

The Hemkunt Yatra: Beckoning the Young & the Bold

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With Waheguru's blessings I undertook this *yatra* this year. Indeed only with Waheguru's blessings one can perform this Yatra. Some of my impressions and humble suggestions for benefit of future Yatris may be useful and I seek your good offices to intervene with concerned Gurdwara Parbhandak Committee to implement the same.

Thousands of *yatris* from all walks of life and from all over the world desire to perform this *yatra*. Their devotion, their feelings and fervour can only be appreciated and felt by becoming part of such groups.

Many such *yatris* are on limited budgets, are in different physical conditions and have other constraints. By some efforts the *yatras* of many of them can be made more comfortable. [Despite some constraints their devotion only sustains them.]

At Gobindghat Gurdwara there is a dearth of toilets for ladies. Immediate need is to construct ample toilets and deploy sweepers to continuously clean the same. My father tells me of excellent toilet arrangements by managements of Gurdwaras at Panja Sahib and Nankana Sahib where adequate number of sweepers are deployed.

Another need is to set-up a *good medical centre* at Gobinddham for families, and specially aged *yatris*. Some of the *yatris* did not anticipate the extent of difficulty at an altitude of 15,000 feet and were unprepared to deal with that situation,. We met an elderly gentleman who had to abandon the *yatra* after walking for two days because he could not undertake the last 2kms. of near vertical climb. In such cases, and in order to educate *sangat* about the *yatra*, it would be appropriate if the Gurdwara at Gobindghat could have an orientation program, specially for the old *yatris*, before they start for Hemkunt Sahib. Another way of helping *yatris* would be to distribute brochures in different languages providing necessary information regarding possible medical problems, in particular, for the elderly and others with heart problems or asthma.

Gurdwara funds could be used to provide basic amenities, such as drinking water and clean toilets, along the way by using the infrastructure of existing tea stall owners. To create goodwill amongst local people, enroute Gobinddham and Hemkunt Sahib, some financial help needs to be provided to a select group of tea stall owners. Many *yatris* approach these tea stall owners for tea and snacks, but some just want a glass of water. Now, these tea stall owners bring water from some distance for their commercial use to make tea. It was amazing to see no such *yatri* being refused water though the free service was with some reluctance. This route is nearly six kilometres and if say Rs one thousand can be given each to six stall holders annually at a gap of one kilometre, we could earn their goodwill for better service.

The porters are also very important service providers not only for carrying baggage but also for carrying old and infirm *yatris* on their backs. Without the help of these services many of us would be unable to complete our *yatra*. The condition of these porters could also be improved by at least providing them with some meal facilities in addition to porter charges.

We were shocked [I hope it is not true] when we were told that these porters were not allowed in the Gurdwara premises even for langar purposes. If this is true, it is against the very basic concept of Sikhism which welcomes one and all, [If there is any special prohibition or restriction, it needs to be explained.] Not allowing them inside the Gurdwaras, can also generate hostility amongst the local population.

This Historical shrine has invariably become important to us. Every year thousands of *yatris* visit the same. To my utter surprise not one amongst the local population was seen as Sikh should be with five K's. Let me hasten to apologise if my impression on this short visit is wrong. But the fact is our performing this *yatra* for over fifty [or more] years has not created any impact on the local populace. My family lived in East Africa for over ten years and the same situation exists there. A large number of Africans have adopted Christianity and Islam but we do not find a single African Sikh. Around Hemkunt Sahib where we have excellent infrastructure, some effort and energy be spared for *dharam prachar*. Even if our intention is not conversion, we can continuously explain the salient good points of Sikhism. That is bound to generate lot of goodwill around this holy shrine.

Sikh Religion is unique as it does not believe in conversion by force, or any type of ulterior inducements. Yet there are umpteen cases of conversion to Sikhism by people who got motivated and attracted to its high principles due to the prevalent practices and *dharam prachar*. It is this aspect of *dharam prachar* which is virtually non-existent in the neighbourhood of Hemkunt Sahib. Notwithstanding its importance in all our Gurdwaras, the above area should also attract this *prachar* on an urgent basis due to the visits of uncountable pilgrims.

An extremely good effort for community service and to gain the goodwill of the residents in this area - specifically between Gobindghat and Hemkunt Sahib will be to **start some educational institutions**. We could start initially with one school at Gobindghat. It will immensely benefit the residents around that area, provided the infrastructure is good, dedicated teachers are employed and our institution of LANGAR is incorporated as part of the facility. The Sikh Community with the blessings of WAHEGURU is never short of money; what matters is the correct and sensible planning to benefit the community of which we form a part.

Basing on the experience gained, chain of such educational institutes can be established in this belt. In due course, even an elite school on the pattern of Daghsai Public School can be considered for the benefit of enlightened families, in these heavenly surroundings.

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My Date with My Lord

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In my last summer holidays Almighty blessed me with His blessing and said:

hir jn dyKhu siqguru nYnl]

jo ieChu soel Plu pwvhu hir bolhu gurniq bYnl]

O humble servants of the Lord, behold the True Guru with your eyes. Whatever you wish for, you shall receive, chanting the Word of the Lord's Name, under Guru's Instruction.

Thus I learnt Gurmukhi entirely with His total love and care for me. Later on, one day, my father asked me to learn a *shabad*.

"Chatur disa kino bal apna Sir upar kar dhario".

He wrote the *shabad* on a sheet of paper and told me to learn by heart. Next day when he asked me to recite it, I failed miserably and apologised. Fifteen days later, he asked me yet again and I couldn't do it still. Then one morning he asked me to sit before the Guru Granth Sahib and made me open the Holy Granth and to my surprise, the *vaak* came ...

Cqur idsw klno blu Apnw isr aUpir kru DwirE]

I read the *shabad* and went to do my school homework. In the evening, I myself don't know how, I could recite the whole *shabad* by heart. It made me feel so happy, so content, so blessed and tears came out from my father's eyes.

Dnwsrl mhlw 5]

cqur idsw klno blu Apnw isr aUpir kru DwirE]

ik@pw ktwK' Avloknu klno dws kw dUKu ibdwirE] 1]

hir jn rwKy gur goivMd] kMiT lwie Avgux siB myty dieAwl purK bKsMd] rhwau]

jo mwgih Twkur Apuny qy soel soel dyvY]

nwnk dwsu muK qy jo bolY elhw aUhw scu hovY] 2] 14] 45]

With this Divine blessing descending upon me, I started on my journey ahead as and how He Himself guided and wanted it to be. Now when my sisters and cousins visit my home for holidays, I taught them Gurmukhi and believe me all of them learnt it fast. Today, by His total grace, I now do the Rehraas Sahib every evening and so do all my sisters and cousins, sitting far away.

I once again say that this is all but God's grace, a Divine blessing which I share with *Sadh Sangat* through *The Sikh Review*.

mn qUM mq mxu krih ij hau ikCu jwxdw gurmuiK inmwxx hohu]

O mind of mine, don't be so proud of yourself, as if you know it all; the Gurmukh (the Truth seeker) is ever humble and modest. □