

ALLEGORY: A Tapestry of Guru Nanak's Travels Episode 9: Sampajanna (Clear Comprehension)

'Sampajanna', 'Clear Comprehension', presents the clarity of the conscientious explorer in 'Magadh'. Guru Nanak puts forward his thoughts to the agnostics who neither accepted nor negated the existence of the Omnipresent.

hukame aaddaane aagaasee ||
hukame jal thal tirabhavan vaasee ||
hukame saas giraas sadhaa fun hukame dhekh dhikhaidhaa ||
(Raag Maru, Guru Nanak)

By the law of nature exists this vast expanse of the sky.

By the law of nature, living organisms dwell in water, on land and in the three realms.
By the law of nature, life and sustenance of the creation continue. By the law of nature,
if one sees within then all is seen.
(Raag Maru, Guru Nanak)

'Hukam' is the law of nature; a constant which governs the universe. It has endowed the flexibility of 'Karam', the free will of actions to every individual. Guru Nanak says, actions of an individual determine what is known as destiny.

From Varanasi, Guru Nanak and Bhai Mardana travelled to Chandauli, Sasaram, Gaya, Bodh Gaya, Hajipur, to reach the city of Sonapur. They first travelled from Varanasi to Chandauli.

In travelling from Varanasi to Hajipur, we decide to visit Chandauli by train. Chandauli is a city in Uttar Pradesh, situated on the South-East of the River Ganga, close to the Bihar border.

Life is like travelling on a train between two stations of birth and death, during which many passengers come together and depart. A train ride teaches us to make the most of the situation by remaining unconditionally attached, yet detached.

As per 'Janamsakhi' literature, in the region of Chandauli, Guru Nanak met Hari Nath, the chief of the town. Hari Nath was going through a tumultuous state of mind and was considering renouncing his position as the chieftain. Guru Nanak advised him to fulfill his duty as a virtuous leader and provide selfless service to his people. In this path of deliverance he could be attached, yet detached.

jeeau tapat hai baaro baar ||
tap tap khapai bahut bekaar ||
jai tan baanee visar jai ||

jiau pakaa rogee vilalai ||
bahutaa bolan jhakhan hoi ||
vin bole jaanai sabh soi ||
(Raag Dhanasri, Guru Nanak)

The mind suffers in distress, over and over again.
It continuously bears unnecessary pain.

The body that forgets spiritual words, cries in pain like a diseased patient.
Excessive prattling is all in vain. Even without our speaking, the Divine force is aware of everything.
(Raag Dhanasri, Guru Nanak)

Guru Nanak explained when the mind is delusional it grieves and blabbers thoughtlessly, hurting both the soul and the body. The remedy is in acceptance through introspection.

At Chandauli, we were unable to find any physical memories of Guru Nanak's visit.

From Chandauli, Guru Nanak and Bhai Mardana travelled to Sasaram.

In Guru Nanak's footsteps we travel from Chandauli to Sasaram.

Amardeep Singh: Sasaram is a city historically influenced by Sufism. Guru Nanak on his journey to Gaya, passed through the city of Sasaram.

Sasaram is also the birthplace of the mighty Afghan King Sher Shah Suri, who ruled over much of Northern India in the 16th century. Sasaram is a city in the state of Bihar, with a history dating back to the Vedic times. It was famous as a pathway leading to the Buddhist pilgrimage city of Gaya.

At Sasaram, there is no specific site associated with the memory of Guru Nanak's visit to this city.

In Sasaram city, Gurdwara Chacha Phagu Mal, is a site built in the memory of Chacha Phagu Mal, who was sent to Bihar by Guru Amardas, the third Sikh Guru, to spread the message of Guru Nanak. In Bihar, many centres were established by the 'Udasin' (ascetic) sect to spread the philosophy of Guru Nanak but in recent times, most of them have gone into oblivion. In the outskirts of Sasaram, in a tranquil village, we met Mahant Bajrangi Das Udasin, a follower of Guru Nanak, who is managing the 'Pracheen Aithiashik Udaseein Gurdwara' built in the memory of Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth Sikh Guru.

Mahant Bajrangi Das Udasin:

sabh te vaddaasatigur naanak jin kal raakhee meree ||
satigur ba(n)dhan toR niraare bahuR na garabh majhaaree jeeau ||

naanak giaan ratan paragaasiaa har man vasiaa nira(n)kaareejeeau ||
(Guru Nanak)

A True Teacher is the greatest of all, Nanak says, who has saved me from negativities.
The True Teacher breaks the doubts to lead to self-actualization and stops one from
entering the womb of negativities.

Nanak says, the jewel of spiritual wisdom has revealed that within every soul resides
the formless Creator.
(Guru Nanak)

My name is Mahant Bajrangi Das Udasin. Guru Nanak Dev Ji Maharaj's son, Baba Sri Chand Ji initiated the 'Udasin' tradition, which I follow. As mentioned in the history, the path on which Guru Nanak Dev Ji Maharaj travelled, on that path, the ninth Guru, Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji Maharaj also visited this city. From the same school of thought, our one family resides in Sasaram. Since long, our family has been managing this gurdwara. Guru Nanak Dev Ji Maharaj gave importance to education. Hence, it came to my mind that in the name of the Guru, as we are a part of his legacy, we must run a school in his name and educate our Bihari children and tell them about Guru Nanak. Guru Nanak taught three principles - 'meditate upon Divine', 'share with others' & 'earn through honest means'. These three value systems are also imparted to our children in the Guru Nanak Public School.

To impart education and provide medical assistance to the underprivileged villagers, a school and a medical centre are being operated in this gurdwara, which are being managed by the 'Udasin' (ascetic) community.

From the donor name plates at most of the 'Udasin' (ascetic) sites, it is interesting to note that these centres, established to spread the message of Guru Nanak, were set up with donations from the local non-Sikh community. This is a testimony to the wide acceptance of Guru Nanak's philosophy because of its universality.

It was a delight to witness that Guru Nanak's message of selfless service is being followed in such remote locations by locals who have no connection with Punjab.

galee bhisat na jaieeai chhuTai sach kamai
(Raag Majh, Guru Nanak)

By mere talking, peace can't be achieved. It is attained through truthful actions.
(Raag Majh, Guru Nanak)

Guru Nanak says, wisdom is of no use, if not implemented practically. It is akin to adding condiments to stale food in false hope to make it fresh.

From Sasaram, Guru Nanak and Bhai Mardana proceeded towards Gaya.

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In Guru Nanak's footsteps, we now travel to the city of Gaya.

Amardeep Singh: City of Gaya is located on the banks of Phalgu River, surrounded on three sides by small rocky hills. Since ancient times, this city is sanctified for pilgrimage.

At Gaya, we visit the ancient Vishnupad Temple.

Gaya gets its name from a mythical story of a demon named Gayasur, who was misusing his powers to liberate people. Hence, Vishnu, eliminated Gayasur by placing his foot on the demon's head. In the sanctum of Vishnupad Temple, a footprint incised on a block of basalt, is claimed by the Hindus to be that of Vishnu, while the Buddhists consider it as the footprint of Gautam Buddh. At the Vishnupad Temple, on the banks of the Phalgu River, people perform 'Pind Daan', a ritual for the salvation of a deceased relative.

Mani Lal Barik: Since the practice of 'Pind Daan' was started in Gaya, our ancestors have been residing here. It is our responsibility that the people visiting from Jammu, Himachal, Punjab and Pakistani Punjab who come for Hindu rituals in Gaya. To date, we have been assisting them to perform rituals as per religious traditions.

'Pind' is a ritualistic offering of seven balls made of rice flour, wheat flour, dried milk, honey and sesame seeds, which are used by the priests to perform the ritual and in return expect 'Daan', a charitable payment.

While Guru Nanak was meditating on the river bank, priests approached him, suggesting that he perform the last rites of his ancestors so that their souls could be liberated from the cycle of rebirth. Guru Nanak humbly declined, stating that he has performed the ritual of shedding the darkness of ignorance by lighting the lamp of knowledge. He said hoping for redemption after death is futile. Doing good deeds while alive is the way to become liberated.

eik lokee hor chhamichharee braahaman vaT pi(n)dd khai ||
naanak pi(n)dd bakhasees kaa kabahoo(n) nikhooTas naeh ||
(Raag Asa, Guru Nanak)

People give offerings to the dead ancestors ritualistically but it is the priest who consumes the offerings.

Nanak says, it is the offerings of good actions that are never exhausted.
(Raag Asa, Guru Nanak)

Guru Nanak clarifies that performance of rituals are misconceptions for seeking redemption. Instead, he advises that one should inculcate gratitude, a quality which will remain for eternity.

In the narrow lanes along the banks of the Phalgu River, we visit a site built in the memory of Guru Nanak's visit to Gaya.

Amardeep Singh: This place of congregation, on the banks of Phalgu River, was built by the 'Udasin' (ascetic) tradition in the memory of Guru Nanak's visit to Gaya. It is known as Gurdwara Deo Ghat. Today, it lies abandoned.

Gurdwara Deo Ghat, a centre of learning was established by Baba Almast, who lived at the time of Guru Hargobind, the sixth Sikh Guru. Unfortunately, the site is now in ruins. It is documented that the seal of Baba Almast and a 'Hukumnama', an edict issued by Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth Sikh Guru, was once preserved here. Baba Ram Das Udasi is the last known 'Mahant' (priest) of this place. Verses from the 'Guru Granth Sahib', the Sikh scripture, are inscribed in Gurmukhi on this abandoned palanquin. A local resident informed us that in his youth, he had grown up seeing many 'Udasins' (ascetics) congregate at this site. They would often read the 'Guru Granth Sahib', the Sikh scripture.

Experiencing the past through such abandoned sites which were once thriving as centres of learning for the 'lovers of Guru Nanak', I reflect on the ways of the world.

jiau laahaatoTaa tivai vaaT chaladhee aaiee ||
jo tis bhaavai naanakaa saiee vaddiaaiee ||
(Raag Asa Kafi, Guru Nanak)

As there is gain there is a loss too. This has been the way of existence.
Whatever is the will of nature, Nanak says, is bestowed grace.
(Raag Asa Kafi, Guru Nanak)

From Gaya, Guru Nanak and Bhai Mardana visited Bodh Gaya.

We now visit the Mahabodhi Temple at Bodhgaya at a distance of about twelve kilometres from Gaya.

Amardeep Singh: It is believed that Gautam Buddha attained enlightenment under the 'Bodhi' (Pipal) Tree in Bodhgaya. It is for this reason, this shrine is a place of veneration for the Buddhists.

Prince Siddharth, who is famously known as Gautam Buddha, practiced self-mortification for six years. While contemplating under a 'Bodhi' (Pipal) tree at this site, he realized the futility of penances and gave up the practice of self-mortification. This is known as the day of his enlightenment.

Although Gautam Buddha was born around 2000 years before Guru Nanak, yet their thoughts overlap on social constructs. During their respective times, they spearheaded a

revolution against the caste system and religious hierarchy. They advocated equality, humanity and service to mankind.

Hearing Guru Nanak's thoughts during his visit to Gaya, Mahant Dev Gir, the head priest of the Mahabodhi Temple, invited him to stay at Bodh Gaya.

Both, Guru Nanak and Buddha rejected attaching oneself to a tangible form and advised people to focus on leading a virtuous life.

Buddha was an agnostic, neither accepting, nor negating the existence of God. Guru Nanak, however endorsed that there exists a Divine force. It may not be comprehensible but yet is present everywhere.

merree sakhee sahelee sunahu bhai ||
meraa pir reesaaloo sa(n)g sai ||
oh alakh na laheesai kahahu kai ||
(Raag Basant, Guru Nanak)

O my friends and companions, listen with love in your heart.
My beloved is a treasure of ambrosia, always within me.
It is inapprehensible and invisible. How can I describe it?
(Raag Basant, Guru Nanak)

Buddha emphasized the futility of attaching oneself with the body, yet in present times, he is being worshipped in a physical form.

paathar le poojeh mugadh gavaar ||
oh jaa aap ddube tum kahaa taranahaar ||
(Raag Bihagra, Guru Nanak)

The naive and innocent worship stones.
How can these stones, which themselves sink, help you ferry across?
(Raag Bihagra, Guru Nanak)

Through idolatry, the human mind seeks temporary solace in worshipping an image of a revered mentor. Guru Nanak emphasizes living a virtuous life as a form of worship gives everlasting solace.

From Bodhgaya, Guru Nanak and Bhai Mardana travelled to the historic city of Hajipur.

We now travel from Bodhgaya to Hajipur.

An ancient settlement of Bihar, Hajipur city is bounded by River Gandaki on its west and River Ganga on its south.

Having travelled for days, Guru Nanak and Bhai Mardana were short of money on reaching Hajipur. Guru Nanak had a gemstone which he gave to Bhai Mardana, asking him to seek a buyer so the proceeds could meet their needs. Bhai Mardana visited Jawahartola, the local jewellery market where he met several jewellers but looking at Bhai Mardana's humble attire, no one entertained to ascribe a value to the stone. During this process he reached a jewellery shop, where the manager named Adhraka attended to him gently and took the gemstone to Salis Rai, the owner of the shop. Salis Rai immediately assessed the worth of the valuable gem and decided to negotiate the sale with the owner. He instructed his manager Adhraka to return the gemstone to Bhai Mardana along with a substantial amount of money. Bhai Mardana headed back with the money and the gem. Guru Nanak did not accept the money. For him, without a sale transaction, it was akin to taking alms. Hence, he requested Bhai Mardana to return the money. Pleased with the honest gesture, Salis Rai accompanied Bhai Mardana to meet Guru Nanak.

Salis Rai requested Guru Nanak to share the wisdom of how to maintain one's principles while living in this world which is full of distractions.

padhaman jaaval jal ras sa(n)gat sa(n)g dhokh nahee re ||
(Raag Maru, Guru Nanak)

The lotus flower blossoms in muddy waters, savours its company, yet remains
untouched by its imperfections.
(Raag Maru, Guru Nanak)

The Lotus flower is regarded as a symbol of spirituality. It has the qualities of a provider, regeneration, resilience and purity. Guru Nanak says, aspire to lead a life like that of the lotus flower. Despite living amid dirt do not get affected by the muck. Retain integrity and positivity even in adverse environments.

Guru Nanak advised Salis Rai to not let affluence hinder spiritual growth. He said that Adhraka, though a modest employee, could be more enlightened. Humility and not social, religious or economic status is the touchstone of goodness

We meet a few jewellers to enquire if there is any narrative in their community about Salis Rai, the jeweller from Guru Nanak's times.

Amardeep Singh: Greetings. I wish to speak with you. Do you know anything about Salis Rai?

Raju Soni: When Guru Nanak visited, Salis Rai had met with him. Later, his descendants, moved out of this city. This is a very old narrative.

Amardeep Singh: Are their homes anywhere in this place?

Raju Soni: No. There is nothing here. They have sold their ancestral lands and left.

Amardeep Singh: Alright then.

Raju Soni: They gave donations to the gurdwara and have migrated.

Amardeep Singh: Alright then. Greetings.

We now visit Gurdwara Gai Ghat close to River Ganga.

Amardeep Singh: Gurdwara Gai Ghat is associated with Guru Nanak and Bhai Mardana's visit to the city of Hajipur.

From Hajipur, Guru Nanak and Bhai Mardana visited the city of Sonapur.

We now cross the River Gandaki to visit Sonapur on the north bank.

Amardeep Singh: For centuries, the city of Sonapur is a place of congregation for the 'Vaishnavites', associated with the mythology of Gajgrah.

At Sonapur, on the confluence of the rivers Gandaki and Ganga, the annual Sonapur Fair is held during 'Kartik Purnima', which falls in the month of November. It is also a site for religious gatherings for the 'Vaishnavites', the followers of Vishnu, who consider it holy to take a bath at the river confluence and thereafter offer prayers at the Hariharnath Temple.

We make a visit to the Hariharnath Temple.

In the legend of 'Gajendra Moksh', the mythology of 'Gajgrah', an elephant, attracted to flowers, enters a lake that is blooming with lotuses. Here, a crocodile clutches its leg. After much struggle and not being able to release itself, the elephant appeals to Lord Vishnu by offering a lotus with its trunk. Hearing a genuine call, Lord Vishnu intervenes to release the elephant from the clutches of the crocodile.

eih jag moh het biaapita(n) dhukh adhik janam marana(n) ||
bhaj saran satigur uobareh har naam ridh ramana(n) ||
(Raag Gujri, Guru Nanak)

The world engrossed in temporal love endures the pain of attachment and detachment.
Contemplate in the sanctuary of true insights to get liberated. Introspect repeatedly
within.

(Raag Gujri, Guru Nanak)

In this legend, the elephant is analogous to ignorance, the crocodile to materialistic entanglements, the muddy lake to the world and the lotus flower to the consciousness. The release of the elephant from the clutches of the crocodile symbolizes the gaining of wisdom.

On the banks of the river, a pilgrim asked Guru Nanak, how can one seek spirituality when the mind remains desirous of material gains. Guru Nanak sang,

tan binasai dhan kaa ko kaheeaai ||
bin gur raam naam kat laheeaai ||
raam naam dhan sa(n)g sakhaiee ||
ahinis niramal har liv laiee ||
raam naam bin kavan hamaaraa ||
sukh dukh sam kar naam na chhoddau aape bakhas milaavanahaaraa ||
(Raag Asa, Guru Nanak)

Once the body perishes, then who becomes the owner of wealth?
Without the true wisdom, how can self-reflection be attained?
Contemplation is the wealth that is a companion and friend.
Night and day, turn the sublime attention towards Consciousness.
Except for Divine wisdom, what else is ours?

Consider the states of pleasure and pain alike and do not forsake the force that forgives
and unites.
(Raag Asa, Guru Nanak)

When the body perishes, one's amassed materialistic wealth is of no use. Guru Nanak said the real gain is in amassing knowledge which helps one in transcending from darkness to light.

We now visit the Lok Sewa Ashram, an 'Udasin' (ascetic) centre in Sonapur city.

Here, an elderly 'Udasin' (ascetic) shared that in the past, the 'Guru Granth Sahib', the Sikh scripture, was enshrined in the Loksewa Ashram. According to him, the present generation of 'Udasin' (ascetic) community is no longer attached to Guru Nanak's philosophy. However, the elderly 'Udasins' (ascetic) grew up in a tradition in which Guru Nanak's philosophy was their fulcrum.

Mahant Vishnu Das Udasin: Our community was initiated by Guru Nanak's son, Sri Chand. What is the 'Udasin' way of life? Getting detached from worldly attachments and devoting oneself to the pursuit of the Divine. We have three centres of learning. What is the motive of the three centres of learning? To spread the message of divinity by moving across India and around the world. Guru Nanak gave us a spiritual expression. He taught us the essence of the Divine. The essence is One unifying force. There is One Supreme Consciousness, which is Truth. The world is a mirage and only Divine is ever existing. He

taught, O human being, if you seek happiness in this world, then contemplate on the Divine. You will achieve everything through contemplation. Our 'Guru Granth Sahib' is a consolidation of the teachings of saintly people. It is not a language. Verses of the saints are presented in it. That is what is scribed. There is no caste differentiation in it. There is no discrimination in it.

In a world which is fragmented and conditioned by biases, people glorify separation over celebrating union! Guru Nanak says the glory is in recognizing that we are all interconnected in this worldly game.

vichhuRiaa kaa kiaa vichhuRai miliaa kaa kiaa mel ||
saahib so saalaahaeaai jin kar dhekhiaakhel ||
(Raag Maru, Guru Nanak)

There is no worse separation than that from inner peace and nothing better than unity through self-awareness.

Glorified as masters are those who see and understand worldly games.
(Raag Maru, Guru Nanak)

Discussion Pointers

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The following discussion points present a compelling structure for delving into Guru Nanak's journey from Varanasi to Sonapur. Historically, they emphasize his interactions with individuals from diverse backgrounds, the significant sites linked to his travels, and the pivotal role of the Udasin tradition in preserving and spreading his spiritual legacy. Philosophically, these points address themes of divine order, ritualism, virtuous living, wealth, and the quest for liberation. Together, they reveal how Guru Nanak engaged with eastern India's rich cultural and religious context, challenging conventional beliefs and offering practical guidance for spiritual growth through powerful metaphors. His encounters with various people from all social strata, such as chieftain Hari Nath, wealthy jeweller Salis Rai, and humble pilgrims, demonstrate his exceptional communication ability to respond to specific concerns, adhering to core principles of spiritual wisdom and ethical conduct. These discussion points encourage a deeper exploration of Guru Nanak's pursuit through the heartland of ancient India's traditions.

Historical Discussion Pointers:

1. What was Guru Nanak's journey route after leaving Varanasi, and what significant interactions did he have along the way?

The episode maps Guru Nanak's eastward journey after leaving Varanasi to Chandauli, Sasaram, Gaya, Bodh Gaya, Hajipur, to reach the city of Sonapur. This journey took them through significant religious and cultural centers of eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. In Chandauli, Guru Nanak met Hari Nath, the chief of the town, who was going through a tumultuous state of mind and was considering renouncing his position as the chieftain. In Gaya, he encountered priests who approached him suggesting that he perform ritualistic prayers for of his ancestors so that their souls could be liberated from the cycle of rebirth. In Hajipur, he met Salis Rai, a jeweler who sought his wisdom after witnessing Guru Nanak's honest refusal to accept money without a sale transaction. How do these interactions across different locations reveal Guru Nanak's approach to engaging with various segments of society, and what patterns emerge in his responses to the different challenges and inquiries he encountered?

2. How did the Udasin tradition contribute to preserving Guru Nanak's legacy in Bihar?

The episode highlights the significant role of the Udasin tradition in preserving and propagating Guru Nanak's philosophy throughout Bihar. It states: In Bihar, many centres were established by the 'Udasin' (ascetic) sect to spread the philosophy of Guru Nanak but in recent times, most of them have gone into oblivion. The episode

specifically mentions Mahant Bajrangi Das Udasin, a follower of Guru Nanak, who is managing the 'Pracheen Aithiashik Udaseein Gurdwara' in Sasaram, where he runs a school and medical center for underprivileged villagers. In Sonapur, the Lok Sewa Ashram is identified as an 'Udasin' (ascetic) centre where elderly 'Udasin' (ascetic) shared that in the past, the 'Guru Granth Sahib', the Sikh scripture, was enshrined. Mahant Vishnu Das Udasin explains the tradition that their commune was initiated by Guru Nanak's son, Sri Chand. What is the 'Udasin' way of life? How did this tradition help maintain Guru Nanak's presence in regions distant from Punjab, and what factors have contributed to the decline of these centers in recent times?

3. What historical sites are associated with Guru Nanak's journey through Bihar, and what is their current state?

The episode identifies several sites associated with Guru Nanak's journey, with varying states of preservation. In Sasaram, the episode notes that in Sasaram, there is no specific site associated with the memory of Guru Nanak's visit to this city, though it mentions 'Gurdwara Chacha Phagu Mal' built in memory of an emissary of the third Sikh Guru. In Gaya, 'Gurdwara Deo Ghat', a centre of learning was established by Baba Almast, who lived at the time of Guru Hargobind, the sixth Sikh Guru. Unfortunately, the site is now in ruins. The episode describes how it is documented that the seal of Baba Almast and a 'Hukumnama', an edict issued by Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth Sikh Guru, was once preserved here. In Hajipur, the episode mentions 'Gurdwara Gai Ghat' which 'is associated with Guru Nanak and Bhai Mardana's visit to the city.' In Sonapur, the Lok Sewa Ashram is identified as an Udasin center. What does the current state of these sites suggest about the historical continuity of Guru Nanak's legacy in this region, and what might have contributed to the preservation or decline of different sites?

4. What parallels does the episode draw between Guru Nanak and Gautam Buddha, and how are their historical impacts similar?

The episode explicitly connects the spiritual legacies of Guru Nanak and Gautam Buddha despite their separation by two millennia, yet their thoughts overlap on social constructs. During their respective times, they spearheaded a revolution against the caste system and religious hierarchy. They advocated equality, humanity and service to mankind. The episode notes that both Guru Nanak and Gautam Buddha rejected attaching oneself to a tangible form and advised people to focus on leading a virtuous life. It also acknowledges a key difference: Buddha was an agnostic, neither accepting, nor negating the existence of God. Guru Nanak, however, endorsed that there exists a Divine force. The episode further notes an ironic development in Gautam Buddha's legacy: Buddha emphasized the futility of attaching oneself to the body, yet in present times, he is being worshipped in a physical form. How do these parallel reform movements, separated by two millennia but occurring in the same geographical region, reflect recurring patterns in the evolution of religious and social thought in the Indian subcontinent?

5. What evidence does the episode provide about community support for Guru Nanak's spiritual messages in Bihar?

The episode reveals that Guru Nanak's universal message attracted support from diverse communities beyond Punjab. From the donor's name plates at most of the 'Udasin' (ascetic) sites, it is interesting to note that these centres, established to spread the message of Guru Nanak, were set up with donations from the local non-Sikh community. This is a testimony to the wide acceptance of Guru Nanak's philosophy because of its universality. The author reflects, it was a delight to witness that Guru Nanak's message of selfless service is being followed in such remote locations by locals who have no connection with Punjab. This suggests that Guru Nanak's teachings transcended regional and communal boundaries, resonating with people from different backgrounds who contributed to preserving and propagating his message. What might this reveal about the universal appeal of Guru Nanak's philosophy beyond specific religious identities, and how did this broad appeal contribute to the establishment and maintenance of sites associated with his legacy?

6. How does the episode portray Guru Nanak's approach to leadership through his interactions with Hari Nath and Salis Rai?

The episode relates two significant interactions that reveal Guru Nanak's perspective on leadership. In Chandauli, Hari Nath was going through a tumultuous state of mind and was considering renouncing his position as the chieftain. Guru Nanak advised him to fulfill his duty as a virtuous leader and provide selfless service to his people. In this path of deliverance he could be attached, yet detached. This encounter demonstrates Guru Nanak's view that spiritual growth doesn't require abandoning worldly responsibilities, but rather fulfilling them with detachment and service. In Hajipur, when offered money without completing a sale transaction, Guru Nanak did not accept the money. For him, without a sale transaction, it was akin to taking alms. Later, he advised Salis Rai to not let affluence hinder spiritual growth and noted that Adhraka, though a modest employee, could be more enlightened. Humility and not social, religious or economic status is the touchstone of goodness. How do these interactions reveal Guru Nanak's balanced approach to worldly affairs, suggesting neither complete renunciation nor attachment to material concerns?

Philosophical Discussion Pointers:

1. How does Guru Nanak explain the concept of 'Hukam' (laws of nature) in relation to human free will?

The episode begins with a verse from Guru Nanak that discusses Hukam, the natural law that governs the universe. It explains that this law creates the vastness of the sky and allows living organisms to thrive in water, on land, and across the three realms of existence. Hukam ensures the continuation of life and sustenance. It suggests that if one looks within themselves, they will understand the essence of all creation. The episode elaborates that Hukam represents the law of nature, a constant that oversees the universe. This law also allows for 'Karam,' or free will, giving individuals the

freedom to act. According to Guru Nanak, a person's actions ultimately shape their destiny. This perspective balances the cosmic order and individual choices, indicating that while natural laws control the universe, humans are free to make decisions within this framework, influencing their destinies. How does this understanding of divine order and human agency differ from deterministic or completely free-will-based philosophical systems, and what implications might it have for personal responsibility and spiritual growth?

2. What was Guru Nanak's critique of ritualistic practices like "Pind Daan" at Gaya?

The episode details Guru Nanak's response to the ritual of 'Pind Daan' performed at Gaya for ancestors. While Guru Nanak was meditating on the river bank, priests approached him, suggesting that he perform the ritualistic prayers for his ancestors so that their souls could be liberated from the cycle of rebirth. Guru Nanak humbly declined, stating that he has performed the ritual of shedding the darkness of ignorance by lighting the lamp of knowledge. He said hoping for redemption after death is futile. Doing good deeds while alive is the way to become liberated. The episode quotes his verse which explains that people give offerings to the dead ancestors ritualistically, but it is the priest who consumes the offerings. Guru Nanak says, it is the offerings of good actions that are never exhausted. It further explains that Guru Nanak clarifies that the performance of rituals is a misconception for seeking redemption. Instead, he advises that one should inculcate gratitude, a quality which will remain for eternity. How does this critique challenge the established religious economy of his time, and what alternative spiritual practices does he propose in place of ritualistic offerings?

3. How does Guru Nanak use the lotus flower as a metaphor for virtuous living within the world?

The episode presents Guru Nanak's response to Salis Rai's question about maintaining principles while living in a distracting world through the metaphor of the lotus flower, he says the lotus flower blossoms in muddy waters, savours its company, yet remains untouched by its imperfections. The Lotus flower is regarded as a symbol of spirituality. It has the qualities of a provider, regeneration, resilience and purity. Guru Nanak says, aspire to lead a life like that of the lotus flower. Despite living amid dirt, they are not affected by the muck. Retain integrity and positivity even in adverse environments. This metaphor offers a vision of spiritual engagement that neither renounces the world nor becomes submerged in it, but rather participates fully while maintaining inner purity. How does this metaphor provide a middle path between complete worldly engagement and complete renunciation, and what practical guidance might it offer for navigating ethical challenges in daily life?

4. How does Guru Nanak's philosophy on the divine differ from Gautam Buddha's agnosticism?

The episode explicitly contrasts Guru Nanak's concept of the divine with Gautam Buddha's agnosticism, neither accepting, nor negating the existence of God. Guru Nanak, however, endorsed that there exists a Divine force. It may not be comprehensible but is present everywhere. It quotes Guru Nanak's verse that illustrates this view, which advises to listen with love in your heart. He says my beloved is a treasure of ambrosia, always within me. It is inapprehensible and invisible. How can I describe it? This reveals Guru Nanak's position that while the divine may be beyond full human comprehension, it is nevertheless real, present, and accessible through inner experience. What implications might this philosophical difference have for spiritual practice, ethical conduct, and the understanding of ultimate reality, and how might it have shaped the distinct trajectories of Buddhism and Sikhism?

5. What is Guru Nanak's perspective on material wealth versus spiritual wisdom?

The episode presents Guru Nanak's teachings on the relative value of material wealth and spiritual wisdom through his interaction with a pilgrim in Sonapur: On the banks of the river, a pilgrim asked Guru Nanak, How can one seek spirituality when the mind remains desirous of material gains. In response, Guru Nanak sang his verse which highlights that once the body perishes, then who becomes the owner of wealth? Without the true wisdom, how can self-reflection be attained? Contemplation is the wealth that is a companion and friend. The episode explains that when the body perishes, one's amassed materialistic wealth is of no use. Guru Nanak said the real gain is in amassing knowledge which helps one in transcending from darkness to light. The scriptures are merchants. Spiritual wisdom is the True capital, which is attained through righteous actions. Nanak says, beyond this capital, no other pursuit can generate profit. How does this perspective redefine notions of wealth, profit, and investment in ways that challenge conventional economic thinking and provide an alternative framework for evaluating life choices?

6. How does Guru Nanak address the mind's delusions and their remedies?

The episode details Guru Nanak's insights on mental distress and its remedies in Chandauli. He observes that the mind endures distress repeatedly and bears unnecessary pain. An individual who forgets spiritual learning cries out in anguish, much like a sick patient. Excessive talking is pointless; even without our words, the omnipresent force is aware of everything. Guru Nanak explains that when the mind is delusional, it grieves and speaks aimlessly, harming both the mind and the body. The remedy lies in acceptance through introspection. This message identifies mental delusion as a source of suffering and suggests that acceptance, self-reflection, and spiritual insights can be effective remedies for this condition. How might this understanding of mental suffering and its remedies compare to contemporary psychological approaches to mental health, and what practical applications might it have for addressing anxiety, rumination, and other forms of psychological distress?