

The Essence of Religion

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The essence of religion is the belief in the Fatherhood of God and Brotherhood of man. It urges us to trace our common origin and show respect for the sentiments and aspirations of all the human beings irrespective of caste, colour, creed or country. A truly religious person believes that God does not dwell in churches, temples, gurdwaras or mosques. His real abode is the heart of man. Religious places are only spiritual centres which store virtues like tolerance, truth, honesty and righteousness.

A religious man is he who pins his faith in the doctrine that God is present every where and in every thing. By inflicting pain or torture on a person we hurt the heart of Almighty. This realisation surely turns religion into a uniting force. People professing different religions feel that since they are all created by the same God, they are bound by some invisible bond of some natural kinship. If all human beings accept this principle, "the kingdom of heaven" can come to the earth and perpetual peace can be established and that in turn would usher in an era of plenty and prosperity for entire mankind.

The scriptures of all the religions have two things in common. They stress the need for piety and for shunning sin. A pious man is always liberal in his attitude. He himself practises what he preaches. He firmly believes in the maxim "do unto others as you wish to be done by." No one wants some one to abuse him, pass indecent remarks on him, injure his feelings or make fun of his life style. He should also refrain from indulging in such acts as offend other people.

The person who deliberately tells lies, steals, uses filthy language, grabs the earning of others by hook or by crook, indulges in immoral acts, is a sinner. Such a person has no right to claim attachment to any religion. He is an atheist, an irreligious man and an enemy of humanity.

Religion moralises us. It lays stress on the fact that God is not only omnipresent but also omnipotent. He watches all our actions, right or wrong. This realisation prevents a person from going astray. Whenever he is tempted to perform some condemnable act, the inner voice warns him that is being watched. If he pays heed to that voice, he will leave the path that ultimately leads to hell.

Religion is a sacred sentiment. Yet all religions produce fanatics. The pages of world history bear testimony, to the fact that religious fanaticism is responsible for persecution of innocents, senseless killings and ruthless destruction. These are the misguided elements who fan the fire of communalism and cause immense damage to the bonds of brotherhood and cordiality. Whenever communalism surfaces some people immediately lose their sense of reasoning and indulge in looting, killing and arson. Tolerance, patience, forgiveness, control over one's passions, purity, truth, fellow feelings, insatiable hunger for knowledge, spirit of sacrifice and humility are the essentials of the religion. Those who follow them are religious.

Morality demands that we should honestly and faithfully follow the essential faith and tenets of our religion. No religion allows disrespect for those who profess a different religion. True religion broadens our outlook.

Once in the course of his extensive travels, Guru Nanak Dev was asked: "What is your

religion and which is your country?"

With a broad smile on his face the Guru said, "Humanity is my religion and the whole world is my home." It is high time that people of the whole world followed in the footsteps of the great Guru and adopt a liberal attitude towards religion and nationality.



Baani

1 is inspiration,

Baana₂ a Proclamation of God's Glory

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@ This is inspired by Dimpy Gurvinder Singh's editorial in *The Sikh Review: February 2006: "Rehat Pyari Mujh ko - How to stay connected with the Creator".*

1. Baani: Divinely inspired Scripture in SGGS
2. Baana: Kesh-adorned Persona of the Sikhs.

Unlike the Punjabi Sikh youth (who cut his hair) editorialized in the February 2006 issue of ***The Sikh Review***, I was as a white Sikh - disowned at sixteen years of age, precisely because I decided to *keep* my hair! Disowning does not accomplish a lot in a case like this. (Perhaps ***The Sikh Review*** should reprint my little narrative precisely on this topic, published as "*Two Cousins*," back in February 1995.) When a young person has it in his mind that he is right (and there is significant social support for their belief) parents had best beware. *You cannot make a young person disown his conscience*, but you can educate him at an early age, remembering that a person's basic character is fundamentally set by the time he is five years old.

These youngsters are not to blame. They are the outcome of a colossal failure of parenting, education and every kind of institution. There is a pall of ignorance over the land. Money and worldly gain today is more highly appraised than moral and spiritual values. It is a dark age.

This is not a matter of inculcating Sikh values and/or Sikh identity. *Veechaar* too has its limitations. What is needed are more people who do not just talk the truth, but actually live it. That kind of leader embodies a bright and magnanimous spirit. They need not impose anything. Followers come from nowhere, begging to follow.

I do not believe I belong to a religion in the old sense – a body of required rituals and affirmations, and a separate social class. **I have a practice.** That practice enriches my life with a profound sense of self-awareness. It feeds my inner urge toward God. It denies my apathy. It engages my compassion. It elevates my spirit and makes me feel great.

Gurusikhi is a discipline - not a theology, a culture, a body of thought, or a long-gone tradition. This discipline lives in me. It breathes in me. It gives me life.

The fruit of this discipline – the early rising, the meditation, cold baths, dressing in the Guru's likeness, and the rest is an indomitable feeling of **dwelling in God**. We call it "buoyant spirits" or *cherhdee kalaa*.

To achieve it, you need to know how to still the chatter of your mind. You must meditate and engage the power of your soul. The process is called *tapas* – and it is the furthest

thing from any academic's mind you could imagine. They don't teach it in university. *Tapas* is calculated inconvenience. Sometimes it is a total discomfort, but it makes you bright, intuitive and very calm inside. Together, *jap* and *tap* light the way.

Cultural values are nice. Sikh culture is no less charming than French or Japanese any other culture. I appreciate the *bhangra*, the *samosas*, the amazing hospitality, Lohri, the *saag*, festive gaudily-coloured turbans, the *mehndi*, the *gulab jamans*, *kabadi*... It is marvelous, but it is not what we need right now.

What the world really needs is more saint-soldiers, more fiercely passionate critics, more leaders who lead by following the Guru's *rehit*. Regrettably, you cannot legislate them into being or create them by moralizing alone. First, you must become one.

