

### **Sikh Faith: A Religion for Thinkers**

The compelling feature of a religion is to grant the practitioner a peace of mind. Believer's faith should lead to a life full of joy, contentment and peaceful interactions with humans at large. Moreover, the articles of faith should have a clarity and simplicity about them, enabling Believers to put their faith into practice in everyday living experience and derive the ensuing joy and peace of mind. These expectations are amply met by Sikh faith founded by Nanak in the fifteenth century.

Nanak found the existing religions to be marred by practice of complicated rites led by unscrupulous priests, preaching in languages (Sanskrit and Arabic) not understood by common folks. The practice of religions led to divisiveness among the populace, enslavement of women and a shameful exploitation of the masses at the lower end of the economic strata, leading to extreme unrest among them. All this was done in the name of an omnipresent, benevolent God.

At a very young age, Nanak started questioning the relevance of religious rites and oppressive interventions in the personal lives (what people could not eat, how they should dress and behave, etc) as practiced then by the Hindus and Muslims in India. Nanak traveled all over India (including Tibet, Burma and Ceylon) and the Middle East, discussing the religious precepts held by eminent Hindu and Muslim philosophers; he did not seem to have encountered Jews or Christians. After a deep thought he renounced the teachings in the sacred texts of both the Hindus and Muslims and announced easily understood guiding principles for everyday living; namely, earn living by honest means, share earnings with less fortunate ones, and always remember the Creator. Nanak stressed that if one professes love for God, one must love His creation also. In particular, he emphasized the concepts of equal rights for all (including women) and truthful living. He said, "Truth is higher than everything but truthful living is higher still." He dispensed wisdom in the language of masses (both Hindu and Muslim), they flocked to him in record numbers. They called him their Guru (Teacher).

We are the citizens of a great country whose Constitution states, "...We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness..." The Constitution of USA was written in 1776, nearly 300 years after Nanak was born, yet it resonates the message that Guru Nanak preached to the masses on the other side of the globe. The two messages, one spiritual and other secular, are complimentary. Not surprisingly, the Constitution also grants its citizen the freedom to worship as they please. To this day a Sikh concludes his/her daily prayers as follows.

"We pray to God Almighty.... Give us happiness and peace of mind. Help us to be humble and wise. Forgive us our excesses. Grant us the company of those who are Believers. May we be charitable and help the needy. Keep us in good health. Bless us to retain our faith strong. Help us in restraining our limitations (lust, anger, greed, ego, and pride). Fulfill the desires of all those who pray. Nanak says may God's name be ascendant and by the grace of God may everyone prosper."

Guru Nanak was followed by nine successor Gurus, each chosen for his devotion to the propagation of Sikh faith (preached by Guru Nanak) by the predecessor Guru before his passing; a succeeding Guru may or may not be related to the previous Guru, there were no female Sikh Gurus. The first five and the last two Sikh Gurus were prolific writers of Sikh sacred compositions in a poem style (31 ragas). These hymns (5894) are

to be found in the Sikh holy book called Shri Guru Granth Sahib (SGGS); it has 1429 pages, 19 lines to a page. Before passing on, the tenth Sikh Guru Gobind Singh decreed the end of the line of living Gurus and stipulated that all Sikhs must consider SGGS to be their eternal Guru. This mandate cannot be changed. It should be stressed that Sikhs show reverence to the WORD in SGGS and not the book itself; idolatry is forbidden for Sikhs. The reader may refer to my earlier essays for detailed information about ten Sikh Gurus and the SGGS.

Towards the end of services in a Gurudwara (Sikh place of worship) congregants sing a part of a composition by the third Sikh Guru Amar Das called Anand Sahib, it outlines a path to happiness. Main points stressed in this composition follow.

“I am full of joy, my mother, I am in the company of God. Holy music resounds in my mind. By aligning my mind, body and soul with God, all my sufferings have vanished. God is omnipresent, the Creator of everything. With God by my side I am blessed with peace and happiness and all my desires are fulfilled. Only the fortunate ones attain this state of bliss. Air is Guru, water is father, earth good mother. Day and night are two nurses male and female, they nurse the world. In God’s court one’s merit and failings shall be read. According to their deeds some will remain with God and others will be separated. Those who contemplated God’s WORD completed their journey successfully. Nanak says their faces glow and they are emancipated.”

Guru Nanak defined Almighty as, “ One, absolute, unchanging, formless, omnipresent God, the lord of hundreds of known gods and goddesses, the Creator of all, devoid of fear, without enemies, timeless, unborn, Himself His Own Being.” Guru Nanak emphatically stated that no one (himself included) has the ability to conjure up miracles. This train of thoughts gives us a hint about the whereabouts of God. One is reminded about the paradox of ‘action at a distance’ that haunted Isaac Newton after he discovered the Law of Universal Gravitation in the seventeenth century; he died without resolving it. The same puzzle confronted Charles Coulomb and his contemporaries in the nineteenth century, in their study of the electromagnetic interactions. Michael Faraday’s notion of a field consisting of ‘lines of force’ surrounding a magnet pointed to a resolution of the paradox and revolutionized thinking in Science; it inspired James Clerk Maxwell to formulate the four equations of electromagnetic field theory. In the twentieth century, they inspired Albert Einstein to formulate the Theory of Special Relativity and the notion of Space-Time Continuum and later the General Theory of Relativity. There are many different types of fields known today explaining different kinds of interactions in nature. All of them have energy stored in them and the short-range and long-range interactions occur via exchange of different quanta. These scientific facts and Nanak’s definition of God’s whereabouts suggest that there exists a ‘Field’ in the universe (even outside the Space-Time Continuum) emanating from God. Humans, in particular, sense this ‘God Field’ at a higher spiritual level attained by thinkers such as Guru Nanak and other prophets. If this is true, a challenge lies before us to devise an experiment to detect the ‘God Field.’ It is needless to say that such detection would be ‘the mother’ of all discoveries for human race and settle the acrimonious debate between two constructs of great minds to understand the reality, namely God and Modern Science. It would improve the quality of dialog between the religions by sorting out what is Truth and what are the non-essential details to be discarded. This will bring joy and happiness to human race.

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