

The Unique Ineffable Silent Symbol ੴ

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At the beginning of Jap Ji, Guru Naanak Sahib Ji has portrayed the *Oneness* of Karta Purakh by revealing ੴ. Scholars, researchers, and academics have hypothesised through their own research and understanding about the pronunciation and meaning of ੴ. All scholars and academics are of the same opinion that ੴ represents the *Oneness* of Karta Purakh, but the pronunciation has been deduced differently. ੴ has been pronounced as Ik Oa(n)kaar, Ek Oa(n)kaar, Ik Oa(n)gkaar, Ek Oamkaar, Ikoo, Ekoo, and many other variations.

With the use of the verses within the SGGS we will try to understand what the pronunciation of ੴ should be. It's safe to say that the pronunciation of ੴ cannot be other than the numerical 1, but the meaning and pronunciation of ੴ has been concluded differently by various scholars. But first we need to understand how the pronunciation has been derived at by the scholars.

Within Sri Guru Granth Darpan professor Sahib Singh has written a detailed explanation of his understanding of the meaning and pronunciation of ੴ.

The pronunciation of ੴ has eluded the Sikh panth for generations and has still yet to be understood. Since the Gurus have not written the pronunciation of ੴ within their Gurbani then perhaps there is no pronunciation, and we are searching for something that the Gurus did not intend for it to be pronounced. The Gurus simply represented the *Oneness* of Karta Purakh as ੴ.

Most likely the confusion arose from the vaar of Bhai Gurdas Ji, a Gursikh who was the first to scribe the Adi Granth (the first Granth) dictated by Guru Arjan Sahib Ji. The following is a verse from paurri (stanza) 15, vaar (ballad) 3 of the 40 vaars that were written by him,

ਏਕਾ ਏਕੰਕਾਰੁ ਲਿਖਿ ਦੇਖਾਲਿਆ।
Ekaa Ekankaar Likh Dekhaaliaa |
Numerical ੧(1) representing Ekankaar has been written.
ਊੜਾ ਓਅੰਕਾਰੁ ਪਾਸਿ ਬਹਾਲਿਆ।
Ooraa Oankaar Paas Bahaaliaa |
Alphabet ਓ representing Oankaar has been written beside it.

Within the Sri Guru Granth Sahib and Bhai Gurdas Ji's vaars ਏਕਾਰੁ (Ekankaar) and ਓਅੰਕਾਰੁ (Oankaar) have occurred numerous times. These were two of the many names of the *Oneness* that were used by the Gurus and Bhai Gurdas Ji during their times. ਏਕਾਰੁ (Ekankaar) is a numerical phonetic representation of ਏਕਾ (੧) and ਓਅੰਕਾਰੁ (Oankaar) is an alphabetical phonetic representation of ਊੜਾ (ੳ). Just as phonetic representations are used for the alphabets in other languages, Bhai Gurdas Ji has used ਏਕਾਰੁ (Ekankaar) and ਓਅੰਕਾਰੁ (Oankaar) as phonetic representations of ੧ and ੳ, respectively. Bhai Gurdas Ji certainly did not mean that ਏਕਾ is to be pronounced as ਏਕਾਰੁ and ਊੜਾ is to be pronounced as ਓਅੰਕਾਰੁ. If they are meant to be pronounced as such, then ੴ should be pronounced as ਏਕਾਰੁ ਓਅੰਕਾਰੁ and not as Ek O(n)kaar, Ik O(n)kaar or the many other variations.

If it were meant to be pronounced then without doubt the pronunciation **ੴ** would have been included in the compilation of Sri Guru Granth Sahib by Guru Arjan Sahib Ji, which Bhai Gurdas Ji was the scribe.

ੴ is composed of the first character in the Gurmukhi numerical system, **੧**, and the first character in the Gurmukhi alphabetical system, **ੴ**. Combined, **ੴ** signifies the *Oneness* of Karta Purakh. When composing words and numbers, the characters of both the numerical and alphabetical system form the building blocks of the communication media of the oral and written script. Guru Naanak Sahib Ji within Jap Ji has given clarification for the importance of letters through the following verse in SGGS p.4,

ਅਖਰੀ ਨਾਮੁ ਅਖਰੀ ਸਾਲਾਹ ॥

Akhree Naam Akhree Saalaah II

Through letters (words) Naam is attained, through letters (words) Karta Purakh is praised.

ਅਖਰੀ ਗਿਆਨੁ ਗੀਤ ਗੁਣ ਗਾਹ ॥

Akhree Giaan Geet Gunn Gaah II

Through letters (words) spiritual knowledge is attained and songs of (Karta Purakh's) Virtues (Gunn) are sung.

ਅਖਰੀ ਲਿਖਣੁ ਬੋਲਣੁ ਬਾਣੁ ॥

Akhree Likhann Bolann Baann II

Through letters (words) Shabad is written and spoken.

ਅਖਰਾ ਸਿਰਿ ਸੰਜੋਗੁ ਵਖਾਣੁ ॥

Akhraa Sir Sanjog Vakhaanu II

Those written letters (words) of destiny on the forehead (metaphor for fate, within).

ਜਿਨ ਏਹਿ ਲਿਖੇ ਤਿਸੁ ਸਿਰਿ ਨਾਹਿ ॥

Jin Ehi Likhe Tis Sir Naahi II

Are not written on the forehead (metaphor for fate, within) of the One who wrote them.

ਜਿਵ ਫੁਰਮਾਏ ਤਿਵ ਤਿਵ ਪਾਹਿ ॥

Jiv Furamaae Tiv Tiv Paeh II

As as (Karta Purakh) gives Hukam (of destiny) so does one receive.

Afterall, Guru Naanak Sahib Ji revealed the *Oneness* of Karta Purakh and removed any doubts that there is a second entity (duality). The Gurus imparted their Universal message without anything being *hidden* and certainly did not intend for anyone in search of enlightenment to be engrossed with a *fruitless* search to determine the pronunciation of **ੴ**. So, if within the Sri Guru Granth Sahib the Gurus have not stated how **ੴ** should be pronounced, then for all intent and purpose **ੴ** will be represented as the *Oneness* or the Omnipresence of Karta Purakh, which encompasses the *spirituality* of Guru Naanak Sahib Ji. Therefore, **ੴ** is the representation of the *Oneness*, the *One* reality that is in permanent existence (*Sat*), unknowable, unfathomable, incomprehensible, is beyond human sensory perception and thought, is infinite, but can be perceived through the Guru's Giaan.

Bhagat Kabir Ji explains in the following verse within the SGGS p.340, that there are no humanity constructed letters that can describe the infinite, unfathomable, incomprehensible nature of Karta Purakh. The letters that can describe Karta Purakh are not within these humanly constructed letters,

ਬਾਵਨ ਅਛਰ ਲੋਕ ਤ੍ਰੈ ਸਭੁ ਕਛੁ ਇਨ ਹੀ ਮਾਹਿ ॥

Baavan Achhar Lok Trai Sabh Kachh In Hee Maaeh II

Within the 52 letters everything in the world is governed in.

ਏ ਅਖਰ ਖਿਰਿ ਜਾਹਿਰੇ ਓਇ ਅਖਰ ਇਨ ਮਹਿ ਨਾਹਿ ॥੧॥

E Akhar Khir Jaahige Oi Akhar In Meh Naaeh ||1||

These letters will perish, but those letters (which can describe the Oneness) are not in these.

ਜਹਾ ਬੋਲ ਤਹ ਅਛਰ ਆਵਾ ॥

Jahaa Bol Teh Achhar Aavaa ||

That which can be spoken, the letters are used.

ਜਹ ਅਬੋਲ ਤਹ ਮਨੁ ਨ ਰਹਾਵਾ ॥

Jeh Abol Teh Man Na Rahaavaa ||

That which cannot be spoken, the mind has no descriptive letters.

ਬੋਲ ਅਬੋਲ ਮਧਿ ਹੈ ਸੋਈ ॥

Bol Abol Madh Hai Soee ||

Spoken and un-spoken (the Oneness) is within both.

ਜਸ ਓਹੁ ਹੈ ਤਸ ਲਖੈ ਨ ਕੋਈ ॥੨॥

Jas Oh Hai Tas Lakhai Na Koee ||2||

There is no writing (letters) to describe the nature of the Oneness.

Meaning: Humanity is governed by the letters (characters) within the alphabet system according to the languages spoken by the people. As humanity will perish so will these letters perish, but the letters that can describe the *Oneness* are not in these alphabetical systems. That which can be spoken of with the use of letters is spoken, but that which cannot be spoken of (the *Oneness*) the mind is not able to comprehend and cannot be spoken. Whether the mind can comprehend or not, the *Oneness* is still present in both. It is incomprehensible for the human mind to describe the nature of the *Oneness* with any kind of humanity created alphabetical system.

The letters used for these descriptive qualities are perishable and are not able to describe the nature of the *Oneness*, which is beyond the human sensory perception and thought. There are no humanly created characters (letters) that can describe the incomprehensible nature of the *Oneness*. The *Oneness* is unfathomable, ineffable, is beyond the boundaries of the human mind's perceptiveness. The following verse in the Sri Guru Granth Sahib explains the incomprehensible nature of the *Oneness*,

ਸਲੋਕ ॥

Salok ||

ਰੂਪੁ ਨ ਰੇਖ ਨ ਰੰਗ ਕਿਛੁ ਤਿਖੁ ਗੁਣ ਤੇ ਪ੍ਰਭੁ ਭਿੰਨ ॥

Roop Na Rekh Na Ra(n)g Kichh Tirahu Gunn Te Prabh Bhi(n)n ||

Prabh (Akaal Purakh) is without form, outline, colour and is beyond these 3 forms of qualities (Gunn).

ਤਿਸਹਿ ਬੁਝਾਏ ਨਾਨਕਾ ਜਿਸੁ ਹੋਵੈ ਸੁਪੂਰੰਨ ॥੧॥

Tiseh Bujhaae Naanakaa Jis Hovai Suprasa(n)n ||1|| SGGS p.283

Naanak, those become enlightened who the Oneness Graces.

and,

ਅਗਮ ਅਰੋਚਰੁ ਰੂਪੁ ਨ ਰੇਖਿਆ ॥

Agam Agochar Roop Na Rekhiaa ||

Inaccessible, incomprehensible, without form or outline.

ਖੋਜਤ ਖੋਜਤ ਘਟਿ ਘਟਿ ਦੇਖਿਆ ॥

Khojat Khojat Ghat Dhekhaa || SGGS p.838

By searching and searching the Oneness is seen within the mind (through the enlightenment of the Giaan from the Guru).

Within Gurbani the Gurus have given many descriptive qualities (*Gunn*) of the *Oneness*. These descriptive qualities (*Naam*) are all the attributes that the limited perceptiveness of the human mind can relate to. By internalising these qualities, *humility*, *compassion*, *contentment*, *kindness*, etc., is the way that the human mind can *experience* the *Oneness* (*Sahaj*, bliss). The *ecstasy* of *Sahaj* (bliss) that the mind *experiences* of the *Oneness* are the countless *roop* (*Gunn*, forms) that are perceived within. This *experience* cannot be described by any letters or that which can be spoken of. The Gurus have spoken of the countless *roop* (*Gunn*, forms) of the *Oneness* that are perceived within the mind,

ਤਉ ਕਾਰਣਿ ਸਾਹਿਬਾ ਰੰਗਿ ਰਤੇ ॥

Tau Kaarann Saahibaa Ra(n)g Rate II

For (experiencing) You Saahibaa, (many) are imbued in (Your) love.

ਤੇਰੇ ਨਾਮ ਅਨੇਕਾ ਰੂਪ ਅਨੰਤਾ ਕਹਣੁ ਨ ਜਾਹੀ ਤੇਰੇ ਗੁਣ ਕੇਤੇ ॥

Tere Naam Anekaa Roop Ana(n)taa Kahann Na Jaahee Tere Gunn Kete II SGGS p.358

Your descriptive names are many, endless are Your roop (forms), Your (countless) Gunn (Virtues) cannot be spoken of.

The Gurus speak of the *roop* (form) of the *Oneness* when the mind has been graced with *Sahaj* (absolute bliss),

ਸਤਿ ਸਤਿ ਸਤਿ ਪ੍ਰਭੁ ਸੁਆਮੀ ॥

Sat Sat Sat Prabh Suaamee II

Forever permanent is the One Master.

ਗੁਰ ਪਰਸਾਦਿ ਕਿਨੈ ਵਖਿਆਨੀ ॥

Gur Parasaadh Kinai Vakhiaanee II

By the Guru's Grace it has been spoken.

ਸਚੁ ਸਚੁ ਸਚੁ ਸਭੁ ਕੀਨਾ ॥

Sach Sach Sach Sabh Keenaa II

All that is formed is Real (*Karta Purakh*).

ਕੋਟਿ ਮਧੇ ਕਿਨੈ ਬਿਰਲੈ ਚੀਨਾ ॥

Kot Madhe Kinai Biralai Cheenaa II

Only a rare person among countless knows this.

ਭਲਾ ਭਲਾ ਭਲਾ ਤੇਰਾ ਰੂਪ ॥

Bhalaa Bhalaa Bhalaa Teraa Roop II

Sublime is Your roop (form).

ਅਤਿ ਸੁੰਦਰ ਅਪਾਰ ਅਨੂਪ ॥

At Su(n)dhar Apaar Anoop II

Extremely exquisite, infinite, and incomparable.

ਨਿਰਮਲ ਨਿਰਮਲ ਨਿਰਮਲ ਤੇਰੀ ਬਾਣੀ ॥

Niramal Niramal Niramal Teree Baannee II

Purifying (of the mind) is Your Giaan.

ਘਟਿ ਘਟ੍ਰੁ ਸੁਨੀ ਸ੍ਰੂਵਨ ਬਖਾਣੀ ॥

Ghat Ghat Sunee Sravan Bakhayaanee II

Listened with ears and spoken (internalised) within the mind.

ਪਵਿਤ੍ਰ ਪਵਿਤ੍ਰ ਪਵਿਤ੍ਰ ਪੁਨੀਤ ॥

Pavitr Pavitr Pavitr Puneet II

Sanctified purified (the mind becomes).

ਨਾਮੁ ਜਪੈ ਨਾਨਕ ਮਨਿ ਪ੍ਰੈਤਿ ॥ ॥੮॥੧੨॥

Naam Japai Naanak Man Preet II ||8||12|| SGGS p.279

Naanak, those who internalise the Naam, their mind becomes satiated (in absolute bliss).

The above verses clarify that the *Oneness* cannot be comprehended by thought or by the boundary limited sensory perceptiveness of the human consciousness. Letters, written or spoken are not able to describe the indescribable and will perish one day. But the Gurus explain that the *Oneness* can be perceived within the mind through enlightenment by the Shabad-Guru and internalising the *Naam* (*Gunn*, Virtues), perceiving the *roop* (*Gunn*, form) and becoming satiated with *Sahaj* (absolute bliss).

Sikhs have been trying to find the correct pronunciation of ੴ for centuries. Many scholars, academics and researchers have deduced the pronunciation according to their own research and understanding. Perhaps, we Sikhs are trying to find the solution whilst thinking "inside the box," when we should be looking for an answer by thinking "outside the box."

The ੴ is a representation of the *Oneness* that is infinite, incomprehensible, unfathomable, beyond the human minds limited boundary of thought and sensory perception. No letters or words can describe the *Oneness* beyond these limitations of the human mind.

Everything within *Sargun* will perish (*dissolve* back into the *Oneness*) including the letters and words. The descriptive names that humanity has given to the *Oneness* will also perish. The *Oneness* is imperishable, is *Sat* (in permanent existence) and is always the *One*. *One* (Ik) and *Sat* both pertain to the *Oneness* that is not perishable and is beyond the human comprehension.

ਕੀਏ ਬਾਰ ਪਸਰਿਓ ਪਾਸਾਰ ॥

Kiee Baar Pasario Paasaar II

Many times, there is spread of Sargun (of Akaal Purakh).

ਸਦਾ ਸਦਾ ਇਕੁ ਏਕੰਕਾਰ ॥

Sadhaa Sadhaa Ik Eka(n)kaar II SGGS p.276

(Akaal Purakh) Always remains as One (Nirgun and Sargun).

ਤਿਸ ਕਾ ਕੀਆ ਤਿਭਵਣ ਸਾਰੁ ॥

Tis Kaa Keeaa Tirabhavann Saar II

The three worlds have been formed by the One.

ਓਹੁ ਅਗਮੁ ਅਰੋਚਰੁ ਏਕੰਕਾਰੁ ॥

Oh Agam Agochar Eka(n)kaar II

The One is unfathomable and incomprehensible.

Since the incomprehensible *One* cannot be described with any letters or words, the Gurus themselves did not mention the pronunciation of ੴ within the Sri Guru Granth Sahib. Therefore, ੴ is a representation of the *One* reality, the *Oneness* that is infinite, incomprehensible to the human mind. So, how can we mere humans even begin to describe the indescribable with humanity created perishable letters and words, which have limitations?

ੴ is a unique ineffable *silent* symbol that is a representation of the *Oneness*, the *One* reality that is *Sat* (in forever permanent existence), incomprehensible, unfathomable, infinite, ineffable, beyond the boundaries of human sensory perception and thought. All religions have a symbol representing their own faiths, but ੴ is the only symbol known to humanity that represents the *One* reality that is beyond human comprehension. This is Guru Naanak Sahib Ji's unique enlightenment.

All religious symbols and their representations within *Sargun* (Universe) will eventually perish (*dissolve*), but the representation of , which is the *Oneness, Nirgun, Nirankaar*, will not perish. The *One* reality is forever in permanent existence (*Sat*).