

Dr. Harbans Lal

Look at Vaisakhi as a drama of LOVE; Love that the Guru used to mesmerize his audience when he asked for a head and the love that the Guru inculcated among those who came forward to offer their heads. To them he prescribed a Rehat, a specific life style.

Was this the reason that our 18th century's writers name the path of the Guru as Prem Sumarag meaning the sacred Path of Love? To appreciate this event you have to go into the Guru's lifelong teachings. It was Guru Gobind Singh, who said,

Sach kahon sun leho Sabai jin prem kio tin hee prabh paio.

Listen to this eternal truth. Those who practice life of love, they alone will realize the purpose of this life, that is, to experience divine within and relate the divine to all creation with active expression of love.

The vision of love is always followed by the acts of love that join us to the reality that we intrinsically yearn for, but we do not know how to reach or how to realize, it remains a mystery without a specific path. According to our Guru, the path of love is the path to that mystery.

Secondly, with the practice of love comes a change that leads us into the dimension of spirituality. That is: Your eyes see because in spirit you become the witness to everything. You have newly expanded thoughts because in spirit you begin to know all. Similarly, you feel love toward another person because in spirit you are infinite love.

Connecting the spiritual dimension of human vision to love means abandoning the notion of limited self with its limited ability to act in love and regaining the Self with its unbounded ability to achieve and serve. These are the changes because of the spiritual vision that the Guru incorporated into his injunctions of Five Don'ts.

When the Guru created the Order of Khalsa, he defined Khalsa in the terms of this vision.

He is the true Khalsa (Sikh), who awakens the awareness within of divine light and divine creativity and lives the life of its practices, without permitting inroads to any thoughts of "otherness"

Absolute and unconditional LOVE and its "pertect" meaning full comprehension, full grasp, full understanding of the meaning of love, then becoming embodiment of love, never again to believe in the illusions of the past.

Through the practice of love, Guru Gobind Singh made us aware of pure creativity and pure spirit. Through the vision of love, he made us free from all memories or images from the past. His Love was beyond all illusions.

Like the tiny spark of fire that consumes a forest, his spark of love was all that was needed for his followers to experience love in its full power and glory, in all its aspects -earthly and divine. To them love became spirit, and all experiences of love, however insignificant they seem, were actually invitations to the sacrifice to uphold the truth and justice. Within every story of their sacrifices was a love story hiding the wooing of the creation by the Creator.

The expression - path to



Can there be religious fervour without Love? Can one love God and His creation without Love? How is Vaisakhi as a song of love a major contribution of Guru Gobind Singh to the Sikhs and humanity at large? The learned author authoritatively answers all these queries for the seekers of truth and godly love.



Vaisakhi

The Song of Love

love - is not simply a metaphor; it reappears throughout spiritual history and cultures in many guises. On the day of Vaisakhi, Khalsa became the guise in 1699.

Thus Guru Gobind Singh created Khalsa to raise awareness within, awareness of the creator and the creation, meaning nature and the world order consisting of laws of nature, awareness of society's problems followed by solutions to society's problem and problems of its environments through pro-active resolution of them using the armor of love.

Guru Granth says, *ij n qI sJvA BkaKir sP prK sJin*] Those will become the truly wise who serve the divine mission through the acts of love.

And those who serve the Creator with acts of love, God will carry them across

ij n qI sJvA BkaKir sJ qD pIr aqirA p. 968 Sata Balwand in Guru Granth.

Those who serve you with love - You carry them across.

The prophet lived at a time (1666-1708) when religious fanaticism in South Asia was at its height. It was

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endlessly posing a grave threat to the human spirit of freedom and liberty. Practice of pluralism and multicultural life was in peril.

Those with faith practices different from their misguided rulers were persecuted and the religious places of one religion were replaced with those of others. Guru's great-grand-

father, father, four sons and countless followers were put to death by the powers because they stood against the effort to uniformity of religion and culture. You are well aware of the notorious designs of Mogul administration at the time of Aurangzeb.

It was a dark, grim and ominous period in human history. The innate human desire for individual expression and diversity of belief that was inherited in Indian culture was being severely curtailed.

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He challenged the ruling and dominant powers with grit and determination.

With equal might he challenged the wide-spread religious bigotry and spread a religion of love and freedom of choice in religious practices. It meant preserving the tapestry of regions and religious practices and not a uniform one religion or one way to achieve the religious accept-



ance.

Let me tell you a story right from the Guru's childhood. When time came to announce public recognition to the prophetic role of the Child Guru, a renowned Muslim saint, Syed Bhikhan Shah, did it through a profound public demonstration. The saint was miraculously inspired by a divine vision to make his journey to the guru's birthplace, Patna, to bless the infant Gobind, and to pronounce him divine. When he reached in the Presence of the child Gobind, the pir presented a pre-meditated riddle. He placed two bowls of sweets before the child; one bowl was purchased from a Hindu's shop, and the second from a Muslim's shop, thus signifying the two major contemporary religions in India.

The riddle sought answer to an unspoken question, which sought guidance as to which religion this divine prophet would belong and lead. The proper response would permit the Pir to pronounce the Guru's divinity and his prophetic authority to lead a certain people. To everyone's admiration and deep satisfaction, the baby stretched both hands

and placed one on each bowl. By this action the child Guru was indicating that he would not profile people among religious divides signifying that all religions would be dear to him. Further, he would honor a Muslim holy man, Bhikhan Shah to become the medium of his first message.

Thus in his very first public message Guru Gobind Singh laid the path to love for all through interfaith events and dialogues, and sanctioned inter-religious appreciation and accommodation during the difficult times of religious divisions and fanaticism.

Further, he chose symbolic language of loveful gesture over the literary languages to communicate his first public sermon. Amazingly the Guru used profound public demonstration to impart his first sermon of love in multi-faith dimension. Guru emphasized diversity of faith and its practices that the India is constituted of.

Although in this story Guru Gobind Singh dramatized it, actually the appreciation of diversity in human ecology was presented as

Cosmic Plan or Hukam throughout the Sikh teachings. Guru Granth says,

My Eternal Creator has staged a play. He has created no one like anyone else. He made them different; he placed all the flavors and their appreciation within each body. Then he looks at this diversity with pleasure. -Guru Granth Sahib, page 1056.

Diversity is a law of nature and a law of life that the Creator formulated as a play of his love. Plants and animals diversify to evolve and survive; they perish if they don't. Structures of stars and lands vary millions of times in size and characters, and, the cell and biological particles in the human body do the same.

Just as our physical world is diverse, so are our religions, our cultures, social systems, orbits, and traditions.

The law of diversity applies to the institutions of religions. Pluralistic religions originate out of the human ecology of diversity. They are best suited to survive along with human evolution and human ecology. The Guru Granth Sahib recognized these identities: *isrunk I ka pvr hl] bil hrt j waj gqgrnw hl]*

Nanak places his head at the feet of all people and is a sacrifice to as many identities ascribed to You, O' Infinite. -Guru Granth Sahib, 1168

To spread his message of a perfect egalitarian society based on oneness of God, the tenth master, Guru Gobind Singh paraphrased this doctrine by celebrating the diversity in all of its myriad forms. He wrote:

kaIiBea mIAu sInAisI kaI j gI Biea kaI bhncrI kaIj qI AnambI] ihllqk kaInPsl jemm sP mms kI j iq sbl ekI pihcni] krcq krmI sel rj k rhim ael dbrin BpI kaI Bn Bn mmbI] ek hl kI sy sB hl kaqrdy ek ek hl srp sbl ekI q j mnb] -Akal Btat

Many believe that they become superior by accepting celibacy or undertaking meditation, by giving up material comforts, by making themselves look different, or by wearing long and matted hair or no hair. Others feel higher by joining a particular sect of Islam as, Shia, Sunni, etc. But no one should overlook the basic fact that followers of all religions are the same human beings. The Creator of all provides for the needs of all humans. There is one God of all and that God alone should be worshipped.

Do not remain an ignorant and believe in anyone else except the one Creator. All humanity is equal, each one of us carries the reflection of the Creator in us, and we are all manifestations of one Creator.

Guru Gobind Singh believed that the differences among humans in terms of color, appearance and ethnicity were due to God's creative process; all human beings had a moral responsibility to cherish and preserve this sacred creativity. He emphasized the unity of human spirit; it despite many apparent distinctions. He explained that the differences in our outward appearance, clothes, customs and practices are attributed to the choices that only we make. He said:

cyq Ach j C gDd qrk ihll inAur inAurI dsn kyBs kapBaihl

Many are gods or demon, or celestial musicians. There are heavenly tribes and the learned people or the artists. There may be seen as people of different religions as Muslims (citizens of Islamic nations) or Hindus (natives of Indian subcontinent). They all look and act differently, but their apparent differences are due to the influences from their countries and cultures, or in the clothes, they wear.

Guru Gobind Singh was a champion of human rights. He advocated freedom of culture, religion and thought for every individual. We can thus see that self-righteousness which comes from dividing the world into us and them has no place in the vision of Guru Gobind Singh's vision of love, his Prem Sumarag. His teachings and his sacrifices made great difference and, thank God, the diversity so characteristic of today India, was preserved by the teachings of Guru Gobind Singh and sacrifices of his Khalsa.

Indeed, Guru Gobind Singh's ideal of appreciation and preservation of diversity is a pivotal feature of all human activity. We must never forget to defend it.

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Vaisakhi for All

Vaisakhi projects ecstatic images of nations, nature and cultural landscapes spread wide and across the entire globe. It is the time of year when people of almost every heritage are seen jubilant and celebrating with both sacred and secular merriment. Sikhs celebrate the birth of Guru Nanak in 1469 and the founding of the Khalsa in 1699.

All Punjabis - Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims welcome Vaisakhi as their spring festival when they harvest their crops. At this time trees and bushes are laden with green leaves and bright colored flowers that blossom all around. People act out various expressions of thankfulness while appreciating at a deeper level many scenes of prosperity and cyclical regeneration.

Naba Barsha (Poila Baisakh) is a famous occasion for Bengalis as it is the first day of the first month of Bengali year.

In the year 599 B.C. at the time of Vaisakhi, Mahavira was born as the last one in the galaxy of twenty-four Jain Prophets. Similarly, the god/prophet of Hindus, Sri Rama, is widely believed to be born sometime in the end of March or the beginning of April, the exact date of his birth not yet established. Vaisakhi is also the time of the birth of Sri Hanuman. Prophet Muhammad who gave birth to the second most followed religion of the world -Islam, was born on April 11.

April 7 is Ugadi, the New Year for the people of the Deccan region of India. Sindhis from Sindh of Pakistan celebrate their New Year at the same time. Easter in the spring that falls around Vaisakhi, also called Pascha, is the most important religious feast in the Christian liturgical year. It celebrates the resurrection of Jesus, which Christians believe occurred on the third day after his crucifixion.

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