

SHARING WISDOM

A SIKH PERSPECTIVE

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What Is Wisdom?

You may read and read loads of books; you may read and study vast multitudes of books.

You may read and read boat-loads of books; you may read and read and fill pits with them.

You may read them year after year; you may read them as many months as there are.

You may read them all your life; you may read them with every breath.

O Nanak, only one thing is of any account: everything else is useless babbling and idle talk in ego (SGGS Ji p. 467).

Wisdom cannot be found through mere words. To explain it is as hard as iron.

When the Lord bestows His Grace, then alone it is received; other tricks and orders are useless (SGGS Ji p. 465).

There is a significant difference between one who has acquired knowledge and one who is wise. We know of people who are intellectually brilliant but who lack the capacity to engage beyond their particular area of specialisation. And yet, we know of people who are not renowned for their

intellectual brilliance but who have an understanding and wisdom that seems beyond mere intellect. These individuals are often characterised as having character, virtue and insight. They are able to cut through to the core of complexity with elegant simplicity.

Wisdom is the ability to know that which is of the deepest significance. This 'knowing' comes not through mental calculation or shrewdness but rather through what we may call 'intuition.' This form of knowing is about an inner experience, an inner knowing that is embodied within us. Such wisdom is manifest within us and can be harnessed or awakened through prayer, meditation, service, and contemplation. It is, in short, an inner form of knowing. As the epigraph points out, this form of knowledge cannot simply be acquired through reading books but entails an experiential element.¹

*Question 1:
How does wisdom differ from intelligence?*

From the outset, a significant problem of translation must be clarified. The script used throughout the Sikh scriptures, the Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji (SGGS Ji), is known as Gurmukhi, which is usually translated as "from the mouth of the Guru." This, coupled with the reverence and respect that Sikhs have for the SGGS Ji as the "living and eternal Guru," makes translation impossible. The problem is compounded in English as a result of the gendering of language, as well as the introduction of Judeo-Christian overtones as a result of the colonial experience. For example, to refer to the SGGS Ji as the Sikh scriptures or the Holy text is to miss the essence of its status as a "living Guru." Furthermore, the very idea of Sikhism, the Sikh faith or the Sikh religion is a

poor translation of the notion of the Sikh dharam or simply Sikhi. Hence, in this paper I will use the term Sikhi

Wisdom in Sikhi is about experiencing the Creator and creation. At some level, it is about knowing the Divine plan, while at the same time realising the impossibility to fully knowing the infinite or indeed His plan. This is precisely because of the impossibility of human description of the Creator. At its core, in Sikhi wisdom entails realising and experiencing God as described by Guru Nanak Dev Ji (the founding Guru) in the opening lines of the SGGS Ji, the mul mantar:

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

Repeat

True in the beginning, True before time began,

He is True, Nanak, and ever will be True (SGGS Ji p.1).

In Sikhi, gun is understood as virtues or good qualities. The importance of gun is made clear by Guru Nanak Dev Ji who declares categorically that "devotion without virtues is impossible" (SGGS Ji p. 4). Virtues, according to the Gurus, can be learnt and inculcated through interaction with those who are virtuous. As Guru Nanak Dev Ji puts it, "In the society of the holy, one becomes holy, and one runs after virtues, forsaking one's sins" (SGGS Ji p. 414). In this regard, the acquisition of gun leads to wisdom, which plays a key role in Sikh ethics. The terms to denote wisdom and the fact that one is wise are respectively gian and giani.² Nevertheless, two other terms budhi

(intelligence) and bibek budhi (wisdom) are also used to convey the difference between mere intelligence and wisdom. Critically, one can only acquire bibek budhi through the grace of the Guru.

According to Guru Nanak Dev Ji, the spiritual seeker is expected to contemplate the real nature of knowledge under the guidance of a spiritual leader. In the quest for spiritual realisation, one reaches beyond oneself and the egocentric reasoning (budhi) is transformed into a discriminating reason (bibek budhi) that seeks metaphysical reality. In short, in Sikhi, reason is implied in the very notion of gian. As Sher Singh points out, "in moving from intellect to intuition, we are not moving in the direction of unreason, but are getting into the deepest rationality of which human nature is capable" (as cited in Singh 1990: 178).

In the opening composition of the SGGGS Ji, the 'Japji Sahib,' Guru Nanak Dev Ji points out that wisdom is "a comprehensive point of view as indicated in the actions of a person" (Singh 1996: 87). He maps out what wisdom is and how it can be acquired in three steps. These include: suniye (hearing), manne (reflecting) and dhian (meditation). These steps are clarified further in the Japji Sahib with four stanzas devoted to hearing. First, it is made clear that a person should hear about the lives of exalted persons as well as various aspects of the world. Second, a seeker should hear the contents of consciousness within themselves. Such hearing expands the very consciousness of the seeker. Third, the seeker is implored to hear about fundamental moral qualities that must be cultivated. Finally, the seeker hears about the practical application of the wisdom of leaders and learns how these leaders helped others and guided others during difficult times.

In essence, hearing is meant to teach one about creation and recognising a higher consciousness in all as well as realising that certain moral principles and their practical application can be witnessed in the lives of those

who have lived wisely and who similarly guide others. But simply hearing is for Guru Nanak Dev Ji not enough. For this entails merely accepting what one hears. On the contrary, one is called to reflect on what one has heard. As such, manne or reflection is the second step towards wisdom and once again it is elaborated in four stanzas in the Japji Sahib.

First, Guru Nanak Dev Ji points out that it is impossible to describe the entire process of reflection, primarily because the process itself is vast and infinite. Nevertheless, he tells us that it is through such reflection that the mind, awareness and intellect are shaped and sharpened. Second, it is through reflection that one is able to realise the true nature of reality. Third, reflection removes all hindrances from the path of a seeker and bestows upon one great honour. Critically, the person endowed with such reflection becomes deeply aware of the social context and seeks to serve the Creator and creation. Finally, through reflection one realises salvation itself. It is at this point that altruism becomes central. This is necessarily so, because one realises that the same spirit pervades all creation and all of humanity is simply one family.

*Question 2:
what role does selfless service play in
sharing wisdom?*

The third aspect of wisdom is dhian, which can be translated as a process of meditation and inner reflection. It is the synthesis of the knowledge that one acquires from suniye (hearing) and manne (reflection). This synthesis is itself constituent of gian or wisdom. The virtue of wisdom synthesises knowledge of the world as well as spiritual knowledge. A great deal of importance is attached to practice as an essential constituent of wisdom. It is

through the repetition of the name as well as in service to all creation that one attains wisdom. This wisdom does not necessarily require the knowledge of texts but is attainable only through the quelling of the ego.

Question 3:

The Sikh faith believes wisdom can only be acquired through the quelling of the ego. Does this differ from other faiths?

What is clear is that wisdom is at the behest of the Creator who can give it as a blessing instantly to anyone He so chooses – for it is up to Him to make ‘angels out of mere people’:

A hundred times a day, I am a sacrifice to my Guru;

He made angels out of men, without delay (SGGS Ji p. 462).

Furthermore, an inflated ego obstructs the path to liberation by standing in opposition to anything that is ‘Other’:

Oh Nanak, freedom's gate is tight,
The very small alone can pass.
When ego's swollen up the mind,
How can it hope to pass that gate?
It's when the guru comes to us
That ego goes and all is light
At last this soul finds its release
And always stays absorbed in bliss (SGGS Ji p. 509).

Guru Nanak Dev Ji goes on to say that, "Rare in the world is the man of wisdom who reflects on wisdom and rare is the wise man in this world who practices this wisdom" (SGGS Ji p. 413). In a similar vein, Bhagat Kabir Ji points out that, "if you have wisdom, destroy your evil and discipline your body" (SGGS Ji p. 342). These quotations reinforce the point that wisdom can only be obtained when the ego is negated. As Guru Nanak Dev Ji explains, "How can one instruct the one who says that he knows? He who considers himself as having crossed the sea, how can one tell him?" (SGGS Ji p. 938).

Why Share Wisdom?

In Sikhi, wisdom results only from fusion – the merging of the self and the Divine. The one who attains this wisdom is a Brahm-Giani, one who has attained the ultimate knowledge and wisdom as outlined above. Guru Arjan Dev Ji defines the Brahm-Giani as one who has the True Being in mind, the True One on the tongue and perceives none other than the One. Furthermore, the Brahm-Giani always yearns to do good for others as a parupkari (SGGS Ji, p. 273; 816). The attaining of this state of Brahm-Giani represents the very

embodiment of Godly traits. These traits or gun include the need for one to be kind, forgiving, compassionate, truthful, unselfish, humble, pure, just, fearless, merciful, generous and loving – all of which are essential ingredients if one is to be attuned to God. In Sukhmani Sahib, Guru Arjan Dev Ji gives us an insight into the Brahm-Giani:

The Brahm-Giani is the purest of the pure;

Like water to which filth cannot remain attached

The mind of the Brahm-Giani is enlightened with divine light;

Like the firmament over the earth (which is present everywhere).

To the Brahm-Giani friends and foes are alike;

As he has no pride.

The Brahm-Giani is the most exalted of the exalted;

(Yet) he treats himself to be most humble in his mind.

Only those are Brahm-Gianis;

Guru Nanak says, whom God makes so (SGGS Ji p. 272).

In their love for God and His creation, it is natural for the Brahm-Gianis to want to share these virtues. As the Guru points out, "Yes, share we should the virtues with our friends and shed our sins" (SGGS Ji p. 766). Clearly, embedded in the notion of the sharing of these virtues there is an aspect of sharing socially.

All species carry within them a spark of life that emanates from the infinite divine flame – that is, the Creator. The Guru Granth Sahib Ji tells us to

recognise that there is only one God as well as the commonality of the human race. As Bhagat Kabir Ji notes:

First, Allah created the Light; then, by His Creative Power, He made all mortal beings.

From the One Light, the entire universe welled up. So who is good, and who is bad?

O people, O Siblings of Destiny, do not wander deluded by doubt.

The Creation is in the Creator, and the Creator is in the Creation, totally pervading and permeating all places.

The clay is the same, but the Fashioner has fashioned it in various ways.

There is nothing wrong with the pot of clay - there is nothing wrong with the Potter.

The One True Lord abides in all; by His making, everything is made.

Whoever realizes the Hukam of His Command, knows the One Lord. He alone is said to be the Lord's slave.

The Lord Allah is Unseen; He cannot be seen. The Guru has blessed me with this sweet molasses.

Says Kabir, my anxiety and fear have been taken away; I see the Immaculate Lord pervading everywhere (SGGS Ji p. 1340).

The SGGS Ji is adamant about religious pluralism. In an infinite context, all revelations of the Divine are valid and hence it is stated that no single religion (including Sikhi) can claim to be the full and final expression of God because of the inexhaustible and infinite nature of God's attributes as well as the relativity of the modes of perception. Guru Nanak Dev Ji metaphorically captures this by saying that the "brave sees God in the form of the Might, the intellectual comprehends Him in the form of the Light (of knowledge), the aesthete perceives the Divine in His aspects of Beauty, and the moralist envisions Him as Goodness" (as cited in Ahluwalia 2002: 33).

Life on this globe fits within a spiritual scale that ranges from pure matter to pure spirit in an ascending scale. Pure matter is at the lower end of the scale and is followed by vegetation, the animal kingdom, humans and pure spirit at the pinnacle representing the Creator. As humans, we are bestowed with the power of reasoning for differentiating between good and evil (which have co-existed since creation itself). The human being sits at the apex of this evolutionary scale and, because of the capacity to reason, is required and expected to support and protect creation, which has been entrusted to us. Furthermore, the human being has a duty towards fellow beings. It would be wrong to condemn fellow beings, as well as creatures at the lower end of the spiritual scale, because humility and forgiveness are the bedrock of spirituality. It is incumbent for the human to be forgiving, compassionate, loving, kind and humble within all creation. We are not on this planet to pursue selfish interests. There is a higher motive demanded from us all. Our intended primary aim is prayer, contemplation and service to others, which leads us ultimately to be reunited with the Lord. Sikhi requires one to be an integral part of the world, not a recluse or hermit.

Question 4:

Is the Sikh belief in the universality of humanity a challenge for other faiths?

Sikh ethics then are fundamentally about one's duty and responsibility not simply to the Creator but to all of creation. Sikhi emerged in a context where it was surrounded by Hinduism and Islam and the message of the Sikh Gurus was aimed at all of humanity. The ethical relationship is one that hinges on the responsibility one has to the other. The 'other' here has a double

meaning, signifying all the species that inhabit the planet as well as the infinite 'Other' who is always omnipresent yet difficult, indeed impossible, to comprehend, being attainable only once the self is transcended. This recognition necessarily imbibes a need for sharing.

Sharing then becomes an essential part of Sikhi because altruism is a necessary prerequisite for serving the Creator and creation. It is through sharing that one begins to appreciate the key Godly trait of selflessness. Nevertheless, it is important to note that it is only through love that one can realise God. As the tenth Guru put it: "All should listen to this truth that only those who love God can realize Him." (Guru Gobind Singh Ji in Swaiye)

The overarching commonality of humanity demands that we share our spiritual and worldly earnings. Furthermore, once the ego has been quelled, it is easy to see how all that is given to an individual belongs to God and that this entails a responsibility to share. Fareed Ji, one of the Muslim Saints whose writings are enshrined in the Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji, implores:

If you are wise, be simple;

If you are powerful, be weak;

And when there is nothing to share, then share with others (SGGS Ji p. 1384).

Here, Fareed Ji is suggesting that it is only possible to share when one's ego has been negated and when one truly believes that he or she has nothing to share because all that there is belongs to God. It is only then that 'true' sharing can be effected.

How Do We Share?

The best way to share is explained by Guru Nanak Dev Ji who advocated a threefold motto which is seen as analogous to the essence of Sikhi:

1. Naam Japo – meditate on God (Simran) – and you will become wise (mat uchi).
2. Kirat Karo – Earn your living through remembrance of God and hard work. Only then can work be worship – live in the Lord's presence.
3. Wand Ke Chhako: earn an honest living and share your spiritual and worldly earnings with humanity. Serve God and creation (Sewa) – you will become humble (man neeva).³

The first two principals are important for attaining wisdom, but the third, wand de chako, is the key to how one should share. Furthermore, these fundamental principles can only be practised effectively if one has love for God and His creation. They are a means to ameliorate and polish our human intelligence, budhi into bibek budhi (wisdom). In terms of kirat karo, Sikhi attaches a great deal of importance to the notion of truthful living as emphasised by the SGGS Ji that 'truth is high, higher still is truthful living.' According to Sikhi, wisdom cannot be attained without ethical activity namely – simran and sewa. Nevertheless, all three are inseparable, and it is not possible to discuss them in isolation. By following this threefold motto one can attain mystical awareness of the Truth which according to the SGGS Ji is attained with utmost devotion, faith and love. The way to share is to accept three conditions:

1. The acceptance of the presence of God as the wisest of the wise;
2. To always live in the presence of God; and
3. To live within a connected infinite spiritual scale.

By living a life imbued with these conditions, one is blessed and rendered accountable and responsive to the needs of God's creation, which entails both a duty and a responsibility. This demands an ethical way to live whereby *wand ke chako* becomes a central tenet of the practice of everyday life. However, to treat this merely as an obligation is to miss the point that love is the overarching prerequisite to any form of sharing.

Question 5:

why is love a requirement for gaining true wisdom?

When sharing is approached from such a stance of love, the very idea of not sharing is incomprehensible. Sharing has to occur as a mutual exchange through dialogue, engagement and prayer. It is imperative that we give without expecting anything in return. And, above all, one must not be frugal when sharing. As Guru Nanak explains in order to share it is essential that, "I dedicate my body, mind, wealth and all to Him. I totally sacrifice my soul to Him" (SGGS Ji p. 47).

Specific Wisdoms – What Does my Tradition have to Share and Receive?

The threefold motto of Guru Nanak Dev Ji discussed above is an important wisdom that Sikhi has to offer. This is perhaps best exemplified through the Sikh practice of serving langar (blessed food). Guru Nanak Dev Ji inaugurated the practice of langar when his father gave him twenty rupees to start a business. Contrary to his father's expectations and much to his consternation, Guru Nanak Dev Ji spent this money on serving food to sacred and holy people. This profound eternal act became known as Sacha Sodha – the righteous transaction. Since then, langar has become the cornerstone of Sikh religious practices and embodies that very ethos today.

Langar is an institution that serves blessed food unconditionally to all. What differentiates langar from other acts of providing food is that it is served twenty-four hours a day all year round. The idea that there are set meal times such as lunch and dinner is irrelevant at the Gurudwara (Sikh place of worship), because any hour is a mealtime. Langar is a community kitchen that above all else is a labour of love and an integral part of both service to the Almighty as well as to God's creation. The threefold motto of naam japo, kirat karo and wand ke chhako is embodied within the practice of langar, which throughout all its stages, is linked inextricably with prayer. It is to be financed through one's honest living and shared amongst all. It is not only a benevolent and charitable act but is meant to embody humility, equality and love for all those involved in its preparation, its serving as well as its consumption.

A living example of this tradition was the serving of langar carried out by the Sikh community at the 2004 Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions in Barcelona. What was remarkable here was not that the Sikhs served langar. Rather, what was more important was the effect of this

profound act. It led to people of all faiths coming together to engage in the preparation, and the serving langar and in the cleaning up process. In Barcelona, langar was no longer just a Sikh institution; it became a concrete way of sharing – an example of how faiths give and receive from each other in a responsible manner.

Receiving is also an integral part of Sikhi. Indeed, the very definition of a Sikh is a 'learner' and, as such, learning is a lifetime pursuit. The greatest example of receiving in the Sikh faith is the equal status that is accorded to the writings of Hindu and Muslim saints. The Guru Granth Sahib Ji is a Divine, revealed, sacred Scripture that was compiled by the Gurus for all of humanity. Guru Granth Sahib Ji is a perfect example of interfaith harmony comprising the verses of the Gurus as well as Hindu and Muslim Saints whose writings correspond with the teachings of the Sikh Gurus. Significantly, the teachings of these Muslim and Hindu Saints are accorded the same status as that of the Gurus. This is further evidence of the Sikh belief about the commonality of all humanity. It forces them to recognise that within the infinite context there are countless possibilities.

For example, the crucifixion of Christ is as perfect an example of compassion as there is, and Sikhs have much to receive from understanding the power and love of that act. Most importantly, as a lifelong learner, a Sikh has a responsibility to learn from anyone that has the capacity to teach. This necessitates adopting a critical stance and an ethical position which allow Sikhs to engage with others in non-coercive, non-dominative and non-essentialist ways. This means that in order to share responsibly Sikhs do not have the right to impose their particular teachings but also that they have to be particularly vigilant of the right of other traditions to freely practice their faiths. It was in this context that the ninth Guru, Guru Tegh Bhadur Ji, sacrificed his life in order that the Hindus who were being persecuted by the Mughal Empire could

freely practice their faith. In short, he personified the very principle of parupkari, the yearning for doing good for others.

Sharing Wisdoms – Love and Forgiveness

Sikhi's most profound precept is love. In this paper, it has been suggested often that acquiring wisdom requires one to love both God and the entire creation. And, it is precisely this love that necessitates that one shares wisdom not as an obligation but as a gift, an unconditional gift, for which one does not expect to receive anything in return. The SGGS Ji is full of references to the love-relationship between bhakta (devotee) and prabhu (the gracious and loving Lord), which is essentially a spiritual experience of union between the two.

This is akin to the Sikh marriage ceremony or the Lavan, the circumambulation of the Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji, whilst reciting four passages that suggest that a human bonding in marriage is the ground for the spiritual marriage with God. In Sikhi, humans are all feminised and God is the male who has to be wooed through love and total surrender. According to the Sikh Gurus, spiritual love is the concentration of our total being in love. Sheikh Farid for whom "greed is the negation of love" portrays God as the "sweet, loving, compassionate, provident, master, magnanimous, and beloved" (Singh 1999: 36). However, loving and serving God is only one part of the prescription, whereas to love and serve humanity is the other complementary part. Hence, the love of God and the love of people are both important as Guru Nanak Dev Ji illustrates:

Listen my heart:

Let thy love be that of the lotus for the pool,

Though the ripples shake the lotus and torment it,

It flowers and loves even more the waters...

Listen my heart: love God ceaselessly

As the fish loves water...

O my heart listen:

Love God as water loves milk.

The water must suffer, must evaporate

Before the heat can touch the milk (as cited in Singh 1999: 38).

In Sikhi, God is without any enmity, malice or ill-will. God is love. He is the Lord of every being. He is merciful, compassionate and the protector of all beings. It is precisely these Godly attributes that can be adopted by humans in relation to fellow beings. Hence, just as God is friendly towards us, we should all be friendly to fellow beings (SGGS Ji, p. 671). It was in this context that Guru Gobind Singh Ji declared that "I recognize the entire humanity as one single race" (Dasam Granth, Akal Ustat, p. 85).

Just as love is central to Sikhi, so is forgiveness. Sikhi recognises that as humans we are frail and prone to transgress all the time. But it is through prayer that Sikhs can seek forgiveness from the Lord who is all-loving. Forgiveness is perhaps one of the greatest spiritual gifts. It enables one to be

relieved of the sorrows of the past. But it is pertinent to ask what forgiveness means. Forgiveness does not in any way justify or condone harmful actions. Rather, forgiveness entails recognising that, "Never again will I knowingly allow this to happen." Forgiveness is an opportunity to let go of pain and resentment. Guru Nanak Dev Ji has given a very appropriate place to forgiveness and says that forgiveness is good conduct and that it breeds contentment: "to imbibe the spirit of forgiveness is for me the fasting, good conduct and contentment" (SGGS Ji, p. 223).

The Sikh scriptures contain several textual sources that illustrate the centrality and the benefits of forgiveness. Forgiveness of the Lord is sought and shown to be a virtue. Indeed, it is made clear that to be able to forgive others, we have to forgive ourselves first, and then ask forgiveness from others for the hurt and pain caused by us to them. Asking forgiveness of others and forgiving oneself is an act of great humility and shows one's faith in God and the ability to obey the Divine mandate. Without forbearance one perishes spiritually. As Guru Nanak says: "Without forgiveness and forbearance innumerable have perished" (SGGS p. 937).

Question 6:

Does the notion of forgiving yourself have an echo in your tradition?

A good example of forgiveness can be illustrated through the parable of Bhai Joga Singh, who was unconditionally forgiven by Guru Gobind Singh Ji. From an early age, Bhai Joga Singh lived at the Guru's Darbar and was regarded as a great devotee. One day the Guru asked him his name and he replied, "O true Guru, my name is Joga Singh." The Guru asked, "Whose Joga you are?" (which can be translated "for whom are you?"). To this he replied, "I am Guru Joga (I am for the Guru)." In response, the Guru promised, "If you

are Guru Joga, then Guru is tere Joga" (if you are for the Guru, then the Guru is for you).

After some time, Joga Singh went home to Peshawar to get married at the instigation of his parents. It is often recalled that when the marriage ceremony had been partly completed a man arrived with an urgent message from the Guru asking Bhai Joga Singh to return to Anandpur immediately. At once, Bhai Joga Singh left for Anandpur thereby obeying the Guru's hukam (command). During this journey, the parable recounts that his ego was hugely inflated and he thought to himself, "Who could have acted like me? Certainly very few Sikhs would carry out the Guru's order like I have." That night Bhai Joga Singh was overwhelmed by evil-passion, and he made his way to the house of a prostitute. As soon as he reached the house of the prostitute, a guard appeared and would not allow Bhai Joga Singh to enter the house. Despite repeated attempts the guard refused to allow him to enter. When he reached Anandpur, Bhai Joga Singh appeared before the Guru who reminded him of the promise that he had made many years ago. The Guru explained that the previous night he had to appear in the garb of a guard to protect him. Bhai .Joga Singh fell at Guru's feet and asked for forgiveness.

This parable shows clearly that even when we transgress (which as humans we continuously do), God is all loving and forgiving. Rather than condemning Bhai Joga Singh, Guru Gobind Singh took extraordinary measures to protect his disciple. The significance for Sikhs of this parable is that they have to inculcate this very spirit of forgiveness in the practice of everyday life. The centrality of forgiveness is further illustrated in the following statements from the SGGS Ji:

By adopting forgiveness and gathering truth, one partakes of God's name, the nectar (261).

Still your duality and hold fast to forgiveness (343).

Hold on to forgiveness in the refuge of the true Guru (1030).

The attributes (of a person of God) are the gathering of the riches of forgiveness (1171).

Where there is greed, there is death. Where there is forgiveness there is God Himself (1372).

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Notes:

- ¹ The Sikh scholar Avtar Singh recalled an event that profoundly challenged him. He was visiting a Saint and when he arrived he found a large gathering that was listening attentively to subjects such as the nature of reality and our knowledge of it. The Saint, a lay seeker of knowledge, he points out, was keeping alive the urge for metaphysics. He juxtaposes this to the difficulty that he had in the classroom where he taught philosophy and Sikhi (Singh 1998: 161).
- ² It must be noted that the contemporary usage of the term *giani* is often simply meant to denote those who lead prayers in a Gurudwara or Sikh place of worship. However, Sikhs were traditionally referred to as the circle of *gianis*, that is as knowledgeable and learned persons who had acquired the knowledge of the Creator and creation through a sustained study of the scriptures under the guidance of a spiritual teacher. As Wazir Singh puts it, “Gianis among the Sikh community had a tradition of interpreting the Guru-Granth compositions to the people, of leading a disciplined life that influenced others, and devoting themselves to study, often by way of avocation” (Singh 1999: 17).
- ³ I am indebted to Bhai Sahib Mohinder Singh for his clear exposition of this threefold motto.