

Guru Nanak: Divine Teacher

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IDOL WORSHIP, CASTE, ASCETICISM and rituals have no place in Guru Nanak's religion, which is rational and pragmatic. The full acceptance of life with its truly ethical practice, and fervent faith in God are the principal characteristics of Nanak's faith. His religion was for householders - not for ascetics. He laid stress on a life of piety. "Truth is the highest virtue, higher still is the practice of truth," he proclaimed. Man should maintain his purity in the midst of all impurities, he said.

He himself led a blessed householder's life. He was happily married. He had two sons. His love for his only sister is legendary. Love of his family did not prevent him from going on long travels to spread his message of the unity of God and the brotherhood of man. Accompanied by Mardana, a Muslim minstrel, who played the *rabab* for the divine hymns he sang, Guru Nanak made four arduous journeys which took him across the length and breadth of India, to Mount Kailash, Tibet and Sri Lanka and to holy Mecca and Baghdad in Arabia.

A teacher of truth, Guru Nanak visited places of pilgrimage on his way, and met many people of different cultures and religions. He held religious discourse with holy men – pundits, mullahs and priests – on a wide range of themes including the reality and omnipresence of God, misguided renunciation, asceticism, futility of rituals and false values.

The very embodiment of divinity and life's eternal values, Guru Nanak believed that there is only one God who is the Supreme Truth. He is the Creator, *Karta Purakh*, without fear and hate, neither born nor subject to death, and present everywhere. He said God is a God of mercy and grace. Mortals obtain that which is ordained by God. One who obeys God and submits to His will realizes the bliss. Diseases and sins are destroyed by hearing the Name of God (Japji). To his disciples, he stressed the importance of Naam Simran (meditation on God). Remembering God and singing His praises is to free oneself from the cycle of births and deaths, he said.

Guru Nanak fervently preached his doctrine of the Oneness of God and One humanity. "We are all the children of one Creator - *Ek Onkar* and, therefore, brothers," *Sabna Jian Ka Ek Data* (God is the father of all), he declared. Despite their distinctive religions and beliefs, all human beings, he emphasized, are equal before the Creator who equally abides in everyone. Guru Nanak preached respect for the beliefs and faiths of others. His appeal was for inter-faith harmony. "Loving God, His creation and doing good deeds is the true religion," he reiterated.

Guru Nanak's prophetic vision - of One God and One Humanity - transcended all distinctions of caste, creed, race and gender. By personal example, he inspired mankind to tread the righteous path in the service of humanity in a spirit of fearing and frightening no one, and treating all human beings as equal.

Guru Nanak stood for an ethical and rational spiritual life, free from superstitions and prejudices. He exhorted his followers to give up rituals and religious practices which were shorn of reason and logic. His teachings are thus rational, progressive and practical.

Legend has it that when he himself saw a throng of pilgrims in Hardwar, throwing handful of holy water of the river Ganges, while bathing at a religious fair, to the sun in the east in the belief that it would reach their dead ancestors to quench their thirst, Guru Nanak started offering palmfuls of water in the opposite direction. When questioned, he calmly replied that he was channeling water to his fields in the Punjab so that they do not dry up!

Again, when he was woken up in Mecca, from sleep after a long journey, with his feet pointing towards the holy house of God, he apologized, and asked that his feet may be turned to where there is no God!

Guru Nanak rejected the caste system, and identified himself with the humble and the downtrodden. "*Nicha ander, nich jaat nitchi haur nich Nanak tin ka sang sath, wadian syon koyo rees*". (I am the lowest among the low caste people, the lowest of the very low; Nanak is with them and in their company, there is no relationship, nor any imitation of the high and mighty).

During his travels, Guru Nanak preferred to stay with the (so-called) low caste people who worked hard and honestly to earn their livelihood. "Kirat karni, vand chhakna te Nam japna," i.e. to earn one's living by honest labour, to share one's earnings and to meditate on God's Name, was Guru Nanak's fundamental lesson for his followers.

Guru Nanak's revolutionary moral and spiritual movement for social harmony showed the way to humanity to live in peace, amity and tolerance despite denominational distinctions.

His Parkash Utsav celebrating his 540th birth anniversary reaffirms his timeless message to humanity.

