

A Season of the Sikhs

Enjoy the hay while the sun shines

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TWENTY YEARS AFTER THE traumatic 1984 *pogrom*, the Sikhs have come into the center stage of prominence in handling the affairs of the country, India. What an irony!

2004 can aptly be declared as the **Year of the Sikhs** which is going to carry on into 2005 as well. First it was Khushwant Singh, the renowned journalist and writer who is keeping the literacy flame alive, and then arrived Dr. Manmohan Singh, eminent economist, taking the reins of India into his deft hands – his name being recorded in Indian history as the first Sikh Prime Minister from Kashmir to Kanyakumari and from the Rann of Kutch to the Brahmaputra in the East nestled in the Garo and Khasi hills. Rising from the dust of poverty, his meteoric rise into the political arena, *sans* any political base in the multi-dimensional India, speaks of a unique blend of grit, determination, will power, honesty, courage and fearlessness – qualities which flash before the eyes of the people when the name of a Sikh crops up in conversation.

More recently Lt. Gen. Joginder Jaswant Singh being named as the new Army Chief to take charge from January 2005, is again the first Sikh in the history of independent India to take charge of protecting the country's frontiers. With Montek Singh Ahluwalia heading as the Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission, the destiny of India now lies in Sikh hands. Is this a glimpse of the **Raaj Karega Khalsa** which Sikhs have been reading in the Ardas for many a years ? Just assuming power is not sufficient, one has to fulfill the responsibilities attached to the power.

When Guru Nanak came face to face with Babar, he did not hesitate to admonish him for the cruelty which his reign brought in the wake of the Mughal invasion of India. Guru Nanak's name should indeed be recorded in the history of the world as the valiant saint who spoke up against mighty Babar. Any person who overcomes the fear of death can only speak thus, his or her true feelings. By speaking in poetic verse to Babar, recorded in the Guru Granth Sahib, Nanak's fearless and prophetic character came to the forefront. Speaking up against the injustices meted out by those in power or authority, Nanak thus laid the foundation of a moral authority which ultimately climaxed in "*Zafarnama*" written to Emperor Aurangzeb by the Tenth Sikh Master, Guru Gobind Singh, presaging the downfall of the Mughal regime.

A saying goes that "Power corrupts." Overheard, personally, in social circles that our Sikh Prime Minister bluntly refused to oblige a very close relative's son in getting admission to a reputed engineering college, saying, "I have not sat in this seat of power to oblige you all!", speaks a lot of his reputation of being firm, straightforward, honest and sincere, with doses of impeccable integrity making him stand out like a lotus in the dirty pond of water, symbolizing a majority of the officials working under the umbrella of the corruption ridden Indian administration. Can one individual, or a

handful of persons of integrity, make a difference in a country ruptured with poverty which shall soon boast of outclassing China into being the most populated country of the world?

Guru Nanak has, by laboring in his fields and previously in employment as a state store-keeper, driven home one point which the historians have not properly highlighted from moral angle – that a person has to earn his livelihood by honest means, irrespective of whether the person is self-employed, working as an employee or on the payroll of the government. Becoming an ascetic and living a parasitical life is not the cup of tea for Guru Nanak's Sikhs. Later, successive Gurus' lifestyles, particularly that of Guru Arjun Dev and Guru Hargobind Sahib, set the precedent that there is nothing wrong in living a comfortable family life provided one develops compassion in the heart for one's fellow beings and for the needy.

Creating wealth is a necessity for the advancement of mankind by distributing it for the welfare of all, but creating wealth and amassing or hoarding it in the fear that one shall, maybe, need it in the near future, which is always born of insecurity is a social evil, which Guru Nanak deprecated by proclaiming, "*Wand Chhakna*" - which, literally, means **consuming by distributing**. Guru Nanak not only proclaimed but also practiced it in everyday life as a householder.

The urge to amass or hoard, in fact, arises out of insecurity, and being in the fallacy that one shall live long and death never shall occur. Indeed one avoids to contemplate upon death, as if death is an obscene topic to delve in. By speaking of it one assumes that one shall hasten it. Actually, nothing is more certain in life than death. To take birth can be an uncertainty but to die is certain. Death is inevitable. Energy has to change its form. The body when it is alive and throbbing is full of energy. The body dies but the spirit can live on. Guru Nanak's body also perished like any mortal, but His Spirit is still alive today.

Fearlessness is a quality which every Sikh, nay, every person, has to emulate and imbibe into his or her blood. Until and unless one is fearless, one will not be able to live in totality. To learn about fearlessness, one has to simply observe a person who is truly in love. If the love is total and complete, then this quality of fearlessness is best observed in both the lover and the loved. Lovers are perfect examples of fearlessness. Being in love makes a person fearless, and Guru Nanak was in love with all, whether rich or poor, whether of low or high caste, irrespective of the cultural background the person belonged to. A person who is in love develops compassion for all and indeed Guru Nanak reached the pinnacle of fearlessness by being in love with all. *Vice versa* a person who has overcome the fear of death or who has become *nirbhau* or fearless can only be capable of loving.

In today's scenario, at times one does not even know the neighbor's name, a common occurrence in cities and towns. And Jesus had commanded, "Love thy neighbor" just as our Tenth Guru had said, "*Jin prem kio tin(e) hi prabh paio.*" Why have almost all the spiritual leaders of the world stressed upon **love**? It is so because only when one is in love can the trait of fearlessness develop and without this trait of *nirbhau*-ness, one can never be able to live in totality and achieve the state of equipoise or *sehaj*. Guru Nanak declared, as recorded in page 1412 of Guru Granth Sahib:

ਜਉ ਤਉ ਪ੍ਰੇਮ ਖੇਲਣ ਕਾ ਚਾਉ ॥
ਸਿਰੁ ਧਰਿ ਤਲੀ ਗਲੀ ਮੇਰੀ ਆਉ ॥
ਇਤੁ ਮਾਰਗਿ ਪੈਰੁ ਧਰੀਜੈ ॥
ਸਿਰੁ ਦੀਜੈ ਕਾਣਿ ਨ ਕੀਜੈ ॥

[SGGS : 1412]

*“Jou tou prem khelan ka chao,
Sirr dhar(e) tali gali meri aao.
Itt marg(e) pai dhareejai
Sirr deejaii kaan(e) n(a) keejaii.”*

Guru Nanak said, “ If you desire to play the game of love, come onto my way {or to be specific, enter my heart} with your head placed in your palms.”

What does Guru Nanak imply when he said, “head on your hand.” It simply implies that one can never love another with one’s head or mind in action because mind is scheming and cunning. One has to drop the mind, or head, if one desires to play the game of love. If one drops the mind, then what is left is the heart, or the soul, which really exists. One has to follow one’s heart, or to be specific, **listen to the inner voice** which helps us to verbalize our true inner feelings. With the mind in action only ego, or *haumai*, can develop. The mind is only capable of creating an ego whereas the heart or the inner voice is only capable of creating a fountain of love radiating ‘love energy’ to anyone who comes into contact. Thus, one has to symbolically cut off one’s head (or drop the mind) and follow the heart’s true feelings to be in love.

In fact love is a natural phenomenon which can only mature out of communication with the other. It is only when one communicates with the other that the fodder for creating a relation is provided, and communication is a necessary link or bond between two friends, between parent and child, between master and disciple, between husband and wife, between two lovers, or to speak globally, between two countries. With the efforts now ongoing between India and Pakistan (the initial stride taken by “TTIS”, a wing of the Ananda Bazar Patrika group of publications operating from Kolkata) in communicating **on personal level** by undertaking student’s exchanges and visits, will in fact create an atmosphere of goodwill and bring in peace in the long run when these young students grow up and take charge, one day, of the affairs of their countries. Both the governments have failed to achieve any credible results so far in the 57 years after the gory partition of 1947, in the outcome denying the Sikhs easy and free access to their left behind historical shrines which, we Sikhs daily pray for their *sewa sambhaal* in the *Ardas*. However, a rainbow of optimism can be viewed with Baba Jagtar Singh commencing *Kar Sewa* in Pakistan’s Gurdwaras.

At times, I wonder if Sikhs can enjoy special rights of visiting Pakistan’s Gurdwaras freely without having to undergo the time consuming visa formalities. It is up to the Sikhs basking in the power lobby today who can work this out by communicating with the Pakistani neighbors. Why can’t this much be granted to Sikhs who have lost a lot more than other Indians in terms of personal property and

religious establishments. Easy and unhindered access can result in the actualization of our Ardas read daily since India's Independence, "...

"sRI nnkwxw swihb Aqy hor gurduAwirAW gurDwmW dy ijnHW qoN pMQ f ivCoiVAw igAw hY Kuly drSn dldwr qy syvw sMBwl dw dwn Kwlsw jl f bKSo....."

This goodwill gesture, if allowed by Pakistan, can spearhead the momentum of improvement in relations. All Sikh social and religious organizations should submit a petition to our Prime Minister as well as to the Pakistani Embassy in New Delhi to take up this matter seriously.

Another area which has to be looked into seriously is the Inter-Faith meets which has become popular in the Western world but yet to catch up in India. Dialogues or communications which take place in the Inter-Faith meets can indeed bridge the gap between the so-called religions of India and help in creating an environment of mutual respect amongst the diverse communities which can naturally fountain into mutual trust which in turn can blossom into harmony and love amongst us. This ultimately should lead to peace in the Indian sub-continent devoid of terrorism. **Let's usher in the New Year 2005 as the Year of Inter-Faith Meets.**

