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# (Dis)continuity between Sikhism and Islam: The development of hukam across religions

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(Dis)Continuity Between Sikhism and Islam:  
The Development of Hukam Across Religions

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts  
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College of Arts and Sciences  
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## **Dedication**

I would like to thank those who have supported and encouraged me to complete this project. My friends were kind enough to let me drift into the world of research without taking any personal offense to my lack of free time. I would also like to thank my family and Iris for supporting me throughout the process of writing, and rewriting my thesis. It is with great excitement that I dedicate this thesis to my parents for encouraging my interest in what must have seemed like a pretty far-out field of research to them. Throughout this process, they remained a source of love and support, without which, I simply would not have had the courage to complete this task. Finally, I would like to thank the Ultimate Power for guiding me through this.

Mark Horowitz, (Summer 2007)

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## Table of Contents

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Abstract   | ii |
| Chapter One: Introduction                                | 1  |
| Chapter Two: The HKM derivatives in the Qur'an           | 4  |
| <i>Hakīm</i>   | 4  |
| <i>Hikmah</i>  | 9  |
| <i>Hakam</i>   | 12 |
| <i>Hakama</i> and other verbs                            | 14 |
| Conclusion   | 20 |
| Chapter Three: <i>Hukam</i> in the compositions of Kabir | 23 |
| Conclusion   | 30 |
| Chapter Four: Guru Nanak and <i>hukam</i>                | 33 |
| Historical and social context                            | 33 |
| <i>Hukam</i> in the compositions of Nanak                | 37 |
| Conclusion   | 49 |
| Chapter Five: The Sikh Gurus and <i>hukam</i>            | 52 |
| The Sikh community as an historical entity               | 52 |
| <i>Hukam</i> in the compositions of the Sikh Gurus       | 57 |
| Conclusion   | 65 |
| Chapter Six: The development of <i>hukam</i>             | 68 |
| References   | 70 |
| Bibliography   | 73 |

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Mark Horowitz

**ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study is to analyze the development of the Sikh concept of *hukam*, which is usually translated as a divine command or order. The concept is prominently featured in the Sikh sacred scripture (Guru Granth) and is an important aspect of daily ritual life for the Sikhs. The goal of this study is to provide initial insight into how the concept developed in the Sikh scriptural tradition, as well as the implications that the concept had for the Sikh community.

This paper traces the development of *hukam* from the concepts origin in the Islamic tradition, the writings of Kabir, and the Sikh Gurus, with primary interest in Nanak's compositions. Each of these helps to provide a comprehensive understanding of how the concept developed across cultures and religious traditions. The first section analyzes how *hukam*, originally an Arabic word and an Islamic concept, was employed in the Qur'an. This section includes an analysis of the derivative words that share the HKM verbal root with *hukam*. The second section analyzes *hukam* in its earliest South Asian context through the compositions of Kabir, a 15<sup>th</sup> century Indian Saint. The third and fourth sections of the paper deal with Guru Nanak and his successors, respectively. Starting with Nanak, who founded the Sikh religion, I analyze how he used *hukam* to emphasize a divine order that was familiar for South Asian traditions,

while preserving much of the original themes discussed in the Qur'an. In the following section, I note how Nanak's successors build on his concept of *hukam*, utilizing it in a manner that reflects that growing Sikh identity and authority of the Guru.

Through this analysis, I conclude that the continuity the Sikh concept of *hukam* displays with the Qur'an forces us to reexamine the connections between Sikhism and Islam, which have previously been overlooked or ignored amongst scholars of Sikhism. By analyzing the development of the concept across textual traditions, I provide a framework by which the uniqueness of the Sikh *hukam* can be extracted.

## Chapter One

### Introduction

Everyday in Gurdwaras (Sikh temples) across the world devout Sikhs carry out a ritual known as a *hukam*, which refers to the act of opening the sacred scripture, Guru Granth, at a random page and reading the first stanza. The tradition was begun by the fifth Guru who gave a *hukam* when he installed the first copy of the Granth in the sacred temple (*harimandir*) in Amritsar. The selected verse serves as a daily lesson or reminder that God's revelation, which is contained in the Granth, must guide their actions and beliefs. When Sikh babies are born, the same method is often used to select a name. The parents open the Granth randomly and use the first letter of the first word on the page or, if applicable, the very word that appears on the page to name the baby.<sup>1</sup> In both cases, the idea emphasized in the act of taking a *hukam* is that God's revelation plays an integral role in the lives of humans.

This thesis traces the development of the Sikh concept of *hukam*, which, as a theological concept, is best understood as God's order for the universe and the divine command for humans to adhere to that order. This study is important for two main reasons. First, this study sheds light on the shared meanings between the Islamic and Sikh conceptions of God's *hukam*. As we trace the development of the concept, we will note how *hukam* in the compositions of Nanak and the Sikh Gurus display continuity with the original meanings we will address in the Qur'anic analysis. This is particularly important given the

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<sup>1</sup> Hew Mcleod, *Sikhism* (London: Penguin Books, 1997), 143.



relatively light attention paid to the concept of *hukam*, as well as the overall connections between Sikhism and the Granth with Islam and the Qur'an.<sup>2</sup> This paper is also significant because it allows us to see how Sikh identity was partly shaped through the reinterpretation of existing concepts. Nanak interprets *hukam* in light of a distinct worldview, which was used by his successors to reflect specifically Sikh beliefs and actions.

This paper is divided into four similarly structured chapters that will enable us to understand how *hukam* developed by locating its earliest roots in the Qur'an and its first appearance in a South Asian context in order to understand how it was given new meaning under Nanak and the Sikh Gurus. The first chapter analyzes the meanings of the various verbal and nominal derivatives of the Arabic root HKM, from which *hukam* is derived, in order to understand its original meaning. Each derivative will be examined independently, before concluding with the general meanings that are prominent throughout the HKM root. This will allow us to develop a clear understanding of how *hukam* employed in the Qur'an, as well as, to see how it fits into the Islamic worldview. The second chapter deals with *hukam* in the compositions of Kabir, a 15<sup>th</sup> century Indian religious leader. Due to his interaction with Islam and Muslims, and because his compositions have been included in the Granth, he is an ideal figure to bridge the gap between *hukam* in Qur'an and *hukam* in the Granth. He is the first figure to use the *hukam* in a syncretistic manner, blending it with popular Hindu notions, such as *karma* and *samsara*, while preserving much of the original Islamic meaning. Together, the material from the Qur'an and Kabir's

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<sup>2</sup> W. H. Mcleod, *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968), 158-61, 199 -203.

compositions provide a context by which we can understand Nanak's employment of the concept.

In the Sikh tradition, *hukam* is part of a broad religious vision, "which has to be taken in after a close study of the *Bani* or compositions of Guru Nanak and his spiritual successors."<sup>3</sup> In the third chapter, we will focus on how Guru Nanak employed *hukam* in his compositions, in light of his role as the founder of a community. As we will see, his concept of *hukam* is far more specific and detailed than Kabir's employment of the concept.<sup>4</sup> Through our analysis, it will be evident how Nanak's reinterpretation of *hukam* still preserves much of the HKM root meanings found in the Qur'an. But, in chapter four, we will look at some examples of compositions by the successive Sikh Gurus whose employment of *hukam* is helpful for distinguishing Sikhs from other religions, traditions and teachings. Through these last two chapters combined, we can see a picture of how *hukam* developed as a distinctly Sikh concept and in the process continued to reflect the HKM meanings in varying degrees. As a result, we will see how the Sikh *hukam* reflects a conception of God that forces us to re-examine the nature of the influence of Islam, not just on Nanak's compositions, but on Sikh theology as a whole.

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<sup>3</sup> Gurbachan Singh Talib, *Guru Nanak* (New Delhi: Sahitya Academy, 1984), 30.

<sup>4</sup> W. H. Mcleod, *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*. 189-90.

## Chapter Two

### The HKM derivatives in the Qur'an

The goal of this chapter is to analyze the role of the concept *hukam* in the Qur'an. *Hukam* (Arabic: *ḥukm*), cannot be fully understood without expanding our analysis to include a variety of words and concepts that are derived from the Arabic verbal root HKM. The HKM root plays an important role in understanding the nature and purpose of the revelation contained in the Qur'an. The derivative words we analyze in this section often appear together in a similar context. There are two root meanings that stand out as prominent for our overall analysis of these concepts: wisdom and judgment. As we will see in this chapter, these two dimensions are crucial to understanding Allah's revelation.

#### ***Ḥakīm***

*Ḥakīm* is an adjective generally translated as "wise" or "knowing".<sup>5</sup> It is the most common derivative of the HKM root in the Qur'an and appears most frequently as *al-ḥakīm*, one of the most beautiful names of God.<sup>6</sup> In this regard, the wisdom attributed to Allah is boundless, extending into realms known and unknown. Allah is referred to as "the Wise" in the Qur'an in a variety of contexts ranging from Allah's knowledge, to the transmission of his revelation, and the judgment of humans.

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<sup>5</sup> Kassis, H.E. *A Concordance of the Qur'an* (Berkeley: University of California, 1983), 523.

<sup>6</sup> In the entry in *The Concise Encyclopaedia of Islam*, *ḥakīm* is translated as "the Wise" and explained as a name of God in the Qur'an. The most beautiful names of God are referenced in the Qur'an (7.180). Two of the verbal forms that are based on the HKM, *al-ḥakīm* and *al-ḥakam* are considered among them. Their significance, along with all the names and attributes of Allah, comes from the fact that they provide the basis for describing and understanding Allah in human terms.

We can begin by analyzing how Allah's wisdom includes all things in creation, even that which is hidden and unseen.

It is He who created the heavens and the earth in true (proportions): the day He saith, "Be," behold! it is. His word is the truth. His will be the dominion the day the trumpet will be blown. He knoweth the unseen as well as that which is open. For He is the Wise (*al-ḥakīm*), well acquainted (with all things). (6:73)<sup>7</sup>

According to the verse, the very act of creation occurs through the verbal command of Allah.<sup>8</sup> "His power is such that the mere command BE is sufficient to bring into existence all which He, in His supreme wisdom and according to His overall plan for the universe, chooses to create."<sup>9</sup> The order of creation is according to his will, thus all that can be perceived in nature is a representation of his wisdom.<sup>10</sup> His creation is essentially perfect; everything created is exactly as it must be, that is, in "true proportions". What is important to note for our discussion of Allah as *al-ḥakīm* is that Allah has knowledge of everything that takes places therein, even things which are "unseen".<sup>11</sup> Verse 30:27 points out that for Allah, the process of creating is easy because he is the wise. Wisdom is fundamental to this primordial act and it is impossible to conceive of Allah's creation without divine wisdom.

In addition to creating the cosmos, Allah sustains creation through his knowledge.

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<sup>7</sup> For English translations I used Yusuf Ali, available at <http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/quran/>. The website also contains translations by Marmaduke Mohammad Pickthall and M. H. Shakir.

<sup>8</sup> Q 2:117 explicitly mentions this idea.

<sup>9</sup> Jane Idleman Smith and Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2002), 2.

<sup>10</sup> Lari, Sayyid Mujtaba Musavi, *God and His Attributes*, Trans. By: Hamid Algar (New York: Alavi Foundation, 2000), 47. Lari claims that creation is the most accessible evidence of Allah's wisdom, as it is the easiest for humans to appreciate, regardless of their own personal knowledge.

<sup>11</sup> Knowledge of the unseen, *al-ghayb*, is another divine attribute of Allah.

Whatever is in the heavens and on earth,- let it declare the Praises and Glory of Allah: for He is the Exalted in Might, the Wise (*al-ḥakīm*). To Him belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth: It is He Who gives Life and Death; and He has Power over all things. He is the First and the Last, the Evident and the Immanent: and He has full knowledge of all things. (57:1-3)

Everything in creation is an indication of Allah's wisdom, because all things ultimately derive from his knowledge. We have seen how creation is only possible due to Allah's knowledge, but here we can see how his knowledge is also immanent and pervading throughout the cosmos. It is Allah who gives life and death. He is responsible for the biological condition of humanity according to Q3:6, which refers to Allah "who shapes you in wombs as He pleases." The natural world, which we saw was created in "true proportions" earlier, operates according to his will.<sup>12</sup> There is nothing that Allah does not know, even that which exists in realms that cannot be perceived by humans. The verse indicates that Allah has power or dominion over all things and this is, in part, due to his knowledge of all things. As one who is *al-ḥakīm*, only Allah has "full knowledge" of the laws by which the universe operates.

The following verse allows us to understand how Allah's wisdom is made accessible for humans through the prophets and the revelation they bring.

Our Lord! send amongst them a Messenger of their own, who shall rehearse Thy Signs to them and instruct them in scripture and wisdom (*ḥikmah*), and sanctify them: For Thou art the Exalted in Might, the Wise (*al-ḥakīm*). (2:129)

Allah sends messengers (*rasuls*), in this case Muhammad, to teach people his revelation, which can be described as "the self communication of the knowledge

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<sup>12</sup> Ozdemir, Ibrahim. "Towards An Understanding Of Environmental Ethic From A Qur'anic Perspective." In *Islam and Ecology*, edited by Richard Foltz (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2003), 5-13.

about God and by God Himself.”<sup>13</sup> The revelation given to Muhammad is recorded in the Qur’an, whose verses are considered by Muslims to be *ayat*, or signs of Allah. As the manifestation of Allah’s wisdom, the Qur’an refers to itself as “full of Wisdom (*ḥakīm*)” in Q36:2 and the “Book of Wisdom (*ḥakīm*)” in Q10:1.<sup>14</sup> For Muslims, the Qur’an provides humans with a way to live in accordance with God’s will. Allah makes his wisdom available through the Qur’an and prophets who, as we will see in the next section, are given a special wisdom (*ḥikmah*) to interpret and instruct others about Allah’s will. However, it must again be emphasized that, as *al-ḥakīm*, Allah’s knowledge is infinite and can never be fully known.<sup>15</sup>

The following verse allows us to understand how the dimension of judgment is an important feature of Allah’s wisdom because Allah determines the fate of human’s souls according to their actions committed in the world.<sup>16</sup>

Those who reject our Signs, We shall soon cast into the Fire: as often as their skins are roasted through, We shall change them for fresh skins, that they may taste the penalty: for Allah is Exalted in Power, Wise (*ḥakīm*). But those who believe and do deeds of righteousness, We shall soon admit to Gardens, with rivers flowing beneath,- their eternal home: Therein shall they have companions pure and holy: We shall admit them to shades, cool and ever deepening. (4:56-57)

Acceptance and obedience to the will of Allah, as revealed in the signs (*ayat*) in the Qur’an, is the basis for his judgment. It is a central belief in Islam that every individual will answer to Allah and be judged based on how fully they followed his

<sup>13</sup> Rajinder Kaur Rohi, *Semitic and Sikh Monotheism: A Comparative Study* (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1999), 20.

<sup>14</sup> Yusef Ali. “The Noble Qur’an,” <http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/quran>.

<sup>15</sup> Farid Esack, *The Qur’an: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2002), 77.

<sup>16</sup> Smith and Haddad, 31. They note that several verses directly indicate that Allah has total knowledge of the hour of every person’s death.

revelation. The verse indicates that Allah takes into account humans' physical and mental activity in account when judging. This includes social and familial endeavors, as well as, private thoughts and beliefs of individuals. Those who reject the revelation and act against the will of Allah are punished. They are sent to burn for eternity in constant suffering. Conversely, those who have faith in Allah's message and act according to his will receive his blessing. They are admitted to an eternity in paradise with all the comforts bestowed by Allah. The consequences of his judgment are binding and eternal. Only Allah, who is *al-ḥakīm*, can have such intimate knowledge of the affairs of humans and as we will see later in the chapter, only he can be the judge (*ḥakam*) of humans' souls.

As the most prevalent HKM derivative in the Qur'an, *ḥakīm* offers insight to the two dominant root meanings, wisdom and judgment, with wisdom clearly being the more prominent. As we saw, it is impossible to understand the concept of wisdom in the Qur'an as separate from Allah, it can only be understood as one the divine attributes. As *al-ḥakīm* (the-wise), Allah knows everything that takes place within creation. His wisdom is made accessible to humans through revelation, so that humans can live according to his will. Because Allah judges humans (a notion that will be analyzed further in this chapter), he must have knowledge of all that takes place in creation. As we have seen, this included knowing the inner thoughts of humans along with their actions, as well as the hidden and unseen aspects of the cosmos. Only he can know who has truly lived according to the command given in the Qur'an because he is *al-ḥakīm*.

## **Ḥikmah**

The noun *ḥikmah*, often translated as wisdom, has a special connection with the revelation of Allah, particularly his scripture.<sup>17</sup> The verses in which *ḥikmah* appears are often in the context of the prophets or messengers, who have been directly chosen to transmit and interpret the revelation. Those who are given revelation are bestowed a certain type of practical wisdom, *ḥikmah*, by Allah who is *al-ḥakīm* (the Wise). Thus, it is also common to find in the *ḥikmah* verses a reference to Allah as *al-ḥakīm*.

*Ḥikmah* is mentioned jointly with the scripture and refers to the practical wisdom directly given by Allah.

Our Lord! Send amongst them a Messenger of their own, who shall rehearse your Signs to them and instruct them in scripture and Wisdom (*ḥikmah*), and sanctify them: for You are the exalted in Might, the Wise (*al-ḥakīm*). (2.129)

These two features distinguish someone as a Messenger (*rasul*): scripture from Allah and the wisdom (*ḥikmah*) to interpret it for others to follow.<sup>18</sup> As revelation bestowed by Allah, both are extensions of his divine wisdom (*ḥakīm*). The jurist Shāfi'ī (b. 767 CE) suggested that *ḥikmah*, in this verse and others pertaining the Prophet Muhammad, refers to the wisdom contained in the traditions (*sunnah*) of the Prophet.<sup>19</sup> The wisdom of the Prophet is, in a very specific sense, a practical

<sup>17</sup> Kassis, 525. In the text he notes that *ḥikmah* appears in conjunction with the scripture as part of the definition.

<sup>18</sup> Esack, 75-77. When it comes to interpreting the Qur'an, it is traditionally held that the verses fall under two broad categories: *mukhamat* and *mutashabihat*. Verses that fall under *mukhamat* are considered clear and thus possible to interpret, particularly in a historical context. Verses that are considered *mutashabihat* can only be explained through allegory and metaphor. Because Allah is *al-ḥakīm*, it is not possible, even for the Prophets, to comprehend all that Allah has told in the Qur'an, hence the importance of *tasfir* or interpretation in the Islamic tradition.

<sup>19</sup> Majid Khadduri, *Islamic Jurisprudence : Shāfi'ī's Risāla* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1961), 110-11. The idea that *ḥikmah* pertains to the traditions of the Prophet will be relevant for



example of how to live according to the Qur'an. Shāfi'ī's interpretation of *ḥikmah* as the *sunnah* of Muhammad has been an accepted part of Sunni theology, and thus, followed by the majority of Muslims. For Muslims, Muhammad's *sunnah* is understood as a pattern of actions and the basis for understanding the revelation and obeying Allah's will. Practical wisdom (*ḥikmah*) to act according to the revelation is always a gift from Allah to humans, as Q 2:269 indicates: "He granteth wisdom (*ḥikmah*) to whom He pleaseth; and he to whom wisdom (*ḥikmah*) is granted receiveth indeed a benefit overflowing."

According to the Qur'an, prophets receive the gift of *ḥikmah* from Allah.

Invite (all) to the Way of thy Lord with wisdom (*ḥikmah*) and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious: for thy Lord knoweth best, who have strayed from His Path, and who receive guidance. (16:125)

This passage comes after a reference to following the path of the prophet Abraham, who received *ḥikmah* from Allah and was ordered to preach the truth and teach others to follow the will Allah. Such prophets who do not have a scripture must teach by example as a means of making the revelation of Allah known. Because they have knowledge of the teachings of Allah, their actions are always in accordance with his will. The dimension of judgment is implicitly referred to as the verse points out that Allah knows who strays from his teachings and who follows the instruction of his prophets. We have seen earlier that obedience to the revelation is the basis by which Allah judges humans. This is why it is so essential for humans to have guidance in the form of the prophets' *ḥikmah*, to follow path of Allah.

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our discussion on the genre of *ḥikam*. There we will see the significance not just of the Prophet, but also of all religious teachers, most notably the Sufi *shaykhs*.

In the case of Jesus, who was a messenger as well as a prophet,<sup>20</sup>

*ḥikmah* refers to the wisdom to carry out actions on behalf of Allah, as in sura

3:48-49:

And Allah will teach him the Book and Wisdom (*ḥikmah*), the Law and the Gospel, And (appoint him) a messenger to the Children of Israel, (with this message): "I have come to you, with a Sign from your Lord, in that I make for you out of clay, as it were, the figure of a bird, and breathe into it, and it becomes a bird by Allah's leave: And I heal those born blind, and the lepers, and I quicken the dead, by Allah's leave; and I declare to you what ye eat, and what ye store in your houses. Surely therein is a Sign for you if ye did believe;

According to the Qur'an, Allah not only gave Jesus a new revelation (the Gospel) but also the practical wisdom (*ḥikmah*) to live according to the will of Allah.<sup>21</sup>

Jesus, like all the prophets of Allah, was assigned to use the revelation to help others believe in Allah's message. The verse indicates that Allah gives the prophets *ḥikmah*, which, for Jesus, included performing miracles on behalf of Allah. As a practical expression of Allah's greatness, miracles were only performed so that others come to follow Allah's will. In addition, for Jesus, having *ḥikmah* also meant instructing in daily matters such as dietary restrictions. Again, we see how *ḥikmah* provided humans with a practical example by which they could live in accordance with Allah's will.

*Ḥikmah* plays an important role in the transmission of divine revelation and is essential for making the scripture accessible. Without the *ḥikmah* of the prophets to interpret the revelation, much of the scripture would remain beyond

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<sup>20</sup> The distinction between prophets, those who receive revelation from Allah, and messengers, those who receive a scripture from Allah, needs to be made here. Jesus was a messenger because he was given a book, the Gospel (*injiil*). All messengers are prophets but not all prophets are messengers, such as Abraham or Adam.

<sup>21</sup> Geoffrey Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur'an* (Oxford: One world Press, 1965), 90-91.

the average human's comprehension.<sup>22</sup> Allah is the source of *hikmah* and the scripture have the same source, Allah. *Hikmah* is that practical wisdom given to prophets by Allah so that they could instruct others in the will of Allah. Their wisdom (*hikmah*) enables them to know the revelation and how to implement it. They provide a practical example through their actions and words for humans to follow. Through the prophets and their *hikmah*, humans can come to know and live by the will of Allah and receive his reward in the afterlife. The *sunnah* of Muhammad is a clear example of this. In this regard, judgment is still important as a secondary feature. If Allah did not judge humans and impose consequences, there would be no need to follow his will. Because humans must act according to the revelation, which is beyond comprehension, they can look to examples set by those who were given *hikmah* by Allah.

### ***Hakam***

The noun *hakam* appears twice in the Qur'an and refers to a judge or arbiter.<sup>23</sup> One verse focuses on Allah as a judge and one of the Most Beautiful Names for Allah is *al-hakam*, which refers to him as "the Judge" of humans.<sup>24</sup> In the other verse, which refers to a human judge, *hakam* necessarily implies the wisdom of Allah, because no human can judge without following Allah's teachings in the Qur'an.

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<sup>22</sup> Esack, 75-77.

<sup>23</sup> Kassis, 523.

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/fundamentals/tawheed/namesofallaah.html>. The following information was adapted, with significant additions, from an excerpt in Shaikh Muhammad ibn Saalih al-Uthaimin's book *Al-Qawaa'id al-Muthlaa fi Sifaat Allaahi wa Asmaa'ih*. While the listing of the names is from al-Uthaimin, their translations have been taken from the *tasfir* of al-Qurtubi, Ibn Katheer, at-Tabari, and al-Jalaalayn.

In the passage that directly refers to Allah as a judge (*ḥakam*), we can see how his revelation is connected to his judgment as the basis by which he judges.

Say: "Shall I seek for judge (*ḥakam*) other than Allah? - when He it is Who hath sent unto you the Book, explained in detail. "They know full well, to whom We have given the Book, that it hath been sent down from thy Lord in truth. Never be then of those who doubt. (6.114)

Humans are judged by the sincerity of their belief in Allah's revelation and whether their deeds are according to his will.<sup>25</sup> Only one who has knowledge of all things, including private and personal matters, can properly judge humans. Although one may outwardly appear to be faithful, Allah knows who is sincere in their hearts. He alone knows if actions are performed for selfish motives or for sake of his will and he judges accordingly.<sup>26</sup> The consequences of rejecting or submitting to his will are given in verse 4:56-57: "Those who reject our Signs, We shall soon cast into the Fire... But those who believe and do deeds of righteousness, We shall soon admit to Gardens." Only Allah can be the true *ḥakam* because he gave the scripture, which provides outlines the basis by which his final judgment is carried out. Moreover, the scripture is the foundation for all human knowledge of Allah's will. The dimension of divine judgment is, therefore, inseparable from the knowledge of Allah.

The other explicit mention of a *ḥakam* in the Qur'an is in reference to a human arbiter.

If ye fear a breach between them twain, appoint (two) arbiters (*ḥakam*), one from his family, and the other from hers; if they wish

<sup>25</sup> Smith and Haddad, 63-65.

<sup>26</sup> Smith and Haddad, 31-33. According to their interpretation of Qur'anic verses, Allah is understood as judging humans upon their individual death, and all beings again on the final judgment.

for peace, Allah will cause their reconciliation: For Allah hath full knowledge, and is acquainted with all things. (4.35)

In the context of the procedure for divorce, there is need for more than one judge (*ḥakam*) in a situation. On one level, this procedure assures that both parties are equally represented in matter. Though the arbitration is done by human judges, Allah is understood to be a part of the process. In fact, there can be no human judging without looking to Allah's wisdom given in the Qur'an. The human capacity for judgment is a reflection of the divine attribute of judgment. The verse above notes that reconciliation will be caused by Allah, if the couple both agrees to make amends in their hearts. Only Allah can know who truly wishes for peace and reconciliation. Any divorce is predicated on the notion that Allah has deemed the two as irreconcilable. He must, in effect, judge a couple as unwilling to make peace prior to the need for any human judge to enter the picture. The role of the human judge is always to ensure that justice is upheld by following the revelation of Allah, who is *al-ḥakam*.

### ***Ḥakama* and other verbs**

This section will analyze the verb *ḥakama*, which is most often translated as "to judge".<sup>27</sup> In order to understand the full scope of what it means to judge in the Qur'an, this section will also include the various forms of verb *ḥakama*: *yaḥkumu*, *uḥkum*, *ḥākim* and *ḥukm*. Often, several of these words will appear in together in a set of verses and help to explain the process and focus of judging. Though the primary meaning of *ḥakama* and its various forms is related to

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<sup>27</sup> Kassis, 521-22. It is also translated as "to decide between" or "to decree".

judging, we will continue to see how wisdom is an essential feature of the process.

Allah doth command you to render back your Trusts to those to whom they are due; And when ye judge (*ḥakama*) between man and man, that ye judge (*yaḥkumu*) with justice: Verily how excellent is the teaching which He giveth you! For Allah is He Who heareth and seeth all things. (4.58)<sup>28</sup>

This verse sets out some of the guidelines for a human arbiter (*ḥakam*) for which the most important order is to judge with justice. Judging with justice can only be assured if one follows Allah's wisdom in the revelation, for as we saw in the previous section, Allah is the true *ḥakam*. Moreover, justice is another of Allah's divine attributes and always present in his decrees. The passage appears in the context of the fate of souls. Allah judges all humans for their conformity to the Qur'an and we have already established the consequences for those who reject his command. The act of judging, as in the verse above, is also connected with *ḥikmah*. Muhammad, who is always implicitly addressed in the Qur'an, is told to judge, and, following Shāfi'i's interpretation of *ḥikmah* as the *sunnah*, any action performed by Muhammad must necessarily be an amplification of the Qur'an.<sup>29</sup> Because he was given *ḥikmah*, Muhammad understands how to judge by the revelation of Allah and is a practical example for other judges to follow.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Pickthall and Shakir translated the final line of this verse as: He is the best of judges.

<sup>29</sup> Majid Khadduri, 110-113.

<sup>30</sup> William A Graham, *Divine Word and Prophetic Word in Early Islam*. Germany: Walter de Gruyter, 1977. According to Hadith Qudsi, Muhammad is the only human ever to have the ability to intercede on behalf of humans during Allah's judgment. Thus, he too is given the ability to judge from Allah.

All judges, regardless of whether or not they have *ḥikmah*, must follow the guidelines in scripture for carrying out judgment.

Let the people of the Gospel judge (*yaḥkumu*) by what Allah hath revealed therein. If any do fail to judge (*yaḥkumu*) by (the light of) what Allah hath revealed, they are (no better than) those who rebel. (5:50)

People are supposed to judge (*yaḥkumu*) using the specific revelation given to them by Allah. The revelation of Allah is the basis of judgment and is also a vital dimension of human judgment. In this verse, which refers to the Christian Gospels and the followers of Jesus, Allah commands that humans use the revelation as their basis for judging. The same demand to judge according to Allah's revelation is given to the Jews in verse Q 5:47. Whenever Allah bestows his revelation, it is to be used as a source of wisdom for humans to judge. Accordingly, those who judge by standards other than the revelation of Allah are essentially rejecting that revelation. According to the Qur'an, this can only result in rejection by Allah at the time of his judgment, which we have seen is inevitable for all humans. The penalties for those who are rejected by Allah indicated by Q 22:55-56, which also makes clear the promise of paradise for those who have obeyed the revelation.

The final form of the verb *ḥakama* that we will analyze is *ḥukm*, which is the key concept of this thesis that we will follow into a South Asian context. It is interesting to at least note the variety of translations that exist for this specific word. In the *Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, Esposito defines *ḥukm* as arbitration, judgment, authority, and God's will, in addition to noting a later translation as

government.<sup>31</sup> Unlike the other forms of *ḥakama*, all of which are usually translated as judgment, *ḥukm*, particularly in Ali's translation, is widely varied.<sup>32</sup> As we will see, the concept of *ḥukm* is intimately connected to Allah's general command that all humans obey his revelation and in a very specific sense it refers the prophets who are commanded to lead.

It is not (possible) that a man, to whom is given the Book, and Wisdom (*ḥukm*), and the prophetic office, should say to people: "Be ye my worshippers rather than Allah's": on the contrary (He would say) "Be ye worshippers of Him Who is truly the Cherisher of all: For ye have taught the Book and ye have studied it earnestly. (3:79)<sup>33</sup>

In this verse, *ḥukm*, although mentioned along with the scripture, refers primarily to the role of the prophets as leaders. Ali's translation of *ḥukm* as wisdom forces us to recall a previous verse in which *ḥikmah* appeared in a similar context. "Send amongst them a Messenger... who shall rehearse your Signs to them and instruct them in scripture and Wisdom (*ḥikmah*), and sanctify them (2:129)". Both are forms of revelation given by Allah and have distinct roles in helping humans understand his will. Unlike *ḥikmah*, which referred to their practical wisdom to teach the revelation, *ḥukm* refers to the specific command that Allah reveals through his prophets, who are ordered to lead others in obeying his will. In this sense, it can be suggested that *ḥukm* incorporates *ḥikmah* within its fold because without the specific command from Allah, the practical wisdom and examples set by the prophets would not be relevant. It is only logical for the prophets to insist their followers worship Allah alone, for to

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<sup>31</sup> John Esposito, *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2003), 118.

<sup>32</sup> Kassis, 522-23

<sup>33</sup> It must be noted here that Ali's choice of wisdom as a translation for *ḥukm* in this verse only conflates the matter. Elsewhere he uses the more apt translations of command and authority.



encourage the worship of anything in place of Allah contradicts the revelation and is not possible.<sup>34</sup> The prophets are the interpreters of Allah's revelation and their teachings cannot go against Allah's command that only he be worshipped.

The following verse allows us to better understand how the prophets' authority comes from the command Allah bestows upon them.

These were the men to whom We gave the Book, and authority (*ḥukm*), and prophethood: if these (their descendants) reject them, Behold! We shall entrust their charge to a new people who reject them not. (6:89)

In this verse, *ḥukm* is used to point out the authority that the prophets have as messengers of Allah. As the verse indicates, those who Allah commands must lead humans to follow the will of Allah. If humans reject the prophet and the revelation he brings from Allah, then Allah will give a new revelation and new *ḥukm* to another prophet who will lead. As an Abrahamic faith, Islam acknowledges Judaism and Christianity as predecessors in the covenant of Allah's revelation. The earlier prophets, who were chosen to transmit revelation, were also given *ḥikmah* to instruct others in the revelation.<sup>35</sup> However, because the message of the prophets went unheeded, Allah bestowed further revelations, first through Jesus and finally through the Qur'an and Muhammad. Both of these verses emphasize that a prophet who has the command from Allah cannot act against the revelation. Their authority comes directly from Allah who gave them revelation and the wisdom to interpret it for others as a means of carrying out Allah's command.

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<sup>34</sup> Smith and Haddad, 22-23. To worship any other being besides Allah is the one unpardonable sin by the Qur'an.

<sup>35</sup> Q - 16:125, 17:39

The concept of *ḥukm*, though frequently bestowed upon the prophets, always points back to the authority of Allah, as he is the only one who can demand praise from humans.

If not Him, ye worship nothing but names which ye have named,- ye and your fathers,- for which Allah hath sent down no authority: the command (*ḥukm*) is for none but Allah: He hath commanded that ye worship none but Him: that is the right religion, but most men understand not... (12:40)

As the verse indicates, Allah is the true source of *ḥukm*, and no other being has the authority to lead unless bestowed by Allah. It is because most humans do not understand the revelation that Allah commands his prophets to lead others in worshipping Allah. The authority of prophets generally comes from the fact that they are also given revelation, as we can see with the ancient Jewish kings: “And remember David and Solomon, when they gave judgment in the matter of the field into which the sheep of certain people had strayed by night: We did witness their judgment.” (21:78) Solomon and David, for instance, were both given *ḥukm* from Allah, which they used to judge their subjects. Under their rule, the will of Allah was to be upheld and because they were given *ḥukm*, their judgment reflected the will. Though *ḥukm* is translated as judgment in this verse, the idea is implied that the kings, who presided over the daily affairs of the subjects, have divine authority bestowed by Allah. They are commanded to judge according to Allah’s revelation, and, although they are the kings on earth, the verse indicates that Allah knows their actions and how they judge, since it was Allah, who gave them the wisdom to judge by his will. The main idea regarding *ḥukm* in all the

verses we have analyzed is consistent; that one who is given *ḥukm* is commanded by Allah to exhort others to offer praises to Allah alone.

Judgment is the dominant feature of *ḥakama* and its derivatives, and we have seen that it is connected to revelation given by Allah. For human judges, the guidelines for carrying out judicial procedures are given in the scripture. By following the scripture when judging, one can be assured that justice is being carried out. Moreover, by judging according to the revelation, one can be assured of gaining Allah's favor. Obeying the revelation is basis for Allah's judgment, which we have seen requires that one's thoughts and actions be in tune with Allah's will. Thus, we can see how wisdom is an essential part of judging, given that Allah's revelation is always a manifestation of his wisdom. In the context of Allah's judgment, *ḥukm* refers to the command given to the prophets, who, in turn, lead others to understand how Allah's judges. It is the duty of humans to follow the revelation of the prophets in order to know Allah's will and obey his command.

## **Conclusion**

Having analyzed the HKM derivatives in a variety of passages, the two dimensions, wisdom and judgment, stand out as central to understanding the meaning contained in the HKM root. All of the words analyzed in this chapter are intimately connected to Allah's revelation, which is both the basis for his judgment and a manifestation of his wisdom. Through them, Allah commands

humans to follow the way of life proscribed in the Qur'an and exemplified by the prophets.

Allah's wisdom is immanent in creation, because it existed before creation and was the guiding force in the act of creation. Allah gives life to all things and the natural world exhibits an order that is according to the will of Allah, with everything in "true proportions".<sup>36</sup> Specifically, in the case of humans, Allah made his wisdom accessible so that humans might come to know his will. It is Allah's command that all humans follow his revelation. The Qur'an refers to itself as full of wisdom (*ḥakīm*) in several verses and when referring to Allah's act of bestowing revelation through scripture, he is called *al-ḥakīm* (the Wise).<sup>37</sup> In addition to the wisdom contained in the scripture, Allah gave special practical wisdom (*ḥikmah*) to his prophets, so that they could instruct others in the revelation.

In addition to Allah's wisdom, I have shown how judgment is an inseparable part of Allah's revelation. Allah is the true judge of humans' souls, because he alone knows the inner thoughts and private actions of people. Thus, it is not possible to speak of Allah being the ultimate judge (*al-ḥakam*) without acknowledging his role as *al-ḥakīm*. No human judge could have the total knowledge of creation as Allah does and their guidelines for carrying out justice are given through the revelation in the Qur'an. In other words, the human judges know how to judge justly because they have the example given in the revelation of Allah.

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<sup>36</sup> *Islam and Ecology*, 9. The text explains that the perfect order of nature is proof of God's existence.

<sup>37</sup> Q - 10:1, 11:1, 27:6, 31:2, 36:2, 40:8, 45:2, 46:2.

The concept of *ḥukm* carries the divine command that Allah has bestowed upon the world, affecting everything therein. While always connected with revelation or scripture, *ḥukm* refers more directly to the specific command given by Allah to the prophets as a sign of their authority to lead. However, it is clear that without the revelation that a prophet would not have the authority to lead. Those whom Allah bestows with *ḥukm* are commanded to specifically instruct others to worship Allah alone, thus all humans must follow Allah's command. Whether or not humans accept the *ḥukm* and follow the revelation will greatly affect how Allah judges them and to worship another being before Allah is an unpardonable sin.<sup>38</sup> Thus, we cannot speak of *ḥukm* in the Qur'an without acknowledging Allah's role as the Judge (*al-ḥakam*). Those who have *ḥukm* understand how Allah judges and are ordered to teach others to follow the will and receive Allah's favor. The prophets have knowledge of Allah's will and offer their praises to Allah alone, as he is the source of creation and revelation. This is the message of his revelation, which Allah set as the basis for his judgment. He calls all humans to follow his command and judges with the full knowledge of who has obeyed his will.

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<sup>38</sup> Smith and Haddad, 22-23.

## Chapter Three

### *Hukam* in the compositions of Kabir

At this point, we must pause and reflect on our objective, which is to understand the development of *hukam* in the Sikh tradition. Making the leap to a Sikh worldview requires that we examine some instances where the term developed a new religious significance. One way to bridge the religious and cultural gap is to use Kabir, whose religious compositions were influenced by Islam and incorporated into the Sikh canon. Kabir's compositions contain the first Indian use of the concept *hukam*, which allows us to examine the concept in its earliest Indian transformation. This section will first provide a background of Kabir, briefly explaining the relevant religious context for his life. Then, I will analyze how Kabir employed the concept of *hukam* in his religious compositions. This will allow us to understand *hukam* as a unique concept for Kabir, yet one which displays continuity with its Islamic roots.

Kabir is widely regarded as one of India's great religious leaders and is often quoted by Hindu, Sikh, and Muslim alike. Dates for Kabir's life are speculative, although scholars generally accept 1398-1448.<sup>39</sup> He was part of a diverse religious environment, growing up in Benares, a sacred city for Hindus, during a period of Muslim rule.<sup>40</sup> The name Kabir, meaning great, is taken from the list of the Most Beautiful Names of Allah. This strongly suggests that Kabir

<sup>39</sup> W. H. Mcleod, *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968), 155.

<sup>40</sup> John Stratton Hawley and Mark Juergensmeyer. *Songs of the Saints of India* (Oxford University: Oxford, 1988), 36-37. Muslim rule in India began as early as the 11<sup>th</sup> century C.E. and reached its apex under the Mughal rule from early 16<sup>th</sup> century C.E. – early 18<sup>th</sup> century C.E.

was at least raised in a Muslim home. The caste to which his family belonged, *julaha* (weavers), had converted to Islam in Benares not long before Kabir was born, and his compositions also suggest that he worked as a weaver.<sup>41</sup> Living in Benares, Kabir would have been exposed to a wide variety of Hindu rituals and beliefs, and his awareness of such ideas is evident in his writings. Although he was clearly familiar with beliefs and rituals of both Hinduism and Islam, there is little evidence in Kabir's compositions that suggests he affirmed or favored either of the two religions.

Scholars generally place Kabir within the Sant tradition of northern India, which was comprised of various religious thinkers who lived between the 13<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>42</sup> Loosely tied together by beliefs such as monotheism, and rejection of external rituals, caste restrictions, and sectarian division, these thinkers who were known as Sants (from the Sanskrit *sat* meaning truth) communicated their teachings using vernacular languages rather than Sanskrit. The Sant characteristics noted above, monotheism, a rejection of caste, etc., are in harmony with the message of the Sikh Gurus, and many of their writings had begun to be collected for recitation by the Sikhs as early as the third Guru, Amar Das (1479-1574).<sup>43</sup> The fifth Guru, Arjan, edited and included the corpus of works belonging to various Sants into the Bhagat Bani, or compositions of the Devotees, when he compiled the first official manuscript of the Granth in 1605, which was finalized by the tenth Guru in 1706.

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<sup>41</sup> Linda Hess and Shukdeo Singh, *The Bijak of Kabir* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2002), 5.

<sup>42</sup> Mcleod *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*, 151-158. In his discussion, Mcleod notes that the Sant tradition culled elements from three separate traditions existing in the medieval period: Vaiṣṇava bhakti, Nath Yoga, and Sufism.

<sup>43</sup> Singh, *The Bhagats of the Guru Granth Sahib* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2003), 12, 86.

There are two aspects of Kabir's life and compositions that make him stand out from other Sants stylistically and contextually that are important for understanding why he is relevant to our analysis. First, among the Sants included in the Granth, Kabir is the most prominent, having more compositions included than any other Sant. Guru Arjan took great care in editing the original texts of the Granth, and the fact that he chose to include far more of Kabir's poems attests to Kabir's popularity in the early Sikh communities.<sup>44</sup> Secondly, Kabir's biographical sketch and compositions suggest a closer personal connection with Islam than the other Sants included in the Granth.<sup>45</sup> There is a tradition that Kabir was the disciple and successor of a famous Sufi saint of the Suhrawardi order.<sup>46</sup> Although no definitive ties have been established, the mere possibility of Kabir as a Sufi suggests a greater interaction with Islam. None of the other Sants have any historical ties to Islamic traditions. The influence of Islam on Kabir can also be noted through his style of composing, which occasionally resembled a popular genre of Sufi aphorisms known as *hikam*.<sup>47</sup> *Hikam* is the plural of *ḥikmah*, which we established as revelation in the form of practical wisdom bestowed by Allah upon a human representative. Similarly, the *hikam* literature composed by Sufis was perceived as divinely inspired wisdom

<sup>44</sup> Singh, *The Bhagats of the Guru Granth Sahib*. 101-02. This does not suggest that Kabir and the Sikh Gurus always expressed parallel thinking. In fact, verses were occasionally included by Kabir so that the Sikh Gurus appear to be directly challenging his fundamental ideas.

<sup>45</sup> Stratton and Hawley. The other Sants, such as Namdev, Ravidas, Jaidev, and Tusli Das, were all born into Hindu families and predominantly used Hindu language, albeit in universal terms. While Kabir appears to have had the greatest connection to Islam of the Sants, there are two other thinkers in the Granth who are definitively established as Sufis: Bhikkan and Shaikh Farid. However, the concept *hukam* does not appear in either of their compositions.

<sup>46</sup> Singh, *The Bhagats of the Guru Granth Sahib*. 82.

<sup>47</sup> Ibn 'ata'illah, *The Book of Wisdom*, trans. Victor Danner (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 35-36.



transmitted through a specific *sheikh*, or teacher.<sup>48</sup> Kabir was also famous for his aphoristic style of composing, which often utilized paradox and irony, to stress a particular theme. It is reasonable to suggest that Kabir, who we can accept as having interacted with Sufis, would have been exposed to this style of teaching and familiar with the interconnected meanings shared by the HKM derivatives.

In Kabir's 243 compositions included in the Granth, the word *hukam* appears in only 7 verses, suggesting a minor role for the concept, especially when compared with the Sikh Gurus.<sup>49</sup> However, as we will see, Kabir's basic understanding of the cosmos and the role of humans has been largely shaped by a Hindu worldview.<sup>50</sup> The manner in which Kabir employed *hukam* offers insight into how he reinterpreted an Islamic concept into a synthesis, which fused the concept with the South Asian belief in life as a cycle of rebirths.

We can begin analyzing Kabir's notion of *hukam* in the context of creation, which will allow us to see how he distinguished it from the themes noted in the previous chapter.

The One True Lord abides in all; by His making, everything is made. Whoever realizes the Command (*hukam*), knows the One Lord. He alone is said to be the Lord's slave. ||3|| (1350)

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<sup>48</sup> John Renard, *Historical Dictionary of Sufism* (Scarecrow Press: 2005), 34-35. He has noted that the aphorisms would explain any numbers of ideas or concepts (usually pertaining to the divine-human relationship) in a way that could be easily understood and remembered by even a simple person.

<sup>49</sup> AG 92, 330, 337, 793, 1103, 1104, 1350. Moreover, it does not appear in the Bijak of Kabir at all, although this may be the result of the text being compiled by Brahmins who would have sought to downplay the influence of Islam in Kabir's compositions.

<sup>50</sup> Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism all profess a belief in *karma*, reincarnation and liberation, though each explains the concept in a distinct way. However, it cannot be ignored that Hindus were the largest audience that Kabir interacted with socially and religiously.

For Kabir and many of the Sants, God is immanent and all-pervasive. Kabir uses the concept of *hukam* to express the means by which God created the world. Whoever realizes the *hukam* will come to know God and see God in all things and also become a slave of God. For Kabir, to know the *hukam* one cannot act against the God, just as a slave cannot act against their master. Thus, *hukam* is a means to knowing God, which requires one act according to God's will. This shows continuity with the notion of knowing Allah in the Qur'an. In the HKM derivatives, we also saw that one who has knowledge (*hikmah*) of Allah only acts to express his will. All of the prophets in the Qur'an that were given revelation were also commanded by Allah to bring others to worship the one God. Those who obeyed the command that Allah gave through his prophets came to serve Allah by following the revelation. Similarly, Kabir understood that one who knows the *hukam* is a slave to God; they obey the divine command.

With respect to the fate of human's souls, Kabir's understanding of the goal of life differed radically from the Qur'an.

Why should I come into the world again? Coming and going is by His Command (*hukam*); realizing His Hukam, I shall merge in Him. ||1||Pause|| (1103)<sup>51</sup>

The verse above indicates that *hukam* is a guiding principle in the cycle of death, rebirth and, eventually, liberation. The cycle, *samsara* (Punjabi *sansar*) is a central belief for Hindus, whereby humans are continuously reborn, and each birth is determined by the balance of good versus bad actions (*karma*) committed

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<sup>51</sup> For the translation of Kabir's *bani*, I used Dr. Sant Singh Khalsa available on the [www.srigranth.org](http://www.srigranth.org) Web site. It is important to note that in his translation, he includes the term *hukam* as a given concept relating to the specific command of God. This often appears in his text as "the *hukam* of His command."

in previous lives. The only way to end to the cycle is through liberation (*moksha*) from the cycle of birth and death. Although Kabir affirms the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth, his compositions indicate that he understood *hukam* as a determining factor in the regulation of the cycle. Knowing and following the *hukam* will lead humans to merge with God, thereby ending the cycle of *samsara* (Punjabi *sansar*). In this sense, knowledge of *hukam* is connected to the human actions (*karma*). For Kabir, life and death are subject to the *hukam* of God. Giving and taking life, as well as judging humans upon death, were themes present in the HKM cluster in the Qur'an. There, it was emphasized that Allah revealed himself within creation, so that humans could receive his blessings. We noted earlier that one who followed the *hukam* of Allah would be admitted to Paradise upon death. Kabir's emphasis that liberation is achieved through knowing the *hukam* of God finds affinity with the Islamic concept of *hukam*. When a person knows the *hukam*, than he/she will come to merge with the divine and be liberated from *samsara*.

In the following verse, he explains how it is that one can come to know the *hukam* through the grace of the Guru.

When it is pleasing to Him, then He inspires us to obey His Command (*Hukam*). He causes this boat to crossover. By Guru's Grace, such understanding is infused into me; my comings and goings in reincarnation have ended. (337)

Using imagery that is well rooted in the South Asian tradition, Kabir explains that knowledge of the *hukam* is the result of the guru's grace (*prasad*).<sup>52</sup> The guru, or

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<sup>52</sup> Cole, *Sikhism and its Indian Context: 1469 – 1708* (London: Dartman, Longman & Todd, 1984), 78-79.

teacher, was the figure who was traditionally responsible for the transmission of religious teachings in Hindu society. Although the term generally refers to a human teacher, Kabir's notion of a guru, as Mcleod points out, refers "unmistakably to the *Satguru* (True Guru) within, the voice of God within the human soul."<sup>53</sup> Thus, for Kabir, it is God's grace, which causes people to understand the *hukam* and leads them to be liberated from the cycle of rebirth. It is not possible to achieve liberation, in Kabir's understanding, without receiving God's grace (*prasad*). *Prasad* is an important concept in devotional Hinduism (*bhakti*), which can be traced at least as far back as the Bhagavad Gita. Grace is a gift bestowed by God on one who displays proper devotion.<sup>54</sup> In that context, grace leads to overcoming *karma* and achieving liberation from reincarnation. Kabir places a great emphasis on the importance of grace in achieving liberation, because, as the above verse indicates, one who is given grace comes to know the *hukam* of God. In this manner, we can see how Kabir synthesized the Hindu concept of grace by indicating that it leads humans to follow the *hukam*, an Islamic principle.

Another way of understanding how Kabir incorporated *hukam* in his unique worldview is by analyzing its connection with the Hindu concept of *shabad*, or divine word.

When the Word of the Shabad abides deep within, thirst and desire are quenched. When one understands the Lord's Command

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<sup>53</sup> Mcleod, 156.

<sup>54</sup> Gavin Flood, *An Introduction to Hinduism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1996), 136-138. Flood gives one verse in particular, 18:66, as a passage commonly quoted by devotional poets as explaining the importance of God's grace for overcoming karma. Later the devotional poets, such as Ramanuja, stressed the importance of grace as an act of God that would save humans from the being reborn.

(*hukam*), he plays the game of chess with the Lord; throwing the dice, he conquers his own mind. ||3|| (793)

According to Linda Hess, the concept of *shabad* is the most prominent term Kabir used to describe the means of achieving enlightenment.<sup>55</sup> For Kabir, when the *shabad* or divine word, is heard, one comes to know God. In this sense, God is directly revealed in the form of *shabad*, which would come to reside in the hearts of those who listened to the divine word. As the *shabad* is heard, knowledge of God arises and humans come to know the *hukam*. Following the *hukam* and hearing the *shabad* leads humans to act according to God's will, rather than act following their egos. The use of games and gambling is a poetic device in the Hindu tradition, and Kabir is emphasizing that one who follows the *hukam* will, in effect, win the gamble and conquer his mind. What is important to note in this verse is that the *hukam* is revealed when one comes into contact with the divine revelation or *shabad*. To follow the *hukam* and live according to God's, one must be blessed with *shabad*. Such a person conquers their ego and achieves liberation. Kabir is clear that mind is to be overcome, if one is to know the nature of God.

## Conclusion

From these verses, we can extract some key features that explain how Kabir understood *hukam*. For Kabir, everything in the world is created by God through *hukam*, and the *hukam* can be known when one comes to know God's revelation or *shabad*. Knowing the *hukam* leads to more than just knowledge of

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<sup>55</sup> Linda Hess and Shukdeo Singh, *The Bijak of Kabir*, 3.

the divine; it is an experience that occurs when one merges with the divine. Such an experience can only occur when God grants humans the gift of grace, which causes them to realize the *shabad*, the divine word within. Through *shabad*, one knows God and lives according to God's will and, when the *shabad* is heard, enlightenment or liberation occurs. Thus, liberation occurs by following the *hukam* of God.

We have seen that Kabir predominantly addresses a Hindu audience and uses Hindu themes in his compositions, but his use of *hukam* shows continuity with the cluster of meanings discussed in the previous chapter. First, there is the similarity in the creation of the world. In the Qur'an, Allah created all things through his wisdom and has full knowledge of all that takes place in creation. For Kabir, God created all and actually is omnipresent and immanent in creation. One who has knowledge of the *hukam* will come to know of God. The same was also true in the Qur'an for one who is bestowed *hukam* has knowledge of Allah and his revelation. In the Qur'an, *hukam* referred to Allah's command to obey his revelation in preparation to receive his reward upon judgment. Although Kabir does not subscribe to God's final judgment as in the Qur'an, his use of *hukam* does lead one to conclude that God is directly responsible for the liberation of humans. In this sense, Kabir implicitly acknowledges that God judges humans, taking into account whether they follow the divine order. His compositions state that one who followed the *hukam* would achieve liberation. In both cases, *hukam* is a divine command which, when adhered to, will result in the ideal fate for humans, whether it be paradise in Islam or liberation for Kabir. In essence, Kabir

reinterpreted the divine command of God in Islam to incorporate the forms of revelation familiar to his environment. As we will see, this general understanding is very similar to how Nanak and the Sikh Gurus understand *hukam*, albeit with their own emphasis on the growing identity challenges they faced.

## Chapter Four

### Guru Nanak and *hukam*

It is our goal in this chapter to focus on how Nanak's employment of *hukam* displays continuity with the HKM derivatives in the Qur'an, as well as to point out how Nanak established the concept as something that was noticeably distinct. Following a brief biography and setting for Nanak, I will analyze some compositions in which the term *hukam* is used to allow us to understand the various dimensions of this concept. Through his life and compositions, we will see how Nanak used *hukam* to express a range of ideas, all of which are tied into a distinct understanding of the cosmos. At the end of this chapter, we will have an understanding of *hukam* in the Sikh Granth and be able to analyze how the concept developed new meanings while preserving much of the original context. This will directly set us up for the following chapter that takes into account the compositions of Nanak's successors, Gurus Angad, Amar Das, Ram Das, and Arjan. Analyzing some of their compositions contained in the Granth will allow us to see how the concept of *hukam* was developed over the formation of the text, and how it came to distinguish the Sikh tradition from others.

#### Historical and social context

The biography of Nanak is largely confined to legend; however, there are some key events that scholars readily accept as historically likely.<sup>56</sup> Nanak was born in Talwandi Rai Bhoie (in modern Pakistan) in 1469 to Hindu parents

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<sup>56</sup> In particular, Mcleod's *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion* offers an analysis of the *janamsakhis* or life narratives through the lens of intense historical criticism. His end product is a list of probably and likely events that can be affirmed for the life of Nanak.



belonging to the Khatri (merchants) caste. At some point in his early adolescent years, Nanak went to live with his sister's family in Sultanpur, where he was employed by the ruling Muslim court of Daulat Khan Lodi, likely doing clerical work. During this period, Nanak married and raised two children, in accordance with his beliefs that humans must commit to worldly obligations and not renounce them. Tradition reports that following a religious experience while bathing in a river in 1499, Nanak embarked on a period of extended travels throughout the whole of India. One of his compositions describes the experience:

The Lord summoned the Minstrel to his high court. On me he bestowed the role of honouring him and singing his praise. (150)

Eventually, he established a town called Kartarpur, which is considered to be the first Sikh community, where his followers lived together sharing a common vision of life based around Nanak's new revelation.<sup>57</sup> At Kartarpur, Nanak was both the social and religious leader and many of his teachings were given practical shape during this period. Significantly, before his death in 1539, Nanak chose a disciple, who he renamed (Guru) Angad, to carry on and expand the revelation given to Nanak.<sup>58</sup>

Nanak's teachings, like we saw with Kabir, must be understood in the context of the contemporary religious traditions of his day. His central teaching that "those who wished to transcend the constant cycle of birth and death should

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<sup>57</sup> J.S. Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab* (New Dehli: Cambridge University, 2005), 39-41. According to Grewal, this is, perhaps, the distinguishing feature of the Kartarpur community. The use of Nanak's compositions for liturgical verse in place of either Hindu or Muslim scriptures set the base for the scripture that would become the Guru Granth.

<sup>58</sup> Gurinder Singh Mann, *Sikhism* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2004), 29-30. Although in Nanak's compositions, like Kabir's, the term *guru* refers to God, he acknowledged his own status as *guru* of the Kartarpur community when he bequeathed the office to a successor. With the title of Guru, Nanak's successor, Angad, carried on Nanak's works even composing poetry in the name Nanak.

live in accordance with the will of the Creator, which meant spending life on earth immersed in *nam simran* or remembrance of the Divine Word,” places him within a general South Asian context.<sup>59</sup> Moreover, his use of concepts like the *guru*, rebirth, and meditation all fit within a Hindu background and depart entirely from Islam. Guru Nanak’s teachings and terminology, however, have much in common with the Sant movement, which has led some scholars, including Mcleod, to conclude that Nanak was a Sant himself.<sup>60</sup> However, Nanak’s significance as an independent religious leader is seen in the many ways in which he differed from Kabir and the larger Sant tradition. For one, his decision to found a new community whereby devotees would work, pray, and eat together was unique to Nanak’s vision, and none of the other Sants are credited with the founding of towns. In his analysis of early life at Kartarpur, Gurinder Singh Mann notes that work within a society was as important as spiritual discipline.<sup>61</sup> Nanak rejected asceticism and required those in his initial community to earn a daily living, in addition to daily communal prayers. Thus, the social and religious realms worked hand in hand to bring human consciousness closer to the divine. Moreover, Nanak’s decision to implement his own compositions as authoritative for the community he started indicates his intention to create a movement that would emulate other established traditions in form.<sup>62</sup> Although Nanak’s religious

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<sup>59</sup> Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity, and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 48.

<sup>60</sup> J.S. Grewal, *Contesting Interpretations of Sikh Tradition* (New Dehli: Manohar, 1998), 136-138. Grewal notes that it is Mcleod who is responsible for the designation of Nanak as a Sant. He notes that Mcleod’s designation has been misinterpreted as implying a lack of originality on the part of Nanak.

<sup>61</sup> Mann, *Sikhism* 22-28.

<sup>62</sup> Gurinder Singh Mann, *The Making of Sikh Scripture* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2001), 6-7. This decision, as part of Nanak’s social vision, is enough to clearly distinguish Nanak from the other

terminology borrowed from previous Sants, his interpretation of the concepts such as *nam* (name of God), *shabad* (divine word), Guru (divine preceptor), and *hukam* (divine order) is more clearly developed into a consistent set of teachings.<sup>63</sup> His vision of establishing a lasting community was realized by his unique decision to appoint a successor who was given the task of continuing the scriptural tradition of Nanak, which eventually culminated in the compilation of the Granth by Guru Arjan. No other Sant, including Kabir, attempted to preserve their lineage through both a scripture and a chosen representative. The differences between Nanak and the Sants point to Nanak's attempt to redefine social and religious life according to his vision of God.

By analyzing *hukam* in the compositions of the Nanak, we are attempting to understand how the concept served as part of Nanak's distinct religious identity. *Hukam* is an important concept in Nanak's teachings, signifying the integral role of God's presence and power over creation. It is best understood as a sense of divine order or command bestowed by God that sustains all creation.<sup>64</sup> God, the creator, is continuously present in creation through *hukam*, which is mysterious concept for Nanak. As he muses in one of his verses regarding the *hukam*, "Even if a hundred poets met together, they could not describe even a tiny bit of it" (53). *Hukam* is also the means by which God acts in creation, shaping human destinies. By means of the *hukam*, God guides

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Sants. As Gurinder Singh Mann points out, the designation of Nanak as a Sant only takes into account the religious dimension of Nanak, which, as we will see, do not fit perfectly into the Sant tradition.

<sup>63</sup> Stratton and Hawley, 66, 72. The authors note that it is the concept of *hukam* where Nanak and Kabir depart, with Nanak's *hukam* dictating a more coherent design to the universe, while Kabir's is left abstract.

<sup>64</sup> Mcleod, *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*, 199-203, Stratton and Hawley, 72.

human beings towards knowing the divine revelation through the *guru* (divine preceptor), *shabad* (divine word), and *nam* (name of God). These forms of revelation are accessible to humans and will lead them to understand the *hukam*. As renowned Sikh scholar J.S. Grewal summarizes, *hukam* is “an all-embracing principle, the sum total of all divinely instituted laws.”<sup>65</sup> When humans live according to the divine revelation, then their actions are God-driven, rather than ego-driven. They will be blessed with God’s grace and be liberated from rebirth. In short, for Nanak, the *hukam* refers to the divine plan for humans and God’s specific command to follow to that will.

### ***Hukam* in the compositions of Nanak**

As we turn to analyze Nanak’s compositions, we will confront a variety of English translations for the term *hukam*.<sup>66</sup> This should not be surprising given that *hukam* had the widest variety of translation in the Qur’an. In the case of Nanak’s compositions, the variety of translation is due to the fact that *hukam*, as an all embracing principle, covers a variety of dimensions that will be addressed throughout this chapter. As we did with Kabir, it will be our goal to keep in mind how Nanak’s understanding of *hukam* displays continuity with the HKM root meanings in the Qur’an.

*Hukam* appears in the very first stanza of the first composition in the Granth, the *japu*. Placed at the head of the original Granth compiled by Guru

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<sup>65</sup> Grewal, *Contesting Interpretations of Sikh Tradition*, 134.

<sup>66</sup> Sant Singh Khalsa uses command and order as a translation for *hukam* and he frequently includes the Punjabi word in translating. Thus *hukam* is translated as “*hukam* of his command” or “the Order of the *hukam*”.

Arjan, the *japu* has been described as the culmination of Nanak's religious vision.<sup>67</sup> The opening verse poses the fundamental question for humans:

So how can you become truthful? And how can the veil of illusion be torn away? O Nanak, it is written that you shall obey the Hukam of His Command, and walk in the Way of His Will. ||1|| (1)<sup>68</sup>

Being truthful or of "attaining Truth" refers to a state of union with the ultimate reality and it is one of Nanak's terms for enlightenment.<sup>69</sup> According to Nanak, humans are caught in illusion, caused by their egos.<sup>70</sup> Few humans understand that God has designed a way of life for humans to follow if they are to achieve enlightenment, which results in liberation from rebirths. Instead, most people act according to selfish desires and remain unaware of the true nature of reality. Nanak says that if one is to overcome ego, they must follow the *hukam* of God, which means living in accordance with a divine order.

Nanak goes on to explain the nature of the *hukam* in the following verse of the *japu*, which allows us to extract four dimensions for understanding how it is manifest in the world.

By His Command, bodies are created; His Command cannot be described. By His Command, souls come into being; by His Command, glory and greatness are obtained. By His Command, some are high and some are low; by His Written Command, pain and pleasure are obtained. Some, by His Command, are blessed and forgiven; others, by His Command, wander aimlessly forever. Everyone is subject to His Command; no one is beyond His Command. O Nanak, one who understands His Command, does not speak in ego. ||2|| (1)

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<sup>67</sup> Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh, *The Name of My Beloved: Verses of the Sikh Gurus* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1995), 45.

<sup>68</sup> Sant Singh Khalsa. *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, Available at [www.srigranth.org](http://www.srigranth.org).

<sup>69</sup> Mcleod, *Encyclopedia of Sikhism*, 286.

<sup>70</sup> Mcleod, *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*, 199-200

The first dimension of *hukam* is creation. The verse above explains that humans are created and take birth in the world according to God's *hukam*. *Hukam*, as an agent of God, is the means by which creation takes place. The second dimension is directly tied into the first, with an emphasis on the role of *hukam* in relation to the human condition. It determines our health and wealth, as well as our prosperity and misfortune in life; it sets up each individual's course of life. The third dimension, which is the broadest and most important, explains how *hukam* is connected to the fate of human beings. As we will see, *hukam* is a determining factor in whether humans are reborn into the world or liberated. The fourth dimension draws together the previous ones to show that *hukam* expresses God's omnipotence. No one is beyond God's *hukam*; it is the means by which God creates and sustains the universe. Everything is subject to the divine *hukam* because all things are dependent upon the *hukam*. As we can see from this brief introduction to the categories, all are interrelated to the degree that all pertain to the idea that God created the world with a specific order that must be followed, if liberation is to be achieved.<sup>71</sup>

Starting with the first dimension, we can see that, for Nanak, *hukam* precedes creation.

For endless eons, there was only utter darkness. There was no earth or sky; there was only the infinite Command of His Hukam. There was no day or night, no moon or sun; God sat in primal, profound Samaadhi. ||1|| There were no sources of creation or powers of speech, no air or water. There was no creation or destruction, no coming or going. There were no continents, nether regions, seven seas, rivers or flowing water. ||2|| (1035)

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<sup>71</sup> Nanak has a stanza in *rag sorath* that is a particularly good example of a long passage devoted to *hukam* that covers all the categories present in the second stanza of the *japu*.

Before the universe was created, all that existed was God and the *hukam*. We noted in the *japu* that *hukam* is the means by which God created humans and to this we can add that the entire world was created according to God's *hukam*. Without the *hukam*, creation could not exist and thus, through the *hukam* we can understand that God pervades the universe. God's order is expressed in the natural world through divisions like night and day, land and sea, and life and death.

The following verse allows us to see how God's creation, like the *hukam*, can never be fully known by humans.

He contemplates His creative potency, having established the Universe. He who created it, He alone knows. He Himself beholds it, and He Himself understands it. He Himself realizes the Hukam of His Command. He who created these things, He alone knows. His subtle form is infinite. Nanak: for whom should we mourn, O Baba? This world is merely a play. ||4||2|| (580)

Only one who created the world can have the knowledge of everything that takes place on earth. No human can understand this because no human can understand the nature of God's *hukam*, which is the means by which God creates. As the creator, God has total power over creation and all humans are subject to the *hukam*. Human bodies are formed by God's *hukam* and given birth in a particular time and place that has been determined by God. Only God has the knowledge to set up and sustain the divine order and through that divine order; God pervades the universe.

The dimension of creation in Nanak's compositions is very similar to the themes we analyzed in the HKM derivatives. In the Qur'an, we noted that everything was created in "true proportions" and an example of Allah's wisdom

as *al-hakīm*. This included both the natural world and the specific lives of humans. Allah's knowledge was always beyond the comprehension of humans. He knows the hidden and unseen things in the world. What could be known by humans was made accessible through his revelation. For Nanak, God created the world in a similar manner, with nature exhibiting the divine order. In both religions, God is the creator, whose knowledge can never be fully known by humans. Nanak acknowledged that God created humans with a divine order that must be followed; however, total understanding of the nature of God and the *hukam* is not possible. Only the creator can know the *hukam*, though humans can understand that it exists and must be obeyed as part of God's plan for creation. We also noted in the Qur'an that Allah's wisdom pervades creation and there is nothing that he does not have knowledge of. This is similar to Nanak's belief that God pervades the world and knows everything through the *hukam*.

The second dimension of *hukam* is the human condition, which refers to the role God plays in setting up one's status in life. In the following verse, we see how all humans are born into a certain condition that has been predetermined by God, who controls humans' destiny through the *hukam*.

Destiny, pre-ordained by the Lord, looms over the heads of all beings; no one is without this pre-ordained destiny. Only He Himself is beyond destiny; creating the creation by His creative power, He beholds it, and causes His Command (*hukam*) to be followed. ||1|| (598)

Whether one is born rich or poor, healthy or sick, or high or low is only determined by God. No human can be born in the world without being placed here by God's will. The condition for all things is determined by God's *hukam*



and is directly related to the fact that God created the world through the *hukam*. In establishing the human condition through the *hukam*, God causes humans to live according to certain natural, biological, and social laws as part of the divine order.

As the following verse indicates, part of the human condition is that humans are bound to act by their ego, which prevents them from knowing God's nature.

Whoever understands the Hukam of the Lord's Command, realizes the essence of reality. This is known by Guru's Grace. O Nanak, know this: egotism leads to bondage. Only those who have no ego and no self-conceit, are not consigned to reincarnation. ||2|| (1289)

We noted in the opening stanza of the Granth that Nanak sets up ego as the main obstacle to achieving liberation. Humans who are conceited act according to their own desires and for their own interests. For Nanak, this is false living and considered to be an illusion, which leads to being reborn into the world as part of God's plan. Ego-driven people had no place in Nanak's society, where humans work honestly and share with neighbors, and they were certain to be oblivious to God's order. The way to overcome the ego is to act according to the *hukam*. Following the *hukam* leads humans to understand that God is immanent in all things. As the passage indicates, *hukam* can be known by the Guru's grace, which also affects the human condition. Nanak's employment of this concept is similar to what we encountered in Kabir's compositions. For Nanak, the guru is the voice of God found within all people, which will be examined in the third

dimension, below.<sup>72</sup> Grace is a gift that God bestows upon some humans, which causes them to know the essence of reality.<sup>73</sup> When humans understand, they come to follow the divine order that God has set for humans. Thus, we see how God, the ultimate guru for Nanak, affects the human condition by guiding humans' actions through grace.

In order to understand how *hukam* affects the human condition, we also need to analyze Nanak's understanding of the concept of *karma*.

If people could gather it in by their own efforts, then everyone would be so lucky. According to the karma of past actions, one's destiny unfolds, even though everyone wants to be so lucky. ||3||O Nanak, the One who created the creation - He alone takes care of it. The Hukam of our Lord and Master's Command (*hukam*) cannot be known; He Himself blesses us with greatness. ||4||1||18|| (156-157)

Nanak affirms the importance of *karma*, which in Hindu thought is the determining factor for the condition of human life. However, in his understanding, he is clear that *hukam* dictates *karma*. Contrary to the Hindu idea of *karma*, which is a self-operative principle, Nanak teaches that *karma* operates according to God's command. For Nanak, God has predetermined the conditions into which a human is born by weighing the good versus the bad actions committed in their previous life. All humans are born into a condition that is predetermined by God. This verse highlights the connection between the first two dimensions of

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<sup>72</sup> Mcleod, *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*, 196-199. Mann, *The Making of Sikh Scripture*, 8-9. The concept of *guru* as a divine preceptor is an interesting one for Nanak and the Sikhs. While Nanak never referred to himself as a *guru* and his compositions unfailingly refer to the transcendent God as *guru*, he was conscious of his own authority within the Kartarpur community. This is demonstrated by the decision to nominate his successor as Guru Angad before his death.

<sup>73</sup> Mcleod, *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*, 204-206.

*hukam* because God creates humans and at the same time establishes them in their present condition.

The dimension of shaping the human condition displays continuity with the Qur'an, where Allah was explained as being responsible for placing humans in the womb and determining the conditions into which they were born. In addition, Allah commanded humans act according to his revelation, which he revised throughout the course of history. Although Nanak differed from the Qur'an by placing a greater emphasis on human action, both put forth the idea that humans are commanded to follow God's order and live according to the revelation. All humans were created by the *hukam*, and subject to follow it.

The third dimension that *hukam* expresses is the fate of humans, which is the broadest and most important dimension for understanding the all-encompassing nature of *hukam*. This dimension is directly built on the previous discussion of God shaping human destiny. We noted that God determines how humans are born based on their weighted actions, and, to that end, we can add that God also must judge whether or not they are reborn into the world.

By His Command, some accounts are accounted for, O Beloved; by His Command, some suffer in egotism and duality. By His Command, one wanders in reincarnation, O Beloved; deceived by sins and demerits, he cries out in his suffering. If he comes to realize the Command of the Lord's Will, O Beloved, then he is blessed with Truth and Honor. ||6|| (636)

This verse allows us to see how *hukam* must be realized, if one is to achieve enlightenment, which is the ultimate goal for all Sikhs. This verse restates the obstacle that ego plays in clouding one's actions; it is what keeps humans caught in the cycle of rebirth. The verse indicates that individuals can overcome the

effects of ego and *karma* through knowledge of the *hukam*. The *hukam* is revealed to humans through the divine revelation bestowed from God. When humans come to live by the revelation, they are liberated from the cycle of rebirth.

The following verse indicates the forms of revelation that are tied into knowing and obeying the *hukam*.

Serving the Guru, the treasure is found. With the Naam in the heart, one always prospers. And in the Court of the True Lord, you shall not be called to account. One who obey the Hukam of the Lord's Command, is approved at the Lord's Door. ||6|| Meeting the True Guru, one knows the Lord. Understanding the Hukam of His Command, one acts according to His Will. Understanding the Hukam of His Command, he dwells in the Court of the True Lord. Through the Shabad, death and birth are ended. ||7|| (832)

For Nanak, *nam* is the basic revelation of God, in the form of a divine name. One who meditates on the divine name will come to know the nature of God.

Revelation can be accessed through the vehicle of *shabad*, or divine word, which is the totality of *nam*. For all practical purposes, the two are synonymous, and if a distinction can be drawn, it is that *shabad* contains the *nam* and not the other way around.<sup>74</sup> Both *shabad* and *nam* are revealed to humans through a divine preceptor, or *guru*. Nanak did not look to any human teacher as a *guru*, reserving that term as another of his epithets for God. For Nanak, as we saw with Kabir, the *guru* referred to the voice of God heard within one's heart. The hymns that Nanak composed, were directly revealed to him by God, and were understood by Sikhs as containing both *nam* and *shabad*. In short, the divine *guru* bestowed the *shabad* and *nam* on Nanak, who was the first human Guru for the Sikhs and

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<sup>74</sup> Mcleod, *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*, 191-196.

the mediator of the new revelation. If humans were to be liberated by God, then they must obey the *hukam*. According to Nanak's composition, the *hukam* can only be known through the revelation, which the *guru* has revealed through the divine word. All three of these concepts were prominently used amongst the Sants to describe God or the revelation; however, Nanak's understanding is unique because he ties in the notion *hukam* as a principle that maintains the divine order by which revelation is known.

Another way to understand how the dimension of fate is expressed through the *hukam* requires that we recall the notion of grace

One, upon whom the Merciful Lord bestows His Grace, performs His service. That servant, whom the Lord causes to obey the Order of His Will (*hukam*), serves Him. Obeying the Order of His Will (*hukam*), he becomes acceptable, and then, he obtains the Mansion of the Lord's Presence. One who acts to please His Lord and Master, obtains the fruits of his mind's desires. Then, he goes to the Court of the Lord, wearing robes of honor. ||15|| (471)

Grace, when bestowed from God, will spark a process whereby humans' actions are brought within the fold of God's will. Through the *hukam*, God chooses who is blessed with the gift of liberation and likewise who is destined to wander in the cycle.<sup>75</sup> When God bestows grace upon humans, they come to act according to the divine will. One cannot serve God without the knowledge of *hukam*, which can only be understood through the divine gift of grace; the two are inseparable. Moreover, they are further connected as both are necessary factors in being liberated achieve liberation Grace is intimately. Following the *hukam* is not

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<sup>75</sup> Mcleod, *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*, 191-196.

enough without God's grace, which a concept that humans have no power over.<sup>76</sup>

This dimension displays a strong continuity with the notion of fate in the HKM meanings. In the Qur'an, we saw that all humans were subject to Allah's judgment, which based upon his revelation. Depending on how closely humans obeyed the revelation, they were either awarded eternity in paradise or sent to burn in hell according to his command. Nanak's compositions also indicate that God is judging the actions of humans. For Nanak, God determines who is blessed with liberation and who is destined to be reborn in the cycle of *sansar*. Although Nanak dismisses the Qur'anic notion of eschatology, his compositions are clear that liberation can be achieved only when one follows the *hukam*. This is similar to the *hukam* in the Qur'an, whereby the *hukam* refers to the command for humans to obey Allah's revelation.

The final dimension of *hukam*, God's omnipotence, has already been hinted at throughout the chapter. As the creator, God expresses control over humans by making everyone subject to the *hukam*. The following verse indicates God's power through the *hukam* by tying together the three previous dimensions.

By the Hukam of His Command, all are created. By His Command, actions are performed. By His Command, all are subject to death; by His Command, they merge in Truth. O Nanak, whatever pleases His Will comes to pass. Nothing is in the hands of these beings. ||8||4||. (55)

As the creator, God remains in control of the universe, as we have seen, by dictating the natural cycles and giving life to all things. No one can be born independent of the *hukam* and whatever happens to an individual in the world is

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<sup>76</sup> Grewal, *Contesting Interpretations of Sikh Tradition*, 134-35.

the result God's will. This does not mean that humans are devoid of free will, just the contrary. Humans have the ability to act as they please, however, there can be no end to the illusion caused by ego, if one does not live by the *hukam*. Thus, the destinies of humans are controlled by the *hukam*, which humans must follow in order to be liberated. Otherwise, it is their destiny to continuously be reborn according to God's *hukam*.

We can conclude by analyzing one of Nanak's autobiographical hymns, in which he demonstrates how God is omnipotent through the *hukam*.

I came from the Celestial Lord God; I go wherever He orders me to go. I am Nanak, forever under the Command of His Will. I sit in the posture of the eternal, imperishable Lord. These are the Teachings I have received from the Guru. As Gurmukh, I have come to understand and realize myself; I merge in the Truest of the True. ||3|| (938)

This verse indicates that all humans are subject to God's will and that *hukam* is the means by which God's will is carried out. For Nanak, following the *hukam* leads on to follow the teachings of the *guru*. The term *gurmukh* given in the verse is interchangeable with Sikh (meaning disciple) and refers to the disciples who are devoted to God.<sup>77</sup> As we see from the verse, Nanak understood himself to be a disciple of God, who came to know the nature of God by following the *hukam*. This dimension has an obvious connection with the Qur'an, which is the basis of Allah's wisdom, judgment, and thus, omnipotence over creation. In the Qur'an, we saw that Allah commands humans to obey his revelation and he alone has the power to judge. As we saw, this was due to his total knowledge of

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<sup>77</sup> *Gurmukh* is a common name given to those who follow the revelation of the Sikh Gurus, which is the revelation of God who is the *satguru*, or true guru. Hence, a *gurmukh* is one oriented to the teachings of the *guru*.

all things. Nanak's compositions also indicate that God knows everything that happens and judges humans' actions according to the *hukam*.

## Conclusion

As we have seen in this chapter, Nanak employed *hukam* to cover a broad range of divine activity. Through the four dimensions, we see how *hukam* is the means by which God creates, sustains, and essentially controls the world through the divine order. For Nanak, it is the means by which the world was created and the order by which humans can know God. We saw that God created humans with a specific purpose, that is, to become enlightened and be liberated from rebirths. As part of the divine order for humans, liberation from the cycle of rebirth could be achieved by meditating of the *nam* and *shabad* and following the teachings of the Guru.<sup>78</sup> This order was given to humans and creation as a whole and the entire universe is subject to God's command.

Nanak's use of *hukam* displays continuity with the themes found in the HKM derivatives. Beginning with the first dimension, the Qur'an placed an emphasis on Allah as *al-ḥakīm*, or one who has full knowledge of everything that took place in creation. Allah created humans with an order that they obey his command, which was manifest in revelation and the prophets. As a guide for humans, Allah bestowed practical wisdom on his prophets to be an example of how to act according to the revelation. In the Qur'an, the third dimension of fate is of the utmost importance. As the judge of creation, Allah determined who was destined for paradise or hell. He judged the actions of humans, which included

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<sup>78</sup> Mann, *Sikhism*, 22-28.



knowing the hidden and unseen things in creation, such as the inner thoughts and beliefs. All of the general features are preserved in Nanak's understanding of *hukam*.

Nanak gave the divine order practical shape for humans by establishing a new community where the *hukam* could be carried out as an example for the world. His decision to name a successor to carry on the divine command given to him served to give further practical significance to the concept of *hukam* on the developing Sikh religion, as we will see in the coming chapter. At the moment, we can note that early on in the Sikh community, Nanak's mission was understood as a turning point in the history of the world, in which God bestowed a new order and revelation for humans to follow. In the Qur'an, *hukam* specifically referred to the divine command, which Allah bestowed throughout history, for humans to follow his will. Though contents of the Qur'an, which retells the history of Allah's interactions with humans throughout history, differ from the poetic explications on the nature of God and human found in the Granth, the role of *hukam* is similar. For Nanak, God's *hukam* is a command to both acknowledge the divine order that pervades creation, as well as obey a specific mode of living that was first revealed to Nanak. By following the *hukam*, for Nanak, one would necessarily meditate on *nam*, recite the *shabad*, and follow the teachings of the Guru, which were essentially God's teachings. The concept of *hukm* in the Qur'an was something was given by Allah to his chosen mediator. One who has *hukm* has the command from God has the *hikmah* necessary to lead others in the proper way of life. Certainly this understanding fits in with how

Nanak viewed himself. He appears conscious of the new revelation given to him even noting that he himself was commanded by God to preach.<sup>79</sup> Understanding his role as the leader and preceptor of revelation, Nanak's compositions indicated that his way of life would lead others to know God and achieve liberation. Nanak's vision is highlighted by the way he redefined *hukam*, as did Kabir, by incorporating elements from the dominant social worldview, such as *karma*, and *sansar*. This is demonstrated by the way he used *hukam* to introduce a new system of revelation, through the *guru*, *shabad*, and *nam*. While the *hukam* preserves a pattern of divine command and order that is consistent with Islam, the content is unique to Nanak's religious experience

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<sup>79</sup> GG 150, 722.

## Chapter Five

### The Sikh Gurus and *hukam*

This chapter analyzes the compositions of Nanak's successors, Gurus Angad, Amar Das, Ram Das, and Arjan in order to understand how the concept of *hukam* was developed over the formation of the Sikh text. The poetry of Nanak's successors reflected the changing social and historical environment and the manner in which they employed *hukam* in their compositions reflected an increasing emphasis on the Sikh community and the role of the Guru.<sup>80</sup> While their understanding of *hukam* as the divine command/order is essentially the same concept as Nanak's, they offer subtle insight into the features that constitute a distinctly Sikh way of life. Moreover, through this analysis, we will be able to see how the Sikh Gurus developed *hukam* in a manner that preserves the earlier Qur'anic themes in a more explicit manner than Nanak. Before we can analyze the concept of *hukam* in their compositions, we must first be familiar with the historical context in which the community developed under the leadership of the Gurus.

#### The Sikh community as an historical entity

The Sikh Gurus, in just over fifty years after the death Nanak, established sacred sites, sacred scriptures, distinct rituals and prayers, and an overall new pattern of living for the community of Sikhs. They sought to distinguish their community from Hindu and Muslim communities, as well as from rival claimants

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<sup>80</sup> J.S. Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*, 47-48

to the revelation of Nanak.<sup>81</sup> All of the Gurus analyzed in this chapter composed hymns that are included in the Granth and founded new communities (*sangats*) to spread the faith.

In 1539, Guru Angad became the second Sikh Guru shortly before Nanak died in Kartarpur. Born in 1504, Angad lived as a Hindu before he met Nanak and moved to Kartarpur to serve the Guru. Originally named Bhai Lehna, he was given the name Angad, meaning “limb”, by Nanak to indicate that his successor was a part of himself. Nanak’s decision to choose a devotee, rather than one of his children, is significant because it established a pattern of struggle for succession to Guruship. Mughal law, which came into effect during the life of Nanak, accorded that inheritances be divided amongst male sons. Nanak’s eldest son, Srichand, set himself up as a Guru in Kartarpur and heir to Nanak’s legacy in accordance with the customary laws.<sup>82</sup> This pattern of protest continued throughout the history of the Sikh Gurus, even after the lineage was confined to the family of Guru Ram Das. Thus, early on the Gurus had a motivation to both distinguish the Sikh community from others as well as assert their legitimate authority over that community.

Following Guru Nanak’s example of establishing new communities, Angad moved with his followers to the town of Khadur, where the Sikhs likely maintained a similar pattern of religious and social life as in Kartarpur.<sup>83</sup> Angad composed his poetry under the name of Nanak, which was understood as a direct

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<sup>81</sup> Mann, *Sikhism*, 30.

<sup>82</sup> Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*, 47-48.

<sup>83</sup> Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs: 1469- 1839* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1999), 49-52.

continuation of Nanak's message.<sup>84</sup> Although he had little new to offer by way of theological developments, Angad developed several practical innovations that strengthened the new community's sense of identity.<sup>85</sup> For one, Angad institutionalized the Gurmukhi script (derived an earlier script that existed in the Punab), effectively giving the Sikhs a sacred script (as opposed to Arabic) to record their growing corpus of compositions. Along with his wife Mata Khivi, he also expanded the tradition of *langar* or communal meal, where Sikhs could join in caste free/status free meals with their neighbors.

Amar Das, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Guru, was chosen by Angad in 1552, after which the sons of Angad claimed Khadur as their legal inheritance. Following the tradition of his predecessors, Amar Das established a new town called Goindwal. During his life, Sikhs from distant communities (*sangat*) began making pilgrimages to see the Guru at Goindwal, where he began to institute distinctly Sikh ceremonies for the growing community.<sup>86</sup> His poem titled *anand*, for instance, was composed to be sung at joyous occasions, such as the birth of a Sikh child. Moreover, to meets the demands of the growing community and to maintain cohesiveness, Amar Das assigned regional preachers (*manjis*) throughout the Punjab to spread the hymns of the Gurus (*gurbani*), which had been compiled and recited in daily worship since the founding of original community at Kartarpur. In addition, preachers were to collect offerings on behalf of the Guru, whose growing economic resources were evidenced through his numerous

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<sup>84</sup> The Sikhs commonly quote a verse by Satta and Balvand, two bards contained in the Granth, as an explanation of the process by which the revelatory status of Guru is mystically transmitted. (GG 967)

<sup>85</sup> Singh, *A History of the Sikhs: 1469- 1839*, 49-52. .

<sup>86</sup> Singh, *A History of the Sikhs: 1469- 1839*, 53-54.

projects, such as the construction of a sizeable tank for devotees to bathe in before praying communally at Goindwal.<sup>87</sup> Compositions in the Granth also indicate that his communal kitchen (*langar*) was well stocked with fine ingredients.<sup>88</sup>

One of Amar Das's more lasting decisions was to establish an organized text (*pothi*) of the previous Guru's compositions and of thinkers, such as Kabir and Namdev, whose ideas displayed harmony with the Sikh Gurus.<sup>89</sup> Deeply interested in the scriptural tradition, Amar Das composed numerous poems that expanded Nanak's ideas in light of the growing Sikh identity. As a means of further distinguishing the Sikhs, he composed and instituted specific prayers to be recited at the birth and death of any Sikh, foregoing the traditional Hindu rites.

Before he died in 1574, Amar Das selected his son-in-law, Bhai Jetha, as his successor and renamed him Guru Ram Das. Ram Das was unique as a Sikh Guru, for he was the first to be born in the tradition. While the previous Gurus had grown up as Hindus, Sikhism was the only way of life Ram Das had known. Upon becoming Guru, he moved the community to new town that became known as Ramdaspur, or the town of Guru Ram Das. The name of the city is interesting because it is a reference to the Guru, whereas Nanak and Amar Das opted to use epithets for God as the names for their towns, such as Kartarpur (abode of the creator) and Goindwal (city of Gobind, a name for God). His decision to

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<sup>87</sup>Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*, 50-51.

<sup>88</sup>GG 967.

<sup>89</sup>Singh, *The Bhagats of the Guru Granth Sahib*. 11-12. Guru Amar Das mentions, by name, Kabir and Namdev in a few of his hymns and even appears to have provided commentary on Kabir's work by inserting Kabir's *shaloks* into his own. Moreover, the *pothis* compiled at Goindwal were consulted by Guru Arjan when he compiled the Kartarpur *pothi*, which is the original extant copy of the Granth to be installed in the Harimandir in 1604.

name his center after himself reflects the growing importance and prominence of the Guru in the community.<sup>90</sup> At the center of the town, Ram Das constructed a large tank for bathing known as the lake of nectar (*amritsar*), which came to be the town's name. Though the Guru was the central figure in the community, the town also hosted numerous artisans, traders, and farmers that led to the development of Ramdaspur (Amritsar) as a prosperous center of the Punjab.<sup>91</sup> Ram Das composed and arranged the hymns of the Gurus (*gurbani*) according to a musical system, producing a style of *raga* that was unique to the classical pattern at the time. He built on the innovations of his father-in-law by composing a marriage hymn to be sung at the Sikh weddings.

Ram Das only served as Guru for seven years and in 1581 chose his youngest son Arjan to succeed as Guru. By naming a biological son, Ram Das likely hoped to end the tradition of internal struggle for the office of Guru.<sup>92</sup> Though the Guru lineage remained within his family (Sodhi) through Guru Gobind Singh, the position was always claimed by others. Being a direct descendant, Guru Arjan legally inherited Ramdaspur, which had begun to resemble a royal court, and the Guru came to be seen as the *sacha patishah* or true king. Keeping his residency at Ramdaspur did not stop Guru Arjan from spreading out and establishing new communities, such as Tarn Taran and Kartarpur (different

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<sup>90</sup> Mann, *The Making of Sikh Scripture*, 13-14.

<sup>91</sup> Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab* 51-53.

<sup>92</sup> The decision was to no avail as his eldest son Prithi Chand contested the decision and eventually took legal control of Amritsar, forcing the sixth Guru, Hargobind, to found the town of Kiratpur..

from the original community founded by Nanak), which became important religious and economic centers in their own right.<sup>93</sup>

The innovations under Guru Arjan were numerous and did much to give further identity to the Sikh community. He had a temple built in the center of the sacred pool dug by his father, which is the present day Golden Temple (*harimandir*). He also undertook the task of organizing and editing first authoritative Sikh text, the *Adi Granth* (original book), which included the works of numerous Indian holy men and court poets, in addition to the hymns of the Gurus, including his own.<sup>94</sup> The text was kept at the Golden Temple, where it immediately assumed an important role in the uniting the community. With a thriving sacred center, a new sacred text, and constant offerings of the devotees' pouring in, the Sikh court under Arjan eventually came to be seen as a threat to the Mughal emperor Jahangir, who had Arjan executed in 1606.<sup>95</sup> The martyrdom of Guru Arjan has been described as turning point for the Sikh movement, at which point the community took up overt military and political aspirations.<sup>96</sup>

### ***Hukam* in the compositions of the Sikh Gurus**

As we turn to analyze some of the compositions of the Sikh Gurus, we will see how *hukam* takes on a practical dimension for the community. What was

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<sup>93</sup> Khushwant Singh, 57.

<sup>94</sup> See Pashaura Singh, *Life and Work of Guru Arjan* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2006), 134-171. Guru Arjan's contribution of hymns to the text is the largest with 2063 included..

<sup>95</sup> Pashaura Singh, *Life and Work of Guru Arjan*, 205-244.

<sup>96</sup> For a discussion of the martyrdom of Guru Arjan, see Pashaura Singh's *Life and Work of Guru Arjan*, as well as Louis Fenech's *Martyrdom in the Sikh Tradition*.



important for Angad (and the later Gurus) was the increasing emphasis on Sikh mode of living in relation to *hukam*, as the following verse indicates

The Ambrosial Word of Gurbani proclaims the essence of reality. Spiritual wisdom and meditation are contained within it. The Gurmukhs chant it, and the Gurmukhs realize it. Intuitively aware, they meditate on it. By the Hukam of His Command, He formed the Universe, and in His Hukam, He keeps it. By His Hukam, He keeps it under His Gaze. O Nanak, if the mortal shatters his ego before he departs, as it is pre-ordained, then he is approved. ||1|| (1243)

Angad sets up the general worldview for the *gurmukhs*, which along with the word Sikh (meaning disciple), is another name for a follower of the teachings of the Guru(s). He emphasizes that those who are *gurmukhs* meditate and chant the hymns of the Gurus, which highlights the important role the Guru played as a socio-religious leader. Chanting the *gurbani* was a daily act to be carried out communally. For the *gurmukh*, this was the correct mode of worship and, according to Nanak and Angad, the only way to know the true nature of God. Nanak's compositions were understood as being divinely inspired and containing *shabad*, which we noted in the previous chapter was the word of God. By meditating upon the God's revelation, an individual could overcome their ego and be approved for liberation by God. As with Nanak, the world was created according to the *hukam* and God judges the actions of humans and determines who is worthy to be liberated from the cycle.

In another verse by Angad, we can see how he uses *hukam* to demonstrate the means by which God regulates creation, similar to Nanak.

This world is the room of the True Lord; within it is the dwelling of the True Lord. By His Command (*hukam*), some are merged into Him, and some, by His Command (*hukam*), are destroyed. Some, by the Pleasure of His Will, are lifted up out of Maya, while others

are made to dwell within it. No one can say who will be rescued. O Nanak, he alone is known as Gurmukh, unto whom the Lord reveals Himself. ||3|| (463)

Angad explains that God operates in the world through the *hukam*. We can see many of the dimensions that Nanak's expresses through *hukam* present in this verse. What Angad continuously adds to his verses regarding *hukam* is an emphasis on the *gurmukhs*, as the people who are blessed by God with the knowledge of *hukam*. Their actions are in harmony with God's order and they meditate on the revelation through God's will alone.

Amar Das developed the role of the Guru with a greater emphasis on the actions of the community. For him, *hukam* affected the practical affairs of the *gurmukhs* in the social realm by maintaining the natural cycles of the world.

All farming and trading is by Hukam of His Will; surrendering to the Lord's Will, glorious greatness is obtained. Under Guru's Instruction, one comes to understand the Lord's Will, and by His Will, he is united in His Union. By His Will, one merges and easily blends with Him. The Shabads of the Guru are incomparable. Through the Guru, true greatness is obtained, and one is embellished with Truth. He finds the Destroyer of fear, and eradicates his self-conceit; as Gurmukh, he is united in His Union. Says Nanak, the Name of the immaculate, inaccessible, unfathomable Commander is permeating and pervading everywhere. ||4||2|| (569)

Since the time of Nanak, daily living for the Sikhs consisted of a daily blend of working within societal and familial structures and maintaining a routine of devotional worship. Work in the community, which was almost entirely centered on trade and farming, was profitable because of the *hukam* of God. The *hukam*, in Nanak's first dimension, is responsible for the division of nature into seasons, upon which the Punjabi agrarian society depended. These actions were in

accordance with God's plan that humans must work in the world in order to be blessed by God.<sup>97</sup> Thus, to be a Sikh required social activity and devotional practices as part of God's *hukam*. As in Nanak's compositions, the *hukam* can only be known through the Guru's instruction. The Guru reveals the nature of God's will by bringing the devotees the *shabad*, which is contained within the Guru's compositions, which will lead to liberation. God, in the last line, is given the epithet *hukme* meaning "the commander" who orders humans to follow the revelation bestowed through the Guru, if they are to receive the divine grace.

This verse displays an interesting continuity with the themes discussed in the HKM derivatives, particularly with *ḥikmah*. We discussed in the first chapter that *ḥikmah* was a specific type of wisdom bestowed by Allah upon his messengers. The messengers were given *ḥikmah*, so that they could instruct and interpret the revelation for others to follow. The *sunnah* of Muhammad is the primary example for this, as noted earlier. In the Qur'an, in order to know the will of God, one must follow the practical example of his prophets. This sense of practical wisdom is exactly what we find in the verse by Amar Das in the Granth. The example that Sikhs follow was set by the Gurus, whose teachings, like the *ḥikmah* of the prophets, were directly given from God and considered revelation. The will of God can only be known by following the Gurus' teachings. In addition to bringing the revelation of God, *shabad* and *nam*, the Gurus provided a further practical example of social and religious action that was in accordance with the divine will. Following the divine will, for the Sikhs, meant earning an honest living through farming and trading and sharing the wealth with the community,

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<sup>97</sup> Mann, *Sikhism*, 24.

chanting, and meditating upon the hymns of the Gurus, either in a group or alone, and partaking in a communal meal (*langar*).<sup>98</sup> All of these acts are given praise in the compositions of the Gurus. Amar Das is explicit on this issue stating that the “*shabads* of the Gurus are incomparable.”

The following stanzas by Guru Ram Das offer insight to the actions of the *gurmukhs* by using *hukam* to reinterpret the rituals of traditions that were seen by the Gurus as “other”. In his compositions, frequent distinction is made between the *gurmukhs* (those who follow the true descendants of Nanak) and the *manmukhs* or *bemukhs* (who follow selfish desires and false Gurus).

One who The Gurmukh obeys the Order of her Husband Lord God; through the Hukam of His Command, she finds peace. In His Will (*hukam*), she serves; in His Will (*hukam*), she worship and adores Him. In His Will (*hukam*), she merges in absorption. His Will is her fast, vow, purity and self-discipline; through it, she obtains the fruits of her mind's desires. She is always and forever the happy, pure soul-bride, who realizes His Will; she serves the True Guru, inspired by loving absorption. O Nanak, those upon whom the Lord showers His Mercy, are merged and immersed in His Will (*hukam*). ||18|| The wretched, self-willed *manmukhs* do not realize His Will (*hukam*); they continually act in ego. By ritualistic fasts, vows, purities, self-disciplines and worship ceremonies, they still cannot get rid of their hypocrisy and doubt. (1423)

His use of *hukam* maintains its function as the way for *gurmukhs* to overcome ego by leading them to know and serve God. He describes the community of *gurmukhs* as married to God who is a husband. In the same way as a dutifully good wife obeys the will of her husband, so the Sikh community likewise obeys the *hukam* of God. His critique of the *manmukhs* is indicative of the differences between the emerging Sikh tradition and other religious traditions. In this verse, Ram Das is giving a practical example of actions not to be carried out by his

<sup>98</sup> GG 286, 301, 305, 396, 443, 588, 966-67

devotees. The *manmukhs* are caught in the falseness of ritualistic fasts, vows, and ceremonies. These institutions do not have importance for the Sikhs, since Nanak critiqued such outward observances in numerous verses.<sup>99</sup> *Manmukhs* can never overcome their egos, because they do not follow the teachings of the Gurus. For the *gurmukh*, following the *hukam* of God is a mode of worship, not the Hindu and Muslim ideas of ritual fasting, pilgrimage, or purity. The *gurmukhs* know the *hukam* by following the Guru's teachings and worshipping God in the proscribed Sikh manner, that is, by chanting the *gurbani* and working to make the community prosper. The above verse reiterates the practical role that Guru played in bringing others to follow God's true will. The *gurmukhs* who adhere to the Guru's teachings are destined overcome their ego and be liberated from the cycle of birth and death.

One who does not obey the Hukam, the Command of the Perfect Guru - that self-willed manmukh is plundered by his ignorance and poisoned by Maya. Within him is falsehood, and he sees everyone else as false; the Lord has tied these useless conflicts around his neck. (303)

The life the *manmukh* leads is not the Sikh way of living and, thus, false. The only way to be true is to follow the *hukam* of the Guru, which we noted in Nanak's compositions always referred to God's order for humans. However, in the compositions of the later Gurus, we have seen that the Guru increasingly referred to the human Gurus who upheld Nanak's revelation. By following the *hukam* or will of the Guru, one is necessarily a *gurmukh*, as opposed to the *manmukhs* who reject the Guru's teachings and do not abide by the *hukam* of God. This reasserts the emphasis on the practical example the Gurus play in

<sup>99</sup> GG 2, 155, 471, 489, 634, 687, 789, 1012, 1240

demonstrating how to adhere to the *hukam* of God. The verse further indicates that God is responsible for the condition of the *manmukhs*, since it is God who decides to bless some human with knowledge of the *hukam*.

In the following verse, composed by the fifth Guru, Arjan, the *hukam* of God is directly intertwined with the prosperity of the Sikh community. This verse makes it clear that God provides for the Sikh community because it is through the *hukam* that the community receives the future Guru.

The True Guru has truly given a child. The long-lived one has been born to this destiny. He came to acquire a home in the womb, and his mother's heart is so very glad. ||1|| A son is born - a devotee of the Lord of the Universe. This pre-ordained destiny has been revealed to all. ||Pause|| In the tenth month, by the Lord's Order (*hukam*), the baby has been born. Sorrow is dispelled, and great joy has ensued. The companions blissfully sing the songs of the Guru's Bani. This is pleasing to the Lord Master. ||2|| (396)

This verse by Guru Arjan is understood as an autobiographical hymn explaining the context for the birth of his only son and future successor, Hargobind.<sup>100</sup> After a long, childless marriage, the Guru and his wife, Ganga, had a child who was brought into the world by God's *hukam*. Nanak established the basic idea that all humans come into the world by the *hukam*, but Arjan notes that the specific event of the birth of Hargobind was the result of God's *hukam*. For Arjan, it was part of God's pre-ordained destiny for the Sikhs, who at that time were well aware of their status as a new religion.<sup>101</sup> The response of the community to the birth of their future Guru, as indicated in the passage, was to sing the Guru's hymns and rejoice in the occasion. The birth of the child and the response of the Sikhs is said to be pleasing to God and according to the *hukam*. This verse,

<sup>100</sup> Singh, *Life and Work of Guru Arjan*, 78-79.

<sup>101</sup> W. Owen Cole, *The Guru in Sikhism* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1982), 27-28.

unlike any other we have analyzed, points out that God is deeply involved in the worldly affairs of the Sikhs. We have seen earlier how the *hukam* was tied into the social activities of the Sikhs by affecting farming and trade, but here the *hukam* is sustaining the spiritual head of the Sikhs through the specific birth of the Guru.

Given the historical relevance of this passage, we can notice some similarities to the Qur'an, which is itself a sacred version of history. Throughout the Qur'an, Allah bestowed revelation to different prophets in successive periods of history.<sup>102</sup> The prophets who were given *hukam* had a special authority to lead humans on behalf of Allah. The verse by Guru Arjan implied that God was acting in history to preserve the Sikhs when faced with crisis. As the verse indicates, the Guru's role is upheld through God's divine order for the Sikh community.

Guru Arjan also gave *hukam* a practical application by making it part of daily ritual life for Sikhs. Sikh tradition maintains that in 1604, when Arjan installed the first Granth in the Golden Temple, he opened the text at random and began reading from the top of the page. The verse he read was to be meditated upon throughout the day, in addition to the other established daily ritual worship for the Sikhs.<sup>103</sup> The act and the particular verse chosen were known as a *hukamnama*, meaning a written *hukam*, in the sense that it was God's command that the Sikhs meditate upon the *shabad* of the Guru. This act indicated the authority of the new sacred scripture. *Hukam*, as a divine command can only be

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<sup>102</sup> Rajinder Kaur Rohi, 60-61.

<sup>103</sup> This was comprised of *japuji* and *jaap* in the morning, *kirtan sohila* and *rehiras* in the evening.

given by God, is given a new dimension by Guru Arjan, who declared that the text that had the authority to issue commands on behalf of God. Moreover, the Granth was comprised of the Guru's compositions, which highlights the role that they played in giving practical shape to the divine command.<sup>104</sup> *Hukam*, for Nanak was a very general concept, which was developed in Guru Arjan's compositions to refer to the notion that God has a practical expression for living according to the *hukam*. The ritual act of *hukam* instituted by Arjan gave Sikhs a way to ensure that they would carry out God's *hukam* in their daily lives by using the Granth. For the Sikhs, the Granth and the Guru became joint representatives of God's revelation and the way to know the *hukam*.

## Conclusion

Through the way that Guru Nanak's successors employed *hukam*, we have seen how God's order for humans came to be reflected by the actions of the Gurus and their community. Fundamentally, the concept of *hukam* remained the same as Nanak's. *Hukam* was still understood as the means for creation and the guiding force for humans. As God's order for humans, obeying the *hukam* was still the only path by which one could know the revelation and achieve liberation. However, as we have seen, the later Gurus utilize *hukam* largely in the context of the Guru's teachings and the actions of their distinct group of followers, the *gurmukhs* or Sikhs.

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<sup>104</sup> Following Arjan's establishment of an authoritative text, the later Gurus took up the Mughal practice of issuing *hukamnams* or (written *hukam*) as socio-political edicts. The *hukamnams* of the Gurus Hargobind and Tegh Bahadur, for instance, frequently address distant congregation with specific instructions from the Guru.



As we have seen, for the Sikh Gurus, *hukam* affected both the social and religious affairs of the Sikhs. The dominant professions of the Sikhs were given legitimization by the Sikh Gurus who indicate that their work was in accordance with the divine order. Trading, which Nanak and the Sikh Gurus families were associated with, was considered to be prosperous according to God's *hukam*. Farming, in particular, was intimately tied into the seasonal changes and other natural phenomena, all of which operated by *hukam*. In addition to the dictating the social realm, *hukam* was largely tied into a religious discipline. Since Nanak, we have seen that following the *hukam* meant obeying a new revelation given from God. In the later Guru's compositions, the *hukam* was reflected through the chanting of the Guru's hymns (*gurbani*) and following the Guru's instruction. The true Guru (God) was revealed in the hymns of the human Guru, who was ordered to lead others in following Gods will.

As the popularity and position of the Gurus increased, the way they understood *hukam* in relation to their mission displayed continuity with the concepts of *hikmah* and *hukam*. Like with the Prophet Muhammad, who brought a new revelation and interpreted through his *hikmah*, the Sikh Gurus both provided revelation through their hymns and instructed others in living according to the *hukam*. This meant leading the Sikhs in chanting their hymns, as well as explaining the proper social actions in accordance with the divine order. Both the prophets of Islam and the Sikh Gurus provided practical examples for obeying God's will. Additionally, as the Sikh notion of *hukam* came to reflect a historical context, it became clear how the Sikh understanding of God demonstrated

similarities with the Islamic (or Semitic, for that matter) conception of God.<sup>105</sup> As we saw in the Qur'an, Allah's *hukam* was issued throughout history as he bestowed revelation to prophets. When Guru Arjan declared that the future Guru, the preceptor of revelation for the Sikhs, was born according to God's *hukam*, he indicated that God was watching the Sikhs throughout history and guiding their destiny according to the *hukam*.

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<sup>105</sup> Rajinder Kaur Rohi, 60-61.

## Chapter Six

### The development of *hukam*

This paper has traced the development of the Sikh concept of *hukam* from its earliest textual roots in the Qur'an through the Sikh Granth and examined how *hukam* was institutionalized as part of daily life of the Sikh Gurus. *Hukam* began as a very specific concept in the Qur'an, referring to the command that all people obey the will of Allah. This command was given to Allah's human messenger who provided people with a practical example for carrying out the divine order. Kabir adopted *hukam* to loosely describe a new order of life that directly fit into a South Asian context. His compositions indicate that he understood the divine order as dictating the cycle of rebirth and liberation. He applied the broad Islamic notion of a divine order to a Hindu worldview in his syncretistic worldview. Nanak used the concept much in the same manner as Kabir and added to it an emphasis on the specific revelation, which he received from God. Through Nanak and the Sikh Gurus, the divine order implied by *hukam* began to take a distinct form. In Nanak's compositions, we noted several dimensions, which explained how *hukam* is an all-encompassing concept that displayed continuity with the Quranic emphasis on God's judgment, and the fate of human's souls. Through the innovations of the later Gurus, *hukam* came to signify the specifically Sikh mode of life, which was given practical shape as an example of God's order. Sikhs have clear social and devotional examples set by the Gurus in the Granth, which provide an opportunity to live according to the *hukam*. The Gurus understanding of *hukam* elucidated a uniquely Sikh worldview. The way

*hukam* is employed in the Sikh Granth suggests that the Gurus came to understand their mission as part of God's divine order of their community.<sup>106</sup> According to the Gurus, God's divine command was that people follow the revelation, by chanting the *shabad*, meditating on the *nam*, and obeying the Gurus' teachings, which were an example of the divine order in action. Only in this manner of following the worship could one hope to overcome the ego, destroy the *karma* of past lives, and merge with God in a state of liberation.

We can close by emphasizing that given the important continuity present in the Sikh and Muslim concepts of *hukam*, and due to the similarities in which both religions understand the divine order of the universe, it is necessary that scholars continue the trend of examining the Muslim influences on Sikh religion and history at all their intersections. We can not speak of the Sikh *hukam* as a distinct concept without first analyzing what *hukam* meant for those who initially employed the concept. The same method has proven true in cases where Sikh concepts have been examined in light of Hindu and Sant influence, and clearly there is much to be learned about how Sikhs understood the nature of God and revelation by examining how the *hukam* developed from an Islamic concept to a Sikh concept and ritual.

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<sup>106</sup> Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*, 50. GG 145, 229, 396, 797, 880.

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