

Guru Granth Sahib and World Peace

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Ours is a bewildered, tormented generation. It would not, in my view, be an overstatement to say that mankind is, today, in the midst of one of the greatest crises in history.

Our predicament is due to the lack of adjustment of the human spirit to the startling developments in science and technology. In spite of the fact that the great scientific inventions have liberated us from servitude to nature, we seem to suffer from a type of neurosis, from cultural disintegration. Science has relieved us of grinding poverty, mitigated the tortures of physical pain, yet we suffer from an inward loneliness. It seems to me that the whole world is suffering from scepticism in faith, anarchy in morals; and we do not know which way to turn and what to do. There is a certain duplicity in human nature, which makes us do things even when we recognise them to be wrong. When Pontius Pilate pronounced Jesus innocent and yet handed him over, he did what we all do, say one thing and do another. Our generation has the responsibility for deciding whether we are to prosper or decline, whether our conduct will lead to a beginning or to an end. Unless we model our lives on the principles and precepts we profess, we cannot expect others to follow these implicitly. We do not tire of reminding others of these principles but we are among the first to violate them, and we do so with impunity because that suits our immediate purpose. We merely observe the trappings of religion, the gestures of faith and the conventions of piety; our actions do not match our words. We conceal from ourselves and from others the nature of what we do by euphemism. We must strip away all pretence and be honest with ourselves. That is the only way to regain faith in decency.

Sensitive and informed minds believe that the fundamental need of the world, far deeper than any social, political or economic readjustment, is a spiritual reawakening, a recovery of faith. Great movements of spirit arise when despair at the breakdown of civilisation makes the mind susceptible to the recognition of the insufficiency of the existing order and the need for rethinking its foundations and shifting its bases. Man cannot live and work without the hope that humanity is really capable of rising to a higher moral plane, without the dream that, in the end, he and his fellow mortals will be reconciled and will understand one another. There exist bonds as well as barriers between individuals and nations. But mankind's highest destiny is to become more humane, more spiritual, more capable of sympathetic understanding. This hope rises strong in the human heart in periods like the present, when confusion and horror are abroad.

Human societies like human beings live by faith and die when faith disappears. If our society is to recover its health, it must regain its faith. Our society is not sick beyond saving for it suffers from divided loyalties, from conflicting urges, from alternating moods of exaltation and despair. This condition of anguish is our reason for hope. We need a faith which will assert the power of the spirit over things and find significance in a world in which science and organisation seem to have lost their relationship to traditional values. The world is today a madhouse where individuals, exaggerate their racial superiority, religious pride or national egotism and thus become the victims of moral and spiritual blindness. If violence, which is a cowardly escape from the rule of reason, is rampant, the answer to it is in the growth of decency and compassion. We have to view the world as one whole, a single community, a fellowship of human beings who have the same instincts and fellow feeling, the same faith in the Unseen.

Though we know the world is one, whether we like it or not, and that in spite of political,

national and racial divisions, the fortunes of everyone of us are linked to those of others even though we know that, we do not feel it in our bones. We are not only bewildered but also alarmed when we find that people or nations are not ready to change their ways of dealing with others and persist in ways which are outmoded and even dangerous. The world has, perhaps, been brought together rather too suddenly and this enforced intimacy has intensified the differences and increased the possibilities of friction. We are baffled by the problems which our age has thrown up. Our needs and problems are of the 21st century. Our loyalty should be to humanity as a whole. We must not allow nationalist allegiances to disrupt the spiritual unity of the world. We must cast off pride and egoism, individual and collective. Don't forget, Providence has a way of teaching those who persist, long and willfully, in ignoring great realities, the dignity of man, the sense of human equality and the right of all people to freedom. We need today a sense of humility. We should give up the attitude that we are right and our opponents wrong or the attitude that we know we are not perfect but we are certainly better than our opponents.

We should develop a heart and a conscience, a feeling that we are all members of a brotherhood that knows no race or class. Sikhism seeks to knit entire mankind into one universal brotherhood- "*Ek Pita, Ekas Ke'Hum Barak*". Mankind has stemmed from one root, though it is split up into different communities. It is now striving for recovery of its basic unity and the reconciliation of different cultures. All men possessing wisdom and virtue are of one family. All good men are of one family; the only foreigners are the wicked. I said that if our society is to regain its health, it must regain its faith.

The greatest danger facing humanity after the collapse of secular ideologies is religious-fuelled nationalism; the cloak of sanctity over the politics of hate. We have seen the rise of racism, xenophobia and right-wing nationalism throughout Europe. We have seen neo-Nazism resurgent in a united Germany. And we have seen bloody ethnic war ravaging what was once Yugoslavia. The mood in world politics is dark, darker than the world has ever known. What makes it worse is that in many cases what has risen to the surface are not new grievances but old, and we thought long-buried, animosities: ethnic rivalries that had been dormant for decades. Ogden Nash, once said, "No man ever forgets where he buried the hatchet." He was right. **Prejudice is like a virus that can be frozen into suspended animation, but once unfrozen, it remains as virulent as ever. Far from being called into question by recent events, the importance of inter-faith and inter-racial understanding can hardly be overstated.** To put it bluntly, if religion is part of the problem, then religion must be part of the solution. Violence and vengeance blaspheme the name of God in an age in which God is calling on us not to destroy the world He made. If conflicts between followers of different religions, say, between Jews, Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs and others, have been fuelled by the clash of faiths, then it must be the leaders of those faiths who rise above the conflict and say: In the name of God, STOP! If we were once oppressed, we cannot become oppressors. And if we once cried for help and no one came, we cannot stand idly by when others cry for help. There are some evils which, because they are crimes against humanity, implicate us all. We are sometimes morally responsible for what we fail to prevent, as well as for what we do. The Chief Rabbi in the United Kingdom says in one of his books- "For too long the great monotheisms-Judaism, Christianity and Islam – have sanctioned suspicion and hostility to the outsider, the one who is not of our people or our faith. That hostility costs lives even today between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, between Christians and Muslims in Bosnia, and between Muslims and Jews in the Middle East. Even today," he goes on to say, "theology drives anti-Semitism in Poland and fuels the policies of what critics called fundamentalism. I do not

like this word because it groups together many different phenomena under a single name. But several things followed and have become more and more noticeable over the passing years. First, religion, far from being a force of reconciliation, has become the battleground of some of the fiercest and most intractable conflicts in the contemporary world. Secondly, the kind of religion that has real power over the lives of its followers is increasingly exclusive and confrontational. Thirdly, the theology that speaks of tolerance and openness and dialogue with the modern world is seen, by many believers in search of the truth, as a compromise that lacks content and authenticity. The result is that the most passionate religious believers today, in many faiths, are more concerned with their own destiny than with our collective destiny in this tense and troubled world. But the Bible teaches today, as it has always taught, that our common humanity precedes our particular faiths, and that the ethnic outsider is in God's image even if he or she is not in our image. To put it simply", says the Chief Rabbi, "crimes against humanity are not crimes against humanity alone. They are crimes against God, even when – especially when – they are committed in the name of God. We have great difficulty in recognising the integrity – indeed the sanctity – of those who are not in our image, whose faith and traditions and culture and language are not like ours. Nonetheless, we are told we must struggle to see that the wholly other, he or she who is not in our image, is yet in God's image. For if we are to co-exist in a world of rising religious intolerance, we shall have to find an interfaith imperative that speaks not only with a still small voice, but also out of heart of the whirlwind." He went on to say "the time has come for religious leaders of all faiths to alert the world to what is at stake."

Risk demands courage and courage needs faith. At the heart of our faith is a faith in peace. The faith of the Sikh Gurus leaves no room for other ways of serving God. A faith is like a language. I am at home in my own language as I am at home in my own faith. But I am not compromised by the existence of other languages.

There are times when we scale the heights of goodness. But there are times when we descend into the depths of evil. Creation testifies not merely to God's power but also, as it were, to His belief in mankind. At the heart of religion is not just the faith we have in God. No less significant is the faith God has in us. That faith is surely often tested. It is tested when we turn our back on God. It is tested no less when we commit evil in His name. Yet, He does not lose faith that one day we will learn this – that God has given us many universes of faith but only one world in which to live.

While I am not compromised by the existence of other faiths, I believe that the Sikh religion is uniquely placed to bring about that communion, that brotherhood of man, to build a bridge between different religions in the interest of world peace. The Guru is a messenger of God sent to enlighten mankind. God is not limited to any one incarnation but sends His messengers from time to time, to lead struggling humanity towards Him. It is the law of the spiritual world that whenever evil and ignorance darken human affairs, morality and wisdom will come to our rescue. The Guru, as I said, is a messenger of God sent to enlighten mankind... Now, you may think that that is too bold a claim to make on behalf of the youngest religion in the world. I hope that by the time I have finished, you will be satisfied that I have made good that claim. "*Satgur Nanak Pragatiiaa, Miti Dhundh Jag Chanaan Hooa.*" When the sun rises, the stars become invisible and darkness comes to an end, so with Guru Nanak's appearance on the world-stage, ignorance and darkness were dissipated. Wherever the Guru set foot, that place became a place of pilgrimage or place of worship. His words were to liberate the people coming from the four directions: his message was spread throughout the nine continents. There is hardly a prayer in our liturgy that does not end with a plea for peace and the welfare of all humanity. A person's religion is an

important indicator of personal and social well being. At a time when many people believe in the triumph of secularism, more people than we may suppose are content simply to believe. Simple faith is far from extinct in today's cynical climate, and fundamental religious conviction survives in a society conditioned by scientific values and moral scepticism. But religion which lives in the outer threshold of consciousness without conviction in the mind or love in the heart is utterly inadequate. It must enter into the structure of our life, become part of our being. "He alone knows the truth who knows all living creatures as himself."

The Sikh religion is the youngest of world religions. And, according to the Encyclopaedia Britannica Book of the Year 1994, it is the fifth largest religion in the world after Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism. It is a revealed religion and not an offshoot of one faith or a syncretic blend of different and often conflicting faiths. But it is not a proselytising religion. We do not seek to convert others. We do not need to do that. There are, in our teachings, very firm doctrinal bases for co-operation with all religions and cultures. The moral responsibility, stress on self-respect and sense of honour, insistence on right conduct, concern for the welfare of others and co-existence with other religions and cultures are the prerequisites for spiritual life and individual salvation. Regrettably, that cannot be said of some other religions, some of which are more aggressive in their efforts at conversion. They consider it a divine duty. Those who sponsor religious propaganda in their zeal for the spiritual welfare of their fellowmen indulge in a vulgar competition about the know-how of salvation. Agencies for proselytisation which scramble for souls are not in keeping with the true spirit of religion. There are still people who, with a crusading zeal, affirm that they have the monopoly of a final, unique, exclusive and incomparable revelation. These people are indirectly responsible for the eclipse of religion, for the blight of unbelief in large parts of the world. I hope that I do not tread on any toes, religious or otherwise, when I say that it was Sikhism that raised its voice in protest against empires because imperialism and its latter-day successors, totalitarianism and fundamentalism, are attempts to impose a single truth on a plural world, to reduce Men to Man, cultures to a single culture, to eliminate diversity in the name of single socio-political order. **We Sikhs believe** in religion as communion with God and do not dismiss differences among religions as unimportant or irrelevant. **We do not propose** an undifferentiated universalism or indifferentism. **We believe** in partnership among religions. **We believe** that all human beings are of the same essence and, therefore, of equal worth and entitled to the same fundamental rights-that the human individual is the highest, most concrete embodiment of the spirit on earth and anything that hurts his individuality or damages his dignity is morally wrong.

I believe that man has to come to terms with outside nature and with himself. That is the condition of his survival. All religions proclaim as their goal the unification of humanity. This has taken place in the physical or geographical sense, but our minds and hearts are yet to be prepared for the acceptance of this oneness of humanity. A new orientation is required to build a unity out of the divisions of races and peoples, out of the rivalries of nations and conflicts of religion. This requires a courageous effort and a radical change of outlook. We have to protect the enduring substance of religion from the forms and institutions, which suffer from the weakness of man and the compulsion of time.

Arnold Toynbee writes, "I was brought up to believe that Christianity was a unique revelation of the whole truth. I have now come to believe that all the historic religions and philosophies are partial revelations of the truth in one or other of its aspects. In particular, I believe that Buddhism and Hinduism (and I would add, Sikhism) have a lesson to teach. Christianity, Islam and Judaism in the 'one world' into which are now being carried by the 'annihilation of

distance.' Unlike the Judaic religions, the Indian religions are not exclusive. They allow for the possibility that there may be alternative approaches to the mystery of Existence; and this seems to me more likely to be the truth than the rival claims of Judaism, Christianity and Islam to be the unique and final revelations. For each of us, the easiest approach to the mystery of the Universe is, no doubt, his ancestral religion; but this does not mean that he ought to rule out the other approaches that the other religions offer. If one can enter into these as well as into one's own, it is gain, not loss." And in commenting upon the Granth Sahib, he said, "The Guru Granth Sahib is remarkable for several reasons. Of all the known religious scriptures, this is the most highly venerated. It means more to Sikhs than even the Quran means to Muslims, the Bible to Christians and the Torah to Jews. The Guru Granth Sahib is the Sikh's perpetual Guru (Spiritual Guide). In this coming religious debate, the Sikh Religion and its scripture, Guru Granth Sahib, will have something of special value to say to the rest of the world."

Let me remind you of what some others have said about our religion.

TAGORE – Guru Nanak's noble religious ideology gave birth to a great nation of Sikhs whose greatness is reflected in their character and face.

GOKUL CHAND NARANG – Guru Granth Sahib in Punjab saved the Hindus from spiritual starvation and prevented them from crossing over religious boundaries from which their return was impossible.

MISS PEARL S BUCK (American) – The hymns in Guru Granth Sahib are an expression of man's loneliness, his aspirations, his longing, his cry to God and his hunger for communication with that Being. I have studied the scriptures of other great religions, but I do not find elsewhere the same power of appeal to the heart and mind as I find in Granth Sahib. It speaks to me of life and death, of time and eternity, of the temporal human body and its need, of the mystic human soul and its longing to be fulfilled.

And finally. SIR MOHAMMED IQBAL – India was once again blessed by God with Guru Nanak, possessed of all attributes of a prophet, a complete and perfect human being. Guru Nanak's appearance in the world was no less than that of Prophet Abraham 5000 years ago.

I said a little while ago that human societies like human beings live by faith and die when faith disappears. We are living in a period of disintegration of faith and growing disillusionment about the traditional values which have come down to us. Worldly considerations seem to be corrupting the great ideals. We only pay lip service to these ideals. If we are to recover our health, we must regain our faith. The root evil in human history is pride. According to Greek poets, Hubris, the insolence of pride, is the root of all tragedy, personal as well as national. It is the nemesis of pride that brought down the Pharaohs of Egypt, the rulers of Greece, the emperors of Persia. Only the arrogant believe that they have enough wisdom and virtue to rule the rest. The pride, which apes humility, is most dangerous.

We need a sense of true humility. We should give up the attitude that we are right and our opponents wrong. If we want to convert our opponent, it does not help to speak of his lower side, his defects and shortcomings. We must present to him his own higher and nobler side. Reason, not force, should govern our affairs. We should settle our differences by negotiation, discussion and reach decisions, which reconcile conflicting interests by a process of mutual give and take. There will then emerge, out of the turmoil and trouble, a new order based on moral principles and spiritual values which will draw people together.



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