

Truthful Living: A Perspective from Sikhism

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ABSTRACT

Truthful living involves aligning one's thoughts, words, and actions with the ultimate truth. It is a way of living in accordance with one's true nature, being honest, living with integrity, and practicing humility and selflessness. Sikhism emphasizes the importance of truthful living as a life of purpose, service, and ethical behavior. It is a pathway of connecting with the Divine and achieving spiritual growth and fulfillment. According to Sikh doctrines, truthful living is a holistic approach to life that emphasizes spiritual growth and fulfillment through ethical and sustainable living. Moreover, it is crucial in the modern context because it promotes trust, transparency, accountability, social justice, equality, sustainability, and environmental protection. By living with honesty and integrity, individuals and institutions can create a more just, equitable, and sustainable world for future generations.

Keywords: Truthful Living, Sikhism, Sikh Gurus, Spiritual Growth, Integrity, Authenticity, Sustainability, Social Justice

Introduction

Truthful living (Singh, 2019) refers to living a life based on honesty, integrity, and authenticity. It means being true to oneself and others in thoughts, words, and actions. Truthful living involves being honest about one's beliefs, values, and feelings. It also means being transparent in one's communication and interactions with others. It can include being straightforward in conversations, admitting mistakes, and not hiding one's true intentions. Living truthfully can also mean being accountable for one's actions and taking responsibility for their consequences. Finally, it involves making ethical and moral choices and aligning one's actions with one's beliefs and values. Ultimately, truthful living promotes trust and respect in relationships and helps individuals live a fulfilling and authentic life.

Research Methodology

This article employs a qualitative research methodology to delve into the intricate doctrines of Sikhism regarding

truthful living. The study is rooted in a comprehensive literature review of Sikh religious texts, scholarly works, and articles on Sikh philosophy and ethics. To explore the multifaceted dimensions of truthful living within Sikhism, the research incorporates textual analysis of primary sources such as Sri Guru Granth Sahib ("Sri Granth," n.d.), the central scripture of Sikhism, as well as secondary sources that provide insights into Sikh teachings. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews are conducted with Sikh scholars and practitioners to understand better how truthful living principles are interpreted and practiced in contemporary contexts. Through an iterative data collection and analysis, the study aims to construct a coherent framework that illuminates the core tenets of truthful living according to Sikh doctrines. By engaging with the depth of Sikh wisdom and dialogues with the Sikh community, this research contributes to a nuanced comprehension of truthful living and its relevance in fostering ethical conduct within the Sikh faith and society.

Guru Nanak's Teachings

Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, in his hymns, proclaims ("Sri Granth," n.d.) that truthful living is an essential aspect of leading a virtuous and fulfilling life. Truthful living or being "*Sachiar*" is one of the core values in Sikhism and is considered a fundamental principle for achieving spiritual and moral excellence (Singh, 1983; Singh, 1990). Emphasizing the importance of truthful living, Guru Nanak proclaims:

ਸਚਹੁ ਓਰੈ ਸਭੁ ਕੋ ਉਪਰਿ ਸਚੁ ਆਚਾਰੁ ॥

Truth is the highest virtue, but higher still is truthful Living. (Mahalla 1, SGGS, p 62)

Guru Nanak emphasized the importance of truthful living to attain spiritual enlightenment and connect with the Divine.

ਸਚੁ ਮਨਿ ਸਜਨ ਸੰਤੋਖਿ ਮੇਲਾ ਗੁਰਮਤੀ ਸਚੁ ਜਾਣਿਆ ॥

The way of truthfulness and contentment leads to the union with the True Lord (God). Following the Guru's Teachings, the Lord is known. (Mahalla 1, SGGS, p. 242)

Guru Nanak believed that living truthfully means being honest with oneself and others, speaking the truth, and following one's values and beliefs (Dhillon, 2021). Truthful living also involves being compassionate, respectful, and considerate towards others, regardless of their backgrounds or beliefs. It is about treating others with kindness, fairness, and empathy and living in harmony with the world (Kaur, 2022; Singh, 2022). Basically, truthful living is a way of life that encompasses honesty, integrity, and morality, essential for achieving inner peace and spiritual growth (Singh, 2018).

Five Spiritual Realms (*Panj Khands*) of *Jap Hymns* and Truthful Living

The concept of the five spiritual realms (*Panj Khands*) in *Jap* hymns of Guru Nanak is closely related to truthful living. According to Sikhism, spiritual evolution occurs through a series of stages (realms), each representing a higher level of consciousness and spiritual awareness. Therefore, the concept of *Panj Khands* (Singh, 2019) emphasizes the importance of truthful living as a foundational principle for spiritual growth and evolution in Sikhism.

The first realm, *Dharam Khand*, is characterized by a focus on righteous living. As one progresses through the other realms, including *Gyan Khand*, *Saram Khand*,

Karam Khand, and *Sach Khand*, truthful living remains an important principle. *Panj Khands* stanzas of *Jap* verses of Guru Nanak delineate the different phases of progression of a devotee on the path of Truthful living, tracing the evolution of his thought, emotions, and action in each phase. In stanzas 34-37 of *Jap* composition, Guru Nanak touches upon the core characteristics of each domain. In each domain, the status of the individual is set forth in a social setting (Singh, 2004; Talib, 1977). The devotee is not conceived as a recluse or ascetic. On the contrary, the devotee's social obligations and moral qualities form an essential core of this path. Guru Nanak has described the spiritual journey of the devotee in the five realms as follows:

- 1 **Realm of Righteousness (*Dharam Khand*):** This is the first spiritual realm. It is characterized by a focus on living a life of *dharma*, or righteousness, which includes truthful living. In this realm, individuals learn to follow their values and principles and strive to be truthful in their thoughts, words, and actions. Truthful living is essential to this realm, as it lays the foundation for all the other realms.
- 2 **Realm of Knowledge (*Gyan Khand*):** It is a realm of knowledge. In this realm, individuals gain a deeper understanding of spiritual truths (Chahal, 2023) and learn to distinguish between truth and falsehood. Truthful living is crucial in this realm because it allows individuals to align themselves with the truth and separate themselves from falsehood and ignorance.
- 3 **Realm of Endeavor (*Saram Khand*):** In this realm, individuals practice self-discipline and self-control, which requires them to be truthful with themselves and others. It is a realm of effort and struggle, where individuals strive to overcome their ego and attachments to the material world. Truthful living is necessary for this realm because it helps individuals cultivate the self-awareness and self-control necessary to progress.
- 4 **Realm of Grace (*Karam Khand*):** This realm is focused on selfless service, which also involves living truthfully and with integrity. It is a realm of action where individuals work to serve others without considering personal gain or reward. Truthful living is imperative in this realm because it enables individuals to serve others with honesty and sincerity, without any hidden agenda or ulterior motives.
- 5 **Realm of Truth (*Sach Khand*):** This is the final spiritual realm, representing the final goal of spiritual awakening. In this realm, individuals become one with the Divine and experience the highest level of

spiritual awareness and understanding. Truthful living is vital in this realm because it allows individuals to align themselves with the truth and the divine will, which is the ultimate goal of spiritual perfection in Sikhism.

Concisely, the concept of *Panj Khand* emphasizes the importance of truthful living as a foundational principle for spiritual growth and evolution in Sikhism. By living truthfully and following one's values and principles, individuals can progress through the spiritual realms and ultimately achieve union with the Divine (Singh, 2018).

Daily Practices for Truthful Living

Living a truthful life is an essential aspect of the Sikh faith. Here are a few daily practices of a truthful living as per Sikhism:

- 1 **Meditation:** A daily meditation, which involves reflecting on the attributes of God or reciting a specific prayer, helps to attain internal purity, leading to calm the mind and focus on the truth.
- 2 **Daily Prayer:** A daily prayer to seek guidance and wisdom from God helps to align oneself with the divine truth.
- 3 **Honest living:** Living an honest and ethical life in all aspects, including one's work, personal relationships, and interactions with others, helps to lead a stress-free, worthwhile life.
- 4 **Selfless Service:** Selfless service (Seva) involves helping others without expecting anything in return. It helps to cultivate a truthful and compassionate nature.
- 5 **Simplicity:** Living a simple and honest life, avoiding excess or extravagance, helps to focus on what is essential and promotes honesty and humility.
- 6 **Truthful speech:** Speaking truthfully and avoiding lying or spreading rumours, helps to build trust and respect among others.
- 7 **Humility:** The practice of humility and avoiding ego and pride helps to stay truthful and compassionate towards others.
- 8 **Reading and reflecting on the holy Scripture:** The Guru Granth Sahib is the holy scripture of Sikhism, which contains the teachings of the Sikh Gurus and other saints. The daily practice of reading and reflecting on the Scripture helps to gain wisdom and insight into the truth.
- 9 **Forgiveness:** The practice of forgiving others and seeking forgiveness when a person has done wrong

promotes honesty and compassion towards oneself and others.

- 10 **Equality:** The practice of treating all people with respect and dignity, regardless of their social status, religion, or race, helps to cultivate a truthful and compassionate nature.
- 11 **Compassion:** The practice of compassion towards all living beings helps to develop a truthful and empathetic nature.
- 12 **Self-examination:** Regularly reflecting on one's thoughts, words, and actions to ensure they are aligned with the truth helps cultivate self-awareness and promotes personal growth.

Thus, truthful living, as per Sikhism, involves a daily commitment to meditation, prayer, selfless service, honesty, humility, forgiveness, equality, and compassion. By cultivating these habits, one can strive to align oneself with the divine truth and selflessly serve others.

Truthful Living – Examples from Sikhism

According to Sikhism, a cosmic struggle between Good and Evil has been going on since time immemorial; the mission of Sikhs is to stand up for the cause of righteousness without fear and favor. That is why social and spiritual concerns are inseparable in the Sikh Panth (Singh & Fenech, 2014). The Value of Truthful Living encompasses the whole gamut of the living world.

Guru Nanak had unequivocally criticized the contemporary ruling class for moral degeneration, its atrocities and injustice meted out to the people, indulgence in intolerance, violation of human rights, and restrictions on freedom of worship, besides criticizing Mughal invader Babur in severest terms for his utter disregard for the modesty of women; death and destruction caused to the defenseless and innocent civilians. Human dignity and self-respect were not to be compromised. The Sikh Gurus had not forfeited their right to comment, oppose, and protest against the unjust attitude of the ruling class. That is why the 5th and 9th Guru courted martyrdom to vindicate their cause for righteousness, and the 6th and the 10th Gurus had to take up arms to defend the community.

The Sikh Panth has responded to the call of humanity in distress at different stages of history, demonstrating its commitment to uphold the value of righteousness/truthful living. Sikh history is replete with shining examples of many truthful beings who have inspired generations to live more truthful and meaningful lives. A few examples may suffice.

- 1 **Guru Nanak:** The founder of Sikhism, Guru Nanak, is considered a paragon of Truthful living. He dedicated his life to spreading the message of truth, equality, and compassion and inspired countless people to live more truthful and meaningful lives. He emphasized the importance of living truthfully and spoke out against social injustices such as caste discrimination and gender inequality.
- 2 **Bhai Kanhaiya:** Bhai Kanhaiya was a devout Sikh who lived during the time of Guru Gobind Singh, the Tenth Sikh Guru. He was famous for his firm commitment to truth, compassion, and service to humanity. He is known for providing care and comfort to people of all faiths and backgrounds without discrimination.
- 3 **Baba Deep Singh:** Baba Deep Singh was a revered Sikh warrior and scholar who lived during the 18th century. He was known for his fierce devotion to truth and justice and his bravery on the battlefield. He fought to defend the rights of the oppressed and marginalized and dedicated his life to upholding the principles of Sikhism.
- 4 **Bhai Taru Singh:** Bhai Taru Singh was a devout Sikh who lived during the 18th century. He was known for his steadfast commitment to truth and his willingness to make great sacrifices for his faith. He refused to cut his hair, a requirement imposed by the Mughal authorities and was brutally tortured and martyred for his refusal to compromise his principles.
- 5 **Mata Sahib Kaur:** Mata Sahib Kaur was a prominent figure in Sikh history who played a critical role in the growth and advancement of the Sikh community. She was known for her devotion to truth and her unwavering commitment to the principles of Sikhism. She was a strong proponent of women's rights and equality. She played a crucial role in establishing the Khalsa Panth, a community of baptized Sikhs who uphold the principles of Sikhism.
- 6 **Bhai Mati Das:** Bhai Mati Das was a devout Sikh who lived during the 17th century. He was a close associate of the Ninth Sikh Guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur, and was known for his firm commitment to truth and justice. He refused to convert to Islam, even under the threat of death and was executed by the Mughal authorities for his refusal to compromise his principles.
- 7 **Baba Buddha:** Baba Buddha was a revered Sikh elder who lived during the time of the first six Sikh Gurus. He was known for his deep spirituality and his commitment to living truthfully. He played a critical role in advancing the Sikh community and was a mentor and guide to many early Sikh leaders.
- 8 **Bhai Gurdas:** Bhai Gurdas was a prominent figure in Sikh history who played a significant role in the growth and evolution of the Sikh community. He was known for his profound knowledge of Sikh scripture and unwavering commitment to truth and justice. He was a close associate of the early Sikh Gurus, and his writings continue to be revered by Sikhs worldwide.
- 9 **Mata Bhag Kaur:** Mata Bhag Kaur was a prominent Sikh leader who lived during the 18th century. She was known for her unwavering commitment to truth and justice and for her leadership in the Sikh community. She played a vital role in the defense of the Sikh community against the Mughal authorities and was a powerful advocate for the rights of women and marginalized communities.
- 10 **Bhai Jivan Singh:** Bhai Jivan Singh was a devout Sikh who lived during the 17th century. He was a close associate of the Tenth Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, and was known for his steady commitment to truth and justice. He played a critical role in the defense of the Sikh community against the Mughal authorities and was a powerful advocate for the rights of oppressed and marginalized communities.

Relevance of a Truthful Being in the Modern Context

The relevance of being truthful, as outlined in the hymns of Guru Nanak, is just as significant today as it was in the past. In fact, it is even more important today, given modern life's many challenges and complexities. Some of the reasons why truthful living remains relevant in the modern context are as follows:

- 1 **Building trust and integrity:** In today's world, trust and integrity are more important than ever. People want to do business with individuals and companies that are honest and trustworthy, and they want to build relationships with people who are authentic and sincere. By living truthfully, individuals can build trust and integrity in their personal and professional lives.
- 2 **Fostering respect and understanding:** Living truthfully in an increasingly diverse and interconnected multicultural world can help foster respect and understanding between people of different backgrounds and beliefs. By speaking the truth and acting with honesty and integrity, individuals can create an environment of mutual respect and understanding where people can come together to find common ground and work towards common goals.
- 3 **Improving mental and emotional well-being:** Truthful living can also improve mental and

emotional well-being. By being honest with oneself and others, individuals can reduce stress, anxiety, and other negative emotions that can arise from dishonesty and deceit. Living truthfully can also help individuals develop a sense of contentment and inner peace as they align themselves with their values and principles.

- 4 **Advancing social justice and equality:** Truthful living is crucial for advancing social justice and equality. Individuals can create a more just and equitable society by speaking up for the truth and standing up against injustice. Living truthfully can also help expose and challenge oppression and discrimination systems.
- 5 **Promoting ethical leadership:** Truthful living is essential for ethical leadership, which is especially important in the modern context. Living truthfully in a world where leaders often face complex ethical dilemmas can help leaders make decisions grounded in honesty, integrity, and moral principles. In addition, it can help create a culture of ethical leadership that is essential for the success of businesses, organizations, and societies.
- 6 **Building stronger communities:** Living truthfully can also help to build stronger communities. By being honest and transparent, individuals can create an environment of trust and openness where people can feel comfortable sharing their thoughts, feelings, and experiences. In addition, it can help to create a sense of belonging and connectedness, which is essential for building strong and resilient communities.
- 7 **Nurturing personal growth and development:** Living truthfully is also vital for personal growth and development. By being honest with themselves, individuals can recognize their capabilities and shortcomings and work towards personal growth and self-improvement. Living truthfully can also help individuals develop a sense of purpose and meaning as they align themselves with their values and principles.
- 8 **Combating fake news and disinformation:** In the age of social media and digital communication, truthful living is essential for combating fake news and disinformation. By speaking the truth and sharing accurate information, individuals can help to counteract the spread of false information and misinformation, which can have negative consequences for individuals and society.
- 9 **Enhancing personal and professional relationships:** Truthful living is also essential for enhancing personal and professional relationships. By being honest and transparent with others, individuals can build trust and respect, which can help to strengthen

relationships and promote cooperation and collaboration. Again, it is critical for success in both personal and professional settings.

- 10 **Fostering a culture of accountability:** Truthful living is essential for fostering a culture of accountability, where individuals are held responsible for their actions and decisions. By being honest about their mistakes and shortcomings, individuals can take responsibility for their actions and work towards making things right. Creating a culture of accountability that promotes transparency, fairness, and justice is necessary.
- 11 **Supporting environmental sustainability:** Living truthfully is also crucial for supporting environmental sustainability. By being honest about the impact of human activities on the environment, individuals can work towards creating a more sustainable future. It includes being honest about reducing carbon emissions, conserving natural resources, and protecting biodiversity. Living truthfully can also help to promote ethical consumption and responsible stewardship of the planet.
- 12 **Encouraging open and constructive dialogue:** Truthful living is imperative for encouraging open and constructive dialogue, where people can communicate honestly and respectfully to address complex issues and challenges. Moreover, it is essential for building understanding and finding solutions to complex problems, such as climate change, social inequality, and global health crises.

Thus, the relevance of truthful living in the modern context is highly significant. By living truthfully, individuals can build trust and integrity, foster respect and understanding, improve mental and emotional well-being, and advance social justice and equality. These are all essential values for creating a better world for us and future generations.

Challenges to Living a Truthful Life

Living a truthful life, or "*Sachiar Jeevan*," is highly emphasized in Guru Nanak's hymns. It involves embodying and practicing truthfulness in all aspects of one's life. However, adhering to this principle can present several challenges. Here are some challenges to living a truthful life, as per Gurbani:

- 1 **Overcoming the Ego:** The ego, or "*Haumai*," is the root cause of all falsehood and illusions. It creates a false sense of identity and separates individuals from the Divine Truth. Overcoming the ego and aligning

oneself with the truth requires self-awareness, humility, and constant self-examination.

- 2 **Peer Pressure and Societal Expectations:** Society often imposes certain expectations and norms that may deviate from the path of truth. It can be challenging to resist societal pressures and make choices based on honesty and integrity, especially when they conflict with popular opinions or conventional wisdom.
- 3 **Fear and Consequences:** Speaking and living the truth can sometimes result in adverse consequences or conflicts. Fear of backlash, rejection, or adverse outcomes can tempt individuals to compromise their truthfulness. It takes courage and conviction to stand firm in one's values, even when faced with difficult circumstances.
- 4 **Inner Dishonesty and Self-Deception:** True honesty starts within oneself. It requires confronting and addressing one's biases, prejudices, and internal conflicts. Individuals often deceive themselves by rationalizing their actions or ignoring their shortcomings. Recognizing and acknowledging these inner falsehoods is crucial for living a truthful life.
- 5 **Temptations and Moral Dilemmas:** Life presents various temptations and moral dilemmas that can challenge one's commitment to truthfulness. Material desires, personal gains, or ethical dilemmas can sway individuals away from the path of honesty. It requires a strong moral compass and ethical decision-making to navigate these challenges.

Living a truthful life is not an easy task; however, in Sikhism, it is considered fundamental for spiritual progress and attaining union with the divine. Despite the challenges, Sikh teachings inspire individuals to strive for truthfulness, maintaining a steadfast commitment to honesty, integrity, and authenticity in all aspects of life.

Overcoming the Challenges to Lead a Truthful Life

Overcoming the challenges to lead a truthful life, as per Sikh doctrines, requires conscious effort and spiritual practice. Here are some ways to navigate and overcome these challenges:

- 1 **Seek Spiritual Guidance:** Seek guidance from spiritual teachers, mentors, or individuals who embody truthfulness in their lives. They can provide valuable insights, support, and guidance on living truthfully. Attending a holy congregation (*sat sangat*) can help to achieve this goal.

- 2 **Cultivate Self-Awareness:** Develop self-awareness through introspection, self-examination, and mindfulness practices. Regularly examine your thoughts, emotions, and actions to identify any discrepancies or areas where you may be straying from truthfulness.
- 3 **Practice Humility:** Cultivate humility to overcome the ego's influence. Recognize that embracing truthfulness requires letting go of pride, arrogance, and the need for validation. Humility allows you to be receptive to feedback, acknowledge mistakes, and continually strive for self-improvement.
- 4 **Stay Firm in Values:** Clarify and reaffirm your personal values and commit yourself to upholding them. Write down your principles and ideals to serve as reminders when faced with challenging situations or temptations that may lead you away from truthfulness.
- 5 **Develop Courage:** Develop inner strength and courage to stand up for truth, even in adversity. Understand that speaking the truth may sometimes bring discomfort or opposition, but staying true to your values is essential for personal growth and spiritual well-being.
- 6 **Practice Mindful Communication:** Cultivate mindful communication by choosing your words carefully, speaking with sincerity and compassion, and avoiding harmful or deceptive speech. Practice active listening and empathetic understanding to foster authentic and truthful dialogue.
- 7 **Embrace Inner Honesty:** Engage in self-examination to identify and confront your biases, prejudices, and inner conflicts. Be honest with yourself about your strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement. Embrace personal growth and commit to aligning your inner self with the principles of truthfulness.
- 8 **Surround Yourself with Truthful Influences:** Associate with individuals who prioritize truthfulness and integrity. Surrounding yourself with like-minded individuals can create a supportive environment that reinforces and encourages your commitment to living a truthful life.
- 9 **Seek Inner Guidance:** Develop a connection with your inner self through prayer, meditation, or contemplation. By seeking guidance from within, you can access your inner wisdom and intuition, which can guide you on the path of truthfulness.
- 10 **Practice Forgiveness:** Forgive yourself and others for past mistakes or instances where truthfulness was compromised. Holding onto grudges or resentment can hinder personal growth and prevent you from moving on the path of truth. Embracing forgiveness allows you to cultivate compassion and maintain healthy relationships.

11 Continuous Learning and Improvement: Embrace a lifelong learning and improvement mindset. Be open to new perspectives, challenge your beliefs, and remain receptive to feedback. Continually strive to deepen your understanding of truth and integrate it into your daily life.

Remember, living a truthful life is a journey that requires commitment, self-reflection, and perseverance. It is a process of continuous growth and transformation. By embracing these practices and remaining steadfast in your pursuit of truth, you can overcome the challenges and lead a life of honesty, integrity, and authenticity.

Conclusions

Truthful living is a way of life that encompasses honesty, integrity, and morality. It is a journey that requires commitment, self-reflection, and perseverance. Sikh doctrines emphasize that truthful living promotes trust and respect in relationships and helps individuals live fulfilling and authentic lives. It is essential for achieving inner peace and spiritual growth. *Sat Sangat* is an institution that can help to build up a truthful life among devotees.

Moreover, truthful living is vital for addressing many of the challenges and complexities of the modern world. By living truthfully, individuals can build trust and integrity, foster respect and understanding, improve mental and emotional well-being, advance social justice and equality, promote ethical leadership, build stronger communities, and nurture personal growth and development. Furthermore, truthful beings can combat fake news and disinformation, enhance personal and professional relationships, foster a culture of accountability, support environmental sustainability, and encourage open and constructive dialogue. These are all essential values for creating a better world for us and future generations.

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