

VINOBA BHAVE
COMMENTARY ON JAPUJI

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Guru Nanak's Great Composition

*English Translation with Notes and
Introduction*
by

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FOREWORD

It gives me great pleasure to present to the public this book, being an English translation with necessary marginal notes, of the Hindi Commentary of Shri Vinoba Bhave on Japuji. Japuji, Guru Nanak's great philosophical-spiritual text, has aroused India-wide interest for its profound insight into the spiritual and moral life, and the guidance it affords to man to order his life in search for the Infinite and to realize high ideals. As stated by the Translator, it has been commented upon a large number of times in the various Indian languages, and by now several versions in English also exist. Like the Gita, with which it calls comparison, it has an inexhaustible appeal, which makes it a rich mine to work for the interpretation of spiritual ideals.

Shri Vinoba Bhave's Commentary is his gift of love to the people of the Punjab, who should be grateful to this man of God and noble ideals for this interpretation of their sacred text from a wide spiritual and humanitarian point of view. In the count of the large number of commentaries on Japuji, Shri Vinoba's should occupy a place with the best. This is marvellous in view of the fact that he was exploring an undoubtedly difficult text, expressed in a mixture of medieval Punjabi and Braj Hindi. But the spiritual thought of India, in essentials and fundamentals, being common and, at base, closely integrated, a pure-hearted and sincere seeker from one region can easily understand and appreciate the spiritual thoughts contained in the religious works of other regions. It is this, along with the high calibre of the mind of Shri Vinoba which has helped him to produce this profoundly satisfying work.

Punjabi University, Patiala, has already put out a large volume of literature on the study of religion, besides other themes. It is hoped, this book will initiate English-knowing seekers after truth and students of religious thought everywhere, to the genius and vision of Guru Nanak and the Sikh religious tradition of which he

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is the Founder. With these few words I commend this book to the reading public.

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Vice-Chancellor

Punjabi University, Patiala
March 28, 1973

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Japuji is one of the important spiritual texts of the Indian people, which has been recited, translated and commented upon not only by Sikhs to whose faith it is basic and integral, but by Punjabis in general, as also by people using a number of other Indian languages, particularly Hindi, Urdu and Bengali. Lately, on the occasion of the Fifth Centenary of Guru Nanak's birth which was celebrated in 1969, it got rendered into several other Indian languages besides these mentioned above, and into some European languages as well. In Malaysia and other parts of the Far East, where Sikhs are residing in considerable numbers, its exposition has also been made in those languages. Among the Sikhs and people living in close cultural and spiritual contacts with the Sikh people, Japuji has found earnest seekers of its truths over the centuries, so that in Brajī, Hindi, Punjabi, Urdu and now since over seventy years, in English it has been commented upon over and over again. More than a hundred such commentaries and exegetical texts exist, in addition to about a dozen verse-renderings in Urdu, several of them fine specimens of the poetic art. This process is still continuing, and newer generations of scholars and seekers are at the task to which they come with earnest, dedicated spirits.

Although Japuji is comparatively a brief text, and as Shri Vinoba Bhave has pointed out, its volume is about one-fourth only of Gīta, which itself is a compact composition, its popularity has been great indeed. Standing at the head of the Sikh Scripture, Adi Granth its opening verse, called *Mul-Mantra* (lit. Fundamental Chant) is used on occasions to invoke divine blessing. As one reads through Adi Granth, one constantly comes upon echoes and amplifications of its expressions and turns of phrase, both in the compositions of Guru Nanak himself, who is its author and of his spiritual successors, the Gurus. In the disquisitional and devotional poems called Vars of the great savant Bhai Gurdas, whose work has been called by Guru Arjun, 'Key to the Holy Granth,'

whole texts are just renderings of the esoteric and spiritually-charged phraseology of Japuji. Expositions which bring into the discussion vast ranges of Indian philosophy have been made by Sikh scholars of a somewhat earlier period, when philosophy was an essential part of the equipment of a scholar. As said above, the process of exposition is continuing and fresh secrets and meanings are being explored in attempts further to arrive at the true meaning of what Guru Nanak in this composition has revealed in inspired flashes of vision.

The style of Japuji marks the peak of the compact, aphoristic mode in which Guru Nanak habitually expresses himself. This mode is of the *Sutra* (lit. thread—applied meaning, pregnant terse phrase) so well-known in the Sanskrit spiritual texts. That, and the fact that Guru Nanak has also drawn upon some terminology derived from Muslim spiritual sources, by his time fairly widely known in Northern India, makes the determination of its true meaning a very difficult literary undertaking. While in the case of Japuji the text has been unalterable since its inclusion in *Adi Granth*, the problems of exposition have been cropping up and wrestled with, with varying degrees of success. The rise of new social and philosophical points of view among the Sikh people has, as in the case of other great texts in various languages, whose validity has not been rendered obsolete by time, been suggesting fresh lines of emphasis for exposition, so that several points of view have been placed at the centre by scholars according to their respective backgrounds of thought. Yoga, Vedanta, ethical humanitarianism, the integral approach to life's ideals and such other points of view have been at the core of the diverse lines of exposition. All this has resulted in the accumulation of a vast body of exegetical literature on this text.

The language of Japuji is basically a blend of Western Punjabi and Brajī Hindi—the former being Guru Nanak's own spoken tongue and the latter the current medium for spiritual and intellectual writing over the Punjab and what are now called the Hindi-speaking areas. The vocabulary also shows such admixture with the philosophical terms, mostly Sanskrit based, in popular forms along with a small proportion harking back to the Muslim mystical sources. With these features the problem of making a satisfactory exposition of Japuji presents a number of difficulties.

Besides being well-versed in Indian philosophy, particularly what is called its Nirgunā-dhara (tradition of viewing the Supreme Being as the Attributeless Absolute) the person attempting an exposition of Japuji (or of any other portion of *Adi Granth*, for the matter of that) must have a thorough mastery of the northern Indian medieval languages, called collectively *Hindwi*, to penetrate its shell of meaning. Traditional renderings, handed down from of old are not always helpful, because of the habit of traditional Indian scholarship of fragmented, word by word, or even letter by letter extremely analytical and even fanciful interpretation. One has thus to a great extent, to depend upon experience and intuition and place the whole in the larger context of the teachings of *Guru Nanak* and his successors.

The commentary by *Shri Vinoba Bhave*, presented here in English rendering, was written by him originally in Hindi. *Shri Vinoba* is deeply saturated with religious learning in several traditions—particularly Hindu, Muslim and Christian. He has besides imbibed the essence of the Gandhian ethical idealism. This equipment renders him excellently qualified to comment on a scriptural text such as *Japuji*. His knowledge of medieval Indian languages is astounding, of which one finds evidence here with regard to Hindi, Gujarati and Marathi. He is known to have studied the *Koran* in its Arabic text. His knowledge of the Sanskrit sacred texts is vast and detailed. Few indeed could be better equipped to undertake such a task as *vinobaji* has done here.

As one reads through his exposition and notices his grasp of the relevant literary and technical features of *Japuji*, one is moved with great wonder and admiration. This man of action based on deep moral and religious idealism, learnt the script and language of *Japuji*, and with painstaking labour aided by his vast learning, arrived very close to its meaning—closer indeed than many who were hampered by one or the other overgrown viewpoints or by defective learning. While here and there (though such places are very few indeed) he has strayed perhaps a little from what in the total context of *Guru Nanak's* teaching his meaning could have been, his exposition is remarkably in the spirit which the original should convey. As a matter of fact, Sikhs and non-Sikhs alike will find his exposition extremely helpful and valuable.

In view of the great merit of this exposition, and the reverential attitude of mind which Shri Vinoba has brought to his theme, Punjabi University, Patiala in the Quincentenary year of Guru Nanak's birth (1969) planned to have it rendered into English. Owing to various unavoidable delays, it is only now that it has been possible to prepare it for publication.

While Shri Vinoba has, in his exposition, given the original text in Devanagari script, in the English rendering the translation from M.A. Macauliffe's *Sikh Religion, Vol. I*, has been reproduced. Macauliffe's version is the result of painstaking labour by a competent and devoted person, guided by eminent Sikh scholars of his day. It is not too old, being done at the beginning of the present century. Its renderings should be widely acceptable, though there are more than one line of interpretation of Japuji in vogue.

The present English rendering is due primarily to the efforts in the direction of producing new literature about the religion, history and culture of the Punjab, which is a valuable contribution of Punjabi University in this comparatively unexplored field. Under the able and thoughtful stewardship of Sardar Kirpal Singh Narang, its Vice-Chancellor, effort in this direction is proceeding in an ever-expanding volume. The translator earnestly hopes this effort will meet with the approval of the general reader no less than the scholar. Shri Vinoba's own style of writing is simple and straight in the Gandhian tradition which his mind has absorbed. The English rendering has attempted to keep close to the style and turn of phrase of the original.

Here and there footnotes are added by the translator, partly to elucidate certain obscure points and partly also here and there, to point out where the original exposition may have tended to stray from the spirit of the text. Where in the original some passage appeared to be redundant, it has been only alluded to and placed in brackets. The reader is requested to make a note of these points.

Notes on the Structure of Japuji

According to Sikh tradition, Japuji is an integrated whole outlining the process of spiritual enlightenment and ascent. Its constituent poems, thirty-eight in number in the original, are each called a *pauni*, which in the old Punjabi critical terminology stands

for a verse-unit, like the *band* in Persian and Urdu. 'Stanza' which is the rendering given here, would imply a uniform, planned verse-structure. This is not thus, an exact term, but it was perhaps the only one available. While these pieces are not 'stanzas' structurally, they are nevertheless parts of a whole, whose unity derives from an integrated spiritual vision.

The translation and editing is the work of Professor Gurbachan Singh Talib in general consultation with professor B K. Kalia.

- Note* : 1. All footnotes are added by the translator-editor.
2. The translation of the text, standing at the head of the commentary to each 'stanza' is from *The Sikh Religion* by M.A. Macauliffe.

JAPUJI¹

(Introduction by Shri Vinoba Bhave)

Japuji contains the essence of the spiritual vision. Guru Nanak towards the close of his life, after he had done with his 'Pilgrimages' in quest of Truth, composed it.² It has made a deep appeal to my heart. In 1940 when I was in jail in the course of 'Individual Satyagraha', I studied it for the first time. At that time I was compiling the Marathi hymns of Namdev.³ Some of his hymns in Hindi are also included in the Guru Granth. That prompted me to get a copy of the Guru Granth and read it through to find out what of Namdev is included in it. In those days a Sikh fellow-prisoner of mine used daily to recite *Japuji*. In those days I could follow it only vaguely, and did not have the means to understand it better. Certain of its portions do not lend themselves to spontaneous understanding—such for example, as *Karam Khand ki Bani Jor* (stanza 37). Therein *Karam* stands for divine grace. *Karam* is from the Arabic. Here what is expressed is the form the seeker's expression takes, when he is the recipient of divine grace. In this state he finds union with the Lord Creator.

During my tour of Punjab, I had to enter into an intimate relationship with its people. In view of that I made afresh a study of *Japuji*. This influenced me deeply. Even while dreaming in my sleep, I would recall Guru Nanak's words. On contemplation one enters into the deeper meaning of these words. The more one thinks on these, the more one meets in them. I wish to

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1. The text popularly known as *Japji*, is more correctly written as *Japuji* in consonance with the rules of Sanskrit grammar, applicable to the classical texts in the Indian languages.
 2. Several accounts exist of the process of the composition of this famous text, most of them wrapped in miracle and mystery.
 3. A famous Maharashtrian saint, whose compositions have found a place of honour in Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh Scripture.

communicate their influence on me to the Indian people at large.

In the Indian tradition both kinds of Scriptures are found—those of the detailed exegetical type and those in the terse epigrammatic form. Japuji falls in the latter category. Its thirty-eight stanzas, each called a *Pauri* (step), its opening enunciatory fundamental creed (*Mul Mantra*) and the *Slokas* (distiches) marking the Finale, together contain in themselves the essence of the religious life in a compendious form. The presentation of this essence is not couched in terms only of faith, but embodies a thought-structure. It comprises the path of enlightenment (*Jnan*), Meditation (*Dhyana*), Devotion (*Bhakti*) and Asceticism (*Sadhana*), all in conjunction. As in the eighteen aphorisms of Ishopanishad the essence of Vedanta is expressed, so in Japuji too is expressed the essence of Philosophy, Moral Thought, Metaphysics, Japuji however, does not have that extreme terseness as Ishopanishad. Its thirty-eight stanzas equal in length one hundred and sixty *Anushtap*¹ verses of Gita, which means that in length it is about one-fourth of that.

THE JAPUJI

There is but one God whose name is true, the Creator, devoid of fear and enmity, immortal, unborn, self-existent; by the favour of the Guru.

REPEAT HIS NAME

The True One was in the beginning; the True One was in the primal age.

The True One is now also, O Nanak; the True One also shall be.

Stanza I

By thinking I cannot obtain a conception of Him,
even though I think hundreds of thousands of times.

Even though I be silent and keep my attention firmly
fixed on Him, I cannot preserve silence.

The hunger of the hungry for God subsideth not, though

1. A metrical form in Sanskrit poetry.

they obtain the load of the worlds.

If man should have thousands and hundreds of thousands of devices, even one would not assist him in obtaining God.

How shall man become true before God? How shall the veil of falsehood be rent?

By walking, O Nanak, according to the will of the Commander as preordained.

The Opening

Each prayer contains some fundamental chants intended for meditation on them, as in the Bhagavat creed the Dwadashakshara¹ Mantra; in the creed centred in Rama the Tryodashakshara² Mantra; in the Shiva cult the Panchakshara³ Mantra. In the same way the fundamental chant of the Sikh faith is this Mul Mantra, enunciated by Nanak the Seer. Such chants are not 'written' or composed, but 'revealed'. The seers find them flashed on their spiritual vision. In the Islamic tradition such revelation is called 'Wahi'.

In the beginning of this Aphorism is written the digit (1), not the word One. All religions have based themselves on the unity of God. Omkar (Oankar) is a sound-symbol, a syllable. A word such as this is an aid in meditation. Omkar (Oankar) is believed to embody the essence of Divine Knowledge. The Upanishad and Gita have both employed it in this sense. In enunciating this syllable, Guru Nanak has maintained that ancient tradition. An entirely new idea, built purely on the repudiation of a pre-existing one, proves to be sterile. A new idea basing itself on one pre-existing, yields the beauty of the new along with the strength of the old. As a matter of fact, in this way it acquires added beauty. Jesus said, 'I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil'. The Prophet of Islam too said, 'I have come to confirm.' Guru Nanak has done

1. *Om Namo Bhagavate Vasudeva.*
2. A chant containing thirteen letters.
3. *Om namo Shivae.* (Note: *Mantras* are composed from time to time, as new creeds or any new aspects of these arise for propagation. In the Sikh faith too, besides *Mul Mantra*, other mantras, all based on texts from the *Adi Granth* are in use.

what these great men did. This has added force to his teaching.

Out of the innumerable names of God, Guru Nanak has selected the one called 'Sati-Nam,' (the Eternal Holy Truth). This implies that in the pursuit of this Truth, philosophy and the spiritual quest are united. Truth is taken to be the essence of God, which accords well with our age of the scientific quest. In Gita this has been elaborated into the formula 'Om Tat Sat' (Om the Eternal).

*Karta Purukh*¹ : This formula is compounded of two words signifying that God is the Creator of the universe. Also he is All-mind. 'Purukh' specifically implies that not Nature, but God is the Creator. From non-sentient creation further non-sentient creation results : Some thinkers have actually stated that the basic creative force is non-sentient Nature. Science also attempts to formulate its theory of creation. It is possible that all creation has a mind. But the use of 'Purukh' attaches to God a value independent of His creation. Even if the Creation be assumed to be non-sentient, the Creator, anyway is a mind, a consciousness. In the other event of the creation possessing a mind, the concept of the creative mind is not repudiated.

Nirbhau, Nirvair : The mind gets fixed on these two remarkable attributes. Usually such negative attributes are not applied to God; positive attributes alone are generally employed in this contest. No cause whatever can exist to make God wear Fear or Rancour. The use here of these attributes is intended to impress upon the devotee the necessity of cultivating the qualities of freedom from fear and rancour or malice.

Sat Sri Akal is the formula usually employed by the Sikhs. In the 'Rosary of Names' compiled by me I have also included the names *Akal* (Timeless, Eternal) and *Nirbhaya* (Fearless). By *Akal-Murati* is implied that which is beyond time. God is such. *Ajuni* is unborn, uncreated. *Saibhang* is *Swyambhu*, self-created—implying that all that exists proceeds from Him, while He does not originate in anything else.

Guru Prasadi : In this, God is viewed as the Enlightener. In

1. A variant of the Sanskrit *Purusha*, implying the Male Creative force as also the Supreme Being.

Gita. God is called *Anushasitaram* (Controller, Master). Here God is viewed as Creator and Enlightener. Many people designate God as Father and Mother. Guru Nanak, calling Him enlightener, seeks also His grace.

As among Muslims everything is begun with the enunciation of the Formula *Bismillah-ar-Rahman-ar-Rahim* (In the name of Allah, Merciful and Compassionate), so here too, the injunction is to begin everything in God's name. The *Mul Mantra* must be recited at the beginning of every task, the full implication being : We begin each and every task by the grace of God, who is Omkar (the Supreme Being), Eternal, Creator, All-Mind, Fearless and without Rancour; Timeless, Unborn, Self-created, the Enlightener.

The text begins with *Jap* (imperative form, implying 'recite' thou). The first words then following are *Adi Sach Jugadi Sach*. The meaning is that God is the originator of Space and Time. The Guru wishes to stress that God is the origin of Time and Space both. God was eternally present before the beginning of all time and space; He remains Eternal ever and shall so remain. Thus, in this formula all Time is taken in one sweep—Past, Present and Future.

Meditating even a million¹ times will not give us an adequate idea of God.² God-realization is beyond the power of thought. Logic fails here. Therefore, contemplation undertaken a hundred thousand times even will fail to realize God.

Next, practice of 'Silence' will not give us real peace. Physical actions will not take us nearer God. True peace (silence) will arise only when desire is stilled.

Should we heap vast stores of food, that will not assuage our hunger without eating.³

Intellect, clever arguing, thought—however great (manifold)

1. lit. One hundred thousand.
2. *Soch* here does not stand for 'thought' or meditation, as implied by Vinobaji, but is the popular form of the Sanskrit *Shauch* (Purity). So the meaning would be: No amount of ritual purification will make the mind pure; devotion alone will do this.
3. This part of the interpretation is wrong. What the text implies is : 'Whole worlds of possession will not drive out desire without contentment born of the true love of God.'

will not sustain us in after-life. So the question is posed : how may one's mind be purified and break the wall of false thinking ? The answer to this follows : The path to self-purification lies in submission to the will of God, recorded by Him for man. Thus in this stanza, the question is posed and the answer is provided in very few, brief words. Purity will come only on our giving up egoism and desires; thus alone will the wall of falsehood crumble. This style of expression is similar to Sanskrit, wherein an aphoristic expressive is followed up with the amplification there.

In the last line the term *Hukam* (Divine Ordinance) was used. How may this be known to be obeyed ? In this the mind must be purified and selfish desires thrown out of it. Involvement in desires inevitably erects the will of falsehood which conceals the true vision of the Divine Will. This can crumble only through obedience to His Will. This however, is no easy matter.

[Striking a personal note, Vinobaji here says :] 'I took to Bhoodan not because I had nothing else to do. On the contrary. But when the idea of Bhoodan came to me as a kind of inspiration, I felt, here is the Divine Command to fulfil. Since then, the more I think on this the more I get confirmed in my conviction as to the rightness of this mission. I left my Ashrama, my numerous companions, all concerns of life—as a matter of fact, my mind was with drawn from all things else. And I felt that this alone was the right path to take. I have never felt a moment of regret about this choice.

God's voice is obstructed by man's egoism and moral weakness. The great thing is to visualize what is true. But such vision is never attained with egoism intervening—with the sacrifice of the ego alone will one's thinking move along right lines and the true unflinching light of the soul be attained. With this, right action becomes easier.

Still, to obey the Divine Will is no easy task. For that, Realization alone will suffice. As I view the concerns of man, they appear to me to be void of all appeal. Man must undertake some duty : that is the very condition of living. Even the ordinary physical functions of existence depend upon activity for their proper discharge. But such activity is not directed to any higher end. Some vision must arise to direct our activity. This must for man

become a passion.

Stanza II

By His order bodies are produced; His order cannot be described.

By his order souls are infused into them; by His order greatness is obtained.

By His order men are high or low; by His order they obtain preordained pain or pleasure.

By His order some obtain their reward; by His order others must ever wander in transmigration.

All are subject to His order; none is exempt from it.

He who understandeth God's order, O Nanak, is never guilty of egoism.

In the second stanza God's Ordinance is defined. This is supreme in the universe. He who has an understanding of this is emancipated from considerations of 'I' and 'thou', 'mine' and 'thine'. Such understanding confirms the conviction that all creation is like marionettes in God's hands. Hence all desire must be surrendered to Him; nothing should be undertaken in the spirit of egoism. This viewpoint is purely spiritual. Another consideration arising from this is that man must direct his actions in accordance with the will of God. In terms of an age of science it may be said that all that happens is subordinate to the laws of nature; man's will is irrelevant. It is inconceivable that fire may not burn your hand. So, here is the exhortation to leave all to the will of God, the Supreme Controller. Following from this, obedience to the laws of nature is enjoined upon man. The attitude of egoism becomes untenable.

Similar is the teaching of Islam. 'Islam' literally means, complete surrender to the will of God. Jesus said the same. 'Thy will be done.' In Gita the Lord says in this context: 'Give up all other creeds; come under my protection alone.'

All that happens in the unwise man's involvement with the world; the emancipation of some; all activities within the human community—all this is ordained by the Divine Will. This is the conclusion arrived at by Guru Nanak. Surrender to that will is

also enjoined upon.

Stanza III

Who can sing His power? Who hath power to sing it ?

Who can sing His gifts or know His signs ?

Who can sing His attributes, His greatness, and His deeds ?

Who can sing His knowledge whose study is arduous ?

Who can sing Him, who fashioneth the body and again destroyeth it ?

Who can sing Him, who taketh away life and again restoreth it ?

Who can sing Him, who appeareth to be far, but is known to be near.

Who can sing Him, who is all-seeing and omnipresent ?

In describing Him there would never be an end.

Millions of men give millions upon millions of descriptions of Him, but they fail to describe Him.

The giver giveth; the receiver groweth weary of receiving.

In every age man subsisteth by His bounty.

The Commander by His order hath laid out the way of the world.

Nanak, God the unconcerned is happy.

There are differing ways to picture God, in accordance with the different modes of realization by men. Some picture Him as Almighty, as they have known Him in that aspect. Some speak of His bounty, to symbolize which they mention His gifts; others emphasize His qualities. Some praise His beauty. Others tell of the depth and limitlessness of the knowledge and realization about Him. Others speak of His power to ordain life and death; His cherishing care of man and the universe and also bringing about their dissolution. Some speak of His transcendence; some of His immanent omnipresence. Some see Him as though face to face in all creation. But none of these lines of delineation can exhaust His attributes. Speaking of 'millions upon millions upon millions' even will not bring us near to the end of our understanding of Him. Speaking about him will never be exhausted. His bounties are endless-only

those who receive these, find their end. For aeons He has given and all creatures have received His bounty. His Ordinance proceeds endless; He is ever joyful; His Ordinance is all-supreme-only those who obey it will find fulfilment; others will find unhappiness. Saith Nanak : He abides in supreme joy, without need. He has set up the Law for His creation. He Himself is above it.

The equivalent for 'above need' (*beparwah*) occurs also in the Upanishads, as '*avako anadara*'¹. In the Koran similar attributes find mention, such as '*ghani*'. Guru Nanak had in this matter perhaps been influenced by the Koran as also the Upanishads. Without going further into this it might be said that this might be an original inspiration. But in '*hukam*' the Koranic influence may be traceable. Guru Nanak had surely studied these scriptures. He might not have been a scholar, but acquired much learning from discussions. An inspired person does not stand in need of learning anything from discussion and debate either. In India, certain key-terms have found currency through their use by saints, which may inspire the listener with the religious vision, Japuji contains a fairly good deal of Sanskrit and Arabic² vocabulary, testifying as to its classical background. But fundamentally it contains Guru Nanak's own vision. He in effect says : 'God is beyond need and desire. Nothing binds Him. He has created the ordinance, which must be obeyed by man.'

Stanza IV

True is the Lord, true is His name; it is uttered with endless love.

People pray and beg, 'Give us, give us; the Giver giveth His gifts;

Then what can we offer Him whereby His Court may be seen ?

What words shall we utter with our lips, on hearing which He may love us ?

At the ambrosial hour of morning meditate on the true Name and God's greatness.

1. Chhandogya Upanishad-III. 14.2

2. This should be taken to include Persian.

The King One will give us a robe of honour, and by His favour we shall reach the gate of salvation.

Nanak, we shall thus know that God is altogether true.

The Lord is pure, holy; so is His Name. The language of communication with Him is Love. Infinite Love is the pathway to Him. To put it in another way, His Love is equal for all. No other language has any meaning with Him. All beg favours from Him, which He doles out infinitely. When I approach His Court, what offering shall I carry with me? He does not need any gifts, being the Bestower of all. What words that we speak will draw His Love towards us? He is, of course, eternally the fountain of Love. What man must do to draw His grace is, in the morning ambrosial hour to contemplate His greatness; to utter His holy Name. As are our deeds, so will be the vesture we get—that is our body or kind of birth.¹ But emancipation from the cycle of birth and death is determined not by our efforts alone, but by His glance of grace. Here the Guru has employed the Arabic *nadar* or *nazar*-glance.) This may also be interpreted differently as: Birth is determined by his grace, *karam*. This too is Arabic². In other words, His love and our emancipation both come through His grace. So, saith Nanak: Suffice it to understand in essence that He is purity and holiness itself and self-created. Nothing besides Him has real existence—He alone exists.

Stanza V

He is not established, nor is He created.
The pure one existeth by Himself.
They who worshipped Him have obtained honour.
Nanak, sing His praises who is the Treasury of Excellences.
Sing and hear and put His love into your hearts.
Thus shall your sorrows be removed, and you shall be
absorbed in Him who is the abode of happiness.

1. Here the reference is to the transmigratory cycle, determined by man's deeds.
2. The consensus however is that *karma* (Skt.) 'actions' or 'deeds' is meant.

Under the Guru's instruction God's word is heard; under the Guru's instruction its knowledge is acquired; under the Guru's instruction man learns that God is everywhere contained.

The Guru is Shiv; the Guru is Vishnu and Brahma; the Guru is Parvati, Lakshmi, and Saraswati.

If I knew Him, should I not describe Him ? He cannot be described by words.

My Guru hath explained one thing to me-

That there is but one Bestower on all living beings; may I not forget Him !

Vedic texts are chanted while installing a deity, to invest it with spiritual significance. But do we 'create' it ? No doubt the sculptor shapes the deity out of stone; but again, could it be said that we 'create' it ? God cannot be 'made' or 'created' by any creature. He is self-created. The Upanishad also calls Him *Swayambhu Paribhu* (self-created; created absolutely by Himself.) Again, he is designated as *Niranjana*, that is free from impurity. This term comes from Dhyana-yoga and is current in several modern languages as one of the attributive names of God. God is immaculate *in esse*. Moreover, nothing else has real existence except Himself. So, what force could have created Him ? Those who have worshipped Him whether in His Absolute or Attributive form, they alone have found the clue¹ to an understanding of Him, or have attained honour through devotion to him. What the actual meaning implied by the Guru is we have no means of knowing. But as said by Shankaracharya : Truth is not vitiated by dispute about words. What we should know is, that God who is the treasury of noble attributes, must be worshipped by us. And such worship and devotion must by us be carried to the highest point of spiritual attainment. Should our mind be fixed on this, fall in love with it, sorrows will vanish and our mind will be fixed in the state of bliss. This alone is the pathway leading to the abode where there is uninterrupted bliss. In this the sole demand on us is to devote ourselves in Love to Him.

Gurmukh Nadam Gurmukh Vedam : These phrases have such

1 The original term, *man* is variously interpreted—as 'honour' or as here, clue.

charismatic power as to send the mind into the state of absorption. *Nad* is the divine note heard in the soul in the state of meditation. And the end of knowledge is spiritual awakening (called *veda*). Meditation is of several kinds—that which is led to by contemplation or through absorption; and the spiritual light (*jnan gien*) which comes through the understanding and evaluation of what exists in the universe. *Veda* is what comes as a result of the search for enlightenment. Self-absorption leads to the state of meditation, ecstasy. Only one who has already experienced it, can help us to enter into this state of meditation. Only one who is God-absorbed (*Gurmukh*-lit. with face turned to God) may enable us to enter into this state. God is Ishwar, that is Shiva—implying that Shiva and other deities have only a notional and not real existence. He is also *Gorakh*¹ or Vishnu and Brahma. (Here another text is quoted by the commentator :) *The Guru or God is Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswar (or Shiva)*². God is also Parvati or Shakti, the consort of Shiva. So is He Laskhmi, the goddess who is believed to be the consort of *Vishnu*³. But the whole aphorism is intended to highlight the greatness of the Guru⁴.

The truth about God in the first place is hard to realize. Even when realized it is inexpressible, ineffable. God cannot be expressed in human language. Language is rendered resourceless to describe God. 'In describing the greatness of God an eloquent person may be rendered mute, while a leper may cross over a mountain' (from the Sanskrit). The Guru has emphasized the first part of this observation—that God-realization may strike one dumb with helplessness to utter anything about Him. Guru Nanak closes this stanza with affirming what his Preceptor has taught him, that God alone is the Provider of all; Him must I never put out of my mind.

Stanza VI

If I please Him, that is my place of pilgrimage to bathe in;

1 Lit. Preserver of the earth.

2. From *Skand Purana*.

3. Some commentators here interpret one syllable as standing also for Saraswati, consort of Brahma.

4. *Guru* stands also for God, the Supreme Being, as here.

if I please Him not, what ablutions shall I make ?

What can all the created beings I behold obtain without previous good acts ?

Precious stones, jewels, and gems shall be treasured up in thy heart if thou hearken to even one word of the Guru.

The Guru hath explained one thing to me—

That there is but one Bestower on all living beings; may I not forget Him.

I would willingly bathe at the holy spots (*tirthas*) should this please God. But what use such bathing if God approve not of it ? I have seen in my vision the whole creation, and come to the view that no attainment is possible without the aid of righteousness. (Here follows a brief excursus on the ambiguity involved in the use of the word *karma*)¹...Through the true Preceptor's teaching enters into man's consciousness the higher life which may be called rubies, diamonds and orient pearls. These may in vain be looked for outside of ourselves through ritual practices. Guru Arjun in a similar contest has spoken of three sovereign spiritual attainments : Truth, Contentment and Contemplation. The three values mentioned by Guru Nanak are likely to be the three mentioned by Guru Arjun. The Guru's teaching awakens the mind to higher consciousness. This is different from the ordinary intellect, which develops through the ratiocinative processes (*tarka*).

Stanza VII

Were man to live through the four ages, *yea* ten times longer;
Were he to be known on the nine continents, and were every-
body to follow in his train;

Were he to obtain a great name and praise and renown in the
world;

If God's look of favour fell not on him, no one would notice
him.

He would be accounted a worm among worms, and even
sinners would impute sin to him.

1. Vinobaji has interpreted *karma* as 'grace', but in the context of ritual bathing etc. righteous action is meant, from *karma* (Sanskrit).

Nanak, God may bestow virtue on those who are devoid of it, as well as on those who already possess it;

But no such person is seen as can bestow virtue upon Him.

Should one live for four *yugas*¹, and even ten times that; be famous all over the nine continents² and be acknowledged as the leader among men; be moreover, famous and praised over the world—with all this, without His grace all these attainments will be worthless. In the eyes of God such a person will count for less than a worm. Such a person will be a worm among worms and no more than a sinner.³ Saith Nanak : Only through God's grace may one attain good qualities, and have increase in his noble attributes. From none except God can such conferment of noble qualities come.

Here end seven stanzas. *Mul Mantra* (the fundamental creed) and these seven stanzas constitute a distinct portion of Japuji. In the original no such division has been indicated, but I, on the basis of my own study have thought of such a structural design.

To summarize this first portion : It contains God's Name as *Ek Oankar*; then follows mention of His eternity and purity through all time. Then a question has been posed—how may man come to rest in truth and tear off the veil of falsehood ? To that the reply is the inculcation of the spirit of resignation to the will of God. In the second stanza is mentioned man's egoism and worldly attachment, against which the Guru has pointed out the absoluteness of the Divine Ordinance or Will (*Hukam*). In the third stanza is a glimpse of the attributes of God, His praise. This ends with the vision : His Will ordains all. He is ever-joyful and above need. To submit to Him is the right path for man, away from his straying into different attitudes of minds. In the fourth stanza is mention of devotion or *nam*, to which we must call ourselves in the blessed morning hour. He is holy, so is His Name. To call man to this path is the principal theme of Japuji.

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1. The four 'ages' of the universe according to Indian time-computation.
 2. The Indian system of dividing the earth postulated nine 'portions' (*khanda*)
 3. In the original : arraigned by even sinners and wrong-doers.

The fifth stanza emphasizes the uncreated formlessness of God. The singing of His praises, meditation and His love is enjoyed upon man. He is omnipotent and true greatness lies in devotion to Him. The sixth stanza points out the great merit of seeking refuge in Him. Ritual bathing and such other means are permissible, provided they lead to purity of mind. Through submission to God our mind becomes a mine of qualities valuable as jewels. The seventh stanza points out the worthlessness of name and fame divorced from devotion and divine grace. One without these, however important, is no better than a crawling worm.

SECTION II

THE SECOND STEP

('Listening'¹ or Learning (acquiring) Divine Truths,
(Contemplation and Meditation,)

This second portion consists of twelve stanzas, made up of three sections of four stanzas each. This, after adding some of the first portion constitutes the first half of Japuji.

Of the three sections the first centres in the praise of 'Listening' that is, learning or acquiring Divine Truths.

Stanza VIII

By hearing the Name of God men become Sidhs, Pirs, Surs, and Nath;²

By hearing the Name man understandeth³ the real nature of the earth, its supporting bull, and Heaven;

By hearing the Name man obtaineth a knowledge of the continents, the worlds, and the nether regions.

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1. In this section, *Suniyai* (from Skt. *Shravan*) which literally means 'listening', is rendered also as 'learning', (progress of acquiring spiritual knowledge) which is the sense implied.
 2. In the original, for these attainments the terms are *Sidha*, *Pir*, *Sur*, and *Nath*. Of these *Pir* comes from the Muslim tradition, while the other three belong to the various aspects of Hinduism.
 3. Interpreted more accurately as 'from listening comes knowledge about the earth, its supporting Bull and the heavens.'

By hearing the Name death¹ doth not affect one.
Nanak, the saints are ever happy.

By hearing the Name sorrow and sin are no more.

'Listening' to God's Name, His praise, makes man an accomplished yogi, a saint, a divine being, a mighty spiritual guide. Listening brought into being² the earth, its support and the heavens; the wide world, the various celestial abodes and the lower world. Acquiring divine knowledge puts man beyond the reach of death.³ God's Name itself is Immortal (*Akal*). This stanza ends with a refrain, in which Guru Nanak says : 'God's devotees abide ever in joy and fulfilment. God's Name destroys their sorrows and sins.' Sorrow is most often rooted in sin. So, to shed sin is inevitably to end sorrow.

Editor's Note : 'Listening' used over four stanzas, is in the original '*Suniye*', which is the popular form of the Sanskrit *Shravan* (lit. 'listening'; implied meaning opening the mind and soul to divine knowledge; as for example, from scriptures or the words of a holy person.)

Stanza IX

By hearing the Name man becometh as Shiv, Brahma and Indar.

By hearing the Name even the low become highly lauded.

By hearing the Name the way of Jog and the secrets of the Body are obtained.

By hearing the Name man understandeth the real nature of the Shastars, the Simritis, and the Veds.

Nanak, the saints are ever happy.

By hearing the Name sorrow and sin are no more.

Shiva, Brahma and Indra are substitute forms of God. Each of these is a divine thought taking shape.² (Learning divine truths elevates man to the status of these divine beings.) Divine learning invests even a person of low qualities with praiseworthy attributes. Divine learning also reveals to man the secrets of

1. Transmigration, as also spiritual death is meant.

2. Here the interpretation of the first line is missing, which is provided by the editor in brackets.

Yoga-praxis, and the various 'bodies'¹ investing the human personality. Divine learning further gives one insight into the essence of Shastras, Simritis and the Vedas.² Saith Nanak : God's devotees abide ever in joy and fulfilment. God's Name destroys their sorrows and sins.³

Stanza X

By hearing the Name truth, contentment, and divine knowledge are obtained.

Hearing the Name is equal to bathing at the sixty-eight places of pilgrimage.

By hearing the Name and reading it man obtaineth honour.

By hearing the Name the mind is composed and fixed on God. Nanak, the saints are ever happy.

By hearing the Name sorrow and sin are no more.

*Satya, Santokh, (Santosh), Gian (Jnan)*⁴—These three are the great jewels (highest values). The essence of the Guru Granth is contained in these three attributes of man's soul. (Divine knowledge brings to man Truth, Contentment and Enlightenment.) In such knowledge is implicit the merit of bathing at the sixty-eight holy places.⁵ From divine knowledge comes the merit attaching to the study of holy scriptures. Such knowledge gives man an insight into the nature of meditation induced without the *praxis* of Hatha-yoga.⁶ Saith Nanak : God's devotees abide over in joy and fulfilment. God's Name destroys their sorrows and sins.

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1. These are believed to be the 'gross', 'subtle' and other bodies'.
 2. Vari us Indian (Hindu) sacred Scriptures.
 3. This is the 'refrain,' repeated also in stanzas X and XI.
 4. These serially stand for Truth, Contentment, Enlightenment.
 5. This is the number traditionally given of the holy bathing-places (*tirthas*) in India.
 6. *Dhyana* is meditation, while *Sahj* is the process commended by Guru Nanak. It stands for devotion, prayer, meditation as against the *praxis* recommended in Hatha-yoga and Tantrism etc. The correct interpretation would, however be : 'Listening induces devotion and meditation.'

Stanza XI

By hearing the Name, the depth of the sea of virtue is sounded.

By hearing the Name men become Shaikhs, Pirs and Emperors.

By hearing the Name a blind man findeth his way.

By hearing the Name the unfathomable becometh fathomable.

Nanak, the saints are ever happy.

By hearing the Name sorrow and sin are no more.

From divine knowledge one enters into the minds of men of noble attributes. From such 'listening' one derives spiritual greatness (lit. one becomes *Sheikh*, *Pir* and *Patishah*¹—that is, comes to great spiritual heights.) Divine knowledge will reveal the Path, even to the (spiritually) blind, and to one who 'learns', all mysteries will be revealed. Saith Nanak: God's devotees abide ever in joy and fulfilment. God's Name destroys their sorrows and sins.

In these four stanzas, Guru Nanak appears to commend what has been said also in the Upanishad—*Listen, contemplate and be absorbed*. While in the foregoing stanzas is given the praise of 'Listening' in the four following the theme is Contemplation (*Manan*).

Stanza XII

The condition of him who obeyeth God cannot be described.

Whoever trieth to describe it, shall afterward repent.

There is no paper, or pen, or writer

To describe *the condition* of him who obeyeth God.

So pure is His name—

Whoever obeyeth God knoweth *the pleasure of it* in his own heart.

1. Serially these mean—Muslim mystic, holy man and those of the highest spirituality. *Ptishah* (lit. king) here is intended to convey the idea of spiritual and not temporal eminence. Some Muslim Sufis are given the honorific title of *Sultan* or *Shah*.

Manne ki Gati—By this is meant the greatness of one who contemplates God.

None can measure the heights of the spiritual attainment of the man of contemplation. Anyone attempting such estimation will only regret his own shortcoming in this regard. There is no limit to the greatness of man of contemplation. Human language (lit. paper and pen) will find itself inadequate, however intense the concentration (lit, sitting) of one attempting to record it. Rare will be the man who may arrive at the greatness of God's Immaculate Name.¹

Stanza XIII

By obeying Him wisdom and understanding enter the mind;
By obeying Him man knoweth all worlds;
By obeying Him man suffereth not punishment;
By obeying Him man shall not depart with Jam—
So pure is God's name—
Whoever obeyeth God knoweth the pleasure of it in his own heart.

Contemplation induces Absorption in God and enlightens the mind. From contemplation comes the Knowledge² of the universe (lit. all mansions). That is, to one who contemplates, the knowledge of the blessings of God, spread throughout the universe, descends. Contemplation saves one from the buffets of the agents of divine retribution, and the wrath of Yama.³ Such is the Immaculate Name of God—rare is the human being who may arrive at its greatness.

Stanza XIV

By obeying Him man's path is not obstructed;

1. Part of the last line of the text has been glossed over in the original commentary.
2. By 'knowledge' is implied knowledge of the esoteric mysteries which the ordinary intellect cannot get at.
3. Yama in Indian mythology is the God of death and retribution, also called *Dharma-raj* (Dispenser of Divine Justice).

By obeying Him man departeth with honour and distinction;
By obeying Him man proceedeth in ecstasy on his way;
By obeying Him man formeth an alliance with virtue—
So pure is God's name—

Who ever obeyeth God knoweth the pleasure of it in his own heart.

Contemplation removes the obstacles from the path of spiritual ascent. One who contemplates, his greatness will be manifest throughout the universe. Contemplation eliminates the separateness of creeds, and joins man to the true essence of Religion. Here Guru Nanak has brought out the distinction between partial creeds and the essence of Religion. In Vedanta too occurs a similar insight : "The spiritual life rests on the essence of Dharma where all creeds (Paths) are eliminated."

Stanza XV

By obeying Him man attaineth the gate of salvation;
By obeying Him man is saved with his family;
By obeying Him the Guru is saved, and saveth his disciples;
By obeying Him, O Nanak, man wandereth not is quest of alms—

So pure is God's name—

Whoever obeyeth God knoweth the pleasure of it in his own heart.

Contemplation leads man to the door of liberation (*moksha*), for himself and those associated with him. From contemplation, liberation comes to the Preceptor and Disciple both, who help others with their liberation (lit. swimming across the ocean of life.) One who engages in contemplation is emancipated from all desire (lit. does not beg from door to door). Such is the Immaculate Name of God—rare is the man who may arrive at its greatness.

(Through God's name impurities of the mind are removed. Here the stage of contemplation ends and the next stage, Absorption—*Dhyana*—begins.)

Stanza XVI

The elect are acceptable, the elect are distinguished;

The elect obtain honour in God's court;
 The elect shed lustre on the courts of kings.
 The attention of the elect is bestowed on the one Guru.
 If any one say he can form an idea of God, he may say so,
 But the Creator's works cannot be numbered.
 The bull *that is spoken of* is righteousness, the offspring of
 mercy,
 Which supported by patience maintaineth the order of nature.
 Whoever understandeth this is a true man.
 What a load there is upon the bull !
 Beyond this earth there are more worlds, more and more.
 What power can support their weight ?
 The names of living things, their species, and colours
 Have all been written with a flowing pen.
 Doth any one know how to write an account of them ?
 If the account were written, how great it would be !
 What power and beautiful form are Thine, O God !
 Who hath power to know how great Thy gifts are ?
 By one word Thou didst effect the expansion of the world,
 Whereby hundreds of thousands of rivers were produced.
 What power have I to describe Thee ?
 So powerless am I, that I cannot even once be a sacrifice unto
 Thee.

Whatever pleaseth Thee is good.

Thou, O Formless One, art ever secure.

In accordance with the order already indicated, after *Sravan*
 (*Suniye*—Listening) and *Manan* (*Mannai*—Contemplation) the
 next step is *Dhyana* (Absorption) of which consideration is taken
 up next. Contemplation is an activity of the intellect, but Absorp-
 tion lies beyond it. Guru Nanak, therefore, has defined Absorption
 as Devotion. *Dhyana* is such complete Absorption that it eliminates
 everything else except the object into which the seeker is absorbing
 himself. The Upanishads define this state as identification of the
 self with the object of devotion; that is, realization of it.

The Elect of God are approved by Him. They alone are the
 highest among mankind. (*Panch*, the term used here, implies one
 who contemplates God.) Such alone will be truly honoured. From
 them alone will arise the glory of the Royal Court (i.e. the Court

Divine). This would mean that those alone will be entitled to social, religious and state honour who 'listen' to the glory of God, contemplate it and are absorbed in it. Of these leaders among men, saints and seekers, such devotion alone is the Master and Guide. In other words, they are wholly absorbed in God. They have shed all egoism. (Here in the commentary intervenes a brief excursus on a different and more mundane interpretation, which, however, is not emphasized by the writer—*Editor*).

On contemplation, one will inevitably arrive at the infinitude of God's creation. His power of expression will not be able to cope with his apprehension.

In the next verse, Guru Nanak has expressed his vision of creation in the figure of the mythical Bull supporting the earth. The Mahabharata says : 'Dharam is a Bull'. In the Age of Righteousness, it stood on four legs. In the next age (*Treta*) one of these got lopped off, another in *Dwapar*. In *Kaliyuga* (the present age of sin), he finds support only on one leg. Guru Nanak asks, which is that Bull, supporting the earth? And answers, it is Dharma—Righteousness. The physical bull is born of the cow; but this Bull is born of Compassion (*Daya*). This bull, support of the earth, has tied it up with the string of contentment, and thus given it harmony and order. Through contentment (morality, disciplined character) it has bound the whole earth in love. In the beginning was created divine compassion, out of which the world took its birth. While God is self-created, mankind arose from divine compassion, and rested on Dharma. Without contentment (morality) ordered life is impossible. Morality gave rise to harmony and fellow-feeling.

Whoever enters into the secret of this, his mind will be purified. On such a one will rest the truth of God. He will learn that the entire universe is pervaded by God. Here in a quatrain the Guru has revealed the mystery underlying creation. God who is the origin of all, is eternal and immutable. Moved by compassion, He created the universe. Then appeared Dharma which operates through morality. That in its place creates harmony, fellow-feeling. Anyone contemplating this, will naturally consider what a heavy load rests on the Bull ! What in science is called gravity, here has been designated as Dharma, which implies

that this truth can also be expressed in scientific terms.

There are worlds above¹ worlds, as is testified by Astronomy. In the Veda is a passage (*sukta*) *Aghamarshana* (Evil-destroying) which is recited at the twilight hour. While the other Veda-passages are believed to have the potency to destroy separate evils, this particular passage is destructive of all evils. But in this passage there is no word about the destruction of evil, but it contains instead an account of creation. It says : 'God recited prayers in the beginning but could not think of a way to create the universe. Then He performed penance and contemplated. Then again for the purpose of creation, He performed meditative penance. After deep meditation, He created Cosmic Order and Truth. Out of these He made day, night, sun, moon, time and other objects.' This passage thus expresses the essence of creation, its limitlessness and its moral basis. As a result of the contemplation of this passage, egoism is eliminated. Man sees the pettiness of his own self. One who enters into this state will be freed of the tendency towards evil. Guru Nanak has expressed in succinct form what the Veda has recorded—that one who understands the secret of creation will be rendered pure of mind. Whoever contemplates this, will be struck with the vision of infinity. Guru Nanak has queried, what support lies below the earth ? On what force does it rest ? His answer is, Dharma. On further contemplation as to the support on which Dharma rests, he touches on the Creator.

The vast world contains countless living creatures, their classes and categories, colours and names. In God's record these are being ceaselessly entered. Who may write down an account of all these ? What may be the extent of the power of such an accompter ? Who can decipher what God has recorded ? How infinite His might ! How splendid His beauty ! What count His bounty ? What the vastness of His creation ? The Guru has answered : With one Word He created all. The universe grew out of a word, a sound. From that Word have appeared millions of rivers, that is, sources of life.

How may I express the extent of God's might ? All I can

1. Here Vinobaji has misinterpreted the text, which implies, there are worlds *below* worlds.

say is that I am not fit even to be sacrificed once to Him. Whatever pleases Him (Thee), alone is good. Philosophers may discuss the essence of the good, but in truth good is what finds approval with God. Only the person with the pure soul may know what pleases God. Thou art formless, without limiting attributes. Created forms may disappear, but God is Immutable, ever the same !

Stanza XVII

Numberless Thy worshippers, and numberless Thy lovers;
Numberless Thine adorers, and numberless they who perform
austerities for Thee;
Numberless the reciters of *sacred* books and Veds;
Numberless Thy Jogis whose hearts are indifferent to the
world;
Numberless the saints who ponder on Thine attributes and
divine knowledge.
Numberless Thy true men; numberless Thine alms given;
Numberless Thy heroes who face the steel of their enemies;
Numberless Thy silent worshippers who lovingly fix their
thoughts upon Thee.

What power have I to describe Thee ?

So lowly am I, that I cannot even once be a sacrifice unto
Thee.

Whatever pleaseth Thee is good.

O Formless One, Thou art ever secure.

This stanza states the infinitude of God's creation. Another of its themes is the extent of the penances of the seekers. Such penances consist of an infinite number of prayers and devotional stances. Various forms of adoration are adopted-many symbolic acts and acts of sacrifice and self-mortification. So many recite holy scriptures from memory. Many turn Yogis, and adopting an attitude of non-attachment live their life. Many devotees contemplate the attributes of God. While contemplating Him as with attributes (*saguna*) they state. His attributes, and in His Attributeless (*Nirguna*) from they attempt to capture His Essence. Many are of pure, benevolent natures. Many are the heroes who bear on

their foreheads strokes of sharp steel, sacrificing their lives for the defence of society. Vast numbers are there who have taken the vow of silence, who in a state of absorption, completely subordinate their senses and minds to the soul. There are thus infinite varieties of penance and of those who perform it.

Stanza XVIII

Numberless are the fools appallingly blind;
Numberless are the thieves and devourers of others' property;
Numberless those who establish their sovereignty by force;
Numberless the cut-throats and murderers;
Numberless the sinners who pride themselves on committing

sin;

Numberless the liars who roam about lying;
Numberless the filthy who enjoy filthy gain;
Numberless the slanderers who carry loads of calumny on

their heads !

Nanak thus describeth the degraded.

So lowly am I, I cannot even once be a sacrifice unto Thee.

Whatever pleaseth thee is good.

O Formless One, Thou art ever secure.

This stanza sets forth the varieties of evil prevalent in the world. Many are the purblind stupid men, subject to the dark impulses of *tamas*.¹ Then there are those who live on illicit gains; men of violence, exploiters of others' labour. *Amar* is from the Arabic and stands for power over others—aggression. On the strength of such people, rulers build their own power. Then there are cut-throats whose course of life leads them to commit murder and shed blood. There are numerous sinners in whom the sinful tendency is ingrained. (Here sin may stand for lechery. Or, it may mean any of the various forms of evil in general.) There are liars infinite whose whole life is warped in falsehood. (Here intervenes an excursus on *Mlechha*, which, in its implied sense as here, stands for one whose proclivities are impure, filthy. In its original sense as Panini's *Grammar*, this term implied one whose

1. One of the three 'attributes' of matter-sloth, non-sentience.

habits were not in accordance with the Aryan code.—*Editor*). Infinite are those of impure minds who live on filth.¹ There are vast numbers of slanderers who carry on their heads the burden of sins of all others by revolving them in their minds. The slanderers' mind is like the offal-pit where all filth accumulates.' Unavoidably all these evil tendencies have had to be mentioned, a burden placed on one's speech: Hence Guru Nanak in the next line calls himself *neech* or low-caste². Saith Nanak in humility : I am not fit to be made a sacrifice to Thee even once. Whatever meets with Thy approval alone is good. Thou Formless One, Thou art immutable, the same ever.

This section on evil is very thought-provoking. Here ignorance has been assimilated to sin. This is a subtle point in ethics. The Gita includes ignorance among demoniac attributes, as many sins have their origin in it. Hence ignorance has not been identified with innocence. Here ignorance is shown to be the root of thieving, aggression, murder, violence, lascivious conduct, falsehood eating forbidden food and above these, slandering, which is a heinous sin. All this makes this evaluation so deeply penetrating. The Indian scriptures have laid down five injunctions for self-discipline, *viz.*, non-violence, truthfulness honesty, continence, contentment. Over against these are five evils—violence, untruthfulness, thieving, lechery, greed. Here Guru Nanak has mentioned the evils set against what in Buddhism is known as *Panch-Sheel* and in Vedanta as *Panch-Yam*. Moreover, the Guru has mentioned also purity in food, which is considered to be an important element in the religious quest in India. In Gita, the Upanishads and in the codes of various creeds this aspect has been emphasized. Of course, it would be pointless to emphasize only purity in food and to neglect the other evils. The food we take does affect our life's conduct. Hence this point has been emphasized also by social philosophers. There is, however, an emphasis on food in Yoga, Bhakti and Jainism.

So, among the five evils mentioned are ignorance at the root; impurity in food; slandering as the pre-eminent sin. This last is a

1. Illicit gains are meant.

2. This is actually an expression of humility and not expiation, as Vinobji implies.

heinous sin according to the Guru's valuation. Tulsidas too, while mentioning evil-doers has followed a similar line. Great men do not mention evil to castigate others, but assume as though they themselves are subject to it. A good man normally should not relish the mention of evil. Says Tulsidas : "In the Kali Age of evil, men are crows though they appear pure as swans. I stand at the head of such sinners. Those hypocrites who raise aloft the standard of piety deserve condemnation." Guru Nanak too in the same spirit calls himself *neech*, of low nature. Of course, the Guru thus mentioning himself has broken free of these evil-doers' company.

The three foregoing stanzas and the one following contain a statement of God's might, the religious quest and the pervasive evils in society. All that happens is by His will. Evils are mentioned to inculcate morality. Otherwise from the higher standpoint, all that happens is part of the infinite glory of God. The Divine Law of Good is pervasive, and is beyond man's power of speech.

Stanza XIX

Numberless Thy names, and numberless Thy places.

Completely beyond reach are Thy numberless worlds.

Numberless they who repeat Thy name with all the strength of their intellects.

By letters we repeat Thy name, by letters we praise Thee;

By letters we acquire divine knowledge, and sign Thy praises
and Thine attributes.

By letters we write and utter the word of God;

By the letters recorded on man's head his destiny is declared.

He who inscribeth them on others, beareth them not on His
own head.

As He ordaineth, so shall man obtain.

As great Thy creation, O God, so great is Thy fame.

There is no place without Thy name.

What power have I to describe Thee ?

So lowly am I, that I cannot even once be a sacrifice unto
Thee.

Whatever pleaseth Thee is good.

O Formless One, Thou art ever secure.

In the text *Vishnusahasranama*, the god Vishnu has been remembered by one thousand names. But why one thousand? God's names are infinite in number. So also His abodes. Some believe Him to reside in Badri-Kedar, some in Kashi.¹ All abodes that are in the world, are God's. The worlds created by Him also are countless and inaccessible; such as the world of Varuna (the sea-god), of the moon and others. But even to call His worlds innumerable is to put on oneself the burden of sin, for what appears a diversity, is in reality the unity. Diversity is only an illusion.

Man seeks to fix on God a name. The name would be made up of letters. Some are non-letter words like Om;² others two-letter words like Hari and Ram and so on. But in truth God's name cannot be contained by any combination of letters.

When one seeks to give praise to God, for that too the medium used is words. Scriptures are composed and written in words. Man's destiny too is recorded in words. God is 'beyond words' as said in Vedanta; but man is reduced to expressing himself only through words. But whatever is recorded (of destiny) does not govern Him. He is beyond it. The Self too is beyond it.³ Man will attain whatever is commanded by God who is all-consciousness all self. Whatever has been created is His Name. His Name is in all things.⁴ (Refrain : How may I express Thy might? I am not fit to be sacrificed to Thee even once. Whatever is approved by Thee is good. Thou art formless, immutable and eternal).⁵

(The quest has several forms. The noblest of all paths is love for God and the repetition of His Name. Here the section on Absorption comes to a close, along with the second portion of

1. Badri-Kedar—a place sacred to Shiva, in the Himalayas; Kashi Varanasi or Benares.
2. This enumeration is according to the Devanagari alphabet.
3. This particular point does not appear to be borne out by the original text.
4. This portion about the Name is difficult and esoteric and is interpreted in a variety of ways.
5. This portion within brackets is not given in the Hindi commentary.

Japuji, made up of twelve stanzas.)¹

SECTION III
PRAISE OF THE LORD

Stanza XX

When the hands, feet, and other members of the body are covered with filth.

It is removed by washing with water.

When thy clothes are polluted,

Apply soap, and the impurity shall be washed away.

So when the mind is defiled by sin,

It is cleansed by the love of the Name.

Men do not become saints or sinners by merely calling themselves so.

The recording angels take with them a record of man's acts.

It is he himself soweth, and he himself eateth.

Nanak, man suffereth transmigration by God's order.

If hands, feet or other parts of the body are soiled with dirt, water may wash it off. Should filth such as urine make clothes impure, then soap² will cleanse it. But to cleanse the mind, soiled through evil-doing, not water or soap, but love of God's Name (that is, devotion) will alone be effective. To be in the state of good or evil are not mere words or forms expression. Each of one's deeds will make him one or the other. Man must 'eat' (i. e. receive as reward) what he sows; and as his actions, so in obedience to the Divine Ordinance he must wander through the cycle of births and deaths.

Stanza XXI

Pilgrimage, austerities, mercy and almsgiving on general and

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1. This last portion is not part of the original text.
 2. The word for soap (*sabun*) is found used by Guru Nanak for the first time perhaps in Indian literature.

special occasions.

Whosoever performeth, may obtain some little honour;
But he who heareth and obeyeth and loveth God in his heart,
Shall wash off his impurity in the place of pilgrimage within
him.

All virtues are thine, O Lord; none are mine.

There is no devotion without virtue.

From the Self-existent proceeded Maya (athi), whence issued
a word which produced Brahma and the rest—

‘Thou art true, Thou art beautiful, there is ever pleasure in
Thy heart !’

What the time, what the epoch, what the lunar day, and what
the week-day.

What the season, and what the month when the world was
created.

The Pandits did not discover; had they done so, they would
have recorded it in the Purans.

Nor did the Qazis discover it; had they done so, they would
have recorded it in the Quran :

Neither the Jogi nor any other mortal knows the lunar day,
or the week-day, or the season, or the month.

Only the Creator who fashioned the world knoweth when He
did so.

How shall I address Thee, O God ? how shall I praise Thee ?
How shall I describe Thee ? and how shall I know Thee ?

Saith Nanak, everybody speaketh of Thee, one wiser than
another.

Great is the Lord, great is His name; what He doeth cometh
to pass.

Nanak, he who is proud shall not be honoured on his arrival
in the next world.

Bathing at sacred spots, austerities, compassion towards
others, charity—all these can bring only a small degree of merit.
(Here is an excursus on possible alternative interpretations, which,
however, do not fit into the context—*Editor*). In order to get a
fuller realization of God, it will be essential to ‘listen’ to His
praise, to contemplate His qualities and to love Him from the core
of one’s heart. Here love (devotion) is substituted for Absorption,
since love leads to it. Ritual bathing, austerities etc. take us

some distance, but in order to scale the greater heights we must employ the means of 'Listening,' Contemplation and Absorption. This is in accord with Vedanta. Bathing washes away external dirt, but the impurity of the heart can be removed only through devotion to God. Guru Nanak's phrase here, the *tirtha* or bathing-place of the mind', is so beautiful. Shankracharya has also spoken of '*tirtha* of the mind (*manas-tirtha*).' Only through bathing at this *tirtha* does the mind get purified. 'Listening' and Contemplation etc. alone will help in obtaining purity of mind. The highest bliss of the human life is to 'listen' to God's Name from holy men who have realized Him. God pervades the soul of the devotee (*Guru-mukh*). The words of such persons purify man through being listened' to, contemplated and lived. This is what is meant by bathing in the *tirtha* of the mind.

Next, says the Guru : 'Lord, all noble attributes are Thine; I am devoid of merit. Anyone attributing merit of himself is just ignorant.' The light of noble qualities shines in God. All the merits belong to the soul, and the lower qualities are of the body. Therefore, the faults of anyone should not be mentioned, knowing that these will end with the end of the body. But the merits of a man are really lodged in the body of God, that is, his soul. Truth, love and other qualities emanate from God, and are a source of merit for man. Then follows an aphorism : As long as we do not acquire merit, Devotion (Bhakti) cannot enter ourselves. Our Devotion will be in proportion to our acquired merits. We must, therefore, try to live in the spirit of the attributes of God. Says Shankracharya in a similar context on Bhakti : 'That which seeks its own image (*Svasvarupanusandhanam*).' Bhakti is nothing but a quest after one's own true self. Among the means of acquiring emancipation, Bhakti is the noblest. One's real image is made up to noble attributes. The Bible too says : 'Be ye perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect.' Man must resolve not to remain imperfect, but seek perfection. Noble attributes bridge the distance between the individual self and the universal self. The ascent towards this state is called Bhakti.

(Here follows the exposition of a verse which has presented difficulties to all commentators—'*Svasth Ath Bani Barmau*' Vinoba interprets it as : God's word alone is the bringer of the highest bliss. Another interpretation which he suggests, though

without commending it, is : Thou art Shakti, Lakshmi, Sarasvati and Brahma.¹ So, the right interpretation appears to be : Repeating the ennobling, merit-giving Word of God will instil into us His attributes, thus bringing Devotion—*Editor.*)

(The next verse, after some discussion is interpreted as : God's Word is eternal and holy, of beautiful aspect and conferring everlasting joy. Holiness, beauty and joy is a trinity of attributes. Two other conjectural interpretations follow, which, however, appear far-fetched—*Editor.*)

In the next portion of this deeply philosophical stanza the Guru has contemplated the infinite might and the manifest glory of God. One aspect of His glorious manifestation is this universe of our experience. What the hour when the universe was created ? What the month, what the date, what the season ? The Brahmin-composers of the *Puranas*² do not know this, nor the Muslim divines who took down the Koran. The Yogi too with his esoteric vision knows it not. This secret is known to the Creator alone.

Nasadiya Sukta (the passage in the Veda about creation), which is a great philosophical text, says : 'In the beginning was neither existence nor non-existence.' That state is beyond imagination and describable in neither of these terms. Philosophers have postulated the universe as without beginning. So, it has existed always, but how ? To posit a question about its beginning, therefore, is pointless. The *Sukta* further speculates—'The Creator who is believed to abide in *akasha* (unspecified ethereal space) might not know this secret.' In the same strain, Guru Nanak affirms that neither Hindu philosophers nor Muslim divines know the answer to this question. Hence it may be said to be beyond the power of man. How then to know the extent of God's greatness ? How to find words to praise Him ? Of course, wise men will each offer some explanation, some postulates. Each one claims to know more than others. The Guru only puts himself in the attitude of humility. God is supreme over all; great is His Name; He is the Prime Mover of all. Anyone presuming himself to be wise and great will not therefore make a noble figure. Humility alone brings spiritual merit.

1. In the Sikh tradition, too, this second interpretation would not be acceptable.
2. Hindu mythological texts.

There are hundreds of thousands of neither and upper regions. Men have grown weary at last of searching for God's limits; the Veds say one thing, that God has no limit.

The thousands of Purans and Muhammadan books tell that in reality there is but one principle.

If God can be described by writing, then describe Him; but such description is impossible.

O Nanak, call Him great; only He Himself knoweth how great He is.

Worlds exist below worlds—hundreds of thousands, so also heavens above heavens. Scriptures have been engaged to exhaustion in determining their number and extent. Science also affirms the vastness of stellar formations. (As there is no limit to the vastness of the vast creations, so also the minuteness of minutest objects is beyond our comprehension.)¹ Scriptures² affirm this that, the Absolute Creator pervades all. (Or, that creation is limitless.) In Vedanta it has been said about all that exists : Not this; Not this is the Self.³ Brahman—is Eternal, Coconsciousness and is limitless.⁴

The Guru has mentioned '*kiteb*', that is Kitab or the Koran. In that it is affirmed that there are eighteen thousand universes,⁵ but their essence is solely One. One would put down the account of the extent of creation, should that be available; but who may know it? Whole lives will be exhausted in making such record. Says Nanak : All that man can affirm is the might and greatness of God. So also the Muslim affirmation, *Allahu Akbar*—Allah is Supreme. He alone has knowledge of His might and infinitude.

1. This portion is not based on the original text.

2. Original, *Veda*.

3. Brahadranyake Upanishad. II, 3.6.

4. Sarvasaropanishad.

5. This interpretation is not correct. In Muslim belief there are eighteen thousand *species*, and not as many universes.

Praisers praise God, but have not acquired a knowledge of Him.

As rivers and streams fall into the sea, but know not its extent.

Kings and emperors who possess oceans and mountains of property and wealth.

Are not equal to the worm which forgetteth not God in its heart.

Endlessly is He praised, yet none has penetrated to His Reality. In other words, devotees adore Him with their praises but none has arrived at His essence, or formed any true estimate of Him. Vast numbers of rivers and streams are lost in the ocean, but these cannot know its extent. The Guru here has touched upon a beautiful mystery—rivers may be absorbed in the ocean, but cannot know it. Only one greater than it can have any knowledge of it. By the same analogy, it is impossible that we may be able to see Him, make Him the object of our sight and be ourselves the viewers. But God-realization is possible through absorption (lit. sinking) into Him. We do not have the power to know Him, but can become part of Him. His knowledge, and determination of His extent is beyond our intellect. Knowledge is a function of the intellect. Devotion, however, can lead to His attainment, which means merging our light with Him. In Gita it is said : 'Bhakti can grant a knowledge, a *taste* of Him.' Tukaram, the great saint of Maharashtra has said :

“Thy essence is beyond knowledge and speech;
Bhakti may take a measure of Thee.
Thy infinitude can be contained in Bhakti,
Else is Thy essence incalculable.”

The Gita says :

“Whoever wishes to know my essence,
Can realize me only through Devotion”¹

1. XVIII-55

In truth the Divine essence is beyond our faculty of knowledge and our power of speech. The mind cannot contemplate Him; words cannot express Him. That is the significance of Tukaram's affirmation above : 'Bhakti may take a measure of Him.' The intellect cannot derermine His Reality. Bhakti alone may take the measure of His infinitude. To express Him too the language of Bhakti may be employed. Tukaram further says : God is the sacred stone *shaligram*. He may not be subject to knowledge, but may be *tasted*. Ramakrishna Paramhamsa expressed it differently : 'The mangoes on the trees it would be unnecessary to count. What is necessary is to taste them.'

Not only the larger rivers, but small streamlets also get absorbed into the ocean. In the same way not only great saints, but small persons also may attain to God. A small child may sit in the mother's lap, but can nowise know her. Imagine a Sultan (king) ruling over the ocean, provided with mountains of wealth, but without devotion to God. In God's court he will count for less than an insect (ant) in whose mind God is lodged. In *Mahimanstotra* it is said, 'I am chanting the song of God's praise; what right have I to do so, without knowing His greatness ? But should that be so, even Brahma will forfeit that title, not to speak of one so small as I.' God's glory is infinite. How may I know its extent ? My disability thus, to sing it is as much as Brahma's. But one may give praise according to one's own knowledge. To this concession I may be admitted as surely as Brahma himself. Just as Tukaram has said, 'Thy essence is beyond the power of knowledge and speech,' So Guru Nanak has said, 'However much His praise, His Reality is beyond comprehension.' To praise Him is meritorious, as it makes our speech pure and holy. But His essence must always our man.

Stanza XXIV

There is no limit to God's praises; to those who repeat them there is no limit.

There is no limit to His mercy, and to His gifts there is no limit.

There is no limit to what God seeth, no limit to what He heareth.

The limit of the secret of His heart cannot be known.

The limit of His creation cannot be known; neither His near nor His far side can be discovered.

To know His limits how many vex their hearts.

His limits cannot be ascertained;

Nobody knoweth His limits.

The more we say, the more *there remains* to be said.

Great is the Lord, and exalted is His seat.

His exalted name is higher than the *most* exalted.

Were any one else ever so exalted,

Then he would know that exalted Being :

How great He is He knoweth Himself.

Nanak, God bestoweth gifts on whom He looketh with favour and mercy.

The qualities and attributes of God are infinite. There is no end also to man's enunciation of these. (Not only are these attributes expressed endlessly by the thousand tongues of Shesh-Naga)¹ but also by godly and holy men. Endless is the creation of God, beyond count. Endless also is God's bounty. Endlessly He views and listens to all that happens in creation. By Viewing, Listening, Contemplating and Absorption. Endless is what passes in the divine mind; it is beyond the human capacity to know. Endless are the forms He has created. Limitless is the existence, which He has created. Countless are those who have attempted to know the mystery and limit of His creation, through hard penance and wails of despair. With, all this, His mystery remains remote, impenetrable. The more man tries to understand and express Him, the farther His mystery recedes. No man can know it. (This is what the Shastras also express : The more we try to get close to Him, the higher He appears to rise above us.)

He is Supreme, the Lord of all. High is His place. His Name is higher than the highest thing that we know. Tulsidas too expresses a similar thought in Ramayana : The Name is Supreme

1. This part does not appear to be implied by the original text.

over form. "I say after full consideration that Rama's name is higher even than Rama." Namdev has made another affirmation: "His name and His Form are beautiful, but love for Him is still more beautiful. Love for Him is higher than His Name or form." No man can be high enough to know how high or great He is. So, he alone can know His own greatness. His bounty (to realize and love Him) can be conferred on man by His own grace and blessing. This is what Guru Nanak affirms. No attainment may come to us through our own effort. This implies that the extent of our realization will be in accordance with His grace. Our intellect cannot attain this realization. In the eleventh chapter of Bhagvad Gita, the Lord blesses Arjuna with the spiritual vision. Our ordinary vision cannot comprehend the universe. But even with the mystical vision, Arjun felt that the universe is infinite. Dnyaneshvar says, our ordinary vision does not even have awareness of the infinitude of the universe, which is apprehended by our spiritual sight alone.

Stanza XXV

His many bounties cannot be recorded,
 He is a great giver and hath not a particle of covetousness.
 How many, yea countless heroes beg of Him !
 How many others whose number cannot be conceived !
 How many pine away in sin !
 How many persons receive yet deny God's gifts !
 How many fools there are who merely eat !
 How many are ever dying in distress and hunger !
 O Giver, these are also Thy gifts.
 Rebirth and deliverance depend on Thy will :
 Nobody can interfere with it.
 If any fool try to interfere with it.
 He shall himself know the punishment he shall suffer.
 God himself knoweth to whom He may give, and He Himself
 giveth.
 Very few acknowledge this.
 He to whom God hath given the boon of praising and lauding
 Him,

O Nanak, is the King of kings.

Man cannot take measure of the bounty (grace) of God. Tukaram says in this context : "Lord Vishnu, none is such a generous donor as thou—thou who dost confer on man the boon of fearlessness."

He is the supreme donor. His giving is without expectation of return—He is giving without desire. The Lord in Gita too has prescribed action unattached to reward for the seeker. God too is giver without any expectation of return.

Many are the heroes¹ who still beg boons of Him, despite His endless bounty. Those who are heroes of the spiritual life, beg not of the world, but of God only. Countless are such beggars at God's door. Many there are who instead of begging for noble qualities from God give themselves over to the pleasures of the flesh and make ruin of their bodily powers. Others there are who receive God's bounties, yet are not grateful for these. Others are there whose minds are benighted and know not that all that they get in this life, is from God. Many again are oppressed by suffering and privation, yet forget not to render thankfulness to God, whose mercy they feel still attends them. These are the devotees who are thankful, unattached to the world; who even when involved in suffering, forget not God.

Lord, through Thy Will does emancipation come. No other means to this end is available to man. 'No emancipation without realization.' (Sanskrit text quoted). This is affirmation of the path of Advaita. To the Christian the grace of Jesus is the doorway to salvation. Bhakti believes in divine grace as the sole means of emancipation. The fool, if he knew what buffets he would have to bear for this temerity, would not dare to hold a contrary opinion. Anyone who depends on his own endeavour, that without aid of divine grace it may bring emancipation, would only see suffering in the end. In Gita, devotion unless addressed to God, is shown to be the source of suffering. The Lord Himself understands the devotee's desire and fulfils it. Few are those who understand this spiritual secret. The Tamilian saint Manikya-Vaekkar says :

1, Specified in the next sentence.

'The Lord came and entering my heart made me His devotee. Few of course, are those endowed with the gift of devotion. Fewer still are those who have attained emancipation.' (Another meaning may be that while many make songs of various kinds, few sign the praise of the Lord). Those who are endowed with the urge to praise Him or to do Him homage, are really kings of kings. Those so inspired sing perpetually His praises.

This stanza expresses God's bounty. The great gift of His bountry is emancipation. But greater still is the inspiration to devotion.

Stanza XXVI

Priceless are Thine attributes, O God, and priceless Thy dealings;

Priceless Thy dealers, priceless Thy storehouses;

Priceless what cometh from Thee, and priceless what is taken away;

Priceless Thy rate and priceless the time for dealing;

Priceless Thy justice and priceless Thy court;

Priceless Thy weights and priceless Thy measures;

Priceless Thy gifts and priceless Thy marks;

Priceless Thy mercy and priceless Thine ordinances :

How beyond all price Thou art cannot be stated.

Ever speaking of Thee men continue to fix their thoughts on Thee.

They who read the Veds and Purans speak of Thee;

Learned men speak of Thee and deliver discourses on Thee;

Brahmas speak of Thee, and Indars speak of Thee;

The milkmaids and Krishan speak of Thee;

Shivs speak of Thee, the Sidhs speak of Thee;

All the Budhas Thou hast created speak of Thee;

The demons speak of Thee; the gods speak of Thee;

Thy demigods, men, *munis*, and servants speak of Thee;

How many speak of Thee or attempt to speak of Thee;

How many depart while speaking of Thee !

If Thou wert to create as many more as Thou hast created,

Even then few of them would be able to speak adequately of Thee.

Thou mayest be as great as Thou pleasest.

Nanak, only the True One Himself knoweth how great He is.

If any one were to speak improperly of God,

Write him down as the most ignorant of men.

In this stanza homage is paid to the attributes of God. Priceless are His attributes. The spiritual commerce of man possessed of the capital of these attributes too is priceless. Priceless also is the store of these noble qualities garnered by the devotees of God; and priceless are these devotees, possessors of these treasures. Priceless are those that tread the path of His devotion, and those that leave this world after laying for themselves stores of such devotion. They merge themselves into Him—priceless is the emancipation they attain.

The divine law of Dharma is priceless, so also His justice in retributing the actions of man's life. Priceless is His measure and the scales wherewith man's deeds are weighed; priceless is His mark of approval. God judges man not only by his visible actions, but evaluates him by the purity of his heart. God's grace or blessing is priceless; so also the badge of His grace. His bounty is priceless. Priceless is His Ordinance. Like Guru Nanak in his state of wonder at the grandeur of the divine law, Tulsidas also after expressing its praise, in the end confesses, 'Nothing can I express of it.' Ordinary poets do not confess their helplessness to express, but Tulsidas is at another level, where words come halting. Guru Nanak also says, that because of the infinitude of God's bounty those who set out to praise it, have been struck silent before its immensity. The Vedic texts and the Puranas attempt to give adequate praise to God, and the learned expound them. All the exegetical texts are attempts at describing God.

Who are the one's that are engaged in expressing the praise of God's bounty and greatness? They are the Brahmas created by Him, the Shivas, the Indras, the Gopis, the Krishnas—all those considered to be the ideal devotees. 'Govind' is synonymous with God—both Hindus and Sikhs hold such a belief. In the

present context, God is conceived as immaculate and formless. This is not, however, the Attributeless-Formless Brahman of the Advaita philosophy, but the Formless Lord-God with Attributes. My belief is that 'Brahmas and Indras' in this context recalls the Upanishads and 'Gopis and Govind,' the Krishna of Bhagavat (Purana). Ishvara, that is Shiva, too is engaged in devotion to God. Further, we are aware only of one Buddha, who was Gautama. But who may know how many Buddhas God has created? Here Guru Nanak has recounted three separate denominations—Shaiva Vaishnava and Buddhist.¹ The Shaivas have composed innumerable hymns of praise to God. Similarly other creeds are engaged in praising Him.

In the concluding portion of this stanza, those not mentioned already are brought in for mention for their praise of God. The Titans (*Danavas*), the gods, human devotees, savants (*Munis*), servitors of men²—all are engaged in praising Him. All in these categories are represented as various kinds of seekers (*Sadhakas*). ['Sur' (god) should mean Sadhaka].³

Comprehending the present, past and future, Guru Nanak has the vision of divine praise rising and issuing eternally, in all time. God's greatness is infinite, limitless. He is pure, holy.⁴ Anyone cleverly trying to presume in himself the power to express God's greatness would only show himself to be supreme among fools.

Stanza XXVII

What is that gate, what is that mansion where Thou, O God,
sittest and watchest over all things ?

How many various and countless instruments are played !

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1. This interpretation appears to be somewhat 'stretched.'
 2. Not the correct sense. Here through the poetic structure involved in the original, the meaning would be 'savants who serve Him recount His praises.'
 3. This again may not be an acceptable meaning.
 4. Perhaps the correct meaning would be 'He the pure and holy alone knows His own extent.'

How many musicians,

How many musical measures with their consorts, and how many singers sing Thee !

Wind, water, and fire sing Thee; Dharmraj sings at Thy gate.

The recording angels, who know how to write, and on whose record Dharmraj judgeth sing Thee.

Ishar, Brahma, and Devi, ever beautiful as adorned by Thee, sing Thee.

Indar seated on his throne with the gods at Thy gate sings Thee.

Sidhs in meditation sing Thee; holy men in contemplation sing Thee.

The continent, the true, and the patient sing Thee; unyielding heroes sing Thee.

The pandits and the supreme Rikhis, reading their Veds, sing Thee in every age.

The lovely celestial maids who beguile the heart in the upper, middle, and nether regions sing Thee.

The jewels created by Thee with the sixty-eight places of Hindu pilgrimage sing Thee.

Mighty warriors and divine heroes sing Thee; the four sources of life sing Thee.

The continents, the worlds, and the universe made and supported by Thy hands sing Thee.

The saints who please Thee, and who are imbued with Thy love sing Thee.

The many others who sing Thee I cannot remember; how could Nanak recount them ?

That God is ever true, He is the true Lord, and the true Name.

He who made this world is and shall be; He shall neither depart, nor be made to depart.

He who created things of different colours, descriptions, and species,

Beholdeth His handiwork which attesteth His greatness.

He will do what pleaseth Himself; no order may be issued to Him.

He is King, the King of kings, O Nanak; all remain subject to His will.

This stanza is so pleasing. In another context, this has also been recorded as an independent text.¹ Japuji is recited in the morning, while towards evening the devotees chant *Rahiras*. In that prayer too this stanza occurs. In this wonderful song is expressed the praise of God, of His court. It opens with the wonder-inspired query: "What kind Thy court and mansion wherefrom Thou dost look after² the entire universe." There is the court divine where the Creator is established and from there He looks after all creation, and the whole creation is engaged in raising a hymn of adoration to Him. 'Nad' stands for 'soul-music.' In the court of God, it is as if innumerable instrumentalists are raising an orchestra, producing such an infinite variety of notes. Musical measures and symphonies form themselves in this music. All the forces of nature—air, water, fire raise their song of praise to Thee. At Thy Portal, Darmaraja, King of Retribution sings Thy praises. Chitra and Gupta, the divine scribes of the account of man's good and evil deeds, while writing out their record, sing Thy praises also. While making their record they also assess man's balance-sheet of good and evil deeds.

At Thy Portal moreover, Shiva, Brahma, the Devi Durga—all praise Thee—all these whom Thou has invested with the noblest of attributes. Indra, ensconced on his throne, sings Thy praise along with the deities subordinate to him. So, according to this vision, the forces working to maintain the universe—that is, air, water, the scribes Chitra and Gupta and such others, and in addition, Indra the celestial ruler, all are engaged in chanting His praises. Next as chanting are presented the seekers, the Siddhas who have attained spiritual power, engaged in contemplation and absorption. Their chanting is of the soul, wordless. Others raising this chant are those who have mastered their impulses; those in whose minds truth is lodged and those who have completely controlled their desires. Then, in their company

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1. In the Evening Prayer, called *Rahiras*.
 2. The original word *samale* means 'mind' (verb).

are heroes of unshakable might. Great savants and men of spiritual vision sing His praises yuga¹ after yuga, through holy scriptures. Singing His praises are the enchanting fairies of the three worlds of heaven, the nether-world, and the world of water.² The jewels³ created by Thee are joining this universal harmony, as also the sixty-eight holy bathing places. The Koran affirms that the entire universe is raising God's song of praise. Others in this chorus are the 'four sources' of life.⁴ (While there are innumerable species of living objects, they all are believed to issue from these four sources.) With these also 'mighty heroes of great prowess'⁵ sing Thee. All continents, lands and universes created and held by Thee in place are singing Thy praise. Those alone, however, engage in devotion to Thee who earn Thy favour—they are the devotees whose joy is centred in Thee. Besides all these recounted, are infinite numbers of others, that my limited intelligence cannot recount—what can I say about such ?

He alone is eternal, holy and of the Name Immaculate. He is in the now; will ever abide, immortal—the Creator. He has created this variegated visible world of innumerable species. This He created and watches over. Such is His might. Keeping Himself unalloyed with the world, He is its viewer. He does as His will approves—to no command is He subject. He is the king over kings. Saith Nanak : None in the universe may defy His will.

The conception of God here is not *Nirguna* or the Attributeless Absolute; He is the creator, the cherisher—that is *Saguna* (with Attributes.) But withal He is not Visible Form, though forms are all created by Him. While the Shaivas look upon Shiva as the highest, the Vaishnavas attribute the same supremacy to Vishnu, the Supreme Lord contemplated here is *Saguna Nirakar*—with Attributes and Formless. At His court deities of various orders sing—these are all drawn from the Hindu tradition.

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1. Yuga is one of the four ages constituting time in the universe.
 2. Original, *Machh*.
 3. The fourteen 'jewels' churned out of the ocean by gods and demons.
 4. Accordidg to Indian belief, the egg-born, the placenta-born, the sweat-born and the earth-born are the four forms of life.
 5. Men of great moral and spiritual power are meant.

The Shaiva and Vaishnava deities represented here are not single-attributed. In the Hindu tradition, the gods and goddesses worshipped are of full attributes, even though called Rama and Krishna and others. Guru Nanak implies something similar by using such traditional names.

Rama is believed to be the incarnation (*avatar*) of Vishnu. Tulsidas, great devotee of Rama, in a hymn implies by this name not the Vishnu-incarnation of limited conception, but the Creator of all. To take another example : The great Southern saint Manikyavachkar is the devotee of Shiva (Shankara). He has, however, risen above the limited conception of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva and worships under Shiva's name the Creator who is beyond the attributes of the trinity of these gods and is absolute bliss. The Maharashtrian saint Ramdas, a devotee of Rama, deplores people's limited vision thus :

None mentions Him who created the three universes. It is said that destiny is recorded on every forehead, but whose is the hand which recorded the destiny on the forehead of destiny itself ? God is said to destroy everything, but who will destroy Shankara, the destroyer ?

Which leads us to conclude that despite the several names of limited connotations employed by the various saints, in truth they all gave to the universal Creator the name they loved—thus implying by these various names the same Reality. Guru Nanak too has, like such saints, employed the names of the various deities to signify the one eternal Creator : These other saints, however, symbolized their deities by images, which tendency is not visible in Guru Nanak.

SECTION IV

PRAXIS (Sadhana)

Japuji, with its 38 stanzas, the Mul Mantra and the concluding *Sloka*, is made up of 40 verse units. The first seven stanzas comprise the first section. The next twelve stanzas constitute the second section; the next eight the third. Now, the fourth and last section begins. Such division was not determined

by the original author. This arrangement has occurred to me after study. In the first seven stanzas the theme is the eternity and immaculateness of God and devotion to Him is enjoined upon man. That section is in a sense the Preamble. The second section is made up of three passages of four stanzas each, containing the exposition of the Path of 'Listening', Contemplation and Absorption. The third section contemplates the vision of God, and expresses it as infinite glory and might, presiding over the universe. To imagine His form and might is beyond man's intellect. All that lies within man's power is to pray to Him, to seek refuge in Him, to merge with Him. These we must attempt.

Now, this last section concerns itself with *Praxis*—that is, action and endeavour in the way of God-realization. The first four stanzas of this section make up the salutation to God. The next four make exposition of the merit of prayer. Next, in a few stanzas is a vision of the rising steps that the seeker must ascend. Usually in religious thought, such steps are believed to be three—some count them as four. In the Yoga-philosophy these are enumerated as seven. Guru Nanak has determined these as five. Then, in one stanza mention is made of the eight-fold *praxis*. This is parallel to the 'eight-limbed' *yoga-praxis* and the eight-fold path of Buddhism. The conclusion which follows after, consists of three couplets (*slokas*).

The four opening stanzas of salutation are couched in the sweetest poetry. These open with a parallel drawn by the Guru of his own path with the Yogi's.¹ Each stanza closes with the salutation to God. The Guru herein expresses the relationship of his own path with Yoga, *Jnan* (the path of self-illumination) and other related paths.

Stanza XXVIII

Make contentment and modesty thine earrings, self-respect
thy wallet, meditation the ashes to smear on thy body;

Make thy body, which is only a morsel for death, thy beggar's

1. This parallel is meant to transmute Hatha-yoga into spiritual terms.

coat, and faith thy rule of life and thy staff.

Make association with men thine Ai Panth, and the conquest of thy heart the conquest of the world.

HAIL ! HAIL TO HIM

The primal, the pure, without beginning, the indestructible, the same in every age !

In the text on Yogic ritual numerous forms of discipline of the physical body are prescribed for attaining accomplishment in the Path. In this stanza, interpreting the various parts of this ritual in spiritual terms, the Guru transforms the Yogi's earrings into the quality of contentment. As for the Yogi's begging, these should in terms of this interpretation be endeavour in the way of God. Interpreting the ambiguous *sharm* (or *sharm*) differently, the meaning would be : Our begging pouch is modesty, humility. For us, the Yogis, ashes rubbed over the body is absorption. Our patched cloak is contemplation over death; to realize the evanescence of life and things of the world, and not to forget that this bodily frame will one day be old and tattered. For us the Yogi's *praxis*, consisting in regulated diet and *pranayam* (breath-control) is to keep our body 'virgin', that is, unsoiled by evil courses. The staff in our hand is the power of spiritual intuition.

What will be our 'path' or creed ? Our creed or denomination is universal brotherhood. Our ideal motto is : Conquest of the desires of the mind is the real conquest—it is world-conquest. In this way, Guru Nanak has employed the Yogic symbols metaphorically to state the fundamentals of his own creed.

In conclusion is the salutation to God, who is conceived of as eternal, without form or feature¹, beginningless, free from decline or loss. He is, moreover, immutable, ever the same through all time.² As stated in Kathopanished : 'He is today and will be tomorrow.'

Stanza XXIX

Make divine knowledge thy food, compassion thy storekeeper,

1. Interpreted literally as without the azure hue associated with Vishnu.

2. Lit. yugas.

and the voice which is in every heart the pipe *to call to repast*.

Make Him who hath strung the whole world on His string thy spiritual Lord: let wealth and supernatural power be relishes for others.

Union and separation is the law which regulateth the world. By destiny we receive our portion.

HAIL ! HAIL TO HIM,

The primal, the pure, without beginning, the indestructible, the same in every age !

In this second 'Salutation' stanza also the metaphor is built round the Yoga symbols. Our diet, says the Guru, is self-illumination. Compassion is the housekeeper therefore—the lady who serves this food. For this diet of self-illumination, such a housekeeper alone is appropriate. At meal-times a bell is rung.¹ In each frame such a sound is raised, a harmony is produced by the movement of breath. God himself is our Nath² (Lord). He is the Master whose leading-strings control the entire universe. (Here the Sanskrit 'nath' is used to create a significant image, which is one of the stylistic beauties of this composition. We too may be 'nath' or lord over our own desires, as God is over the whole universe). Miraculous and wonder-working powers acquired through Yoga are of a 'different order of satisfaction.' These are not sought after by the true man of God. Hence the Guru rejects them. These are for men of lower inclinations. The universe is run on a dual principle—union and separation³. These fall to man's lot as destined. Salutation to Him—eternal, immaculate, immortal, ever the same. (Author's note : Japuji gives evidence of a high creative quality. Most authors show a decline in quality as they go along; but in Guru Nanak the creative power remains at an undimmed splendour).

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1. This is not the sense of the original, where rather the Yogi's ritual horn-blowing is meant.
 2. Nath : Yogic Superior or Patriarch.
 3. The ultimate end of the spiritual endeavour is 'union' with the Supreme. Those devoid of the spiritual life remain 'separated' from God. This principle alone is significant in the universe.

Stanza XXX

One Maya in union with God gave birth to three acceptable children.

One of them is the creator, the second the provider, the third performeth the function of destroyer.

As it pleaseth God, He directeth them by His orders.

He beholdeth them, but is not seen by them. This is very marvellous.

HAIL ! HAIL TO HIM,

The primal, the pure, without beginning, the indestructible, the same in every age !

The Universal Mother is what in Vedanta is known as Maya. She is the progenitress of all, through the creative process ordained in the universe. She has three authentic agents : One the Creator (Brahma), the second the Cherisher (Vishnu) and the third the Judge Over all (Shiva the Destroyer). This Maya generates not through 'union' with God, but only through a 'process' ordained for her. This is the order of this generative process. Maya has been endowed with power to creat out of herself the three qualities of *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. God is the natural witness in this process. This creative process goes on as it pleases Him, as is His ordinance. (Here the author glances at a possible literary pun in 'furman' which is far-fetched and not borne out by the context. 'Sphurti' from Sanskrit which has a similar sound is not intended. The author with noble inspiration sees herein the Guru's aim to harmonize the Hindu and Muslim traditions. While such intention was there, it was not advanced through the creation of such ambiguous verbal structures as here imagined by the author—*Editor*).

The supreme wonder is that while God views the whole universe, He remains invisible to the eye. The Gita says, 'I know all, but none knows Me.' While this affirmation is made in the Gita through an expansive discourse, the Upanishad puts it succinctly in two words : 'He is the invisible Viewer.' So here, in Japuji occurs the same vision as in the Gita and the Upanishad.

Salutation to Him—the Eternal, Immaculate, Immortal and

ever the same.

Stanza XXXI

His seat and His storehouses are in every world.
What was to be put into them was put in at one time.
The Creator beholdeth His creation.
Nanak, true is the work of the True One.

HAIL ! HAIL TO HIM,

The primal, the pure, without beginning, the indestructible,
the same in every age !

The Throne of God is established in all the universes created by Him. His art of creation was perfect as He made His inspiration manifest. He did not have to reconstruct or revise His handiwork. The Creator, after shaping the universe, cherishes it; is ever mindful of the well-being of His creation. He is not like a painter, whose work, however skilful, must still lack ideal perfection. God's work, however, says Guru Nanak, is holy; His creation is perfect and holy. It would be an unacceptable assumption the God who is real and holy, should make a universe which would only be an illusion.

These four stanzas of salutation to the Creator give evidence of superbly intricate creative poetic art. In each one of the aphorisms is enshrined a secret of the essence of truth. What in effect Guru Nanak is saying is, that contrary to one Indian belief, the universe cannot be false, an illusion of our senses. Shankaracharya, who is reported to have rejected the world as 'false'—cf. his aphorism 'Brahman is real; the world is false'¹—has himself amplified his real meaning in the verses whose meaning is indicated below :

For men of raw mind and underdeveloped feelings the world is real and of great worth. That is how they feel about it. Objects of the world take possession of their minds. As a consequence of such an attitude, they run about seeking this and that, and revolve

1. This affirmation would run counter to the idea, met with in atheistic or heterodox thinking, of a groping mind behind creation.

in the cycle of birth and deaths. Vedanta has called the world false, unreal. The true meaning of which is, that what is believed to be real, is only the form, not the substance. So, it is futile to run after it. Whatever the senses perceive is unreal, mere form. But the scriptures (Vedas) do not declare the world unreal for those whose minds have been enlightened through primal merit and good deeds of their earlier births. For such, the entire universe is real, the visible form of Brahman itself. This is also meant by Guru Nanak in his affirmation in this stanza—*Nanak Sache ki Sachi Kar*—what the Creator, holy and eternal, has made is itself holy. Shankaracharya says that in order to draw the uninitiated to non-attachment, they are taught to regard the world as unreal. But the initiated, who are already non-attached are entitled to be given the subtle insight. So, for such the universe is declared to be Brahman itself. But to see Brahman in the visible world, primal merit is necessary. So, according to Shankara, the universe is as real as Brahman. But this secret can be vouchsafed only to those with mature minds.

Stanza XXXII

Were one tongue to become a hundred thousand, and a hundred thousand to become twentyfold more.

I would utter the name of the one Lord of the world hundreds of thousands of times with all my tongues.

In this way I should ascend the stairs of the Lord, and become one with Him.

On hearing of the exaltation of the religious the vile become jealous.

Nanak, the former have found the Kind One, while false is the boasting of the false.

‘If one were to have a hundred thousand tongues instead of one, and the hundred thousand were to be multiplied twenty times; and if each utterance of the Name of the Lord of the Universe (*Jagadish*) were to become hundred-thousand-fold.’ I interpret this utterance of Guru Nanak thus: Each time God’s Name is uttered, millions repeat it, and so prayer in all cases becomes

communal rather than remaining individual. In this path—the path of the Master—one may thus ascend these ‘stairs’ (stages of spiritual endeavour) and become merged into Him (lit. become one with Him.) As ordinary people (lit. worms) hear about the path leading upto God, they too feel inspired to ascend to Him. Says Nanak : We can only obtain His glance of grace¹—the rest is idle talk of impostors. Only one thing is true—that we can hope to obtain His grace. All that lies within our power is to ascend the stairs of His devotion through millions of repetitions of His Name, in company with millions of devotees. Nothing else lies in our power—the rest, that is, rewarding our devotion, lies with Him.

Stanza XXXIII

I have no strength to speak and no strength to be silent.

I have no strength to ask and no strength to give;

I have no strength to live and no strength to die.

I have no strength to acquire empire or wealth which produce a commotion in the heart.

I have no strength to meditate on Thee or ponder on divine knowledge.

I have no strength to find the way to escape from the world.

He in whose arm there is strength, may see what he can do.

Nanak, no one is of superior or inferior strength before God.

Now the theme is complete self-surrender to God. So, says the Guru, the power to achieve emancipation is not ours. Even engaging ourselves in devotion is not by our will. Silence (i.e. complete cessation of desire) too does not lie within our power. To ‘still’ the mind from desiring, giving, living, dying—nothing is ordained by our will.² Neither power nor wealth comes by our

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1. The original text should imply ; We can attain to Him only through His grace.
 2. Here the commentary is somewhat confused. In the original the meaning appears to be ; By our will we may not live if death calls, or die if the hour is not come; nor get power, wealth or the inclination to achieve things in the world.

will, even though the mind is resounding with crying desire for these. Here an ordinary word like 'shor' (noise) has conveyed a whole viewpoint. We are helpless to obtain illumination of mind when we seek it, or soul-awakening or absorption in God. Emancipation too does not lie within our power. The Guru, after recounting the power of self-expression (speech), seeking His favour, giving away (charity), keeping alive, dying, attainment of power; and after, emancipation—affirms that nothing lies in our own power. He who is All-Powerful exercises power. In view of the powerlessness of men, says Guru Nanak, no one should consider himself superior and any others lowly or outcaste. The divine system continues in its operations. Waves of water rise to different heights; but with all their differences, they are in essence, water. The Guru has said in the second stanza : 'By His ordinance is one high or low in scale.' Here the related thought is expressed, that no one may be considered high or low. Whatever man is, is by divine ordinance. God watches over all creatures uninvolved, impartial.

Stanza XXXIV

God created nights, seasons, lunar days, and week days,
 Wind, water, fire and the nether regions.
 In the midst of these He established the earth as a temple.
 In it He placed living beings of different habits and kinds.
 Their names are various and endless,
 And they are judged according to their acts.
 True is God, and true is His court.
 There the elect are accepted and honoured.
 The Merciful One marketh them according to their acts.
 The bad and the good shall there be distinguished.
 Nanak, on arrival there, this shall be seen.

Now this composition, Japuji is being brought to a close. At this stage the seeker is instructed in the steps towards self-perfection. How he should rise from step to step—this theme is treated of in a most original fashion here. Of course, what has gone before has also such great originality. The themes which have preceded are the determination of the nature of God as Attributed

and Attributeless, *Yoga-praxis*, progress in cultivating noble qualities, devotion—all these are included in a synthesis, which could be obtained only with genius of the highest order. In this concluding portion the originality of Guru Nanak's vision is of a high degree of brilliance. It can be placed side by side with other scriptures which have treated of this theme. Guru Nanak, through his intuition has shown a new path to the seeker.

In this stanza are mentioned five stages which the seeker must traverse. Guru Nanak has given to each of them the name 'Khand' (lit. part). The first stage has been called '*Dharma-Khand*' (the stage of Duty in the world of men).

The world of men is regulated on the one hand by the sequence of day and night, changes of seasons, dates and days of the week. On the other, the earth on which man lives is surrounded by air, water, fire and the elements of the surrounding worlds (*Patal*). Thus, besides the earth, four elements are mentioned. This is how the material universe is regulated. The earth, situated amidst time and space has been determined by God to be the sphere of Moral Duty (*Dharma-shala*). The earth is fixed in time and space, as said just now. Situated thus and influenced by these two elements, it is intended to serve as the venue of man's moral life. What the Guru wishes to convey to man is that he must endeavour in the performance of moral duty. Immeasurable are the worlds, each with its own sphere of space and its time-system. Thus fixed between space and time, the earth exists principally to serve as the sphere of moral duty. This is the specific purpose of our birth. The earth is a small place in the midst of limitless time and space. Here we are called upon to merge into God through our moral action. God has created various kinds of creatures with their different natures and names, which are innumerable and endless.

Each creature will be judged by its deeds (*karmas*). This judgement will be in the Divine Court, where presides God who is perfect in wisdom and truth, and so is His justice. There true justice will be done, in consultation with the jury of God's saints (*Panchas*). Those juror-saints grace this court divine, and are witnesses to all our deeds. There jurors are situated within our bodies. Who are these? These are our five senses, which are our

agents for all our deeds, and they will bear witness about us¹ and thus will our deeds be justified. Those who are favoured with the grace of God, will bear His mark of honour. It is there that human lives will be judged as false or true (lit. unbaked or baked). This judgement cannot be made by the criteria of this world, for the motives of actions are not known here. Only one part of the action is visible here. Its complete picture is revealed only before God. Therefore, our deeds cannot be truly evaluated here. Not knowing the motivation behind actions, we see only their results, and so misjudge them. In that world, actions will be judged truly by their motives and true intentions. It is there therefore, that the truth about us will become manifest. The world honours even the unworthy, since its gaze is superficial. The final judgement can be formed only after the account of life is closed—no way earlier. Jesus has rightly adjured : ‘Judge not, that ye be not judged ! Bear love and compassion towards others, but judge them not as to what you consider them to be. Actions can be judged only by God, who views them from within.

Stanza XXXV

Such is the practice in the realm of righteousness.

I now describe the condition of the realm of knowledge.

How many winds, waters, and fires ! how many Krishans and Shivs !

How many Brahmas who fashioned worlds ! how many forms, colours, and garbs !

How many lands of grace like this ! how many mountains ! how many Dhurus and instructors such as his.

How many Indars, how many moons and suns, how many regions and countrie’s !

How many Sidhs, Budhs, how many Naths ! how many goddesses and representations of them !

How many demigods and demons ! how many saints, how

1. This interpretation of the text is individual and not likely to find wide acceptance.

many jewels and seas !

How many sources of life ! how many languages ! and how many lines of kings !

How many possessors of divine knowledge ! how many worshippers ! Nanak, there is no end of them.

Such is the characteristic of the sphere of Duty, where in moral action is supreme. Next after the stage of Duty, comes the stage of Spiritual Illumination. The seeker must purify his character by acquiring the power of discrimination between what is moral and immoral. In modern parlance, this would be called the Sphere of Morality. Then follows Illumination.

Moral discrimination, judgement regarding good and evil, pursuit of the good, rejection of evil—all this falls within this first sphere—that is, the moral. When the mind obtains the height of non-attachment, it enters the sphere of Illumination. In this sphere the mind is uninvolved, a kind of witness of the play of life. One learns then that there are worlds upon worlds beyond this one of the five elements. Looking beyond our limited world, there are innumerable Krishnas, Shivas and Brahmas engaged in creating fresh worlds. Innumerable are the forms, colours and modes. As against this world of ours, the scene of our actions and their retribution, there are countless other such worlds; countless also are *Merus* (mountain believed to act as the pillar, situated in the middle of the earth.) Countless also are the spheres¹ of Dhruva.² (This may also stand for Narad's Sermon to Dhruva which turned his mind to devotion and panance) Hence the meaning would be : There are in the universe innumerable such sermons and Dhruvas who absorbed them. Innumerable again are Indras, moons and suns and astral constellations. Millions there are of Siddhas (Jain saints), Buddhas³ and Naths (accomplished Yogis). All these are paths of spiritual knowledge or

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1. Original—*upadesh* : This can mean 'sermon,' as also 'region.'
 2. A great Bhakta, termed the pole-star. Both interpretations are given here.
 3. 'Siddha' in Guru-vani stands for a Yogi who has arrived and 'Buddha' for an illumined soul. There does not appear to be a reference to Gautama the Buddha or his creed.

gnosis. Many are the devotees of Dēvi, the goddess Durga, who adopt her robes.¹ Many are the gods, titans and savants. Many are the sources of life—many forms of speech, many dynasties of kings (heroes). Many are the modes to obtain spiritual awakening; many the devotees, without end.

Stanza XXXVI

In the realm of knowledge the light of divine knowledge is resplendent.

There are heard songs from which millions of joys and pleasures proceed.

Beauty is the attribute of the realm of happiness.

There things are fashioned in an incomparable manner.

What is done there cannot be described.

Whoever endeavoureth to describe it shall afterwards repent.

There are fashioned knowledge, wisdom, intellect, and understanding;

And there too is fashioned the skill of demigods and men of supernatural power.

This stanza too opens with the exposition of the Realm of Realization. In this Realm of Realization man acquires Gnosis (Knowledge of Reality) which is like a blazing light. This places him at the central point of creation and he feels in his innermost soul one with the whole universe. The outer mind (that is, the process of conception and intellection) howsoever fully accomplished in learning, will fail to arrive at such central point of all knowledge, and will remain only at the periphery, amidst non-essentials. But the inner mind through its intuition has the vision of the entire universe. Through such experience man finds himself at the centre of the universe. This kind of knowledge is not based on the senses or the ratiocinative process. This knowledge is lodged in the inner mind, the Soul. There one hears marvellous sounds, inner voices; experiences joy and is witness to

1. The accepted interpretation is, forms of incarnations of Devi, consort of Shiva.

manifold happenings—happenings out of the ordinary and a strange bliss are the order there.

Innumerable notes of divine harmony are heard in that state. That is the state of vision, of joy in unlimited plenty. This is the true Sphere of Divine Knowledge. The spiritual preceptor must place himself at the central point of the universe. He should have transcended the Sphere of Duty, and should have attained non-attachment. He should thus have a total vision of the universe, which can be acquired only by this process. As long as he places himself in one corner of the universe, his vision of it is fragmented and not total and harmonious. Then certain questions arise as to the cause of the existence of suffering and injustice in the universe. One who places himself at the centre, will experience nothing but joy. Nothing will he experience there except harmony, joy, marvels and bliss.

After the Realm of Realization, the next one is that of Endeavour or Asceticism (*Sram-Khand*). In *Dharma-Khand*, the central issue is morality, the discrimination between good and evil. Then follows the Realm of Realization (*Jnan-Khand*) : next after that is *Sarm* (or *Sram*) *Khand*. This rather cryptic term (*Sarm* or *Sram*) written in a manner to be read as either, may mean, if the derivation be Sanskrit, endeavour; if Persian, modesty or humility of spirit. Perhaps Guru Nanak meant to glance at both meanings. He appears to be a new kind of teacher, whose language has already undergone a synthesis of meaning. So, taking both the sources just mentioned in unison, *Sarm-Khand* might be interpreted as 'endeavour with humility of spirit.' So, the Sadhana or Asceticism commended is effort in the spirit of humility. What would be the expression (*vani*) of such endeavour? It will result in a beautiful form imposed on one's life. In the Realm of Realization too is mention of shaping a marvellous form. But in the present context man is not shaping anything, but is witness to the beauty being created by God in the cosmic sphere. Here, one is the artist in one's own life. In the Realm of Duty the clay was prepared. Realization moistened it, and now in the Realm of Humility and Endeavour the stage of shaping a beautiful figure has been reached.

This great stage is beyond man's power of description. Anyone

attempting this will only be ashamed of his inadequacy in this respect. This beauty of life is achieved by slow degrees of self-imposed penance and effort. Any attempt at describing it will only lead one to the painful realization that it is beyond one's power of description. (Such a statement, that while trying to describe it, one will only regret one's inadequacy, occurs in the stanza on *Mannai* (*Manan*—contemplation). Such repetition perforce occurs in the Veda as well as the Koran.

One of the qualities forged in that process of life-perfection is called *Surcti*, which means complete identification of the individual soul with the universe. A Gujarati poet, Premaldas defines the man of God thus : One whose mind is at one with God (lit. the Dark-skinned One, that is, Krishna.) The other quality perfected is *Mati*—the power of contemplation. Along with such powers of the mind, absorption is forged in this Sphere of Endeavour with Humility of Spirit. There is forged such awareness—God-consciousness—as is associated with great seekers and men of perfect spiritual vision (*Siddhas*). *Sur*, (lit. god) stands here for seekers whose asceticism is perfect; *Siddha* for men of perfect vision.

Stanza XXXVII

Force is the attribute of the realm of action.
Incomparable are they who dwell therein.
There are very powerful warriors and heroes.
They are filled with the might of Ram—
There are many Sitas in the midst of greatness,
Their beauty cannot be described—
They die not, neither are they led astray
In whose hearts God dwelleth.
There dwell congregations of saints;
They rejoice; the True One is in their hearts.
God dwelleth in the true realm.
He looketh on its denizens with an eye of favour, and
rendereth them happy.
There are continents, worlds, and universes.
Whoever trieth to describe them shall never arrive at an end.
There are worlds upon worlds and forms upon forms.

They fulfil their functions according to God's orders :
God beholding and contemplating them is pleased.
Nanak, to describe them would be impossible.

We have so far been shown the three Realms which the seeker must enter—that of Moral Thinking, of Realization of Truth and of Asceticism with Humility. The next two Realms—the fourth and the fifth are stated in one stanza. Such integration of these two Realms perhaps implies that despite their being two separate Realms, Guru Nanak took them to be one. The first of these is *Karam*,¹ that is grace. After Asceticism (Devotion, Prayer) the next stage is for divine grace to arrive. What is the expression of this experience? The answer is, 'Union with God!' The implication is that divine grace results in man perpetually living with God. While man is with God, he experiences God alone—nothing else for him exists. The world as such ceases to exist for the seeker; man absolutely enters into God. Many have attained to this Realm. Here is a picture loved by the pious of many faiths, such as those believing in the path of Emancipation (that is, believers in Higher Hinduism) and Muslims. In the vision of such believers, God is perpetually with the good, and a kind of discourse goes on in His presence about matters spiritual. Here one finds 'heroes of great might', that is, those who have passed through the experience of Supreme Asceticism. God (here called Rama) resides in their hearts; He alone fills them. This is the first use of 'Rama' in Japuji, but it stands for God, and not any deity or incarnation. While names of other deities too are used, the name 'Rama' signifies God only. Derivatively 'Rama' means 'he who pervades our being.'

'*Tithe Sita*'—This phrase is extremely hard to interpret. It might mean : There is glory sewn, that is, it is inseparable from God! Glory is inseparable from Him, just as light from the sun, Shakti (might) from Shiva, shadow from substance, and the creation from Brahman. Here there might have been intended a kind of ornate literary figure on 'Sita'. The glory of Rama, that

1. This is from the Arabic. In the absence of absolutely clear indication it might also be *Karma* from the Sanskrit, meaning action, and good fortune descending upon man as a result of his good actions.

is God, pervades the entire universe. This glory is to Him what Sita was to Rama. Where does God reside? The Brihadrayan Upanishad says: "He abides in His own glory, and yet does not abide in it. This glory is His, and more than His, of Purusha"¹ Man can describe only a particle out of His glory. We can never rise to the description of the height of His glory and our mind must always operate at a level lower than it. Substance and its attributes cannot be separated. Balmika in his Ramayana says, Sita's splendour is beyond description; so is the glory of God. He in whose heart Rama's devotion is fixed, finds stability, equipoise, and hence such a one will not die. He will become immortal. No power on earth can 'cheat'² such a person.

In this Realm abide devotees from so many worlds. 'Worlds' here implies such regions as the moon-world, the earth etc. In this Realm is a large concourse of God's devotees. They have no other task to perform except to abide in bliss. The gods eat not, drink not, but are filled even by the sight of Amrita.³ The paths of Realization and Asceticism have already been traversed by these devotees. After these Realms, in the fourth Realm which is now entered, there is nothing but joy and bliss. There will be seen the followers of numerous faiths. They abide in bliss, because the eternal God is lodged in their souls.

Next begins the fifth Realm. Guru Nanak affirms here, 'The Formless-Absolute abides in the Realm Eternal.'⁴ He created the universe, and after, blesses it for ever. In this Realm is God alone, exclusively—nothing else. In the fourth Realm were two—God and His devotee, without a third. In this last Realm only God abides, none else. There lie spread innumerable regions and even universes without end. There God's existence alone is real; we that is, our separable entity has vanished. The entire universe is the visible glory of God. In this Realm are forged the shapes of countless universes. All happens as He wills it. God watches over and is in joy in contemplating His creation. In Guru Nanak's

1. Purusha (lit. the Male) is interpreted as the Absolute without Attributes, Om.

2. Used here to imply the perverting influence of Maya or worldliness.

3. The immortalizing substance, ambrosia.

4. A minor grammatical discussion has been omitted in the translation.

script occurs 'vichar' that is, thought. Watching does not require it, though joy does. So, the sense would be : He watches over His creation, and contemplating it, is in supreme joy. Guru Nanak says, that to describe that state is as hard as to bend steel.

Here, in one single stanza is included the description of three Realms—experiencing grace, fortune through good actions, and entry into the Realm Eternal. It is possible that here there is only one Realm of experience and the rest is a description of the sphere where God abides. Which means that in this last Realm or Sphere the seeker cannot enter. God alone abides there. The seeker's last reach is the place where the devotees are assembled and God the eternal ever abides in their souls. There, in other words, are Rama and Sita and no third. Those devotees have become inseparable from God. Now the question arises, is this the highest (last) Realm of the seeker ? After the devotee is completely merged in God our description of God includes the devotee also. My interpretation inclines here to take this as the complete merger of the devotee into God. But my inclination is not very relevant. It is, therefore, possible that Guru Nanak meant to describe the divine substance is a separate vision.

He says, in the Realm Eternal the Lord alone abides. He creates and watches over His creation. Since the devotee is merged into God, what remains is the description of God. *Jor* (Union) may stand for identification of the devotee or his eternally living in the divine presence. So, in the fifth Realm, it is possible that God alone is mentioned or alternatively, the devotee merged in God.

I have discussed these two Realms with a number of people. Some of them do not favour the interpretation of merging with God. Their mind prefers to think of the conception of the devotee as also of God, both distinctly. They love to contemplate such a relationship of love. God after all, does not give any reward other than the devotee's devotion itself, which is *the* reward.

Note : The discussion in the commentary above is deep and brilliant. It is possible that Vinobaji has diverged somewhat from the traditional interpretation of this stanza, but since this vision is sublime and ineffable, all interpretations should be welcome.

This is what is known as 'Emancipation with Attributes' (*Saguna Mukti*). A number of people find the very idea of *Nirguna Mukti* (Emancipation without Attributes, that is, complete merger) intolerable. In such a case, that fifth Realm does not belong to the devotee; but is rather a description of a vision of God.

Stanza XXXVIII

Make continence thy furnace, resignation thy goldsmith,
Understanding thine anvil, divine knowledge thy tools,
The fear of God thy bellows, austerities thy fire,
Divine love thy crucible, and melt God's name therein.
In such a true mint the Word shall be coined.

This is the practice of those on whom God looketh with an eye of favour.

Nanak, the Kind One by a glance maketh them happy.

In this stanza the imagery is taken from the goldsmith's workshop, where he shapes jewellery. The seeker's self-discipline, continence, is such workshop, self-mastery is the goldsmith—that is, he who casts gold into moulds. Intuitive wisdom which seeks divine guidance (*mati, buddhi*) is the anvil, Realization (Veda) is the goldsmith's hammer. Fear of God (such fear is essential for an ascent in the scale of morality and spirituality) is the bellows. This bellows raises flames of fire. The fire here is austerities, penance. Love of God (devotion, as also universal love) is the crucible. In this crucible ye may cast Amrita of the Name of God (prayer, purity). In this mint of truth and purity is forged the Divine Word (Eternal, Revealed Truth, realization, vision). Guru Nanak has laid down eight means for forging *Shabda* (Divine Word). These are self-discipline, self-mastery, intuitive wisdom, realization, fear of God, austerities, devotion and the Divine Name (prayer). These eight means are in a way the final testament of Guru Nanak. This stanza instructs the seeker that the spiritual state attained as a result of these eight means alone will be our saviour. Who may create such a state, this experience? One on whom the Lord's grace descends. That is, grace is indispensable, without which this eight-fold

asceticism will not be effective. Guru Nanak says, innumerable devotees attain bliss through God's glance of grace.

SLOK

The air is the guru, water our father, and the great earth our mother;

Day and night are our two nurses, male and female, who set the whole world a-playing.

Merits and demerits shall be read out in the presence of the Judge.

According to man's acts, some shall be near, and others distant from God.

They who have pondered on the Name and departed after completion of their toil,

Shall have their countenances made bright. O Nanak; how many shall be emancipated in company with them !

The couplets¹ are the finale, the summing-up. The earth is our holy mother. Water is the Father. The air is our Master. (I, Vinoba, affirm that the earth too cannot be possessed just as air and water cannot.) Guru Nanak too has mentioned these in one group. Man is imparted wisdom by his mother, father and the teacher-guide. The Upanishad affirms that true enlightenment comes to one who is blessed with noble parents and a noble teacher. The earth, here mentioned as mother, has already been mentioned as the stage for performance of Moral Duty.² In Stanza XXXIV while the Time-process goes on increasingly, man's world is situated amidst the elements of air, water, fire and ether. Here the first three are assumed to be forms of space. Day and Night are the nurses to look after the infant, man. These two cherish and fondle the universe. Good and evil deeds will be judged at the Divine Court of Justice. Here is repeated what was earlier affirmed in connection with the Realm of Duty, that the genuine and false in our actions will be determined in the world beyond. Further, man's being 'near' or 'far' with respect to God, is a result of his own deeds. God is not near or far—He is immutable and ever in His own state. But men

1. There are three couplets, though they are numbered as one, and are spoken of in the singular.

2. Stanza XXXIV

are situated near Him or far. That is because the reward a man reaps is in accordance with his own deeds. In the Commentary (Bhashya) of Shankara, this point is explained through a fine simile. The Lord says in the ninth chapter of Gita : 'All to me are alike; none is my enemy, nor have I attachment for any. Still those who are devoted to me, I am theirs and they are mine.' This however, to a superficial gaze would appear to be something like partiality. 'I am like to him.' In order to bridge the gap between me and Him, Shankaracharya has used the image of fire—'God is like fire.' Fire is not partial. Whoever is close to it, will get warmth, but none who is far will get this. This is not partiality in the behaviour of fire. Swami Ramdas¹ has expressed the same idea through another figure : 'God is compassionate, and though a witness only, is partial too.' This means that He is compassionate to the worthy His devotees. In setting down God's attributes, such as these have ever been employed, 'Dayalu, Rahman, Rahim'.² Again, it has been said in this context, that He is a witness, unconcerned in the goings on in this world; that He awards 'fruits' of actions according as these actions are; that He is like a Judge. Compassion comprehends the idea of grace. So, while on the one hand expressing His quality of compassion, it is affirmed that He of course rewards good actions, and forgives sinful actions. But again, it is said that when His wrath is aroused, He destroys the wicked. So, while He is compassionate, He is also impartial, unconcerned like a judge. Thus in one of His aspects he is compassionate to His devotees. He has thus three different aspects : the first being His partiality to His devotees; the second His quality of compassion, and the third His impartial justice. Ramdas, in the verse already alluded to, has expressed this triple reality. Guru Nanak has earlier said that whoever has been blessed with the inclination to praise Him, is truly a king of kings.³

So, man must realize that he may come near God or be thrown

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1. A seventeenth-century Maharashtrian saint.
 2. *Dayalu* is from the Sanskrit, *Rahman* and *Rahim* from the Koran. All these express the Divine quality of compassion.
 3. Stanza XXV

away from Him through his own actions. The responsibility is ours. In the Koran it has been said : 'God punishes evil-doing in the same measure as the evil done. But good actions He rewards ten-fold.' So, the fruits of actions are as these are sown. But to His devotees He is partial, compassionate and just.

Those who have devoted themselves to God, their travail shall end in successful achievement. Says Guru Nanak : Their faces will glow with joy, and many more will get emancipation through their inspiration.¹ So, while they themselves get the reward of their devotion, many others too benefit from them. On this affirmation Japuji comes to a close.

2. The idea is, through inspiratio to devoton, not intercession.