

46th ਸਲੋਕ \ Couplet

ਤੀਰਥ ਬਰਤ ਅਰੁ ਦਾਨ ਕਰਿ ਮਨ ਮੈ ਧਰੈ ਗੁਮਾਨੁ ॥
ਨਾਨਕ ਨਿਹਫਲ ਜਾਤ ਤਿਹ ਜਿਉ ਕੁੰਚਰ ਇਸਨਾਨੁ ॥੪੬॥
teerath barat ar dhaan kar man mai dharai gumaan ||
naanak nihafal jaat teh jiau ku(n)char isanaan ||46||

Literal Meaning: Those who make pilgrimages to sacred shrines, observe ritualistic fasts and make donations to charity while still taking pride in their minds O Nanak, their actions are useless, like the elephant, who takes a bath, and then rolls in the dust.

Literal Word Meanings:

ਤੀਰਥ (teerath) = pilgrimage
ਬਰਤ (barat) = fast
ਅਰੁ (ar) = and
ਦਾਨ (dhaan) = charity
ਕਰਿ (kar) = do
ਮਨ (man) = mind
bath
ਮੈ (mai) = in
ਧਰੈ (dharai) = holds
ਗੁਮਾਨੁ (gumaan) = pride

ਨਿਹਫਲ (nihafal) = useless
ਜਾਤ (jaat) = go
ਤਿਹ (teh) = that
ਜਿਉ (jiau) = like
ਕੁੰਚਰ (ku(n)char) = elephant
ਇਸਨਾਨੁ (isanaan) =

We have explored the literal meanings of the verse, along with the word-by-word breakdown. Now, we begin a deeper journey — to understand what the verse is pointing toward. The following exercises are designed to encourage out-of-the-box thinking. They may feel open-ended, and at times even challenging — that is intentional. Growth often begins where certainty ends.

Exercise 1: Common Understanding

Most people understand this Salok as talking about:

- ☐ Visiting all religious sites
- ☐ Donating to temples or Churches or Gurdwaras
- ☐ Fasting or performing rituals

Exercise 2: Question the Idea of “Outer Acts”

Think carefully:

Scenario:

A middle-aged person asks: “*Have you visited all the Gurudwaras in the world?*”

How do you feel if someone uses this to judge you?

- ☐ Offended / insulted
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Curious / Reflective

Question:

What does your inner self really say about someone who judges others based on appearances or achievements?

- ☐ True religiousness is about outer acts
- ☐ True religiousness is about inner mind-state

Exercise 3: Pride in Charity or Seva

Reflect:

A person donates every month but brags about it

A person fasts but gets angry or boasts, saying “*I do this because I am fasting*”

Question:

Will these acts still hold value if nobody recognizes them?

- ☐ Yes, they are inherently valuable
- ☐ No, they were done for pride / recognition

Exercise 4: Elephant Analogy

Imagine: An elephant bathes in water, rolls in dust, gets dirty again.

Question:

Which of the following does the Salok point to?

- ☐ The act itself (donation, pilgrimage, fasting)
- ☐ The mental state behind the act

- ☐ How others perceive you
- ☐ Physical cleanliness

Exercise 5: Inner Mind-State Reflection

When I do something spiritual or charitable, my mind is mostly:

- ☐ Proud / boastful
- ☐ Content / humble
- ☐ Distracted / thinking about recognition
- ☐ Focused on the Divine / inner growth

Do you think external acts alone can cleanse the mind if pride remains?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

Exercise 6: Psychological Application

Think about yourself:

When ego or pride controls your actions, your mind gets “dirty” again like the elephant.

The outer act may look good but internal transformation is missing.

Questions:

Have you ever done something ritualistically, but later realized it didn’t change your mind or behavior?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If yes, what blocked the transformation?

- ☐ Ego / Pride
- ☐ Attachment / Desire for recognition
- ☐ Impatience / misunderstanding
- ☐ Other: _____

Exercise 7: Self-Reflection & Integration

Your inner mind is the real “pilgrimage” or “charity”

External acts are fruitless without humility, contentment, and detachment

Questions:

How can I shift my focus from outer recognition to inner transformation?

What small action today can I do purely for the sake of inner growth?

Am I willing to practice detachment and humility even if nobody sees it?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Sometimes

Spiritual Meaning (Word → Wisdom)

ਤੀਰਥ (teerath) = Pilgrimages/holy places—outer religious actions

ਬਰਤ (barat) = Fasting/vows—self-discipline done as a practice

ਅਰੁ (ar) = And—listing multiple “good deeds”

ਦਾਨ (dhaan) = Charity/giving—helping others materially

ਕਰਿ (kar) = Doing—actions on the outside

ਮਨ ਮੈ (man mai) = In the mind—where the real test happens

ਧਰੈ (dharai) = Holds on to—keeps tight inside

ਗੁਮਾਨੁ (gumaan) = Ego/pride—“I am holy, I am better, look what I did”

ਨਿਹਫਲ (nihafal) = Fruitless—no real spiritual result

ਜਾਤ (jaat) = Goes—effort gets wasted

ਕੁੰਚਰ (ku(n)char) = Elephant—symbol of big outer action without inner change

ਇਸਨਾਨੁ (isanaan) = Bathing—cleansing ritual

Write Your Own Interpretation:

Take Action → Living the Wisdom

Follow these practical action examples to bring the teaching into your daily actions and choices.

Drop spiritual superiority - Avoid comparing your devotion with others.

Practice without display - Keep your worship sincere, not just for show or routine.

Accept correction humbly - Let guidance refine you without resistance.

Release the need for praise - Serve and pray without seeking recognition.

Examine your intention - Ensure your practice is for transformation, not reputation.

Reflect and Explore

These discussion questions can be explored alone or in a group to encourage reflection, learning, and honest sharing, with no right or wrong answers.

Can good deeds really change you if pride is still inside? Have you seen this in your own life?

How can you make sure your work or service leads to real inner growth, not just praise?

What habits seem good on the outside but don't truly change you? (Example - Reading self-help books but living the same way)

How often do you check if your actions come from humility instead of ego?

What practical steps can help you understand ego and grow with awareness?
