

# Guru Nanak's Timeless Message and its Relevance Today

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IN AN ERA WHEN THE PEOPLE of diverse faiths live in mortal fear of clash of cultures, and the so-called civilized nations compete in the clandestine manufacture of destructive weaponry, the rousing message of Guru Nanak for peaceful co-existence and mutual trust acquires a special urgency.

Historically, Guru Nanak launched his movement for peace and love in the fifteenth century, but his message enshrined in Guru Granth has a timeless quality and universal appeal. His utterances are as true and compelling in the strife-ridden world as they were some 500 years ago. He did not set out to impose a new set of doctrines but harked back to the truths and wisdom forgotten by strife torn world. He set out to build a community of men and women devoted to God and filled with a sense of love, equality and mutual respect, because God's language is love - for all creatures.

Guru Nanak believed in one God - formless, *nirguna*, the absolute, eternal and infinite. He is revealed by His Grace to any one who seeks Him through pure devotion. This belief has been at the core of the Sikh doctrine.

Guru Nanak worked towards bringing all creeds, in particular, Hindus and Muslims, together in a spirit of reverence and cordiality. He tried to create harmony between the communities, even as he called upon rulers and potentates to desist from repression and exploitation of the common people. A popular proverb describes him as the Guru for the Hindus and the Pir of the Muslims:

*Guru Nanak Shah Fakir  
Hindu ka Guru, Mussalman ka Pir*

As the present-day tensions develop uncontrollably across continents, there is an urgent need to create bonds of mutual respect and love between all communities, and a firm resolve to avoid strife and disharmony. We have all to work towards attaining this goal in our personal and public lives. No one can accomplish these goals better (and faster) than the younger generation - of every religious persuasion and nationality - for Guru Nanak broke all barriers, social as well as geographical, to disseminate this spirit of universal brotherhood. In a fiercely competitive world Guru Nanak teaches us to share our resources, our possessions and privileges.

Guru Nanak says: a person can lead an ideal life as a householder (*grihasti*) doing his normal activities, while being deeply soulful and absorbed in contemplation and devotion to God. The seeker or learner - a Sikh - must attend to his familial and social duties, and do good to others, yet have his own being in God:

Without practising the truthful conduct, all pilgrimages, penances, and alms-giving bring little merit. It is the one who listens to - and believes in - God's Name will be made holy and pure, for the place of pilgrimage is in our hearts. How simple - yet profound - this message is: Look within for your true self as everything is pre-programmed. Today's leaders indulging in petty power politics and selfish gain need

to heed this message. The world could be a happier place if we follow this basic creed. There is enormous emphasis on the idea of “common wealth,” or the spirit of sharing. Guru Nanak speaks of the importance of *seva* - serving the needy above self - combined with compassion.

Thus humanitarian service is not giving ‘alms to the needy’. It is much more, as the way to redemption and transcendent merger with the Divine.

In these perilous times we need to look around earnestly and find areas where we can help follow humans. Schools that educate children from impoverished families need our support - not only monetary but by giving of our time and making a difference in the lives of children. There are many organizations across the country and beyond, doing good work for our community. We need to identify them, encourage them and give them our support in every way we can.

It is Guru Nanak’s perception of the true nature of man and the quest for the spirit for the Eternal Being that has been the guiding force for the Gurus who carried on Guru Nanak’s moral mission. They remained loyal to this basic ideal and incorporated it in their inspiring *bani*. To be able to integrate the areas of the temporal with the spiritual has been one of the most significant contributions of Guru Nanak. He has given us the idea of equipoise in life. It is this philosophy that all of us need to follow. Too often we tend to forget the spiritual and overemphasize the material. In a consumerist society it is not too hard to do so, for the comforts of a materialistic life are by far the easiest to succumb to. A balanced life - as Guru Nanak taught and practised - offers the best opportunity for peace and harmony.

Men and women who are responsible for steering our community forward in this millennium, therefore, shoulder a tremendous responsibility. We need leaders who can be role models to our youth, and successfully lead them through changing times. Across the continents, men and women of calibre who can work selflessly must blaze the path to unity and commitment to the moral values taught by Guru Nanak, for us to reach heights of glory that our Gurus envisioned.

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