

ALLEGORY: A Tapestry of Guru Nanak's Travels Episode 6: Paheli (Veiled Message)

'Paheli', 'Veiled Message', presents the cogent scholar Guru Nanak's exemplary cues to induce critical thinking in the city which cannot be 'conquered by unrighteousness'. It also extends homage to the Saints who shared the same revolutionary philosophy as Guru Nanak.

raanaa raau na ko rahai ra(n)g na tu(n)g fakeer ||
vaaree aapo aapanee koi na ba(n)dhai dheer ||
(Raag Ramkali, Guru Nanak)

The kings, the nobels, the rich and the holy, all will depart.
Everyone has their turn to go as no one is bound to stay.
(Raag Ramkali, Guru Nanak)

Time is a dimension which can't be encapsulated. It is an infinitesimal moment, where past and future do not exist. The truth is that everything is transient, so why hold on? Live in the moment as if it is the last.

From Nanakmatta, Guru Nanak and Bhai Mardana travelled to Nanakpuri Tanda, Gola Gokaran Nath and reached Ayodhya. They first travelled west from Nanakmatta and stopped at Tanda, which is now known as Nanakpuri Tanda.

We now travel from Nanakmatta to Nanakpuri Tanda which is a small town situated in the present-day district of Rampur. This region is famous for rice cultivation.

At Nanakpuri Tanda, we visit Gurdwara Nanakpuri Tanda, which has been built to commemorate Guru Nanak's visit to Tanda.

Amardeep Singh: Tanda is a town in the Terai region. During the 14th century, this was a halting place for the traders and many gypsies resided here.

When Guru Nanak and Bhai Mardana reached Tanda, a gypsy family was celebrating the birth of a son. As fate would have it, the new born died the next day. Within a few hours, people who were in a joyous mood, were now mourning the loss. To lift the spirits of the grieving family, Guru Nanak explained that joy and sorrow are fleeting moments. Birth and death is a play of life, the ultimate law of nature. Dwelling on them is futile. A short life lived sagaciously is more momentous than a long life lived in the grip of illusion.

har kaa naam na chetai praanee bikal bhiaa sa(n)g maiaa ||
dhan siau rataa joban mataa ahilaa janam gavaiaa ||
(Sri Raag, Guru Nanak)

The being does not introspect and remains perplexed by worldly attractions.
Absorbed in futile materialism and intoxicated by youth, this rare opportunity of a
fulfilling life is wasted.
(Sri Raag, Guru Nanak)

Like gypsies, our thoughts wander. We aimlessly attach ourselves to insignificant pleasures, failing to delve on the qualities of the all-pervading Sustainer. Engrossed in materialism, mindlessly, we waste away a divine life, not recognising that life is illusory and death is inevitable.

In this small town of Tanda there are five gurdwaras in close proximity; all associating Guru Nanak's visit to a narrative not documented in the earliest 'Janamsakhis'. As per this narrative, when Guru Nanak visited Tanda, the region was known as Rohilkhand. It was infamous for its slave trade. Guru Nanak is said to have transformed himself into a young boy, allowing himself to be abducted and sold four times by a 'Rohilla Pathan'. As the story goes, Guru Nanak miraculously dried up a well, ravaged a blooming garden, vanished grains from a storehouse and made a sheep die in order to revive it. On each occasion, he would be set free from slavery.

The term 'Hukam', the law of nature, is repeatedly used by Guru Nanak in his verses; perhaps to serve as a constant reminder of its importance. I believe he would have confronted the slave traders and transformed them through the wisdom of his words and reasoning. I wonder if it is our inability to comprehend the profound depth of Guru Nanak's philosophy which causes us to project him through narratives which require limited and superficial introspection.

nadhar kareh too taareh tareeai sach dhevahu dheen dhiaalaa ||
pranavat naanak dhaasan dhaasaa gurmat jaaniaa soiee ||
(Raag Tukhari, Guru Nanak)

Grace the knowledge for transition and bestow the Truth to the meek, O compassionate
One.

Nanak seeks to be a slave to the devotees. The compassionate One nourishes all.
(Raag Tukhari, Guru Nanak)

The human mind, enslaved by the mundane, becomes incapable of grasping the depth of philosophies and operates in the superficial realm. Guru Nanak's profound message about slavery is that he is ready to enslave himself to the one who is in unison with creation.

Setting out from Nanakpuri Tanda, Guru Nanak and Bhai Mardana travelled south-east to Gola Gokaran Nath.

Trailing Guru Nanak's footsteps, we now travel from Nanakpuri Tanda to Gola Gokaran Nath, close to the city of Lakhimpur Kheri.

During the times of Guru Nanak, the region of Terai was a dense forest, sparsely populated.

Amardeep Singh: Gola is an ancient town famous for the Gola Gokaran Shiva Temple, which was once the hub for the 'Nath Yogis' (ascetics). River Sarada, which now flows at a distance from the town, was closer, when Guru Nanak visited Gola.

At Gola Gokaran Nath, we visit the ancient temple dedicated to Shiva, the Hindu Trinity God associated with the force behind destruction. During the 16th century, 'Nath Yogis' (ascetics) were an integral part of this temple. It is said that Guru Nanak had discourses with them during his visit to Gola Gokaran Nath.

The aniconic idol representing Shiva, the 'Shivling', enshrined in Gola Gokaran Nath Temple is shaped like a cow's ear unlike the traditional cylindrical pillar shaped idol. According to a legend, a devotee of Shiva, a learned scholar, the arrogant King Ravana pressed the head of the 'Shivling' in desperation for not being able to lift it. Thinking about the infamous scholarly King Ravana and his legend associated with this place, I wonder, what is wisdom, devotion and ignorance?

a(n)tar agiaan dhukh bharam hai gur giaan gavaiee ||
jis kirapaa agiaan dhukh bharam hai gur giaan gavaiee ||
(Raag Malar, Guru Nanak)

Ignorance, pain and doubt residing within get eradicated through wisdom.
Those graced to acquire the wisdom attune themselves to practice self-reflection.
(Raag Malar, Guru Nanak)

In my humble interpretation, having gained wisdom, yet harbouring arrogance is ignorance. Understanding the root cause of ignorance is true wisdom. Accepting the law of unity is devotion.

We make detours from the footsteps of Guru Nanak to include the memories of those Saints, some predeceasing and other contemporaries of Guru Nanak, whose verses are enshrined in the 'Guru Granth Sahib', the Sikh scripture.

During the time of Guru Nanak, for the vast majority of adherents of the Hindu and Muslim faiths, the essence of religion lay in following the diktat of the clergy and adhering to conventional ceremonies. Overtime, this started limiting the universal acceptance of the core philosophies. To fill the gap created by the divide amongst people of the Indian subcontinent, two parallel reformist movements emerged in the early 10th century. 'Bhakti'

in Hinduism and 'Sufism' in Islam. Both dissenting voices responded in the form of poetry in the vernacular to express their devotion to the One single unifying force, the Creator.

Guru Nanak too was an exponent of Monism - a doctrine that supported unity and rejected duality. His philosophy was consistent with that of the 'Bhakti' and 'Sufi' spiritualists.

Taking a detour from the footsteps of Guru Nanak, we travel to Kannauj to explore sites associated with the memories of Bhagat Parmanand.

Bhagat Parmanand is believed to be a contemporary of Guru Nanak. Even though there is no evidence that the two met, since one of his verses is inscribed in the 'Guru Granth Sahib', we know that philosophically their thoughts met. Little is known about Bhagat Parmanand. Some believe that he was a resident of Barshi in Maharashtra and others identify him with Brahmin Parmanand Das from Kannauj in Uttar Pradesh.

In Kannauj we tirelessly tried to locate any memorial associated with Bhagat Parmanand. Unfortunately, the residents were unaware of the devout saint.

cha(n)dhan bhagataa jot inehee sarabe paramal karanaa ||
(Raag Tilang, Guru Nanak)

Like sandalwood, Saints spread their fragrance everywhere.
(Raag Tilang, Guru Nanak)

The fragrance of the sandalwood tree envelops and permeates its surroundings, leaving an impact of its scent. Similarly, people of merit infuse love for unity, leaving an everlasting fragrance of their wisdom.

In the present times, the city of Kannauj is a centre for the manufacture of 'Ittar', local perfume. The power of scent is that it invisibly spreads its fragrance. Similarly, even though Bhagat Parmanand's memories are forgotten in the city of Kannauj, yet the fragrance of his philosophy has permeated far and wide.

tai nar kiaa puraan sun keenaa ||
anapaavaneeh bhagat nahee aupajee bhookhai dhaan na dheenaa ||
hi(n)saa tau man te nahee chhooTee jee dhiaa nahee paalee ||
paramaana(n)dh saadhasa(n)gat mil kathaa puneet na chaalee ||
(Raag Sarang, Bhagat Parmanand)

O being, what have you truly understood from hearing the scriptures?
Firm devotion has not yet sprouted, and the embrace to help the needy is lacking.
Cruelty has not left the mind and the kindness for others is not cherished.
Parmanand says, even in the company of the virtuous there is no inspiration to gain wisdom.

(Raag Sarang, Bhagat Parmanand)

Bhagat Parmanand in his verse emphasises the importance of sincere devotion and moral conduct over ritualistic practices. Superficial recitation of holy books cannot expunge the negativity in one's character. Devotion can be imbibed only through the company of positive thoughts.

From Kannauj, continuing further towards Ayodhya on Guru Nanak's footsteps, we make another detour, visiting Kakori to explore memories of Bheekhan Shah, a Saint whose philosophy was aligned with that of Guru Nanak's. Bheekhan Shah was a Sufi Saint from village Kakori. A contemporary of Guru Nanak, he was born in 1483 AD. Influenced by the 'Bhakti' and 'Sufi' movements, he critiqued the futile practices of superstition and formalism.

Bidauni, a historian, writes of Bheekhan Shah as being a great scholar. Engaged primarily in teaching and imparting wisdom, he called himself 'Kari' - a student, a learner! The use of this pen-name reflects the humility in his personality.

har gun kahate kahan na jaiee ||
jaise goo(n)ge kee mittiaaiee ||
rasanaa ramat sunat sukh sravanaa chit chete sukh hoiee ||
kahu bheekhan dhui nain sa(n)tokhe jeh dhekhaa(n) the soiee ||
(Raag Sorath, Bhagat Bheekhan)

Attributes of the Creator can't be expressed through words.
It is like a mute trying to verbalize the sweetness of a candy.

Tongue that utters, ears those listen to words of peace and the mind that contemplates
brings bliss.

Says Bheekhan, my eyes are content and wherever I look, I see the Creator's presence.
(Raag Sorath, Bhagat Bheekhan)

As an individual with speech disability is unable to describe the taste of sweets, similarly, the exhilarating state of self-realisation cannot be expressed in words.

Bheekhan Shah's verses, inscribed in the 'Guru Granth Sahib', the Sikh scripture, reflect that the panacea of human maladies is dispelled by inculcating divine attributes. Even today, his vision is kept alive by his progeny, who run a study centre at his memorial.

Anwar Habib Alvi: The wisdom of Bheekhan Shah, with which Guru Nanak was aligned and liked, was that humanity should embrace each other, be benevolent and love one another. When the works of Sufis and Saints were collated in 'Guru Granth Sahib', it was then realized how beautifully the wisdom of the learned Saints came together in one repository. In this world, the only source of threading people together people is through love.

sun sun boojhai maanai naau ||
taa kai sadh balihaarai jaau ||
(Raag Gauri, Guru Nanak)

Those who are receptive to listening, understanding and implementing,
I forever sacrifice myself to them.
(Raag Gauri, Guru Nanak)

Celestial sounds surround us. Only the conscientious few, listen, comprehend and practice these melodies of wisdom.

From Gola Gokaran Nath, Guru Nanak and Bhai Mardana travelled by boat on River Sarada and reached Brahma Ghat, the confluence of River Ghagra and River Sarada. From here they continued by boat on River Ghagra towards the city of Ayodhya.

After having made detours, we resume our journey in the footsteps of Guru Nanak from Gola Gokaran Nath to Ayodhya.

Amardeep Singh: Located along the banks of the Ghagra River, which is also known Saryu, the city of Ayodhya derives its name from Sanskrit, which metaphorically means, cannot be conquered by unrighteousness.

Ayodhya, the birthplace of the legendary King Ramachandr, is an important place of pilgrimage for the Hindus.

Stories can be powerful means of inspiration, if told and comprehended at a philosophical level. 'Ramayan' is an epic associated with Ramchandr. It conveys a spiritual message through deep metaphoric representations.

Ramchandr personifies pure consciousness, which resides in 'Ayodhya', a realm where there is no conflict. The name of Ramchandr's father, 'Dasrath', is a combination of two words; 'Rath', a chariot representing the body; and 'Das', representing its ten sensory and action organs. Ramchandr's wife, Sita, represents the mind. Ramchandr and Sita's exile to the forest, represents worldly entanglements. In a state of duality, Sita, the mind, is deceived by ego, metaphorically represented by Ravan. The army of monkeys represent the agility of free will to facilitate action. The battle is a metaphoric representation of internal reflections to defeat vices. Victory is achieved by targeting the epicentre of intentions, represented by the navel. Once the intentions are conquered, the human psyche returns to a state of equilibrium.

We now visit Gurdwara Brahm Kund which is built in the memory of Guru Nanak's visit to Ayodhya. This site also commemorates the visits of Guru Tegh Bahadur, the 9th Sikh Guru and Guru Gobind Singh, the 10th Sikh Guru to Ayodhya.

'ALLEGORY: A Tapestry of Guru Nanak's Travels', the 24 Episode Guru Nanak Docuseries
is available in 5 languages at TheGuruNanak.com
Email: onenessindiversityfoundation@gmail.com

Amardeep Singh: Close to River Ghagra, Gurdwara Brahm Kund is the oldest site built in remembrance of Guru Nanak and Bhai Mardana's visit to Ayodhya.

Guru Nanak visited Ayodhya to engage with people who would come on a pilgrimage to pay homage to Ramchandar.

At Ayodhya, Guru Nanak gave a profound message,

naanak nirbhau nira(n)kaar hor kete raam ravaal ||
keteeaa ka(n)n(h) kahaaneeaa kete bedh beechaar ||
kete nacheh ma(n)gate giR muR pooreh taal ||
baajaaree baajaar meh aai kaddeh baajaar ||
(Raag Asa, Guru Nanak)

Nanak says, the Omnipresent is indomitable and formless. Rest all manifestations perish.

There are many stories of the manifestation and many reflections in the scriptures.
Many who dance and beg, swirling to the worldly beat.
Like people in business, they arrive in the marketplace to showcase their merchandise.
(Raag Asa, Guru Nanak)

Guru Nanak says that while the mind anchors on physical aspects to connect with the Formless and Omnipresent Creator, mortals come and go. Rising from dust, they eventually merge with it.

At the banks of Ghagra River, seeing people undergoing severe penances in the hope that these would lead them to liberation, Guru Nanak sang,

jagan hom pu(n)n tap poojaa dheh dhukhee nit dhookh sahai ||
raam naam bin mukat na paavasmukat naam guramukh lahai ||
raam naam bin birathe jag janama ||
bikh khaavai bikh bolee bolai bin naavai nihafal mar bhramanaa ||
(Raag Bhairo, Guru Nanak)

Despite giving holy feasts, sacrificial offerings, charity, performing austerities, worshiping and enduring physical discomfort, yet every moment, they suffer mental pain.

Without introspection, emancipation is not achieved. The state of peace is obtained by the wisdom oriented.

Without self-reflection, the reason for birth into the world is useless.
Akin to eating poison, they utter foul words. Without realization they wander and die spiritually in doubt.
(Raag Bhairo, Guru Nanak)

Day and night, we wander in illusion. Liberation is in living a life of simplicity and sincerity, not of austerity.

Guru Tegh Bahadur, the 9th Sikh Guru and Guru Gobind Singh, the 10th Sikh Guru also visited Ayodhya. Raja Maan Singh was the King of Ayodhya at the time when Guru Gobind Singh visited this city.

We now visit Mr. Yatindra Mishra, who is the descendant of Raja Maan Singh.

Yatindra Mishra: When Guru Gobind Singh Ji (10th Nanak) visited Ayodhya, according to a narrative in our family, he stayed in a garden and gave his spiritual messages, which attracted many to congregate. The then King of Ayodhya went and bowed to Guru Gobind Singh Ji (10th Nanak). In respect, the King said, “the land where you are sitting, in your devotion, for your righteous message, I present to you as a gift.” Since then, that neighbourhood has been known as Nazarbagh.

We now visit Gurdwara Nazarbagh.

Amardeep Singh: Gurdwara Nazarbagh is built on a royal garden, donated by Raja Maan Singh, the King of Ayodhya.

Yatindra Mishra: In context to Ayodhya, where various religious communities and sects intermingle, that one fellowship, the noble flow of heartedness, that one ancestral link, that brings people together, to create a large family, taking that into perspective, I have penned a poem, ‘Coming Together’, which I will read for you,

How does it matter if, in Ayodhya, one sings ‘Padh’ (poetry) or ‘Shabad’ (verse)?
In distant Nankana, an elated being, instead of ‘Japji’ (Guru Nanak’s verse) sings
‘Qawwali’ (Sufi rendition).

It does not matter if we can ask from Bala and Mardana, the ones who pick flowers from
the words of Nanak, with a one-stringed instrument in their hands.

Often while striking a note, they even visit the homes of Khusrau and Kabir.

It does not even matter that today, in every conversation, if people add poetry for unity.
Those who find differences in everything maybe they never put an effort to fight for
unity.

Why is it that the reach of Divinity is confined to the mansions and verses of noble
beings?

And why, from past to present, the new generation of the elated artistic beings take the
first step forward, to make friendship with the compassionate and nectar-filled ones.

The human mind seeks Divinity in tangibles. Guru Nanak says why go far! Divinity resides right within the body which is its temple. It just needs to be recognised.

dhoor na jaanaa a(n)tar maanaa har kaa mahal pachhaanaa ||
(Raag Tukhari, Guru Nanak)

You do not need to seek afar; it is within. Recognize the presence of the Divine force.
(Raag Tukhari, Guru Nanak)

Discussion Pointers

ALLEGORY: A Tapestry of Guru Nanak's Travels Episode 6: Paheli (Veiled Message)

The discussion points vividly explore the profound historical and philosophical significance of Guru Nanak's journey from Nanakmatta to Ayodhya. From a historical perspective, they detail his interactions with diverse communities and unveil the overlap between his viewpoints and those of contemporaries like Bhagat Parmanand and Bheekhan Shah. Philosophically, they delve into his insights on impermanence, the importance of inner wisdom over external rituals, the metaphorical interpretations of mythical narratives, and the idea that divine energy is omnipresent. These elements create a framework for understanding how Guru Nanak's travels through the Gangetic plains served not only as a geographical expedition but also as a philosophical exploration of the spiritual traditions and practices of his time.

Historical Discussion Pointers:

1. What was the historical significance of Nanakpuri Tanda during Guru Nanak's time, and what commemorative sites exist there?

The episode describes Tanda as a town in the Terai region which during the 14th century was a halting place for the traders and many gypsies resided here. When Guru Nanak visited, the region was known as Rohilkhand and was infamous for its slave trade. Today, in this small town of Tanda there are five gurdwaras in close proximity; all associating Guru Nanak's visit to a narrative not documented in the earliest 'Janamsakhis'. These sites commemorate a narrative in which Guru Nanak supposedly transformed himself into a young boy, allowing himself to be abducted and sold four times by a 'Rohilla Pathan', performing various miracles to secure his freedom. In what ways does this narrative illustrate the historical memory regarding Guru Nanak's visit? Furthermore, how does the narrator's skepticism toward this account shed light on the diverse perspectives and methodologies that need to be used to interpret Guru Nanak's historical interactions and their significance?

2. What was the historical role of the Nath Yogis at Gola Gokaran Nath, and how did they interact with Guru Nanak?

The episode describes Gola Gokaran Nath as an ancient town famous for the Gola Gokaran Shiva Temple, which was once the hub for the 'Nath Yogis' (ascetics). It notes that during the 16th century, 'Nath Yogis' (ascetics) were an integral part of this temple. It is said that Guru Nanak had discourses with them during his visit to Gola Gokaran Nath. The temple houses an unusual aniconic idol representing Shiva, the 'Shivling' shaped like a cow's ear unlike the traditional cylindrical pillar shaped idol. What might these interactions between Guru Nanak and the Nath Yogis reveal about

the religious landscape of northern India during this period, and how did Guru Nanak's approach to spiritual discourse differ from or align with their practices?

3. How did the parallel reformist movements of Bhakti and Sufism create the historical context for Guru Nanak's viewpoints?

The episode explains that during the time of Guru Nanak, for the vast majority of adherents of the Hindu and Muslim faiths, the essence of religion lay in following the diktat of the clergy and adhering to conventional ceremonies. Overtime, this started limiting the universal acceptance of the core philosophies. In response, two parallel reformist movements emerged in the early 10th century. 'Bhakti' in Hinduism and 'Sufism' in Islam. Both dissenting voices responded in the form of poetry in the vernacular to express their devotion to the One single unifying force, the Creator. Guru Nanak is described as an exponent of Monism - a doctrine that supported unity and rejected duality. His philosophy was consistent with that of the 'Bhakti' and 'Sufi' saints. How did this historical context of religious reform movements provide fertile ground for Guru Nanak's message of equality?

4. What do we learn about Bhagat Parmanand and Bheekhan Shah as contemporaries of Guru Nanak, and how are their memories preserved?

The episode states that Bhagat Parmanand is believed to be a contemporary of Guru Nanak. Even though there is no evidence that the two met, since one of his verses is inscribed in the 'Guru Granth Sahib', we know that philosophically their thoughts met. Similarly, Bheekhan Shah was a Sufi Saint from the village Kakori. A contemporary of Guru Nanak, he was born in 1483 AD. The episode notes that in Kannauj, the narrator tirelessly tried to locate any memorial associated with Bhagat Parmanand. Unfortunately, the residents were unaware of the devout saint. In contrast, at Kakori, Bheekhan Shah's vision is kept alive by his progeny, who run a study centre at his memorial. What do these different patterns of historical memory suggest about how spiritual legacies are preserved across time and place, and what significance might the inclusion of their verses in the Guru Granth Sahib have for their enduring influence?

5. What historical connections exist between Ayodhya and the Sikh Gurus, and how are these commemorated?

The episode notes that Guru Nanak visited Ayodhya to engage with people who would come on a pilgrimage to pay homage to Ramchandar. It also states that Guru Tegh Bahadur, the 9th Sikh Guru and Guru Gobind Singh, the 10th Sikh Guru also visited Ayodhya. These visits are commemorated at Gurdwara Brahm Kund which is built in the memory of Guru Nanak's visit to Ayodhya. This site also commemorates the visits of Guru Tegh Bahadur, the 9th Sikh Guru and Guru Gobind Singh, the 10th Sikh Guru to Ayodhya. Additionally, Gurdwara Nazarbagh is built on a royal garden, donated by Raja Maan Singh, the King of Ayodhya to Guru Gobind Singh. According to Yatindra Mishra, a descendant of Raja Maan Singh, when Guru Gobind Singh (10th Nanak) visited Ayodhya... he stayed in a garden and gave his spiritual messages, which

attracted many to congregate. The then King of Ayodhya went and bowed to Guru Gobind Singh. What do visits by Sikh Gurus to Ayodhya suggest about the city's significance in Sikh tradition?

Philosophical Discussion Pointers:

1. At Nanakpuri Tanda, how does Guru Nanak inspire us to reflect on the concepts of impermanence and the fleeting nature of life?

The episode opens with Guru Nanak's verse mentioning that the kings, the nobles, the rich and the holy, all will depart. Everyone has their turn to go as no one is bound to stay. It further reflects that time is a dimension which can't be encapsulated. It is an infinitesimal moment, where past and future do not exist. The truth is that everything is transient, so why hold on? Live in the moment as if it is the last. When encountering a family grieving the death of a newborn in Tanda, Guru Nanak explained that joy and sorrow are fleeting moments. Birth and death are a play of life, the ultimate law of nature. Dwelling on them is futile. A short life lived sagaciously is more momentous than a long life lived in the grip of illusion. How can this philosophical perspective on impermanence serve as a framework for navigating life's challenges? Furthermore, in what ways might it provide solace to individuals grappling with grief and loss?

2. What is Guru Nanak's philosophical critique of slavery, both literal and metaphorical?

In Nanakpuri Tanda, a region infamous for its slave trade, Guru Nanak, in one of his verses requests the all-pervading force to grace the knowledge for transition and bestow the Truth to the meek. The episode discusses Guru Nanak's metaphor of slavery, which illustrates his willingness to submit himself to those in unison with the essence of creation. It also suggests that when individuals are preoccupied with everyday concerns, their minds often struggle to understand more profound philosophies and focus only on superficial aspects of life. How does Guru Nanak reframe the concept of slavery from being a form of oppression to a choice made for spiritual growth and what might this reflect about freedom and bondage in both physical and spiritual dimensions?

3. How does Guru Nanak define wisdom, devotion, and ignorance in his spiritual dialogue at Gola Gokaran Nath?

Reflecting on the legend of King Ravana at the Gola Gokaran Nath temple, the narrator poses the question, what is wisdom, devotion and ignorance? Guru Nanak's verse provides insight that ignorance, pain and doubt residing within get eradicated through wisdom. Those graced to acquire wisdom attune themselves to practice self-reflection. The narrator interprets this as having gained wisdom, yet harbouring arrogance is ignorance. Understanding the root cause of ignorance is true wisdom. Accepting the law of unity is devotion. How does this philosophical framework challenge conventional understandings of wisdom and ignorance, and what does it suggest about the relationship between intellectual knowledge and spiritual humility?

4. How does Guru Nanak's philosophy of Monism align with and possibly transcend the Bhakti and Sufi traditions?

The episode states that Guru Nanak too was an exponent of Monism - a doctrine that supported unity and rejected duality. His philosophy was consistent with that of the 'Bhakti' and 'Sufi' Saints. Both movements responded in the form of poetry in the vernacular to express their devotion to the One single unifying force, the Creator. This perspective is reinforced by Anwar Habib Alvi's comment that Bheekhan Shah's vision was aligned with Guru Nanak's message, which is that humanity should embrace, be benevolent, and love one another. Alvi further notes that when the works of Sufis and Saints were collated in 'Guru Granth Sahib', it was then realized how beautifully the wisdom of the learned Saints came together in one repository. In this world, the only source of threading people together is through love. How does Guru Nanak's belief in monism provide a philosophical foundation for interfaith understanding and unity transcend the existing reformist traditions of his time?

5. What does Bhagat Parmanand's verse reveal about the relationship between scriptural knowledge and authentic devotion?

In this episode, Bhagat Parmanand questions what we have understood from hearing the scriptures. Firm devotion has not yet sprouted, and the embrace to help the needy is lacking. Cruelty has not left the mind and the kindness for others is not cherished. Parmanand says, even in the company of the virtuous there is no inspiration to gain wisdom. The narrator explains that Bhagat Parmanand in his verse emphasises the importance of sincere devotion and moral conduct over ritualistic practices. Superficial recitation of holy books cannot expunge the negativity in one's character. Devotion can be imbibed only through the company of positive thoughts. How does this philosophical critique challenge the prevalent religious practices of reading scriptures without internalizing their ethical insights, and what alternative path to spiritual growth does it propose?

6. How does Bheekhan Shah articulate the limitations of language in expressing spiritual experience?

The episode mentions Bheekhan Shah's verse that says that the attributes of the Creator can't be expressed through words. It is like a mute trying to verbalize the sweetness of a candy. Tongue that utters, ears those listen to words of peace and the mind that contemplates brings bliss. He says, my eyes are content and wherever I look, I see the Creator's presence. The narrator explains that as an individual with a speech disability is unable to describe the taste of sweets, similarly, the exhilarating state of self-realisation cannot be expressed in words. How does this philosophical insight challenge the limits of language and intellectual understanding in spiritual experience, and what alternative modes of knowing does it suggest?

7. How does Guru Nanak reinterpret the Ramayan narrative as a metaphor for inner spiritual transformation?

The episode presents a metaphorical interpretation of the Ramayan epic where Ramchandr personifies pure consciousness, which resides in 'Ayodhya', a realm without conflict. The name of Ramchandr's father, 'Dasrath', is a combination of two words; 'Rath', a chariot representing the body, and 'Das', representing its ten sensory and action organs. Ramchandr's wife, Sita, represents the mind. Ramchandr and Sita's exile to the forest represents worldly entanglements. In a state of duality, Sita, the mind, is deceived by ego, metaphorically represented by Ravan. The army of monkeys represents the agility of free will to facilitate action. The battle is a metaphoric representation of internal reflections to defeat vices. Victory is achieved by targeting the epicentre of intentions, represented by the navel. Once the intentions are conquered, the human psyche returns to a state of equilibrium. How does this allegorical interpretation transform a well-known religious narrative into a guide for inner spiritual development, and what might it indicate about Guru Nanak's method of engaging with established religious traditions?

8. What is Guru Nanak's critique of ritualistic practices at Ayodhya, and what alternative path does he propose?

The episode describes that at Ayodhya, seeing people undergoing severe penances in the hope that these would lead them to liberation, Guru Nanak sang a verse saying that despite giving holy feasts, sacrificial offerings, charity, performing austerities, worshipping and enduring physical discomfort, yet every moment, they suffer mental pain. Without introspection, emancipation is not achieved. The state of peace is obtained by those who seek wisdom. The narrator concludes that day and night, we wander in illusion. Liberation is in living a life of simplicity and sincerity, not of austerity. How does this philosophical critique challenge the efficacy of external religious practices, and what internal spiritual practices does Guru Nanak propose as an alternative path to liberation?

9. How does Guru Nanak's philosophy about the omnipresence of the divine force challenge conventional pilgrimages to sacred sites?

The episode concludes with Guru Nanak's verse that says that one need not seek the omnipresent afar; it is within. Recognize the presence of the Divine force. The narrator explains: The human mind seeks Divinity in tangibles. Guru Nanak says why go far, divinity resides right within the body, which is its temple. It just needs to be recognised. Earlier, at Ayodhya, Guru Nanak had proclaimed that the Omnipresent is indomitable and formless. Rest all manifestations perish. There are many stories of the manifestation and many reflections in the scriptures. Many who dance and beg, swirling to the worldly beat. Like people in business, they arrive in the marketplace to showcase their merchandise. How does this philosophical perspective on divine immanence challenge conventional understandings of sacred geographies and pilgrimage, and what alternative spiritual practice does it suggest?