

Love and discipline: Pathway to Waheguru

JASVINDER KAUR CHANA*

* sikhkids.com; <http://spirituality.indiatimes.com>

SIKHISM IS A WAY OF LIFE; it is the path of learning that encompasses the objectives of gaining knowledge of life, of the truth, and living in the light of new knowledge in order to achieve fulfillment in life. As Sikhs, we believe in love and equality of humankind, with faith in the Guru's word. We look upon *Akal Purakh* Waheguru to achieve salvation, freedom and union with God.

We believe that there is One God, Waheguru, which means 'Wonderful Lord'; God is the greatest teacher: Guru Gobind Singh's verse says it all: "I came into the world for the purpose of spreading the faith, saving the saints and eliminating tyrants... Nothing is obtained by placing your hopes on others; repose your faith in the One God alone..."

Vaisakhi is the first month of the Sikh calendar, and it is also a time to remember the founding of the Khalsa by Guru Gobind Singh, the Tenth Guru who was at once a saint, soldier and philosopher. Throughout his life he professed the word of God, His Grace and His unity.

Whenever tyranny, oppression and suffering run riot in the world, God sends a true saint to see that justice prevails. Guruji's followers would come to him and tell him of the injustices they were facing at the hands of the ruling king's soldiers, how they were being robbed, humiliated, assaulted, and how their children and families were being massacred before their very eyes. Having listened to and watched the misery of his followers, Guruji decided that the only way out was to get together and form themselves into a divinely inspired force and defend the defenceless.

During the spring festival of Vaisakhi in 1699, Guru Gobind Singh, at Anandpur Sahib, appointed the Five Faithfuls as the *Panj Piare*. They had shown their willingness to lay down their lives at the feet of the Guru if that would help establish peace and harmony... and the Guru founded the Khalsa, with the *Panj Piare* as the first members of Akal Purakh ki Fauj: soldier of God.

The Khalsa were the pure ones, the saint-soldiers who were to strengthen the foundation of the Sikh brotherhood. Guru Gobind Singh's message was simple: Those who possessed courage and loyalty and unity of purpose would ensure that peace and harmony prevailed.

A true Sikh is one without fear. All members of the Khalsa are equal. Hence the initiation ceremony or '*amrit*' involves drinking from the same bowl and adopting the same surname, Singh or lion for men, and Kaur or princess for women. Five Sikhs represent the Panj Piare at the ceremony, a sixth reads from the Guru Granth Sahib, one of the five Beloved Ones recites the duties they must follow and the vows they must honour and keep. Prayers are said and hymns from the Guru Granth Sahib are recited, each person drinks some of the holy *amrit* which is then sprinkled on their eyes, hair and hands. The ceremony concludes with the eating of *Karah Prasad*, the delicious sweet made of roasted wheat flour, ghee and sugar.

One of the commitments of a true Sikh is to wear the five K's: *kesh*, *kangha*, *kachha*, *kara* and *kirpan*, i.e. natural tresses - *kesh*, wooden comb, underwear, steel

bangle and a sword, symbols of the Khalsa. Male followers in particular are enjoined to wear the turban. All outward symbols serve to encourage adherents to take pride in their faith and in their ancestors. There is no coercion involved; the underlying philosophy is that the route to true salvation is achieved through loving God and ridding ourselves of lust, anger, greed, undue worldly attachment and ego - the *panch doot*, or five vices.

