

The New Kartarpur Community

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Recently I turned fifty-six years old and some one asked me if I was planning to retire. I told him no, because in USA the early retirement age is sixty-two and a half and the age of regular retirement is sixty-five. It really dawned on me that the youth of which we all are proud of and would like it to last for ever, was really over. I remembered these words of the *Gurbani*:

“iKsY jobnu bDY jrUAw idn inhwry sMig mlcu j”

“*Kheesai joban bdhai jarooa, din neeharae sang(h) meech.*”

(SGGS: 458)

Meaning: My youth is wasting away, old age is approaching, and death, my companion, is counting my days.

But, it did make me reminiscence about the prospect of retiring and wonder as to what I would do with all the time that I will have at my disposal and what type of life style will it be? It also made me wonder about the retirement times of my grandparents and parents. I realized that at the age of 56, many would have retired and some others would be on the verge of retiring. But now times have changed, the retirement age has been increased as the people are living longer, and are as well staying active. But, then there is a significant change in the way families live now days-with more nucleus families and the joint families are becoming things of the past. Earlier the seniors upon retirement took a back seat and let the life roll by at the leisurely pace. I have seen a little more active life style of many seniors in America who purchase a Recreational vehicle (RV) and embark on a journey exploring the countryside. Well exploring the wide swath of countryside, seeing new places, meeting interesting people is an enticing proposition, but I was not very convinced of the appeal of this venture. I was not thinking of having a sedentary lifestyle either. Then I started thinking about the model of the life style that we could find from the lives of the Gurus. Suddenly, I remembered about Guru Nanak Dev Ji as to how he established city of Kartarpur in the year 1521, after returning from his journeys called *Udasees*. So, the only fruitful option will be to see if the model could be replicated and thus invest the remaining life span in the search of deathlessness. It will be a drastic change in life style that would need some serious adjustments and getting used to.

Guru Nanak Dev Ji was fifty-two when he settled down quietly to live in peace at Kartarpur, almost for the rest of his days. He started a new life style where he occupied himself largely in wheat farming. But the early morning and evening were reserved for *Sangat*, for congregation to have Holy Communion. Gradually Guru Ji's disciples, the Sikhs began to converge towards Kartarpur from wherever they had heard Guru Ji's message during his *udasees*. He also wrote down many of the hymns he had already sung elsewhere earlier during his journeys. Guru Ji now put off his special costumes that he had put on to preach during his journeys and dressed himself as an ordinary householder of the day. He regularly preached to the great crowd who came out daily to see him, teaching all to live in the world and work, while at the same time thinking of God always and praying for nothing but His grace. Now this is a practical model that Guru Ji has demonstrated for us. In his practical and meaningful life style he showed us a new way of living, a productive and fulfilling life style. His lively speech “radiated love and faith and attracted men as light gathers moths”; says Puran Singh. **So, with this model to bank upon the last phase of life will not be a slow wait for death to snatch us.**

Guru Nanak Dev Ji has laid down the frame work and it can be easily tailored to suit with the changed times. I am imagining to have a commune or community who have come together to explore a fulfilling life. The overall plan of this community living is like that of a hub and the spokes plan. At the hub is the center of spiritual activity or *Gurdwara*, which is like other *Gurdwaras* but it is more like a *Dharamsal* or a place to learn about *Dharam*. Kabir Ji has defined *Dharam* in *Guru Granth Sahib* as:

“kblrw jhw igAwnu qh Drmu hY”

“*Kabiraa jehaa giaan theh dharam ha*” (SGGS:1372)

Meaning: Kabir, where there is spiritual wisdom, there is righteousness and Dharam.

I have used the term originally used by Guru Nanak Dev Ji because our *Gurdwaras* now have become places of worship, place to visit, socialize, and base for politicians. These are not places of learning where the proper environment, discipline of a learning campus is maintained. With the *Dharamsal* at the hub, residences for the inmates, gym, workshops, and class rooms will be like spokes extending outwards together with the gardening and farming area. The housing is not very big or extravagant but simple and yet comfortable. The individual resident can enjoy the quietness of solitude as well a healthy place to meet other like minded individuals with similar interests. The synergy of like minded and aligned with the common goal will unleash such vibrations that the entire community will become charged with loving and caring emotive power. Every one meets in the morning session for *keertan* of *Asa De Waar*, followed by recitation of *Japji Sahib*, and other *Nitnem banis*. Then after the *Diwan*, have a community breakfast together. The early morning *Simran* or meditation is an individual effort done at one's own place of residence or out in the open as per individual's preference, and temperament.

Then between the breakfast and lunch time the individual residents take part in different activities based on the community needs and individual's abilities, training and expertise. The residents interested in farming can enjoy being out and could engage in farming providing grains, fruits, vegetables for the community kitchen and surplus food being processed and used to fight against hunger or as an aid for disaster victims. Like retired accountants managing the accounts of this institution and providing services to outside world as well, and so on. Besides that, there will be classes conducted by the resident experts or hired experts in new areas where the residents seek to gather proficiency like computers, physical exercises etc. In addition there will be classes where the *Gurbani* will be taught and discussed in a class room environment. Because we have become highly successful professionals, accomplished businessmen but our understanding of our scriptures is almost at the datum level. Many a times our understanding is not in alignment with Guru Ji's teaching. Then at lunch time, it will be a community effort in cooking, serving, cleaning and enjoying the meal together. Although there will be time to socialize, but it should not be about bragging rights about the past accomplishments and reliving the past; but to gain new insight. Afternoons are spent in activities that promote individual growth, community growth and support the larger growth of the rest of mankind. There can be medical clinics, medical camps, books written, published, marketed, and other outreach programs that benefit the community and world at large. Then in the evening we have a *keertan diwan* starting with recital of *Rehras Sahib* and culminating with *Sohela*. All the activities are under the guidance of accomplished individuals who act as mentors and coaches for the rest of the community. There will be dedicated mentors for different fields. For example the mentor for life style will be a “*Gurmukh*”. The definition of a “*Gurmukh*” from *Gurbani* is:

“gurmuiK AMqir shju hY mnu ciVAw dsvY Awkwis j”

“Gurmukh anter sahaj hai, mun charreya dasvek aakash.”

(SGGS:1414)

Meaning: Within the *Gurmukh* is intuitive peace and poise; his/her mind ascends to the Tenth Plane of the *Akaashic* Ethers.

Gurmukh is not one who wears a particular type of clothes or dress but a state of mind. After all, only a true *Gurmukh* can inspire, mould, and coach like Guru Nanak Dev Ji who transformed lives. The entire concept of this community is centered on this objective, so the mentor on this field has to be an accomplished “*Gurmukh*”.

Similarly the other mentors will also have to be accomplished persons from their fields. It is only that an accomplished person acting as a mentor can inspire, provide guidance, encouragement, and provide challenges to help mould the character and teach new skills. The entire environment will be that of *Saadh Sangat* which provides the residents with an invigorating and stimulating regimen where the spiritual growth is possible. Guru Ji has emphasized the significance of *Saadh Sangat* in these words:

“swDsMig imil nwmu iDAwvhu pUrn hovY Gwlw j”

“Saadsang mil naam dhi-aavahu pooran hovai ghaalaa.”

(SGGS 617)

Meaning: Joining the *Saadh Sangat*, the Company of the Holy, meditate on the Naam, the Name of the Lord; your efforts shall be rewarded.

“vfBwgl swDsMgu prwpiq iqn Bytq durmiq Koel j”

“Vadbhaagee saadsang paraapat tin bhaytat durmat kho-ee.”

(SGGS: 617)

Meaning: By great good fortune, one obtains the *Saadh Sangat*, the Company of the Holy. Meeting them, evil-mindedness is eliminated.

Guru Nanak Dev Ji's life style in Kartarpur was a true role model for both the mentors and the mentored. Guru Ji led a life of humility, inspiring and guiding Sikhs to become not only productive citizens but also spiritually uplifted. The environment in Kartarpur was woven in the reverent faith of the Creator. The flavor of the environment is to be found in the *shabads* that we even sing today and in future. His humility was so great that he never claimed any extraordinary greatness for himself in spite of his vast influence, and the respect that people had for him. He always considered himself to be a mere man among men, mortal and sinful as they were, though he was always in union with God.

His personality is reflected in these words of Guru Angad Dev Ji who took his training from him:

“hau ikAw swlwhl ikrm jMqu vfl qyrl vifAwel j”

“Hau kiaa saalaahae kiram ja(n)th vaddee thaeree vaddiaaee.”

(SGGS: 792)

Meaning: I am a worm - how can I praise You, O Lord; Your glorious greatness is so great. Spurred by growing research suggesting that mental activity fights off dementia, in my mind it will be an ideal environment not only to ward off diseases and simultaneously work on spirituality. The times have changed, the joint families spanning three generations under one roof are things of the past. The nucleus families are now fighting to survive as family units. In such a social fabric of society, where else can one find a better place to engage mind, keep the body fit and work on the spiritual growth. The environment in this setting will create a new family for the residents who have common aspirations and goals. Here the residents are not just waiting for their last days to be over at an idling pace, or just share company of like minded, and enjoy the meals together. Instead it will inspire creative

talents that have been latent up till now, and ignite the zeal to rekindle the connection with the soul. Guru Amar Das Ji came to Guru Angad Dev Ji at a ripe age of sixty-two and achieved the objective for which we are all here on this earth. There is no better example for the inspiration and role model. Guru Amar Das Ji's words are always heard in all our *keertan diwans* as:

“Anḁdu BieAw myrl mwey siqgurU mY pwieAw j”

“*Anand bhaeiaa maeree maeae satguru mai paaeiaa.*”

(SGGS: 917)

Meaning: I am in ecstasy, O my mother, for I have attained the True Guru (inside me).

One of the essential aspect of having a good life during receding phase of life is having a healthy body. During the earlier period of life this aspect had been frequently compromised, as other events become more significant. By now the true significance of healthy body makes it imperative, that the daily regimen of exercise is strictly implemented. Regular exercising improves sleeping habits, boosts energy level, improves body immune system, reduces stress, and strengthens muscles as well as bones. Another aspect that will be equally practiced will be keeping mind engaged. That will not only help onset of dementia, depression but also help keep us sparkling with enthusiasm. In fact trying to explore the depths of *Gurbani*, its poetic nuances, its mystical love, music and lore will be so invigorating that it will keep everyone mentally captivated. The words of *Gurbani* are the real weapons that can strike us and bring about the transformation in us.

The human life can be compared to a three legged stool- body, mind and soul. If one leg is missing then the consequences can be easily predicted. We have discussed about two aspects body and mind earlier, and now let us talk about the third and the most vital of the three- soul. Guru Jis have provided us with a rich soul food in form of *Gurbani*, singing, and listening to it provides with soul nourishment, just as food provides nourishment to the body. With this soul food we can bring joy, and bliss to our lives. During the earlier phase of life-education and working phases, we have neglected this aspect and now is the time to compensate for that deficiency. The experience of joy can only be obtained by connecting with the soul, when we open it to the feelings and emotions. The potency of this soul food has been tested by Guru Nanak Dev Ji against the meanest characters as-Kauda, Sajjan and Nur Shah, etc. and we know that it is magical. The uplifting singing of the spiritual food with dedicated sessions on understanding and exploring the depths of its emotions will act as the harbinger of a new state of consciousness. Thus all three areas will be explored and our lives will be enriched, because each of these three besides growing individually also provide the requisite impetus for the growth in other two, thus creating a chain effect. In this realm we will be connecting with our own soul at each moment, so that we are not being lonely in our aloneness. The loneliness that affects the lives of many in their last days will thus be eliminated. In fact if we can create a cascading effect the potential for achieving the purpose of life is there. Guru Granth Sahib Ji has defined it as:

“jlvq pwvhu moK duAwr j”

“*Jeevath paavah mokh dhuaar*” (SGGS: 343)

Meaning: You shall attain the Gate of Liberation while yet alive.

The time spent in such an invigorating, communal and healthy environment will be uplifting for the soul. It is only in such an environment that the soul can be tested in its depth. What better ending chapter to our own autobiographical account can be written? The lives of our Gurus have provided us with a blueprint not only for joyful lives, but also for joyful departing from this world for the last time.

“jrw mrw qwpu sBu nwTw gux goibMd inq gwvhu j”

*“Jarra marra taap sabh naathaa gun Gobind nith
gaavahu.”* (SGGS: 611)

Meaning: The pains of old age and death shall all depart, when you constantly sing the Glorious Praises of the Lord of the Universe.

Now, if we can create a New Kartarpur Community in our own town and it becomes the seed so that this model is replicated in every town, and country of the world, it will bring about quantum changes in the society. It does not have to be a big or elaborate edifice. A small community will be more cohesive, focused and efficient. In the strife torn world of cut throat competition, where the seniors are relegated to the roles of waiting on the sidelines, can we create this alternative? Yes! We can. With Guru Ji's grace this transformation is possible. Let us create enough momentum for this to take way of life to take firm roots and spread joy all around.

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