

Let your neighbourhood know roots of Sikhism:

"Kesh Darshan" demo in USA

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FULLERTON, CALIFORNIA. It all began last year (May 2001), when we registered our six-year-old son, AnupHarji Singh, in first grade in Wagner Elementary School of Placentia-Yorba Linda Unified School District. He was the only Sikh boy who attended this school with long hair covered with a 'Patka'. Several times, inquisitive parents stopped me to know as to what was it that Harji was wearing to cover his head. At times some students addressed him as a girl. Harji experienced the same situation at the Wagner Child Care center that he attended after-school with K-6 students. His day-care peers had similar questions. Some wanted to touch his 'Jura' (hair knot on top of the head) while some others called him a 'girl' even after knowing that he was a boy. Ms. Karen Robinson, Director, thought it was because of their ignorance about the new religion and culture that some of the students acted the way they did. She requested me to bring a doll with a 'Patka' and tried to use it as a teaching tool to the pre-school kids about this new culture. It worked well for some time. A few months later Harji complained that some older students in the day-care were bothering him.

We contacted Capt. K. Harbhajan Singh, (known to the world Sikh Community as 'Bhapa ji' or IGS Papa), founder of International Institute of Gurmat Studies (IIGS), to discuss the issue. He immediately suggested the 'Kesh Darshan' demonstration in front of these students. "Kesh Darshan demonstration has been a very successful tool to teach students about the Sikh faith, its distinct features and traditions", he said, and assigned the job to his tall and handsome son, Sardar Kavi Raj Singh, who had carried out several such demonstrations in the past for other Sikh children facing similar problems at their schools.

Mrs. Joan Bonn, Principle Wagner Elementary School was very co-operative and open and to this. She arranged for two such demonstrations, one with First grade class in the morning and another for the day-care students in the afternoon. That week happened to be the 'Cultural week' at Wagner Elementary.

In the morning, Sardar Kavi Raj Singh, my husband Sardar Kanwarbir Singh and I, dressed in beautiful Punjabi attire, met with Harji's class. Harji proudly wore a *Chola*, traditional Sikh attire to the school that day. First grade teacher, Mrs. Janet Sheehan, dressed in a farmer's dress, greeted us cheerfully. Harji introduced us to his classmates while Sardar Kavi Raj Singh gave a brief introductory talk on Sikhism and displayed the beautiful oil paintings of Guru Nanak Dev ji, Guru Gobind Singh ji, *Chhotte Sahibzaade* – Jorawar and Fateh Singh ji, Golden Temple and Maharaja Dalip Singh. Mrs. Sheehan graciously took several photographs, before and during the demonstration, while asking a few cultural and regional questions about the Indian people. The students listened carefully and participated by asking several intelligent questions about *Kara*, *Khanda* on Harji's *Chola*, Punjabi *Salwar-Kameez*, different kinds of turbans Sikhs wear,

meaning of 'Singh' and 'Kaur' etc. **All were happy to know that Harji did not cut his hair because of his love and respect for God's design. One student intelligently connected the long hair to 'Samson's story from the old Testament. The 20-minute discussion ended most happily with Harji distributing some goody bags to his class mates who promised never to bother him again.**

The second session that afternoon was even more exciting. It was attended by a group of almost sixty students of various age groups (K-6). During this session Sardarni Gurpreet Kaur and Sardar Monty Singh of the IIGS also joined in. Mrs. Robinson, Director Wagner Child-care and four Day-care Teachers stood there through out the session. As soon as Kavi Raj Singh started talking about 'One Universal God and His followers called 'Sikhs' (seekers of truth), almost 90% of students had their hands raised. These were the little hearts full of curiosity and hunger for knowledge. One student repeatedly asked 'You mean you never, ever, ever cut your hair', another asked 'how often do you wash them', another was just curious to know how long they were and requested if they could see it.. Sardar Kavi Raj Singh explained the Sikh concept of love and respect for all castes and creeds by showing the painting of the Golden Temple. The concept of *saint-soldier* was explained while telling about Guru Gobind Singh ji and that of equality by explaining the meanings of 'Singh' and 'Kaur'. He also told them that Sikhs were not supposed to drink, smoke or do drugs.

At the end of the discussion, the much-awaited moment came when Sardar Kavi Raj Singh took off his turban and let his long, waist-length silky hair roll down his back. Children were screaming with joy. There was a spontaneous expression of excitement with words like 'cool', 'awesome', 'wow' and 'oh my God' by the students and teachers alike. And then came the time for a turban tying demonstration. As Kavi Singh started to put his turban back on, the students counted till 72. An intelligent first grader girl, Angie, immediately stood up and said, "It took him one minute and twelve seconds to tie his turban" Explaining that the 'Turban' was like a crown for a Sikh, Kavi Singh politely asked the children to respect Harji's hair and *Patka*.

Mrs. Robinson was amazed to see that children sat so attentively for 45 minutes and participated so actively in the discussion. She requested us to come back to hold such discussion-cum-demonstration on regular basis at Wagner Elementary. It was an eye-opening event for all the students and the parents that came in to pick up their kids and joined in. All students were given candies at the end. Some of them hanged around and asked questions from all of us on personal basis. A few girls requested even Sardarni Gurpreet Kaur and myself to show them our hair, so we opened our hair to them. It was such a wonder full experience for all of us.

I would request IIGS to hold camps for parents where more volunteers may be trained to give such demonstrations at various schools to educate people about Sikhs. Let us create support groups in every city so Sikh kids may attend school proudly and feel special amongst their peers.



The Hair and its significance

*Bahadur Singh Sethi**

Diverse views and practices are currently observed about the hair on the human body. The fact stands that it is not a waste matter to be discarded at will.

God has created the hair to meet some specific requirements of the body. The practice of cutting the hair, irrespective of the consideration whether it is wrong or right, continues for ages, generation after generation. Had the hair been a waste matter, one would have to submit the whole body to hair cut on daily basis! We pass out urine, stools, foul air, sweat, etc. to cleanse the body. These products have an unpleasant stink and we feel relieved of the pressure when these are discarded. This is not the case with the hair. Before coming to any conclusion, we can apply our mind and commonsense gifted by God and an answer will be there.

Hairs on the skin are tiny tissues which act as windows and ventilators for the energising agents functioning under the skin. Nutrients are sucked in and an excretory fluid is passed out. This is washed away at intervals according to our own convenience. The water content in the sweat also helps in the process of evaporation in the season of intense heat and causes a cooling effect on the body.

The hair on the cheeks and lips are a growth associated with masculinity. That is why it is different from feminine anatomy.

The hair on the skull is long. The growth serves the brain, the crown of the body. The hair store and preserve vital energy in the form of fluids which nurture and nourish the inner cells. Blood vessels pass on nutrition to all parts of the body, but some requirements are met through external sources. The evaporation process cools the brain in summer, whereas, in winter, black hair absorb sun rays to provide natural warmth. The growth also serves as a natural cushion to protect the brain from injury.

There may be many more uses which remain unexplored. One vital aspect which is generally unknown to the common man is that it is virtually a channel of communication with God. Divine messages are received by sages and holy men through this medium. Only a personal experience would build up that belief. In this dark age of unethical human pursuits, this magical phenomenon is very rare.

Natural hair are a source of natural beauty. Innocence in the form of a pleasant radiation is emitted from the faces of those who keep hair, preserve and maintain them neat, clean and tidy. This is not a poetic narration but an absolute truth which is self revealing when experienced.

The hair is our precious limb in slender form. We do not experience pain when these are cut but surely we are handicapped in certain functions. If an unfortunate person loses a finger or two, he

becomes disheartened and distressed. A similar situation arises with the loss of hair, but we are unable to recognise it.

Guru Gobind Singhji did not *create* hair but directed the followers to preserve them truly and devoutly as gifts of God. Sikhs have been ordained to love and respect God. They are the persons who obey the will of God and like to serve humanity with full vigour and sincerity steeped in sympathy, compassion and sense of sacrifice. They are far removed from the concept of exploitation of the weak, the poor and the needy because they love God and will not see His children suffer.

The Truth is before us. It is for us to accept it or not. The Truth has no barriers and remains unaltered and unaffected by changing moods, attitude, approach or perceptive ability and remains unruffled under changing times and circumstances.

