

Four Pillars of Sikhism

Bani, Bana, Simran and Seva

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SIKHISM HAS EMERGED IN THE Western lands like a cool breeze in the torrid heat of summer. Life in the technology age can be fast-paced and remorseless, leaving people with a shallow and emotionally cruel existence. Striving to maintain ourselves in this age, we find that our years pass with such speed and anxiety that sometimes we do not know what sustains us except the blessing of God's compassion. Into this fertile ground came the seed of the Guru's Word. In 1969 a man now known as Siri Singh Sahib Harbhajan Singh Khalsa Yogiji came to North America to teach meditational yoga and spread the wisdom of the Guru's teachings. Thirty-four years later, thousands of Western-born people have adopted Sikhism, and we are now seeing the third-generation of western people who are born as Sikhs.

The message Yogi Bhajan brought was that Guru Gobind Singh Ji gave us the answers to our modern-day problems more than three hundred years ago. Guru Ji said:

jb lg Kwlsw rhy inAwrw]
qb lg qyj dlau mYN swrw]
jb ieh ghY ibprn kl rlq]
mYN n kroN ien kl pRqlq]

Jab lag khaalsaa rahe niaaraa
Tab lag tej deeo mai saaraa.
Jab eh gahai bipran kee reet
Mai(n) naa(n) karo(n) in kee parteet

So long as the Khalsa will remain distinct, I will give my strength to them.

But if they adopt the ways of the entrenched priesthood, I will not support them.
[Guru Gobind Singh Ji, *Sarb Loh Granth*]

The formula is clear, the solution is simple in nature, and success is guaranteed. This is the simple strategy of *Bani, Bana, Simran, and Seva*— the four pillars of Sikhism. Let us examine the identity first.

BANA -The Khalsa Uniform

Bana is our standard of natural identity. It clearly defines who we are. If one were to have the dress and fashion of a movie star, that would make a statement as to who one is. If we wear the clothes of a beggar, that also tells the world what our status is. But if we wear the *bana* of the Khalsa, this makes a statement of strength that cannot be ignored by the hardest of hearts. *Bana* is the image and dress of God's grace. *Bana* is the embodiment of the five K's of the Khalsa: *Kesh, Kachera, Kanga, Kara, and Kirpan*. Each one of these beautiful accoutrements gives us strength and integrity. *Bana* is a statement that says, at one glance, that I belong to Guru Gobind Singh, and He belongs to me.

hau ^wlsy ko ^wlsw myro]

Eq poiq swgr bUMdyro]

HaaO khalsay ko khaalsaa mayro
Ot pot saagar boondayro

I belong to the Khalsa and Khalsa belongs to me as the drop of water forever merges into the ocean.

[Guru Gobind Singh Ji: *Sarb-Loh Granth*]

Let me share with you, dear reader, my own story and experiences in relation to the *bana* of the Khalsa. When I first became a Sikh, thirty years ago, I had never seen an Indian Sikh woman. I knew only American Sikhs, and in fact, very few of those. But I knew that *kesh* and *dastar* were part of the 5-K's of Guru Gobind Singh.

Well, as a young woman of 18 years, full of the spirit of life and the excitement of discovering the teachings of Guru Gobind Singh Ji, it never occurred to me not to wear a turban. The Khalsa of Guru Gobind Singh wore the *dastaar*, and that was who I wanted to be. So it was with great sincerity that I tied my first turban.

As you can imagine, the most dramatic effect of wearing a turban is not physiological, but rather it is social. Wearing a turban gave me pride and confidence. My parents and my friends were stunned. They thought they had lost me as a daughter and companion, but of course this was not the case. Instead, the experience of being distinct has made me more committed to the welfare of those around me, because everything I do is highlighted and examined by others.

Now that I have lived my life experiencing the benefits of the turban, I can tell you honestly that anyone who does not wear one is missing a great opportunity. I have been given the respect and the status of a spiritual woman, even when I myself have been filled with self-doubt and misgivings. This I see as Guru Gobind Singh Ji fulfilling his promise, giving me strength even when I do not have strength myself. This beautiful *dastaar* proclaims to the entire world that I belong to Guru Gobind Singh and that is a reality I will never deny.

***BANI* -The Word of God**

By the Grace of God, we are Sikhs of the *Shabd Guru*. We bow to no man. We worship no images. We bow only to the Word, the *Shabd*, the sound current. We cannot underestimate the power of our own words and language. Our words contain the power of love and hate, and we should be fully aware of this when we speak. How do we do this? Through exercising the daily recitation of *Nitnem* and *Gurbani*. The daily prayers of the Sikh are a beautiful form and format that rearranges our neurological processes to provide us with a direct connection with the infinite creative energy of the universe. This is the heart of the Guru's teachings. And if we do not experience this ourselves, we will most likely deny this experience to our children.

vwhu vwhu bwxl inrMkwr hY
iqsu jyvfU Avru n koie]

*Waaho waaho baanee nirankaar hai
tis jayvad avar no ko-i*

Great! Great is the Bani, the Word of the Formless Lord. There is no other as great as He is.

[Guru Amar Das ji, *Siri Guru Granth Sahib*, page 515]

This is why we say that our Guru is the *Shabd Guru*. The Siri Guru Granth Sahib Ji is not a “book,” it is not a “Bible;” it is a ‘living Guru’ that guides us, protects us and enlightens us. The whole science of Gurbani has the power to make a person divine just in its recitation. It does not require a deep and scholarly understanding, or interpretation, for an impact on our consciousness because *bani* is understood by the heart, not by the head. **The entire Siri Guru Granth Sahib is the calling out to the Beloved. People do not need to be dependent on saints and preachers, being led around like a donkey with a string in his nose. All that is needed is the inner experience of God that can be brought to us from our own Guru, the Living Guru, the Shabd Guru. That is the miracle, the science, and the blessing of *bani*.**

SIMRAN- Meditation on God

In the first line of *Sukhmani Sahib*, Siri Guru Arjun Dev Ji tells us:

ismrau ismir ismir suKu pwvau]
kil klys qn mwih imtwvau]
ismrau jwsu ibsMBru eykY]
nwmu jpq Agnq AnykY]

Simarao simar simar sukh paavao
Kal kalays tan maaeh mitaavao
Simarao jaas bisumbhar aykai
Naam japat aganat anaykai

To the one who meditates on Him there comes a perfect peace
And all pain and sorrows depart.
Meditate on Him who contains this universe,
Whose Holy Name is the whisper on the lips of the entire creation.

[Guru Arjun Dev Ji, *Siri Guru Granth Sahib*, page 262]

Simran provides us with the answer to maintaining our balance and equilibrium in a fast-paced world. *Naam Simran* is the use of the *Gurmantra*, the meditation and recitation of Wahe Guru. How do you do *simran*? There are as many answers to that question as there are people to ask. **The simple answer is: *simran* is not a technique but a process. At any time that is peaceful, but especially in the early morning before dawn, sit and concentrate on the Holy *Naam*. Project out with focused clarity. If you beam the signal out, you will get a clear signal back. This cleanses the subconscious mind, clarifies the conscious mind, and gives us the experience of bliss and peace. In this divinely human experience, we understand our depth and dimension, gaining access to our inner strength, direction and intuition.**

Don't you wonder about yourselves sometimes? You are born with no claws, no hoofs, and no strength superior to the animals of the jungle. As a human being it appears we have been born with no defense mechanism. Have we been created by God as the only defenseless creatures in His creation? No. Our strength lies in our intuition. When you can intuitively sense what is going to happen, then you can avoid

entering a wrong sequence and you will not end up with an unwanted consequence. That is the best defense we could possibly have. **We are all born with intuition, but what develops and fine-tunes it?** *Simran*. Intuition works when there is no fear involved, no greed involved, no attachment involved and no lust involved. The subconscious mind has to be a clear channel, and then the conscious mind perceives the information that is coming through our intuition.

SEVA- Selfless service

If the strength of one is great, the strength of the many is even greater. **Seva is the knot that ties us to each other, ties us to our Guru, and transcends us from our own individual consciousness to the expansive nature of universal consciousness.** No matter how great our stature, no matter how vast our authority, if we separate and isolate ourselves through the definition of ego, then we are far less than what our potential could be. **Service to each other and service to Guru Ji, when done with a loving heart, with no desire for reward, breaks the bonds of ego and frees the soul.**

Guru Amar Das Ji tells us:

siqgur kl syvw sPlu hY jy ko kry icqu lwie]
min icMidAw Plu pwvxw haumY ivchu jwie]

Satigur kee sayvaa safal hai jay ko karay chit laa-i
Man chindi-aa fal paavanaa
haumai vichaho jaa-i

Service to the True Guru is fruitful and rewarding
if one performs it with his mind focused upon it.

The fruits of the mind's desires are obtained, and egotism departs from within.

[Guru Amar Das Ji, *Siri Guru Granth Sahib*, page 644]

Throughout history, Sikhs have displayed a seemingly endless capacity for *seva*. Service to others is in our nature, the very bones of our being. It is part of our beauty and part of our strength. **By doing seva, we lose the limitations of our finite self, and expand into the infinite strength of the body of the Khalsa.** Through *seva* we remain humble, for *seva* is an activity that is not recognized as an individual action. The heavy and enormous burden of appreciation and recognition is not a factor in the performance of *seva*. It is personal, anonymous and deeply expansive. We become part of a whole that is unbreakable and unparalleled. *Seva* is actually our physical link to the Guru. By serving the Khalsa, we have the experience of serving our Guru, touching that great wisdom with our own hands.

When all the aspects of *bani*, *bana*, *simran* and *seva* are put together, you find the multi-faceted aspects of the Khalsa *Rehit*, the moral regimen. The *Rehit* gives us the strength and the tools to live successfully in the modern age. And by freeing ourselves, we also free those around us.

“Life has a simple challenge. Act, do not react. Calm yourself and claim yourself. When you light a torch, it takes away the darkness for a long distance. When you illuminate yourself like a torch, your psyche takes away the pain and indifference from those around you.”

[Siri Singh Sahib Bhai Sahib Harbhajan Singh Khalsa Yogi Ji]

