

CIRCLE OF LIFE

Human life begins when the spark of the individual soul is separated from the Universal Soul. It goes on adopting forms according to its deeds and actions. Until it is taken back and reabsorbed in the Universal Soul, the life and death circle goes on. The tenth Satguru has vividly described this process in the following *Kabit in Akal Ustat* :

As from one fire millions of sparks arise

ਜੈਸੇ ਏਕ ਆਗ ਤੇ ਕਨੂਕਾ ਕੋਟ ਆਗ ਉੱਠੇ,

Though rising separately, they unite again in the fire;

ਨਿਆਰੇ ਨਿਆਰੇ ਹੁਇਕੈ ਫਿਰ ਆਗ ਮੈ ਮਿਲਾਹਿਗੇ ।

As from one heap of dust several particles of dust fill the air,

ਜੈਸੇ ਏਕ ਧੂਰ ਤੇ ਅਨੇਕ ਧੂਰ ਪੂਰਤ ਹੈ,

And on filling it again blend with the dust;

ਧੂਰ ਕੇ ਕਨੂਕਾ ਫੇਰ ਧੂਰ ਹੀ ਸਮਾਹਿਗੇ ।

As in one stream millions of waves are produced,

ਜੈਸੇ ਏਕ ਨਦ ਤੇ ਤਰੰਗ ਕੋਟ ਉਪਜਤ ਹੈ,

The waves being made of water all become water;

ਪਾਨ ਕੇ ਤਰੰਗ ਸਬੈ ਪਾਨ ਹੀ ਕਹਾਹਿਗੇ ।

So from God's Form nonsentient and sentient things are manifested;

ਤੈਸੇ ਬਿਸਵ ਰੂਪ ਤੇ ਅਭੂਤ ਭੂਤ ਪ੍ਰਗਟ ਹੋਇ,

And springing from Him, shall all be united in Him again.

ਤਾਹੀ ਤੇ ਉਪਜ ਸਬੈ ਤਾਹੀ ਮੈ ਸਮਾਹਿਗੇ ।

Guru Nanak Dev in *Japu* says :

According to our actions we get the next birth, but

salvation lies in Grace alone.

ਕਰਮੀ ਆਵੈ ਕਪੜਾ ਨਦਰੀ ਮੋਖੁ ਦੁਆਰੁ ॥

After roaming through many ages and generations when we improve our actions, we get better life. By and by we get higher and higher and ultimately human form is bestowed upon us. This is an opportunity to soar high and attain nearness. In *Rag Sorath*, the ninth Guru says :

After passing through age upon age, I attained the human vesture.

ਫਿਰਤ ਫਿਰਤ ਬਹੁਤੇ ਜੁਗ ਹਾਰਿਓ ਮਾਨਸ ਦੇਹ ਲਹੀ ॥

Nanak says, this is the opportunity to realise God, then why do you not 'remember' Him.

ਨਾਨਕ ਕਹਤ ਮਿਲਨ ਕੀ ਬਰੀਆ ਸਿਮਰਤ ਕਹਾ ਨਹੀ ॥

The fifth Guru in *Maru Solhe* cautions us lest we miss this opportunity :

Out of eighty-four *lacs* of species, man is blessed with glory.

ਲਖ ਚਉਰਾਸੀਹ ਜੋਨਿ ਸਬਾਈ ॥ ਮਾਣਸ ਕਉ ਪੁਭਿ ਦੀਈ ਵਡਿਆਈ ॥

Whosoever misses this opportunity suffers in the cycle of coming and going.

ਇਸੁ ਪਉੜੀ ਤੇ ਜੋ ਨਰੁ ਚੁਕੈ ਸੋ ਆਇ ਜਾਇ ਦੁਖੁ ਪਾਇਦਾ ॥

He again warns in *Sri Rag* :

O man, you came to earn profit,

ਪ੍ਰਾਣੀ ਤੂੰ ਆਇਆ ਲਾਹਾ ਲੈਣਿ ॥

but you are engaged in useless actions while the night of life is passing away.

ਲਗਾ ਕਿਤੁ ਕੁਫਕੜੇ ਸਭ ਮੁਕਦੀ ਚਲੀ ਰੈਣਿ ॥

This cycle of life and death can be successfully completed by the help, guidance, and Grace of Satguru. The adage is : First deserve then desire. To fulfil the condition to deserve, we have to work and act in such a way that it pleases the Guru and it is approved by him. This can be done by moulding our life and actions according to the teachings in the *Guru Shabd*. Still we cannot lay a claim to it. That will not be in accordance with the Satguru's teachings. This will be an indication of ego lurking in us. But we can then pray for Grace.

Action, Karam

In *Japu* the Satguru says :

The principles of meeting and drifting away regulate our conduct, and it is fate which counts.

ਸੰਜੋਗੁ ਵਿਜੋਗੁ ਦੁਇ ਕਾਰ ਚਲਾਵਹਿ ਲੇਖੇ ਆਵਹਿ ਭਾਗ ॥

The following line in the *Japu* also needs noting :

According to their own actions some shall attain nearness, while others shall be kept afar.

ਕਰਮੀ ਆਪੇ ਆਪਣੀ ਕੇ ਨੇੜੈ ਕੇ ਦੂਰਿ ॥

When both of the above lines are read together it becomes evident that it is our actions which when accumulated shape our fortune. It is, thus, our actions which count for our union and nearness or separation and drifting away from the Fountain-head of Life. Good actions and values are of two kinds, those that are active and the other passive, former could be called positive, the latter negative, that is, the acts of commission and omission. It is easy not to tell a lie, not to molest a woman, not to snatch away what is another's, not to beat or kill an innocent person and so on, and these are desirable values all right. But it requires great courage, and strong will and readiness to sacrifice and suffer for another, when you get up and challenge the aggressor who is molesting a woman or like Ahmed Shah Abdali, is carrying away girls to be sold off as slaves, or when you get hold of a person picking another's pocket, or when you volunteer to depose the truth in a court in favour of a person you know to be innocent, or when you go to help and rescue a person being beaten or mercilessly killed by a robber, and so on. In Sikhism much higher place is given to good actions, and deeds, that are active and positive, as is said in Guru Nanak's *Japu* :

There can be no worship without doing good deeds.

ਵਿਣੁ ਗੁਣ ਕੀਤੇ ਭਗਤਿ ਨ ਹੋਇ ॥

This principle of leading a life of action, an integrated whole of spiritual, intellectual, social and political activity, which aims at a progressive movement on all planes of mankind towards God-head, to be achieved not by renunciation but in *sangat* (society), was inculcated in Sikhism since its very inception. Sometimes

some people, who do not wish us well, say that Guru Nanak Dev was a man of peace and he taught only spiritual lessons and guided us in spiritual development, and that it was the sixth and then the tenth Guru, who turned the Sikhs into a militant class. Nothing could be more misleading than this. As far as peace of mind is concerned, it is an essential requirement. But it depends on the correct attitude our mind adopts by intellectual understanding (*Gian*) and knowledge of the *Gurshabd* and its interpretation in everyday life. On the political and worldly plane, peace means status quo and contentment resulting in inaction. Inaction in other words means death. But opposed to this, the living of a Sikh is a dynamic movement for emancipation and liberation.

Conflict, Struggle and Victory

Struggle, therefore, becomes a part of Sikh life. As we know, it was Guru Nanak himself who set the example not only by raising a voice of protest but also even courting arrest at Saidpur during Babar's invasion. The principle of the Sikhs has, ever since, been not to bow before brute force and aggression or injustice. They do not believe in avoiding a conflict by surrender and submission. They are even ready to face and indeed welcome a conflict if it is against a bully or an oppressor of the weak. They are enjoined upon to die rather than to surrender. Sikhism thus becomes the antithesis of oppression whether spiritual, social, intellectual or political. A Sikh's mission thus becomes one of liberation and emancipation from all these and is symbolized in the sword (*Sri Sahib*). The tenth Nanak, Guru Gobind Singh has endorsed and finalised this principle in these words :

Blest is his life in this world who repeateth God's Name with his tongue and meditateth on resistance in his heart.

ਧੰਨ ਜੀਉ ਤਾਕੇ ਜਗ ਮੈ ਮੁਖ ਤੇ ਹਰਿ ਚਿਤ ਮੇਂ ਜੁਧ ਬਿਚਾਰੈ ।

The body is fleeting and shall not abide forever; people embarking the ship of fame, shall cross the ocean of the world.

ਦੇਹ ਅਨਿਤ ਨ ਨਿਤ ਰਹੇ ਜਸ ਨਾਵ ਚੜੈ ਭਵ ਸਾਗਰ ਤਾਰੈ ।

Make this body a house of calm resignation, light thine

understanding like a lamp.

ਧੀਰਜ ਧਾਮ ਬਨਾਇ ਰਹੈ ਤਨ ਬੁਧ ਸੁ ਦੀਪਕ ਜਿਓਂ ਉਜਿਆਰੈ ।

Take the broom of Divine Knowledge into thy hands and sweep away the filth of timidity.

ਗਿਆਨ ਹਿ ਕੀ ਬਢਨੀ ਮਨੋ ਹਾਥ ਲੈ ਕਾਤਰਤਾ ਕੁਤਵਾਰ ਬੁਹਾਰੈ ।

The conflict, the struggle, the fight, on all fronts has to be continuously, persistently and dextrously fought. A Sikh has to remain ever ready (ਤਿਆਰ ਬਰ ਤਿਆਰ) for it. We have to fulfil our duty (ਧਰਮ) towards both our Creator and His Manifestation, the creation. If in this performance any obstacle comes in the way, it has to be swept away. It was in this perspective that the sixth Satguru wore two swords of *miri* and *piri*, representing spiritual and worldly powers which were merged in the hands of the tenth Satguru into one double-edged sword called *khanda*.

As long as life lasts, the struggle must continue. Sikhism does not believe in any escape from it, and there is no place for *sanyas* (ਸੰਨਿਆਸ) in it. The tenth Master says :

When the end of life comes, let me die fighting in the thick of the battle.

ਜਬ ਆਵ ਕੀ ਅਉਧ ਨਿਧਾਨ ਬਣੇ ਅਤਿ ਹੀ ਰਣ ਮੈ ਤਬ ਝੂਝ ਮਰੋਂ ।

The struggle has to be fought and won. We do not take anything lying down. The slogan given to us is 'Victory', *Fateh*. The Khalsa is of the God-Guru (ਵਾਹਿਗੁਰੂ ਜੀ ਕਾ ਖਾਲਸਾ) and so is Victory (ਵਾਹਿਗੁਰੂ ਜੀ ਕੀ ਫਤਿਹ)