

Death as Redefined by Guru Nanak.

(Video series titled SIKHI CONCEPTS by Karminder Singh Dhillon, PhD (Boston) available at

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL_YigetSYIOVCUDb_yKLAhrMZMHEHW_rh

In the philosophical sense Guru Nanak RE-DEFINED – in a REVOLUTIONARY way - all spiritual concepts that existed in the Old Canvas – the belief system of the world he was born in.

So while all the concepts of the old canvas are MENTIONED in the SGGS, they have been given NEW Meanings.

And IF we intend to appreciate the Sikhi of Guru Nanak, we will need to understand the NEW meanings or REDEFINED meanings of the concepts.

Concepts such as After Life, Heaven and Hell, 8.4 million, Ava Gaun, Reincarnation, Jum Doot, Chitar Gupat, Dargah, Dharam raj etc.

The new, redefined, and Gurbani meanings of these concepts are outlined within the 1429 pages of the SGGS.

We begin by looking at the concept of DEATH.

We begin with the concept of death because Death after all, was the primary pillar of the old canvas. A very large portion of the concepts in the old canvas had to do with death. The focus and obsession of the old canvas was death and after death.

So by REDEFINING death, Guru Nanak did two things:

First, He shook the very foundation of the old canvas. He pulled the rug from under the feet of that canvas – so to speak. He demolished the two pillars that held up that canvas – death and the fear of what happens after death.

Second, in redefining DEATH, Guru Nanak established the foundation of his own Canvas of Sikhi – which was LIFE. The foundation of Guru Nanak's canvas was Living in the Here and Now.

Death according to the old canvas was when physical life came to an end and the soul went on onto an incredulous journey of its own into other realms.

All that about a journey that NO one has travelled, and no one has come back to file a report on. A journey that No one knows anything about. But presented as a religious FACT, and religious TRUTH. And believed by millions.

When the details of that concocted journey of after death were put together – the effect was unimaginable fear, unmistakable anxiety and unthinkable distress – all of which were SUFFERED IN THE PRESENT LIFE, in the here and now.

Imagine for one moment the illogic of it. The insanity of it. Living a life that is REAL in the here and now. But living it in FEAR, ANXIETY and DISTRESS in worry of an IMAGINARY and CONCOCTED after life that no one knows anything about.

What is incomprehensible is that the FEAR, anxiety and distress is not forced upon anybody. Its suffered IN choice, BY choice. Suffered by those who chose to believe in the clergy concocted tales of afterlife.

So the first thing Gurbani does – EVEN Before the REDEFINING the concept of death is to provide a proper, balanced and realistic understanding of the notion of physical death.

We can say that Gurbani first ALIGNS physical death by grounding it as a REALITY of life; and then goes on to REDEFINE the concept of DEATH to give it Gurbani meanings.

This ALIGNMENT serves the purpose of LIBERATING the mind of the debilitating fear and crippling anxiety created by concocted narratives of the so called journey of the soul after death.

And the REDEFINING itself is aimed at channeling that LIBERATION and FREEDOM into creating a spirituality of Anand and Bliss for the HERE and NOW.

So here is the ALIGNMENT, The grounding of physical Death in the Reality of LIFE.

This is a verse of Guru Nanak from page 685 of the SGGS ਅਨਿਕ ਜਤਨ ਕਰਿ ਕਾਲੁ ਸੰਤਾਏ ॥ ਮਰਣੁ ਲਿਖਾਇ ਮੰਡਲ ਮਹਿ ਆਏ ॥ Meaning the fear of physical death is debilitating in so many ways. ਅਨਿਕ ਜਤਨ ਕਰਿ ਕਾਲੁ ਸੰਤਾਏ ॥ Yet life is predicated, life is grounded in death. Life is written, life is established on the reality of physical death. ਮਰਣੁ ਲਿਖਾਇ ਮੰਡਲ ਮਹਿ ਆਏ.

The message is clear. It pertains to the Certainty of Physical Death. Why fear something that is certain. Why not live life to the fullest and to the best of our ability?

Here is another verse of Guru Nanak from page 936 of the SGGS. ਰਾਣਾ ਰਾਉ ਨ ਕੇ ਰਹੈ ਰੰਗੁ ਨ ਤੁੰਗੁ ਫਕੀਰੁ ॥ ਵਾਰੀ ਆਪੇ ਆਪਣੀ ਕੋਇ ਨ ਬੰਧੈ ਧੀਰ ॥ Meaning- all human beings – the poor and the wealthy, the ruled and the rulers, the temporal and the religious – are merely awaiting their turn. ਵਾਰੀ ਆਪੇ ਆਪਣੀ. We are in all in que. We are all in line. None can step out of the que ਕੋਇ ਨ ਬੰਧੈ ਧੀਰ. Again, why fear something that is definite, certain and for everyone.

Why not live life to the fullest and to the best of our ability then?

Here is another verse on page 1427 of the SGGS. ਪਾਂਚ ਤਤ ਕੇ ਤਨੁ ਰਚਿਓ ਜਾਨਹੁ ਚਤੁਰ ਸੁਜਾਨ ॥ ਜਿਹ ਤੇ ਉਪਜਿਓ ਨਾਨਕਾ ਲੀਨ ਤਾਹਿ ਮੈ ਮਾਨੁ ॥ ੧੧ ॥ Meaning: Physical life is constituted from the basic elements. ਪਾਂਚ ਤਤ ਕੇ ਤਨੁ ਰਚਿਓ Everything that has its origins in these elements eventually returns to that form. ਲੀਨ ਤਾਹਿ ਮੈ ਮਾਨੁ

We can summarize the attempt by Gurbani to provide a proper, balanced and realistic understanding of the notion of physical death – or what we have called Aligning – to the FOUR principles as follows.

- 1) Physical death is for everyone.

- 2) Physical death is certain.
- 3) We are all in que and awaiting our turn.
- 4) Physical death is the return of elements back to their source.

So that's the alignment. The balancing. The provision of REALISTIC context to the notion of physical death. The grounding of physical death as part of the reality of Life, IN the reality of life. The description of physical death as a return to our origins.

This alignment is LIBERATING because it frees us from the crippling fear of a concocted tale, the anxiety of a fabricated journey, and the worry of a fake judgement.

The alignment is MEANINGFUL because it tells us to MAKE THE VERY best of our life. It tells us to live our lives in the Here and Now. It tells us to live our lives to the fullest right up to the moment of the certainty of physical death.

Now we come to the REDEFINING. Death is given TWO new meanings within Gurbani. Two revolutionary meanings. Let's examine them both.

This verse of Guru Nanak on page 9 of the SGGS re-defines Death. It redefines Death in the manner in which it becomes RELEVANT to spirituality.

It re-redefines death in a way that it Becomes pertinent to spiritual life. Becomes applicable to our spiritual journey.

It redefines death in the way by which it becomes a concern to Gurbani.

ਆਸਾ ਮਹਲਾ ੧ ॥ ਆਖਾ ਜੀਵਾ ਵਿਸਰੈ ਮਰਿ ਜਾਉ ॥

The phrase ਮਰਿ ਜਾਉ means death, to die, to suffer death. The word VISREY is critical. VISREY means non-realization. That is the definition of death in Gurbani.

Physical death is RE-defined as spiritual death. And Spiritual death is defined in terms of VISREY – non realization.

The death that IS of concern to Gurbani, the death that IS of relevance to our spirituality is SPIRITUAL death.

That is Because the life that is of concern to Gurbani and relevant to our spirituality is SPIRITUAL life.

Physical life has happened, has occurred. But Spiritual Life does not happen, does not occur. It has to be Brought About.

Physical death WILL happen and CANNOT be avoided. But Spiritual Death CAN be avoided. Death of our Conscience can and MUST be avoided.

Gurbani tells us to CREATE spiritual life and to PREVENT spiritual death from happening.

So in this verse ਆਸਾ ਮਹਲਾ ੧ ॥ ਆਖਾ ਜੀਵਾ ਵਿਸਰੈ ਮਰਿ ਜਾਉ ॥ the word MAR JAON translates as Will die. The verse is in the present tense. So VISREY MAR JAON means "IF VISREY happens I WILL DIE. It means Every time VISREY happens, I die.

But it is NOT about physical death. It is certainly NOT about physical death. Lots of people are in the VISREY state but they don't die physically.

The verse is about spiritual death. More importantly, it is REDEFINING death and DEFINING spiritual death within the parameters of Gurbani.

Here is another verse from page 143 of the SGGS

ਪਵੜੀ ॥ ਇਕਨਾ ਮਰਣੁ ਨ ਚਿਤਿ ਆਸ ਘਣੈਰਿਆ ॥ ਮਰਿ ਮਰਿ ਜੰਮਹਿ ਨਿਤ ਕਿਸੈ ਨ ਕੇਰਿਆ ॥

Guru Nanak is saying: There are those ਇਕਨਾ who are unaware ਨ ਚਿਤਿ that they are dead or dying ਮਰਣੁ ਨ ਚਿਤਿ. They are unaware of their death in their excessive desires ਆਸ ਘਣੈਰਿਆ. Guru Nanak says we die this death repeatedly, over and over again, everyday ਮਰਿ ਮਰਿ ਜੰਮਹਿ ਨਿਤ.

Again, this verse is about spiritual death. It's about the death of our conscience on a daily basis ਮਰਿ ਮਰਿ ਜੰਮਹਿ ਨਿਤ. More importantly, it is

REDEFINING death and DEFINING spiritual death within the parameters of Gurbani.

Why is that so?

Because this is the death that matters. This is the death that is of concern to Gurbani and to us. This is the death that we can do something about. This is the death that can be avoided and must be avoided.

That is what spirituality of Gurbani and spirituality of the shabd is all about. It's about creating Spiritual Life and keeping spiritual death at bay. The spirituality of Gurbani is about preventing the death of our conscience from happening.

On page 940 we have this verse of Guru Nanak: ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਕੈ ਜਨਮੇ ਗਵਨੁ ਮਿਟਾਇਆ ॥

Janmey translates as "being born". ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਕੈ ਜਨਮੇ means – Being born into the spirituality on account of the Creator Connecting Guru – Satguru. ਗਵਨੁ ਮਿਟਾਇਆ means – ending the cycle of spiritual life and spiritual death.

It's about CREATING/ BRINGING ABOUT spiritual life within the parameters of the Satguru – the shabad. And preventing Spiritual death, avoiding the death of our conscience. Averting the death of our spirituality.

It's about preventing ourselves from becoming the Walking dead. Stopping us from becoming beings with dead souls.

Here is a quote that is attributed to Benjamin Franklin. It makes clear that he understood the concept of death of the conscience very well.

Many people die at 25 but aren't buried till they are 75. Why 25 – you may ask. 25 is the prime of age where ppl enter the prime of their youth. The message here is that Death of the conscience happens when ppl enter the prime of their youth – at or around 25.

How and why does that happen?

Gurbani provides the answers. Spiritual life is predicated on virtues. It is centered on understanding divine virtues, accepting them, inculcating divine virtues, habitualizing divine virtues and finally BECOMING divine virtues. Eventually BECOMING Divine. Becoming REALIZED of Divine Virtues.

That is why Gurbani as found within the SGGS is a discourse of REALIZING divine virtues.

Now if spiritual life is brought about by divine virtues, then the converse is also true. Spiritual death is brought about by human vices.

Here is a verse on page 1207 of the SGGS

ਕਿਉ ਜੀਵਨੁ ਪ੍ਰੀਤਮ ਬਿਨੁ ਮਾਈ ॥ ਜਾ ਕੇ ਬਿਛੁਰਤ ਹੋਤ ਮਿਰਤਕਾ ਗਿ੍ਰ ਮਹਿ ਰਹਨੁ ਨ ਪਾਈ ॥
1 ॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥ 1207

ਕਿਉ ਜੀਵਨੁ ਪ੍ਰੀਤਮ ਬਿਨੁ ਮਾਈ means How can I obtain life, how can I become spiritually alive (ਕਿਉ ਜੀਵਨੁ) without realization of the divine ਪ੍ਰੀਤਮ ਬਿਨੁ.

The second verse is ਜਾ ਕੇ ਬਿਛੁਰਤ ਹੋਤ ਮਿਰਤਕਾ Mirtak is death, Guru Arjun is saying Death happens, spiritual death happens to me when I am devoid of that realization. ਗਿ੍ਰ ਮਹਿ ਰਹਨੁ ਨ ਪਾਈ ॥ 1 ॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥ When that realization does not remain steadfast within me, I suffer death.

Here is another verse on page 1268.

ਬਿਛੁਰਤ ਮਰਨੁ ਜੀਵਨੁ ਹਰਿ ਮਿਲਤੇ ਜਨ ਕਉ ਦਰਸਨੁ ਦੀਜੈ ॥ ਨਾਮ ਅਧਾਰੁ ਜੀਵਨ ਧਨੁ ਨਾਨਕ
ਪ੍ਰਭ ਮੇਰੇ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕੀਜੈ ॥ 2 ॥ 1268

ਬਿਛੁਰਤ ਮਰਨੁ means I die, death comes, spiritual death comes, death of my conscience happens. How? Through ਬਿਛੁਰਤ, through separation of divine realization

ਜੀਵਨੁ ਹਰਿ ਮਿਲਤੇ means I acquire life, spiritual life, How is spiritual life acquired? Through acquiring Divine Virtues.

ਨਾਮ ਅਧਾਰੁ ਜੀਵਨ ਧਨੁ ਨਾਨਕ – The basis of my life, the catalyst of my life, the oxygen of my spiritual life is Nam – Divine Virtues.

Here is one verse of Kabir ji on page 330 of the SGGS

ਗਉੜੀ ਕਬੀਰ ਜੀ ॥ ਕੈਸੇ ਜੀਵਨੁ ਹੋਇ ਹਮਾਰਾ ॥ ਜਬ ਨ ਹੋਇ ਰਾਮ ਨਾਮ ਅਧਾਰਾ ॥ 1 ॥
ਰਹਾਉ ॥

The word Jeevan means life. But the reference is to SPIRITUAL life, not temporal or physical life as the second verse makes clear.

Ram refers to the Omnipresent Divine Creator. Naam means Divine Virtues. Adhara is based upon.

Kabir is asking: How Can I acquire Spiritual Life, ਕੈਸੇ ਜੀਵਨੁ ਹੋਇ ਹਮਾਰਾ if it is NOT based upon acquiring Divine virtues ਜਬ ਨ ਹੋਇ ਰਾਮ ਨਾਮ ਅਧਾਰਾ

It is clear then that Spiritual Life is on account of Divine Virtues. And Spiritual death is on account of the absence of Divine Virtues.

This verse of Guru Nanak on page 580 ties it all together.

ਆਵਾ ਗਵਣੁ ਸਿਰਜਿਆ ਤੂ ਥਿਰੁ ਕਰਣੈਹਾਰੇ ॥ ਜੰਮਣੁ ਮਰਣਾ ਆਇ ਗਇਆ ਬਧਿਕੁ ਜੀਉ
ਬਿਕਾਰੇ ॥

Ava Gavan refers to – The cycle of life and death. For the purposes of Gurbani – it is the cycle of Spiritual life and Spiritual death. Remember the re-defining. It is the redefined meanings that will lead us to the intended messages of Gurbani,

Now that we know that, we can make sense of the next verse. ਜੰਮਣੁ ਮਰਣਾ ਆਇ ਗਇਆ.

We know this ਆਇ ਗਇਆ – the coming and going - is about Spiritual Life and Spiritual Death and the cycle of spiritual life and spiritual death - because the next part of the verse is ਬਧਿਕੁ ਜੀਉ ਬਿਕਾਰੇ .

ਬਧਿਕੁ means bound, tied to. ਜੀਉ refers to life. ਬਿਕਾਰੇ is vices

The death that is brought about by being bound within vices is Spiritual death.

The cycle that is brought about by being bound within vices is the cycle of SPIRITUAL Life and SPIRITUAL death.

Gurbani tells us to break the cycle and create a permanent and enduring spiritual life.

So it's clear that in Gurbani, Spiritual death is brought about by human vices and this is the cycle that is liberated by the adoption of divine virtues.

Now we understand why Benjamin Franklin says many people die at 25. 25 is the prime of youth and this is where the human being begins to get grounded in vices.

So that's the first meaning of DEATH in Gurbani. It is REDEFINED as SPIRITUAL Death. It's a revolutionary re-definition. The second meaning of DEATH in Gurbani – which is equally revolutionary - is DEATH from VICES, death OF vices.

This is a verse of Bhagat Kabir on page 1365 of the SGGS. The beauty of this verse is that it talks about all 3 forms of Death – physical, spiritual and from vices – all in the same verse.

ਕਬੀਰ ਮਰਤਾ ਮਰਤਾ ਜਗੁ ਮੁਆ ਮਰਿ ਭੀ ਨ ਜਾਨਿਆ ਕੋਇ ॥ ਐਸੇ ਮਰਨੇ ਜੋ ਮਰੈ ਬਹੁਰਿ ਨ ਮਰਨਾ ਹੋਇ ॥ ੨੯ ॥

The underlined words Marta / Marna / Mar and Mua all mean death. There are 7 references to death in this one single couplet. But of the seven, only one is used for physical death. On the other 6 occasions it refers to spiritual death and death on account of vices.

The meaning of the verse is Kabir, the world has experienced physical death in abundance ਕਬੀਰ ਮਰਤਾ ਮਰਤਾ ਜਗੁ ਮੁਆ, but has not realized the need for death on account of our vices ਮਰਿ ਭੀ ਨ ਜਾਨਿਆ ਕੋਇ. One who dies such a death on account of vices ਐਸੇ ਮਰਨੇ ਜੋ ਮਰੈ will never suffer spiritual death again ਬਹੁਰਿ ਨ ਮਰਨਾ ਹੋਇ.

In conclusion therefore pyareo, we have seen that Gurbani does the following 4 things when it comes to the concept of death.

Firstly, it Provides a realistic context to the notion of physical death.

Second, Gurbani grounds physical death as part of the reality of Life.

Third, Gurbani defines physical death as a return to our origins.

Fourth, in doing so, Gurbani frees us from the crippling fear of afterlife.

When You Stop Living the Spirituality of Fear, You Start Living the Spirituality of JOY

When You Stop Living IN FEAR of Death, You Start Living in The Joy of LIFE

Fifth, Gurbani tells us to MAKE THE VERY best of our life, to live our life to the fullest right up to the moment of the certainty of physical death.

When You Stop Worrying About What Will Happen Tomorrow; You Start To Live In The Present.

You Start Living the Spirituality of Here and Now.

Sixth, Gurbani redefines death into spiritual death. The death that matters, the death that must be avoided, that can be avoided is Spiritual death, death of the conscience, and this is the death that is the subject matter of Gurbani. The very fact that Gurbani talks about avoiding death tells us that death is REDEFINED in Gurbani as spiritual death.

Finally, Gurbani speaks of a necessary death. A death that we need to die in the Here and Now. Namely a death of our Vices. Why? Because Death of our vices allows our spiritual life to blossom.

This REDEFINING is crucial in understanding the real messages of Gurbani. For every 100 verses in the SGGS that speak of death – ONE is attributed to physical death and the remaining 99 to Spiritual death and death of vices. That one verse is about REALIGNING and grounding physical death in the reality of Life, and the remaining 99 REDEFINE death into spiritual death and Death from Vices.

If we ignore this REDEFINING, and think (wrongly of course) that every mention of death within the SGGS is about physical death – we will fall into the parameters of the 4K year old discarded canvas – whose focus, fixation and obsession was indeed about physical death. Guru Nanak has eliminated that fixation. He has painted over that entire canvas.

Guru Nanak's focus is on preventing spiritual death, and his motivation is on avoiding the death of our conscience.

Pyareo, Whe you STOP Chasing the Wrong Things, You give the Right Things a Chance to Catch You.

When You Discard the Gurbani discarded narratives of the 4K year old Canvas

You start living the truths of Gurbani.

The REDEFINING of Death is crucial and critical. By REDEFINING death, Guru Nanak set the stage for demolishing the entirety of the old canvas. After all, the old canvas was constructed on Death and After death.

Now, since death itself is REALIGNED and REDEFINED, every concept that is related to death, every concept that follows death, every concept of the old canvas is REDEFINED in Gurbani.