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A Brief Introduction To The Sikh Faith

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FORE-WORD

Sikhs are now settled all over the globe and are known as a nation of brave and hard&working people. The Sikh population, about twenty&two million, is a little more than that of the Jews. The Sikhs stand out with their turbans and unshorn hair. Many universities in India and abroad have recently established chairs to study the development of the Sikh faith. It includes the study of their scripture, Sri Guru Granth Sahib and its social, political and spiritual contributions to mankind.

To commemorate the third centennial of the Khalsa panth, an international function was held at Sri Anandpur Sahib in 1999. The need of a booklet in makor languages of the world was felt to educate people about the Sikh heritage. Accordingly, we are publishing this tract, A Brief Introduction to the Sikh Faith.

For making this write up easy to read and understand by a common person, religious jargon and scholarly language have been avoided. The theological information given is based on Sri Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh scripture; references to the relevant pages have been given, wherever considered necessary.

On behalf of the Shiromani Singh, Sardarni Sumit Kaur and many others who helped us prepare this publication.

August, 2002

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PRESIDENT

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Revelation Of The Divine Message

One day in 1499 CE, Guru Nanak (1469- 1539)*, the founder of the sikh faith, went to a nearby stream for his daily morning bath, but he did not return, On the third day when he was seen coming to the village, people gathered around him. In great surprise they asked him, “**Where were you ?**” The Guru replied that God summoned him and gave him a message for them: Do not divide people into Hindus and Muslims. ***All are His children, hence equal.*** In simple language it means that people should not be divided on the basis of their faith, nation or any other cultural or biological differences. This was the public proclamation of the founding of a new faith, later known as sikhism.

The Indian society at that time was split into two major groups, Hindus and Muslims. Clergy of both religions claimed their faith to be the true religion and labelled the followers of the other religion as non-believers or the doomed people. Hindus were divided into many creeds and four main castes. Brahmins claimed themselves to be the superior most caste, while shudras were regarded as the lowest caste and were considered untouchable.

Guru Nanak did not accept this division of society; he gave a revolutionary thought and preached:

- God is the Father as well as Mother of humanity, He equally loves all people.

* Guru Nanak Dev was born at Talwandi, later known as Nankana Sahib, now in Pakistan.

- By birth, no one is high or low, being His children, we are all equal;
- Any person who loves Him can experience Him.

He told: No prophet can claim to be the sole arbiter between man* and God. Everyone has the right to meet Him without any intercession by a prophet or a saviour. In His Court one is judged by one's deeds alone; the Namw (Allah, Ram, God, etc.) adopted by a devotee to remember Him is inconsequential.

Guru Nanak observed that the common man was a victim of political and social tyranny let lose by the corrupt, immoral and greedy administration. He exposed them in unambiguous terms: *"The kings have turned butchers; righteousness is nowhere visible; truth is impossible to be found in the darkness of falsehood."* (p.143)**

To protect the weak against this social injustice, political hypocrisy, and religious bigotry the Guru put forth a new creed. Guru Nanak's teachings and arguments were sharper and more effective than sword; he made good use of them to directly confront the corrupt and unjust rulers. The compendium of these teachings and arguments advocated freedom of action for everyone within the limits of Hukam (God's Order). This was the foundation upon which his nine successors built what is known today as the Sikh faith and the Khalsa Panth.

Sharing The divine Message

Guru Nanak started a mission to educate people split into various faiths, creeds and castes. He told them that they all are the children of the same Father, hence all equal. The *

* The word 'man' is used in general sense and means both men and women.

** It is not literal translation, but liberal interpretation of the hymn to explain the message in simple words.

Guru Nanak born in a Hindu high-caste chose Mardana, a Muslim belonging to the weakest strata of society, as his companion, and addressed him as bhai (brother). Accompanied by Bhai Mardana, he visited major religious centres of Hindus, Muslims, Yogis, Buddhists, and other people. When the Guru recited hymns, Bhai Mardana played on the rebeck. For about twenty years Guru Nanak travelled from place to place sharing the revelation received by him.

In the East, the Guru went as far as Bangladesh and Assam to share his message. Later, after touring south India, the Guru sailed to the island of Sri Lanka to spread his message of oneness of humanity and equality of peoples. On his return journey, the Guru explained his teachings to the people in central and south-west India. To share his message in the West, the guru went as far as Mecca, Medina, and Baghdad. He returned to Punjab via Iran and Afghanistan. The Guru reached the high hills of the Himalayas to have a dialogue with Yogis and other hermits living there.

Practice Of The Faith

To cut across all barriers of caste, creed, and race the Guru introduced two unique institutions, namely, sangat and pangat. Wherever the Guru went, he taught people to sit together as equals without discrimination of faith, ethnicity, or any other distinction. Such a congregation of people seeking Truth was called sangat.

Sangat loves God by all names, Allah, Ram, Gobind, Guru, etc., adopted by different faiths in India. Hymns sung by people motivate them to have control over the vices, anger, greed, ego, etc. The members are guided to practise virtues, sewa (**honorary service**) and simran (**Love of God**). The Guru preached that human life is a unique opportunity given to mankind to get nearer to Him by loving and serving humanity. Pangat is a gathering of people who partake of community meals (**langar**) without any discrimination. All people, Muslims and Hindus including the so-called untouchables, were welcome to join the pangat. All were treated at par and served the same food. It was prepared by their joint efforts and all the material and services were provided by the people voluntarily. No one was treated as high or low.

In this way, people understood and practised the message that all humans are equal, being children of the same Creator. Guru Nanak, thus, re-established the shattered bonds of human brotherhood. Because of his teachings, all people efficacy of his teachings. He was accepted as a great pir (religious leader) by the Muslims and a Guru (religious guide) by the Hindus.

In brief, the message of Guru Nanak is that the whole world is a vast multi-cultural society. mutual regard and respect among all people is the basis of a true religion. There was no religion superior to that way of life.*

Guru Nanak taught that the rights to life, equality, and worship are God-given gifts to every person. No religious or political authority can take them away. One may remember God by any name one wants to, it is the sincerity and honesty that counts with Him and not the name which one may choose for Him.

*Unfortunately, mutual hatred among people still continues all over the world. It reminds us that human vices are extremely strong urges and most difficult to be controlled. Unless we overcome them, the world cannot live in peace. It is a challenge

to those who believe in the God-given human right of equality. to maintain peace, the UNO passed the Bill of Human Rights in 1949, which is a restatement of the preachings of Guru Nanak. People should practice and popularize it to preach unity of humanity. We have the example of sangat and pangat before us.

During his visit to the West, the scholars at Baghdad asked Guru Nanak, “Who is superior, a Hindu or a Muslim?” This question was the foremost issue among the preachers of the two religions. Everyone claimed his religion to be superior to that of the others’. To the utter surprise of all, Guru Nanak replied : “Without good deeds everyone, irrespective of one’s faith, will be doomed.” He explained that unless a belief is translated into practice to serve the needy without discrimination of any kind, it is not approved by the Almighty.

Faith In The Service Of Society

The purpose of the faith according to Sikhism is to provide peace and pleasure to human beings. To direct the actions of the people accordingly, the Guru preached :

A learned person is one who serves the needy (p.356)

The rulers, however, were greedy, hence unfair to the common man. the Guru challenged the right of such kings to rule. He stated :

Rulers have turned beasts of prey,

Their officers hounds.

They suck the blood of the common man. (p.1288)

Let such alone be seated on the throne as are fit therefor. (p.1088)

To motivate the rulers to walk the righteous path of helping the needy and protecting the weak, the Guru says :

I seek the company of the lowliest, and have no interest

In the egotists (so-called big shots). God’s blessings

are showered where the weak and meek are taken care of. (p.15)

During his first sojourn, the Guru agreed to be the guest of an honest but poor carpenter and declined the invitation of the rich but corrupt local chief. Explaining the

reason for rejecting the sumptuous food served freed by the latter, the Guru replied that he extracted money from the helpless people. Taking away the rights of the weak and helpless people. Helpness is like sucking their blood. This is as sinful as beef for Hindus and pork for Muslims. The Guru explained :

Cloth is reckoned soiled if blood-stained,

How may minds of such persons be deemed clean, As blood of mankind suck ?
(p.140)

In brief, the Guru preached that a person can be accepted in His Court only if he practices justice while dealing with people in his day-to-day life. A religious person must stand up and protest if the rulers are corrupt and they attempt to take away the human rights of the weak. The history of Gurus and the Sikhs is filled with numerous sacrifices made while practicing this virtue. **(Section III)**

The same consensus was reached at the World Conference of Religions for Peace, New Jersey, USA in 1979. They virtually restated the basic principles of the Sikh faith in modern terminology, when in their meeting they concluded :

Too often the names and practices of our religions have been associated with warfare and strife. Now we must reverse this by :

- i) Breaking down barriers of prejudice and hostility between different religious communities and institutions.
- ii) Confronting the powers of the world with the teachings of our religions rather than conforming to them when they act contrary to the well-being of humanity.
- iii) Building inter-religious understanding in our local communities.

Before his demise in 1539, the Guru appointed his disciple, Bhai Lehna, as the second Nanak. Nine successors of Nanak elaborated his message. They preached it in different regions of India and adjoining countries. The Sikh scripture, Sri Guru Granth Sahib, was compiled by the fifth Nanak, Guru Arjun Dev. The tenth Nanak, Guru Gobind Singh, passed on the Guruship to the Sikh community through the five chosen Sikhs (Section III) under the directions of Guru Granth Sahib.

SRI GURU GRANTH SAHIB

Sri Guru Granth Sahib is the most venerated scripture and is uniquely placed amongst the scriptures of the world religions. It is the only scripture which has come to us in its original form as it was written by the Gurus themselves. It is a treasure of spiritual literature. moreover, it is not narrow or sectarian in its approach, it has got universal appeal. Its focus has been the entire mankind rather than a particular sect or nation. The hymns preach that the best religion consists of remembering God and doing noble deeds.

Compilation

Sri Guru Granth Sahib contains hymns (Gurbani) revealed to the Gurus and other men-of-God (Bhagats). They were born in different religions and belonged to different regions of India. They covered a period from 12th - 17th century CE.

Compilation of the scripture was completed in August, 1604, when it was installed in the Darbar Sahib, literally meaning the Court of God, at Amritsar. This centre was conceived by the third Nanak, the pool (Sarovar) dug by the fourth Nanak, and the buildings were completed by the fifth Nanak. The sanctum sanctorum was named Harmandir Sahib. The pool was named Amrit-Sarovar and the city, which developed around it, came to be known as Amritsar. The place chosen was in the middle of Punjab, and about fifty kilometres from Lahore, the capital city. Because of the gold plating of the domes of the Harmandir Sahib, the British called it the Golden Temple.

The hymns of the ninth Nanak were later added to the Adi Granth, and the tenth Nanak conferred Guruship on it and called it Sri Guru Granth Sahib. There are some 5,800 hymns grouped into 31 ragas (musical modes). In addition there is a preamble in the beginning of the scripture and another set of concluding hymns in the end. Due to the revelatory nature of the hymns spoken by the Gurus, the scripture is treated as the soul of the Gurus and not just as a religious book. As a mark of exaltation, Sri Guru Granth Sahib is installed on an elevated seat under a canopy.

Gurbani is written in Gurmukhi script. Its language is pan-Indian. Words and phrases from Persian, Arabic, Braj, Bengali, and other Indian languages have also been used liberally.

Basic Belief, God Of All People

The basic belief of the faith is recorded in the very beginning of the scripture as an invocation. It is also mentioned at the head of each rag, and its sub-units.

It states- "By the grace of the One Supreme Being, Who is True, the Creator, the All-pervading Reality without apprehensions, Immortal, Un-incarnated and Self-existent."

Guru Nanak preached that God belongs to humanity. He loves all people irrespective of their colour, class, caste, or creed. No prophet or a community can claim an exclusive right over Him. The closing hymn of the preamble says,

"Those who love the Almighty realise the Truth (God) and thus achieve the mission of human life."

As mentioned earlier, in addition to the Gurus there are more than two dozen other men-of-God whose hymns are included in Sri Guru Granth Sahib. The fact that the same Light Illumines every heart was realised by every Bhagat and that was one criterion that their hymns were included in the scripture; here are some of those hymns :

Guru Nanak (1469-1539), the founder : *Those who meditate on (love) Him realise Him. There is a reflection of His Spirit in everyone. All 'glow' only with His light. (the Preamble to Guru Granth Sahib). We are all equal children of the same One Father. (p.611)*

Bhagat Kabir (1398-1495), a weaver (considered a low caste) born to a Hindu mother, raised by a Muslim couple, lived in Varanasi, a Hindu sacred city : *The whole universe sprang from One Divine Light. A Person who attunes himself with Divine Law, finds Him pervading everywhere through the whole universe. (p.1349)*

Bhagat Ravi Dass (a contemporary of Kabir), a shoemaker, considered an untouchable, lived in the holy city of Varansi : *All thoughts of mind and thine, second or third (other than One Creator) have vanished. I observe only Him prevailing everywhere. (p.345)*

Bhagat Nam Dev (1270-1350), a calico printer (considered a low caste) lived in Maharashtra (south-west India) : *None else but the Lord speaks in all the living beings, whether they trail on the ground, walk on their legs or fly in the air. Those who give up*

all desires and become devotees of the Almighty, find Him not away (different) from themselves. (p.988)

Bhagat Farid (1175-1265), a Sheikh, a **Muslim Darvesh**, highly respected by the masses and even by the rulers of India, lived in South-West of Punjab (now in Pakistan) : *Do not be rude to any person, the same Divine Master dwells in the heart of every human being. If you want to realise the Lord. do not hurt the feelings of anyone, you will hurt Him residing therein. (p. 1384)*

Bhagat Bhikhan (1480-1573), a Sufi fakir, lived in Lucknow in northern India : *The Lord blessed me with the priceless jewel, the Divine describe it. I observe Him revealing Himself everywhere. (p.659)*

Bhagat Rama Nand (1366-1467), a Brahmin (considered a high caste), a great spiritual guide. Kabir and some other renowned men-of-God were associated with him : *O Lord ! you are all-pervading. You have made me experience the Divine in my own heart. (p.1195)*

Bhagat Jai Dev (1201-1245), a sant from Bengal, famous for his spiritual hymns : *O mind ! Sing the virtues of the Lord (love the Lord), all kinds of discrimination and coherness will vanish from your mind (you will experience Him everywhere). (p. 526)*

Fundamental Concepts

1. God, Soul And Matter

Thinkers differ regarding what constitutes Reality Truth. They may believe in one, two or all three of the following as constituting Reality : i. God (Parmatma), ii. Soul (atma), and iii. Matter (parkirti).

According to Gurbani, there was nothing but ONE in absolute form in the beginning. When He willed, He became manifest in the creation we call the universe. The creation is continuously undergoing change according to His Will and shall vanish when He so wills. creation or matter is not eternal. Only the ONE who was there before creation is true, hence Eternal. He neither ages nor does He die. There is none else but Him in the manifest or absolute form.

God has been conceptualized in the mool mantar (invocation) and elucidates upon in the hymns. God is not an abstract idea or a moral force, but One with Whom we can have a personal loving relationship. None else but God Himself is the Creator, Sustainer and Destroyer of what is created.

He is immanent in His Creation. He is the Ocean of all virtues. In defining the fundamental nature of God, the Guru says, **“Friends want me to describe the Lord. He is all Love, the rest to Him is ineffable.”** Thus, the key of understanding God is to know that He is Love; Love has many facets :

- it is the source of all virtues and values.
- it is benevolent towards life which it suffuses.

Thus love generates neither a dialectical movement nor suicidal competition or struggle.

God, according to Gurbani, is both immanent and transcendent. Therefore, people who come with preconceived notions to study Sikhism often blunder in offering its interpretation. If, however, we were to study Sikhism as a new organic growth to meet the needs of a newly evolved humanity, we would find no difficulty in recognising Sikhism as a uniquely distinct philosophy.

Guru Nanak describes God as the “In-dweller of Creation.” He is not a mere mechanic, fashioning pre-existing matter into the universe. He does not exclude matter, but encompasses and transcends it. He does not belong to

3. Sikh Workship

A Sikh is advised to worship only the Creator, and not the craton; Sun, moon, mountains, rivers, animals, trees, etc. are not to be worshipped by a Sikh. Gurbani does not accept the sanctity of any particular lunar or solar dates. Neither does it consider any particular day of the week to be auspicious for prayer. Every day is a good day if one forgets Him. A Sikh is, therefore, directed to practice the teachings enunciated in gurbani hymns ever day to enjoy his linkage with God.

God has limitless attributes, hence His names are innumerable. No one particular name has been described as superior or inferior to others because all

address the same Father. God loves us all, whatever Name or whichever language we may use to remember Him and sing His virtues. Guru Granth Sahib has thus made a unique contribution for developing mutual understanding amongst people of different faiths. Gurbani has given a wider meaning to the traditional terminology used by the followers of different faiths. For example, Hindus consider Ram as the name of their God, while Muslims believe God's name to be Allah. the Guru told them that both these names, along with many other names adopted by different people, address the same Almighty God. Therefore, they all should be equally acceptable to a devotee.

Mission Of Human Life

1. The Mission, Heaven And Hell

We have been bestowed this life to experience God. we have to realise Him prevailing everywhere and in every being. Rehras, the evening prayer, says that human life is an occasion to love God and strive to realise Him. Without making a progress in that direction one's life is wasted away.

The aim of life is not reaching an imaginary abode called Heaven. Gurbani does not accept that there is any physical place called Heaven or Hell somewhere in the universe, where people are destined to go after death. Living with the reality of His existence and in accordance with His Hukam (Will) is living in Heaven. Forgetting the Lord and suffering from eg, lust, anger, etc., is living in Hell on this very earth. It depends on us whether we make our lives 'heavenly' or 'hellish'.

2. Realizing The Mission

In the preamble to Sri Guru Granth Sahib, Guru Nanak satates that one cannot understand Truth (realise the Lord and be in peace) by long time continuous silence and meditation. Neither can one do so by collecting heaps of wealth or becoming the most powerful ruler in the world. After rejecting the popular pursuits generally followed by the seekers, the Guru puts a specific question, "How can then the veil of ignorance be removed and how can one realise Truth?" In other words, which is the right path that can lead a person to the realisation of the human goal? The Guru replies himself: To remove the pall of ignorance (falsehood) and to realise Truth, one should obey the Lord and live according to His Will. (p.1)

The Guru formulates another question : What shall we offer Him so that we may behold Him, and what shall we say with our lips so that we may merit His love? And he answers this question : One gets emancipation because of His grace alone; on our part we should dwell on Him and His virtues. (p. 2) The rest of the hymns explain the Will of the Lord and the way to understand it.

The hymns also caution the devotees about the pitfalls and distractions one has to face while following the spiritual path. They also guide the seeker regarding the ways to overcome or avoid those hurdles.

Total submission to Him is essential. Divided faith does not let one move on any path. The principle is explained by the analogy of a devoted and loyal wife. A woman flirting with another man cannot really enjoy the love of her husband. She knows she is not sincere or loyal to him, hence she cannot be at peace with herself. A seeker must totally submit to Him and to Him alone. Ego, anger, and other vices have to be controlled by understanding Truth. Gurbani question : How can a person dare to cheat, rob, or hurt anyone, if the mind knows that the same Lord is the Father of everyone and resides in every heart ?

One must contiguously practice virtues (humility, service, etc.) to keep the mind occupied, otherwise vices (ego, anger, etc.) take over the empty mind. A devotee should keep his mind tuned to Him by observing and feeling Him to be the cause of all actions, good or deemingly bad. The Lord is the writer, director as well as the actor of this play called life. He runs the whole universe according to His Will. And He is infallible.

Teachings Of Gurbani

1. Whole -Life Approach

Sikhism preaches an integral combination of spiritual and worldly ingredients of man's life. This is called the Miri-Piri doctrine. Miri means the social and political aspect of life, while Piri guides one on the spiritual path of life. The Miri-Piri combination means that a devotee must practise spirituality in his daily social life. A person must, as a religious responsibility, resist and confront all kinds of injustices, (Social, political, or religious) Wherever he comes across them.

Some faiths, particularly in the Indian tradition, place a high value on monasticism and celibacy for spiritual growth. Neither of these, however, together or separately, is the path of a Sikh. Gurbani says that God is like milk to the child, riches to the poor and food to the hungry. Obviously, His such traists can be understood properly and easily by a householder, who is involved in family and social activities. A householder's life is, thus, a forum for spiritual activities and growth.

Sikhism has given a new definition of religion itself. Sikhism does not deal solely with meta-physical realities but integrates the spiritual and temporal realms of human life, It intensifies the faith in the transcendental God as a result of the idea of reality of the World and living a meaningful life as an extension of God's worship. According to a sociologist, "Anti-asceticism and anti-hedonism became the two boundaries between which the Sikh idea of social actions is displayed. Asceticism and hedonism are to be negated as two extremes so as to build the boundaries of the morally- dyed sikh concept of social action. The Sikh idea is closely interwoven with, and even conditioned by, the sensitivity to social evil."

2. State And Religion

In most countries, political life and religious life are kept apart through statutory provisions. It is argued, "How can one practice a particular religion while performing one's political responsibilities in a modern multi-religious society ?"Actually, political life, divorced from morality, and ethics (religion) has come to mean self-serving life. Once can be corrupt or a social parasite in one's public life but still may claim to be a religious person by performing some rituals. To avoid this pitfall the Guru gave the doctrine of Miri-Piri, so that man combines his temporal life with spiritual life. It means that a Sikh must keep the good of humanity foremost in his mind, instead of only the good of self, his caste, or his nation. It does not approve of a person practising dichotomous behaviour, performing prayers in personal life but being immoral in public life.

The world has already started realising that divorcing religion from public life by political leaders is the cause of many ills of our society. Politicians and administrators are motivated by greed and lust. Thus, they lose all sense of responsibility or service to

the public. They justify their immoral actions by declaring that their faith and beliefs have to be isolated from their public actions. However, they know that the immoral, anti-social, and self-serving actions, which they indulge in, are strictly prohibited by their faith.

A critical caution needs to be mentioned here. **If a religion permits the use of political authority for the conversion of other people by force or denies equal rights to people of other religions, it must be kept totally away from political and state activities.**

3. Uplift Of Self

when the actions of a person are inspired by over of God and a desire to serve one's fellow-beings, he/she is called a gurmukhi (i.e., God-oriented or God-attuned). Signing the virtues of God with devotion and serving people attunes the soul to Him. One, thus, uplifts oneself and achieves the mission of human life.

One who ignores God's Will and follows his own will disregarding the harm his/her actions might cause to others, he/she is called manmukh (ego-oriented). Such a person wastes the opportunity offered by the human life for uplifting his/her soul. "The gift of human life is an opportunity for us to love the Lord and be benefitted by His virtues. Singing His virtues in association with His devotees helps one move on the path of the Lord. Other pursuits are futile." (p.12)

Mere repetition of some sacred words or visits to some designated places have little value in His Court. Such actions, of course, remind one of his religious responsibility. The benefit of these rituals is achieved only if a person is guided by the message of the hymns, subdues his ego and gets motivated to love and serve all people without any discrimination.

Ego is a curtain which separates man from God and also from fellow beings. It is the greatest malady afflicting people, including those who claim to be religiously elevated. Love of God and ego cannot go together. They are antagonistic to each other. By subduing his ego, an egoist (manmukh) can become God-oriented (gurmukh) and thus get liberated.

A person who finds life after destroying ego is jiwan mukta (liberated). (p.449)

people are slaves of vices; liberated are those who subdue their ego (and other vices). (p.413)

One must always keep in mind that all people are equal, though they might appear to be different because of their different environment, culture, and language. People Americans, they are all children of the same Parent, God Therefore, the Sikh completes his prayer with the request:

O' Lord! In thy Grace bless the whole humanity. Gurbani teches that living such a life is the way to uplift oneself.

Loving God and doing noble deeds is the best (true) religion. (p.266)

4. God's Will And Human Will

The workings of man's will and God's Will are subtle and intricate, hence, it is difficult to explain them. The analogy of a fish in water may help us understand this. The fish may swim in a river with or against the current, or from one side to the other, but it cannot get out of the water, Similarly, man may move according to his own will instead of His Will, but he will always remain within the limits of His principles. Just as a fish swimming against the current faces problems, a person acting against His Will comes to grief.

A person may be God-attuned or ego-attuned, and thus may either merit His grace or ruin this chance (life) to uplift his soul. One is responsible for one's decisions. In case a person's will is attuned to the Supreme Will, he is graced and finds himself ever in His presence. If his decisions are ego-guided, then he wastes the opportunity of finding the everlasting pleasure of His grace in this life. The source of evil is not Satan, but man's own sense of ego, which makes him take a wrong path in life and suffer the consequences. Ego leads man to become a slave of his lust, greed, anger, etc., and thus, lands him in trouble. Whereas Gurbani guides people to get in tune with His Will, overcome their ego and enjoy true happiness.

5. Moral And Ethical Code

Evering people and thereby serving god is the mission of human life. Each moment should be spent in His love, which is one's true companion. A sikh lives in

peace because he/she is advised by Gurbani to be always contented. One is welcome to earn as much money as one can and lead a prosperous life, the only condition being that it be earned through honest means. Acquiring wealth and becoming rich, of course, is not the purpose of life. Dishonest earnings are strictly prohibited. A Sikh should be ever grateful to the Creator and never think of acting against the interests of individuals or society.

Social behaviour of a Sikh towards other people is guided by the belief that all humans form one fellowship. All people, whatever their creed, country, colour, sex, education, financial or political status, are members of the same brotherhood called humanity. No one as such is inferior or superior. Sikhs believe that whatever God does is for the overall good of the people. Therefore, a Sikh lives a life of chardi-kala-optimism and high-spirits.

III. GURU KHALSA PANTH

Creation Of The Khalsa

In 1699 Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Nanak, sent messages to all the Sikhs for a special gathering on the Vaisakhi day (**29 March**). In this great gathering, drawing his sword the Guru desired some Sikh to offer his head to uproot injustice and protect righteousness. One Sikh calmly presented himself before the Guru. He was taken to a nearby tent. The Guru repeated this demand four more times and four more Sikhs came forward. These five volunteers were asked to drink sanctified water (amrit) from the same bowl; they were, thus, initiated into a brotherhood of equals, though they belonged to different castes and regions in India. The same last name Singh was given to each of them to identify them as members of one fellowship.

The five chosen Sikhs were honoured by the title Panj Piar's. They had demonstrated their willingness to sacrifice their lives to uphold the principles of human rights. Panj Piar's were authorized to welcome all people, irrespective of their caste, colour or creed to become members of this fellowship. The Guru himself took Amrit from the Panj Piar's; he also got the last name Singh, and Gobind Rai became Gobind Singh. This fellowship of the Khalsa was named Guru Panth, or simply Panth. The community is generally known as the Sikhs. The Guru declared that the decision of

the five chosen representatives of the corporate body is to be respected as the 'decision of the Guru' (Gurmata).

Creation of the Khalsa was the climax of the evolution of Sikhism. People divided by their faith, caste or status were united into one brotherhood and were taught to live with mutual love and affection. Thus, the religious and social revolution started by Guru Nanak achieved its goal- the oneness of humanity and oneness of its mission.

Mandate to the Khalsa : The purpose declared by the Guru for raising the Khalsa may briefly be restated as below :

- _ *to protect righteousness; and to uproot all repression and injustice;*
- _ *to serve society as sant-sipahis (policemen for human rights);*

The members of the Khalsa panth are required :

- to wear 5 Ks, the five articles of faith, all starting with k, viz., kesh (uncut hair), kangha (comb), kirpan (sword), kara (iron bangle), and kachcha (a particular kind of loin wear, breeches);
- to live for justice, and if need be, to sacrifice one's life for it.
- not to use tobacco or other addictive or intoxicating substance;
- not to have adulterous relationship;

Historical Perspective

1. Political Suppression

Guru Nanak preached that God loves all people regardless of their faith or social status. All people deserve equal human rights. This was not to the liking of those in power, whether religious or political. They joined hands to harass the Sikhs.

Complaints were made against the thried Nanak by the high-castes to the effect that the guru was 'polluting' their faith by equating low-caste with them. The Guru, himself born in a high-caste, had permitted the low-caste to take water form the well got dug by him. The fifth Nanak built the religious center, Harmandar Sahib (Golden

Temple), at Amritsar and compiled Sri Guru Granth Sahib. He was tortured to death by those in power because they felt threatened by the Gurus' teachings. The sixth Nanak had to face four army attacks which were repulsed from Amritsar to the Shiwalik foothills, away from Lahore, the seat of political authority.

Political interference and harassment of the Sikhs, however, was continued by the rulers during the ministries of seventh and eighth Nanaks. The ninth Nanak was arrested along with three Sikhs. They all were tortured and finally murdered. The tenth Nanak and his Sikhs had to defend themselves from repeated army attacks. The Guru, therefore, decided to organize the Sikhs into a regular force to serve society in peace and in war. He named them Akal Purkh Kik Fauj (Legions of the Lord for Peace).

2. The Khalsa, And The Government

A big chunk of land in Shiwalik hills was purchased by the ninth Nanak, and a new center, Anandpur Sahib, was established there by him in 1666. As the teachings of the faith (equality of humanity and respect of human rights), were not to the liking of the rulers, therefore, the tenth Guru was forced to leave it in 1704 by the armies of the governor of Sirhind and the hill chieftains. They laid siege to the village for many months. To avoid bloodshed, the Guru agreed to vacate Anandpur when assured by the army commanders that he and his Sikhs would not be harmed. However, the Sikhs were attacked by the huge army in violation of the solemn oath taken by the commanders. All the four sons of Guru Gobind Singh and most of the Sikhs were martyred. Through the famous letter, *Zafarnama* (Epistle of Victory), the Guru reminded the emperor of the immoral and inhuman behaviour of his army commanders. In response, the representatives of the emperor came to the Guru; they informed him that the emperor wanted to meet him personally and regret the excesses done to him. However, the emperor died before he could see the Guru. His successor did not deliver the promised justice to the people though the Guru travelled along with him to the Deccan to discuss this issue. Therefore, the Guru nominated a disciple, Banda Singh Bahadur, to go to Punjab, organize the Sikhs and protect the people from the tyrannical administrations.

The Khalsa under the guidance of Banda Singh Bahadur defeated the Governor of Sirhind, and took over the rule of the state (region lying between Delhi and Punjab) in 1710. Before Banda could consolidate the gains, the emperor himself organized all

his army to attack Sirhind and took it over when Banda was away to another town. Banda Singh retreated to the hills. In 1716 he was treacherously arrested along with 700 sikhs. They were taken to Delhi and were offered the choice of giving up their faith or face death. According to the Government chronicles and the British (by then the British had their representative in Delhi) reports, they all, rather than relinquishing their faith, chose death bravely.

To eliminate the Sikhs, the emperor issued orders to kill all the Sikhs wherever seen. Rewards were offered to those who would inform about a Sikh, help his arrest or get him killed. A general hunt for the lions (Singh) was on.

To retain their faith the Sikhs had no alternative but to leave their homes. They moved to the desert areas in the southern parts of punjab or to the shiwalik hills in the north where it was difficult for the roaming army bands to find them. Harmandar Sahib, Amritsar, the source of strength for the Sikhs, was taken over by the police. Alone visiting the sacred place was killed. In spite of these dangers to their lives all around, the Sikhs retained their basic tenet, love for all people. As a sample, a couple of incidents from this period are given below.

(i) Fighting The Invader : In 1739 Nadir Shah of Persia attacked India. He massacred people in Delhi, the estimated death toll was more than 100,00. He took away with him wealth and women from the capital. The fearless Sikhs made guerrilla attacks on this terrible invader when he was passing through punjab while returning. They recovered the women prisoners and retrieved partially the looted property from him, thereby taking away from him the satisfaction of complete success. Nadir was, however, able to escape with the valuable jewel-studded golden throne of the emperor and the Koh-i-Noor, the largest and the most valuable diamond in the world. The diamond* was later recovered by the Khalsa during the time of the Sikh rule of punjab.

(ii) The Minor Holocaust : The Sikhs started living in small groups wherever they could find a place to avoid the squads of the army. Once the governor of punjab sent a force to kill them; its commander rode an elephant to keep himself safe.

* When punjab was annexed by the British in 1849, the Koh-i-Noor was taken to England by them.

During the fighting, a Sikh suddenly climbed on the elephant by its tail and chopped off his head. Hearing this news the minister, Lakhpat Rai, who was the brother of the commander, was maddened with rage and organised a special campaign to hunt the Sikhs. The army was deployed to encircle the jungle (along the river Beas, district Gurdaspur) and all residents of nearby villages were forced to assist the army in killing the Sikhs. About 10,000 Sikhs were martyred in that action. This massacre of 1746, instead of demoralising the Sikhs, made them more determined to resist the tyrannical authority.

(iii) The Major Holocaust : Ahmed Shah Abdali repeatedly (1747 to 1767) invaded India to take away wealth and women. Every time the Khalsa did their duty of getting the women released and escorting them back to their homes. In 1761, Marhattas gave a tough fight to Abdali but lost badly. Abdali could reach Delhi only after losing thousands of his soldiers. When returning, exhausted Afghan soldiers loaded with booty found it impossible to withstand the surprise attacks of the Khalsa. Not only did they get about 2,000 Hindu and Muslim women prisoners released, but they also recovered part of the wealth looted by the invaders from Delhi. After suffering a heavy loss of soldiers, Abdali returned home almost empty handed, hence sad and angry. To avenge his defeat, he decided to return soon with a faster and stronger force to eliminate the Sikhs from the face of the earth.

Abdali again came in February 1762. To get out of his way, the Sikhs started moving towards deserts in the south of Punjab. Abdali moved fast, covered more than 150 kilometres in two days, and took the Sikhs by surprise when they were in village Kup and moving towards Barnala.

The Sikhs had with them a large number of old people, women and children, hence were in a very vulnerable situation. About 30,000 Sikhs, almost half of the Sikh nation, lost their lives. After this Abdali marched to Amritsar, razed Harmandir Sahib to the ground, and filled the sacred pool with debris. This was the heaviest blow yet to the Sikhs, hence they refer to it as 'the Major Holocaust'. However, the Sikhs reorganized themselves and attacked Abdali in October of the same year, when he was returning after looting Delhi. The Sikhs forced him to leave Punjab. They, thus, justified the Sikh slogan : **"We are like grass, the more we are cut, the more we grow."**

(iv) Offer Of Governorship : During his 1766 invasion of Punjab, Abdali found that a fairly bitg rural part of the province was under the control of the Sikhs. The Muslim residents of Lahore told him that Sikhs treat them with due respect and protect their civil rights. They convinced Abdali that Sikhs deserve to rule Punjab and they should be offered the governorship of the State. Abdali finding the Sikhs too strong to be subdued, agreed to make the offer to the Sikhs to rule on his behalf. However, the Sikhs rejected the offer because they knew that the people, both Hindus and Muslims, were pleased with them and were willing to accept them as sovereign rulers of Punjb. In 1769, Abdali was not allowed to cross the Jhelum river to enter Punjab. He found that punjab had gone to the Sikhs and was out of his reach.

3. The Khalsa Rule

The Khalsa created its pockets of influence in about a dozen lovalities in Punjab because the repeated invasions by Abdali had weakened the Mughal Government. The sikhs Provided protection and peace to the residents of the region. As a reward for that, they collected nominal tax called rakhi, watch and ward charges. The people were pleased with the clearn administration and the liberties provided to them by the Khalsa. In 1799 under Ranjit Singh's leadership, the Khalsa took over the rule of Lahore, the seat of power in Punjab, and ruled it till 1839.

The political authority was jointly exercise by people of all communities. Khalsa reign was known for providing peace and progress to the country. The benevolence of the rule can be understood from the fact that not even a single person was executed during this period.

Whereas the invasions from the West ended from ever, the European powers took over the estern and southern coastal areas of India. Finally the British won. After taking over Delhi, they advanced towards Punjab. In view of the popularity and the strength of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, they agreed to limit themselves to the Satluj river. However, the British continued to follow their sinister designs to take over Punjab.

British intelligence penetrated the ilner affairs of the Khalsa Government. **The Hindu Prime Minister, Gulab Singh Dogra,** was promised a reward of his asking for sabotaging the Khalsa rule from within. Having been assured of secret support from

inside the ministry, the British attacked the Panjab and finally annexed it in 1849, ten years after Ranjit Singh's death. The hill state of Jammu and Kashmir, a province of the country of the Khalsa, was given to the Prime Minister of Panjab as secretly promised to him. His descendants ruled it during the British Raj. After the British left in 1947, the ruler had to join the Indian Union to protect the state from being taken over by the Pakistani militants.

4. The Sikhs And The British

The Sikhs had to struggle against the British on many fronts.

Non-Cooperation Movement : When the British annexed Punjab in 1849, a section of the Sikhs did not submit to the Delhi rule. Under the leadership of two pious Sikhs, Bhai Maharaj Singh and Baba Ram Singh, they started non-cooperation movement. They did not join the British Government service, but found their own employment. All civil and social conflicts were settled in their own courts. They ran their own underground postal system as well. Some of them, however, got involved in violent protests. They were arrested and blasted with canons. Both their leaders were exiled and imprisoned for life.

Gurudwara Freedom Movement : In 1849, the British also took over the control of the gurudwaras (Sikh religious places) when they conquered Punjab. The hereditary custodians of the gurudwaras, called mahants (priests), were made the owners of the gurudwaras and the vast property attached to them. This was to keep the Sikhs away from their instructions, which provided them a platform as well as a policy by the British so as not to let the Khalsa panth get religious inspiration to fight for their freedom.

The grant of ownership to the mahants made them to openly disregard the Sikh principles Protected by the British, many mahants lived luxurious and licentious lives with no respect for the Sikh tenets. Not only did they harass the genuine Sikh visitors to the gurudwaras, they also sexually abused women visitors. Whenever the Sikhs protested, the Government always sided with the mahants. The Sikhs, having thus been frustrated by the Government finally started their morchas (non-violent passive struggle) in 1921. They suffered State violence patiently and stoically to get back the control of their gurudwaras. They were beaten with iron-knobbed sticks to make them

fall to the ground, then mounted police and their horses walk over them crushing their bones. Witnesses were horrified by the beatings and were awed by the conduct of the Sikhs. Father Andrews, head of the Christian mission in India, himself saw the cruelties inflicted on the non-violent unarmed hymn-singing Sikhs and cried, "I see hundreds of Christs being crucified everyday."

After many years of struggle invoking physical and financial sacrifices on the part of thousands of Sikhs, the British Government agreed to let Sikhs manage their religious places. The Sikh Gurudwaras Act was approved on July 18, 1925. According to the statement made in the Punjab Legislative Council, 30,000 Sikhs were arrested, 2,000 wounded and 1,100 killed during this struggle. A fine of one and a half million rupees was imposed and pensions of Sikhs retired from the army or civil services were forfeited. The Sikhs, Thus, made great sacrifices in blood and paid a very heavy price in terms of money, for regaining the right to manage their own gurudwaras.

Indian Freedom Struggle : The Indian Congress was organised in 1885 for obtaining political rights. The Congress leaders were impressed by the Sikh struggle for obtaining the freedom of their gurdwaras from the British control. Moved by the sacrifices of the Sikhs, Mr M K Gandhi sent a telegram congratulating the Sikhs and hoped to get freedom also for India with their help. Under the leadership of Mr. Gandhi the Congress continued the non-cooperation movement started by the Sikhs. The Congress in 1929 held their annual session at Lahore, Punjab, Encouraged by the achievements of the Sikhs, They decided to demand complete freedom from the British rule. Gandhi and other Congress leaders approached the Sikhs to provide them the necessary co-operation and support for their mission. In the freedom struggle, the contribution of the Sikhs was out of all proportions to their population (about 2%).

Capital punishment : 93 Sikhs and 28 non-Sikhs

Life imprisonment : 2147 Sikhs and 49 non-Sikhs

In 1947, the country was given freedom and divided into India and Pakistan. Punjab which had a little more than **50% Muslim** population should have gone as a whole to Pakistan, extending its limits to the borders of Delhi. By the special promises made to them by Mr Gandhi and Hindu leaders, the Sikhs were induced to opt for

being a part of India instead of pushing harder for an independent country (Khalistan) of their own. Accordingly, Punjab, their homeland, was divided, and a significant affluent section of the Sikhs living in the West Punjab became refugees. As a result of the sacrifices of the Sikhs, the borders of Pakistan were pushed back to river Ravi. The Sikhs had to move to the East Punjab, leaving their homes and fertile and developed by them in the West Punjab. The hardworking Sikhs converted the food-deficit East Punjab into a food surplus state, now contributing more than one third of the total food grains to the central pool. The Sikhs regret that they did not get the justice promised to them jointly by Mahatma Gandhi and the Hindu leaders. Soon after 1947, they backed out from all their promises (both verbal and written) with a complete disregard for their faith. The Sikhs feel that being a very small minority they are not being treated as equal citizens. Further, to reduce the significance to the Sikh Nation, their contributions towards freedom struggle have been ignored while writing history books.

5. The Sikh Diaspora

Sikhs migrated in small numbers to the West in the closing years of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. Mass scale emigration to Great Britain and North America occurred after World War II, when men were needed to run the industries there. Early emigrants to North America settled mostly on the pacific coast in California and British Columbia. They established gurdwaras in Stockton, Vancouver, and other cities. In the East, Sikhs were taken to Malaysia and Singapore by the British for the police force to manage their eastern settlements. Some Sikhs went to British colonies of better employment opportunities. Retired army men also settled there.

Being hard-working people, they made a good living for themselves and invited their relatives to settle there. Now, Sikhs settled all over the world, are playing a significant role in the social, political, and economic fields. The second generation of the immigrant Sikhs is well-set in various fields. They have proved themselves to be good doctors, engineers, industrialists and businessmen. A large number of them are employed in blue-collar jobs as well. They are brave soldiers, good sportsmen, competent professionals, good workers and affectionate friends.

They have earned good reputation as respectable citizens. At present the whole world is acquainted with the Sikhs because of their character and unique appearance. Sikhs are no more strangers in any major city of the worlds.

IV. SIKH WAY OF LIFE

The document describing the code of religious conduct outlines four major ceremonies for a Sikh.

Birth

The birth of a baby in a family is considered to be a gift of God. To express their gratitude to the Almighty and to select a name for the baby, the family with baby visits a Gurdwara. Hymns which express thankfulness for God's blessings are recited by the granthi (priest). To name the baby, Sri Guru Granth Sahib is opened at random after prayers. The first letter of the hymn is used as the first letter of the baby's name. For a boy, Singh, and for a Girl, Kaur, is given as the last name.

Initiation

The ceremony for the initiation of a Sikh to the Khalsa Panth is called amrit sanchar (partaking of sanctified water). It is conducted whenever the parents consider that their child has grown up to understand the basic principles of the faith. There is no minimum age prescribed for undergoing this ceremony. A person is, however, expected to be formally initiated into the faith before his/her wedding. One may, however, take Amrit at any stage of his/her life. Amrit is a vow to live the virtuous life of a Sikh.

He/she is enjoined to always lead a virtuous life. Some specific do's and don'ts prescribed for a Sikh are given in Section II & III.

A Khalsa becomes an apostate if he/she commits any of the prohibited acts like cutting of hair, adulterous relations, use of tobacco, alcohol and other intoxicants. In case a Sikh violates any of the prohibitions, he/she has to appear before the panj pyar's and explain the reasons for his/her becoming an apostate. The panj pyar's discuss the matter and decide the "punishment". Usually it may be doing service (sewa) in langar (fresh community meal) or gurdwara and reciting specific hymns of ascertain number of days. This is done to develop the required commitment to the Sikh vows and devotion to the faith through humility (by doing sewa) and discipline (by recitation of hymns).

Marriage

The Sikh marriage ceremony is called anand karj (a happy function). The religious ceremony was legally recognised in India through the Anand Marriage Act of 1909 during the British period.

A Sikh is to marry a Sikh only the spouse may belong to any race or caste. Before marriage the bride and groom are expected to have formally embraced the Sikh faith. If one is not already a Sikh for a reasonable period before he/she marries a Sikh.

The groom and the bride present themselves in front of Guru Granth Sahib for the ceremony. To give thanks for God's blessings, hymns are sung by the congregation. Addressing the groom and bride, the granthi (priest), or any other competent person, explains the role of husband and wife, and the do's and don'ts of a virtuous Sikh life. The two are asked to bow to Guru Granth Sahib as a sign of their consent to those principles. The couple is directed to circumambulate Sri Guru Granth Sahib four times and the relevant hymns are sung by the raagis. Concluding prayer is said to thank God for blessing the couple.

Death

According to Sikh philosophy, a person comes to this world as willed by God. When called back by Him, the person leaves the world in obedience. A human life is an opportunity to realize the Lord by keeping the mind attuned to Him and serving His creation.

When a Sikh dies, the relatives and friends are not supposed to weep or cry but to recite hymns for Guru Granth Sahib. The hymns chosen for this occasion remind the listeners that life is a temporary phase. As willed by Him, everyone has to leave this world when his/her time is over. This creates a serene bearing the pain of the departure of the beloved calmly. Friends gather to listen to the recitation and to be with the relatives of the deceased.

A prayer is made to God to graciously excuse all the wrongs the person might have committed in life and to admit his soul into His court. The body, wrapped in cloth (not necessarily enclosed in a casket) is placed on a bier and carried to the cremation ground.

The pyre is lit by a near relative, usually a son, brother, or father of the deceased. When the fire spreads and consumes the corpse, a departing prayer is said and people return to their homes. When the cinders have cooled, usually on the third day, ashes and residual bones are collected and disposed off in the nearest flowing stream of water. Or they may be buried in the ground with the surface levelled and no mark or stone left to indicate the spot. In some countries according to the custom there, the dead body is kept in a crematorium. On the day of cremation the body is put in a box, visitors file past, prayers is said, and then is is cremated.

According to the Sikh philosophy the dead body may be buried, cremated, or immersed in water. Any convenient and respectful method may be adopted for the disposal of the body. It does not help or harm the soul. In His Court one is judged only by the deeds done by him/her while living on this earth.

The bereaved family arranges a completer recitation of Sri Guru Granth Sahib. the relatives and friends visit to listen the humns and to express their sympathy to the members of the family. On the day fixed for the final function (usually a week after death), the recitation of the scripture is completed and the final prayer said. After this prayer, no other ceremony is performed for the departed person.

Waheguru ji ka Khalsa,

Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh.