

## A Clarion Call to Youth

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'I remember my youth and the feeling ... that I could last forever, outlast the sea, the earth & all men... the triumphant conviction of strength... the heat of life ... the glow in the heart .....

- Joseph Conrad

In the stanza above, Conrad has beautifully described the prodigious energy of young people in the above quoted lines. Truly, the rising generation of Sikhs everywhere is the blazing force of a family, community and the nation. With their thoughts and efforts, young people can - and have metamorphosed - the historical annals. From times immemorial, propelled by our innate conviction, coupled with a desire to transcend individual gains for personal advantage, young people have set upon themselves tasks, the fruition of which has seen the evolution of civilisation in its present *avatar*. Science-led innovations have brought in their wake a life replete with comforts and luxury. The web world has broken all barriers and expanded the vistas of knowledge - by the click of a mouse alone!

At the root of alienation of the young from moral values is the ceaseless onslaught of a largely mindless media. Add to this phenomenon is the general apathy of the parents. However, in concepts like liberty, equality and fraternity have rung in universalisation of education and minimisation of religion, race, sex-based bigotry, which can be heralded as a victory for the human spirit. In this fast paced world, opportunity knocks at our doorstep time and again, and exhorts us to take on life with *joie de vivre*. With so much on offer, why do we still see vice around us? Why is the crime rate going up the world over? Why, in spite of opportunity, is there poverty? Why are families breaking up? Why are nations warring? Why do we read about perversion and promiscuity? The plain, simple answer lies in the fact that despite all the material attainments, man is not at peace with himself.

To prove this point, we need to observe the microcosmic existence of man *vis-a-vis* the smallest social unit i.e. a family. Man gets associated with a family by birth & soaking in the various influences as a part of this unit, grows up to interact with the people beyond. A prodigal son squanders the riches earned by his father. To be able to befittingly inherit them & make them grow, he needs to exercise prudence, which essentially has to be inculcated by good mentoring -

bwbwxAw khwxIAw puq spuq kryin ]

[SGGS: 951]

Sharing glorious accounts of the lives and moral tradition of our gurus with our children will make them righteous.

Moving within the span of the smallest social unit, i.e. a family, I want to zero-in onto the psychological turbulence in the mindset of the Sikh youth across the world today so that we can guide them by sweet reasoning, encouragement and love to channelise their faculties progressively for a deeper understanding of the Sikh Ethos.

Our Tenth Guru's decree enunciates that Amrit - baptized Sikh should sport God's gift of unshorn hair (Kesh), which readily suggests the wearing of turbans and having the dignity of untrimmed beards. For over three centuries, this edict of our Guru has been followed to the book and has resulted in giving a distinctive identity of the Sikhs the world over. Lives have been sacrificed and battles have been fought to uphold as well as maintain this identity. What is agonising is the fact that our children, exposed to the ravages of mindless media, ape the western culture and, as a fallout, our community is facing a threat of losing its uniqueness. This statement is devoid of rhetoric 'cause our young boys, who have paradigms of fortitude, like the four sahibzadas, to emulate are now hero-worshipping 'hollywood' & 'bollywood' celebs. Superficial glamour, empty fashion and an overpowering lure of the lucre has seen many Sikh youth trading off their turbans and beards with a fallacious 'cosmopolitan' look.

As the principal of a co-educational Khalsa school, I was stumped by the casual observation of a Sikh student of the twelfth grade, during a tete-a-tete session with the senior students. He commented on our double standards - as in going for and enjoying watching movies but raising a hue and cry if one of our Sikh guys, sporting the so-called cosmopolitan clean-cut look, joined the bandwagon! I did not lose my cool, nor did I reprimand him. On a closer inspection, I found out that in his heart of hearts, he nursed a desire to be an actor and was at loggerheads with his parents, who could not come to terms with the fact that their son would trim his hair - to join a slippery, controversial profession. I counselled the child to fly on the wings of his ambition, join a training institute to hone his dramatic skills and take on the world with his '*sabat surat*' (unshorn hair, turban, beard, et al) He was thrilled to know that some film directors, like Ms Ish Amitoj Kaur, had attended 'Mr Singh International' contest held recently at Amritsar to select a Sikh lead actor for her forthcoming film!

In an effort to curb the cutting of hair and motivating Sikh students to maintain their '*sabat surat*', we at Khalsa School have granted tuition fee concession for eleven months to 'puran gursikh' students. Such incentives have transformed many shaven sardars in the primary and middle school, but there are still some senior boys who nonchalantly remark, "we'd rather pay the fees and be the way we are!" Quite surprised by their reaction, I found out that such an utterance was a result of peer pressure - yet another reason for Sikh boys over-riding "gurmat". Sarcastic remarks by fellow students in schools and colleges like -

"Are you sick?" or "Hey, do you belong to the family of camel jockeys? or "Is there a bomb under your turban?" have seen many young Sikh boys lose their steadfastness. Can't we as parents and teachers foster as much love in the hearts of our children as is essential to embolden them in accepting our customs and mores? It indeed is a reflection of our failure in instilling the right kind of a value system in our children that they unabashedly behave like bohemians on growing up.

My mother used to teach me and my siblings the recitation of the Japji when we were toddlers, saying:

"pYsw gMT, gurbwxl kMT"

thereby emphasising the importance of memorising Gurbani. Gradually, over the passage of years, we learnt the recitation of the 'Nitnem'. What began as a mere 'jap' (the edifice of communion with 'shabad' guru) turned into a serious love affair and the 'shabad guru' has never let us down! We love to spend time in Babaji's room (the

'prakash' place of Guru Granth Sahib ji), musing over the ennobling recitations of our gurus.

Life has unfolded itself in myriad hues - there have been good as well as bad times but the truth in the dictum -

vwhu vwhu bwxl inrMkwr hY iqsu jyvfu Avru n koie ] [SGGS: 515]

Let the 'shabad guru' be praised for it is the manifestation of God & is incomparable)

has stood the test of all times. It has enabled me to reinforce my belief in the repository of all virtues - the holy Guru Granth Sahib ji, for -

nwnk inrguix guxu kry guxvMiqAw guxu dy ] [SGGS:2]

Says Nanak that the unworthy are made righteous and virtues added to the already virtuous people by the grace of God

The degeneration that has come about in our Sikh youth is essentially a result of parental negligence. Our children want answers which we are not able to provide, hence they stray. Let the parents take upon themselves to introduce the 'Nitnem" (the set of daily prayers) to their children, so that by adolescence, recitation of the same becomes a part and parcel of their daily regimen. Over and above this, let us all pray for our youth:

inmK n ibsrau qum@ kau hir hir sdw Bjhu jgdls ] [SGGS: 496]

Let the Sikh youth today learn - and yearn - to be like 'Sahibzadas' of Dasam Patshah!

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