

"The Sun never sets" Guru Nanak in Baghdad

*Late Raja Sir Daljit Singh**

* From the author's book: *Guru Nanak*(LahoreBook Shop, Ludhiana. 1979)

From Mecca Guru Nanak proceeded to Medina and from Medina to Baghdad. He reached there about nightfall and stopped outside the town. It happened to be a place where lepers were segregated and no provision was made for their comfort or treatment.

They crowded round the Guru and made loud lamentations. The Guru was moved. He asked them one by one to pass before him. He took some water and sprinkled it on the leper who came before him and he walked away entirely cured. The lepers that were healed next morning ran to the city and spread the news of their healing. The people from the city came in crowds to see the miracle worker and surrounded the Guru.

"Listen, o people", said the Guru addressing them, "I have worked no miracle. Mercy is of God and He acts through those who are instruments of His will. He is known as Rahim, the merciful; He is known as Karim, the Giver, and yet we seek other doors than His."

The Grand Mufti of the city sent a messenger to invite the Guru to his presence.

Guru Nanak said, "I stay where I like; I go where I like. If the Mufti wishes to see me he can come here."

The Mufti, when he received the message, went himself with all the pomp of his office and sat near the Guru.

"I want to hold discussions with you," he began.

"Discussions are like the wind that blows," said the Guru, "unless there is a spark of fire in the heart which can be blown into the fire of devotion."

"What do you mean?" asked the Mufti.

"I mean," said the Guru, "that discussion is only fruitful if it lights the hidden fire of devotion."

"Do you know the *Kalima*?" asked the Mufti, to change the conversation.

"May I repeat the question?" said the Guru. "Do you know it?"

The Mufti laughed with scorn. "I am a Muslim. How can you ask me this foolish question?"

"I asked the question, because I am sure your tongue recites the *Kalima* but it passes over your heart as water over a stone."

"The *Kalima* is my life-breath," protested the Mufti. "What do you mean?"

"Did not I say that discussion is mere wind?" said the Guru "You may recite the *Kalima* loudly but it does not reach your heart, which is full of other needs."

"How is that ?"asked the Mufti.

"You begin by saying that there is no other God but Allah, and yet you call men of other religions *infidels*. They are also of the one God, who has no second. You repeat the *Kalima* and yet your heart is not moved with forgiveness, nor your hand moved to give. You love other things better than the one God you invoke. My friend, do you not realise that you render lip service to Allah, while you worship other objects. Allah is on your tongue and that which is other than Allah possesses your heart."

They were continuing the discussion when a man came running and fell at the feet of the Guru. "Protect me, O great one," he begged.

"Tell me who is persecuting you," asked the Guru.

He looked at the Mufti and trembled. "I have been condemned to be stoned to death."

"I remember" said the Mufti, this man has sinned grievously. He has been sentenced to be stoned to death according to the *Shariat*. He deserve no consideration whatsoever."

"Ah!" said the Guru, "remember the *Kalima*. God is merciful. God is all-forgiving. We act as God would wish us to act; when we show mercy, when we forgive even our enemies. Do those who administer law in their own person break no law? The laws of holy Quran, nay of God Himself, pray for forgiveness. God is merciful. He will forgive you. God commands you to show mercy to his man."

The Mufti felt as if he was commanded by God Himself. "I obey you, O great one," he said.

The Guru then instructed the Mufti in the art of right living and discovering the right way to find God, and, after a few days sojourn, the Guru left Baghdad. The Guru was passing through Iran, when he struck a centre of Sufis. They welcomed the Guru and invited him to occupy a seat near their leader, who offered him food and drink of which the Guru and his attendants partook.

"From where have you come?" asked the senior Sufi. "And what is your destination?"

"I come from everywhere into here and I must return from here into everywhere."

"Have you brought any news of the Beloved?"

"Does not the heart breathe His immanence through your lips?"

"Why does the sun set?" asked the Sufi.

"The sun never sets. It is just a dot that makes and night."

"Where is light to be found?" asked the Sufi.

"In the darkness itself," answered the Guru. The dawn of the morning is hidden in the gloom of the night."

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My Turban is my Crown!

*Dr Gurbakhsh Singh**

** Excerpted from the author's work: "Teaching Sikh Heritage to Youth". Courtesy: Sr Narinder Singh*

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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*, this writer and other speakers gave lectures for seven to ten minutes as planned by the management.

The *Sangat* was deeply touched emotionally when one of the speakers - a European-American having adopted the Sikh faith, described his experience of adopting the faith of Guru Khalsa. The key part of his lecture maybe 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 an insignia of being the ruler of the country. Another person with a stronger force may take over his country and also his crown from him. However nobody can take the crown away 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,

mother and all his four children. In this way, he earned this crown for his Sikhs. Later, the Khalsa Panth had to give their homes and live for three generations in the jungles. 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 family and 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 reiterate the sentiment of another Englishman, Mr. Cliff R. Huthins, who too adopted the Sikh faith. When someone asked him why he has 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 Future Gurdwaras as speculated on "Vision Television"

- A View from Canada

*Jagpal Singh Tiwana**

Dr (Bhai) Harbans Lal was in Canada to present a paper, "The Sikh Gurdwaras and Sikh Generation in Year 2015", at the Ninth Sikh Educational Conference held at Kitchner, last September. Raghbir Singh Samagh interviewed him afterwards and aired the interview for the *Gurbani Hour* at Vision Television on October 6, 2001.

Dr. Lal emphasized that today's youth would be us in a few years and will define our religious and social culture. Although the Sikh theology will stay rooted in Guru Granth and Gurdwara-based congregations will remain an important medium of religious instructions, the future Sikh generation will not be as uniform with respect to defining their religious interpretations, practices and institutions. Further, religious culture of youth will be more individualistic, and it will embrace multi-layered faith practices.

To stay in faith, the future youth will struggle between two conflicting yearnings: attraction to idealized versions of religious truth but a degree of repulsion to traditional practices of their ancestors. To them cultural narratives of religious teachings that are ethically loaded will seem outmoded and often seen as deceptive or exploitative, thus reducing their meaning in modern life. In response, the Gurdwara congregations will have to devise drastic changes to suit the new times and be proactive to the new realities in order to insure survival of the faith. Well-educated *granthis* or clerics, decentralization of religious teaching, availability of "virtual libraries", progressive programming, diversity in religious services, that are offered in the new mother tongues, interfaith dialogues, emphasis on 'ritual-free' spirituality, and investment in the youth will be some of the changes considered necessary.

Dr. Lal's interview was widely appreciated by most of the people who watched him cool and composed, making his points.

