

EYE, BLOOD AND OTHER ORGAN DONATION OF THE BODY IS GENERALLY OPPOSED BY THE SELF STYLED RELIGIOUS GUIDES OF DIFFERENT FAITHS ON THE PRETEXT OF DESECRATION OF THE DEAD BODY. WE PRESENT HERE THE SIKH POINT OF VIEW. THE SIKH SCRIPTURES SHOW HOW TO SANCTIFY THE HUMAN BODY, AS AGAINST PRESERVING IT IN ITS TOTAL FORM, AND REJECT THE UNDUE IMPORTANCE GIVEN BY THE SOCIETY TO THE PUTREFYING DEAD BODY. THE DIASPORA SIKHS IN THE US HAD RECENTLY UNDERLINED THIS SPIRIT BY ORGANIZING A MASSIVE SIKH NATION BLOOD DONATION DRIVE.



A picture from the first ever Sikh Nation Blood Donation Drive in the United States in June 2009. Sikhs paid a tribute to the martyrs of 1984 by donating blood. What a wonderful way to underline the community's resolve of caring about the society! - A WSN photo

Nanak Singh Nishtar

As per 1995 data, there were 40 million blind people in the world, out of which 15 million were in India. Of these, 2.5 million are blind due to damage to the cornea. The cornea is a clear circular transparent portion at the front surface of the eyeball, which is the main focusing element. Damage to the cornea can be hereditary, or due to infection, chemical burns, accidents or trauma, resulting in loss of vision. The sight can be restored with cornea transplantation, by a surgery known as "Penetrating Kerato Plasty" and its only source is from a human dead body.

Religion has a very powerful influence on the people; some religious beliefs are an obstacle in eye donation or in getting people to donate other organs. The voluntary organisations and social activists have made several appeals to the leaders and intellectuals to come forward to end this religious dilemma and form an educated, informed opinion on the subject. The aim is to educate and inspire the general public, particularly the Sikh masses, to come forward to donate eyes and project the Sikh religious point of view of being a religion that has Sarbat Da Bhala as its motto. We expect and appeal to the religious leaders of other faiths to come forward and give a lead to the peoples of their faith, too, in this most humane crusade.

Sikhism teaches us the art of living and inculcates desire for purposeful dying. Sikhism is a spiritual form of staunch humanism, which is evident from the teachings of the scriptures and lives of the Sikh Gurus. The tenth Guru, Shri Guru Gobind Singh Ji (1666-1708) transformed the Sikhs into the present form of Khalsa and declared that they are *Wahguru Ji Ka Khalsa* (People of the God) in the year 1699.

Sikhism is misunderstood, misinterpreted and wrongly projected by some sections of the people who do not have thorough knowledge of the scriptures which ought to be the main source of information, knowledge and wisdom. It preaches, practices and stands for oneness of God and oneness of mankind, and condones no discrimination between



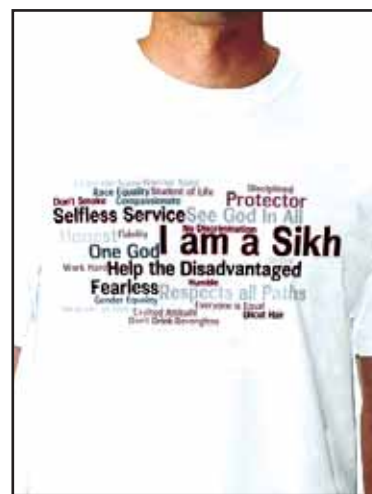
gender, religion, caste or creed. The founder of Sikhism, Shri Guru Nanak Dev Ji, has said, "He (God) is the life within all the lives, and is pervading in all the hearts". (Shri Guru Granth Sahib pp 1273). The fifth Guru, Shri Guru Arjan Dev Ji (1563-1606) declared, "We are neither Hindu nor Muslim, but the body and soul of Allah and Ram (Shri Guru Granth Sahib p1136). Both words denote the One Absolute and all pervading God and Ram does not refer to the son of

Sikhism & Organ Donation

In the Sikh Ardas, there is mention everyday of female and child members of the Khalsa who laid down their lives in the cause of Dharma and some who even got their bodies dismembered bit by bit, got their bodies sawn off, got mounted on spiked wheels, made sacrifices in the service of the shrines but did not waver from their faith, maintained adherence to the Sikh faith with sacred unshorn hair to the last breath. Clearly, this underlines that what matters is the purpose to which a Sikh puts his body, not what happens to it.

King Dasratha. It believes in only One Creator, who lives in His own creation, and there is nobody without it in its total form, and reject the undue importance given by the society to the putrefying the dead body. It is up to the readers to decide, which is the better way, either utilising their eyes and other body organs to be transplanted for giving life and vision to fellow beings, or of disposing it of as a perishable commodity. It is said that service to

man is service to God. Shri Guru Granth Sahib is the matchless treasure of wisdom, knowledge and experience. It is the outcome of the personal experiments of great social scientists conducted in the human laboratories. It is a digest of the teachings of the Sufis, Bhagats and Gurus, who faced all ups and downs of life. They practised and preached the practical life, under the most unfavorable circumstances for over a period of 500 years, from Hazrat Sheikh Farid Ji (1175-1265) to



the ninth Guru, Shri Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji (1621-1675). They were from a variety of background of different class, castes and creed from all corners of the Indian sub-continent. In the year 1708, the tenth Sikh Master, Guru Gobind Singh Ji bestowed Guruship to this Scripture. This is the present and eternal Guru in succession to Shri Guru Nanak Dev Ji and the living Guru of the Sikhs. Shri is a prefix for respect, Guru means spiritual teacher, Granth means book and Sahib is a suffix for respect again. This scripture of 1430 pages has most spiritual relevance for the entire mankind. It is wrongly perceived as an object of worship. The Sikhs worship only the Formless God. This scripture was compiled by the fifth Guru, Shri Guru Arjan Dev Ji between the years 1599 and 1604 under his personal supervision, and installed in the Golden Temple. Without the fear of any contradiction, it can be said that this is the only scripture of any religion or faith, which is written during the lifetime and under the supervision of their founders.



The body of a Sikh, alive or dead, should be of some use to others, in the larger interest of service to mankind. And donation of blood, eyes, and body organs and dead body are very much in consonance and conformity with the letter and spirit of the Scriptures of Sikhism.

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To quote from Gurbani, "If you want to play the game of love, come to me with your head placed in the palm of your hand. Once you have stepped in this path, be ready to lay your head without any hesitation (p.1412)".

Guru Nanak Dev Ji has said, "After the death, the limbs or body will not accompany you as it is made up of air, water and fire, and will disintegrate here itself (pp. 1257)".

Regarding the disposal of dead bodies, his mandate is above any confusion: "Some bodies are thrown into water and some cast into tower of silence, this much is not known as to where do they go and disappear?" (pp648).

The fifth Guru, Shri Guru Arjan Dev Ji, in the widely read verses of Sukhmani Sahib, says that, "False is the body which does not do any good to others (p.269)". The verse continues, "Who is delighted in doing good to others is a God's realizer in true sense (p.273)". He declared, "The person

and his tongue which sings the praises of Har (God) and ever does good to others is invaluable. Prabhu (God) lives in his mind and body". "If you put sandal wood paste to the dead body, then what is the gain it makes? If the dead body is rolled in human dung, and then what does it lose? (p.1160)".

Bhagat Kabir Ji (1398-1495), a Muslim weaver of Banaras of Uttar Pradesh, says, "When a man dies, he is of no use to any man, but when an animal dies, it serves ten purposes (p.870)".

"He alone is known to be truly brave who fights for the cause of "deen" (oppressed) and does not leave the battle field, but dies even though he is cut out into pieces (p.1105)".

Bhagat Parma Nanda Ji, a Brahmin of Sholapur district of Maharashtra, says on page No.1253, "O man, what is that you have learned by mere listening to the holy books? Devotion has not welled up nor have you given alms to the hungry? You have not helped any needy person. Your hardhearted mind has not cherished mercy for living creatures".

The Code of Sikh Conduct and Conventions (Sikh Rehat Maryada) is a product of collective Panthic (community) wisdom for ensuring uniformity of observances of religion's code of ethics and avoiding unintended heresy. It was approved and updated in the year 1945 and says the "concept of service is not confined to fanning the congregations or performing service in the free common kitchen-cum-eating house. A Sikh's life is for selfless service to others. The most fruitful service is that which secures the maximum good with minimum efforts."

For dead body, it is mentioned to be cremated. However, where arrangements for cremation cannot be made, there should be no qualms about the body being immersed in flowing water or disposed off in any other manner. It contains a supplicatory prayer called "Ardas" which is recited on all occasions, for initiating or concluding any congregation, function or prayer. In this, martyrs are remembered by recalling the achievements of the male, female and child members of the Khalsa who laid down their lives in the cause of Dharma and some who even got their bodies dismembered bit by bit, got their bodies sawn off, got mounted on spiked wheels, made sacrifices in the service of the shrines but did not waver from their faith, maintained adherence to the Sikh faith with sacred unshorn hair to the last breath.

The Ardas also says that wherever there is Khalsa Ji Sahib, may there be protection and leniency. Victory may prevail for Deg and Tegh. By the help of Sri Sahib, the honour of the weak should be protected and the Panth become victorious."

It concludes with a desire of well being of entire humanity saying, "Grant us the association of those dear ones on meeting whom one is reminded of Tera Naam. Says Nanak, may the Naam be ever held high! In Your (God's) will, may the good prevail for all."

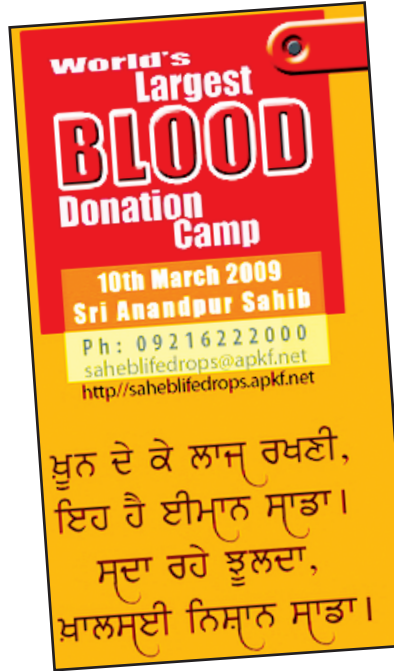
In view of some of the quotations above mentioned, the body of a Sikh, alive or dead, should be of some use to others, in the larger interest of service to mankind. And donation of blood, eyes, and body organs and dead body are very much in consonance and conformity with the letter and spirit of the Scriptures of Sikhism.

9. 10 c.c. (a very little quantity) of blood sample is collected from the donor's dead body for testing.

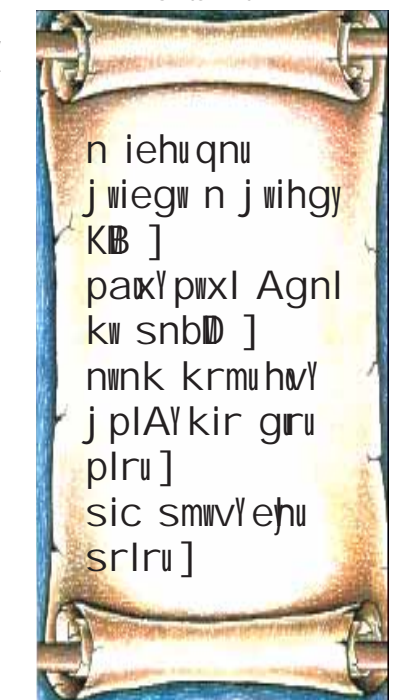
10. Eye Banks are non-profit service organisations. The collected cornea is examined, preserved and used for transplantation within 72 hours according to the waiting list. So you need not doubt about their integrity and the rightful use of your donation.

11. Simply the act of your pledging may not ensure that your wish will be fulfilled. Because it would hardly be the first thought to occur to grief-stricken relatives. It is also not necessary for the donor to register his/her pledge earlier for eye donation during his life.

12. Do something now itself to make sure that when the time comes, your eyes will actually be donated. For this sacred cause, discuss eye donation with your family members and convince them. They must take the responsibility to inform the Eye Hospital/Eye Bank immediately after death. By all means, just your wish is quite immaterial, unless your family members make up their mind for donation and do accordingly.



A poster from a recent Sikh Nation Blood Donation Drive at Anandpur Sahib, one of the largest ventures of its kind.



HOW TO DONATE ?

1. India has the largest number of blind people in the world. Wrong beliefs and superstitions are responsible for indifference towards eye donation.
2. Your eye donation gives sight to two blind persons by Corneal Graft, because in India country one blind person is given one eye at a time due to acute shortage. This enables you to continue to be part of this world even after death.
3. Every human being of any age can donate eyes.
4. In case of death by burns, leprosy, cancer, dog bite, snake bite, jaundice, HIV/AIDS and drowning, the eyes are not useful for transplantation.
5. It has to be removed within 6 hours of death. So, no time should be lost in informing the nearest Eye Hospital or Eye Bank.
6. Switch off fans (AC can be kept on) and close the eyelids. Place a wet cotton or wet cloth over the eyes. It will keep the eyeballs moist. Raise the head with a pillow.
7. The body need not be taken to the Eye Hospital/Bank. On informing the Eye Hospital/Bank, a team will come to the spot at their own cost.
8. The cornea is the clear circular transparent portion at the front of the eyeball. This is taken out carefully, without leaving any scar or disfiguring the face and keeping the eyeballs intact. It takes only 10-15 minutes for this process.

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BLOOD AND OTHER BODY PARTS

Blood is the elixir of life. It is not only life, but also saves and gives life to others. It is needed for those who have lost blood due to accidents, diseases or surgery. Blood donation is nothing but a sacred service and symbol of humanity. Any healthy man or woman can donate regularly after every 12 weeks without any loss of their body requirement. Blood donation is a painless process, which is completed within few minutes. Human body maintains its level of blood. During blood donation only 350 c.c. of blood is taken, which the body in a very short time replenishes. The donor does not feel any loss or weakness even after five minutes.

Also, try and convince the family members to donate your organs and tissues for saving the life of a few individuals who are facing imminent death. Incisions to remove organs are made at places where clothing covers the body. It does not cause any disfigurement and in any way does not interfere with the customary funeral. The hospital where the donor is under treatment is the proper agency to guide.

In case of accident, many a time the victims are virtually brain dead and there is no possibility of such patients regaining consciousness although their heart continues to beat and blood circulation is maintained. For all other purposes they are clinically dead. The moment their breathing support machine is withdrawn they die. The organs of such brain dead person, i.e., Cadaveric Donor, can be donated for transplantation to different needy persons. The organs can be preserved only for a few hours before they are transplanted to the recipients free of cost. The sale and purchase of organs is strictly prohibited in India by the Transplantation of Human Organs Act 1994. The donors need not pay anything, only the recipients have to pay the hospital charges.

Presently, only Cornea, Blood, Skin, Bone, Bone marrow, Liver, Kidneys, Heart, Lungs, Pancreas, Intestine and Cartilages are being transplanted. Let us hope and pray that by the time our turn for donation comes, science may be further advanced to add some more organs for transplantation.