

Framework for Decision making: A Viewpoint

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THE EMPHASIS OF SIKH TEACHING is not so much on the laying down of highly precise and rigid rules of how man might utilise his or her God given knowledge; the essence of Sikh teaching is to provide man with a healthy, progressive and responsible philosophy for addressing modern issues. It provides a framework and not definitive answers for the future. Two basic rules of Sikh teachings would seem to be relevant when discussing modern issues:

(1) Human life is at the apex of life on earth and is an important phase in the development of the human soul towards complete God-centred harmony.

(2) Family life and the institution of marriage are central to Sikh teachings.

The general principles (partly based on an article by Dr I J Singh of New York) may be summarised as follows:

- 1) Not all actions can be universally condemned in all situations at all times.
- 2) Instead of providing fixed unchanging answers to changing problems, Sikhism provides an unchanging process based on moral framework in which one can devise moral and ethical criteria by which an ethical dilemma can be negotiated.
- 3) Inherent in Sikh teachings is the principle that all rights come with responsibilities and no actions are free of accountability.
- 4) Before committing to an action, a human being must delve into his or her essential being. "Recognise the divine spark within you", says Sikhism. ("*Mann toon Jote Saroop hain apna mool pacchaan.*")
- 5) The discerning intellect that Sikhism asks of its followers is far from perfect, but grows only by use, prayer and grace. In this role the Sikh community, the *sangat* becomes paramount. Individual lives exist as biosocial contracts within the historical framework of a community.
- 6) The decision making process does not occur in isolation and the individual choices are ratified by the *sangat*.

From the above, one may conclude that *Gurmatt* based decisions regarding modern issues should be made intelligently in the light of all the research and information that is available, ethically and collectively in any given situation. The mental/spiritual mode required is that of humility, complete harmonisation with the Will of the Creator, sense of service to all creation and a highly responsible attitude towards human values and the progress of human institutions (e.g. the institution of family life, in the context of unnatural human cloning and homo-sexuality). **The objective of human progress is to improve the quality of life so that it becomes God-centred and not self-centred.** Research in the spiritual and temporal fields, is encouraged by *Sikhi*. The pre-condition is that it must be guided by *Gurmatt* as continually interpreted by Gursikh scholars, and applied accordingly. That is the ethical challenge for man before (s)he starts tinkering with the building blocks of life; or starts making radical departures from the accepted institution of heterosexual

marriage for normal family life. (e.g. Human cloning or sexual inclinations need to be controlled - and interpreted - in that context.)

With a decision making framework in which science and enlightened religious thought work together, one can turn to the specific questions. According to *Gurmatt*, the main purpose of life is to achieve a harmonious relationship with the Supreme Soul (*Param-atma*) during this life. Unbalanced pursuit of worldly power, comfort and pleasure (in the nature of normal or abnormal sexual gratification), and attachment can lead one astray from the path of *Gurmatt*. In fact, pain is prescribed as a “medicine” (“*dukh daaroo*”) when the human mind loses direction due to single-minded pursuit of worldly achievements or pleasures. However, in Sikhism physical pain or suffering is not a pre-condition to becoming a God-centred being. Science should be used to provide relief from such pain, although, *Sikhi* would not recommend the ending of life (euthanasia) as a means to ending physical or mental pain. Use of genetic engineering in non-human life forms may produce “better” vegetation and animals (from the human view point). It may be argued that the main purpose of these life forms is to sustain life itself (e.g. in the sea “*Jian ka ahaar jee khana*”) and is not the same as human life. Presumably, the Sikh religious criteria for genetic engineering of non-human and human life forms would be based on different considerations. One is reminded of the word “*mann*” in Gurbani which is “self awareness in time/space,” but which is also the light of God in man (“*Mann toon jote Saroop hain*”). This would seem to be a uniquely human faculty, which distinguishes man from all other life forms. In relation to genetic engineering this theme needs further *Gurmatt* research.

A balanced human family life is essential for achieving the human life’s goal. To achieve this objective, the same person needs to play many roles and needs many different skills to develop a full and balanced personality: as marriage partner and parent; roles in different family relationships; and thinker, writer, craftsman, saint, soldier etc. To produce super unbalanced beings in test tubes, for example, would be totally unethical. On the other hand, providing cure from disease and enhancing the quality of life would accord with *Sikhi*.

Man needs to be aware of his own imperfections and proceed with great caution, and continuous (and continual) vigilance when applying science and technology to the alteration of own hereditary characteristics evolved over millions of years by nature. He must remain aware, in total humility, regarding own limitations before the Supreme Intelligence, and also be prepared to take full personal and collective social responsibility for the consequences of genetic engineering and similar advances in science. To conclude with a quotation from Dr I J Singh: “The discerning intellect that Sikhism asks of its followers is far from perfect, but grows only by use, prayer and grace. In this role the Sikh community, the *sangat* becomes paramount, the process does not occur in isolation.....individual lives exist as biosocial contracts within the historical framework of a community.” (“*The Sikh Way: A Pilgrim’s Progress*” p. 25)

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The Future of Sikhism: Vision & Mission for Centenaries

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By an extraordinary configuration the year 2004 carries special significance in contemporary Sikh history. This year's three centennial celebration events calls upon the Sikh leadership/institutions to introspect and project true Sikh doctrine/history in a well co-ordinated manner to inspire particularly the youths. The 500th birth centenary of Sri Guru Angad Dev Ji, 400th year of installation of Sri Guru Granth Sahib, and 300th martyrdom centenary of four Sahibzadas are the major commemorative events. Let the seamy side episodes of the 1999 Khalsa Tercentenary be not repeated this time around. Equally important historic centenaries would occur in the next few years.

The Prakash Quincentennial Guru Angad Dev Ji should be a spur for the propagation of education, eradication of caste and social evils, concept of work-culture/discipline/sports and physical well-being. The unique secular spiritual heritage and philosophy enshrines in our living Guru emphasizes sharing message with humanity for world peace and prosperity. The martyrdom of four Sahibzadas requires focusing on youth to play their role in community upliftment and inspiring them to fight against drug addiction and social evils. The promotion of our young generation and Vanjaras (Nanak Panthis) are the two crucial sectors which need priority consideration for bringing them back to Sikh-mainstream after drawing a **"Road-Map" of Sikh Vision 2010**. Every Guru Nanak "*Naam-Leva*" is called upon to share/contribute their respective resources for achieving the Centenaries' objectives in a befitting manner.

Roadmap for Sikh Vision: 2010:

The managements of Sikh Institutions/Gurdwara/Societies/NGOs, etc; require formulating and executing special Component Planning and Counselling within respective infrastructure and resources to attract strayed youth from the crucial ignored sectors back to our heritage. A Corpus Fund out of "*Daswand*"/donations may be operated to finance and support youth promotions. The locally available faculty specialists/counsellors can be associated to diagnose ailments and try applying healing touch to the "targeted group" of ignored sectors on fixed days/hours. The factors for drawing out area "Roadmap" for Vision-2010 are:

- Unemployment among Punjab youth and outside, specially in rural areas, causing lot of depression. Major responsible factors are corruption at all levels, non-governance, vested and demoralized leadership, uneconomic landholdings, discriminations, and many others. About 40 lakhs youth are unemployed in Punjab alone (excluding Vanjaras and unregistered). They need counseling, support and placement through Community's combined efforts.
- Illiteracy/school drop-outs in backward/rural sector is to be checked.
- Sports-men need training/patronage to compete and maintain Sikh identity.
- Entrepreneurship/Vocational Training thrust to promote self-employment.

- Awareness to agro-based industry/herbal plantation and adoption of alternate side jobs can attract youth back to ancestral agro-profession and to arrest the flooding in of migrant labour.
- Vacant/encroached Gurdwaras land need to be economically exploited to create rural jobs by inviting NRIs and industrialists.
- Introducing traditional sports, karate training, health check-up, Kirtan classes and counselling cells promotion to attract youth to gurdwaras.
- Estimated over six crore Vanjaras/Sikligars remained un-listed as Sikhs in General Census. The Constitutional discrimination has to be resolved/fought democratically by sponsoring resolutions and delegations to Home Ministry, to ensure their eligibility for reservation rights and Sikh minority status. The Sikh population increase from present 2% to 8% likely to enhance our status.
- Short duration youth/Vanjaras awareness camps/tours be sponsored with free board/lodging facilities for visiting historic/religious centres.
- Legal assistance cells for seeking rightful justice for families of weakers.
- Promoting destitute children/women/old-age homes through societies.
- Promotion of libraries, reading habits, quiz/*Gurbani* contests and arranging coaching classes for defence recruitment/All India Service competitions.
- Organizing “Self-help” voluntary missionaries cadres for propagating at grass-root level by arranging whole-day weekly camps and monitoring.
- Adoption of urban sectors/village Panchayats/Dev. Blocks as unit of basic development and spreading awareness through institution’s workers.
- Constituting social welfare societies of targeted persons (and women) within complexes for aids eligibiliy out of Govt. sponsored various Dev. schemes as being availed by various other communities in the country.

Under the divine message of the Guru, “*Apan Hathi Aapna Ape Hi Kaaj Swareiay*”, the community has to rise to the occasion to protect and guide our neglected generation for building up the spirit of “*Chardi-kala*”. Scarse resources and energies have to be saved by limiting frequent *nagar-Kirtans*, *Kirtan Darbars* and Gurdwara buildings renovations, and diverting the funds for above mentioned visionary projects for promoting our young generation and in particular century-ignored over six crore Vanjaras/Sikligars brethren.

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