its real destination and mingles in the real existence of God. This is the strange type of relationship of the individual self with the Divine Self.

The Guru makes us understand what the individual self is and what it is in relationship to the Divine Self. What is its real form? What are its attributes? What is the essential reality where it has come from and where it will go back ultimately? In Guru Granth Sahib, Guru Nanak Dev has explained the real nature and attributes of the Ultimate Reality (God). In Mul-Mantra he has explained the mystery of divine knowledge and the attributes of that Reality. He said; God is one and is prevalent equally in his creation. His name is truth; that means He always remains the same and permanent. He alone creates the whole universe. He is so great and capable to do everything that He is not afraid of anyone. The whole creation is just the expression of His own being. Thus He has no enmity with any one. He is such an existence, which is beyond time and death, rather time and death are the handiworks of His own play. He never takes birth and He created Himself. He can be realized with the grace of the true Guru. This way the Guru gives knowledge of existence and attributes of such a great God and inspires to remember Him. Before we try to understand the nature of the self we must know the nature of the source from where we have been created forth. Reason is that the Guru tells us that our existence has come from the one single source that is God Himself. Thus our final destination is to remerge into the same source. Without and before we really mingle in the ultimate source of our being we are destined not to rest in peace. We suffer the pains of separation and also

the results of our actions done in the consciousness of separation and ego. In this way Sikhism is a unique thought-system which provides the understanding that the individual self is not merely to attain liberation from the circle of transmigration but it has also to go back to its real source of existence that is the being of God.

The Guru has said right in the beginning of Guru Granth Sahib that God is truth and He can be realized while treading on the real path of truth. A Sikh understands the reality and attributes of God that inculcates the sense of fear, respect and love for God. Through the Guru he comes to know that God and God alone possess those great attributes. Guru Nanak says in Japuji Sahib that even if an individual has plenty of his own independent wisdom and understanding about God and His attributes but he can never reach God because merely with that knowledge one can not reach Him. Actually it is not the knowledge of God that makes the Sikh reach Him, it is also the path shown by the true Guru. Human mind is always in a thinking process and often suspects the sayings of others. That is why the Guru who actually knows the truth makes him understand and satisfies his suspicions about the Ultimate Reality, and the knowledge and the passage to realize that. Therefore, it is certain: without the guidance of the true Guru no one can realize the Ultimate Truth which is God.

In Sikh way of life Sabad or Gurbani is considered similar as the living Guru. As a living Guru satisfies and guides the spiritual mind on its way to self-realization, similarly Guru Granth Sahib guides the Sikh on his spiritual path. Sangat in Sikh way of life plays a very important role. Gurbani is interpreted in the Sangat that is known as the physical appearance of the Guru, after Guru Granth Sahib. The Sangat becomes the guiding source for the treader on spiritual path and constantly inspires the individual for divine love and obedience.

### Aim of the Gurmukh

In order to realize oneself an individual self has constantly to pass through many stages of spiritual consciousness. The wayfarer, who wants to attain the completeness or the knowledge of its own reality, has to become obedient (Gurmukh) to the Guru. With the grace of the Guru an individual targets upon his ultimate aim. The Guru has said that the real and final destination of an individual soul is to become one with the Divine soul after breaking the false wall of ego which lies between individual and the Divine Soul. This is self-realization, the last destination of individual human existence. How-

ever, this aim can be attained only after coming in the obedience to the Guru and adopting the way of life as suggested by the Guru. A Sikh knows the truth about God through the Guru and then he concentrates on the attributes and name of God according to the suggestions of the Guru. The human soul has the path in itself through which the human concentration travels further with the help of the true Guru while remembering the name of God in a specific aptitude and in a specific manner as suggested by the Guru.

One fact is certain that independent individual understanding is not capable to lead human mind independently to attain its ultimate goal. Only a true Guru and the devoted concentrated human mind jointly make an endeavor on that path. If the true Guru has capability to take the individual self to its real destination only then one can realize its destination. Otherwise thousands of souls are roaming about in the endless circle of birth and death. A common individual when after crossing the bondage of his individual ego goes in the obedience of the Guru and submits his own self to the order of the Guru and lives according to his teachings, only then he realizes his spiritual destination. The Guru said God can be realized if the soul loves God but we can not love God without knowing his greatness and His grace upon us. Yet this path of knowledge and love is inspired by the true Guru who has already attained the oneness with God while treading on his way in love and obedience.

### Importance of Guru Granth Sahib

In the present Sikh way of life Guru Granth Sahib is the true Guru for a devout Sikh. To guide on the way to spiritual attainment Guru Granth Sahib is the main source of knowledge. It contains the knowledge about the reality and descriptions of the attributes of God. It also provides the right methodology to fall in love with the ultimate goal of religious attainment. The right training of spiritual reality and path is very necessary for a Sikh. A true Sikh is he who learns to tread on the path of truth and who goes in the obedience of a true Guru for that purpose. Guru Granth Sahib fulfils this purpose of a devout Sikh who goes in its obedience. A serious understanding of Gurbani makes a common person a way fairer on the path of truth. This is how we define a Sikh. If one molds his life and thought according to the teachings as enshrined in Guru Granth Sahib one becomes a true Sikh of the Guru. The teachings of Guru Granth Sahib are explained in the Sadh Sangat; like minded God oriented gathering in the presence of Guru Granth Sahib. The importance of Sadh-Sangat along with Guru Granth Sahib is equally important in the spiritual life of the Sikh. As for the present time the Sikh can un-

derstand the deeper and mystic meaning of Gurbani in Sadh-Sangat where Gurbani, which is enshrined in Guru Granth Sahib, is interpreted in an idiom understandable for a common man. Mind of a devout actually gets directed towards the love of that ultimate Reality in the company of God oriented people (Sadh Sangat). He makes us reach the truth. This truth is God Himself, the goal of human existence. This is the final destination of human self. It is in fact becoming one with the truth. Thus directed by the teachings of the Guru individual mind and body both act according to the Guru's teachings, thus the individual soul reaches its final and most developed form of its being that is becoming God Himself. This is what can be called the going back of the individual soul to its final and eternal essential.

### Importance of Sadh Sangat

Sadh Sangat is the gathering of like-minded God oriented people who gather in the presence of the Guru and discuss the attributes and greatness of God as directed in Guru Granth Sahib. Sadh Sangat is most important place for the Gurmukh (God oriented person) to attain its spiritual destination. In the Sikh way of life Sadh Sangat has one single aim that the God oriented people are to attain the loving devotion to God through the singing and discussion of Gurbani (God's word) that is replete with God's attributes. The life history as really lived by the ten Gurus is also discussed. That guides and inspires them to lead a religious life according to Gurbani. In Sadh Sangat a God oriented person also gets spiritual as well as social inspiration to live a life of saint as well as a servant to the society. A Sikh gets inspired by the word of God (Gurbani) yet also learns how people having faith in Guru's teachings had been living in our history as well. Secondly one becomes part of the whole of the gathering which comprises people from various castes, colors, creeds, linguistic and regional diversity. A Sikh, who is supposed to consider Sadh Sangat (the whole gathering) as the spiritual and physical body of the Guru, serves them with full dedication. Here one is not only directed towards one's spiritual destination yet one also sheds one's individual ego while serving God in the form of Sadh Sangat. In the constant presence of Sadh Sangat one remains inspired on one's right track of a better spiritual and social life. This way one remains steadfast to one's difficult path and finally one realizes that which normally is very difficult to be realized. However, it only happens in the company of Sadh Sangat. The doubts of a Sikh about spiritual journey, about the life and teachings of the Gurus and about God get cleared in the constant company of Sadh Sangat. While having

doubt in one's mind one cannot tread on God's path and can not attain single-minded concentration and thus loses faith.

### God's love and remembrance

A God oriented Sikh comes to the understanding of divine qualities through the Guru, and this is how slowly and gradually he inculcates the sentiment of extreme love for God. As taught by the Guru a Sikh lives a pure mental, physical, social and spiritual life so that he becomes capable to keep the pure name of God in his mind. It only happens when a Sikh follows the teachings of the Guru for a better human life and the method told by the Guru to tread on the difficult path of spiritual attainment. That is why a constant and obedient submission of a Sikh to the will of the Guru is very necessary for the realization of the ultimate aim. The final and the last stage of human existence can only be attained by the grace of God. This path is neither a path of Karam Yog only nor the path of external Bhakti. This is in fact a combined adventure into the realms of mental, social and spiritual training. Therefore, a Sikh – as mentioned above - adopts the method taught by the Guru and slowly and gradually treads on his path. This does while doing moral deeds in social life so that his mind gets or remains purely concentrated into the truth, which he is supposed to realize from within. The total orientation of Gurbani is the moral and spiritual growth of mankind. In totality Gurbani is referred to man, its main purpose is to make him understand the higher attributes of the Divine and attain its experience. Gurbani provides the direction to walk on the passage which starts from gross to most subtle, so that man while walking through the material and the social world comes in direct contact with intellectual, esthetical and moral values, so that he can touch the highest value of spirituality.

That is why in the Sikh way of life it is stressed that the teachings of the true Guru have to be carefully and obediently heard, considered and lived upon. Only after living according to the teachings of the Guru in real life a common person can become a Gurmukh, and a Gurmukh can attain the state of oneness with God. Guru Nanak said that after obediently adopting the teachings of the true Guru a common person with very normal capacity of mental and spiritual qualities can attain the position like that of realized and great saints. He comes to know the underlying mystical realities of earth and even the sky. The follower of the Guru never dies, always remains in blissful mood and attains the spiritual purity from within like that of bathing at sixty-eight places of pilgrimage. He clearly understands various spiritual powers and the sources of spiritual knowledge. This way he easily attains the con-

centration in the holy name of God. Even the person who lives according to the teachings of the Guru his greatness can not be explained in words. These types of people are considered as the special and chosen people of God.

The most important effect of submission to the obedience of the Guru is the method of understanding how to concentrate on the true name of God as taught and directed by the Guru. The recitation of the name of God with a specific and systematic method is such a source without which no one can be called a Sikh, and no one can be called even a religious person according to the Sikh way of religious life. A Sikh constantly remains in the obedience of the Guru to learn to tread on the real path to attain knowledge and oneness with that Truth (God).

While treading on the path of truth a Sikh adopts the concentrated poise of mind and keeps away from vices, which hinder his mind to attain concentration and equipoise with the name of God. A mind filled with vices cannot tread on the path of God. That is why according to the Guru a Sikh has to be conscious of vices, which mainly are lust, anger, avarice, greed and ego. These are such vices, which constantly keep gripping the human mind and don't let it walk on its real path. Remaining in equipoise of one's mind only then one can attain peace with God. Due to the vices one's mind can never remain in peace. Only after adopting Guru's teachings in real life one can control these vices and thus can tread on the path of spirituality without any hindrance. Only the true Guru can really teach that method. Not only that; the Guru also knows the mental and spiritual capability of the Sikh who becomes a medium to receive that great name of God and can realize the specific method of the Guru.

The final realized state of individual soul is to become one with the Eternal Truth. The true knowledge of the self is to be merged in the Super-Self (God). This destination can be attained by soul even while living in human body. This is called liberation while living. Even while we are active in social duties it can be attained. We have only to recognize our inner real existence while remaining active in social life. This can happen only with spiritual training in the constant obedience to the true Guru. This is called Jeevan Mukti. The second type of liberation is attained when one leaves this human body and gets mingled into the light of the Supreme Light. According to this view when one leaves one's body one never takes another birth and gets liberated from the cycle of rebirth. That soul eternally gets merged into the soul of God. This meeting is like the ray of sun that gets merged into the sun, the drop of water that gets mingled into the ocean and become one with that. It is the realization of human soul and the final destination of its being.

Guru Nanak Dev Ji said the human soul has to pass through various stages of mental and spiritual progress to reach this state of existence. The stages of progress are known as Khands in Japuji Sahib which are five in number.

### Five Khands

In Japuji Sahib Guru Nanak established five stages which are known as the five khands as the stages of spiritual progress. These are the stages upon the way to self realization where a Sikh adopts religious awareness, tries to understand the universe as created by God and then works so hard on the path to spiritual completion that he receives the grace of God. After passing through God's grace he reaches the realm of truth that is the abode of God Himself. This is the actual and final destination of the human existence. This is completion of physical, mental and spiritual progression of individual soul, which treads on its path by the grace of the true Guru.

While giving the description of realm of Dharma (Religion) in Japuji, Guru Nanak said that God created many types of days, seasons, dates, days of the week etc. He also created air, water and fire and also created the nether regions. In between all these He established the earth which was created as the place for one single purpose that was the worship for God. The creatures on this earth were created with many types and colours within the great divine scheme. The decision about these creatures was made on the basis of their own deeds. This is the rule of the region of Dharma. Complete knowledge about creation is provided in the realm of knowledge. That knowledge is about the whole of the creation of God. It is like how many types of air, water, fire and how many types of Krishnas and Shivas have been created. Even it is explained that how many types of Brahmas are created and how many goddesses with different forms, colours and outfits are there, how many earths, moons, suns and the solar systems are there, how many types are realized persons, forms of goddesses, sages and oceans of gems are created, how many types of eatables and languages, and how many types of great people with spiritual intentions and the savants of God. There is no end to all this. In the realm of knowledge the whole of created world that is seen or unseen is pondered upon. A very strange type of knowledge of mystical happenings and bliss is there.

The next stage of spirituality is the realm of rigorous spiritual training. The formation of this realm is very beautiful. In this realm human spiritual intentions are carved in such a way that their beauty can not be explained after that. In that realm the higher stage of mental ability is carved which provides

true knowledge to the human mind. At that stage the knowledge which is provided is like that of the great souls.

The next stage of spiritual progress is known as the realm of grace. This is the realm of the God's grace. The form of this realm is of the power of God. In that realm nobody else resides. Great and powerful worriers whose minds are ever filled with the name of God reside there. They always keep their mind engrained in the praise of God. They are so good looking that the beauty of their forms cannot be defined. They get eternal liberation whose minds are filled with the love of God. At that place the lovers of God reside together who come from various worlds. As the true God resides in their minds they are always filled with bliss.

In the realm of truth God Himself resides there. From that place he feels happy while watching his creatures. In that region countless worlds and universes exist. If one tries to explain all that, one cannot be successful. Countless worlds and countless forms of creatures exist there. As God orders them so they act accordingly. While thinking and watching about all that, God remains in bliss. However, it is very difficult to explain all that.

While explaining all the five realms at the end Guru Sahib says to pass through all these stages of spiritual progress the human mind has to be molded into a specific mold and only then he can reach his destination. He said that chastity, tolerance, divine knowledge, and love for God is to be adopted by man and then his heart becomes a vassal for remembrance of God in love. This is how man becomes able to tread on the true path of the True one. However, liberation of soul is attained only with the sight of God's grace. Guru also says that God is gracious and becomes happy while bestowing his grace upon his creatures. It means he creates his creatures and becomes happy while giving them liberation.

### Knowledge of the Self

This way liberation of soul or salvation means the soul goes back to its original position i.e. to be one with God from where it has come forth. This can occur with the teachings of the true Guru. With his teachings the true Guru makes a Sikh rationally understand the real attributes of God and makes him understand the significance of those attributes. To inculcate a deep faith in his mind a Sikh believes in and understands the qualities of the Absolute Reality (God) as guided by the Guru. The Guru makes him understand that only one single absolute is real, being beyond time, space and situations yet above any reality of the world. God is above any type of divine power or gods like Vishnu, Shiva or Goddesses. The Guru teaches these di-

vinities are created by God and are not the subject to worship because only one single Reality, God Himself, is to be worshipped alone. From Him the individual soul takes birth and to Him the individual soul goes back - to its final abode which is its final realized state. In the state of realization first of all the individual soul comes to know about itself then becomes one with the Divine Self. That is why it is called knowledge of the self or realization of the self.