

# ***Kirpan: The Guru's Grace***

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Ravinder Singh is a journalist in Delhi and he was travelling to Anandpur one week before the tercentenary celebrations of the Khalsa. His host was a man of influence and Ravinder knew his family well. He had an impression of the life of this person, but he was not prepared for what he would experience in the early hours of the following morning.

It was 4:00 a.m. and Ravinder was woken up by a sound. His host was getting ready to go to the Gurudwara. The next Ravinder saw this man carry a long sword with him to the Gurudwara. This shocked Ravinder, he always identified the sword with violence, with elements of Sikh polity that held it as a ritual and as a necessity. Why in the World would a well-settled, educated, modern looking man like to carry a sword? May be a small one, but a full length sword is not what he expected.

He saw his host walk up to the steps of the Gurudwara. Although he wore a long *Kurta* and a sword, yet it suited his host. It set Ravinder Singh thinking and he thought to himself: "Why not me? I have lived all my life as a person trying to *hide* my identity as a Sikh. I travel and move in circles of Indian society almost trying to *blend* into others and be one of them".

There was so much pressure from the times he had to report and the newspapers he worked with, it was almost as though he wanted to hide his love for his Guru within him and not let it be seen by anyone. He remembered the times when he was often trapped into saying things he did not agree with as far as his religious identity was concerned. Now, this one happening was changing him. He thought, "If this man can carry a sword like that to the Guru, why can I not live my identity?"

## **Symbol of Faith:**

Ravinder went to Delhi and unfurled his rolled up heard, as an announcement of a step towards setting his thought free. The Sword the symbol, our Love for our Guru! The sword became a part of Sikh psyche at the time of the 6th Guru Sahib, Guru Hargobind Sahib Ji. Since then, generations of Sikhs are connected by this Symbol of our faith. Sahib Guru Hargobind wore two Swords, the swords of *Miri* and *Piri*, symbolized by the same symbol.

## **Anandpur 1699:**

The Sword was to be further forged into the Sikh psyche forever. On this day this symbol transcended time and was made part of The Khalsa. Sahib Guru Gobind Singh tested the Spirit of his Sikhs; he tested them by the Sword calling to them from beyond time and across the eons of Humanity, to the One awakened spirit of Man. A Sikh can come forward and save himself, nay save the World, by offering himself. Not one, but the Beloveds Five stand with us since then: forever with us – Sahib Dharam Singh Ji, Sahib Daya Singh Ji, Sahib Himmat Singh Ji, Sahib

Mohkam Singh Ji and Sahib Sahib Singh Ji. They stand with us today in our lives, our prayers and in our being, resplendent with the Swords the Guru blessed them with.

*For us the Sword is a medium of the guru's grace and a symbol to be revered. The Sword lives as a part of us and will live as a part of us forever. Till Sahib Guru Gobind Singh Ji we were baptized by a practice called the Charan Amrit, but from that day at Anandpur, things changed forever. Baptism of the Guru Now became the present practice of Khande ka Amrit. 'A baptism by the Shabad', I prefer to call it, with the Sword as our medium. As Sikhs we wear the sword to guard ourselves against annihilation. To recognize our identity and to live in its freedom. To allow the spirit of the Sikh to roam free in this World in pursuit of perfection, within and without.*

Difficult times fell on the Khalsa after the departure of Sahib Guru Gobind Singh Ji. For about 70 years the Khalsa lived with a price on his head. Living on horseback and surviving day to day we lived with the sword as our companion and our protector. It was during these testing and trying years that the Khalsa relied on the gift of His Guru in real terms. For Guru Gobind Singh Ji gave us the training and the blessing to use the Sword only as a means of protecting the meek and the helpless.

In the *Zafarnama*, Sahib said to Aurangzeb:

*Chun Kar az hama hilate dar guzasht Halal Ast Burdan ba shamsheer dast.*

"Only when all other efforts of reconciliation fail is it righteous to wield the Sword."

### **Crisis:**

The extreme times are very hard and can be very stressful. It is in these times that we learn how to call on our inner reality and our inner strength. We can, when faced by an extreme situation, change to realize our real and true self. Patwant Singh Ji in his book. *'The Sikhs'*, mentions an instance about a Sikh youth who was attacked by a mob at Bidar. This is what he has to say in his book and it represents what is in our subconscious:

*"One engineering student who was part of the Bidar massacre in the late 1980s explained that he had been far removed from his Sikh origins until, as a Hindu mob bore down on the temple in which the students had taken refuge, someone handed him a kirpan (the sword or dagger carried by Amritdhari Sikhs). 'What was I supposed to do with a kirpan?' he recounted. 'But I kind of held it out in front of me and you know, somehow I suddenly felt like a real Sikh. In that gesture I knew what being a Sikh meant'."*

It is may be this history of His being which shook Ravinder Singh from his roots and changed him forever. What may be faced by any of us when one day we realize we are not just mere beings of skin and bones but that we are the spirit of the Khalsa ever fresh and ever new? Like the young calves who suckle their mothers, just as soon as they are born, never taught by anyone, just so instinctively, do we realize and start living with the Guru in our hearts. We get in touch with our Soul's everlasting truth and reality: that day changes us forever.

## **Non-Aggression:**

It is important to note that through out history no Sikh community, group or individual has ever used the Kirpan as a mode of aggression or for conversion. We are to convert ourselves from within, understand and work with our mind, submit ourselves to the Guru The *Paudi 27* in the *Japji*, given below, tells us what Victory signified for the Khalsa:

"Make contentment your ear-rings, humility your beggings bowl, and meditation the ashes you apply to your body. Let the remembrance of death be the patched coat you wear; let the purity of virginity be your way in the world, and let faith in the Lord be your walking stick. See the brotherhood of all mankind as the highest order of Yogis; conquer your own mind, and conquer the world. I bow to the One, I humbly bow. The Primal One, the Pure Light, without beginning, without end. Through out all the ages, He is One, the Same."

Never in the annals of Sikh history have we been aggressors for forcing conversions. We have, of course, used this steel symbol for self-protection, and self-preservation. Many amongst us would relate the Kirpan to violence. It is worthwhile to consider that violence or non-violence do not lie in the object of the Kirpan, but lie within us, in our own mind. Some look at the Kirpan as uncivilized. They forget that, for the Khalsa, the Kirpan is not an object left behind in time, but a symbol of positive expression of Guru's grace, always living with us.

In contemporary India, there has been a debate on non-violence Vs. terrorism. The Sikh ideal however is love and sacrifice. No one taught us this better than the Ninth Guru. His sacrifice is absolute and unparalleled. In one action of his, Sahib Guru Tegh Bahadur made the resolute statement of human freedom; no political or administrative entity has the right to subjugate another individual or community. Religious freedom is the birth-right of every man. We have lived by this in numerous examples during the historical times.

It may be worthwhile to mention that laws in the United States uphold the right to carry a gun without a license, but some states of the USA do not allow the carrying of a Kirpan more than three inches in length. Is it that the gun is less destructive than a Kirpan? Or is it that the American mind does not relate to a Kirpan as it does to a gun?

The Kirpan for us does not have a mere physical presence; it has a spiritual and mental presence too. We have to fight our spiritual battles within. Our stress is on the issue of inner development. In this battle, the Kirpan is our symbol of grace of God and Guru. This World is a battlefield and to come our victorious, Guru's Grace is the central pillar. Our *Mool Mantra* talks of GURPRASAD. In my opinion, in the physical world, *Guruprasad* is represented in the Kirpan. Understanding the Kirpan and the nature of Guru's grace is like the key to our approach to life as Sikhs.

## **Non-violent Struggle:**

*We are all aware of the arrest of Sher J. B. Singh whereby I was prompted to write this note. I do know that if we look at our history, we have been faced with similar situations before. In our colonial history itself there was a Morcha in 1921-22 called the 'Kirpan Morcha': A campaign*

*started by Sikhs to assert our right to keep and carry a Kirpan. This was denied to us under the Indian Arms Act (XI) of 1878. The Chief Khalsa Divan was at the helm of this Morcha. We could be arrested during this period for carrying a Kirpan without a warrant. As an act of defiance, the Khalsa started carrying a full size Kirpan and a weekly newspaper was started called the 'Kirpan Bahadur'.*

The result is that even today we enjoy the freedom to carry full size Kirpans in India at least, without worry, except in Aircrafts and in the Legislative Assembly where we cannot carry a full size Kirpan.

It is not for me, in the present context, to give a direction for the path we should all take as a community. I have only tried to express some of the sentiment that is relevant and needs consideration by us today. We as a community and as individuals, have to choose and carve out our approach.

*For me, certainly the Kirpan is my love for my Guru, and I would love to be able to carry it unhindered wherever I go. As an individual I love and admire the Guru Sikh who once told me: to him "the Kirpan is like the Hand of Guru Gobind Singh.....".*

