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Chapter Six

Sikhism





Guru Nanak Dev and Sikh Dharma



Approximately 650 years ago (around the 1500s), Indian civilization was reeling from the severe attacks of the Mughal invasions. The subsequent erosion of Indian culture was profound, and religious suppression escalated.

When the Mughal invasion was at its zenith, many people were forced to abandon their native religion and turn to Islam or face persecution. In the ensuing cultural assault, the gap between the lower and higher castes widened and the rift between various religious sects had deepened so much that the very fabric of Indian culture was threatened.

During this crucial period of social, religious and political upheaval, Guru Nanak emerged as a great reformer and guardian. His teaching and his exquisite exposition of devotional *sadhana* (practices) revived the ideals of Indian culture and helped restore Indian civilization. The surge of reform and revival began in Punjab in Northern India, and is attributed solely to Guru Nanak. He sought to establish true religion and emphasized the unity of Hindus and Muslims. He also emphasized that humans should possess the best attributes of all the castes: *Brahmin* (priest), *Kshatria* (ruler), *Vaishya*



(trader), and even *Shudra* (laborer) classes. The tradition he established is known as Sikh Dharma or Gurumat (the Path of Gurus).

The Gurus of Sikhism

The tradition of the strong relationship between spiritual preceptor (*guru*) and disciple is unique to Sikhism and is not seen elsewhere. Each of the ten *Gurus* of this tradition is unmatched in world history. They have all proven to be prominent social, political and religious leaders. They were always ready to sacrifice everything for the protection of Truth.

The names of the ten teachers (Gurus) are as follows:

1. Guru Nanak
2. Guru Angad
3. Guru Amardas
4. Guru Ramdas
5. Guru Arjundev
6. Guru Hargobind
7. Guru Hari Rai
8. Guru Harikrishan
9. Guru Teg Bhadur and
10. Guru Gobind Singh.



Descent of Guru Nanak

In former times there was a small village called Raipur in the state of Punjab, about 48 miles from Lahore. After the partition of India and Pakistan this village was reconstructed and came to be known as Talwandi Raymoi. Presently, this village is in Pakistan and is known as Nankana Sahib, the birth place of Guru Nanak.

In 15th century Punjab there lived a noble and religious man named Raibular. He was very wealthy and owned a considerable amount of property. He appointed Shri Kaluchand (the father of Guru Nanak), a good natured and compassionate person, as his manager. Kaluchand was from the *Surya* clan and was *Kshatria* by caste. He was a trustworthy man who made serious effort to honor and follow the noble path of his virtuous ancestors. His wife's Trapta Devi was cultured, kind and of a devotional disposition.

The first child born to Shri Kaluchand and his wife was a daughter named Nanaki. On October 20th, 1469, when Nanaki was five years of age, their second child, a son, was born. The infant boy was of extraordinary brilliance and is said to have smiled at his birth, instead of crying. According to tradition a



pundit was called to cast a horoscope for the newborn. The pundit studied the horoscope and declared that this child was a great soul, and predicted that he would either be a great king or a great sage. The child was named Nanak.

Childhood of Guru Nanak

From his childhood, Nanak showed signs of great spiritual promise. Whenever his mother gave him something to eat, he always shared it with his sister Nanaki and his friends before he ate himself. If a sage, mendicant, or *fakir* would come to their door, Nanak always enjoyed giving money, clothes or food to them with great generosity.

At a very early age it was clear that Nanak's proclivity was toward the divine. Whenever he heard any religious discourse, he would become absorbed in devotion with great religious fervor. He enjoyed all thoughts of the divine, and always loved chanting and reciting God's name. If Nanak happened to meet a Muslim *fakir*, he would greet him by invoking the name of Allah, *Allah Hu Akbar*. When he would meet Hindu believers, he would greet them with the names of Lord Ram and Govind, the Hindu gods. He had great charm and spread joy to all he



met. This was by way of his highly affectionate disposition and pure nature.

When Nanak was five years of age he was sent to school. His teacher was Gopal Pandha. Nanak had a prodigious memory and quickly learned whatever he was taught. On one occasion, the teacher asked Nanak to write an explanation of the practical elements of life. In response he composed a poem and wrote the following on his writing board:

God has created the whole universe and He is the One who permeates it. Whosoever serves God, his life is worth living. Why, oh foolish mind, have you forgotten this?

The teacher was astounded when he read this piece of mystical and philosophical writing. However, he tried to dissuade Nanak by stating that his ideas were impractical.

The child Nanak replied:

Human beings do not achieve true happiness from wealth or political power. True happiness is only achieved with high morals and the development of the soul.

At the advice of this teacher, Nanak's father sent his son to study the *Vedas* and scriptures with a great scholar named Pundit Vrajnath. This pundit taught the hymns of various gods and goddesses from the *Vedic* scriptures. However, young Nanak



wrote poems about the unity of God and always talked about the One Almighty God, *Parabrahman*. The students of this Pundit usually took about five or six years to achieve proficiency with his teaching, but Nanak attained full command of this knowledge in just two year. Finally, the pundit told Guru Nanak's father, "Nanak is a fountain of spiritual knowledge and I have nothing left to instruct him. He asks deep philosophical questions about religion which can only be answered by an enlightened *yogi*."

When Nanak was ten years old, Jagirdar Raibular, a local property owner, became quite fond of him. He called Nanak's father to suggest that his son must be taught Arabic and Persian languages. He assured Nanak's father that knowledge of these languages would help the child to secure a profession of high status. At that time, India was under Mughal rule. The language of the courts was Persian, and Islamic literature was primarily written in Arabic, so fluency in these languages was essential. Therefore, Nanak was sent to the school of Mullah Kutubudeen. In just two years, Nanak attained full proficiency in these very difficult languages.

It is said that Guru Nanak acquired his knowledge of Sufism and Islam from a Sufi *dervish* (ascetic), Sayad Hassan. Nanak's writings reflect his deep understanding of the foundational



teachings of Islam as well as the philosophy and literature of the Vedic tradition, including the six systems of Indian Philosophy, *Upanishads*, *Yoga Sutra*, *Bhakti Sutra*, *Tantra* and *Hatha Yoga*.

The Youth of Guru Nanak

By the age of ten, Nanak began to emerge as a bridge-builder between various religious traditions. Sometimes he would visit mosques and pray with the faithful Muslims. At other times, he would visit the Hindu Temples and chant *bhajans* with the Hindus. Nanak's family felt that he was old enough to receive the sacred thread (*janeu*), which is the Hindu rite of spiritual manhood. Therefore, an appropriate and auspicious time was set for the ceremony. Initially, it was arranged that only the higher class friends and relatives would be invited to attend the ceremony. But Nanak insisted that Muslim *fakirs*, *sadhus* and many common poor people of a lower caste should also be invited to the ceremony. His father was persuaded by his son's arguments and invited his guests, even though some of the upper caste people were not pleased with the decision.

When all of the guests were assembled and preliminary rites had been performed, the family priest, pundit Hardyal, sat Nanak down for the ceremony of receiving the sacred thread. The



pundit said: “From today I am your *guru* and you are my disciple. You must first bow your head and pray to the *Shaligram* (Lord Vishnu worshipped in an abstract form—a sacred stone).” Without hesitation the youth replied: “Why should I bow down to this stone?” The pundit responded: “Because this is a qualified (manifested) form of Lord Vishnu.” The young Nanak picked up the *Shaligram* and said: “How could this stone be the qualified form of the infinite God? If this small stone can become a deity such as Vishnu and Brahma, then should we as well consider the large mountain as the qualified form of the Infinite God? Isn’t it true that the entire universe itself is the visible and manifest form of God? And isn’t it also the case that the light of that Infinite Divine Form and His energy are ever shining in each human being? Instead of praying to this stone wouldn’t it be better to recognize God in each human being and serve them?” When the pundit heard this he was speechless. Nanak’s father became apprehensive and asked the pundit: “Why are you arguing with this naive boy? I have no idea where has he acquired such knowledge that he makes everyone speechless with his astute arguments.”

The pundit resumed the sacred thread ceremony and chanted the sacred *Gayatri mantra* (a highly revered invocation) from the *Vedas* in the ear of Nanak and instructed him: “You must repeat



this *mantra* over and over.” The boy replied with respect: “If you are giving me this *mantra* and have become my guru, are you yourself, in fact, enlightened? Have you experienced the Absolute Knowledge? Have you achieved self realization by meditation with this *mantra*? What kind of spiritual transformation should I expect within myself if I take up the use of this *mantra* and wear the sacred thread?”

The pundit explained the significance of the sacred thread: “A *Kshatriya* established in his sacred duty (*dharma*) finds it necessary to wear this sacred thread. Without this you will not get the rights of the higher castes.” Nanak asked with patience: “Please provide me a thread which will never break.” The pundit replied: “What kind of sacred thread could that be? Have you seen such a thread?” Young Nanak said: “Yes I have seen it. I have prepared it and I have worn it as well. Now listen to how this type of thread is acquired.”

Then he sang:

Let Compassion (mercy) be the cotton for making this thread; contentment is the thread and is woven with the truth. This is the true sacred thread of human beings, O Pundit! It does not break or get soiled, neither does it burn. Nanak says those who wear this thread are blessed.



The wise youth subsequently refused to wear the thread presented to him by the pundit, causing a wave of concern among all. The outraged priests called it an abomination of Hindu *Dharma*. However, the pundit who had cast Nanak's horoscope at his birth had great faith and trust in him. He told the boy Nanak: "Oh child, *rishi* (seer), all your words are true. I have worn the sacred thread for many years. I have taught religious principles for years, but it has not been my good fortune to acquire self knowledge. Now please show me this path to inner knowledge and knowledge of the Self." Nanak, the great teacher albeit youthful, gave this pundit the teaching and blessed him. The priest then experienced the mystical light of Knowledge within.

Guru Nanak remained more and more immersed in thoughts of God, and gave little importance to the day to day duties of life. After repeated demands from his father, Nanak finally agreed to enter into a business. His father gave him money so he could purchase the merchandise he would need to establish a small business. A man named Bala who was skilled in commerce accompanied the young sage at his father's request. Bala and Nanak set out on their journey. On the way, they saw a group of holy men near a jungle. The compassionate Nanak sat near the holy men and engaged them in conversation. He discovered that



these men had gone days without eating and were terribly hungry. The kind heart of the sage melted and he immediately went out to buy food for all of the *sadhus* (holy men). He spent all of his money on food to feed these holy men, and when he returned home, he was empty handed.

When Nanak's father heard the entire story from Bala he became quite upset. Nanak defended himself by explaining that the commodities he had purchased were a "true bargain" and there was no business that could be better than this. As the father listened to Nanak he became increasingly irritated with the reasoning offered by his son, and his anger grew. Finally, unable to restrain himself, he flew into a rage and began hitting his son. Nearby, Nanak's sister Nanaki could not bear to see her brother treated this way, so she ran and touched the feet of her father, begging for his mercy. This caused the father to collect himself and calm down. But he had not fully calmed down. From his perspective, Nanak's indiscretion had caused his own plans of entangling his son in business and worldly affairs to crumble.

Jagirdar Raibular, the local land owner who had encouraged Nanak to learn the languages of the court, was sympathetic to Nanak. He arrived at the scene and rebuked Nanak's father. He also told Nanak's parents that if in the future Nanak should incur



any further losses on his father's account, he would personally reimburse any losses. Then he told Nanak, "Whatever charity or good works you want to do, please obtain the money from me."

After some time Raibular arranged for the marriage of Nanaki (sister of Nanak) with Jai Ram Palta, a courtier of the King Daulat Khan Lodhi. After the wedding Nanaki moved to her husband's home, as was the tradition. Now, Nanak had no one left at home who understood his inner emotions. He began to spend much of his time in solitude with his heart engulfed in the fire of love for God. Nanak's father became concerned about his son's indifferent attitude toward worldly affairs. He considered this behavior so peculiar that he suspected his son had some kind of health disorder, or even worse, some form of mental illness. Accordingly, he called for Haridas, an *Ayurvedic* doctor (*vaidya*), to cure Nanak. As the doctor began to look for his pulse, Nanak recited the following lines:

*My father has called a vaidya (physician) for me
The poor man he searches for a pulse in my arm
The naïve vaidya does not know the reason for the
pangs in my heart.*

The doctor (*vaidya*) declared his helplessness in diagnosing or curing the disease of Nanak whose illness was none other than his yearning and mad love for God.



Time passed. One day Nanak came across Mardana, a singer who was also a master in playing the *rabab*, a string instrument. Nanak was very impressed with his music. Inspired by Nanak's knowledge, Mardana decided to stay in the tutelage of Nanak. Nanak was then 16 years of age. At this time Nanak's family became seriously concerned about his mental state. Their greatest fear was that in this state he would forsake householder life and choose the life of an ascetic. Hoping to avert such a crisis they hurriedly betrothed him to Sulakshani, the daughter of Mulchand, a pious merchant and landlord. The wise Nanak, always in accord with the larger Divine plan, allowed for his marriage to take place. However, since he was opposed to rituals and baseless customs, his wedding ceremony was not performed according to *Vedic* rites, but instead, hymns and chants, praising God, were sung on this auspicious day.

Meditation Practice (*Sadhana*)

Nanaki's husband Jairam was the manager of the Modhikhana (stores) of Nawab Daulat Khan. When Nanak was persuaded by his family to take a job, Jairam invited him to Sultanpur to meet with the Nawab (the provincial governor of the Mughal Empire). The Nawab was a good man, and was very impressed by Nanak's honest demeanor. The Nawab was captivated by



Nanak's spiritual magnetism. The Nawab consulted with his brother-in-law Raibular and promptly offered Nanak a job as the manager of the storehouse of Daulat Khan Lodhi. As would be expected, Nanak was very dedicated and sincere as a manager. He always advised his employees to work with honesty. After a few months in this position Nanak purchased a house. His family as well as his close friends Bala and Mardana, were all able to live together in his house.

Each day before the break of dawn, Nanak went for a bath in the River Vei (Bein). After immersing himself in the water, he would absorb into the depths of meditation on the banks of the river. He would then return home and spend time chanting the praises and prayers of God. Only then would he go to work at the court. Once, when Nanak was weighing an order of wheat flour, he counted loudly "one, two, three..." until he reached the number thirteen. At this point he began repeating the word "tera." In the Punjabi language the word *tera* means both "thirteen" and "thine". Nanak was repeatedly calling out the word *tera*, meaning "Thine! Thine! Thine." This induced him to become rapt in thoughts of the Divine. Many times he was so overcome with the ecstasy of God that he gave much more wheat flour than was paid for. The customers did not understand his bountiful way.



Satsang was held every evening in Nanak's home for all of his followers and devotees. He would always offer his teaching to everyone who was present, Muslim and Hindu, lower caste and upper caste. All sat together without any feeling of favoritism.

Through his presence and discourses, Baba Nanak would dissipate the clouds of religious and social delusions embedded in the hearts of the people. He taught that the purity laws, the hierarchical superiority of the upper Hindu castes, as well as the communal sentiments of the Muslim clerics, were against the spirit of truth. He taught that these sentiments actually lead seekers away from God.

Not surprisingly, the teachings of Nanak threatened both Hindu priests and Muslim clerics. For them, religion was a business and Nanak was seizing their customers. Consequently, they complained to Devadatta, the Diwan (Minister of Commerce). This suited Devadatta as he himself secretly felt threatened by the honest conduct of Nanak. The Nawab had become so taken with Nanak that it was rumored that the Nawab might even appoint Nanak as the Diwan (Minister of Commerce). Nanak had thoroughly won the trust of the Nawab, the Muslim governor.



Devadatta discovered that Nanak was abundantly giving food out of the royal treasury to the poor and needy every day. He also found out about Nanak's habit of becoming rapt and overfilling grain orders. Devadatta went to the Nawab to present his case, and had complete confidence that he would destroy Nanak's reputation. As soon as he saw the Nawab, and not being a man of self control, Devadatta got right to the point and claimed that Nanak's reckless conduct would bring the treasury to bankruptcy. He reported what Nanak had been doing and accused Nanak of depleting the Nawab's resources to the point of emptying the treasury. He warned the Nawab that bankruptcy would put an end to business in the kingdom. The Nawab became alarmed and quite fearful. He appointed the accountant Jadorai and immediately ordered an inquiry. After examining the books carefully and in the greatest detail for five days, the accountant's report was presented to the Nawab. To his astonishment, it was revealed that the money in the treasury had actually increased rather than decreased as his Devadatta had alleged. Having had his integrity questioned, Nanak promptly and humbly gave his resignation to the Diwan. Nanak stated that it was not fitting for him to continue working where there was no respect for hard work. Further, he said he did not desire to associate with a place where deceit and immorality seemed to be condoned. The Nawab then realized the conspiracy and injustice



of the situation, and offered the position of Diwan (Minister of Commerce) to Nanak. He also sent his heartfelt apologies to Nanak, pleading with him to become the Diwan. Nanak respectfully declined, and so began his life's true work—the divine mission—of Guru Nanak.

The Divine Mission

The next day, Baba Nanak went to take his morning bath in the river. But, after his first dip in the waters he remained submerged and remained as such for three days. When people found out about this incident they became overwhelmed with great concern and confusion. The Nawab and Jairam (Nanak's brother-in-law) called out for the boatmen and ordered a search with nets in the river, but the search proved futile. Nanak's sister Nanaki, his wife Sulakshani, and his two little sons became flooded with grief.

But just as swiftly as Nanak had disappeared, after three days he suddenly emerged at the same place where he had entered the river. His face was gleaming with peace and radiance. News quickly spread of this miraculous event and people began to recognize Nanak for the great sage that he was. It is thought that during those two days he was immersed in the *Samadhi* of the



Infinite. The Nawab was exceedingly happy to hear of Nanak's miraculous return. Without hesitation he offered him the job of Prime Minister of the kingdom. The saint had no interest in worldly ties or power and replied, "I have accepted the service of my true master (God) and now taking on any other service is impossible."

When Nanak returned home he gave away most of his possessions to needy people. He became increasingly detached from worldly affairs, and began to spend a good deal of his time in meditation and *satsang*. On one occasion he was asked: "Are you a Hindu or a Muslim?" Nanak replied, "With respect to my body I am not different from Hindus or from Muslims, but the divine light which is unceasingly shining within me is neither Hindu nor Muslim."

One time on a Friday, the holy day of the Muslims, the Nawab and other Muslim courtiers were going to the mosque to do their routine prayers (*namaz*). A Muslim cleric said that if Nanak believed in only one God, *Allah*, then he should join them in prayer in the mosque. So Nanak went to the mosque with them and stood in the line of Muslim worshippers. During the prayer the worshippers bent down and put their heads on the ground to show their servitude to *Allah*, but Nanak stood in silence without



taking part in the *namaz*. After the prayers the Muslim cleric questioned Nanak: “We showed our respect to God. Why did you not partake in this with us?” Baba Nanak replied, “Your prayer cannot be accepted in heaven.” The clergy asked, “Why do you say this?” Nanak replied, “Your mouth indeed was murmuring the prayers, but your mind was intent on your mare which today has given birth to a colt. Your mind was filled with fear lest the newborn colt might fall in the well. Now, you tell me, how can this kind of prayer be accepted by God?” The cleric felt embarrassed and was mortified.

The Nawab, who was listening to the conversation, asked Nanak, “Tell me, will my prayer be accepted in the heavens?” Baba Nanak replied, “Your mind also was not in the prayer. You were anticipating the arrival of the horses that you have ordered from Kandahar. Your mind was distracted by concerns about buying and selling horses.” The Nawab responded with exasperation, declaring: “Nanak is a mystic, he is a prophet. But, this is my misfortune—that I had a minister like him but now he has become a *fakir*!” The Nawab implored with devoutness, “Dervish Nanak! Please bestow upon me that light with which you came to dissipate the darkness of the world. Please show me the right path and make me your disciple.” In his divine



compassion Nanak made him his *sikh* (disciple) and the Nawab benefited immensely.

One day Daulat Khan said to Baba Nanak, “I have heard that Khizar is a living mystic. I greatly desire to have *darshan* with him (be in his presence).” Baba Nanak said, “Go, sit in meditation.” Khan complained: “My mind does not focus in meditation.” Baba Nanak said, “As you meditate, continue focusing with great intent.” Khan accepted the advice of his preceptor and diligently obeyed. As the years went by Khan became so accomplished in meditation that Pir Khizar, the mystic, personally came and fell at his feet. Due to his progress in meditation, Khan is considered to be one of the more prominent disciples of Nanak.

During this time, Nanak visited his family. He saw his sister, his brother-in-law, his wife Sulakshani, and both of his sons, Shri Chand and Lakshmi Chand. He then left to live in the jungle across the River Vei, where he spent most of his time immersed in meditation. When people came to visit him, he taught them the True *dharma* (path). Many of the visitors achieved great peace in the new way Nanak was teaching. They began to call this Way *Gurumat* (the Teaching of the Guru). Whether Hindu, Muslim, Brahmin (Hindu priest), or Shudra (lower caste), all



were becoming his disciples. No matter what their social or religious background was they began to be known simply as the disciples of Nanak. Thus, Nanak shattered the walls of communal, cultural and social status which had always stood between Hindus and Muslims, and between higher castes and lower castes.

Historical Journey to Spread the Sikh Dharma

Through persistence in inner meditation Nanak realized the nature of *atman* (inner self) and had direct experience of the Infinite. He was, no longer just thought of as Nanak, but became Guru Nanak (spiritual preceptor). He perceived the great need to dispel the darkness of hatred, hypocrisy, and animosity which permeated the earth. The sage could see that this formidable task would be difficult to accomplish if he just stayed at his home. So he set out on a divine journey for the purpose of teaching the true *dharma*. Everywhere Guru Nanak went he taught the importance of good will and moral integrity, and also emphasized devotion to the formless, unborn, Infinite Being. He taught that liberation is attained only by worship of the formless God. His words rang with magic in the ears of listeners, and they came under the captivating influence of the great master.



The Four Famous Great Journeys of Guru Nanak Dev

1. On the first journey, Guru Nanak Dev visited Eminabad where he stayed with a poor and low caste carpenter, Lalo. He chose to stay with Lalo in order to demonstrate that the laws of purity of the high castes are nothing but remnants of superstition. Next, he traveled to Haridwar (the holy city of Hindus), Delhi, Benaras, and Gaya, teaching the essence of true *dharmā*. He concluded this first journey in Jagannath Puri, (temple). Jagannath is the foremost sacred pilgrimage place for Hindus. There he taught how to perform the true *arati* (ritual devotional song of dedication) of God (Kartar, the Creator), not a mere ritual.
2. On the second journey Nanak set out toward the south. He taught his way of devotion in Arbudgiri (Koh Abu), Setubandh Rameshvar, Singhal Dweep, and other prominent places in the South of India.
3. On his third journey Nanak visited Sarmaur, Hemkut, Gourakhpur, Sikkim, Bhutan and Tibet. On this journey his teaching focused on the way to meditate on one God.
4. The fourth journey was toward the west. Many stories are told about this portion of Nanak's travels. Nanak



reached Mecca, the holy city of the Muslims, via Blauchistan, where he questioned and condemned the Muslim custom of praying to the Almighty and All-pervasive God by facing only one direction. A story is told about Nanak's visit in Mecca. He lay down to sleep at night with his feet turned towards the *Kaaba* (the holy shrine of Islam). A Muslim priest kicked him and said, "It is sin to sleep with your feet towards the House of God!" Guru Nanak replied, "Turn my feet in the direction in which God is not." This so angered the *qazi* (Muslim priest) that he seized the Guru's feet and dragged them in the opposite direction. As the story is told, the priest was astounded to see that the *Kaaba* (the holy shrine) had turned around and followed the revolution of the Guru's body. Whatever direction the *qazi* moved Nanak's feet, the *Ka'ba* also moved in that direction. The priest soon realized that Nanak was not an ordinary being, but must be an omniscient sage. He sought his mercy and begged for forgiveness. Those who witnessed this miracle were mesmerized and saluted the *guru* as a supernatural being.

Guru Nanak traveled through Rume, Bagdad, and into Iran spreading his teaching of *Sat Nam* (One True



Reality). In Kabul and Kandahar he visited Hassan Abdal (now known as Punja Sahib). While in Kandahar an event transpired which shattered the pride of a Muslim *fakir* named Valikandhar.¹

Middle Years of Guru Nanak

After traveling for 25 years, teaching the glory of the True Name, Guru Nanak returned to Kartarpur and settled there. He himself had established this place. In the same year the mother and father of Guru Nanak passed away. While he was in Kartarpur, Guru Nanak engaged in meditation and *kirtan* (chanting of the Lord's name and praise). He also conducted his spiritual discourses. Whenever there was a visitor to the *ashram* (spiritual retreat center) of Guru Nanak, no one was allowed to leave hungry and all were fed.

During this period of time Guru Nanak found an apt disciple in Shri Angad. Guru Nanak decided that Guru Angad was qualified to be his successor and carry the torch of spiritual teaching. By appointing Shri Angad his successor and not his own son, Guru Nanak demonstrated that a person is not qualified for guruship by birth but by degree of knowledge and spiritual attainment.



The Evening of Life

On the 22nd of September in the year 1539 Guru Nanak was sitting under a tree in Kartarpur in his *ashram*. His face was radiant and peaceful and all his disciples were chanting spiritual hymns in devotion and great ecstasy. The sound of a special Sikh hymn called *Japaji* infused the whole *ashram*. At that time Guru Nanak drew a sheet over his body and began chanting. Reciting the glory of *Guru* he left this body and merged into the Divine forever.

After the shock of realizing what had transpired his followers began to consider the funeral arrangements. There was a considerable and heated debate between his disciples as to whether the rites should be Hindu or Muslim because all considered him to be their *guru* and master. It is said that after some time spent in this heated debate, the sheet covering Guru Nanak's body was lifted. To everyone's amazement Guru Nanak's material body had disappeared. The disciples were humbled, and they divided the sheet, giving one piece to the Muslim followers and one piece to the Hindu followers. The funeral rites were duly performed for the respective traditions using the sheet in place of the missing body of the great sage.



According to one legend, flowers were found under the sheet instead of his physical body.

***Shri Guru Granth Sahib*, the Holy Text of Sikhism**

By studying the childhood of the boy Nanak it becomes evident that Guru Nanak composed poetry prolifically. Most of his poems were composed while Guru Nanak was in the ecstasy of devotion. Even in his later life he spontaneously composed an abundance of poems and wrote some prose. All the words of Guru Nanak were first compiled by the fifth Guru Shri Arjan Dev. This sacred collection is known as the *Shri Guru Granth Sahib*. The most famous hymns of Guru Nanak are *Japji*, *Patti*, *Arti*, *Dakhni Omkar*, and *Siddha Goshth*.

The *Granth Sahib* is the holy text of the Sikhs. It was initially comprised of the *banis* (sacred words; chants) of the first five gurus of the Sikh tradition. Later, the tenth guru, Shri Guru Gobind Singh added the hymns of the ninth guru, Guru Teg Bahadur. In addition, the *Shri Guru Granth Sahib* includes the sayings and poems of Sheik Farid, Sant Kabir, Ravidas, Jaidev, and other prominent saints. The sacred words of the gurus also contain the essential teachings of the Hindu and Buddhist



traditions. The language of the *Shri Guru Granth Sahib* is Gurumukhi, which was standardized by Guru Angad Dev.

When studying the *Granth Sahib*, one feels well acquainted with the way of communal harmony and social unity. The celestial *banis* of the *Shri Guru Granth Sahib* are read and chanted daily in the Golden Temple in Amritsar, Punjab; in Sheeshganj and Bangla Sahib *gurudwaras* (the abode of Guru; temple) located in Delhi; and in hundreds of other Sikh temples in India and throughout the world.

Central Doctrines of Sikhism

Guru Nanak taught a monotheistic view of divinity instead of the polytheistic approach. Just as many other mystics and saints, he regarded God as One, without a second. He spoke of this One Divine Reality as Truth, Timeless, Omniscient, Indescribable and Mysterious. This Reality is, indeed, the object of worship and is brimming with Love. According to Guru Nanak, one is able to have knowledge of the divine only through the grace of a spiritual preceptor.



The Sikh gurus gave the following instructions to their followers:

- Maintain brotherly feeling for all human beings; further, always be eager to help others according to the available means and required needs, either with body, mind, and material wealth.
- Follow the path of truth; practice moral integrity and maintain a virtuous character.
- Be ready to serve and defend your country and tradition (*dharma*).
- Chant the name of God, give glory to the guru (*Vah guru*), and meditate on the True Name.

The last of the ten Gurus was Guru Gobind Singh. He gathered and united his followers and named the tradition *Khalsa Panth*, the 'Pure Path.' When he initiated his disciples, he required them to wear warrior clothing for defending *dharma* (religious traditions and political freedom), including cow, Brahmin, and saints. He instructed his disciples to remain prepared for any adverse situation and to always be vigilant. To this end Guru Gobind Singh prescribed five sacred symbols to his followers, which many Sikhs keep these even today. These five requirements also known as symbols of Sikh *Dharma* are the following:



1. **Kesh:** Uncut and unshaven hair. Keeping uncut hair had been the tradition of the ancient *rishis* and sages.
2. **Kangha:** A comb to clean and groom the hair.
3. **Kacha:** Long under shorts as a symbol of celibacy and energy.
4. **Kara:** A bracelet, symbolizing discipline and moral rectitude.
5. **Kripan:** A sword for protection of *dharma* and for self defense.

A close look at the basic teachings and doctrines of Sikhism reveals that it was greatly influenced by Indian *Vedantic* philosophy as well as the fundamental philosophy and mystical aspects of Islam. For this reason, Guru Nanak, the first of the ten Gurus of Sikhism, is himself considered an icon of Hindu-Muslim unity.

Teachings of the Sikh Tradition (*Dharma*)

These selections from *Shri Guru Granth Sahib* explicate the teachings of Sikh *Dharma*:

In the association of Sadhus and Saints is found the miraculous powers as well as knowledge and wisdom.

To recite the name of God and to perform pure deeds is the highest sacred duty of all.



Attachment to family and worldly affairs bears no fruit; therefore abandon these selfish attachments.

Due to ignorance the mind has become entangled in the worldly illusion (maya). Driven by illusion as well as greed it becomes increasingly bound by actions (karmas).

Illusion (maya) is like a venomous snake which has gripped the whole world. The most astonishing truth is that those who willingly serve the snake of illusion, in fact, are devoured by her (in the form of death).

If by the grace of God one finds the association of a Saint (satsang), then illusion (maya) cannot touch that person.

The human self (jivatman) and the Supreme Self (the divine) live together. In spite of living in the same house (the body), they do not meet each other. This is because there is a wall called the ego which separates the two.

Insects, fish, bumble bees, elephant and deer are each driven by one of the five sensory attachments—sight (insect), taste (fish), smell (bumble bee), touch (elephant) and sound (deer), which eventually lead all to death's door. [How much more, then, does this describe the condition of the human being who is attracted by all of the five senses?]

Truth can only live in a pure vessel [God's true form can only reside in a pure heart]; however there are very few who have such pure lives and who are free of lying, stealing, intoxicants, killing and adultery.



The mind is very attracted to sensory objects; even if many means are employed, the mind does not desist, as its nature is to love the senses. Mind is engrossed in duality and experiences many kinds of suffering. It gives much hardship to the inner self.

Conquer this mind and then meet the Divine. After meeting the Divine there will be no suffering left.

Oh mind, why are you so engrossed in the body and attached to the ego? Consider that this body is filled with foul smells and is most impure. Whatever things you may be delighted by in the body are all marked for destruction (at the time of death).

Meditate on the form of God, repeating the Divine name while keeping the holy feet of your spiritual preceptor fixed in your heart [surrender yourself in the feet of the Guru]. Show reverence to the preceptor as though he were the Lord himself.

Those who have performed the repetition of God's name live naturally within the will of God. Even the god of death and the god of time are slaves at their holy feet.

If you keep the form of your spiritual preceptor (God) in your heart then you will have all your desires fulfilled.

Oh wandering deranged mind, remain at the guru's feet and repeat the name of God, meditating on the holy Name. Only then the god of death (Yama) will be fearful of you, and suffering will also cease to exist.



As a wave of water becomes one with the ocean, in the same way the practitioner's atma (soul) merges with the great divine light. Guru Nanak says that the veil of ignorance of the practitioner lifts, and the soul is no longer trapped in the net of illusion (maya).

Those who are ignorant of the inner celestial sounds madly pursue the pleasures of this world. They waste their precious human life and squander their time chasing these pleasures. Guru Nanak says that only one inner sound, which is OmKar, is the nectar. The one who can find this sound (submerge in the ecstasy of the divine sound) is the guru's true disciple.

The Method of Meditation

The meditation technique of Guru Nanak clearly illustrates the way to seek the divine, while living in this world.

Guru Nanak Dev explains:

Just as the lotus born from the water cannot be drowned by the rising of the waters, but always stays above the water, in the same way we are born in this world and live in this world. We should live in this world just as the lotus does and rise above the world. The water of worldliness should not be able to drown us. As the sweet fragrance from the lotus permeates the air in all directions, so also we must attain knowledge and that knowledge and glory will spread through the world as the fragrance of the lotus.



Guru Nanak gave the knowledge of the divine in this essential doctrine when he says:

God is Omkar, which is the primal sound of the universe, as well as the True Name, the Creator, the Ancient One, without fear, without hatred, Timeless, and Birth less. One can only know God by the grace of the preceptor (guru).

He clearly stated that God is beyond human comprehension, beyond the realm of time and space, beyond birth and death, and that God transcends the senses. The question arises of how to discover this God.

Guru Nanak answers:

Everything is in the house (within the body) and whoever looks outside of the house for the answer is deluded.

Our house is the one in which our body lives, and our body is the house in which the soul lives. Therefore, in this bodily house we can find everything necessary to make the journey to God. Those who look for God outside the body are deluded. The outside is delusion and the inside is the Divine (*Brahma*).

Guru Nanak says:

To find the Divine it is not necessary to go to the forest, for God is always within. He resides in every being, yet is not attached, and is always with you. As the fragrance lives in the flower and the reflection lives in the mirror, in the same way the Divine



permeates our whole being. To find it, look within. God is both within and without and is everywhere. However, without knowing our true nature we cannot dissipate the filth of delusion which obscures our knowledge and ability to recognize the Divine.

As long as we are so deluded because of our ignorance we are unable to have direct knowledge of the Divine. Through the senses we recognize the body, but we cannot recognize the soul through these same senses. We declare that our physical possessions are ours, but even as we claim this we realize they are not really part of us. The truth is we are not the possessions. We are different from these things. Similarly, when we say ‘my hand’, ‘my eyes’, ‘my nose’, and so forth, do we mean that we are those bodily parts? Of course, we do not mean that. They all are ours and we are the owner. We then ask how we can recognize the divine soul. The answer lies in this illustration given by various saints: During deep sleep we are unable to have any knowledge of this physical body; however, after waking up we recall this body, our relations and possessions. In the same manner, until we are in the three states—awake, sleep, dreamless sleep—we are unable to directly perceive our inner self and the divine. The Saints tell us that there is yet a fourth state, called the *Turiya* state, which is above the others. In this state we can directly perceive our own nature and know the divine.



Guru Nanak Dev affirms:

When there is union between the soul and the Divine, all suffering is destroyed. This union occurs by the grace of God. Once the mind is in God, then death (Kal) cannot harm a person.

In order to have direct knowledge of the Divine, Guru Nanak teaches that it is necessary to have a path. Such a path is only found through association with a Saint or spiritual preceptor. Without this help it is not possible to have direct knowledge of the Divine.

Concerning this knowledge Guru Nanak proclaims:

Dear brothers, without the spiritual preceptor (guru,) knowledge and the means for attaining this knowledge cannot be obtained.

The means of knowledge, such as devotion, grace, the removal of ego, peace and freedom, cannot be achieved without a guru.

Further:

Without the guru there is no devotion, and there is no purification of the dirt of ego, declares Nanak after much contemplation. Let no one be mistaken and remain in delusion in this world. Therefore, I (Nanak) declare that without the grace and help of the guru no one can go beyond this cycle of birth and death.

Guru Arjun Dev also underlines the importance of a *Sadguru*:

The person who does not have initiation by a preceptor lives life as a dog, pig, ass, crow or snake.



A person must become a devotee of the divine, leaving all illusions behind.

Guru Nanak says:

That preceptor is worthy who unites the aspirant with the Divine.

Guru Nanak taught the people of this present Dark Age (the *Kali Yuga*) that the Divine has abhorrence for none. God sees the ill behaved actions of humans, and even then, he does not despise people. Therefore, humans should offer worship to the Divine in their hearts.

It is said in the *Granth Sahib*:

The guru is sat guru (the enlightened teacher). By meeting with him, the heart is filled with joy and bliss. The knot of ignorance is destroyed and the ultimate abode of God is obtained.

Those who find the true guru and the true path, who perform benevolent actions, who perform righteous (*dharma*) deeds, who live a moral life, will naturally have a good name in this world, and when they leave this body they will experience happiness and bliss in the other world. The glory of the guru is sung in the following verse:

Let there be luminosity of hundreds of moons, let there be brilliance of thousands of suns; in spite of such light but without the guru (the divine light of knowledge), there is nothing but darkness (in the heart of humans).²



In this cave (deep cavity) of the body there are unlimited treasures. No matter how much you can take of these treasures they will not be depleted. Not only this, the Divine resides in this body. The question is how to obtain this treasure. It is obtained through the grace of the guru. The ones who have attained the Divine within have fullness in their inner life as well as fullness in their outer life. Their lives are full of happiness and bliss.

By taking refuge in the preceptor all spiritual abundance can be achieved. Guru Nanak elaborates on the need of *satguru* on the path to liberation:

Without serving the Guru one cannot be successful in their spiritual efforts (yoga). And without taking a true preceptor one cannot achieve liberation (mukti). Without meeting the true preceptor (sat guru) one can not find the path of the True Name. Without meeting the true preceptor, one will continue to suffer (in the fire of ego and duality). Without meeting the preceptor one is filled with egoism. Without meeting the preceptor one's life is a failure.

In this poem Guru Nanak is speaking about the path. But we must notice what he is saying about the true path (*yoga*). Guru Nanak describes the true nature of *yoga* which unites the soul to the Divine:

*Yoga is not performed simply by wearing the robes and rags of a monk,
Neither by carrying a begging bowl and scepter.
Yoga is not performed by shaving the head,*



*Nor by being a recluse.
It is not performed by witty discourse.
Yoga is performed by focusing the attention between
the two eyebrows (the one-pointed focus; Driṣṭi yoga)
and by journeying within.*

Such aspirants focus their attention within and experience the inner light and inner divine sound. These are the true *yogis*.

Guru Nanak says:

*There is a rain of nectar in the heart; and the mind
drinks the sweet nectar of the celestial sounds. The
mind, intoxicated by the sweet nectar day and night,
remains in joy.*

In the inner realms of being, there is a shower of beautiful shimmering rays of light, and also the rain of divine nectar of divine sound. In these two forms is found the true divine elixir within. There has always been a talk of this nectar in the myths and legends, but no one has seen this nectar. What is this true elixir?

Guru Nanak says:

*Those who follow the true guide (guru) find the nectar in
the form of Divine Sound.*

Guru Nanak tells us that one must seek this inner light, this inner sound, and this nectar through the following technique:

*In each heart the Divine resides hidden; each heart is
permeated with divine light.*



By intense focus one is able to break the door open and reach the Realm of the Divine. By the grace of God the door shatters, and the mind becomes immersed in the sweet drizzle of divine sound.

By focusing on the divine sound (Shabda) the consciousness goes beyond the realm of death and rebirth.

While journeying within, the seeker at first experiences the *Anahat*, the divine vibrating sound, and then the *anāhat* sound, the transcendental un-struck sound which reverberates in the depth of the soul. This is also known as *Omkar*. Through *Omkar* the entire creation came into being.

The tenth Guru, Gobind Singh sings the praise of the divine sound:

OM is the sound of the beginning. Through this sound the whole world, the earth and the sky. came into existence.

It is said in the *Prana Sagali*:

The sound is the essential essence of the world. This (Shabda) sound reverberates in the heart of each person, proclaims Guru Nanak.

Those seekers who can experience this sound find that it takes them to the Divine Realm. In this way of meeting God, the inner self finds true peace. Therefore, aspirants should meditate on the words of the guru and should abandon the ego—this is the path



to liberation. This path is taught by the Gurus of the Sikh tradition.

¹On the top of a small hill, there lived a Muslim *fakir* called Vali Kandhari who was well-known in the area for possessing miraculous powers. Mardana needed water which could only be obtained from Vali. Mardana told Vali that Guru Nanak had arrived and he advised him to see the Guru, who was a great saint of God. Vali, who claimed holiness exclusively for himself, became offended on hearing the guru's praises. He refused to give water saying that if the Guru were such a holy man, he could provide water to Mardana. When this reply was communicated to the Guru, he sent Mardana back to the Vali with a message that he (the guru) was a poor creature of God, and laid no claims to be a saint. The Vali paid no heed to this protestation and still refused to provide water. Upon this the Guru picked up one stone and a stream of water immediately issued forth. In fact this water came out from the Vali's tank which then dried up. This naturally increased Vali's rage and it is said that through his miraculous powers he hurled a small hillock upon Guru Nanak's unoffending head. The Guru, on seeing the descending hillock, held up his right hand, and as it touched the hand of the Divine Master, the hillock came to a standstill. With the divine touch, the stone melted and softened like wax and left the mark of the Master's palm indelibly deep into it. Vali Kandhari was very much astonished and at last fell at the feet of the Guru and begged for forgiveness. The Guru exclaimed, "O friend, those who live so high, should not be hard at heart like a stone." Vali was blessed by the Master.

The imprint of the Guru's hand (*Punja*) is still visible on the stone and the pool of crystal clear water still flows from there. There stands a *Gurudwara* which is known as 'Punja Sahib'. It is now situated in West Pakistan.

<http://members.dancris.com/~sikh/chap03.html>, accessed on August 28/05]

² The word *guru* literally means dispeller of darkness.

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