

Sant Attar Singh Maharaj provides the
simplest answer to the most difficult question!

What is God?

By Baba Iqbal Singh

MAN
- EGO
= GOD

Man minus ego is God

From times immemorial, seekers of truth have been trying to find answer to the question - What is God and how can He be realized? Many a life time of penance, chanting **mantras**, prayers and deep intellectual knowledge have not led people to understand the divine concept of God. Sant Attar Singh Maharaj, a great saint of the twentieth century, has illustrated this through a parable from our ancient epic relating to Ashtavakar, a God-realized **rishi** and his disciple, King Janak.

Ashtavakar was the son of a **rishi**, Uddalka. Ashtavakar means 'eight twists in the body'. When Ashtavakar was still in the mother's womb, he heard his father giving a wrong explanation for a spiritual problem. Speaking from the womb, he tried to correct his father, who became furious and cursed his son. Thus, he was born with a deformed body and got his name Ashtavakar.

King Janak was a great seeker of truth. He met many scholars and spiritualists but they could not satisfy him with their lengthy and intellectual explanations. He believed that a God realized person should be able to explain the divine concept of God in a few words. After elaborate consultations, he proclaimed that if he did not get an answer to the divine concept of God in as brief a time-span as he put his foot into the stirrup of the saddle for climbing his horse, he would presume that God did not exist and he would turn an atheist.

Messages were sent across the country for an assembly of learned scholars, who had mastery in **Vedas, Shastras, Puranas, Smritis** etc. A date and time was fixed. Sixty thousand scholars assembled on the due date in the court of Janak. A golden throne was reserved for the person, who would enlighten King Janak.

The craving of King Janak for spirituality was conveyed to Ashtavakar through telepathy while he was in deep meditation in the nearby forest. He immediately perceived that this was the crucial moment to convey the divine concept to the King for spreading the divine message to the masses and saving mankind, or else, Janak turning an atheist, would lead to chaos in humanity through ego and its five vices of lust, anger, greed, attachment and pride. He immediately headed for the king's court to attend the congregation of spiritualists.

As Ashtavakar entered the court of Janak, everybody looking at his deformed body, began laughing. While he moved towards the golden throne, there was a big commotion in the court, as a deformed man was about to occupy the golden throne reserved for the person, who was to enlighten King Janak. After the congregation calmed down, Ashtavakar roared like a lion with the divine force and enquired of Janak, "Why have you gathered cobblers in this spiritual congregation?"

Janak was astonished but in all humility and with folded hands, replied;

"Sir, they are all learned people, who have studied **Vedas, Purana, Shastras** and **Smritis**. How are they cobblers?"

Ashtavakar said, "They are no better than cobblers since they have only seen my deformed body but have failed to perceive the divine within me." He added, "Only a cobbler analyzes the quality of skin. Those, who identify people merely by the skin are virtually cobblers".

Hearing this everyone in the court was stunned and felt ashamed of himself. Appreciating the deep humility and craving of Janak for divine

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wisdom, Ashtavakar enquired, "What do you want?"

"O, my Lord! I seek divine wisdom to understand God and merge with him", replied Janak.

Ashtavakar understood the king's curiosity and announced,

"To understand God, you will have to shed your ego. For this you will have to submit your mind, body and entire wealth to me. Only then you shall perceive the wisdom, which I will convey to you, through God residing in my body. However, to remove your doubt, as per your wish, I accept your condition to give you this wisdom as you put your foot in the stirrup to climb the horse"

To quench his immense quest for the Divine, Janak unhesitatingly and promptly submitted his mind, body and entire wealth at the service of Ashtavakar, who took Janak to his horse. As he started to put his foot in the stirrup, Ashtavakar said, "Who will receive the divine wisdom?"

"I, of course, I will", Janak replied.

"Where is your 'I', when your mind, body and wealth have already been given to me," retorted Ashtavakar and added, " 'I' means the ego, which is responsible for possession of mind, body and wealth."

As Janak put his foot into the stirrup, Ashtavakar said, "King Janak, since you have also submitted your 'I' to me, now your body is full of divine bliss, and your father, the Almighty God desires you to be in tune with Him. Now you are nothing but the Divine itself."

Janak instantly became a divine soul with his face glowing as brightly as the sun. He became one with the Lord and ruled his kingdom with divine wisdom.

King Janak is held in high esteem in the spiritual world for attaining divine wisdom while performing worldly duties. He has been referred to at several places in *gurbani*.

Bhai Gurdas in his *Vaars* comments, "Janak is a great disciple, who attained divine wisdom while performing his worldly duties".

Thus, Sant Attar Singh Maharaj explains that the divine wisdom cannot be attained through intellect but through the elimination of ego. God is nothing but 'Man minus the Ego.'



Truth is the only protective shield. It never fails. In moments of hostility or despair, only Truth can help us emerge unscathed. Gurbani is the repository of Truth. As Guru it is our lasting refuge. Truthful devotees seek only the support of truth. Only the truthful ones can render true support. Truth of one's being is ultimately one's true strength and support. Established in the Truth of Cosmos, one discovers one's truth of being.