

PILGRIMAGE

In almost all religions the custom of pilgrimage is common. Sikhism does not believe in the aims and purposes which some others have attached to it. If a pilgrimage is undertaken for the sake of an outing, to view a new countryside or to visit a place of some historic importance, or to escape from the burning heat of the plains and enjoy the bracing climate of the hills for a few weeks, then it is alright. If it is made in, and to benefit by, a company of persons of knowledge and noble character or if it is undertaken to refresh one's memory of the noble and valorous deeds of heroes connected with the places to be visited, or to help in the management or establishment of a historic place of worship or to make use of the assemblage of the visitors at a place to promote the mission or to put up new ideas, then it is good. Even the Satguru himself visited such places to take advantage of the gatherings there to spread the *Shabd*.

But if it is done with the expectation that by having a dip in water at a particular place, the bad actions done and sins committed will be atoned and one would get a free permit for the future, or if it is done because the Guru's spirit is residing at a particular place and waiting to receive and bless the pilgrim visitor, or if it is undertaken under the impression that a visit to a certain place and a dip in a particular tank (*sarovar*) or river will bring about salvation, then it is totally against the basic principles of Sikhism. Our history tells us that after the sixth Nanak, none of the Gurus ever visited Amritsar which is our most important religious centre. The ninth Guru once did go there but he was not allowed to enter the temple.

If sanctity, as mentioned above, were attached, some one of the later Gurus would certainly have made a visit even of a short duration. There are definite injunctions about it by the Satguru :

I would bathe at sacred places if it could please Him, otherwise, what is the use of bathing.

ਤੀਰਥ ਨਾਵ ਜੇ ਤਿਸੁ ਭਾਵਾ ਵਿਣੁ ਭਾਣੈ ਕਿ ਨਾਇ ਕਰੀ ॥ (ਜਪ)

Pilgrimages, austerities, acts of mercy, charity, and gifts if at all one earns any appreciation for these acts, it is only an insignificant amount.

ਤੀਰਥੁ ਤਪੁ ਦਇਆ ਦਤੁ ਦਾਨੁ ॥

ਜੇ ਕੇ ਪਾਵੈ ਤਿਲ ਕਾ ਮਾਨੁ ॥ (ਜਪ)

By hearing the Name, obeying it, and loving it, we wash our sins at the sacred fountain within us.

ਸੁਣਿਆ ਮੰਨਿਆ ਮਨਿ ਕੀਤਾ ਭਾਉ ॥

ਅੰਤਰ ਗਤਿ ਤੀਰਥਿ ਮਲਿ ਨਾਉ ॥ (ਜਪ)

Why go to bathe at a pilgrim place, for the real pilgrimage is in *Naam*, the understanding of the *Shabd* and the inner wisdom.

ਤੀਰਥ ਨਾਵਣ ਜਾਉ ਤੀਰਥੁ ਨਾਮੁ ਹੈ ॥

ਤੀਰਥੁ ਸਬਦ ਬੀਚਾਰੁ ਅੰਤਰਿ ਰਿਆਨੁ ਹੈ ॥ (ਧਨਾਸਰੀ ਮ : ੧ ਛੰਤ)

There is no other pilgrimage place equal to the Guru; because it is the Guru who is the pool of contentment.

ਗੁਰ ਸਮਾਨਿ ਤੀਰਥੁ ਨਹੀਂ ਕੋਇ ॥

ਸਰੁ ਸੰਤੋਖੁ ਤਾਸੁ ਗੁਰੁ ਹੋਇ ॥ (ਪ੍ਰਭਾਤੀ ਮ : ੧)

Wisdom is the real pilgrim place within us, the true Guru has revealed it.

ਅੰਤਰਿ ਤੀਰਥੁ ਰਿਆਨੁ ਹੈ ਸਤਿਗੁਰਿ ਦੀਆ ਬੁਝਾਇ ॥ (ਵਾਰ ਵਡਹੰਸ ਮ : ੩)

The mind is soiled, it does not concentrate on One God; the innerself is filled with dirt of duality;

ਇਹੁ ਮਨੁ ਮੈਲਾ ਇਕੁ ਨ ਧਿਆਏ ॥

ਅੰਤਰਿ ਮੈਲੁ ਲਾਗੀ ਬਹੁ ਦੂਜੈ ਭਾਏ ॥

The egocentric repairs to banks of holy bathing places and different countries and gathers more and more dirt of ego.

ਤਿਟ ਤੀਰਥਿ ਦਿਸੰਤਰਿ ਭਵੈ ਅਹੰਕਾਰੀ ਹੋਰੁ

ਵਧੇਰੈ ਹਉਮੈ ਮਲੁ ਲਾਵਣਿਆ ॥ (ਮਾਝ ਮ : ੩)

True Guru is the real pilgrim place; for he dwells on the Lord's Name day and night.

ਤੀਰਬੁ ਪੂਰਾ ਸਤਿਗੁਰੂ ਜੋ ਅਨਦਿਨ ਹਰਿ ਹਰਿ ਨਾਮੁ ਧਿਆਏ ॥ (ਵਾਰ ਮਾਝ ਮ : ੧)
A stone is not purified if bathed at a sacred place, when the mind is soiled with the dirt of ego.

ਤੀਰਥਿ ਨਾਇ ਕਹਾ ਸੁਚਿ ਸੈਲੁ ॥
ਮਨ ਕਉ ਵਿਆਪੈ ਹਉਮੈ ਸੈਲੁ ॥ (ਭੈਰਵ ਮ : ੫)

In fact, it is the mind which is to be controlled, moulded and attuned to the Will of God. The Satguru teaches us that this can be done by dipping the mind in the spiritual nectar of the Satguru's Sarovar of *Gurbani* and cleansing it of all prejudices. In *Rag Majh*, the third Satguru says :

The Satguru is the real Pool-Of-Nectar wherein the mind is washed, cleaned of dirt.

ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਹੈ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤਸਰੁ ਸਾਚਾ ਮਨੁ ਨਾਵੈ ਸੈਲੁ ਚੁਕਾਵਣਿਆ ॥

Without this, the ninth Guru in *Rag Bilaval* says :

If one performs pilgrimages and even keeps fasts, but the mind is not in one's control;

ਤੀਰਥ ਕਰੈ ਬ੍ਰਤ ਵੁਨਿ ਰਾਖੈ ਨਹ ਮਨੁਆ ਬਾਸਿ ਜਾ ਕੋ ॥

I tell him the truth that his actions are all useless.

ਨਿਹਫਲ ਧਰਮੁ ਤਾਹਿ ਤੁਮ ਮਾਨਹੁਸਾਚੁ ਕਹਤ ਮੈ ਯਾ ਕਉ ॥

The tenth Satguru in the ten *Swayyas* recited when preparing the initiation nectar says :

Men bathe at places of pilgrimage, exercise mercy, control their passions, bestow gifts, exercise abstinence, perform various special ceremonies.

ਤੀਰਥ ਨਾਨ ਦਇਆ ਦਮ ਦਾਨ ਸੁ ਸੰਜਮ ਨੇਮ ਅਨੇਕ ਬਿਸੇਖੈ ।

Yet without loving the Supreme Being, even kings are of no account.

ਸ੍ਰੀ ਭਗਵਾਨ ਭਜੇ ਬਿਨ ਭੂਪਤਿ ਏਕ ਰਤੀ ਬਿਨ ਏਕ ਨ ਲੇਖੈ ।

Again :

This world is lost, and the next also, for those who go about bathing even in the seven oceans.

ਨਾਤ ਫਿਰਿਓ ਲੀਏ ਸਾਤ ਸਮੁੰਦਰਨ ਲੇਕ ਗਾਯੇ ਪਰਲੋਕ ਗਾਵਾਯੋ ।

Caravans of Sikhs on buses, trucks, tractor-trolleys, cycles, bullock-carts, and on foot going to places of so-called pilgrimages,

and gatherings on *Pooranmasis* (fullmoons), *Amavas* (darknight), *Sankrants* (first of the Bikrami months), *Ashtamis* (eighth of the month), and *Dasmis* (tenth of the month), etc., have become a common sight nowadays. But these are all aping of Hindu ways and rituals. In the Satguru's way, they have no place or value. It has been laid down in our Scripture :

Those who meditate on the Name, their affairs are all taken care of.

ਜਿਨਿ ਜਿਨਿ ਨਾਮੁ ਧਿਆਇਆ ਤਿਨ ਕੇ ਕਾਜ ਸਰੇ ॥

Who repeat the Name of True God Guru, are declared truthful in the Divine Court.

ਹਰਿ ਗੁਰੂ ਪੂਰਾ ਆਰਾਧਿਆ ਦਰਗਹ ਸਚਿ ਖਰੇ ॥

All the months, days, and minutes are auspicious and good for him on whom God looketh with favour.

ਮਾਹ ਦਿਵਸ ਮੂਰਤ ਭਲੇ ਜਿਸ ਕਉ ਨਦਰਿ ਕਰੇ ॥ (ਬਾਰਾ ਮਾਹਾ ਮਾਝ ਮ : ੫)

and then :

Whatever the Perfect Lord does comes about.

ਆਪੇ ਪੂਰਾ ਕਰੇ ਸੁ ਹੋਇ ॥

Considerations of lunar or solar days create sense of duality.

ਇਹਿ ਬਿਤੀ ਵਾਰ ਦੂਜਾ ਦੋਇ ॥

Without the True Guru there is pitch darkness.

ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਬਾਝਹੁ ਅੰਧੁ ਗੁਬਾਰੁ ॥

Only ignorant fools show any regard for any such particular days and time.

ਖਿਤੀ ਵਾਰ ਸੇਵਹਿ ਮੁਗਾਧ ਗਵਾਰ ॥ (ਬਿਲਾਵਲ ਮ : ੩)