Teaching Sikh Heritage to the Youth

Lessons Learnt

Institute of Sikh Studies
Chandigarh

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Dr Gurbakhsh Singh

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FOREWORD

It is a pleasure to write a foreword for this volume, not only because it comes from Dr Gurbakhsh Singh, but more so because it is a unique contribution to literature on Sikh religion.

The author needs no introduction. Readers know him through his numerous earlier writings notably, *The Sikh Faith and Questions and Answers*, which have gone through several editions, and have been published by numerous agencies including the SGPC. The general public is familiar with him as the 'Roving Ambassador of Sikhism' not only in India and the East (Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, etc.) but also in the West, particularly the United Kingdom, USA, and Canada. It is, however, the youth which has the major claim on his time.

He was born in village Gill (Ludhiana, Punjab) on September 15, 1927. During his undergraduate years he studied at Khalsa College, Amritsar. In 1963, he was awarded a Ph.D. degree by the Ohio State University (USA). He served as a Professor and Dean at the Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana, till 1984.

He was inspired by Sant Teja Singh of Mastuana (M.A., LL.B., A.M., Harvard University, a great educationist and spiritualist) to preach Sikhism to the youth in North America. In 1984, Dr Gurbakhsh Singh gave up his job at the University and devoted himself to the teaching of Sikh religion.

Gurmat Camps for youth are his major activity. He has used this medium in the West so effectively that it has now become almost a movement. With his understanding of the

basic philosophy of Sikhism, and his deft handling of the youth, he has turned the tide of rapidly growing apostasy to a deep commitment to Sikh philosophy. There are not many living scholars or preachers who touch such a responsive chord among youth as Dr Gurbakhsh Singh.

The present book furnishes glimpses of these youth camps. The episodes have been carefully selected and make a fascinating reading. Each episode has a moral independent of the rest. Yet there is a continuity of thought which compels the reader to continue and finish the book in one sitting.

The episodes included are personal experiences of the author, which makes it a kind of auto-*janamsakhi*. But these are only a fraction of the whole fund of his rich encounters with life. I hope he will record more of them soon. These episodes are indeed deeply inspiring and generate spontaneous faith and genuine pride in the great Sikh heritage.

Dr Gurbakhsh Singh deserves gratitude of the Panth for the service rendered by him through this book, which, I have no doubt, will receive enthusiastic welcome in all quarters interested in promotion of the great message of the Gurus.

In the end, I wish to express my gratitude to the Canadian Sikh Study & Teaching Society, Vancouver, for the initiative and the financial contribution for this publication.

Kharak Singh
Institute of Sikh Studies
959, Sector 59, SAS Nagar-160 059

January 1, 1999

FOREWORD TO THE SECOND EDITION

It is with humility and reverence, that this book goes in for a reprint. Institute of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh, once again dedicates this book to the youngsters, who are the future of the world.

Passing the torch of faith and culture to the next generation is both a sacred duty and a modern challenge. Today's young people navigate a complex, hyper-connected world, making it more vital than ever to ground them in the foundational principles of selfless service, equality, and spiritual resilience. True connection, however, cannot be forced through rigid mandates; it must be nurtured through meaningful conversation, patience, and mutual respect.

This reprint edition of Teaching Sikh Heritage To The Youth by Dr. Gurbaksh Singh ji, serves as an invaluable roadmap for that journey. Rooted in real-world experiences from global youth camps, the insights within these pages stem from direct, honest interactions with young minds. Rather than offering dry historical recitations, the text addresses the genuine questions, doubts, and identity challenges that modern adolescents face, making the profound wisdom of the Gurus highly accessible and practical for daily life.

Releasing this reprint now is incredibly vital. As youth search for purpose amid shifting societal norms, this book reframes heritage not as a burden of rules, but as an empowering anchor of strength and ethical clarity. It provides educators, parents, and community leaders with a compassionate framework to guide the next generation,

helping them embrace their identity with clear understanding and heartfelt pride.

May this text inspire young readers to carry their heritage forward with confidence, dignity, and grace.

The Institute of Sikh Studies expresses its profound gratitude to Dr. Paramjit Singh, Secretary, Institute of Sikh Studies, for his invaluable academic and financial support in bringing out this reprint. He personally undertook the painstaking task of proofreading the manuscript on multiple occasions, ensuring its accuracy and quality for the reprinting of the book. The Institute deeply appreciates his dedicated efforts, generosity, and unwavering commitment to the cause of Sikh scholarship.

Gurbir Singh Machaki
President,
July 1, 2026 Institute of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In the spring of 1997, I was in India to participate in the *Gurmat Chetna Lehr*. In Delhi, during informal talks with friends, I shared a few of my experiences regarding my discussions with the Western youth. It was suggested that I publish these episodes because they were useful lessons for all people. I liked the idea and consequently recorded them into this book.

The first six articles were written in July 1997 in Birmingham, U.K. which I visited on my return journey. They were typed and repeatedly corrected by a student, Jaskaran Singh, his sister and their cousin. The remaining job was completed in September, 1997 by two students, Jasjit Singh and Baldeesh Singh in Vancouver, Canada.

In November 1997, I again went to India to join the Gurmat Chetna Lehr. I requested Sardar Raminder Singh of Patiala and Bibi Prabhjot Kaur of Chandigarh to suggest improvements to the draft. Sardar Pal Singh of Edmonton, Canada, Taranjit Singh of Richmond, Canada and Ms Sumit Kaur of Chandigarh, India also made useful suggestions. On the advice of a friend, the intended title *Lessons Learnt From the Youth* was changed to *Teaching Sikh Heritage to the Youth - Lessons Learnt* because most of the articles are related to the discussions with the youth. Two students, Sandip Singh and Tarndip Singh of Burnaby, Canada read the manuscript to finalize the draft for printing. Mohinderpal Singh of Vancouver, Canada made useful editorial contributions and typeset the final copy. All of them deserve the thanks of the author.

The learning of these lessons was made possible by the kindness of more than three dozen directors of Sikh youth

camps in many countries. Over the last fourteen years, they have invited me to address the youth and have free and frank discussions with them. I am obliged to all of them for their invaluable help and contributions.

Gurbakhsh Singh

FROM THE AUTHOR

Teaching is a highly rewarding profession. The peace enjoyed by a teacher while looking at the satisfied faces of the students and hearing the sincerely voiced '*thanks*' cannot be described in words.

Here are, however, some of the lessons learnt by the author himself from the youth while teaching Sikh heritage to them. Mutual learning brought a great change in my thinking. I feel more committed and devoted to the faith than before I started participating in the Sikh youth camps in North America. Therefore, it is now my turn to say '*Thank you*' to my students and friends.

I have always loved explaining *gurmat* philosophy and Sikh heritage to the youth. However, answering their searching and challenging questions was a great experience which changed my own life. The book, *The Sikh Faith - Questions and Answers* is the outcome of these discussions. In paperback form, it has been published in USA, Canada, India and Singapore. The Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, Amritsar has published its revised hard cover edition. Its *Panjabi* and *Hindi* versions have been published by Guru Gobind Singh Study Circle, Ludhiana, Panjab. I hope this small volume, which contains *Gurmat* lessons learnt by the author, will also be welcomed by the readers. The episodes have been written in the order that I remembered them. The youth will enjoy reading them and benefit from the lessons they teach. The Sikh community in general should also find these articles interesting.

Finally, I have to make a request to the reader. These episodes are actual life experiences narrated for the guidance of the youth and their parents. They are not to be read as stories. Instead of reading the entire book in one sitting, I suggest reading one or two a day. This will allow time for reflections as each episode narrates an experience for leading a peaceful life. The advantage thus taken by the youth will give peace to the author.

1

OVATION TO GURU NANAK

I went to see a friend in Cleveland, Ohio, USA who was to speak on the Sikh faith at an inter-faith gathering. More than half a dozen speakers from different faiths were in attendance. After each one had spoken about the good points of his faith, a simple looking person asked a very embarrassing question, "*What do the speakers have to say about the people of other faiths? Will they be saved or not?*"

It was very difficult for any speaker to say that the people of only their faith will be saved while the followers of other faiths will not be permitted entry into Heaven. Every speaker, therefore, just kept beating about the bush; their difficulty of giving a straight answer was obvious to the listeners.

For the Sikh answer, the author, who was the last person to speak, replied as follows:

i. Friends, I very much appreciate this interesting and challenging question. However, it is not applicable to the Sikh faith. We believe **there is one God, one humanity and hence one faith**. Of course, we address God, our common Father, by many Names according to our language. Many names of the Father should not be taken to mean that there are many faiths.

One day Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh faith, did not return from the river when he went there for his regular morning bath. On the third day, when he was seen coming to the village, people gathered around him. In great surprise they asked the Guru, "Where were you? We thought you had drowned in the river." The Guru replied, "I have brought a message from God for you. Do not divide people into Hindus

and Muslims, we all are His children and hence equal."

ii. The holy Sikh scripture, Guru Granth Sahib, tells us to love God and remember Him by any Name - Allah, Ram, Gobind, God, Guru... the way we love our father by addressing him by any name - dad, daddy, papa. Our Father values sincerity of love and does not care which language we use to address Him. All languages and names belong to Him (To support my above observations, I quoted some hymns from the Guru Granth Sahib, which address the Lord by the above Names).

God being our Father, each of us has a right to meet Him without any intercession from other persons. No one can claim a franchise on Him to have exclusive rights. Anyone who loves Him can realize Him; in His court, one is judged by one's deeds alone, the Name adopted by a devotee to address Him has little value there.

iii. The Sikh scripture contains the hymns of six Gurus and more than two dozen other holy persons, including Hindus, Muslims, and so-called low-caste people. A person of any religion, race or caste, rich or poor, can love the Lord and realize Him without the intercession of any third person or a prophet.

The response to this reply was enthusiastic applause from the entire audience. I was elated and reminded of the folk lore - *Nanak Shah fakir, Hindu ka guru Musalman ka pir* - Guru Nanak was accepted as a guide both by Hindus and Moslems. On that day, the people of all major religions participating in the inter-faith group also accepted Guru Nanak to be a *pir*.

But the climax was yet to come.

While everyone was enjoying the answer, the smart person was thinking of another question. When the clapping stopped, he stood up and asked, "Well, what you mean is that anybody, whatever his faith, who believes in God will be

saved. Everybody here has happily accepted it. But tell us what do you say about those persons who do not believe in God?"

I replied that the answer to that question could be given by my personal example. I have a son in India who was unable to meet me or talk to me since I came to USA in 1984. If my son says that he has no father, I cannot say that he is wrong. He truthfully says what he has experienced. Also, I have a daughter in USA with whom I stay. She knows that I have a son in India who believes that he has no father. However, she prays everyday, "God bless my brother."

Similarly, Sikhs know that all people including even those who do not believe in the Common Father, God, are their brothers and sisters. Therefore, we pray twice a day for the welfare of the people all over the globe, believers and non-believers, our supporters or opponents. A Sikh prayer always concludes with a request, "Father! In thy Name bless the whole humanity."

Hearing this, everyone in the hall stood up and started clapping loudly. This standing ovation to Guru Nanak by people of all faiths, comes to my mind quite often even a decade after it occurred. This unique response shown by non-Sikhs has been shared with the participants at many Sikh youth camps and all have been delighted to hear it.

Later, I met one young man who attended the inter-faith meeting. He had joined a medical college and his self-esteem as a Sikh was very high. It was visible not only from his appearance (turban and beard), but also from the name-plate of his car, Khalsa-I.

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2

WHY ARE YOU CARRYING A DAGGER?

In Vancouver, B.C., Canada, the author was asked to speak before a social group known as C.R.J. (Committee for Racial Justice). The members include representatives of all religions, Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs and other faiths. Police officials and public representatives also attend it. This gathering is held in turn at the religious place of each faith. About a decade ago, in the late eighties, they met in the Guru Amar Das Niwas, a wing of the Gurdwara at Ross Street, Vancouver.

While sharing special and unique features of the Sikh faith, I spoke about my unpleasant experience of being asked a wrong question by the local people, "*Why are you carrying a dagger?*" The audience enjoyed my observations when I explained to them why asking this question to a Sikh is wrong.

The relevant part of my speech is briefly mentioned below.

i. "Friends, I hope all of you will agree with me that we are not *carrying* our shirts and pants, but we are wearing them. This (showing my *Kirpan* in the sling), is an article of my faith. I wear it, I do not carry it. Further, it is not a dagger, but a *Kirpan*.

We know that robbers carry daggers to kill and rob people. However, the Sikhs wear *Kirpans* to protect people.

Wearing of the *Kirpan* by a Sikh, can be explained by an analogy to the wearing of a pistol by a police man.

We have the police chief with us today (wearing his full

uniform, he was sitting in the front row, just near the podium). He will agree with me that robbers carry pistols to rob people or even kill them. On the other hand, policemen use pistols not to kill people, but to protect them. Therefore, the policemen are required to wear them to perform their duty and as a part of their uniform. Sikhs are *Sant-Sipahis* (holy policemen), hence they are required to wear *Kirpans* as a part of their *panj kakaar* (5-K) uniform to be reminded of the responsibility of their faith to protect people.

This will help you understand why I feel hurt when somebody asks me, "Why are you carrying a dagger?" This question sends a very wrong and derogatory message to a Sikh. Surely, every police official will feel bad when he hears "He is carrying a pistol to kill people, whereas we pay him to protect people."

ii. The Guru had a very solid reason to coin a new name, *Kirpan*, for this article of the Sikh faith; *Kirpan* means a weapon for doing a favor to the people and protect their honor. The name reflects the mission for which a Sikh wears it. A Sikh is to publicly agree under oath before the *Panj Pyaras* for its genuine use before he is allowed to wear it.

On the same analogy, I suggested to the police chief to change the name of the pistol to *protectil*, when it is given to policemen for protecting and keeping peace. This new name will also reveal the mission of the police. It will provide them the psychology of service and motivate them for the right use of the equipment. (A white policeman was suspended for allegedly shooting an African-Canadian out of color bias. This use or misuse of the pistol was in the news during those days).

There was a smiling response from the audience including the police chief. After the meeting, he informally endorsed the justification of the wearing of the *Kirpan* by the Sikhs when he said to the President of the Gurdwara, "Now, I know that a Sikh does not carry a dagger, but he wears a *Kirpan*."

3

PUTTING THE CLOCK BACK BY ONE GENERATION

The founding of the first Khalsa school in Vancouver, in the mid-eighties was a landmark in the history of the Sikhs in Canada. The author served as its first Sikh heritage teacher. Talks given by him in the Gurdwara and lectures given to the inter-faith meetings earned appreciation both from Sikhs and non-Sikhs.

One day, while I was busy with my class, a local T.V. crew came there and the reporter said to me, "I am from BCTV and I want to talk to you." I answered, "You are welcome." They entered the room and set up their gadgets quickly. Here is a brief description of the dialogue as recorded by the T.V. crew under the full glare of the camera lights and the children watching us:

Reporter: By starting the Khalsa school, you have put the clock of your people back by one generation...

While shooting these words upon me, her questioning eyes and aggressive attitude seemed to label me as a sort of criminal for doing something wrong to the Canadian children. I was accustomed to reading good words about me, the Sikhs and the school. Hearing negative and damaging comments, and those too from a reporter, I was taken aback for a moment. Though I was not sure what was in her mind, I composed myself and responded by using her own words.

Author: Madam, the Canadian clock is out of order. The Khalsa school has been founded to put it in order.

I noticed a change in her aggressive looks and she explained her statement.

Reporter: What I mean is that the first generation of your community did not mix with the Canadians. Your second generation was learning Canadian culture along with other children in the government schools. By taking them out from there, and admitting them in the Khalsa school, you have put the clock of your people back by one generation. They will grow as Indians and miss the Canadian culture. Therefore, they will remain separate for another generation. *Her changed expression soothed my nerves and I explained my statement with full confidence*.

Author: What I meant was that most of the Canadians, not just you alone, believe that the world ends, where the Canadian boundary ends. You do not accept the people living across the border (Americans) as your own; you treat them as being different, aliens.

The world has not forgotten recent history. Americans bombed Vietnamese believing them to be different and not members of their own race. They killed hundreds of thousands of people who had not committed any fault or crime. By this they orphaned many children. Thousands of Americans did not return alive, orphaning their own children.

At the Khalsa School, I teach the students that all people in the east or the west, believers or non-believers, black or white, are God's children, hence equal. The earth is their common inheritance. We are a garden of human beings nursed by God. In a garden, every flower, whatever its color or shape, adds to the beauty of the garden. Similarly, each ethnic group, whatever its color or culture, makes the human garden more refreshing, attractive and pleasing.

We must realize this in order to live in peace and enjoy the gifts of God. Everyone of us is a member of His family. Of course, the language and culture vary depending upon the region in which people are born, and this adds to the beauty of the world.

Reporter: *Her face revealing her satisfaction and her surprise.* This really is great. I agree with you. I did not know this earlier. Thanks for talking to us.

Author: Well, these students (of the Khalsa school) have been taught to carry not the guns, but the fruit of goodwill for the people wherever they go and enjoy their love and affection. The guiding clock of the Sikh faith is that humanity is one big family of the Lord.

Reporter: Sure, you are setting the clock right, thanks.

Author: Will you be bold enough to report this on T.V. what you have said to me?

Reporter: You watch the evening news at 6.00 P.M.

She said this with a smile and in an assuring tone, while going out of the door. The author who watched the evening news did hear the above statement. This was a great relief to me. Many friends who listened to the news bulletin added to my satisfaction when they called me to appreciate my dialogue with the reporter.

¤

4

IF YOUR FATHER DRINKS

Drinking is considered a vice worldwide but still many adults drink. Children feel very embarrassed, ashamed, and sometimes even degraded if they find their father drinking alcohol and losing his self-control. They pity him but feel helpless. A few experiences with camp trainees, who did not approve drinking by their fathers, are worth sharing with the readers. This topic was included as the result of a very touching response by a young boy at a Montreal (Canada) Camp.

After I had told of the bad effects of drugs and alcohol use to a junior group, we discussed how young people could save themselves from drugs. One youth observed, "If adults and our parents do not drink, we will not get into that bad habit. They must stop drinking." A girl asked, "Everybody knows that drugs and alcohol are bad for health, then why do they drink? Why can't we tell them not to drink?"

This led us to discuss how to stop adults from drinking alcohol. The youth made many suggestions. One of them was to read Sikh *Maryada* to those who drink alcohol. It will teach them that the Sikh faith prohibits the use of drugs and alcohol. Many youth agreed with this suggestion.

Another youth asked, "Is there any specific hymn in the Guru Granth Sahib, which prohibits drinking?" The author recited and translated a few lines of the hymn: "ਜਿਤੁ ਪੀਤੈ ਖਸਮੁ ਵਿਸਰੈ ਦਰਗਹ ਮਿਲੈ ਸਜਾਇ॥ (Guru Granth Sahib, p. 554).

Why drink alcohol, which makes one forget the Lord and be punished in His court.

After listening to the translation of the hymn, a couple of them said "Uncle, that is good. Write it on the board, we will copy it." When the youth copied the hymn in their notebooks, I asked, "Do you think that adults will stop drinking after listening to this hymn? Most of them responded, "Yes, they should."

However one boy, with frustration looming large on his face, started shaking his head. From his response, I read the message of his heart, "No way. It won't work in the case of my father." The class was over, I met the boy and asked him, "What is worrying you? Why did you shake your head like that?"

His reply gave a chill through my spine. Tears formed in his eyes before he could speak. With a choked voice, which would have melted every heart, the boy spoke, "You may do anything, my father does not listen. My mother and my grandfather have told him many times but he ignores them. All our relatives have failed; how can he listen to the reading of this hymn by me?"

I cannot put into words what went through my mind after hearing that. To console him, I told him, "All fathers and mothers love their children. They may not listen to their elders or their friends but they cannot ignore the request of their children. He will surely listen to you. I will also try to talk to him."

When I was talking to the boy, I knew I might not be able to see his father or talk to him but his pathetic condition made me say the above words. Quite often I remember the boy shaking his head in desperation, whenever I find some parents drinking with complete disregard to the feelings of their children.

I know that he is not the only child being tortured emotionally by his father, there are thousands suffering like him helplessly. May be, the reading of this experience and two other incidents stated below, will touch the hearts of the

Sikhs who drink. I pray that they give up this habit and rebuild their self-esteem. Further, I hope they will not demoralize their children any longer and destroy their lives.

At another camp, a middle-age group (10 to 14 years) was told to write what a Sikh is required to do and what he is not permitted to do by his faith. Among the prohibitions, of course, all students stated that a Sikh does not take drugs, he does not drink or smoke. They were asked if someone in their family drinks, how will they tell him/her not to drink? Many answers were given and all were in the tone, "You should not drink, it is a bad habit of yours."

They were suggested to find a better way to say the same thing. By mutual discussions the following statement was finalized by the group. "If a child does something wrong, blame goes to the parents for not disciplining their child; if a Sikh drinks, it reflects disregard towards the Guru and it lowers the image of the community. A Sikh needs to avoid it."

Before concluding the discussion, the trainees were told not to argue with the drinking persons to justify their observations. They were suggested to leave them alone to think for themselves.

The very first Sunday following the camp, a Sikh came to me as soon as the gurdwara function was over and the *Sangat* was moving out for the *langar*. He said, "I wish you to drink tea with us at our house." I was still thinking of what answer to give when the young girl with him said, "Uncle, he is my father." I remembered immediately that the girl was at the camp. I agreed to visit their house that very day after the *langar*.

Even before the tea was served, the father proudly narrated what happened at his house the other day, when his daughter returned from the camp. "My friend and I were drinking when she entered the house. With her bag still on her shoulders, she uttered verbatim what you told her at the camp and immediately went to her room. We analyzed her

statement and found that she was right. To restore her faith in us and to assure her that we love her, we both decided to give up the habit right away. We threw away the bottle and felt a great relief after doing that. I know Sikhs are prohibited from the use of alcohol but I drank just to build my false ego."

Similar good experiences have been reported from some other parents as well. However, one case backfired and that too needs to be told to the youth.

A young boy argued with his father that drinking is bad and that he should not drink. One day when his father started drinking, the boy picked up his bottle and wanted to take it away to express his protest. The father became angry, gave a hard slap on his face and yelled, "Are you my father or am I yours? You must know how to behave."

The boy narrated this experience to the director of the camp who shared this sad incident with me. On the last day, when parents came to the camp to take their children home, I said in my farewell speech, "Respected parents, we take full responsibility for whatever the youth have learned at the camp. In case it does not agree with your beliefs or your daily practices, you should hold teachers and not your children responsible for it. We will personally apologize to you for anything taught to the youth if it is not endorsed by *Gurbani* or by the Panthic *Reht Maryada*. If punished for their disagreement with you, the children will lose faith in you and in our teachings at the camp." Later, the director of the camp told the author that according to the feedback received by him, the message was very much appreciated by both the parents and the trainees.

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5
SIKH OF THE SUIT

Every person has his own values of life. When the circumstances change, our outlook on life and values of life also change. What one loves very much today may be of no significance to the same person the next day. I learnt a unique value system in my early life from Sant Teja Singh of Mastuana, Sangrur.

I joined as a lecturer at the Panjab Agricultural University (then Government Agriculture College), Ludhiana in 1956. I was chosen for special training in agricultural implements to be conducted at Udaipur, Rajasthan. I considered it a great honor and, therefore, thought that I must wear a befitting officer's dress for that training program. Accordingly, I purchased costly British suiting cloth and got it stitched from a high class tailor. This was the first time I was to put on a suit, let alone a costly one.

During my studies, I went to college wearing a *kurta pajama* (traditional Panjabi outfit) while all other students used to wear pants. I never felt inferior or embarrassed. Maybe, because I could not afford to have pants. For my postgraduate work, I was granted a research scholarship. Now, being an M.Sc. student and having money in my pocket, my outlook changed. I purchased my first pair of pants. Of course, it was a low cost pant and I had it stitched from a tailor whose charges were not high. Later, having become a professor, wearing of a costly suit was considered by me a requirement.

Being conscious of wearing an expensive suit, a new

personality overtook me. The person, who I had been until then, no longer existed. I felt superior and found myself walking two feet above the ground. When I went to the college I heard unspoken words, "What a great suit! How superbly it is stitched! It must be very costly." In the class, my own assumptions made me feel that all students were looking at my suit and appreciating it in their minds. Nobody, of course, talked about it at all. All teachers were wearing suits, some even better ones. I could see only my suit moving about the whole day and did not notice myself absorbed in the suit. It was the British suit in my mind and in my thoughts.

The same day I got a message from Sant Teja Singh to meet him. I was happy that he would also be able to see my new suit and be very appreciative of it. I met him in the evening. Observing me engrossed in my suit, he said, "Gurbakhsh Singh, your suit is very nice. It looks very good on you." Having heard this admiration of my suit, a fast stream of words started flowing from my mouth. I described in detail the quality of the cloth and its fine stitching by a costly tailor. The Sant continued listening to me patiently. When the speed of my words slowed down, he asked a very simple question totally unrelated to my suit, "Did you recite *Jap Ji* in the morning?" I replied with pride, "As required of a Sikh, I regularly recite all the five Gurbani hymns. In addition, I also recite *Asa Ki Var* and *Sukhmani Sahib*, every day orally."

I was stung and got immediately cooled down when Sant Ji asked, "Did you enjoy the same happiness when you recited *Jap Ji* in the morning, which you are feeling now by wearing this suit?" I became completely silent and the changed expression of my face reflected my regret for living with low values of life. I felt that I recited Gurbani mechanically as an obligation, not as something holy to enjoy and get guidance from it.

Observing this change in my mind and finding me in a receptive mood, the Sant gave his valuable sermon in very

sweet and affectionate words, "Gurbakhsh Singh, so far you are a 'Sikh' of your suit. Can you imagine how happy you will be when you become a Sikh of the Guru, and feel the honor of being the son of Guru Gobind Singh. That should be the goal of your life. Remember, God values our virtues and not the wealth we possess or the clothes we wear."

After that, I got rid of the slavery of the suit (clothes). Now, with my *kurta pajama* I travel all over the USA and Canada to attend local, national and even international meetings, fully relaxed without any embarrassment. I live with my self-esteem, and people respect me as such everywhere. Thanks to the guidance given by the professor who was a great scholar as well as a sant. Teja Singh did his M.A., L.L.B. in 1902. He was chosen for civil service in Panjab but he gave it up soon to join as Vice Principal, Khalsa College, Amritsar in 1904. He joined the University of Cambridge for his Ph.D. in 1906, and was the first student with turban to study there. One term short of getting the degree, he joined at Columbia, New York, USA, where he was granted a scholarship. However, he had to leave his studies half way to go to Vancouver to help Indians to continue to stay and work in Canada. After winning the legal battle there, he obtained his A.M. degree from Harvard University in 1911, and returned to India where he continued his educational career. His journey in this world was completed in 1965. Even today, I enjoy the true values of life told by him.

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6

GURU NANAK! PLEASE, COME AGAIN

During the early forties, I was a student studying at the Khalsa Collegiate School, Amritsar. The students were taken to the gurdwara for celebrating the birthday of Guru Nanak Dev. One of us read a poem in Panjabi with the title, *Guru Nanak! Please, come again*.

"We need you very urgently; people have become greedy. There are many *Sajan Thugs* and also many *Malik Bhagos*. They are sucking the blood of the innocent people. We have forgotten God, we love money. Instead of living the life of a Sikh, we follow an evil path. Please, please, Guru Ji! Do us a favor, come again and save us, we are sinners."

Professor Sahib Singh, B.A. (later granted a D. Lit degree by the Panjabi University, Patiala), used to teach Sikh religion. He had been invited to give a talk on the teachings of Guru Nanak Dev. In response to the poem read by the student, the professor observed:

"We do not have to call Guru Nanak. He did not leave us, he will remain in the world for ever in the form of his teachings, ie., *Gurbani*. The Guru does not die; he is ever alive. Of course, his body completed its life span assigned to it. According to the principles of nature, everything visible, the moon, the sun, the earth, the whole creation will be gone one day. However, the message of the Guru, the *Gurbani*, will guide us till the world lasts. We have to read it, understand it and follow it to be saved here and in the next world as well.

Guru Nanak says that no one can save anybody else.

Guru only guides us to safety; to be saved, one has to follow the right path of *sewa* and *simran* told by the Guru.

Further, the Guru is not to be found in big palaces, he lives with the poor. Guru Nanak lives in the sweepers colony, you go there and meet him. He is waiting there for everybody. Guru Nanak himself has said this.

ਨੀਚਾ ਅੰਦਰਿ ਨੀਚ ਜਾਤਿ, ਨੀਚੀ ਹੂ ਅਤਿ ਨੀਚੁ॥
ਜਿਥੈ ਨੀਚ ਸਮਾਲੀਅਨਿ ਤਿਥੈ ਨਦਰਿ ਤੇਰੀ ਬਖਸੀਸ॥

Guru Granth Sahib, p. 15.

Let us love the poor. God will bless us.
You recite Gurbani with love and you will find the Guru speaking to you.

I have been reminded of his observations many times in my life. When one barely makes both ends meet, one is usually sincerely devoted to Gurbani and the Sikh way of life. When one has excess money to spend on worldly pleasures, he follows vices and ignores the mission of human life. Faith is usually the first casualty when one becomes rich.

Let everyone be assured that Guru Nanak Dev is here in the world, and he (through *Gurbani*) is always ready to save us. But we must follow the directions of *Gurbani*, practice virtues and keep away from vices. In this way we will have peace while living on this earth and enjoy bliss after our physical death.

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7
SON OF S.P.

Panjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana is not only my alma mater but I also worked there as a professor for a long time. While performing my duties as a teacher, I learned an important lesson from a problem-student. In every school/ college we find students of all shades. Some students are more interested in creating problems for themselves, their teachers, and the management than studying their courses. I was a senior teacher, therefore, one such group PP (those involved in serious problems) was assigned to me.

I found that the correct way to help students was to learn about their family and friends. Accordingly, I always recorded the family details of the students in my tutorial group. This helped me improve relations with the students and their parents. Consequently, I informed the parents regarding undesirable behavior of their children. I am pleased that I was able to help many students build their careers and also save some of them from ruining their lives.

Once the following dialogue took place between me and a student. I would like to share it with the readers.

Teacher: What is your name please?

Student: Mr. A*, son of S.P. (Superintendent Police, the senior most officer of Police in a district. He is virtually the lord of the people in the district).

Teacher: The name of your father?

Student: Mr. B*, S.P.

Teacher: Please give me his address?

Student: S.P., district C*.

(*Actual names are withheld because of obvious reasons).

When I heard the word S.P. for the third time, my eyes closed and I forgot that about a dozen students were sitting in front of me in my office. An emotional message was delivered to me in a flash as if it had been recorded in my brain sometime earlier.

"Look! this boy is bubbling with the feelings of being the son of a police officer, who may or may not be an honest person. Why are you not proud to feel that you are the son of Guru Gobind Singh? He was a unique 'father', king of kings; he sacrificed his whole family for defending the human rights of the weak. Can you think of any other person who did so much for the people?"

It was Saturday, and the last period of the day. When the tutorial period was over and the students left, I sent a message home, "I will not be coming home tonight, I am going out for this weekend." I took an evening train to Amritsar. Next day, I appeared before the *Panj Pyaras* at the *Akal Takht*. I took *Amrit* and became a *Kirpan* wearing Sikh, and I am pleased to wear it over my shirt even today. May God bless me and give me strength to live like that till my death, so that I may enjoy being a son of Guru Gobind Singh till my last breath.

I must add here similar feelings of another Englishman. Mr. Cliff R. Huthins who had adopted the Sikh faith. When someone asked him why he had to wear long hair to practice the Sikh philosophy of life, he answered, "Is it not enough that people call me the son of Guru Gobind Singh just because I wear the five *kakaars*?"

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8
MY TURBAN, MY CROWN

In the mid-eighties, an international seminar was held on the Sikh faith in Detroit, Michigan, USA. The speakers were invited by the president of the Gurdwara to address the *Sangat* briefly on Sunday. After morning kirtan, the author and other speakers gave lectures for seven to ten minutes as planned by the management. The *Sangat* was emotionally charged when one of the speakers (a European-American having adopted the Sikh faith) described his experience of adopting the faith. The key part of his lecture may be summarized as below:

Sikhs receive their turbans as their inheritance and get them free without paying any price for them. Some Sikhs, therefore, do not know the value of the turban; they may just throw it away without a second thought. I was in search of a turban and I found one. I picked it up, cleaned it and tied it on my head with great honor. For me it is not a mere piece of cloth which I wrap on my head to cover my hair. I respect it as a **crown** granted to me by my 'father', Guru Gobind Singh.

I was not born to Sikh parents. Therefore, I did not receive this turban free as my heritage. I had to pay the price for it. My friends left me when they saw me with a turban on my head. I had to sacrifice my relations. Even my mother and brother deserted me because they did not accept me with my turban. Now you can understand how much I value it.

A king puts a crown on his head as the insignia of being the ruler of the country. Another person with a stronger force may take over his country, and also the crown, from him.

However, nobody can take away my crown from me because it was gifted to me by my father, Guru Gobind Singh. The Guru paid more than the full price of this crown by sacrificing his whole family, his father, his mother and all his four children. In this way, he earned this crown for his Sikhs. Later, the Khalsa Panth had to give up their homes and live for three generations in the jungle in order to retain this gift of the Guru on their heads. Many Sikhs underwent unbearable tortures but did not barter their turban.

Today, when I wrap my turban on my head, every hair on my body feels grateful to the Guru and utters, "Father, thank you. You paid the price of this holy crown by the blood of your whole family and your innumerable devotees. No king or tyrant can take it away from me. Only ignorant or ungrateful Sikhs may themselves throw it away. They forget that along with the turban they also lose their right to be respected and addressed as Sardar Ji, the son of Guru Gobind Singh."

It will not be out of place, if I restate here the feelings of another Englishman, Mr. Cliff R. Huthins, who had adopted the Sikh faith. When someone asked him why he had to wear long hair to practice the Sikh philosophy of life, he answered, "Is it not enough that people call me the son of Guru Gobind Singh just because I wear the five *kakaars*?"

The author visited India in 1997 to participate in the *Gurmat Chetna Lehr* inaugurated by the *Jathedar* of the *Akal Takht* for educating the Sikh youth regarding their heritage. He narrated the message of the above lecture to the Sikh youth. In every group there were some Sikh youth without turbans. After listening to this, some of them would stand up and make a promise, "From now onwards I am going to keep my hair and tie my turban to enjoy the self-esteem of being the son of Guru Gobind Singh."

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9

BE CAREFUL! A HINDU MINISTER IS HERE

A big youth gathering was held at Gurdwara Sukhchain Sahib, Phagwara (also known as Gurdwara Sukhchainana Sahib) during the late seventies. At that time, there was a joint government of Hindus and Sikhs in Punjab as it is today (1997). I was working as a Professor at the Panjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana. The youth invited me to address that important gathering. A large number of adults were also present because two ministers were to grace the occasion. The total count of the audience ran into the thousands.

I was to be the first speaker to talk regarding Sikh heritage. The purpose of the lecture was to motivate Sikh youth to feel the self-esteem of adopting the Sikh way of life. After telling them the purpose of the meeting and giving other information about the function, the stage secretary announced, "I now request Dr Gurbakhsh Singh, Professor, P.A.U., Ludhiana to come to the stage and deliver his lecture to you."

The secretary, a local student, had not met me earlier and did not know me by face. My appearance, *kurta pajama*, flowing beard and *Kirpan* in a sling over my shirt, was not his expectation. Therefore, he did not notice me, though I was sitting just next to him near the microphone. The image of a university professor in his mind was a well-dressed gentleman, wearing a nice suit and a tie, with his beard rolled up.

After hearing my name when I was getting up, the secretary was amazed to look at me. While getting down to sit, he whispered in my ear, "Doctor Sahib, be careful; do not

say anything which may create a problem, a Hindu minister is also sitting here."

When waiting for my turn to speak, my mind was repeating the teachings of the Guru, which I had planned to share with the audience. "All human beings are God's children. Do not divide them into Hindus and Muslims." Having been drenched with this lesson of Gurmat, the instruction given to me by the secretary, "Be careful, a Hindu minister is here" struck me hard. I found the stage well set for starting my lecture. What I said may be summarized as below:

"Friends, before I say anything else, let me share with you what the secretary whispered in my ear. The message is really important; he had to tell it to me just before I straightened myself to reach the microphone. He cautioned me to be careful and not to say anything, which displeases the Hindu minister sitting here.

Well, may I tell all of you that anything, which displeases a person because he is a Hindu or for that matter a Muslim, is not the message of Guru Nanak. He preached his faith, not to the Sikhs (who did not exist at that time) but to the Hindus and the Muslims. Both communities accepted his message. The folk song, "*Nanak Shah Fakir, Hindu ka Guru Musalman ka Pir*", summarizes the people's response to his teachings. If a Sikh feels that Hindus, Muslims or people of any other faith are different and not his brothers and sisters, he is ignorant of Gurmat. We must remember that all of us are children of our common Father, God. To support this statement I quote Gurbani:

i. ਤੂੰ ਸਾਝਾ ਸਾਹਿਬੁ ਬਾਪੁ ਹਮਾਰਾ...

Lord (God) you are the common Father of us all.

Guru Granth Sahib, p. 97,

ii. ਨਾ ਹਮ ਹਿੰਦੂ ਨ ਮੁਸਲਮਾਨ॥ ਅਲਹ ਰਾਮ ਕੇ ਪਿੰਡੁ ਪਰਾਨ

Guru Granth Sahib, p. 1136.

Do not label (identify) me as a Hindu or a Muslim. My body and soul were gifted to me by Allah and Ram.

(Therefore, who can say whether I am a Hindu, disciple of Ram or a Muslim, disciple of Allah).

Further, *Gurbani* says no one can claim a franchise on God; anyone, irrespective of the faith in which one may be born, whosoever loves Him realizes Him.

ਆਪਨ ਬਾਪੈ ਨਾਹੀ ਕਿਸੀ ਕੋ ਭਾਵਨ ਕੋ ਹਰਿ ਰਾਜਾ॥

Guru Granth Sahib, p. 658.

The above introduction to that lecture is remembered by many even today. Unfortunately, our community is not known to practice it in their daily life. The result is that we fail to earn due respect for the Sikhs from people of other faiths. It is again the need of the day that we rededicate ourselves to the Sikh faith. It is time for us to live the Sikh way of life and enjoy the honor of being Sikhs, and share this happiness with the rest of the world.

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10
GOD DOES NOT DIE

There are some incidents, or maybe accidents, in one's life which one can never forget. The following is such an occurrence in our family. In April 1940, we moved from our village Gill, Ludhiana, to Amritsar where my father was working. I had passed my fifth grade and my younger brother had passed his second grade when we left our village. Both of us joined the Khalsa Collegiate School there.

A tragedy occurred in December of the same year. My father, the only earning member in our family, died in a road accident. Our friends and relatives felt a lot of sincere sympathy for us. They were worried as to how we would be able to survive after that bereavement.

My uncle, a distant cousin of my father, who was very well off, was employed at Lahore. A couple of days after the death of my father, he came to Amritsar to express his condolence to the family. When he was talking to my mother, I was standing nearby. Showing his deep concern for the untimely death of my father, he said, "It was wrong for God to take away my brother at this time. The children are very young. Who will take care of them? God should not have done this to you."

My mother interrupted him to respond to his sympathy. In a few Panjabi words she said, "God does not do anything wrong. This is God's Will. We cannot protest against His Will, we have to live with it. Well, our association with him (my

father) was destined only for this long. After completing his time, he has been called back by God.

God is ever living. He does not die. He nursed these children when their father was with us, and He will continue to nurse them even now. No person but God can provide food and protection to any living being. If God has taken their father away from us, He must have made alternate arrangements to raise these children. We must have faith in Him."

This may be one reason why I was raised as a child with a very strong faith in God. Whenever I had a problem in my life, the words of my mother always rung in my ear, "God does not die, we should have faith in Him. He takes care of us the way He Wills."

I was happier when I was poor. I confess that I became less happy and more worried after becoming a professor in the University when I had no financial problems. God gave me sufficient money and good social status. However, instead of bringing more peace, it brought me more worries. I wish to get back my earlier faith in God who gave me peace and pleasure. I lost that *Anand*, bliss, probably because I started believing that whatever I had achieved was the result of *my efforts*. However, now, I know that it was actually the gift of God. When I think in this way, my mind starts feeling the same peace, which I enjoyed during my days of poverty. I pray that God may bless me again with the same faith and tranquility.

11

SHOULD RELIGION PUT RESTRICTIONS ON US? IS NOT GOD HIMSELF EGOCENTRIC?

At the Sikh youth camps, every year the trainees are urged to learn about their heritage and feel proud of it. They are told to follow the Sikh practices, reciting *Gurbani*, wearing five K's and observing the Sikh discipline. At the Vancouver Island camp, one day the teenaged group was not in a learning mood. The faces of the two senior students revealed their inner feelings. To scuttle the teachings planned for that day, they came out with their own agenda.

1 was busy arranging my teaching material and before I called the class to order, one youth acting as their spokesman asked me, "Uncle, anyway, why do we have to have a religion? Why should it put restrictions on the freedom of an individual? One should be able to live the way one likes. Of course, one should not cheat or commit any other crime."

Having understood their mood and temper, I felt it would be of no use to discuss the scheduled topic with them. They needed a change in their regular program and I provided it to them. After listening to the question, I said, "This is a wonderful question. Today, this period will be used only to answer your open questions on any topic. Any more questions please?"

The trainees were visibly relaxed and pleased with the success of their plan. The second student came out with another question, "Why should one continue to say 'God',

'God', every day? OK, God does many favors for us. But

why should He demand daily meditation from us? Uncle, is God not Himself egocentric? I do not like *your* God."

There were many more questions asked by the youth. This dialogue brought them back to a listening and learning mood. A summary of the discussions with them is given below:

1. When asked how many of them would like to go swimming that afternoon (it was summertime) every one raised his hand. I asked, "Will the pool benefit from you when you swim in it? Do you oblige the pool when you enjoy it?" The answer was "No".

I put another question to them, "During winter when you enjoy the sun at the beach, is the sun benefited by your sitting there?" Of course, the answer was the same. Having thus prepared their mind, I asked, "If not, then why should you think you are obliging God when you bask in the 'sun' of the virtues of God or 'swim' in the comforts provided by Him?"

When we meditate on God, we think of His virtues and try to imbibe them for lighting the path of our life. It is not God who benefits when we remember Him, it is we who benefit by meditating on His virtues to obtain peace and happiness. No doubt, repeating His Name like a parrot, without keeping the mind tuned to His virtues, is of little benefit.

Now, I think you understand God is not an egocentric person. It is we who on many occasions become ungrateful and fail to thank Him for His favors. Again, it is we who lose the benefit, which flows from His virtues if we do not meditate on Him.

2. To answer the other question, the discussion followed like this:

Did anyone of you notice that I was late for the morning assembly in the Gurdwara? A couple of boys responded, "You were not late, we had just started when you quietly slipped in." I asked, "Anyway, when the classes are over today I need two volunteers to go with me with a small gun." The students

were surprised to hear that and looked at me askance. I continued, "I want you to break all the traffic red lights on my way, they unnecessarily delayed me in the morning. At every crossing (intersection) the driver stopped the car. When I told him to move on as no car was coming from any other side, he responded that the police will give him a ticket (fine him)."

When I pointed out that there was no policeman to be seen anywhere, he replied, "We may meet an accident and may lose our life." I asked the driver, "How can there be an accident when there is no vehicle coming from any side?" He said, "That is the law. We have to stop at the red light, vehicle or no vehicle from other sides."

I questioned the youth, "Is it not the wrong law? Why should one stop when there is no vehicle coming from any direction? A red light unnecessarily delays our journey." The students jointly responded, "Without red and green lights to direct the traffic, there will be chaos and many accidents will occur. Even when the law is there, some people ignore the traffic rules and cause accidents. We should not remove red lights."

To interpret their view I observed, "You mean to say that even when you are bothered and delayed, you should not disregard red lights." The youth in one voice replied, "Yes, one should always follow the signals." I continued, "Now, it should be easy for you to understand the answer to your second question, why a religion has 'red' lights. They tell you not to defy certain directions to save yourself from meeting accidents of life. They have been 'fixed' not to obstruct your way of life, but to keep your path clear and safe. Some 'roads' have permanent 'red lights'. A Sikh cannot smoke or drink, nor is he permitted to have premarital/extramarital sex, etc. You must study the Sikh *Reht Maryada* for this.

One must move on at the 'green light' to reach his destination. Otherwise, not only he himself will miss the goal but will also delay the traffic (mislead other people) following

him. I believe, now, you will also understand why Sikhs must remember God every day and recite Gurbani regularly, as directed by the Guru; this is the 'green light' of our faith."

The youth enjoyed the discussion that day and the author felt satisfied that the trainees received a useful lesson for everyday life.

12
THANK YOU, UNCLE

It was a great experience to work as a heritage teacher at the Khalsa School, Vancouver, Canada. One day the children were playing basketball and I was deputed to supervise them. The basketball poles were very near the boundary fence. When a student attempted to throw the ball in the basket, it hit the board, bounced over the fence and went on to the street.

The students wanted to get the ball back but they did not attempt to go over the fence because I was standing and watching them. Going around the fence and through the gate would have taken a lot of time, almost all of the remaining time of the lunch recess. The students were helplessly looking towards the basketball, trying to decide what to do.

Just then a gentleman happened to pass by. After seeing the ball, he looked at the students. The students, though spoke nothing, but through their eager eyes sent a strong request to him. "Please throw the ball over the fence to us." The stranger bent down, picked up the ball and smilingly threw it over the fence to the students. Every student shouted aloud, "Thank you, uncle; thank you, uncle." The gentleman negotiated the corner and the students started playing again.

Supporting myself against the post of the fence, I could not help closing my eyes and thinking of another 'thank you' word, heard some minutes earlier. The students were eating lunch, one boy passed the glass of water to his friend, sitting on the other side of the table. The friend immediately said, "Thank you' in a routine way.

With my eyes closed, and my mind tuned to the words

'thank you, I listened, "Gurbakhsh Singh! What an ungrateful person you are? Look! The students felt obliged to the stranger when their own ball was returned to them. They responded aloud 'thank you.' Just for pushing the glass of water by his friend, the student voluntarily said 'thank you.' How dare you ignore to feel 'thankful' to Him, Who gave you this body and everything in this world to enjoy your life?"

I do not know for how long the above thought continued to occupy my mind. When I opened my eyes the students had gone to their classes. I slowly walked to the building, every cell of my body voluntarily repeating. "Waheguru, thank you."

I still remember myself drenched in the feelings, "God, Thank you." I enjoyed supreme bliss that was beyond words. As mentioned somewhere else, I was lucky to benefit from the association of Sant Teja Singh. While walking or just sitting, he was often heard saying, "*Waheguru tera shukar hai*, God! Thank you."

Today I recollect that experience, but have not been able to enjoy that kind of bliss again. It was a rare gift from God.

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13
MY SON DOES NOT LISTEN TO ME

A Canadian friend of mine came to pick me up from the Buffalo (New York, USA) airport. I was to attend a youth camp in Toronto. In the car, we talked about the Sikh youth and we felt concerned that many of them are not interested to know their faith and their great heritage. Both of us agreed that many youth do not care to listen to their parents. When we reached home, he asked his son to tell his mother to prepare tea for us.

Soon, the son came to the living room with a tray containing tea and biscuits. When he presented the tea to me, the father complained, "Baba Ji! He does not listen to me. Please tell him that it is good to be obedient to his parents."

This observation reminded me of our talks during the journey from the airport. I thought it advisable not to say anything against the youth particularly when he was offering tea to me. I picked up my cup of tea, thought for a minute and responded, "You should be thankful to God, Who has given you an obedient son. He came immediately without your asking and offered us water. Further, as told by you, he approached his mom, got tea prepared by her and brought it to us. What else do you expect from him?"

The boy was obviously pleased after listening to my comments. While sipping my tea, I continued, "Sonny, it is OK if you do not listen to your dad. He also does not listen to his 'father'. 'Our father', the Guru, says that a Sikh should recite *Gurbani Nitnem* regularly. Your father does not do that. Last time when I visited your home, he went on talking and talking meaninglessly with his friends. I had to go out in the cold to

recite *Rehras*. Listen to him only when he listens to his 'father' and starts reciting *Gurbani* regularly,"

On my next visit to their house, the same ritual of tea was repeated. When the son was offering tea, his father again complained, "Now I recite *Gurbani*, but still he (son) does not listen to me." Before I could say anything, his son smiled and responded immediately, "Baba Ji! Daddy does not recite *Gurbani*. He only pretends to do so just to show off to me, so that I listen to him." This gave me some time to think. I felt a lot of relief when the father immediately responded, "He sure is right. I just go through the ritual to show him that I recite *Gurbani*." Everything was said in a light mood and we had a good laugh. The message was very clearly understood by the father and he started reading *Gurbani* with devotion and love to obtain guidance from it.

The next time we met, the father had a long list of issues to discuss with me regarding the message of different hymns of *Gurbani*. When we were discussing Gurbani hymns, his son came and asked, "Daddy, my friend has invited me to join him for playing football. May I go there?" The father agreed, saying, "It is OK, be back by dinner time. Don't keep us waiting."

The son after saying, "Thank you, I will be back before dinner," was putting on his shoes, and the father continued, "You were right. My son has changed a lot. He is, now, even more obedient and more respectful to me than I was to my father. He shares everything with me and keeps no secrets from me. I feel really proud of him. Reciting Gurbani with devotion has proved a miracle."

A few months later, the son started keeping long hair and tying a turban on his own. When they met me at our common friend's house, they were really happy. I congratulated the boy for keeping a turban, and presented him my recently published book, The Sikh Faith - Questions and Answers. His father observed, "Thank you for encouraging

him. If we listen to the youth, they reward us by being obedient to us. They are very sensitive to any criticism. If parents become friends with their children, they can guide them better and save them from the wrong path."

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14
WHERE IS YOUR VILLAGE?

I was studying at Ohio State University, USA during the years 1961-1963. I found an American student looking again and again at me when we were attending our first math class there. Next week, when I was waiting outside the classroom for the bell to ring, the student came to me and said, "Hello." When I answered him, he surprised me by asking a totally unexpected question, "Are you a Sikh?" After a moment's silence, I said, "Yes." The bell rang and we went to the class.

When he met me again, he was very respectful to me and asked, "My father wants to talk to you. Can you find time any day in the evening to have tea at our house? I can pick you up from your room and drive you back to your place." This was the first time an American student treated me like that. I felt I was no longer a stranger at the campus, somebody was interested in me there.

Friday evening was the only time when I could make social visits. My friend drove me to his house. When we reached there, his father was sitting in the living room with an open atlas on a coffee table in front of him. As a usual courtesy, I greeted him and waited for his response. Without listening to me, he put his finger near Jalandhar on the Panjab map. He said something with great excitement, which I could not understand. Hence I kept silent. He emotionally repeated his question very fast. Again, I could not make any thing of what he uttered. Finding me a bit confused, the student repeated his father's question slowly, "Where is your village?"

Without caring to know what I said and remaining

deeply charged with emotions, the father continued, "A Sikh who belonged to this village saved my life. As long as you stay in Columbus, we will be glad to be available to you for any kind of service." It is impossible for me today to describe his excitement and the words he spoke. There was a lot unsaid that could only be understood from his emotions and his expressions. What he told me in so many words can briefly be described as follows:

"Neither my son nor I would be here but for the sacrifice of the Sikh from this village. During World War II, we were fighting in North Africa when the Germans were raining bullets on us. We received orders to retreat and save our lives.

I was unable to move, I had been seriously wounded. Instead of retreating to safety, the Sikh risked his own life and dragged himself to me. He put me on his back and snailed some distance on his stomach towards the trench. When in the trench, he moved on all fours, carrying me on his back... We were finally out of danger.

I am alive today. This life is a gift given to me by a Sikh. This son was born after I came home. Sikhs are the best people I have ever met."

There was no end to his words, and he continued talking about the Sikhs for a few minutes. Whereas my ears were listening to him, my mind was tuned to the sacrifice made by that Sikh whose brave deeds raised the image of our community. I prayed in my heart, "*God, thank you for giving me birth in a Sikh family. I request you to give me the strength and bravery of a Sikh so that I may live a life worthy of a Sikh.*"

The boy married next year when I was still studying at the Ohio State University. My two Sikh friends and I were invited to attend the marriage. We were treated as VIP guests. Our appearance looked unusual to everyone there. After the marriage, a girl in her pre-teens sitting near us asked a question from the groom, "Are they the three wise men who are mentioned in the Bible? Are their beards real?" Everybody

started smiling. The father of the boy replied, "Yes, they are the *wise and brave Sikhs*, yes they have *real beards*."

After hearing these words said in appreciation of the Sikh community, I got tears in my eyes. Drenched in those emotions, my mind told me, *"What a great honor to be a Sikh! We Sikhs must perform good deeds to maintain this great image of our community so that we can pass this rich heritage on to our coming generations."*

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15
DUTY FREE GIFT, FREE TRAVEL

1. A friend of mine living in the USA told me an interesting incident of his life. It was an embarrassing situation, but he was proud to tell it because he learnt a great lesson from the incident. He was travelling to Toronto to see his cousin, who had asked him to bring duty free bottles of alcohol while crossing the border at Niagra Falls. My friend purchased three bottles, one more than permitted to be imported duty free. The immigration officer, along with other routine questions, asked him, "Any alcohol?" My friend replied, "Two bottles of alcohol." His son immediately corrected him in loud words to be heard by the officer, "Daddy, not two, but three bottles; a third one is wrapped in the bag and put under the seat."

The reader can better understand the embarrassment of the father than it can be described in words. The officer sent them to the customs office for inspection of the papers and for charging duty on imported goods, where they had to pay duty as well as a fine for not declaring their purchases.

2. There was a very similar incident in the life of a relative of mine in India, but with a different result. During summer vacation, a lady, with her two children, went to stay with her parents. Her father was a big landlord in the Tarai area (U.P.). He lived in a farmhouse with a lot of open space to play and green fields to walk around. Every summer, the children spent their vacation at the farm.

Once, on their return journey, they needed one more child-ticket. The birthday of the younger child fell during the vacation. At that age free travel was not permitted to a child,

he was required to buy a child-ticket. The mother thought that it was a matter of only a couple of days, it could be ignored.

When the family disembarked at the Ludhiana railway station, they handed over two tickets to the ticket collector at the gate. The son, who had been picked up by the mother, told the collector, "My mom had not purchased any ticket for me. She had picked me up so that you believe me to be a child. My birthday was celebrated last Sunday and now I am not a child, but a boy." The educated, well-dressed mother felt very much embarrassed for trying to conceal the age of her son to save a rupee or so. However, to her relief, the collector smiled. Giving a used ticket to the boy, he said, "You surely are a grown up boy, here is the ticket for you. You can show it to your friends." Addressing the lady, he said, "It is okay, you started your journey when the boy was below age."

Parents! Watch your children. They are not so naive as you may think. Be careful not to do anything, which lowers your image in their minds. At the Sikh youth camps, some children told me that they felt let down, and even demoralized when they see their parents drinking and doing other things which they must not do.

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16

NO AMRIT, NO KIRPAN FOR ME

During the late 80's, every summer I attended 8-10 Sikh youth camps, one after the other. A friend of mine once drove me a long distance from Toronto to a Sikh youth camp in Ottawa. He wore a turban and did his Nitnem regularly. Only one aspect of our thinking, hence also of our living, was different. I was always seen with my Kirpan over my shirt, while he was without one.

On our way, this subject came up for discussion. He said, "I want to take *Amrit* and be a 'full' Sikh. I am, however, turned off when I see some of my friends who are *Amritdhari* Sikhs and wear *Kirpans*. They disrespect the Guru and they disregard their vows taken before the *Panj Pyaras*. Some of them tell lies, cheat, do bad things, drink alcohol publicly, and even steal Gurdwara funds. I live a clean honest Sikh life. I have never told a lie or cheated anyone during my business dealings. I feel I am a better person without *Amrit*. Hence I think 'No *Amrit*, and no *Kirpan* for me.' In our society, being an *Amritdhari* actually means being a thug. If I take *Amrit* and wear a *Kirpan*, people will also assume me to be one of them. Scared of that label, I do not dare to take Amrit. You know, I recite my *Nitnem* daily and commit no sin."

I could not think of any response to his observations, I kept mum. After a short silence, he continued, "Tell me, is taking *Amrit* still necessary for me?" Again I had no answer to his question. While trying to say something, I simply uttered, "No... if... but." Finally, I thought of an answer, "Sir, surely you are a great Sikh, and there is no doubt about it. Most of

the Sikhs in the community also agree with this. They respect you and your good life. Actually that is why it is necessary for you to take *Amrit*. It is only then that the correct image of an *Amritdhari* will be known to the people. Further, you will provide a good role model for them also. Some *thug* Sikhs will feel embarrassed and may change. Others will be criticized by the Sikh community and considered hypocrites. Is it not a good way to build the image of the Sikh community and provide self-esteem for the Sikh community?" He kept silent for some time, and our dialogue on *Amrit* ended at that point. We started discussing something else.

Both of us meet quite often and continue to be close friends. He has not yet taken *Amrit*. However, he feels that a Sikh should take *Amrit* to formally join the Khalsa Panth.

My experience with such Sikhs tells me that it is simply reluctance on the part of many Sikhs that keeps them non-*Amritdhari*. Such persons, who take courage to go in for *Amrit*, later confess that ignorance was the cause of their reluctance. Earlier, they feared that they may not be able to live up to their vows. However, it was no problem to practice the Sikh *Reht*. Rather, it helped them to move straight on to the Sikh highway and it stops them from taking wrong exits.

Each such Sikh I met had his own reasons for being happy after taking *Amrit*. "Whenever there was a function in our family, it was very hard for me to justify my not drinking liquor. Now, a few words, *I have taken Amrit*, are more than enough to save me from repeated pressures of my friends. Further, I do not feel guilty for disregarding the requests of almost everyone at the function and they do not feel disrespected if I do not agree to join them."

Another lady said, "Now, we enjoy every evening. Earlier, a friend or two might come and start drinking and bothering us many times a week." Another person felt that he started enjoying his regular life only after taking *Amrit*. "Many times in our society, we waste this precious life just sitting

and talking trash. When you want to leave, your friends force you to continue to sit by asking *Ki Kahli hai*? - *What is the haste*?. Now I leave after saying that it is Rehras time. We have to recite it together in our family. By saying this, I get rid of their pressure to force me to waste my time there. His wife continued, "If I find some people hanging on unnecessarily after a friendly evening, I request everybody to enjoy the *Rehras* to be recited by our daughter. Every person thinks of an excuse to leave us."

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17
YOUR SWORD AND YOUR SPEECH

In 1986, I visited Vancouver on the invitation of the Khalsa Diwan Society, and addressed the *Sangat* in the Ross street Gurdwara there. The success of the discussion motivated the Gurdwara management to start a regular Sikh heritage class every Saturday for the Canada-born youth.

The class became very popular because the presentations were made in English. The word spread to Victoria, the capital city of British Columbia. A father with his two children came from there to attend the class. After the lecture, he wanted me to visit Victoria and address the students of the school where his son was studying. He briefed me that the staff and students were curious to know about the Sikh faith, particularly because of our unusual appearance. I agreed.

He talked to the Principal who gladly arranged my lecture in the school. There were about 45-50 students (2 classes) along with some staff members. I discussed the founding of the Sikh faith by Guru Nanak. He preached, "Do not divide people into Hindus and Muslims or adherents of any other faith. We all are children of the same Father. Love all and hate none. Anyone who loves God can realise Him." The establishment of the institutions of *Sangat* and *Pangat* and their functions to preach this message were explained to them.

The students listened attentively, and their satisfied faces were an indication of the successful communication of the Gurmat message, "God, in Thy Name bless the whole humanity." At the end of my lecture I invited questions from the students.

Before any student could respond, one of the staff members

took the initiative. He observed "Your sword (I was wearing a *Kirpan* over my shirt) and your speech do not match with each other." He was apparently upset by the positive impression my talk had made on the non-Sikh students. I do not remember the actual words used by him, but he challenged whatever I had conveyed to the students. His main objection was that, with a sword hanging by my side, preaching the message of peace and welfare of all people had no meaning. His question was: "Sword means violence, how can peace and sword go together?"

Without looking towards him (the questions were supposed to come from students and not from the staff) I requested one student sitting in the front row to stand up and asked him, "Do you feel frightened when you see a policeman with a pistol, a weapon of death." He immediately responded, "No. Instead I feel secure and protected. Policemen do not hurt, they are there to help and protect people."

I further observed "So, you think the pistol and peace can go together, if the weapon is in the right hands." After the student nodded and said 'yes', I continued: "I do not know whether a policeman has to take a religious oath, but it is a requirement for a Sikh before he is initiated. A member of the Khalsa Panth is called *Sant-Sipahi*, holy policeman or saint-soldier. His mission is to protect the weak and their human rights. That is why a Sikh is enjoined to wear a *Kirpan*, you call sword.

I briefly referred to the sacrifices made by the Khalsa for the people in Punjab, regardless of their faith, to protect them from the invaders who came every year to rob them.

At this stage, I looked towards the teacher and said, "Any other question please?" He kept mum, and did not look up. His question had been answered to the satisfaction of all. After this episode, their turban, the article of their faith, did no longer embarrass the Sikh students that attended the school. Instead it became a source of pride, and improved their self-esteem.

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18
DIALOGUE WITH GURU NANAK

The youth are usually not enthusiastic to learn Gurmukhi. They learn it only because it is one of the subjects, which they have to study at the camps. Therefore, before I start teaching any group, I spend some time to overcome the reluctance of the trainees to learn Gurmukhi

I surprised one such group by telling them in the very beginning of the class, "I can arrange for you a dialogue with Guru Nanak." In order to make the students feel serious, I added, "But you have to pay for that." Although doubtful of my statement, they asked, "How much will it cost?" I had a ready reply with me, "Twenty hours."

An interesting dialogue followed after that.

Author: Can you tape record the speech of a person today and hear it later?

Students: Yes.

Author: If my lecture is recorded today, can you listen to it after I die?

Students: Yes, we can.

Author: So, you can listen to Guru Nanak and other Gurus today if someone had recorded their hymns during their lifetime.

Students: Yes, but nobody did that. The system did not exist during those days.

Author: Yes, the system existed, but you do not know about it. You have to learn that system, before you can listen to the Guru speaking.

Students: Yes, we are willing. Teach us how to listen to the Guru speaking.

Author: Please understand that whatever Guru Nanak spoke was recorded by him, not on a tape recorder, but on paper in ink, in Gurmukhi script. Other Gurus did the same. You have already been told that the fifth Guru, Guru Arjun Dev Ji, compiled all these hymns. He also added to them the contributions of other holy people who realized the Almighty vibrating everywhere and in every human being. All these hand-written *Gurbani* hymns have been handed down to us by the Gurus and are now available in easily readable printed form.

Dear friends, you need only twenty hours to learn Gurmukhi script and can then talk to the Gurus and other holy people whose hymns are included in the Guru Granth Sahib. *Gurbani* in the Guru Granth Sahib was actually revealed to the holy persons, it is not poetry written by scholars about the teachings of the Gurus. If you commit yourself to learn *Gurmukhi*, you may need only 16 to 20 hours to start reading *Gurbani*. About ten youths have already learnt it during the previous two Sikh youth camps. They, who are serious, can also learn to read Gurbani during this camp. A Sikh is supposed to be able to communicate with his Guru, understand him, and learn the philosophy of life taught by Him by reciting Gurbani.

Students: Will it be possible to learn *Panjabi* in such a short time?

Author: Yes, you only need commitment to learn it. Maybe, some of you can learn it in less time because part of the alphabet is already known to you.

The author has developed a phonetic system of teaching *Panjabi* to the English speaking youth. Instead of teaching the *Panjabi* alphabet in the usual order, five to six letters along with one vowel are chosen each day. This helps them to make words the very first day. To help the trainees memorize the

letters, associations are told to them. For example, ਹ is like a hook, one can easily remember the H sound. The words taught are only of two letters and are from the English vocabulary to make it easy for the students to understand and learn. For example, ਹਿਟ, ਹੀਟ, ਬਿਟ, ਬੀਟ. *This Panjabi Primer for fast Learners* is available in the U.K. from the Sikh Missionary Society, 10 Featherstone Road, Southall and in Canada from the Canadian Sikh Study and Teaching Society, #108-1083 to East Kent Ave. Vancouver B.C.

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19

DO WE NEED RELIGION TODAY?

There are many religious societies, organizations and institutions preaching Sikh faith. However, the indifferent attitude of the youth towards religion continues to be a major concern of the elders. To motivate Sikh youth to value their heritage, Guru Gobind Singh Study Circle, Ludhiana, Panjab has organized many student-units in different schools and colleges. One such unit at P.A.U Ludhiana invited me during the spring semester of 1997, for a talk on the Sikh faith. Keeping in mind the disinterest of students towards faith, out of the many topics listed, 'Do we need religion today?' was chosen for open discussion in the Students Home auditorium there.

Though it was a Sikh study forum, the topic of the talk attracted a large number of clean-shaven youth as well. I could read from the faces of some students that they did not believe in God or in the philosophy of religion. Therefore, I decided to provide a twist in my lecture. Instead of justifying the need of religion, I passed on this responsibility to the youth. It made the discussion very lively and the results were much better than expected.

My introduction to the topic may be stated briefly as below:

1. Friends, many of you know that I am a strong believer of religion and I try to live up to the principles of my faith. However, being a scientist, I have some problems in accepting what I was told to believe and practice. The scientists now know a lot of what was unknown when the religions were founded and developed. History of the earth and evolution of man is no longer the field of faith alone. It is a subject taught

in schools and colleges. Earth is no longer accepted to be the center of the universe; the sun and moon are no longer gods to be worshipped by human beings. As a child I was taught to bow to the moon, our good uncle, '*Chanda Mama*'. Bathing in 'sacred' rivers and giving charity during solar and lunar eclipses were then religious requirements. Of course, some people out of ignorance do it even today to continue the tradition.

In the west, Galileo was declared guilty and imprisoned for reporting his scientific discovery that the earth revolves around the sun. His observation challenged the Bible, 'the word of God', and hence he had to suffer. (In 1986, the Pope confessed before scientists, in a televised speech that Galileo was right and the Pope, who punished him, was wrong. He regretted the punishment given to the scientist.)

Similarly there was a strong protest by Christians against the theory of evolution. Darwin was even abused for suggesting that man, as we find this species (Homo sapiens) today, was not created by God but has evolved over time. Scientists have found that the earliest human being, Homo erectus, who was the first human to walk erect on two feet, is already extinct. Now, Darwin's theory has become the foundation for the study of the evolution of life on earth.

2. Leaving aside that some beliefs of religions are unacceptable to science, history reports that their contributions to society have been negative. Let us start from our own country. In 1947 India was divided into Hindu India and Muslim India followed by bloodshed on a vast scale. It also involved untold miseries to millions of people who moved from one side of the border to the other. Violent sporadic clashes between Hindus and Muslims continue even today. In the Middle East, some Jews and Muslims (Palestinians) are thirsty for each other's blood. Killings are reported there every week. The violent clashes among Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland are a long standing problem for the U.K. government.

You may look at any country and find that religion has caused and is still causing bitterness among human relations. Everywhere it has resulted in the unnecessary loss of life. Maybe, all this bloodshed in the world could have been avoided if there was no division of people into different religions.

3. Thirdly, religions were founded to keep society in social and moral discipline. It told people not to steal, rob, or tell lies. Religion requires an individual to earn his living honestly. It prohibits strong people from bullying or bothering the weak by declaring such acts as sins. Now, all this discipline is being imposed by the government. Law prohibits all anti-social activities and prescribes punishment for those who ignore it.

Another advantage of religion is that it directs people to give charity for the welfare of the needy, weak and poor. This responsibility, too, has been taken over by the government. Out of the tax collected from the people, government provides relief to the sick, old and poor.

In other words, the present social and political structure of society has made religion unnecessary. What we have been left with as religion is a set of rituals only.

Many of these rituals make little sense to the people of the science and computer age. Religion, therefore, appears to be irrelevant for leading peaceful and happy lives. This thought is well reflected in the life of people, particularly, the modern youth.

4. Lastly, some persons openly say that they do not believe in God. Further, many of those who claim to believe in religion are seen not practicing it. People generally show blatant disregard to the instructions of their faith. This sends a clear signal to the youth that religion is no longer the need of the day.

Let us talk about Sikhs as an example. Sikh *Maryada*

requires a disciple to recite *Gurbani* regularly. Sikhs are directed not to drink alcohol or use any other drug. Many Sikhs are seen, however, disrespecting these instructions. Can you guess how many Sikhs have even read that *Maryada*? Leave aside its study, just let me ask, "How many of you sitting here know that there is a pamphlet called Sikh *Reht Maryada* (Sikh code of conduct)?" It was finalized by the Panthic scholars and published by the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, Amritsar after it was approved by its general body.

It is common knowledge that many Sikhs drink alcohol without any hesitation even though they know that it is prohibited by their faith. Unfortunately, in the recent Gurdwara elections alcohol was distributed to Sikh voters by candidates seeking election to the Sikh statutory body. If a large majority of believers and their leaders do not follow their faith and still live their lives without any problem, then where does the necessity of religion for our modern society lie? In the age of Science there seems to be no reason for us to hold on to the religion.

Of course, it was needed by the primitive, uneducated and unorganized society. Those periods are over, we are now ready to enter the 21st century. Let us shake off this unnecessary and out-of-date philosophy of faith and found a homogeneous society without religion to enter into the modern era of science.

Having presented the reasons which youth generally give for not believing in faith, I concluded my talk by asking. "Is there anybody who will like to plead the case of those who are in favor of retaining religion as it is? Any questions? Any observations please? Thank you."

Nothing was left to be said by the youth to challenge the necessity of religion. To carry on the discussion, they had no alternative but to justify the need for religion. They did perform that responsibility very ably leading to an interesting and creative discussion. The purpose of my talk was thus achieved.

To the surprise of everyone, particularly the organizers of the talk, a clean-shaven student gave the first and the final

answer. (He was awarded a book, The Sikh Faith, Questions and Answers by the author.) It helped the youth to jointly conclude:

We humans go through the same biological functions as other animals yet we are considered different and superior than all of them. We claim this because we have the unique faculty to understand that we humans have a mission or purpose in life other than to just exist, procreate and die as other living beings do. *This mission is provided only by religion*. Actually religion provides a lot more than mere discipline to keep peace in society. It gives meaning to the life of human beings. Religion tells what human beings are to achieve besides just completing the biological cycle as Homo sapiens.

Humans live not only to enjoy their life and continue their species but they have a purpose in life as well. No scientist, sociologist or scholar can tell that purpose. What one is expected to do with one's life can only be explained by a holy person, whom we call a prophet or guide. The mission and the path advised to be followed by a devotee is named religion or faith. That is how we have so many religions today.

Discussing the negative aspect of religion, as a cause of hatred and war, it was found that it is politicians who misuse religion, otherwise, there is nothing inherently wrong in the philosophy of religion. Also, politicians split people into nations, ethnic groups, linguistic divisions, regional units, etc., to make people fight with each other. They even divide professional people to create conflicts amongst them. The groups fight for their economic and political benefits. Politicians will use anything and every-thing to divide humanity; religion is just one of them. It is the people who must stand up against corrupt politicians when they misuse it.

In the end, everyone was happy and left the auditorium with great satisfaction. The youth were pleased that they could meet the expectations of the speaker and prove them to be scholars of their faith. They had developed an answer that was

acceptable to everyone at the gathering.

The speaker was happy that he was successful in convincing the youth that believing in faith is essential to raise the status of Homo sapiens above the animal kingdom. It is only the practice of our faith, which gives us the title of human beings, otherwise, biologically we are no different from animals.

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20

WHY DID GURU NANAK FOUND ANOTHER FAITH?

The interesting discussion and positive outcome of the talk, "Do we need religion today?" created a desire among the youth to arrange another discussion on the mission of the life of a Sikh. The talk also brought out the answer to the question often asked by the youth, "Why did Guru Nanak found another faith?"

The audience, I was to address, was well aware of the basic principles of the Sikh faith. The talk, therefore, was a dialogue to crystallize the ideas of the participants about the subtle and unique aspects of *Gurmat*. It is briefly stated below:

1. Let us first understand the Sikh faith. Then we can ask 'why did Guru Nanak found the new faith?

When the Guru came out of the *Bein* (a small river), he told people "*Na koi Hindu, na koi Musalman*". By preaching "*People cannot be divided into Hindus and Muslims*", the Guru laid the foundation of a new faith, independent of Hinduism and Islam. He revealed that all human beings are children of the same Father, and all of us are equally loved by Him. Anyone, who loves Him, realizes Him. The Guru, thus, destroyed the barriers dividing people into mutually hating creeds and faiths. In Jap, he stated, "ਆਈ ਪੰਥੀ ਸਗਲ ਜਮਾਤੀ, the holiest person is one who considers oneself to be an equal member of humanity."

However, disregarding this philosophy, today Sikhs are themselves divided into different sects and groups, each considering itself to be superior to the others. It has become a

great hurdle in the spread of the knowledge about *Gurmat* among Sikhs and non-Sikhs alike.

2. How did the Guru preach the unique principles of this faith?

He founded two institutions, *Sangat* and *Pangat* where all people irrespective of their faith, caste or creed, were welcome and treated as equals.

In the *Sangat*, they sing His virtues (perform *kirtan*) and love Him by any or all names, Ram, Allah, Guru, Gobind, etc. The philosophy to be understood *was that no one can claim a franchise on God*

ਆਪਨ ਬਾਪੈ ਨਾਹੀ ਕਿਸੀ ਕੋ ਭਾਵਨ ਕੇ ਹਰਿ ਰਾਜਾ॥ page 658

Further, anyone who loves Him can realize Him.

ਜਿਨੀ ਨਾਮੁ ਧਿਆਇਆ ਗਏ ਮਸਕਤਿ ਘਾਲਿ॥ *Jap.*

The Guru thus, rejected the belief that the followers of a particular faith alone are entitled to go to Heaven while others will be sent to Hell.

In *Pangat* everyone, including Hindus, Muslims, men and women, high caste and low, sit together and eat as equals free food provided by the Guru (*Guru ka Langar*).

3. What is the Mission of Human Life?

The mission of the life of a Sikh is not to get into Heaven after death. While living, one should aim to realize the Lord vibrating everywhere in the universe and in every living being. Living according to the Will of the Lord and singing His virtues during the earthly life is living in Heaven.

Ignoring Him and suffering from vices, such as ego, anger, lust, greed, etc., is living in Hell. The Guru preached that there is no place called Heaven or Hell where people are destined to go after they leave the world.

4. Can believers of a Faith be saved by their prophets?

We are judged by our deeds alone. No one, a prophet or a god, can intercede in His court. *Sewa, simran, sat santokh*, and singing His virtues alone can help one to realize the mission of human life. Wishing well for whole humanity lights the path to the Lord. This helps a person to lead the right kind of life to realize the Lord. Such a person gets honors from the Lord.

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21

REAL NAME, ALLAH OR RAM?

The recent history of India is full of Hindu and Muslim clashes because of the lack of their mutual confidence (faith). The country was divided into Hindu India and Muslim India (Pakistan) in 1947. Bloodshed took place on a very large scale. I was an eyewitness to the division of the country and the violence that followed. Just a thought of those events sends a chill through my body even today. Millions of people, myself being one of them, had to move from one side of the dividing line to the other. About two decades later, an incident in my family in the mid-sixties reminded me of this tragedy and made me feel that we have ignored the real contribution of Guru Nanak to humanity.

One day, just before leaving for school, my daughter as usual said, "*Dar jee*, we are leaving." My son, who was also ready to go along with her, suddenly lost his temper. He was about to hit her, when he saw me watching both of them. He, therefore, with-held his hand and, while murmuring something, left for his school.

When they returned from their school, I called both of them into the yard where I was busy studying a book. Addressing my son, I asked, "Why did you get mad in the morning? She did not say anything to you." With some reflections of the morning anger, he said, "She insulted us. Does she not know how to address you? She said *dar jee* to you in the presence of the professor from Delhi. Will he not think that we are uncultured and rustic people? Does she not know that the father is addressed as daddy. Only un-educated village folk say *dar jee*. I felt ashamed to hear that. Tell her not to use

this word again." Here, the reader must be told the background of 'dar jee' before I tell what happened later.

After completing my M.Sc. Agr. in 1951, 1 was appointed at Fodder Research Station Sirsa, in Haryana state. I was the only Sikh in the unit and everybody addressed me as *Sardar jee*. Many persons did not even know my name. There, we were blessed with our first child, a daughter. She also addressed me as *Sardar jee* because everyone else called me by that name. However, being a baby, she could only say *dar jee*. This name was fine with us because one of my friends also addressed his father as *dar jee*.

I was transferred to the Agricultural University, Ludhiana in 1956. There my son was born. All the children at the university campus called their father daddy. My son, therefore, assumed that the word daddy is used in educated society, whereas *dar jee* is used in rural society. Accordingly, I was daddy for my son and *dar jee* for my daughter. Till then, we never noticed this difference in our family but I will never forget it for the rest of my life because of the lesson I learnt from it. The morning incident had brought the two different names to my attention. My son lost his temper because he could not tolerate to hear the word *dar jee* in the presence of an outsider.

The dialogue was heard by my daughter as well. She was right there and listening to what her brother was saying. I asked my daughter, "You may also call me daddy. Do you have any difficulty in it?" She thought for a minute, took half a turn to look away from me, and whispered to herself, daddy. She turned back to me and apologetically said, "*Dar jee*! No, daddy is merely a word for me. It does not make me feel that I am addressing you." It was followed by a silence, waiting for a response from me. Hearing this, I could not hold my heart and was speechless. A minute later, I said to them, "O.K. Go, have your snacks and finish your school work."

My eyes closed and a wave of thought went through my

mind. "Guru Nanak! You were really great. Like children, we still fight and shed blood to decide whether to call God Allah or Ram."

Nobody in the family or any friend ever took notice of the two different names for more than six years. Everything went smoothly. Why should there be any problem when some people address our common Father as Ram while others love Him as Allah?

We have forgotten the first sermon the Guru gave after coming out of the river *Bein*. His message to the people was "*Na Koi Hindu. Na koi Musalman*." Do not divide people as Hindu or Muslim, inferior or superior, high caste or low caste. We are children of the same Father, hence equal. Anybody who loves Him (by any name) realizes Him.

Hymns composed by Kabir, a low caste, Ravidas, a shoemaker and untouchable, Baba Farid, a Muslim, and many other devotees are included in the Sikh scriptures. They all loved God by different names and realized Him.

Why have we failed to understand this simple message which is revealed throughout the Guru Granth Sahib? The division of the country in 1947 and the bloodshed, which followed and is continuing all over the world even today, could have been avoided.

The thought, which at that moment lifted me to the other world cannot be restated today. I cannot get myself into the same spiritual mode. My intellect cannot take me there again. I was awakened to this world only when my daughter called me, "*Dar jee*, will you come inside to have tea, or should we bring it to you?" Without answering, I came to the living room. Even before my daughter brought the cup of tea, my son placed some sweets on the table, and said "Daddy, yesterday auntie brought these sweets. Mom told us we can have them with our evening tea."

I was the same person again, *Dar jee* to my daughter, and

daddy to my son. As long as I live, both names are going to be with me. Though, my son-in-law and my daughter-in-law call me daddy but for my grandson, I continue to be *Dar jee*, the name he picked up from my daughter.

To conclude, may I beg my fellow Sikhs to understand and also share the teachings of Guru Nanak with all people whom they meet. If they write articles about it and also live their life with this belief, the world will become a better place to live in than what it is today. Let every Sikh tell people that Allah, Ram, Guru, God, and all other names are equally loved by Him. Let people choose any name they like to address Him. God judges us not by the name with which we address Him, but by the deeds we do.

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22
YOU ARE A COWARD SIKH

A couple of years ago, some Sikh parents in Toronto were charged with child abuse, based on the evidence given by their children. It is sad that a twenty-minute documentary was shown on television depicting the "harsh' and 'dictatorial' behavior of the parents towards their grown up children. The Sikhs felt bad, some even angry and raised objections against presenting this negative image of them by the media. The community felt that the parents did no wrong because it was their duty to save their children from going on the wrong path.

I happened to watch the documentary and was very much upset to observe the irresponsible behavior of our youth and the 'wrong' reaction of their parents. Some students missed their classes to participate in daytime drink-and-dance gatherings. The parents hit the children for ignoring their studies and failing their examinations.

Some well-behaved senior students of Toronto were known to me. I called them to an informal meeting to discuss the issue with them. I wanted to advise the rebellious youth that their primary responsibility is to study. Further, they should convince their junior friends to listen to their parents and be respectful to them.

To the responsible youth gathered in a friends house, I proposed, "Let us try to understand where we have failed to let that sad incidence happen, and what we can do to improve the image of our community." Unexpectedly, everyone started blaming me as if I was the real culprit responsible for the problem. It appeared as if the youth had summoned me to be thrashed by them for my failures.

"Uncle, you are a coward teacher. You tell us to respect the Sikh tenets. Why do you not dare to tell the same thing to the parents and the adults? Are you scared to face them? Are you a Sikh? A Sikh is not scared to tell the truth?..."

The tables having been turned on me, I became speechless. Everyone had something to say to me as if they had planned to accuse me, or maybe, to awaken me to my duty, whichever way one may think. They even named some responsible Sikhs, members of the gurdwara management, and even some preachers, who did not care to respect Sikh Maryada." Mr. A. Singh got drunk at the party, his turban fell off, and his hair were spread; even Mr. B. Singh was found drinking. Last Sunday, Mr. C and Mrs. C. celebrated the silver jubilee of their wedding. Some Sikhs drank too much, they fought among themselves and were arrested by the police."

This seemed to go on ad infinitum. The break came when one youth said, "Why blame youth? Adults are the role model for us. If these things are good for them, they cannot be bad for us. If you are a fearless Sikh, you should advise the parents. You did not dare to tell this even once to them. "*Shooting of these allegations ended when one of them said, "It is no use telling us to follow the Sikh Reht, to avoid alcohol and not to dance at parties, unless you make our parents practice it. As long as the parents do not listen to you, the youth will not care to listen to you*."

I humbly agreed, "Yes, I respect your wishes. I will convey your feelings whenever I have a chance to address the *Sangat*."

The very next Sunday, I told everything in detail to the *Sangat* at the Dixie Road Gurdwara. I shared my feelings with the *Sangat* without any sophistication in the following words.

"The other day, the youth slapped me, of course, not with their hands, but with their words... Unless the parents themselves observe the Sikh *Reht,* how can they expect the youth to follow it? When we enter the gurdwara hall, all of us

bow to the Guru Granth Sahib. It means we respect *Gurbani* and promise to obey its directions. Gurbani says that a Sikh should not drink. (I quoted hymns to support my statement). *To save our children, whom we love so much, I request all Sikhs here in the gurdwara to throw away the bottle, and start reciting Nitnem from today onwards.*"

My words did have their desired effect, as I was told later. I narrated this thrashing given to me by the youth to the *Sangat* at many places. It might have displeased a few Sikhs who relish drinking, but helped many others to give up alcohol and to practice the Sikh *Reht*.

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23

'ANIMAL' - MAN AND 'HUMAN' - MAN?

The topic was discussed both in Canada and USA; the outcome is given below.

A. I was invited to a high school in Quesnel, B.C., Canada, for a lecture about the Sikh way of life. There were some Sikh students in the school. They wanted me to address their classmates and answer their questions about Sikhs and their heritage.

As an introduction, I started with unanticipated questions to draw the attention of the students and to make my talk more interesting.

Author: Why have you come to school today? It is a nice day to be outside.
Students: We want to study.
Author: Primitive man did not have to go to any such school. Why do you have to attend school?
Students: We want to become professionals, doctors, engineers, etc.
Author: Why?
Students: We must earn money for our living.
Author: So you come to school for money? If I give you $5 million each, will you still come to school? If yes, why?

This made the students think, and become more involved in the talk. A very useful discussion followed.

Going to school and becoming a professional does not make an 'animal' - man into a 'human' - man. If we humans

live only to eat, grow, produce children, get old, and die, we are absolutely no different from animals. All living beings go through the same cycle during their life. Education does not merely involve learning how to earn money, we must also know the purpose of life and how to achieve it.

The youth were asked as to what should be the mission of human life. Many answers were given by the students. They were debated and none of those answers could be agreed to be the true mission of human life.

It was then that I spoke, "Friends, it is not possible for us to know why God created us. We have to look somewhere else for an acceptable answer. We need some enlightened God-person to explain to us the purpose of human life. In the past, these philosophers or prophets have been addressed by such names as Son of God (Jesus Christ), Messenger of God (Mohammed), Incarnation of God (Bhagwan Ram, Bhagwan Krishan), One-Who-Knows (Buddha), One-Who-Guides (Guru), etc.

We can choose to believe any one of them. That becomes our faith or religion, and whatever faith we choose, we have to live according to it. Ignoring our faith means refusing to be a human being, and living the life of an 'animal'-man. True peace and pleasure is obtained by disciplining one's mind and living according to one's faith. Rejecting, or distorting the principles of faith, and living according to one's convenience only keeps one in an illusion.

To explain this, let me quote one common example. Doing exercise is not tormenting your body, but making it strong, healthy, and happy. Forcing your mind to follow your faith is not limiting or restricting your happiness, but enjoying the path of real pleasure. Faith tells us to practice the virtues - truth, service, and humility and at the same time to stay away from vices – ego, lust, greed, and anger. If one follows this path, one leads a peaceful and contented life here, and is also assured of a similar 'life' in the next world.

After carefully listening to what I said, the students asked me about the mission of my life. My answer was, "*To understand and realize the Creator, Our Father, so that I am able to accept the whole of humanity as my brothers and sisters*." (See episode 1 Ovation to Guru Nanak)

At the end of the lecture the teacher said, "This is the first time in my life I found all the students listening attentively up to the end. Even after the bell rang, they were interested to hear more. Otherwise, they are usually eager to leave the room."

B. (i) When discussing the same question at a USA camp, the youth took a different view. Some new aspects were presented to identify humans from animals.

It was observed that human beings are the most intelligent animals. Man has brought every animal, even the most ferocious and dangerous ones, under his control. Further, he has discovered many secrets of nature and has made many inventions - engine, airplane, telephone, computer, etc.

It was also agreed that human beings (without technology) have their own limitations - the best engineer cannot build a weaver bird's nest. Human beings cannot communicate over long distance as dolphins can. Further, a gorilla can be tamed to type messages and communicate with human beings.

Finally, it was agreed that the real uniqueness of humans lies in the fact that we can understand we have a mission in life and this faculty puts human beings in a distinct category of superior 'animals'. It is, therefore, only the practice of faith (the mission of a human being) that raises an animal-man to the status of a human-man.

ii. With a second group, there was another interesting approach developed by the trainees to identify the superiority of man over animals.

The concept of marriage and family is not there among the animals. They randomly mate to produce their offspring. After the mother stops suckling her young ones, she loses all relationship with her issue. They agreed that among domestic animals, the male plays little part in the life of the new generation fathered by him.

The author took advantage of this analysis. The attention of the students was drawn to the permissiveness being adopted by some youth in their pre-marital sexual relationship and often with more than one person. It was regarded to be immoral behavior, which degraded cultured human beings to uncultured-animals'. The outcome proved very helpful in giving the message of chastity to the youth and adults alike.

This open discussion, resulting in such conclusions, stimulated every participant to contribute an answer. One of them was that "Animals do not wear clothes." After many comments, the group agreed in a general sense, "An animal, even if clothed will behave as an animal. A human being will continue to be the same even if the person is not dressed. A naked man is legally prohibited to come out in public. However, irrespective of the legal aspect, an unclothed person will not be regarded as a cultured human being.

A very useful message was obtained by the youth from these observations. The scanty-dress culture being adopted by some youth has misled many young people. It lowers the image and grace of a cultured human being. It may be an important cause of immorality among the youth. Sikh youth must avoid it to maintain their dignity and self-esteem. It is uncivilized behavior to go out to a public place baring one's body.

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24

IS GOD MALE OR FEMALE, MAN OR ANIMAL?

At every training camp, youth ask many different kinds of questions regarding God. For example: Is God male or female? Does God look like some animal or man? Why does God not get old and die? *Gurbani* tells us that God is inside everybody, then why can't we describe God?

This time my answer was simple and unusual. It did not involve the routine terms used in religion. That was precisely what the youth wanted. The camp was held in a gurdwara in Montreal, Canada. The dialogue which took place can be briefly written as below:

Teacher: Where is Canada?
Youth: This is Canada. Montreal is in Canada.
Teacher: Is this Canada (I pointed towards the walls of the gurdwara)?
Youth: No, the whole country is Canada.
Teacher: Please show me Canada?
Youth: (One youth found a map on the wall and traced the boundary of the Canada) This is Canada.
Teacher: Yes. Now I understand that the few inch portion of the paper marked by the young man is Canada.
Youth: Sir, you know Canada. Why do you ask such questions from us? You know this is a map of Canada.
Teacher: I know you have not seen Canada and cannot tell me what Canada is. Has anyone seen Montreal. Please tell me where it is?

The Youth did not answer my question but they started

talking among themselves. I continued:

Friends, forget about Canada, none of you can even explain what Montreal is. It is a continuously changing picture of landscape, roads, buildings and details of the buildings, people, their many cultures, etc.

When you say, "This is Montreal", you mean a place in Montreal, not the whole city. You can never 'show' the complete Montreal to any person by speaking about it. You know that Montreal is only a tiny part of Canada. Let us go beyond Canada imagine North America, the whole earth, the solar system, our galaxy and millions of galaxies, which we cannot count. Even then it is not the end of the universe, it only defines the limit of our knowledge, and you know that we have been increasing this limit with the passage of time.

Even by 'knowing' that Montreal is a part of Canada, one cannot imagine the whole of Canada without actually seeing it. Similarly, even by knowing the physical creation (the limit of which we can never know) made by God, one cannot know Him. Whatever we know is not the limit of God, but God is there in it everywhere. Nothing is without Him. The way Canada is there in every street of Montreal, rather in every house but no place in Montreal can be accepted as the whole Canada.

God is inside of us but we do not care to realize it. You can now understand why God is beyond description. Actually we observe Him but we do not know Him. Have you seen anger? Where does it live? Any answers please.

Youth: It is in all of us.

Teacher: If it is in all of us, please show me anger in anyone of you. Agreed, it is in all of us but it remains invisible. However, when we become angry, our face and our words express it. Anger cannot be found in the body by any surgeon, yet it is always there.

God is love. It is in all of us but cannot be found or seen in our body. It is only when a person is drenched in the love of God, that his words and his behavior change and we can 'see' God in that person. The virtuous life of the holy people, free from vices, anger, lust etc. reveals Him.

You know that when more than two scientists verify a fact, it becomes accepted. In this manner, dozens of holy scientists, the *Bhagats*, have found God and proved Him to be the Truth. I narrated some *Bhagat Bani* hymns from Guru Granth Sahib to explain that people of different religions and born at different times realized God and found Him in every human being. Many *Bhagat* scientists, if you want me to use this term, of different faiths, independently found God vibrating in every person. Is this not scientific proof of God? Hymns of such holy persons are included in the Guru Granth Sahib.

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25

ONE HYMN IN SUKHMANI IS 'NOT CORRECT'

I could not believe my ears when a medical doctor at a Sikh Youth camp in USA told me, "There is one line in Sukhmani which is not correct." Before I could think of any response, he continued, "ਮਾਨੁਖ ਕੈ ਕਿਛੁ ਨਾਹੀ ਹਾਥਿ... (Page 281) - *a human being cannot do anything*. You know I treat sick persons and make them healthy."

I already knew the doctor and his family. They were devoted Sikhs. The children were well behaved and recited *Gurbani*. Hence, his statement surprised me.

For this unusual question, I started with an unusual approach. I asked the doctor, "How can you make sick people healthy? I don't think you can even walk to touch that tree which is only 9 to 10 feet away." It was the month of July and we were sitting under the shade of a grove and eating apples.

The doctor took a couple of steps, touched the tree and said, "See! I have done it." What I was to say was already in my mind, "No. You were taken there by God. Did you not breathe air provided by God for you to remain alive and walk?" He did not expect that response from me. While sitting on the chair, he said, "This is nature. It is already here." The tone of his words revealed that he understood my message. I continued, "We can do nothing. Everything is in the hands of God."

Later, what I explained to him can be stated as below:

Who are we? We were born from a speck. After being fed, first the milk of the mother and later food of many kinds,

we became adults. All these things were provided to us by God. The apple and other fruit, we eat in dozens every week, are produced for us by God. No human being can create a single fruit or grain. Our body is, thus, a gift of God and it depends upon His blessings all the time. Our soul, you already believe, is a reflection of God because of which we are alive.

The physical, intellectual and other faculties are provided to us by God. You, as a doctor, know that human beings have their own individual nature and thinking. Who gives them this thinking and mental faculties? The best students join the medical profession but some of them fail to perform the hard work. Even though they wish it, they are not provided with the devotion, intellect or other characteristics necessary to complete the requirements of the medical degree. God is running this whole show. We are mere actors who have been assigned our separate roles to perform according to our capabilities.

Our dialogue ended abruptly when the doctor was called for some managerial decisions. I myself, sitting alone, went through all our discussions in my mind. I honestly felt that God is *Kartar*. He runs the whole show. I am not sure what conclusions the doctor drew from our discussions.

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26

GRANTHI SAHIB CUTS THE GRASS

It was September 1948, Dr. Harinder Singh Dhindsa was teaching our class under a shady tree in the grounds of the Khalsa College Amritsar. While sitting in the class, I could not help repeatedly looking at the *Granthi Sahib* of the college gurdwara cutting grass just 50 meters away. This distracted the attention of the teacher.

Being otherwise a disciplined student, the teacher excused me a couple of times. Finally, he became concerned at my looking away again and again. He himself looked back to see what was more interesting to me than the class. He also recognized that the gentleman cutting grass was the *Granthi Sahib* of the gurdwara.

We know that the person holding the responsibility of gurdwara *kirtan*, recitation, and prayer commands the highest respect among Sikhs. The whole class then also looked at the *Granthi Sahib*. It is totally unexpected of the person holding that status to perform a job usually done by illiterate unemployed persons. Without saying anything to me, the professor addressed us:

"Well, boys close your notebooks. Let us understand a great moral lesson today. This will be a very important guide for your future life." I felt relieved for not being rebuked by the teacher. He continued:

"Do you watch that man with a white turban cutting grass in the fields. I know him. He is the *Granthi Sahib* of our college gurdwara. He is a very admirable person. Sikhs in the locality respect him a great deal. I also know why he is performing that lowly job. He has a cow at his house. Having put a rope

around her neck, it becomes his responsibility to provide grass, grain, and protection for her.

If you young people get the 'rope' of faith around your neck, God will do everything for you and will never fail to protect you from the worries and problems of your life. If you follow the path prescribed for you by your faith, you will never face any failure. You will always enjoy you peace and pleasure in your heart.

It is only when we disregard the directions of our faith that, we meet mental and physical problems in our life. Think of the cow tied at his house. If she gets free from the rope and wanders into the green crops, the farm guard will beat her with a stick. If she damages some experiment, he may get very angry and teach her a lesson, he may even break her leg. When we, under the stress of vices, 'free' ourselves of the religious 'rope' - the direction for a righteous life - we land ourselves in trouble.

We see thieves, drug users and cheats, creating trouble for themselves and leading stressful lives. If you want to be happy, respect the religious way of life. It may appear to be restricting but it keeps you disciplined and, like the cow at his (*Granthi's*) house, safe.

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27

MOM, I WANT TO CUT MY HAIR

I was invited from India by North-American Sikhs to participate in their annual conference at Los Angeles, California in May 1984. During a session in the gurdwara, I was to address the audience on the heritage of the Sikhs. A local lady speaker followed me. During her speech she narrated her experience with her son. The problem of the youth, the response of her mother to his feelings and its outcome will be of great help to many Sikh youth and their parents today. The relevant part of her speech is given below:

In California, the mother was tired of explaining to her son, day after day, why she wanted him to keep his hair. Finally, when he asked her, as he did frequently, for permission to cut his hair, she told him to bring the scissors, and that she herself would cut his hair. The son was, of course, astonished that she hadn't told him, as usual, that a Sikh would rather lose his head than cut his hair, a complete silence followed.

After a couple of minutes, his mother reminded him that, although it would be easy to cut his hair, it would be impossible to change his features and the color of his skin. Consequently, the white Americans, to whom he was apparently trying to conform, would still not accept him fully. She told him, "Since you can never be the same as they are, remain what you are, work hard, and become superior to them."

In this way, the boy was shown that his different appearance made him inferior only if he allowed it to. Therefore, he became determined to earn people's respect.

He graduated from high school with prizes for both his sports achievements and his academic work. The white students, whom he wanted to resemble, showed great respect for him and his parents.

The boy was later convinced that his turban was no hindrance in being popular with his friends.

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28
SONNY, TIE YOUR TURBAN

In 1987 I was working as a Sikh heritage teacher at the Khalsa School Vancouver, BC Canada. For motivating students to be proud of their heritage, something very valuable for building the self-esteem of a person, I used to tell them lessons and share experiences of my life with the youth. The students and their parents appreciated them as good moral lessons.

Motivated by my experiences, one of the parents of a student narrated an episode of his relative. I decided to include it here as a great lesson for Sikhs living in foreign countries, particularly in the West.

My cousin is a millionaire. His father was among the early immigrants to British Columbia. He was born and educated in Vancouver. His parents were of fair color and he is also of very fair color. He got his CA (Chartered Accountant) degree and later founded his own accounting firm. He cuts his hair, speaks excellent English with a Canadian accent. His dealers and even employees mistake him for a European. One day in a meeting with his employees, he mentioned about his East Indian origin. After hearing this the changed facial expression and later behavior of the Europeans sent him the message, "Though you are our employer, but you don't deserve to be equal to us; you are not of the white race."

This man, who had been asking, "Why should Sikhs keep long, shabby hair when they live and work in Canada? Like other Canadians, they should cut their hair and look clean, neat, and smart.", suddenly learned a fact of life. When he came home he advised his young son:

Dear, you must keep your hair and tie your turban. You should not lose your self-esteem of being a Sikh by cutting your hair. Look! I pass for a rich European. My personal looks, my education, and my financial status make me a respectable citizen and an elite person in Vancouver. But when the Europeans came to know that I am an East Indian they considered me an *inferior* human being. You may do anything, but white persons will not consider you equal. Therefore, be a Sikh, look like a Sikh, and be proud of that. Why disrespect your faith? Even by doing so, you do not get what you want, 'equality with the majority'.

This episode should help remove inferiority complexes in the minds of Sikh youth living in western society. One must respect his own culture and faith if he wants to be respected by his friends. If you disregard the principles of your own faith, you lose the respect of the community and also of western people. If you are a good person, people will respect you regardless of your looks, they always value your character and not your appearance.

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29

MOM! THIS IS MY LIFE

This tragic episode is related to the life of a young European girl in North America. She published it in a letter to Ann Landers, a popular columnist of the western world. I read it sometime in the mid-eighties. The incident reveals the attitude of the youth towards their parents and the sad outcome of disregard for their advice.

I wished to include her original words, but I could not locate the newspaper cutting I had saved. It will be better understood if I narrate, what I remember, in the first person:

When I was a teenage girl, I did not care to listen to the advice of my mom. As with many teenagers, whenever my mom would ask me to do or not to do something, my reply always was "Mom, this is *my* life. I know (what to do). Do not interfere."

Every time I went outside, she would tell me, "Do not go out, it is too late for you to venture outside." I was tired of hearing this again and again, hence I decided to leave the house to enjoy my *freedom* as an independent individual.

I soon became pregnant and delivered a baby girl. Being a single mother, I suffered for more than a decade to raise my daughter. I did nothing but nurse her. I was shocked when my daughter shot at me the same words that I had said to my mom when I was a teenager, "Mom! I know. This is *my* life; do not interfere."

I could understand only then the agony my mother suffered when I used those words. I was awakened to the truth and understood what a mother is for her children and how

much she loves them. Moved by the love for my mother, I went to her home to apologize for hurting her feelings. When I reached the neighborhood I saw a dead body being taken out for a funeral. It was my mother.

Dear Ann, now, I do not want to live anymore. I want to die and meet my mother so that I can apologize to her, be forgiven for my sin and overcome my guilt. It is impossible for me to live with that guilt in my mind. When 1 meet her I will say, "Mom! I am really sorry for disrespecting and hurting you by not listening to you. I ruined my own life, and yours too, by disobeying you. Please forgive me.

The advice given to her by Ann Landers may be stated as below:

By committing suicide you cannot meet your mother. I am publishing your feelings so that youth all over the world will read them. This will convince many of them to obey their mothers, express due regard to them, and thus, save their own lives while keeping their mothers in peace. You must go to the youth, talk about this tragedy and advise them to listen to their mothers. This is the way you can console yourself, overcome your guilt and lead the rest of your life in peace.

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30
CASH AND TRASH

A close friend, a university professor at Ludhiana, narrated this episode to me about two decades ago. I repeat below what my friend described to me.

You know, I contribute regularly for gurdwara functions. Once, special Gurpurb celebrations were arranged by the campus residents of the Panjab Agriculture University, Ludhiana. The organizers as usual visited me for my contributions. I usually gave 25 rupees every time they came for collections. They told me, "This will be a special function, we want bigger contributions this time. Mr. A (a clerk) paid 20 rupees." This was a signal for me to double my contributions. However, keeping my recent promotion and position at the University in mind, I contributed one hundred rupees. The members were very pleased since they expected only 50 rupees.

When my friends left, my ego overtook me, "Look! I am a great Sikh. This contribution will draw God's attention and He will give me special rewards for this."

I regret and am embarrassed to tell you (I know you won't reveal my name to others) what went into my mind on the day of the function. When I went through the aisle to pay my respect to Guru Granth Sahib, I could not help looking at the *Sangat* already sitting there. Drenched in my ego, I said to myself, "This person would have paid only five rupees; this teacher might have given ten rupees; this worker would not have paid anything, he has come only for *langar*. Look! I paid one hundred rupees. I am really a great devotee."

This thinking continued in my mind even after the

function was over and I had returned to my house. At night I had a dream in which I telephoned God. The dialogue, which 1 had with His office, was like this:

Response: God's office. What can we do for you?

Professor: Do you know that I gave one hundred rupees for the Gurpurb? Did you credit this big money to my accounts?

Response: No. We received no money from you.

Professor: How could you miss this big sum of money? I may be the only devotee to give that big an amount.

Response: Oh! Yes, I now remember. We received the cash but threw it in the trash for where it was meant. You gave the money to build your ego and not with love for God. There is no place for ego here. So far as your account with us is concerned, it is totally blank.

I was really disappointed to hear that. I could not help crying like a child (in my dream). The office secretary became concerned with my weeping. To console me she said, "Let me check with the other secretary, she maintains another kind of account. I am going to connect you with that desk, please continue to hold. I was very happy when the second secretary told me that I have a huge balance in my favor and will never feel any shortage of anything, anywhere. I could not believe my ears when I heard about the huge balance in my credit. I asked her when had I deposited that money?

I heard the secretary speaking, "A couple of months back in the month of November, you had an argument with your wife. She was proud of your promotion at becoming the head of the department, and therefore had purchased new shoes for your son. You didn't approve of the purchase because the old shoes were in good shape. When you questioned her she replied that she didn't want her son to get sick in the cold wearing old shoes. You were upset and left the house for your office.

When you got out of the house, you saw some poor students going to their primary school. One of them was without shoes. Your heart was moved with sympathy for the boy going to school barefoot. You told the boy to wait there. You went inside, picked up those old shoes and gave them to the boy. The boy put on the shoes, smiled a little and without saying anything walked away to his school. The sympathy for the poor has turned the trash (old shoes) into an unlimited amount of cash and you will never be short of anything. Do you remember this?" She hung up even before I could say, "thank you."

Dear friend, I know you practice a religious life and that is why I have shared my dream with you. It has given me a great lesson, "Ego turns our cash into trash. Sympathetic feeling for the poor turns trash into cash. This episode I have remembered many times and I felt pressured inside to share it with somebody. I chose you. You give lectures to the youth and talk to the *Sangat* in the gurdwaras. Maybe, you can share this lesson with them, of course, without revealing my identity."

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ARE THE 5 K'S NECESSARY TODAY?

A son questions his father, and the father responds.[1]

Jaskirat was from a fairly affluent family of Panjab and had been residing in a hostel for eleven years. His friends did not consider him to be 'hip" (westernized) enough, and this was certainly a drawback. Being "hip' provided the key to the all-night parties and was a measure of the upward social mobility among the student community. Jaskirat's flowing beard and his refusal to join his friends in drinking bouts and smoking joints of Marijuana earned him the nickname of "*Sant Maharaj Ji*." "Don't you smoke?" was the usual query. "Come on, you must be smoking in your room, all Sikhs do. Go ahead, we are not going to write to your old man".

When Jaskirat told his friends that he did not smoke, they were not pleased with him and were not ready to take his word. They called him a hypocrite behind his back. But his ostracism on campus did not end there; the pressures were increasing every day. Amrita Kaur, a popular classmate and good friend of Jaskirat, was unwilling to accept his invitation to a party because he insisted on carrying a *Kirpan* with him. For her it was a sign of cultural shallowness and crudeness of the mind. Such behavior was certainly an obstacle in her endeavor to be one with the "in-Crowd." She was in no mood for a compromise this time and was determined to put him on the spot. In her intellectual anger, she tersely told him, "You claim to be

1 Condensed by Baldeesh Singh of Vancouver from the bulletin, "We Are Not Symbols?". First published by Sri Guru Nanak Sat Sang Sabha, 17 Wilkinson Road, Singapore 1543. Reprint by Canadian Sikh Studies and Teaching Society, # 108-1083 East Kent Street Vancouver B.C. V5X 4V9, Phone/ Fax (604) 327-4147

progressive in your views, but you still carry a sword like a feudal hero. If it is for self defense and honor, which you are so fond of claiming, then a machine gun, would be more efficient to do the job. Live in the present, do not be a priest of the past." She slipped a note in Jaskirat's room in the hostel, offering him a job as a "Moral Science Teacher in a Convent School."

Unable to carry on with the ever-increasing pressure of his tight rope walking, Jaskirat decided to write to his father, who was keen to see his son as a *Guru ka Sikh*. He was fortunate to have as his father a famous poet who had been a guest lecturer at Cambridge, Harvard, and Michigan, and had spoken before various international associations and institutions.

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LETTER OF THE SON

My dear Dad, Sat Sri Akal.

1. It is with extreme pain, conflict, and misery that I resolved to write to you about my inability to accept the 5 K's. I have no question about the efficacy of these symbols endowed three centuries ago. They were essential in times of war to maintain the identity of Sikhs and give them a common denominator of unity. It was a good strategy for fighting against an enemy bent on destroying the very seeds of Sikhism. But for the present, these symbols have no justification, no meaning or any convincing explanation. Sardar Partap Singh wrote a five-page article on the utility of the 5 K's, but when I met him at the club last month, he was definitely not carrying a *kirpan*. He is no exception in these double standards.

It is not me alone who has felt this lacuna, but most Sikh boys in my college are also unable to accept these symbols and their validity for everyday life.

They can establish no coherent connection between a kirpan and the human effort for the communion with God. In no way can I convince them that these symbols make me more of a Sikh than them. They are recognized as much Sikh as I am. In fact more so because they are seen in tune with the modern times, I as an idiot who sees in a set of 5 symbols a stepping stone for my liberation in the future. *The belief in God, the harm in smoking, the ill effects of drinking, the daily reading of the Japji - all these I have no objections to accept; but the 5 symbols do not fit into any logical framework*. A happy life and the 5 symbols seems to me to be an absurd and illogical equation.

2. As beliefs shape experience, these symbols become

an inescapable reality. Once the mind has experienced the pleasure, which identification through these symbols brings, the mind is firmly entrenched in this deceptive pleasure and nothing can shake it. The end result is that we are slaves of this false identification. We do not want to question them because that would not be honorable. And the older generation does not want us to inquire; they do not have the courage to face our questions. The acceptance of these symbols with them has become the means for gaining status in society. But Dad, there must be freedom to grasp our own instincts and act accordingly. Why can't I free myself from this structure of imitation? It is constantly building up fear in me and this fear is further strengthening this structure. To be my own self, I must break these imposed symbols.

3. My belief in God is not bound to my hair. These symbols are not religion, they are only the result of our being forced to conform to war conditions. Is not religion something, much purer, and much deeper than these symbols? We must learn to live without these symbols and face reality. These signs have to be discarded and life has to be seen as it is.

We are told that cultural, military, psychological, social, political, economic, spiritual, physical, and sexual factors were the main considerations, which made Guru Gobind Singh endow the Sikhs with the 5 K's. If I accept one set of these explanations, the next set contradicts the former. The explanations for the 5 K's are a paradise of pick and choose. One may choose the one, which fancies an individual the most, very much like a nice trouser in a show window. It is not strange if some think that the choice is still not wide enough to appeal to their senses. So they come out with the choice of discarding these symbols.

If I take the view that the *Kirpan* is for self-defense, can I discard it if I have twenty bodyguards with all the latest equipment for my protection? Similarly, I can question the necessity of the other K's.

Daddy, I am utterly incapable of understanding the

value, the justification and the imposition of these symbols. I am prepared to take the challenge and I give you my word that in case you can show me the way and the significance of these symbols, I will enjoy living the life of an *Amritdhari* Sikh.

Your loving son,
Jaskirat

Reply from the father

Dearest Jaskirat,

Sat Sri Akal. It is a pleasure to hear it all, so plainly stated. I understand your feelings and I hope to be able to calm your mental anguish.

1. When you leave the university and face the world it seems to me that what is crucial in life is not to succumb to various pressures, but to understand and feel them as they are. You may question what is given to you or what many of your age assert, is being forced upon you - but this also means *that you must question yourself*. It is only with such an integrated total approach, that you will understand not only the *Kakaars*, but also appreciate the agonies, the joys, the pain, the pleasure, the vanities and the hope of living.

Over and over again, you want to know the significance of the 5 K's? In our efforts to be practical individuals, we want to imbibe only what is of utility and significance, the rest we want to discard. The search for significance in everything is a curse of the present century. It is a form of self-killing and therefore it breeds the fear of living. The whole world, all your friends, your relations, everyone is struggling for significant and useful things. But what might be significant for you, might not be so for your friends.

If you go to a man who has ill health, he will undoubtedly say, what is significant is good health. If you go to a mother, she will say the significant thing is to have a son. This is the reason you find an intricate web of explanations, for the significance of the 5 K's.

2. The first step in your questioning of the 5 K's should be to get free of this yoke of significance. It is this illusionary search for significance, which has made many youth and their seniors to discard their articles of faith. They see no value in them.[2] It is a pity that we went to reduce Sahib Guru Gobind Singh Ji, to our own mundane level of thinking and view all his actions in light of *practical utility*. If he was in search of merely objects of practical utility, he could have made a truce with Aurangzeb, when the latter made the offer. If the Guru wanted the 5 K's to be reflections of practical use values, he could have very well added not only more weapons, but instead of a sword, he could have given us a gun, as guns did exist at that time. But he was not inspired out of a hunt for weapons of self-defense or practical value, as we would make it out, reflecting our own thinking backwards in history. The sword, anyway, in the battlefield would have been useless without a shield.

The *Kanga*, the *Kesh*, the *Kara*, the *Kirpan*, the *Kachha*, were all delicate gifts of love and beauty to the Khalsa from a man who desired nothing for himself, but everything for the Khalsa. These gifts were from a Guru who totally surrendered everything for the cause and unique love of the Khalsa. "If thou art zealous of playing the game of love, then enter upon my path with thy head on thy palm." It was out of such love that these gifts were presented to the Khalsa and not out of any attempts to carve out soldiers.

When there is total love, there is action, there is sacrifice, is there not? The love of the Guru for the Khalsa was not the result of mental vibrations. In his life, there was no gap between love and action, as there is between our thinking and action. It is only we who want to be one sided in our love and make claims of loving the Guru in our ideals. Consequently we

2 A Briton was asked, "Why do you wear a turban? Is it not enough for you to practice the philosophy of Guru Gobind Singh in your social and personal life?" He replied, "The people accept me as the son of Guru Gobind Singh. Is it not enough reason to wear the turban?" This can be understood when we see many people, particularly the youth, having clothes and shoes bearing brand names. The Sikhs are similarly proud to wear the brand name of Guru Gobind Singh.

reason out that we don't have to express our love for Him in action, in the *Kesh*. But can there be love without total commitment and action? No. The total love of the Guru for the Khalsa becomes apparent in the book titled the *Sarbloh*, where, He becomes one with the Khalsa and portrays the Khalsa as his highest love:

> Khalsa is the breath of my body,
> Khalsa is the very soul of my life.
>
> Khalsa gives me intellect and wisdom,
> Khalsa is my object of meditation.

The mind that lives the Sikh way of life can know what is the beauty of the gifts the Guru gave to us. The 5 ornaments that we wear are the gifts, from the Guru whose whole family was sacrificed for the total love of the Khalsa. Could such a Guru be looking for practical utilities of an *animal existence*? He was not the person to endow us with gifts of mere practical value, but gifts of *love*, which knew no questioning, no bartering, no deals, and no betraying. His was a total sacrifice and a total love, in both thought and action, for the happiness of the Khalsa. These gifts had their pangs of birth in a sea of human blood. *It was not out of any practical benefit that the evil genius of the Mughal government announced awards for the hair of the Sikhs. It was because they knew that, the Khalsa, deprived of these gifts (the Guru's love), would disintegrate.*

3. The *Kirpan* is a gift from Guru Gobind Singh Ji to the Khalsa. It is not to be judged and measured as a weapon of war or peace, it is a gift activated by the love of the Guru. Even a whole army of bodyguards or the best police state in the world cannot make it redundant. It shall always remain attached to me. The sword is the love wherein the Guru resides.

You say it is inconvenient, frustrating, and impractical to grow our hair long. But more frustrating is an existence of no inspiration and no effort. Our superficial hollow life is no way less discouraging. The day to day fragmentary living, the

everyday struggle for food, the daily pain, suffering, distress, torments, and headaches are in no way less discomforting. But in spite of all this, do we cease to exist?

4. The Kara has to be received by us as a present with the message. "Guru loves me. He made me His own. You want to question the utility of the iron bangle of the Guru, but not of the gold bangle which is so much in vogue at Sikh engagement ceremonies today. You are ready to discard the Guru's bangle for the yellow metal. *Kara* comes to us as a manifestation of His love and benediction. From the day we put it on our wrists, the *Kara* was forever ours; no one could separate it from a Sikh. And we still want to find reasons for wearing it.

Jaskirat, do not make our presents into dead symbols, they are the gorgeous ornaments of the living. We are the "Wedded devotees" of God. They are the wedding gifts from our Bridegroom. He gave all of them to us and they are God-sent, imperishable, indispensable, and indestructible. You may object and say all this is irrational, unacceptable, superstitious, and fatalistic. But the waves of pure love always have their own logic, irrationality and fatalism. I love the Guru's irrationality- if you want to call it so. "To serve them pleases me." I don't have the courage to reject such devotion.

Does a would-be-wife question the intrinsic value of the engagement ring, she is gifted by her husband? No, never, even if it is made of copper or a shell. Today, you want to discard these gifts, because gold has more value. The choice is yours, the consequences are yours. The bliss of love is yours, the solitude of separation is yours. These gifts are not to be stored in the darkness of the cellars; drink deep into them, if you want to live in spiritual grandeur.

5. The head of a Sikh, (the *Kesh* of a Singh) having been once offered to and accepted by the Guru, is in unceasing trust with Him. It is, therefore, imperative for a Sikh to carry his head high and not to bow it before a mortal barber. It shall only bend and bow before the Guru.

Every day we recite in our prayer, "*Nanak das sada*

kurbani." "Nanak thy servant is ever a sacrifice to Thee." But instead we sacrifice our 5 K's. Shocking is our spirit of sacrifice. Are we the worthy inheritors of this heritage? After drawing on his blood, now by discarding our 5 K's, we want to stab him in the back!

Jaskirat, one kilometer from the Lahore railway station stands a gurdwara, sacred to the Sikhs in the loving memory of Bhai Taru Singh Ji. It bears the name of Shahid Ganj, the Abode of Martyrs. The governor said to him, "Somehow my heart does not permit me to have you killed, but you must cut and present me your tress-knot."

Taru Singh replied, "*The Sikh and his hair are one. I will be pleased to give you more than you ask me, my head with my tress-knot. These hair are the eternal gift of love, they cannot be separated from a Singh's head without separating his head."* Hearing the offer of a high office and an estate for his tress-knot, the Singh continued, "Neither my life, nor my hair are for bargaining in your court which views beauty, life, and religion in weights of gold. The value and beauty of our hair cannot be measured in terms of luxuries and *jagirs*."

Thakur Rabindranth Tagore, a great mystic-poet of Bengal and a Nobel laureate, has beautifully sung of this episode: "More than asked for."

Jaskirat, if Bhai Taru Singh had looked for practical utility, significance and relevance, wouldn't he have exchanged his hair for a *jagir*, for beautiful women, and the power he was offered? But all these he regarded as worthless when he weighed them with his way of life. If the hair were mere symbols for him, would he have staked his life for them. We find not only Bhai Taru Singh, but a whole galaxy of martyrs in our history, all playing with their lives, which appears to us so irrational and fatalistic.

6. Knowledge is like a kerosene lamp; on a dark night, it can illuminate only so long as it has fuel. Life is much vaster and deeper, it cannot be lived with the aid of an extinguishable

lamp. Knowledge is essential to everyday existence, as money is to buy your food, but it cannot grasp the reality of love, of God, of living. *Love is not to be hooked in the net of intelligence; if you use knowledge to grasp love, it will die as a fish does out of water.* After the victory of the battle of Bhangani, Guru Gobind Singh Ji blessed *Pir* Budhu Shah with no treasures and no elephants for his services, as was the custom of that time. However, the Guru gave him the gift of a *kirpan* and a comb with some broken hair of his. This very "jewelry', he presented to all of us, in spite of the fact that our lives were not wrought in the furnace of sacrifice; a jewelry which no craftsman, no intellectual, no jeweler is capable of imitating.

Jaskirat, ask not from me, the significance and the value of our tress-knots, for I am incapable of describing it. In our mystical tress-knots, insipid mankind is inspired. **People build monuments for the dead, you want to uproot the living monument the Guru gave to you**. If you want it to disintegrate you may, but you shall forever be buried under it. The beauty and the love can never be dissected and summed up. What would the cuckoo's song mean to you, if you want to take down its notations and analyze them? What would your mother's love be for you if you want to know her by analysis?

In the end, let me conclude that the *Kesh*, the *Kachha*, the *Kara*, the *Kanga*, the *Kirpan*, are the gifts, chiseled out for the Khalsa by the Divine Artist. These are the gifts endowed to us forever, by the Divine Bridegroom, on the day of our 'marriage' to Him on Baisakhi in 1699. We will carry His gifts of love, in honor, purity, and splendors. Our love will blossom in all climes, in all times and in all continents.

Your loving father,
Harcharan Singh

Later, Jaskirat Singh served the Indian Diplomatic Corps in Germany. He sponsored several study circles on the Sikh way of life in London, Geneva, Berlin, and Delhi. With his inspiration, twenty-five Sikh boys in Germany, who had under environmental pressures cut their hair, very lovingly took the Amrit. ¤