**Student Handout**

**The Religious Philosophy of Sikhism**

The Guru Granth Sahib is the authority on Sikh religious teachings.

***God:***

Sikhism is strictly monotheistic. The concept of God is highlighted in the **Mul Mantar/Mool Mantar**. This is the basic belief of Sikhism and is found at the very beginning of the Adi Granth. Sikhs are expected to recite it daily:

Ik Onkar, Satnam, Karta Purakh, Nirbhau, Nirvair,

Akal Murat, Ajuni, Saibhang, Gurpursad.

There is one and only one God, The Name is Truth, The Creator, Without Fear, Without Hate, Immortal, Beyond birth and deaths, The Enlightener, He is known by the Guru’s Grace.

There are many names used for God by Sikhs: Waheguru, Satnam and Satguru are just a few of these. God in Sikh thought is strictly beyond gender, there are no images of God.

God in Sikhism is personal, yet also metaphysical. Therefore, the concepts of God as both **nirguna** and **saguna** are very important. Loving devotion (**bhakti**) is offered to God by Sikhs. There is no concept of avatars (incarnations) in Sikh thought.

**Saguna** – God is manifest through creation so that humans may experience God. God is particularly immanent in the hearts of human beings.

**Nirguna** – God has no form, it is Nirankar (formless).

***The Human Condition:***

The human predicament is the soul’s entrapment in *samsara*, the cycle of continuous death and rebirth.

opportunity”. The human birth is regarded as a blessing for one to realize Satguru:

“Meet The Creator of the Universe,

Now is the time for the meeting: after a long time you have been

given human form” (AG 176)

There are two categories into which human may be divided: that of the *bhaktas* (those who have responded to God’s call) and the *samsaris* (who remain alienated from God, having ignored His call and remain bound), these were classified as ***gurmukh*** and ***manmukh*** respectively.

At death, it is the gurmukh who has the bestchanceof becoming united with God, the goal of Sikhism. This is not guaranteed though and is up to the Will of God.

Haumai obstructs one’s transition from manmukh to gurmukh. This is literally the ego, self or self-centredness of the personality. In Sikhism this is termed haumai, literally ‘I-I’.

The law of karma (also referred to as karam) is operative in Sikhism.

***The Mind (the man):***

The term *man* is difficult to define in English terms. It is sometimes translated as ‘mind’ bit in Indian thought ‘mind’ has much wider connotations. According to McLeod:

“The *man* is mind and it is heart, and it is also that human attribute which does not perish with physical death and which man must seek to unite with God, which he must strive to have carried across the ocean of Existence.” (McLeod, W.H. (1996) *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*, Del*hi: Oxford University Press*, p. 180.

***Maya:***

The concept of maya in Sikhism is very different to that in Hinduism.

The world/universe is indeed, very real in Sikh thought. It is the arena, the action ground on which the individual works towards freedom from samsara – known as mukti.

The extent of maya in one’s thinking is responsible for the differentiation between gurmukh and manmukh.

***Nam Simran***:

Sikhs are encouraged to meditate on the Name of Gd – this is Nam Simran.

Since there are no representations of God in Sikhism, it is the Name that becomes the focus of one’s devotion to God. A loving relationship through meditation on the Name of God is known also as bhakti – the path of loving devotion.

When meditating, Sikhs will quietly repeat the Name of God. Prayer beads (known as a Mala) are very often used.

***The Grihasta Stage:***

The life of a householder is paramount in Sikh thought. There is no such notion that one should retire from the worldly life in order to achieve mukti (salvation).

It is in accordance with the grihasta stage that one can fulfil their needs as a human being.

However, there must be a balance between indulgence and abstinence. In this respect Sikhism has similar tones to the Middle Way of Buddhism.

A social relationship with the community is emphasized through:

*Kirt karna* (performing good deeds)

*Vand chakna* (sharing one’s fortune with the less fortunate)

*Nam Japna* (meditation on God’s Name).

***Predestination:***

Fundamental in Sikhism is the thought that ultimate union with God is the responsibility of God rather than the individual.

‘Grace’ can be translated as ‘Nadar’ which implies the ‘sight’ or ‘vision’ of God (the term ‘nazar’ may also be used.

Hukam is translated as God’s Will.

Therefore, the terms Hukam and Nadar have an inseparable connection with regards to the release of the soul from samsara.

***Karma:***

Guru Nanak’s teachings very often reflect his Hindu background. The law of karma is operative in Sikh religious thinking.

Although the concept of predestination is operative in Sikh thought, one’s own actions (karma) play a vital role too.

***The Five Khands – ‘realms of existence’:***

What is it then that decides whether the soul escapes samsara? Is it via karma, nadir or hukam? This dilemma can be examined in the context of the *pac-khanda* - the five realms of transition from manmukh to gurmukh.

1. *Dharam khand* – God offers initial Nadar.
2. *Gian khand* – the haumai is overcome through realization.
3. *Saram khand* – one’s opportunity to live in total harmony with God’s Will.
4. *Karam khand* – realm of Grace.
5. *Sach khand* – the stage of truth.