

**Addressing economic inequality –  
An expanded interpretation of the 3-Pillars Sikh Theory in  
Sri Guru Granth Sahib**

**Dr. Inderjit N Kaur**

Research Associate, Music Department  
UC Santa Cruz

*Presented at*

**Second Annual Conference celebrating Prakash Utsava of Sri Guru Granth Sahib**

**Sponsored by Sikh Gurdwara San Jose and Chardi Kalaa Foundation  
The Sikh Gurdwara San Jose**

**September 14, 2013**

**Introduction to Power Point Presentation**

The main point I aim to make in this presentation is that Gurbani is a guide not just to an ethical *individual* life but a guide to *social* action, to social and public policy, to political choices, and the making of an ethical society. Gurbani offers an analysis of social ills and provides tools for social improvement. Within Gurbani are pointers to how individuals can, and should, participate actively, and substantially, in shaping an ethical society.

I make this point using the example of the particular social ill of extreme economic inequality, which is today an acute global, as well as a local problem here in the Silicon Valley.

In this presentation, I outline a Sikh theory of social action based on Gurbani. I offer expanded interpretations, based on Gurbani, of the three pillars of *NaamJapo-KirtKaro-VandChako*.

# **Addressing economic inequality – An expanded interpretation of the 3-Pillars Sikh Theory in Sri Guru Granth Sahib**



***If using ideas from this presentation, please reference***

**Dr. Inderjit N Kaur**

Research Associate, Music Department, UC Santa Cruz

*Presented at*

Second Annual Conference celebrating Prakash Utsava of Sri Guru Granth Sahib

Sponsored by Sikh Gurdwara San Jose and Chardi Kalaa Foundation

The Sikh Gurdwara San Jose

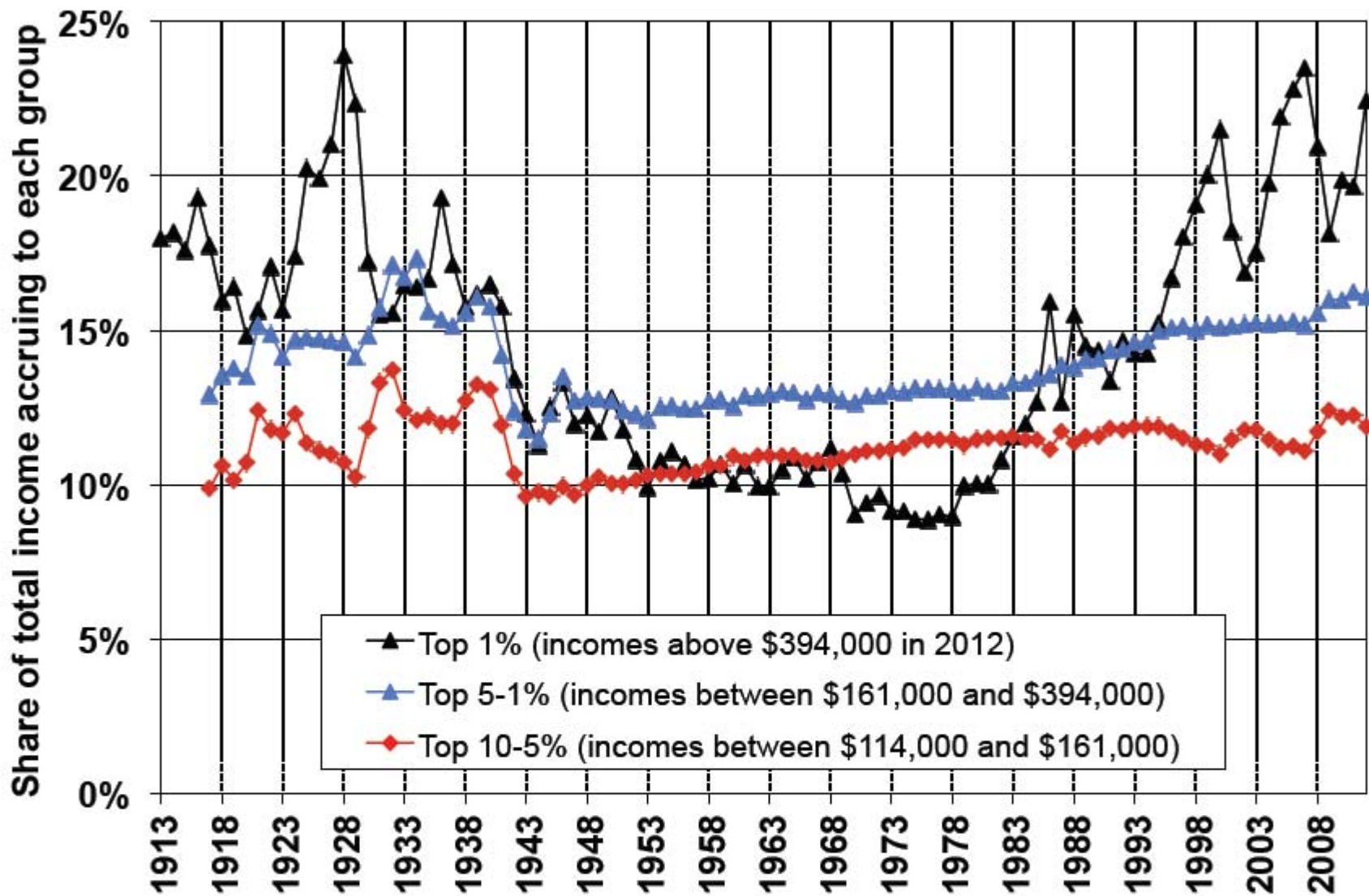
September 14, 2013

# Main points

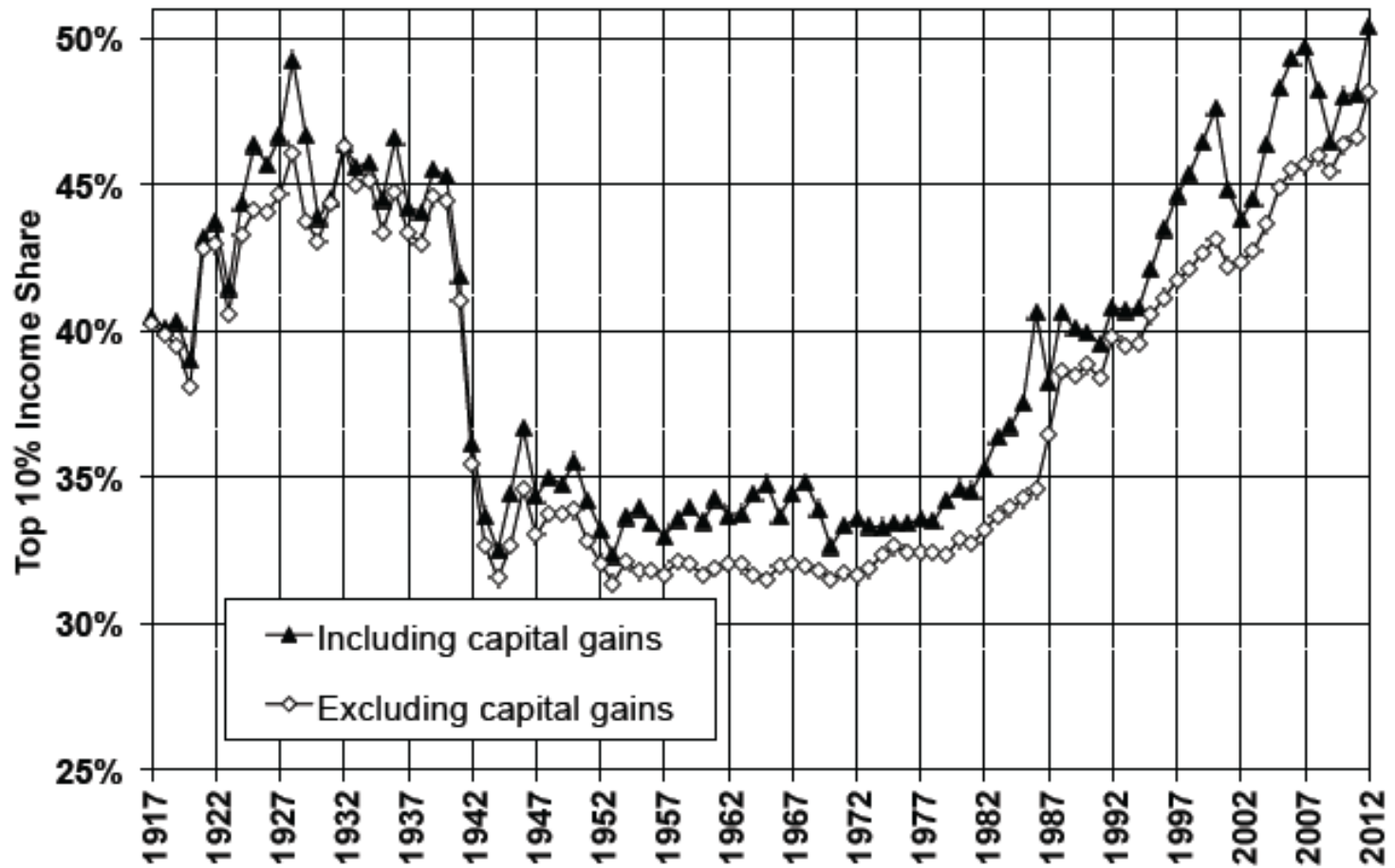
- In Guru Granth Sahib, there is a Sikh theory, not only of ethical *individual* living, but of ethical *societal* and *political* structure
- This Sikh theory is a guide for everyday social action as well as social policy and political choice
- This presentation focuses on what this Sikh theory says about the causes of economic inequality, and how it provides guides to solutions
- It offers an expanded interpretation of the three pillars – *Naam Japo, Kirt Karo, Vand Chhako*

# Extreme and increasing economic inequality is a social reality today

- Inequality in US highest since 1928, and growing
- Source for following graphs
  - *Striking it Richer: The Evolution of Top Incomes in the United States (Updated with 2012 preliminary estimates)* Emmanuel Saez, UC Berkeley, September 3, 2013
  - Accessed Sept. 14, 2013 from <http://elsa.berkeley.edu/~saez/saez-UStopincomes-2010.pdf>



Decomposing the Top Decile US Income Share into 3 Groups, 1913-2012



The Top Decile Income Share, 1917-2012

# Problem with narrative of meritocracy

- “the current dominant cultural narrative about the market and efficiency and fairness and equality” is:  
“America = fairness/opportunity = individual freedom = free market.”  
Thomas Edsall, quoting Sean Reardon, *New York Times*, Sep 10, 2013
- Completely misses issue of gross inequality of opportunity

Source: <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/09/10/can-the-government-actually-do-anything-about-inequality/>

# Increasing inequality, decreasing empathy

- “On average, however, widening inequality seems to be reducing, not increasing, empathy, as the life experiences of the affluent diverge from those of ordinary workers, to such an extent that the upper class no longer sees members of the working class as people like themselves.”

Paul Krugman, *New York Times*, Sep. 2, 2013

Source: [http://krugman.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/09/02/how-the-other-47-percent-lives/?\\_r=0](http://krugman.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/09/02/how-the-other-47-percent-lives/?_r=0)



# Gurbani empahzises human dignity and equality

ਪਦੇ, ਸੋਰਠਿ ਮਹਲਾ ੧

ਜੋ ਅੰਤਰਿ ਸੋ ਬਾਹਰਿ ਦੇਖਹੁ ਅਵਰੁ ਨ ਦੂਜਾ ਕੋਈ ਜੀਉ ॥

Within, and outside, see the same; there is no other.

ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਏਕ ਦ੍ਰਿਸਟਿ ਕਰਿ ਦੇਖਹੁ ਘਟਿ ਘਟਿ ਜੋਤਿ ਸਮੋਈ ਜੀਉ ॥੨॥

As guru-oriented, look upon all with the single eye of equality; the divine pervades all.

SGGS 599

# Causes of inequality in Gurbani can be found in the 5-Thieves Sikh Theory

ਰਾਗੁ ਆਸਾ ਘਰੁ ੨ ਮਹਲਾ ੪ ॥

ਕਲਿਜੁਗ ਮਹਿ ਧੜੇ ਪੰਚ ਚੋਰ ਝਗੜਾਏ ॥

ਕਾਮੁ ਕ੍ਰੋਧੁ ਲੋਭੁ ਮੋਹੁ ਅਭਿਮਾਨੁ ਵਧਾਏ ॥

In immoral times, the Five Thieves instigate alliances and conflicts.

Sexual desire, anger, greed, emotional attachment and self-conceit have increased.

SGGS 366

# ***Lobh – Avarice***

ਰਾਗੁ ਆਸਾ ਮਹਲਾ ੯ ॥

ਬਿਰਥਾ ਕਹਉ ਕਉਨ ਸਿਉ ਮਨ ਕੀ ॥

ਲੋਭਿ ਗ੍ਰਸਿਓ ਦਸ ਹੂ ਦਿਸ ਧਾਵਤ, ਆਸਾ ਲਾਗਿਓ ਧਨ ਕੀ ॥੧॥

With whom can I share the condition of my mind?

Engrossed in greed, all run around in ten directions,  
holding to hopes of wealth.

**SGGS 411**

# *Lobh, Ahankaar* **Avarice, Arrogance**

ਮਾਝ ਮਹਲਾ ੩ ॥

ਤਿਸਨਾ ਅਗਨਿ ਜਲੈ ਸੰਸਾਰਾ ॥

ਲੋਭੁ ਅਭਿਮਾਨੁ ਬਹੁਤੁ ਅਹੰਕਾਰਾ ॥

The world is burning in the fire of desire, in  
avarice and arrogance.

SGGS 120

# ***Moh* – Excessive attachment**

ਅਸਟਪਦੀਆ, ਸਿਰੀਰਾਗੁ, ਗੁਰੂ ਨਾਨਕ ਦੇਵ

ਤਿਸਨਾ ਮਾਇਆ ਮੋਹਣੀ, ਸੁਤ ਬੰਧਪ ਘਰ ਨਾਰਿ ॥

Excessive materialism, leads people to become emotionally attached to their children, relatives, households and spouses.

ਧਨਿ ਜੋਬਨਿ ਜਗੁ ਠਗਿਆ, ਲਬਿ ਲੋਭਿ ਅਹੰਕਾਰਿ ॥

The world is deceived and plundered by riches, youth, avarice and arrogance.

ਮੋਹ ਠਗਉਲੀ ਹਉ ਮੁਈ, ਸਾ ਵਰਤੈ ਸੰਸਾਰਿ ॥੧॥

The drug of emotional attachment has destroyed me, as it has destroyed the whole world.

SGGS 61

***This 5-Thieves Sikh theory relates to contemporary social and economic theories of the social problems from economic inequality***

- conspicuous consumption
- demonstration effect
- aspirational consumption; trickle down consumption
- unaffordable consumption; expenditure cascades
- debt; crime
- “ideas don’t climb up”

# Sikh theory points to solutions by

- Disincentivizing excessive wealth
- Incentivizing ethical values

# Disincentivizing excessive wealth

ਸੁਖਮਨੀ, ਗਉੜੀ ਮਹਲਾ ੫

ਮਿਥਿਆ ਤਨੁ ਧਨੁ ਕੁਟੰਬੁ ਸਬਾਇਆ ॥

False are body, wealth, and all relations.

ਮਿਥਿਆ ਹਉਮੈ ਮਮਤਾ ਮਾਇਆ ॥

False are ego, possessiveness, and materialism.

ਮਿਥਿਆ ਰਾਜ ਜੋਬਨ ਧਨ ਮਾਲ ॥

False are power, youth, wealth, and property.

ਮਿਥਿਆ ਕਾਮ ਕ੍ਰੋਧ ਬਿਕਰਾਲ ॥

False are sexual desire and wild anger.

ਮਿਥਿਆ ਰਥ ਹਸਤੀ ਅਸੂ ਬਸਤ੍ਰਾ ॥

False are chariots, elephants, horses, and expensive clothes.



ਮਿਥਿਆ ਰੰਗ ਸੰਗਿ ਮਾਇਆ ਪੇਖਿ ਹਸਤਾ ॥

False is the love of gathering wealth, and reveling in the sight of it.

ਮਿਥਿਆ ਧ੍ਰੋਹ ਮੋਹ ਅਭਿਮਾਨੁ ॥

False are deception, emotional attachment, and arrogance.

ਮਿਥਿਆ ਆਪਸ ਉਪਰਿ ਕਰਤ ਗੁਮਾਨੁ ॥

False are arrogance, and self-conceit.

ਅਸਥਿਰੁ ਭਗਤਿ ਸਾਧ ਕੀ ਸਰਨੁ ॥

Only devotional worship is permanent, and the sanctuary of the Holy.

ਨਾਨਕ ਜਪਿ ਜਪਿ ਜੀਵੈ ਹਰਿ ਕੇ ਚਰਨੁ ॥੪॥

Nanak, by meditating, lives at the feet of the Divine.

SGGS 268

# Sikh theory of solutions to economic inequality

## 3-Pillars Theory

- *Naam japo*
- *Kirt karo*
- *Vand chhako*

# **An expanded interpretation of the 3-Pillars Sikh Theory**

- not just individual mandates
- claim on societal structure
- pointers for construction of an ethical society

# Expanded interpretation of first pillar

## - *Naam Japo*

- *Naam japo* includes
  - *Vichaar* – contemplation on divine attributes, on Gurbani, and its ethics
  - *Drirdh karna* – enshrine divine attributes within self
  - Practice – everyday living by those ethics
- *Naam japna* creates appropriate mindset regarding interpretations of fairness and justice

# Naam as

## Truth, Contentment, Contemplation

ਮੁੰਦਾਵਣੀ ਮਹਲਾ ੫ ॥

ਬਾਲ ਵਿਚਿ ਤਿੰਨਿ ਵਸਤੁ ਪਈਓ ਸਤੁ ਸੰਤੋਖੁ ਵੀਚਾਰੋ ॥ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤ ਨਾਮੁ  
ਠਾਕੁਰ ਕਾ ਪਇਓ ਜਿਸ ਕਾ ਸਭਸੁ ਅਧਾਰੋ ॥ ਜੇ ਕੋ ਖਾਵੈ ਜੇ ਕੋ ਭੁੰਚੈ  
ਤਿਸ ਕਾ ਹੋਇ ਉਧਾਰੋ ॥ ਏਹ ਵਸਤੁ ਤਜੀ ਨਹ ਜਾਈ ਨਿਤ ਨਿਤ ਰਖੁ  
ਉਰਿ ਧਾਰੋ ॥ ਤਮ ਸੰਸਾਰੁ ਚਰਨ ਲਗਿ ਤਰੀਐ ਸਭੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਬ੍ਰਹਮ  
ਪਸਾਰੋ ॥੧॥

Upon this Plate, three things have been placed: Truth, Contentment and Contemplation. The Ambrosial Nectar of the Naam, the Name, has been placed; it is the Support of all. One who eats and enjoys shall be saved. This thing can never be forsaken; keep this always and forever in your mind. The dark world-ocean is crossed over, by grasping the Feet of the Lord; O Nanak, it is all the extension of God.

# ***Naam-imbued overcome the Thieves***

ਪਦੇ, ਸੂਹੀ ਮਹਲਾ ੫

ਕਾਮ ਕ੍ਰੋਧ ਲੋਭ ਮੋਹ ਤਜਾਰੀ ॥

I have renounced excessive sexual desire,  
anger, avarice and emotional attachment.

ਦਿੜੁ ਨਾਮ ਦਾਨੁ ਇਸਨਾਨੁ ਸੁਚਾਰੀ ॥੩॥

I have enshrined the Naam within myself,  
with altruism, true cleansing and  
righteous conduct.

SGGS 740

# An expanded interpretation of second pillar - *Kirt Karo*

## *Kirt Karo*

- responsibility and right to earn honest living
- “honest” includes recognition of each person’s right to honest living as universal human right
- responsibility to allow and enable others their right to earn an honest living

# Universal Declaration of Human Rights

## Article 23.

- (1) Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.
- (2) Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work.
- (3) Everyone who works has the right to just and favourable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection.



# *Kirt Karo*

ਵਾਰ, ਸਾਰੰਗ ਮਹਲਾ ੧

ਘਾਲਿ ਖਾਇ, ਕਿਛੁ ਹਥਹੁ ਦੇਇ ॥

One who works for what he eats, and gives  
some of what he has

ਨਾਨਕ ਰਾਹੁ ਪਛਾਣਹਿ ਸੇਇ ॥੧॥

- O Nanak, he knows the Path.

SGGS 1245

# *Kirt Karo*

ਵਡਹੰਸ ਕੀ ਵਾਰ ਮਹਲਾ ੪ ਲਲਾਂ ਬਹਲੀਮਾ ਕੀ ਧੁਨਿ ਗਾਵਣੀ

ਸਲੋਕੁ ਮਃ ੩

ਇਸੁ ਭੇਖੈ ਥਾਵਹੁ ਗਿਰਹੋ ਭਲਾ, ਜਿਥਹੁ ਕੋ ਵਰਸਾਇ ॥

Instead of wearing these beggar's robes, it is better to be a householder, and give to others.

SGGS 587

# An expanded interpretation of third pillar – *Vand Chhako*

- *Vand Chhako*
  - Not simple charity
  - Mindset of contentment, compassion, equality
  - Pointer to substantial public policy such as progressive taxation, programs for job creation

# *Santokh, Dya,* Contentment, compassion

ਪਦੇ, ਸਿਰੀਰਾਗੁ ਮਹਲਾ ੫

ਸਤੁ ਸੰਤੋਖੁ ਦਇਆ ਕਮਾਵੈ ਏਹ ਕਰਣੀ ਸਾਰ ॥

Practice truth, contentment and compassion; this is the most excellent way of life.

SGGS 51

ਬਾਰਹ ਮਾਹਾ, ਮਾਝ ਮਹਲਾ ੫

ਅਠਸਠਿ ਤੀਰਥ ਸਗਲ ਪੁੰਨ ਜੀਅ ਦਇਆ ਪਰਵਾਨੁ ॥

Be compassionate to all beings - this is more meritorious than bathing at the sixty-eight sacred shrines of pilgrimage and the giving of charity.

SGGS 136

# Beyond simple charity

ਸਲੋਕ ਸੇਖ ਫਰੀਦ

ਮਤਿ ਹੋਦੀ, ਹੋਇ ਇਆਣਾ ॥

If you are wise, be simple;

ਤਾਣ ਹੋਦੇ, ਹੋਇ ਨਿਤਾਣਾ ॥

if you are powerful, be weak;

ਅਣਹੋਦੇ ਆਪੁ ਵੰਡਾਏ ॥

and when there is nothing to share, then share with others.

ਕੋ ਐਸਾ ਭਗਤੁ ਸਦਾਏ ॥੧੨੮॥

How rare is one who is known as such a devotee.

SGGS 1384

# Summing up

- Guru Granth Sahib provides a holistic theory of everyday living that provides a model for egalitarian society
- The 5-thieves theory of *kaam-krodh-lobh-moh-ahankaar* point to social problems of conspicuous consumption, demonstration effect, unaffordable consumption, debt, crime
- The 3-pillars theory of *naamjapo-kiratkarovandchhako* provide solutions to egalitarian society
- Expanded interpretations of
  - *Naam japna* - includes contemplation on and practice of ethical values
  - *Kirt karo* - points to a societal structure that enables each person the universal right to honest living
  - *Vand chhako* - points beyond simple charity to public policies such as progressive taxation
- Practice in daily living - for this Sikh theory to be relevant globally, or even locally, for Guru Granth Sahib to “speak”, it needs to be “heard”, that is, put into practice in everyday living, as well as in social and political choices