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SIKHI'S WISDOM, ETHICS AND (DE)RADICALIZATION

DECOLONIZING THE MIND THROUGH DISIDENTIFICATION AND CIRCULAR THINKING

Khushwant Singh

ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਖੇਟੇ ਖਰੇ ਪਛਾਣੁ॥

Wise ones recognize good and bad.

Guru Granth Sahib (GGS), 942, M.1

Radicalization stems from identification. From identification with an ideology, a belief, a dogma, a historic narration, a land, an institution, a leader, a group.²³⁸ We are capable of inflicting the worst possible harm when we lose the ability to reflect even for a second. Human history is replete with abhorrent examples at both the individual and collective levels. Colonization, the Nazi Reich, state violence, terror in the name of

²³⁸ Khushwant Singh heads the Secretariat of the International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD) and is the founder of the SikhiCouncil. He studied ethnology, education and social anthropology. DOI: 10.58863/20.500.12424/4293073 | CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 International

religion, the exploitation of nature, fellow human beings, and animals for the sake of accumulating wealth based on a linear growth-based capitalist worldview demonstrate the atrocities that can result from unquestioned identification with an ideology.

The distinction between “good” and “bad”, “truth” and “falsehood”, accompanies us like a shadow. However, in a state of radicalization, we abandon this shadow. This essay offers initial insights into (de)radicalization and disidentification from odious passions from the perspective of Sikhi’s original wisdom. Let me outline the basics of Sikhi before we delve into the subject.²³⁹

Sikhi: Living with wisdom

Sikhi, often referred to as Sikhism, is the fifth largest religion in the world. Its 25 million followers are called Sikhs, which refers to “students of truth and wisdom”. Sikhi originated in Panjab, in present-day North India in pre-colonial medieval times. It traces its origin to Divine revelations to over 30 messengers of truth, including Gur Nanak, born in 1469, his nine direct successors as well as others like Bhagat Kabir (*bhagat, bhatt*), who are regarded by Sikhs as Enlightened Ones. They originate from different social and religious backgrounds and age groups. These Wise Ones unanimously emphasize that they do not identify with any existing religion but rather adhere to the principles of truthfulness, lifelong learning, and mentoring, known as *sikh mat* or

²³⁹ All original references are derived from *Gurbani*, the divine scriptures of Sikhi. GGS refers to the (*Adi*) *Guru Granth Sahib*. The number indicates the page in the printed/online standard edition and is followed by the name of the Enlightened One, e.g. Bhagat Kabir or Namdev. Mahala (M.1/M.2 etc.) refers to the direct line of the ten Enlightened Ones, starting from the first Mahala Nanak. DG refers to the writings of the tenth Enlightened One, Gur Gobind Singh, in the standard edition of *Dasam Granth*. It is of special importance for Sikhs of the order of *Khalsa*. Original key terms are added in italics in parenthesis.

gurmat. According to their own insights, they transcended worldliness, and were able to live in harmony with the Divine Will (*hukam*) through self-contemplation – and not through identification with existing religious dogmas, codes of conduct, the practice of rituals, mantras, recitations, fasting, dietary regulations, pilgrimages, yoga and meditation techniques, or intellectual debates. The Wise Ones consider themselves as humble and fallible servants (*das, jan*) and messengers (*gur*) of the Divine, which they regard as the only true *Guru*, the one eternal source of enlightenment and life. They stress the need of having congruity between words and deeds, and criticize object-oriented practices, idolatry, discrimination along social status and the caste system, the maltreatment of women, traditions like circumcision, dogmatism and fanaticism, the dependency on a clergy, personality cult, economic rationale underlying religious practices through paid services, and the misuse of religion for political, worldly, or missionary purposes. For the Enlightened Ones, true worship means internalizing the wisdom, virtues, and creativity of the Divine, which brings out all the inexplicably wondrous of life.

Figuratively speaking, we can regard ourselves as travelers who are on the verge of dying of thirst in the desert. Then we see a desert dweller. Desperately we ask for water. The dweller points in the direction of a water source. If we now start worshipping the dweller or the finger pointing to the source, or start endlessly repeating the word “water”, we will not survive. The only thing that will prevent us from dying is to attentively follow the indicated direction, find the source and then drink the water. The act of internalizing Divine wisdom is therefore referred to as soul food (*langar*). To remain on the path of enlightenment, there is a constant need of cultivating the spiritual piece of land, the soul, with *nam*, spiritual wisdom since only the degree of

enlightenment, the level of light in the soul, is solely carried along after leaving the body.²⁴⁰

The Enlightened Ones view life as a precious gift that provides an opportunity to heal the hybris (*pharam*) we carry within us as powerful spiritual beings. This life is seen as a therapeutic place of diasporic healing (*daru*), allowing us to fully reconnect with our spiritual homeland and family of all enlightened souls (*wahe guru, sach khand, par brahm, sukh sagar*), which we had abandoned due to our narcissism that made us believe that we, the drop, can remain without the ocean. Since we went on the arrant path of separation, we experience limitations through natural laws, and seemingly contradictory experiences like joy and suffering. After countless reincarnations we eventually can reach a level of humility that culminates in the realization: Although I am divine, I need my spiritual family. I no longer identify with the diaspora of ephemerality. I want to return home. It is

²⁴⁰ ਸਿਖ ਮਤਿ ਸਭ ਬੁਧਿ ਤੁਮਾਰੀ ਮੰਦਿਰ ਛਾਵਾ ਤੇਰੇ॥ GGS, 795, M.1; ਗੁਰਮਤੀ ਸਾਲਾਹਿ ਸਚੁ ਹਰਿ ਪਾਇਆ ਗੁਣਤਾਸੁ ॥ GGS, 27, M.3; ਤੇਰਾ ਕਵਣੁ ਗੁਰੂ ਜਿਸ ਕਾ ਤੂ ਚੇਲਾ॥ ... ਸਬਦੁ ਗੁਰੂ ਸੁਰਤਿ ਧੁਨਿ ਚੇਲਾ॥ GGS, 942, M.1; ਆਦਿ ਅੰਤਿ ਏਕੈ ਅਵਤਾਰਾ॥ ਸੇਈ ਗੁਰੂ ਸਮਝਿਯਹੁ ਹਮਾਰਾ॥ DG, 1386; ਚਾਰੇ ਕੁੰਡਾ ਦੇਖਿ ਅੰਦਰੁ ਭਾਲਿਆ॥ GGS, 149, M.1; ਬਾਹਰਿ ਟੋਲੈ ਸੇ ਭਰਮਿ ਭੁਲਾਹੀ॥ GGS, 102, M.5; ਜਪੁ ਤਪੁ ਸੰਜਮੁ ਧਰਮੁ ਨ ਕਮਾਇਆ॥ GGS, 12, M.1; ਗੁਰ ਅਮਰਦਾਸ ਕੀ ਅਕਥ ਕਥਾ ਹੈ ਇਕ ਜੀਹ ਕਛੁ ਕਹੀ ਨ ਜਾਈ॥ GGS, 1406, Bhatt Bal; ਗੁਰ ਅੰਗਦ ਦੀਅਉ ਨਿਧਾਨੁ ਅਕਥ ਕਥਾ ਗਿਆਨੁ ਪੰਚ ਭੂਤ ਬਸਿ ਕੀਨੇ ਜਮਤ ਨ ਤ੍ਰਾਸ॥ GGS, 1399, Bhatt Nal; ਬਾਹਿ ਗਰੇ ਕੀ ਲਾਜ ਅਸਿ ਗੋਬਿੰਦ ਦਾਸ ਤੁਹਾਰ॥੮੬੪॥ DG 290; ਸਦਾ ਏਕ ਜੋਤਜੰ ਅਜੂਨੀ ਸਰੁਪੰ॥ DG 39; ਚਾਰੇ ਵਰਨ ਆਖੈ ਸਭੁ ਕੋਈ॥ ਬ੍ਰਹਮੁ ਬਿੰਦ ਤੇ ਸਭ ਓਪਤਿ ਹੋਈ॥੨॥ GGS, 1127, M.3; ਸੇ ਕਿਉ ਮੰਦਾ ਆਖੀਐ ਜਿਤੁ ਜੰਮਹਿ ਰਾਜਾਨ॥ GGS, 473, M.1; ਸਰਮ ਸੁੰਨਤਿ ਸੀਲੁ ਰੇਜਾ ਹੋਹੁ ਮੁਸਲਮਾਣੁ॥ GGS, 140, M.1; ਜਿਸੁ ਪਾਹਨ ਕਉ ਪਾਤੀ ਤੇਰੈ ਸੇ ਪਾਹਨ ਨਿਰਜੀਉ॥੧॥ GGS, 479, Kabir; ਜਿਨ੍ ਮਨਿ ਹੋਹੁ ਮੁਖਿ ਹੋਹੁ ਸਿ ਕਾਂਢੇ ਕਚਿਆ॥ 488, Bhagat Sheikh Farid; ਛਾਡਿ ਕਤੋਬ ਰਾਮੁ ਭਜੁ ਬਉਰੇ ਜੁਲਮ ਕਰਤ ਹੈ ਭਾਰੀ॥ GGS, 477, Bhagat Kabir; ਰਾਜੁ ਨ ਚਾਹਉ ਮੁਕਤਿ ਨ ਚਾਹਉ ਮਨਿ ਪ੍ਰੀਤਿ ਚਰਨ ਕਮਲਾਰੇ॥ GGS, 534, M.5; ਜਿਸ ਕੈ ਅੰਤਰਿ ਰਾਜ ਅਭਿਮਾਨੁ॥ ਸੇ ਨਰਕਪਾਤੀ ਹੋਵਤ ਸੁਆਨੁ॥ GGS, 278, M.5; ਗੁਰਿ ਕਹਿਆ ਸਾ ਕਾਰ ਕਮਾਵਹੁ॥ ਗੁਰ ਕੀ ਕਰਣੀ ਕਾਰੇ ਧਾਵਹੁ॥ GGS, 929, M.1; ਲੰਗਰੁ ਚਲੈ ਗੁਰ ਸਬਦਿ ਹਰਿ ਤੋਟਿ ਨ ਆਵੀ ਖਟੀਐ॥ GGS, 967, Bhatt Balvand Te Sata; ਬ੍ਰਹਮ ਗਿਆਨੀ ਕਾ ਭੋਜਨੁ ਗਿਆਨੁ॥ GGS, 273, M.5; ਧਰਮੁ ਭੂਮਿ ਸਤੁ ਬੀਜੁ ਕਰਿ ਐਸੀ ਕਿਰਸ ਕਮਾਵਹੁ॥ ਤਾਂ ਵਾਪਾਰੀ ਜਾਣੀਅਹੁ ਲਾਹਾ ਲੈ ਜਾਵਹੁ॥੮॥ GGS, 418, M.1.

with this sense that the Wise Ones say that the antidote to the separating poison of narcissism is contained in the disease itself.²⁴¹

Inspired by a profound sense of compassion, the Enlightened Ones gathered all the available spiritual wisdom and brought it into writing (*Gurbani*). This monumental collaborative task over a time span of 200 hundred years resulted in the compilation of the poetic anthology known today as the (*Adi*) *Guru Granth Sahib* (GGS). It offers a timeless opportunity for people across different eras, regions, and religious traditions to benefit from the revealed wisdom. The scriptures combine linguistic beauty and diversity and are written in the specifically developed script-language *Gurmukhi* and is based on melodies. Sikhs consider the 1,430-page anthology, completed in 1708 by Gur Gobind Singh, as the primary source of spiritual and ethical inspiration.

Sikhi evolved into a unique spiritual way of life during the 15th to 17th centuries CE. Today, around 25 million people worldwide regard themselves as Sikhs. Despite suffering existential threats, persecution, suppression, and trauma by those in power, Sikhi evolved to become one of the youngest world religions marked by an ethically and socially oriented lifestyle, unique traditions of musical and defensive martial arts and naming. The common spiritual descent is symbolized by collective family names: Sikh women use the name Kaur (princess) and men Singh

²⁴¹ ਭਰਮੇ ਭੂਲੇ ਆਵਉ ਜਾਉ॥ GGS, 229, M.3; ਸੰਸਾਰੁ ਰੋਗੀ ਨਾਮੁ ਦਾਰੁ ਮੈਲੁ ਲਾਰੈ ਸਚ ਬਿਨਾ॥ GGS, 678, M.1; ਅੰਤਰਿ ਕਪਟੁ ਫਿਰਹਿ ਬੋਤਾਲਾ॥ GGS, 1347, M.5; ਦੁਖੁ ਦਾਰੁ ਸੁਖੁ ਰੇਗੁ ਭਇਆ ਜਾ ਸੁਖੁ ਤਾਮਿ ਨ ਹੋਈ॥ GGS, 469, M.1; ਰਹਿਮੈ ਚੀਰਘ ਰੇਗੁ ਹੈ ਦਾਰੁ ਭੀ ਇਸੁ ਮਾਹਿ॥ GGS, 466, M.5; ਨਾਨਕ ਬੋਲਣੁ ਝਖਣਾ ਦੁਖ ਛਡਿ ਮੰਗੀਅਹਿ ਸੁਖ॥ GGS, 149, M1; ਰਹਿ ਆਇਆ ਦੁਰਹੁ ਚਲਿ ਕੈ ਮੈ ਤਕੀ ਤਉ ਸਰਣਾਇ ਜੀਉ॥ GGS, 763, M.5; ਪਸੁ ਪੰਖੀ ਬਿਰਖ ਅਸਥਾਵਰ ਬਹੁ ਬਿਧਿ ਜੋਨਿ ਭ੍ਰਮਿਓ ਅਤਿ ਭਾਰੀ॥ GGS, 1388, M.5; ਲਖ ਚਉਰਾਸੀਹ ਜੋਨਿ ਸਬਾਈ॥ ਮਾਣਸ ਕਉ ਪ੍ਰਭਿ ਦੀਈ ਵਡਿਆਈ॥ GGS, 1075, M.5. For a more detailed explanation of the root cause of life and linkage between the soul and the Divine see Singh, Khushwant. 2018. "Gurmat – The Art of Spiritual Wisdom. How Peace from Mind through Knowledge of the Soul can Help Overcoming the Challenges of Humankind". In: *Religious Imaginations*, Walters, James (ed.), London: Gingko.

(lion). A sovereign form of representation based on virtues by five initiated Sikh role models (*panj piare*) of the order of *Khalsa* (pure ones) took shape in the 17th century CE.

The dream state of identification

Let us now look at one disturbing example from recent history to illustrate how lack of wisdom and interest-driven identification with dangerous phenomena leads to disastrous global consequences.

Worldwide, the conviction prevailed that nuclear energy is supposedly “safe, clean and good”. It provides uninterrupted power, and we customers used to enjoy relatively low electricity prices and consumed it carelessly. Warning voices, including concerns about the long-term effects of nuclear waste by scientists, went mostly unheard. The Chernobyl disaster in 1986 revealed the dangers of nuclear power in a fatal way to the whole world. But it did not bring about a global policy change. In 2011, a tsunami led to a nuclear catastrophe in Fukushima, Japan. Overnight, nuclear energy was deemed as “bad” in Germany by those who until then supported it. A phase-out of nuclear power was decided.

The example illustrates several things, primarily our hypocrisy and our failure to be farsighted despite having better knowledge. We let assessments to be influenced by our identification with immediate daily comforts we enjoy and prevalent opinions. With our lack for holistic compassion, we not only harm each other but also Mother Earth. Even though nature provides us with sufficient resources and energy for a healthy and materially carefree life, we widely use extractive and other harmful practices to become richer and raise the level of comforts endlessly. All this is happening at the cost of nature, humans, and animals, as is evident from the fact that so many sentient beings are living in undignified conditions. All this is happening despite the cross-

cultural experience that material progress – beyond the point of having a senseful and decent paid job, a housing, educational and health facilities – does not lead to sustainable peace of mind or justice. Until today, there are more than enough people in power, who ruthlessly crave for even more influence and territory. They are not only backed by local people (often elites) who benefit from such regimes but are tolerated by other nation states as long as they have an economic or geostrategic advantage from trade and other forms of collaboration. The ongoing war in Eastern Europe reminds us, after decades of apparent carefreeness, that energy is a precious commodity, and that short-sighted and profit-driven dependencies on ruthless leaders and regimes that trample upon humans and nature never pay off in the long run.

The outlined developments are possible because our mind easily identifies with worldly power, ambitions, and comforts. The deeper the identification with ephemeral phenomena of the manifest world, the greater are our insatiable desires. Ultimately, they can only be quenched at the expense of others, be it the environment, our fellow human beings, or animals. The more entangled we become in the complexities of the world, the less capable are we of deconstructing our identification with our body, thoughts and emotions, objects, ideologies, or other human-made formations such as nation-states. As individual attitudes and collective structures mutually reinforce each other, the entrapment intensifies over the course of time. When we identify even with the most odious passions and desires, we are willing to use our intellect to commit the most horrific acts. The ultimate effect of this development is that we regard ourselves as soulless biological machines, as transhumans, whose bodies, brains and life span can be optimized with technology and augmented intelligence.

Intuitive versus evoked ethics

When we examine regions that claim to be developed and modern, it becomes evident that there is an imbalance between worldly progress and the state of inner evolution. Such regions show high rates of chronic diseases, obesity, depression, loneliness, addictions, and have the highest pollution rates. We can observe that such regions mostly follow a linear growth-based paradigm. And they are dominated by what I describe as *evoked ethics*. It arises individually and collectively, if at all, when the pressure becomes high to change course. The devastating consequences of linear based attitudes and behavior on nature and the climate are just one global example. Now that more and more people are realizing that we are heading towards a global tragedy, we can perceive a change in mindset, at least among portions of the global population as is evident from initiatives like *Fridays for Future* (website: <https://fridaysforfuture.org/>). This change, however, is mainly brought out through external pressure and the fear that we might destroy the planet. In contrast to this, I refer to a conscious, reflexive, and farsighted attitude as *intuitive or spiritual ethics*.

The latter manifests itself independently from any pressure or worldly (short-term) interests, and even extends beyond one's current life. Here, righteous actions are intuitively performed because the inner voice of the soul, inspiring virtuous and forward-looking actions and fostering cyclic farsightedness, is not blinded by conscience appeasement. Intuitive ethics is quality-oriented and never lets quick-wins or quantitative considerations rule.

The diaspora of life: Being guests

The basis to strengthen our in-built ability of intuitive ethics is the realization that the earthly realm is a true dream. Like any dream, it will come to an end, however, without the dreamer, who came here to learn

and heal, ceasing to exist. Reminding ourselves of our status as guests on Earth and revitalizing our transcendent rooting helps us act lovingly while also overcoming exaggerated identification with ephemeral phenomena. It also enables avoiding self-centered and short-term selfishness, and this irrespectively from religious or any other claims of salvation in the Hereafter. When we do the right thing not out of morality, not to gain popularity, not to earn points for the next political election, not to accumulate rewards for a supposed paradise in the Hereafter, then we do the right thing. Intuitive ethics in short means being good and compassionate even when fully aware that the universe is going to be destroyed in the next moment. Acting honorably out of oneself and not due to any expectation, is a testimonial ament of intuitive spiritual ethics.

Democracy, at least from my learnings, is the ability to appropriately consider the natural needs of nature, humans, and the animal world. To achieve this, mastering the art of collaboration and active listening – not only to each other but also to Divine wisdom – is a prerequisite from the perspective of Sikhi. Spiritual wisdom is the realm of openness, unifying values, virtues, and natural needs. It inspires us to strive for individual and collective well-being, solidarity, cohesion, sacrifice, and modesty. It also reminds us that we are not citizens of the world or a human-made nation. We are guests on Mother Earth. We are deeply embedded in a cyclic cosmic theatre. We all live in the diaspora of impermanence. The whole world is diaspora. Paradise and heaven are here when we are happy. Hell is here when we suffer. This unites all of us.

When we truly embrace the role of guests, we intuitively treat each other and Mother Earth with more respect. If I am a guest in your home, I will not rampage in your living room. Instead, I will be polite, perhaps enjoy a cup of tea, be thankful for the hospitality offered, and eventually return home. As a hotel guest, I would not begin decorating the hotel. As a patient, I do not embellish the hospital room. Instead, I focus on

everything necessary to recover according to the doctors' recommendations, aiming to be discharged as soon as possible. The Wise Ones use the metaphor of "getting on one's feet" (*charan chalo*) to express the need to nurture all the virtues I need to heal, master the rocky path of life and ultimately reach enlightenment. This is when my small light merges with the infinite source of light (*joti jot ralia*). The drop merges with the ocean. It is in this sense that Sikhi is about saving oneself and not the world.²⁴²

If we internalize these insights, chances are little that we identify unreflectively with ephemeral phenomena or behave radically in diaspora. So alongside nurturing humanistic values, spiritual wisdom inspires us of transcending our being. Accordingly, only wisdom and values that connect us as sentient beings, are regarded as Divine in Sikhi. Constructions like nation-states, ethnicity, nationalism, or racism, which all separate us, are seen as human made. Being wise and spiritual therefore means cultivating values that are universal, transcend time, people, ideologies, institutions, boundaries, and regions. Divine values serve as guiding principles for all people, regardless of their background.²⁴³ In practical terms, this means for example that we do not differentiate ourselves from others based on certain traditional dietary regulations, but instead, let ourselves be guided by the principle of health. When we extend the value of being healthy beyond our body, to our psyche, and animals and to the environment, we intuitively deduce not to overeat, purchase organic and regional products, avoid industrially or genetically processed food, sugar, fattening ingredients, preservatives, and additives such as hormones that end up in the water and affect sentient beings. In this way, we become a healthier part in the larger cycle.

²⁴² ਚਰਨ ਚਲਉ ਮਾਰਗਿ ਗੋਬਿੰਦ॥ GGS, 281, M.5; ਜੇਤੀ ਜੇਤਿ ਰਲੀ ਸੰਪੂਰਨੁ ਥੀਆ ਰਾਮ॥ GGS, 846, M.5; ਆਈ ਪੰਥੀ ਸਗਲ ਜਮਾਤੀ ਮਨਿ ਜੀਤੈ ਜਗੁ ਜੀਤੁ॥ GGS, 6, M.1.

²⁴³ ਹਰਿ ਜੁਗੁ ਜੁਗੁ ਭਗਤ ਉਪਾਇਆ ਪੈਜ ਰਖਦਾ ਆਇਆ ਰਾਮ ਰਾਜੇ॥ GGS, 451, M.4.

Moving from desires to natural needs

A wisdom-oriented approach is not about adhering to a commandment for its own sake or due to a reward I will gain in the Hereafter, but about the ability to distinguish natural needs from unquenchable desires and satisfy them appropriately.²⁴⁴ As we have seen, the wisdom of being healthy ultimately helps us in all areas of life, allowing us to contribute just by a little change in behavior to animal welfare, reduce factory farming, and lessen the burden on our bodies and nature. Moreover, it brings us closer in our hearts, as there are no dietary restrictions dividing us. If we internalize such approaches already in childhood, we will be able to later advocate for corresponding values as decision makers in education, economy, medicine, agriculture, city planning, and politics.

The outlined insights are deeply engrained in Sikhi. They become apparent when we look at how respectfully Sikhs try to treat the soul and body. This not only comprises satisfying spiritual, and basic physical and emotional needs, having a fresh, healthy, and modest diet, and keeping the body fit. It also encompasses avoiding altering the body without a medical need, may it be through piercings or plastic surgery. Sikhs keep their hair uncut and gently cover it. Male Sikhs keep their bear untrimmed and a gently cover their head with a turban. Women usually use a headscarf; some also wear a turban. The turban, called *dastar*, along with uncut hair are considered natural expressions of a pious, devout, and humble lifestyle. The turban also expresses a deep love for the Divine which acknowledges that it is not upon us but the protective hand of the Divine to decide which therapy is necessary for us to heal and return home to our spiritual homeland. Ultimately, Sikhs honor the body as it is the vehicle for the soul to transcending

²⁴⁴ ਜੇ ਹਰਿ ਲੇੜੇ ਮੇ ਕਰੇ ਸੋਈ ਜੀਅ ਕਰੰਨਿ ॥ GGS, 133, M.5.

ephemerality. And at the same time, Sikhs are cautious of the body as it harbors everything that binds us to the ephemeral world.²⁴⁵

Decolonizing the mind from linear thinking

If we want to overcome unreflective identification and different forms of radicalization, enhance justice, dignity, respect, and harmony, and protect nature in a better way, we need to *decolonize the mind*. This involves recognizing where we mimic trends, follow the zeitgeist or even colonial practices in an unreflecting manner, and live in denial of the profound wisdom that was given to us unconditionally. Essentially, it encompasses unlearning (*anpadea*) all conditionings that harm us in the long run. This process is painful yet transformative. For after each injury comes healing.²⁴⁶ This perspective gives hope. People from various traditions, including Indigenous Peoples, tell me of similar experiences. Once this process is initiated, we intuitively start strengthening life-affirming and unifying values.

Moving from desires to needs also means to move from linear to cyclic thinking. When observing a leaf falling from a tree, someone might say, “The leaf has died.” In reality, only transformation is taking place. Spiritual wisdom involves embracing phenomena as they truly are, looking beyond their surface appearance. From the leaf, new soil and life emerge, whether one believes in it or not. We are bound by the same cosmic laws and connected to the natural cycles that govern life. Sikhi even transcends this view: If we miss the current opportunity of

²⁴⁵ ਇਹੁ ਜਗੁ ਸਚੈ ਕੀ ਹੈ ਕੋਠੜੀ ਸਚੇ ਕਾ ਵਿਚਿ ਵਾਸੁ॥ GGS, 463, M.2; ਇਹੁ ਤਨੁ ਧਰਤੀ ਬੀਜੁ ਕਰਮਾ ਕਰੇ ਸਲਿਲ ਆਪਾਉ ਸਾਰੰਗਪਾਣੀ॥ GGS, 23, M.1; ਇਹੁ ਸਰੀਰੁ ਮਾਇਆ ਕਾ ਪੁਤਲਾ ਵਿਚਿ ਹਉਮੈ ਦੁਸਟੀ ਪਾਈ॥ GGS, 31, M.3; ਕਹੈ ਨਾਨਕੁ ਏਹੁ ਸਰੀਰੁ ਪਰਵਾਣੁ ਹੋਆ ਜਿਨਿ ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਸਿਉ ਚਿਤੁ ਲਾਇਆ॥੩੫॥ GGS, 917, M.3.

²⁴⁶ ਪੜਿਆ ਅਣਪੜਿਆ ਪਰਮ ਗਤਿ ਪਾਵੈ॥੧॥ GGS, 197, M.5; ਮੇਰਾ ਬੈਦੁ ਗੁਰੁ ਗੋਵਿੰਦਾ॥ GGS, 618, M.5.

spiritual self-realization, the universe will graciously offer us another chance in the next reincarnation.

Indigenous Traditions, but also scientists like Rachel Carson, Aldo Leopold and James Lovelock remind us that cyclic thinking recognizes and embraces the inherent interconnectedness of life. Rather than perceiving situations and phenomena as linear or isolated occurrences, cyclic thinking considers the context and acknowledges that everything is part of a larger interconnected dynamic system. Accordingly, cyclic thinking encourages to consider the holistic long-term implications of our attitudes and actions. Just as nature operates in cycles, so do our own lives and the systems we are a part of. By adopting this perspective more consciously and from early age onwards in our families and educational institutions, we could intuitively develop more harmony, a sustainable lifestyle and consider the broader and long-term impact of our decisions on us, society, and nature. In essence, cyclic thinking cannot lead to an extreme position, whether at the far left or right. It recognizes that there is no beginning nor end, nor a goal waiting somewhere in the future on a chronological timeline.

René Descartes, Isaac Newton, and Immanuel Kant, just to name a few influential proponents of linear thinking, emphasize a sequential, logical cause-and-effect understanding, where each event is perceived as leading to the next in a line, often following a predetermined goal. In linear thinking, there is an expectation that outcomes can be predicted. This mode of thinking often seeks to find the most direct and efficient path to a desired outcome. The prevailing paradigm that measures development and success based on economic growth, even when it comes at the cost of exploiting human beings, animals, and our precious Mother Earth, is a direct outcome of linear thinking. It disregards the undeniable reality of our planet's limited resources and shows vividly what harmful side-effects linear thinking has caused. It is self-

understood that linear thinking has its own merits in certain contexts, for instance in mathematics.

Mastering cyclic thinking and transformation through holistic education

Once our education systems begin nurturing a holistic culture which places at least the same importance on unifying values, timeless wisdom, and respectful collaboration as on the transmission of scientific knowledge, only then can we lay the ground for resilient young people which respect the inherent worthiness of all living beings, including nature, as the central core value from which everything else is derived. Then young people will not regard themselves as optimizable biological machines who compete on a capitalistic market and in a virtual and editable world but as humble guests who entered the mystery of diaspora for a deeper purpose beyond their bodies and volatile emotions and desires. Then we are able not only to create scientists of matter and body (*badehi*) but virtuous researchers of the soul (*dehi*).²⁴⁷ When more spiritual insights are passed on, future generations will be better equipped to holistically deal with individual and collective radicalization and other dangerous developments.

The Wise Ones say that when we understand ourselves, we understand the universe. If I truly understood myself, I would not have to say: “How could I do this?” Because I would be a conscious participant observer. When we reach a synchronicity of reflection and action, we know that we are fully healed. Then there is no reason to be reborn. While we are on the path of healing, we mainly learn in two ways: 1. through suffering, and 2. through observation. This reconnects

²⁴⁷ ਵਿਣੁ ਗੁਣ ਕੀਤੇ ਭਗਤਿ ਨ ਹੋਇ॥ GGS, 4, 199 M.1; ਦੇਹੀ ਗੁਪਤ ਬਿਦੇਹੀ ਦੀਸੈ॥ GGS, 900, M.5; ਭਾਈ ਰੇ ਤਨੁ ਧਨੁ ਸਾਥਿ ਨ ਹੋਇ॥ GGS, 62, M.1; ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਕੈ ਭਾਣੈ ਜੋ ਚਲੈ ਵਿਚਿ ਬੋਹਿਬ ਬੈਠਾ ਆਇ॥ GGS, 40, M.4.

again with evoked and intuitive ethics. Evoked ethics require something external to happen, such as a nuclear catastrophe, for us to realize that operating nuclear power plants is highly problematic not only now but especially due to the long-lasting radiation hazard. Intuitive ethics is at work when we avoid everything that creates severe and lasting side effects.

Applying wisdom-oriented self-exploration (also in secular realms)

The beauty of self-exploration is that it is a secular process which can be applied not only in school but in all spheres: in family life, at work, in psychology, ethics, biology, and economics. It can even be applied in policy making. Then, politics is not based on shortsighted party programs and electoral calculations but on inclusive and cyclical thinking that holistically considers the long-term effects on the well-being of humans, animals, and the environment. We could call this *wise policy making*. This process not only entails a structural and institutional paradigm shift. It presupposes the ability to first identify and then accept our individual and collective weaknesses. In Sikhi, we speak of the “five thieves” that drain our energy, meaning they absorb virtues. The first law of thermodynamics as formulated by Julius Robert von Mayer and James Prescott Joule states that energy cannot be created or destroyed and that the total amount of energy in a system remains constant, although it can change from one form to another. The art of spiritual wisdom masters the transformation of our inherent energies: vices are transformed into virtues.

According to the Wise Ones the five “thieves” that arise from the primal disease of *hybris* include: 1. desire, 2. anger, 3. greed,

4. attachment to ephemeral phenomena, and 5. egoism.²⁴⁸ During the process of healing, desire is transformed into acknowledgement of natural necessities, anger into courage, greed into frugality, attachment into unconditional love, and egoism into altruism. This is truly an art as difficult as walking on a hair or the edge of a sword, as the Enlightened Ones say. They also speak of the art of wielding the “sword of wisdom” (*gian khadag*). The small sword that Sikhs carry who have been initiated (*khande di pahul*) into the order of the *Khalsa* established by Gur Gobind Singh in 1699, symbolizes two things: the ongoing battle against our inner demons and vices, and the courage to stand up for justice and marginalized people, and the common good. The sword of wisdom acts like a scalpel. It separates the bad, the tumor, and preserves what is healthy. That is the daily pilgrimage of spiritual people: they take a bath in the temple of their heart and purify it with wisdom. Therefore, brining spiritual wisdom to life is seen as the highest art of life in Sikhi.²⁴⁹

A global vision: Holistic Well-being Index

It could help all of us, if we gave more space to wise human beings who underwent this inner transformation, authentically follow an intuitive ethics, and are not driven by worldly interests or missionary zeal. They could work with scientists in interdisciplinary and multiplex local and global settings on a common global vision: a *Holistic Well-being Index* (HWI), where the well-being of nature, humans, and animals would be the core indicator of progress instead of income based on a linear economic growth paradigm. In such an inclusive

²⁴⁸ ਇਸੁ ਦੇਹੀ ਅੰਦਰਿ ਪੰਚ ਚੇਰ ਵਸਹਿ ਕਾਮੁ ਕ੍ਰੋਧੁ ਲੋਭੁ ਮੋਹੁ ਅਹੰਕਾਰਾ॥ GGS, 600, M.3; ਸਭੇ ਸੂਤਕੁ ਜੇਤਾ ਮੇਹੁ ਆਕਾਰੁ॥ ਮਰਿ ਮਰਿ ਜੰਮੈ ਵਾਰੇ ਵਾਰ॥ GGS, 229, M.3; ਗਿਆਨ ਖੜਗ ਪੰਚ ਦੂਤ ਸੰਘਾਰੇ ਗੁਰਮਤਿ ਜਾਰੈ ਸੋਇ॥ GGS, 1414, M.3.

²⁴⁹ ਕਾਢਿ ਖੜਗੁ ਗੁਰ ਗਿਆਨੁ ਕਰਾਰਾ ਬਿਖੁ ਛੇਦਿ ਛੇਦਿ ਰਸੁ ਪੀਜੈ॥੩॥ GGS, 1324, M.4; ਮਨੁ ਮੰਦਰੁ ਤਨੁ ਵੇਸ ਕਲੰਦਰੁ ਘਟ ਹੀ ਤੀਰਥਿ ਨਾਵਾ ॥ GGS, 795, M.1; ਉਤਮ ਕਰਣੀ ਸਬਦ ਬੀਚਾਰ ॥੩॥ GGS, 157, M.3.

collaboration, wise people also from Indigenous Traditions would be listened to carefully, also when it comes to the planning of new cities. Because Indigenous people from Australia for instance see cities as inherently hostile to nature because Mother Earth can never be replenished with what a city depletes from her natural resources. They advocate for smaller communities that are based on cyclic systems and relationships. This aligns with how the Enlightened one Gur Nanak lived and worked as a humble farmer in the village of Kartarpur in Panjab, which he founded around 1504.

Epilogue

The prerequisite to live an ethical life free of odious passions is to remember the aesthetics of humility, natural necessities and seeing through ephemerality. The ideal of life in Sikhi is being loving and pure with equanimity amidst impurity. It is like in Star Wars. It is up to us decide whether we want to be on the side of light and harmony or on the side of darkness and cacophony. Whichever path we chose, the answers to the mysteries of life we can only find within ourselves.²⁵⁰

²⁵⁰ ਕਹੁ ਕਬੀਰ ਜਨ ਭਏ ਖਾਲਸੇ ਪ੍ਰੇਮ ਭਗਤਿ ਜਿਹ ਜਾਨੀ॥ GGS, 655, Bhagat Kabir; ਆਪਣਾ ਹਥੀ ਆਪਣਾ ਆਪੇ ਹੀ ਕਾਜੁ ਸਵਾਰੀਐ॥ GGS, 474, M.1; ਏਹ ਕਿਨੇਹੀ ਦਾਤਿ ਆਪਸ ਤੇ ਜੇ ਪਾਈਐ॥ ਨਾਨਕ ਸਾ ਕਰਮਾਤਿ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਤੁਠੈ ਜੇ ਮਿਲੈ॥ GGS, 474, M.5.