

Mr. and Mrs. Affluent Singh Invite You

Bhupinder Singh (USA)*

*
15022 Berkshire Green Drive, Houston
TX77083.USA. Email: singhbo@gmail.com

Recently I was visiting our son out of town and we were invited to a *keertan* by their family friends at their house. When we arrived there, we found out that the family had been blessed with a new house and they were having a *keertan* to mark the occasion. Many invitees came with gifts, gift cards and gift cheques, etc. as they were quite aware of the occasion. Since, we were not aware about it; we obviously were not prepared that way with our little gift. The new house was a palatial house, with a pool in the back yard, facing the golf course. The paintings on the wall, decorations, quality of the furniture, kitchen, home theater room, bathrooms and the wet bar were all testimonials of a true swanky and a classy place. The host family had arranged valet parking for the cars of arriving guests. Even the picture post card size of the parking ticket was part of this great orchestrated event, and speaking out loud about affluence. During the program, we noticed many invitees showing up were not even aware of the protocol observed in the presence of Guru Granth Sahib, such as covering the head.

After the program was over and *parshad* distributed, the atmosphere suddenly changed as if it was a different place. The ambience took a 'party look' and sound level without the amplifiers touched the deafening levels. If the Sound Level Meter was brought into that house, it probably would have indicated that the noise level was outside the meter limits. It was as if the elementary school children were being allowed to have the play period in the class room. The deafening sound forced us to make a hasty retreat home, instead of waiting for *langar*. I should not have used the term *langar* as the food was served by swankiest Indian restaurant of the town with their own wait staff in attendance. The food was served in China plates, silver and white cloth napkins instead of foam compartment plate, plastic spoon and paper napkins.

I would not have minded being treated well and pampered when I am served, but I would not like it to be a part of 'staged event' in the name of *keertan*! If this were an isolated case of a random event, I would not have been bothered by it. However, since this was the fifth incident, in the last five years, of this magnitude that I feel forced to share my viewpoint. While it is heartening to see that our brethren [who came to USA with India sanctioning eight dollars, in foreign exchange, in their pockets during 1970's] have definitely grown prosperous and well heeled, but there is a sense of pain to see them stricken by the fever of 'affluenza'. It may sound to be a case of sour grapes, but in reality it is not so. Because, I am not striving or aiming to get into a competition with my more successful brethren in this game of being successful, rich and famous, even if it is just within the community level itself instead of an all out race with the world.

It is, in fact, a great feeling to see that our brethren have substantial disposable incomes - which could be put to constructive use instead of being blown away like this. It sure would leave a good impression on the guests and it will become a topic of discussion in the subsequent social events. But will it even transform a single life or leave a legacy behind? It is not only the occasion of house warming or *Greh Pervesh* as we would call it that the flagrant display of wealth is made, but occasions like weddings become events where the

effort is to outdo the others. The problem is one person or one family doing an occasion in such a manner raises the bar for many more, who in turn try to get a step ahead of the predecessor and then it spreads like a disease. Now instead of having a *gurbani* in *sangat* it becomes a big hoopla, an extravagance, where the purpose is not gathering to listen to *keertan* but to have a social event and opportunity to rub shoulders with who's who of the society. The whole thing appears to have been shuttled away in a manner that sanctity, thankfulness, holiness that should have been mark of the event instead a bashing display of wealth, and ambience of having fun prevails all around. Guru has described *gurbani* as:

logu jwnY iehu glqu hY iehu qau bRhm blcwr]

“Loag jaanai eihu geet hai eihu tau braham beechar.” [SGGS: 335]

Meaning: People believe that this is just a song, but it is a meditation on God.

Guru Ji has said about *gurbani* that it is not a song but deep thought process and sharing of experiences, understanding and ideas about the Creator God. For an opportunity of exposure to that kind of subtle issues, a certain type of environment is also to be created. This type of knowledge is not normally exchanged in our daily affairs, nor are such issues aired either on regular radio or television programs. Thus such an august gathering was an opportunity for exposure and exposition of higher needs of the soul. So that when we come out of the session we are not talking about cost of the house, carpeted area of the house, architectural aspects of the house design, furnishings or the furniture or decoration in the house, instead we would be talking about the new ideas and understanding that we acquired there. If we asked Guru Ji to share with us what will be the benefits of the celebrations and indulgences? Guru Ji provides the answer in these words:

bhu swdhu dUKu prwpiq hovY]

“Bahu saadhahu dhookh paraapath hovai.” [SGGS:1034]

Meaning: From excessive indulgences, one receives only pain.

Again let us ask Guru Ji about having big mansions without the resonating remembrance of God. Guru Ji says:

Bll suhwvl Cwprl jw mih gun gwey] ikq hl kwim n Daulhr ijqu hir ibsrwey]

“Bhalee suhaavee shhaaparee jaa meh gun gaaee. Kith hee kaam na dhhoulehar jit har bisaraee.”

[SGGS:745]

Meaning: Even a crude hut is sublime and beautiful, if the Lord's Praises are sung within it. Those mansions where the Lord is forgotten are useless.

No wonder Gurus have advocated leading a simple life and advised against celebration of wealth or its ostentatious display. Guru Ji is not against wealth, but against its pompous exhibition. It is for this reason Guru Ji has advised us that those who get attuned to Guru, they may attain power and riches but remain meek and humble as expressed by Guru Ji in these words:

hodY qwix inqwxIAw rih inmwIxIAwh]

“Hodhai taan nithaaneeeah rekeh nimaananeeeah.” [SGGS:85]

Meaning: They remain powerless, even while they have power; they remain humble and meek.

This is the model that Guru Ji has created for us and wants us to aspire for it. We cannot allow such occasions to be turned into celebration of wealth and use it to declare it to the world; “Look at me. I am really successful in life. How about you? Where are you in comparison?”

Investment in glorious heritage - instead of consumerism and ostentatious exhibition of

wealth is the model advocated by Guru Nanak. He gave this practical lesson to Seth Duni Chand, when invited to his house in Lahore. Let that story, rather history and legacy, be our touchstone on how the wealth can be optimally utilized.

