

SIKH ETHICAL TEACHINGS

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ABSTRACT

In this essay mention is made of some of the traditional areas of Sikh ethical concern but attention is focused more on modern issues. It is my contention that religions and spiritual movements came into existence to remind human beings of an eternal dimension that was the goal of life, it may be called liberation or salvation, and of ethical concerns that should be the principles directing and controlling their lives during their earthly existence. In this twenty first century of the Common Era Gurdwaras, churches, mandirs, mosques, and other places of worship witness daily to spirituality but the communities that participate in worship often fail to address themselves to the pressing global ethical issues of our times. Can we extrapolate from the teachings of the Aad Guru Granth Sahib, Qur'an, or Bible, how God would have us live today? If we cannot are the scriptures that inspired our ancestors dead letters, if we can discover a living message for today, we should proclaim it for our children need it. We are living in challenging times, as never before: it is my hope that readers will use the pages of this journal to join in a discussion of modern ethical issues for the benefit of Sikhs and members of other faiths.

INTRODUCTION

Sikhism is a profoundly ethical religion. The Gurus had no place for forms of spirituality, which emphasized enlightenment and liberation (*mukti*), without social responsibility. This is why they could be so severe on those who practised austerity in their personal quest but did not give alms or serve others. The path they trod was one of selfishness and they themselves were filled with *haumai* (self - centeredness). To be a disciple of the Guru one had to be *Gurmukh* (one whose face is turned towards God). Bhai Gurdas described such a person as one from whom God, the Guru, 'eradicates his lust, anger and resistance and has his greed, infatuation and ego erased. (The five cardinal evils, according to Sikh teaching are, *kam* (lust), *lobh* (covetousness), *moh* (attachment), *krodh* (wrath), and *ahankar* (pride). Instead the Guru makes him practise truth, contentment, kindness, dharma, which is (*Nam*), charity (*Dan*), and ablution (*Ishnan*).

Adopting the teachings of the Guru, the individual is called a Sikh.' A century earlier Guru Nanak had warned against the corrosiveness of lust and anger:

ਕਾਮੁ ਕ੍ਰੋਧੁ ਕਾਇਆ ਕਉ ਗਾਲੈ ॥

ਜਿਉ ਕੰਚਨ ਸੋਹਗਾ ਢਾਲੈ ॥

AGGS, M 1, p 932 [1].

As borax melts gold, so lust and anger consume the body.

More comprehensively, he warns against the destructive fires that can be doused through the practice of *Nam Simran*:

ਜੀਅਰੇ ਰਾਮ ਜਪਤ ਮਨੁ ਮਾਨੁ ॥

ਅੰਤਰਿ ਲਾਗੀ ਜਲਿ ਬੁਝੀ ਪਾਇਆ ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਗਿਆਨੁ ॥੧॥

AGGS, M 1, p 21.

Extinguish the four fires of cruelty, greed, anger, and

Author's Note: *This article has been prompted by Dr Jodh Singh's article 'Ethics of the Sikhs' [5]. A more detailed account of Sikh Ethics is to be found in chapter nine of my book [3]. It is my hope that readers will use the pages of this research journal, Understanding Sikhism, to join in a discussion of modern ethical issues for the benefit of Sikhs and members of other faiths. Caste, ritual purity and pollution, and the place of women, are not discussed in this article, not because they are unimportant or irrelevant to the life of the Panth in the twenty first century, but because they are covered in the Aad Guru Granth Sahib [1] and I want to concentrate on modern issues, those which should be concerning us all globally. Too often, in my experience, they are matters on which we turn our backs and offer no answers. If people of faith ignore them we may be left with governments influenced only by expediency, and congregations and members of most or all religions who have to grope in the dark, lacking guidance themselves and being unable to offer help to the next generation.*

lust, in the water of Nam, which is obtained by the Guru.

As we frequently encounter reference to condemned evils is accompanied by the Guru-proclaimed remedy, Nam.

The basis of Sikh teaching lies in the oneness of God and humanity. Theology has an intensely practical purpose, the spiritual release of the soul from rebirth. In a discourse with a group of yogis it is clear that Guru Nanak was intent on bringing his adversaries to accept his teaching on liberation rather than enter into a philosophical debate, which might have obscured his message with sophistry.

Sikhism takes the world seriously. In it one finds God, or more precisely, one is found by God. Guru Nanak did not point his followers towards material success, but to responding to the material world seriously, that is altruistically. He taught:

ਘਾਲਿ ਖਾਇ ਕਿਛੁ ਹਥਹੁ ਦੇਇ ॥ ਨਾਨਕ ਰਾਹੁ ਪਛਾਣਹਿ ਸੋਇ ॥੧॥

AGGS, M 1, p 1245.

They alone have found the right way, who earn through toil and share their earnings with others.

The consequences of such living could extend beyond this present life:

ਨਾਨਕ ਅਗੈ ਸੋ ਮਿਲੈ ਜਿ ਖਟੇ ਘਾਲੇ ਦੇਇ ॥੨॥

AGGS, M 1, p 472.

One receives hereafter only what one gives here out of honest earnings.

An interesting and touching statement says:

ਜੈਸੇ ਗੋਇਲਿ ਗੋਇਲੀ ਤੈਸੇ ਸੰਸਾਰਾ ॥

ਕੂੜੁ ਕਮਾਵਹਿ ਆਦਮੀ ਬਾਂਧਹਿ ਘਰ ਬਾਰਾ ॥੧॥

AGGS, M 1, p 418.

As the herdsman is to the pasture for a short time so is the mortal in the world.

The Indian husbandman works hard, probably caring for animals, which belong to someone else. Similarly human beings should be devoted servants of God, but they are mistaken if they think that they have any permanence here.

SIKH TEACHINGS

i) Vegetarianism

The avoidance of meat and other blood products, and blood itself, whether it be from a carcass or a menstruating woman, is related to the issue of purity and pollution. In the Panth vegetarianism may be regarded as having an ethical dimension. Khalsa members are forbidden to eat animals slaughtered in

the Muslim manner, (*Sikh Rehit Maryada*, p.38) [7]. Khalsa members may eat only *jatka* meat that is meat from an animal, which has been killed with one blow of a knife or similar implement. Many Sikhs are vegetarian but the reason for this might be family tradition. In Gurdwaras *langar* is invariably a vegetarian meal so that no one may be offended. This is a significant feature of the religion. Whereas in some traditions non-members are excluded from certain religious meals, in Sikhism, on the contrary, these are open to everyone. Such people as high caste Hindus may refuse to eat alongside someone of a lower caste or partake of food prepared and served by such Sikhs but it is they who exclude themselves, not the *sangat*. This is, however, very rare in the Diaspora.

According to the *janam sakhis* (biographies) Guru Nanak ate venison on at least one occasion. The Bala - based *janam sakhis* describe him as eating goat. In verses on pages 1289 and 1290 of the Aad Guru Granth Sahib he addresses the issue as follows:

ਮਾਸੁ ਮਾਸੁ ਕਰਿ ਮੂਰਖੁ ਝਗੜੇ ਗਿਆਨੁ ਧਿਆਨੁ ਨਹੀ ਜਾਣੈ ॥

AGGS, M 1, p 1289.

Fools quarrel over flesh, and know neither God nor meditation.

Here we may perceive his reason for raising the issue. There were those in the Hindu community who avoided meat eating because of their ideas of pollution. Muslims would avoid the pig because of the teachings of the Qu'ran and they too associated it with pollution. Guru Nanak had no time for such disputations and actions, any more than he had regarding burial or cremation. It was so easy to quibble over such matters and fail to realise what he considered to be most important - becoming *brahmngiani* or Gurmukh that is one who has direct experience of God. He does not let his case rest there, however. A little further on he speaks in a way, which might shock some of his listeners:

ਮਾਤ ਪਿਤਾ ਕੀ ਰਕਤੁ ਨਿਪੰਨੇ ਮਛੀ ਮਾਸੁ ਨ ਖਾਂਗੀ ॥

ਇਸਤ੍ਰੀ ਪੁਰਖੈ ਜਾਂ ਨਿਸਿ ਮੇਲਾ ਓਥੈ ਮੰਧੁ ਕਮਾਰੀ ॥

ਮਾਸਹੁ ਨਿੰਮੇ ਮਾਸਹੁ ਜੰਮੇ ਹਮ ਮਾਸੈ ਕੇ ਭਾਂਡੇ ॥

ਗਿਆਨੁ ਧਿਆਨੁ ਕਛੁ ਸੂਝੈ ਨਾਹੀ ਚਤੁਰੁ ਕਹਾਵੈ ਪਾਂਡੇ ॥

ਬਾਹਰ ਕਾ ਮਾਸੁ ਮੰਦਾ ਸੁਆਮੀ ਘਰ ਕਾ ਮਾਸੁ ਚੰਗੇਰਾ ॥

ਜੀਅ ਜੰਤ ਸਭਿ ਮਾਸਹੁ ਹੋਏ ਜੀਇ ਲਇਆ ਵਾਸੇਰਾ ॥੩॥

ਅਭਖੁ ਭਖਹਿ ਭਖੁ ਤਜਿ ਛੋਡਹਿ ਅੰਧੁ ਗੁਰੂ ਜਿਨ ਕੇਰਾ ॥

ਮਾਸਹੁ ਨਿੰਮੇ ਮਾਸਹੁ ਜੰਮੇ ਹਮ ਮਾਸੈ ਕੇ ਭਾਂਡੇ ॥

ਗਿਆਨੁ ਧਿਆਨੁ ਕਛੁ ਸੂਝੈ ਨਾਹੀ ਚਤੁਰੁ ਕਹਾਵੈ ਪਾਂਡੇ ॥

AGGS, M 1, p 1290

They are produced from the blood of their mother and father, yet they do not eat fish or flesh. When a man and a woman meet at night they co-habit with flesh. From flesh

we are conceived, from flesh we are born, we are vessels of flesh. All creatures have sprung from flesh and the soul has taken its abode in flesh.

He continues:

ਮਾਸੁ ਪੁਰਾਣੀ ਮਾਸੁ ਕਤੇਬੀ ਚਹੁ ਜੁਗਿ ਮਾਸੁ ਕਮਾਣਾ ॥
ਜਜਿ ਕਾਜਿ ਵੀਆਹਿ ਸੁਹਾਵੈ ਓਥੈ ਮਾਸੁ ਸਮਾਣਾ ॥
ਇਸਤ੍ਰੀ ਪੁਰਖ ਨਿਪਜਹਿ ਮਾਸਹੁ ਪਾਤਿਸਾਹ ਸੁਲਤਾਨਾਂ ॥
AGGS, M 1, p 1290.

Flesh is allowed in the Puranas, flesh is allowed in the Muslim scriptures, and flesh has been used in the four ages (kalpas, or periods of history since the creation). Flesh adorns sacred festivals and marriage functions, and flesh is associated with them. Men, women, kings and emperors spring from flesh.

An explanation for Guru Nanak's rejection of vegetarianism may lie in his hostility to notions of ritual pollution. What was simpler than accepting a meat meal to demonstrate this?

Since his time meat eating has been a matter of personal or family preference. No one would eat beef, the cow being a sacred animal to Hindus, the majority community. Occasionally, in times of active sectarian hostility Muslims have slaughtered cows and thrown their carcasses into temples, just as dead pigs may be used to desecrate mosques, but the cow is usually respected even by groups who do not share beliefs about its sanctity. Namdhari Sikhs believe in a living Guru who has been president of the World Vegetarian Association. All his followers are vegetarian.

ii) Drugs

God's light (*jot*) has been placed within human beings. Therefore the body must be treated with respect.

This is taken as far as the rejection of circumcision, and, by many Sikhs, the refusal to cut the hair, including body hair. Not surprisingly then, the Khalsa Code of Conduct, forbids the use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs, except for medicinal purposes. Some members of the Panth, who have not been initiated into the Khalsa, do drink alcohol.

Guru Nanak made a few references to drug taking. He told his disciples that those who deal in the Nectar of Truth have no need of alcohol:

ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤ ਕਾ ਵਾਪਾਰੀ ਹੋਵੈ ਕਿਆ ਮਦਿ ਛੂਛੈ ਭਾਉ ਧਰੇ ॥੨॥
AGGS, M 1, p 360.

Compared with God's Amrit, worldly wines were tasteless.

His companion, Mardana, saw a correlation between

alcohol and immorality:

ਕਲਿ ਕਲਵਾਲੀ ਕਾਮੁ ਮਦੁ ਮਨੂਆ ਪੀਵਣਹਾਰੁ ॥
ਕ੍ਰੋਧ ਕਟੋਰੀ ਮੋਹਿ ਭਰੀ ਪੀਲਾਵਾ ਅਹੰਕਾਰੁ ॥
ਮਜਲਸ ਕੂੜੇ ਲਬ ਕੀ ਪੀ ਪੀ ਹੋਇ ਖੁਆਰੁ ॥

AGGS, M 1*, p 553.

Wine causes mortals to commit vice.

(***Editorial Note:** * Guru Nanak is addressing Mardana. But some theologians think that this Sabd is by Mardana.)

iii) The Sikh Householder

Guru Nanak utterly rejected the varnashramadharm ideal. For him there was one *varna*, humanity, which included women and men; there was one *ashrama*, the householder stage of life; there was one *dharma*, obligatory upon everyone, the worship of God and the service of humanity. A passage in **disapproval of** renunciators, wandering mendicants, yogis, men of learning, ascetics and celibates, all of whom are destined to wander in transmigration, has these words of commendation for the devout family person:

ਪੰਡਿਤ ਪਾਧੇ ਜੋਇਸੀ ਨਿਤ ਪੜ੍ਹਹਿ ਪੁਰਾਣਾ ॥
ਅੰਤਰਿ ਵਸਤੁ ਨ ਜਾਣਨੀ ਘਟਿ ਬ੍ਰਹਮੁ ਲੁਕਾਣਾ ॥੪॥
ਇਕਿ ਤਪਸੀ ਬਨ ਮਹਿ ਤਪੁ ਕਰਹਿ ਨਿਤ ਤੀਰਥ ਵਾਸਾ ॥
ਆਪੁ ਨ ਚੀਨਹਿ ਤਾਮਸੀ ਕਾਹੇ ਭਏ ਉਦਾਸਾ ॥੫॥
ਇਕਿ ਬਿੰਦੁ ਜਤਨ ਕਰਿ ਰਾਖਦੇ ਸੇ ਜਤੀ ਕਹਾਵਹਿ ॥
ਬਿਨੁ ਗੁਰ ਸਬਦ ਨ ਛੂਟਹੀ ਭ੍ਰਮਿ ਆਵਹਿ ਜਾਵਹਿ ॥੬॥
ਇਕਿ ਗਿਰਗੀ ਸੇਵਕ ਸਾਧਿਕਾ ਗੁਰਮਤੀ ਲਾਗੇ ॥
ਨਾਮੁ ਦਾਨੁ ਇਸਨਾਨੁ ਦ੍ਰਿੜੁ ਹਰਿ ਭਗਤਿ ਸੁ ਜਾਗੇ ॥੭॥
ਗੁਰ ਤੇ ਦਰੁ ਘਰੁ ਜਾਣੀਐ ਸੇ ਜਾਇ ਸਿਵਾਣੈ ॥
ਨਾਨਕ ਨਾਮੁ ਨ ਵੀਸਰੈ ਸਾਚੇ ਮਨੁ ਮਾਨੈ ॥੮॥੧੪॥

AGGS, M 1, p 419.

Pandits, teachers and astrologers are forever reading the Puranas, They do not know that which is within.

Brahman is contained in the heart. Penitents perform austerities in the forest and some even live at pilgrimage places, unenlightened they do not understand themselves. For what purpose have they become ascetics? Some by effort succeed in restraining their semen. They are called celibates. After truth, and are attached to the Guru's teaching. They hold fast to Nam, Dan and Ishnan, and remain awake in God's meditation.

In supporting the householder way of life, that of a husband and wife, their children and other members of the extended family, it might be argued that the Guru was making a virtue of necessity; that most of his audience, if not all, had no alternative but to toil to live, and to eke out a poor existence at that. He was,

however, doing more than face an unpleasant reality; he was affirming that the householder, (*gristhi/grihasta*) life is ordained by God. It makes for social unity and coherence; it should, as the Guru envisaged it, find a place of equal status for man and woman, husband and wife.

It may be true also of other Indian originating religious tradition but it is certainly part of the Sikh way of life that young people should marry. One has frequently spoken with Sikh students about what they intend to do after graduation, to be told by almost all of them that their parents are looking for a suitable match.

An unemployed, highly qualified Sikh divorcee was asked whether she might contemplate going back to India where she would easily have obtained a chair in her chosen discipline. She replied, 'Not until I'm too old for my parents to look for another husband for me'. Obviously there are Sikhs who never marry but the ideal norm is that partners should be found for women and men. Against the tendency to renounce the world Guru Nanak taught:

ਹਾਟੀ ਬਾਟੀ ਨੀਦ ਨ ਆਵੈ, ਪਰ ਘਰਿ ਚਿਤੁ ਨ ਡੋਲਾਈ ॥
ਬਿਨੁ ਨਾਵੈ ਮਨੁ ਟੇਕ ਨ ਟਿਕਈ, ਨਾਨਕ ਭੂਖ ਨ ਜਾਈ ॥
ਹਾਟੁ ਪਟਣੁ ਘਰੁ ਗੁਰੁ ਦਿਖਾਇਆ, ਸਹਜੇ ਸਚੁ ਵਾਪਾਰੋ ॥
ਖੰਡਿਤ ਨਿਦਾ ਅਲਪ ਅਹਾਰੰ, ਨਾਨਕ ਤਤੁ ਬੀਚਾਰੋ ॥੮॥

AGGS, M 1, p 939.

Remain in towns and near the main high roads, but be alert. Do not covet your neighbour's possessions.

Without Nam we cannot attain inner peace or still our inner hunger. The Guru has shown me that the real life of the city, the real life of its shops, is the inner life. We must be traders in truth, moderate in our eating and sleeping. That is true yoga.

As the above passage states, there is such a thing as householder ethics - moderation in all things is how it might be expressed. The overemphasis on material possessions will only lead to the neglect of Nam. Elsewhere he amplifies what it means to live the *gristhi* life:

ਸੋ ਗਿਰਹੀ ਜੋ ਨਿਗੁਰੁ ਕਰੈ ॥
ਜਪੁ ਤਪੁ ਸੰਜਮੁ ਭੀਖਿਆ ਕਰੈ ॥
ਪੁੰਨ ਦਾਨ ਕਾ ਕਰੈ ਸਰੀਰੁ ॥
ਸੋ ਗਿਰਹੀ ਗੰਗਾ ਕਾ ਨੀਰੁ ॥
ਬੋਲੈ ਈਸਰੁ ਸਤਿ ਸਰੂਪੁ ॥
ਪਰਮ ਤੰਤ ਮਹਿ ਰੇਖ ਨ ਰੂਪੁ ॥੨॥

AGGS, M 1, p 952.

He only is a householder who checks his passions and begs from God meditation, hard work, and selfrestraint. The householder who with his body, gives all he can to the poor, is a pure as the river Ganges.

Guru Nanak did not define what were acceptable occupations for Sikhs to follow; most would seem to have been workers of the land or Khatri businessmen. There were, however, also craftsmen in metal, cloth makers, and carpenters. One way of making a living, which is considered a legitimate practice among some castes seems to be rejected from Guru Nanak's day, is that of begging. Guru Nanak had nothing but scorn for the yogi beggars:

ਘਰਿ ਘਰਿ ਮਾਗਤ ਲਾਜ ਨ ਲਾਗੈ ॥੧॥

AGGS, M 1, p 903.

O yogi! You feel no shame in begging from door to door.

The work ethic is a strong aspect of the religion and seems to be endorsed by the passages quoted above.

The householder life did not, in itself, ensure spiritual liberation. Guru Nanak gave this warning:

ਬੰਧਨ ਮਾਤ ਪਿਤਾ ਸੰਸਾਰਿ ॥ ਬੰਧਨ ਸੁਤ ਕੰਨਿਆ ਅਰੁ ਨਾਰਿ ॥੨॥
ਬੰਧਨ ਕਰਮ ਧਰਮ ਹਉ ਕੀਆ ॥ ਬੰਧਨ ਪੁਤੁ ਕਲਤੁ ਮਨਿ ਬੀਆ ॥੩॥
ਬੰਧਨ ਕਿਰਖੀ ਕਰਹਿ ਕਿਰਸਾਨ ॥ ਹਉਮੈ ਡੰਨੁ ਸਰੈ ਰਾਜਾ ਮੰਗੈ ਦਾਨ ॥੪॥
ਬੰਧਨ ਸਉਦਾ ਅਣਵੀਚਾਰੀ ॥ ਤਿਪਤਿ ਨਾਹੀ ਮਾਇਆ ਮੋਹ ਪਸਾਰੀ ॥੫॥
ਬੰਧਨ ਸਾਹ ਸੰਚਹਿ ਧਨੁ ਜਾਇ ॥ ਬਿਨੁ ਹਰਿ ਭਗਤਿ ਨ ਪਵਈ ਥਾਇ ॥੬॥
ਬੰਧਨ ਬੇਦੁ ਬਾਦੁ ਅਹੰਕਾਰ ॥ ਬੰਧਨਿ ਬਿਨਸੈ ਮੋਹ ਵਿਕਾਰ ॥੭॥
ਨਾਨਕ ਰਾਮ ਨਾਮ ਸਰਣਾਈ ॥ ਸਤਿਗੁਰਿ ਰਾਖੇ ਬੰਧੁ ਨ ਪਾਈ ॥

AGGS, M 1, p 416.

Entanglements are mother, father, and the world. Entanglements are sons, daughters and wife.

Entanglements are religious ceremonies performed through pride. Entanglements are sons, wife, and another's

love in the mind.', and so the list continues to include worldly love and the wealth which bankers amass, and the Vedas and religious discussions.

Finally, Guru Nanak says: "He whom the True Guru saves is free from entanglements."

While it seems clear that the way of life, which is favoured, is that of the householder, it is a means to an end rather than the final goal. It is all too easy for the daily concerns of family members to lead to the neglect of *Nam Simran, Dan, and Ishnan*. This, presumably, is why begging is unacceptable. The Buddhist mendicant may be providing an opportunity for the layperson to perform a good deed, but normally begging is an act of self-centredness.

iv) Sewa (Service) and Langar (Eating without any Social or Religious Discrimination)

Sikhism endorses and teaches a way of life committed to the service of one's fellow human beings. This might be said to be characteristic of many inhabitants of the subcontinent but it is built into the way of life of Sikhs and, in the author's experience, is unhesitatingly and unstintingly given. Besides being an individual response to the Gurus' teachings, it takes on a corporate aspect in the form of *sewa* and *langar*.

Sewa. The teaching that God's light is in everyone was implemented in a practical way by *sewa* and the institution of *langar*. *Sewa* is service directed to the whole of humanity. To care for one's own family or other Sikhs was not enough. As God's provision had no bounds so *sewa* should be unlimited. The Gurus asserted:

ਜੇਤੇ ਜੀਅ ਤੇਤੇ ਸਭਿ ਤੇਰੇ ਵਿਣੁ ਸੇਵਾ ਫਲੁ ਕਿਸੈ ਨਾਹੀ ॥

AGGS, M 1, p 354.

All living beings are your creatures; none can obtain any reward without rendering service (sewa).

Sewa was not a mere act of temporal concern. It had eternal significance:

ਵਿਚਿ ਦੁਨੀਆ ਸੇਵ ਕਮਾਈਐ ॥ ਤਾ ਦਰਗਹ ਬੈਸਣੁ ਪਾਈਐ ॥

ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਬਾਹ ਲੁਭਾਈਐ ॥੪॥੩੩॥

AGGS, M 1, p 26.

If we want a seat in God's court we should dedicate ourselves to the service of people in this world.

ਫਲੁ ਤੇਵੇਹੋ ਪਾਈਐ ਜੇਵੇਹੀ ਕਾਰ ਕਮਾਈਐ ॥

AGGS, M 1, p 468.

We shall be rewarded according to the deeds we perform.

This is considered to have the same meaning. The phrase 'Nam, Dan, Ishnan' was a persistent reminder of the responsibility to serve others, to perform 'Dan'. It may be worth repeating a verse quoted earlier after all *sewa* is one of the most important and cherished characteristics of the Sikh faith:

ਘਾਲਿ ਖਾਇ ਕਿਛੁ ਹਥਹੁ ਦੇਇ ॥ ਨਾਨਕ ਰਾਹੁ ਪਛਾਣਹਿ ਸੇਇ ॥੧॥

AGGS, M 1, p 1245.

One who eats what has been earned through honest labour and from the hand gives some in charity, alone knows the true way of life.

Sewa, however, has never been putting money in a

collection box, though that Sikhs do, it should be something practical which involves women, men, and children, in acts of service. In the Guru's day not many Sikhs may have had money to donate to good causes, but he realised that it is in doing that awareness of the unity of humanity is achieved. Attached to many Gurdwaras are dispensaries or even hospitals, and eye clinics where people give their services free. Specialist surgeons give time to perform operations. Other Sikhs will cook or clean. It is often in *langar* that children begin the practice of *sewa*.

The most famous example of *sewa* is Bhai Khanayah, (his name is spelled in various ways), who lived in the time of Guru Gobind Singh. He cared for wounded men on the battlefield by giving them water whether they were Sikhs or Mughals. He was taken to the Guru and charged with helping the enemy. He denied this and claimed that he saw God in everyone. The Guru, greatly moved, commended him and encouraged him not only to give water to the needy but also dress their wounds. From his work developed a movement of *sewapanthis* that still exists.

Langar, or *Guru ka langar*, is a term found in the Guru's writings and there is a reference to Mata Khivi serving *langar* (AGGS, Bhatt, p 967). It has been suggested that its origin may lie in Sufi Islam but to defend the uniqueness of the founder, the Sikhs often dispute and reject the suggestion. The concept is fundamental to his teaching and may be seen as the corollary of *sewa*. 'Langar' means 'eating together without discrimination', or 'free kitchen', and that is a place where anyone may come to be fed. It fits in perfectly with the first Guru's teachings on *sewa*.

Today, and the tradition the practice is based on goes back a long way, *langar* is characterised by three things: *pangat*, eating in lines sitting on the ground, facing one another; a vegetarian meal so that no one need feel threatened by the diet provided, and the donation of food by members of the *sangat* (Congregation).

Responsibility for *langar*, some giving food, others preparing and cooking it, while others serve and wash up - or, where it is served on leaf plates, clear away the debris is the point where *langar* and *sewa* converge. This combination may be hinted at in *pauri* 19 of the twenty seventh Var by Bhai Gurdas:

The Sikh of the Guru, falling at his feet, forswears ego and the desires of the mind. He fetches water, fans the congregation, grinds flour and does all manual jobs. He cleanses and spreads the sheets while putting fire in the

hearth. He adopts contentment as a dead person does. He gets fruit by living near the Guru as the silk-cotton tree does by being near the sandal wood tree. Sikhs loving the Guru make their wisdom complete.’

(A recent translator and commentator on the writings of Bhai Gurdas follow the phrase ‘grinds flour’ with a parenthesis ‘for langar’. The silk-cotton tree growing near a sandal wood tree imbibes the tree’s fragrance.)

Social Justice: The image, which many outsiders have of Sikhs, is one of military prowess or militancy. This is not the place to discuss the battles fought by Guru Gobind Singh or the eighteen-century struggle for survival, which resulted in the empire of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Even less should we comment on the troubles of the nineteen eighties which have so influenced the Sikh psyche. What, however, must be said is that social justice has always been important. The *B40 Janam Sakhi* suggests that Guru Nanak witnessed the sacking of Saidpur by the armies of Babur and contains the story of a meeting with the emperor [4, p-70]. A Gurdwara near the city of Eminabad, which stands on the site of the old town, commemorates the place where Guru and conqueror met [4]. Whatever one’s view of the historicity of the meeting, the Aad Guru Granth Sahib does contain material known as the Babur Bani, (pages 417 – 418 of AGGS). In these verses a terrible portrait is painted, of women being raped by soldiers who did not bother to discriminate between Hindus and Muslims who were in their path:

ਇਕਨਾ ਵਖਤ ਖੁਆਈਅਹਿ ਇਕਨਾ ਪੂਜਾ ਜਾਇ ॥

AGGS, M 1, p 417.

Some lost their five times of prayer, some the time of puja.

The Babur Bani has to do with the fate of the sufferers being determined by God:

ਕੋਟੀ ਹੂ ਪੀਰ ਵਰਜਿ ਰਹਾਏ ਜਾ ਮੀਰੁ ਸੁਣਿਆ ਧਾਇਆ ॥

ਥਾਨ ਮੁਕਾਮ ਜਲੇ ਬਿਜ ਮੰਦਰ ਮੁਛਿ ਮੁਛਿ ਕੁਇਰ ਰੁਲਾਇਆ ॥

ਕੋਈ ਮੁਗਲੁ ਨ ਹੋਆ ਅੰਧਾ ਕਿਨੈ ਨ ਪਰਚਾ ਲਾਇਆ ॥੪॥

ਮੁਗਲ ਪਠਾਣਾ ਭਈ ਲੜਾਈ ਰਣ ਮਹਿ ਤੇਗ ਵਗਾਈ ॥

ਓਨੀ ਤੁਪਕ ਤਾਣਿ ਚਲਾਈ ਓਨੀ ਹਸਤਿ ਚਿੜਾਈ ॥

ਜਿਨ੍ ਕੀ ਚੀਰੀ ਦਰਗਹ ਪਾਟੀ ਤਿਨ੍ ਮਰਣਾ ਭਾਈ ॥੫॥

ਇਕ ਹਿੰਦਵਾਣੀ ਅਵਰ ਤੁਰਕਾਣੀ ਭਟਿਆਣੀ ਠਕੁਰਾਣੀ ॥

ਇਕਨ੍ ਪੇਰਣ ਸਿਰ ਖੁਰ ਪਾਟੇ ਇਕਨ੍ ਵਾਸੁ ਮਸਾਣੀ ॥

ਜਿਨ੍ ਕੇ ਬੰਕੇ ਘਰੀ ਨ ਆਇਆ ਤਿਨ੍ ਕਿਉ ਰੈਣਿ ਵਿਹਾਣੀ ॥੬॥

ਆਪੇ ਕਰੇ ਕਰਾਏ ਕਰਤਾ ਕਿਸ ਨੋ ਆਖਿ ਸੁਣਾਈਐ ॥

ਦੁਖੁ ਸੁਖੁ ਤੇਰੈ ਭਾਣੈ ਹੋਵੈ ਕਿਸ ਥੈ ਜਾਇ ਰੁਆਈਐ ॥

ਹੁਕਮੀ ਹੁਕਮਿ ਚਲਾਏ ਵਿਗਸੈ ਨਾਨਕ ਲਿਖਿਆ ਪਾਈਐ ॥੭॥੧੨॥

AGGS, M 1, p 418.

When they heard of the invasion of emperor Babur millions of religious leaders failed to halt him. ...No Mughal became blind and no one wrought any miracle.....The Mughals aimed and fired their guns and the Pathans attacked with their elephants. Those whose letter has been torn in God’s Court must die, my brothers...The Creator acts and causes others to act. To whom should we complain? Weal and woe are according to your will. To whom should one go to lament? The commander is pleased issuing God’s commands. Nanak the mortal obtains what is destined for him.’

In the *Janam Sakhi* the importance of the material, which centres upon Babur and Saidpur is the light, which it throws upon the Guru’s concern for justice. The invading emperor is told:

“If you desire mercy (from God), release the prisoners.’ Babur then clothed the captives and sets them free.” [4, p-78].

Whatever the historical basis of this narrative, and Bhai Gurdas too mentions a meeting (Var 26, Pauri 21), it is interpreted as a concern for human rights and social justice. When, in 1675, Guru Tegh Bahadur was martyred for responding to an appeal from a group of Kashmiri Brahmins that he should ask the emperor of the time, Aurangzeb, to allow them religious freedom, he was following in a path deemed to be blazed by Guru Nanak. Specific passages from the Aad Guru Granth Sahib are cited in affirmation of God’s concern for justice, for example:

ਸਚੈ ਦੈ ਦੀਬਾਣਿ, ਕੂੜਿ ਨ ਜਾਈਐ ॥

ਝੁੱਠੇ ਝੁੱਠ ਵਖਾਣਿ, ਸੁ ਮਹਲੁ ਖੁਆਈਐ ॥

AGGS, M 2, p 146.

No one can enter the Court of Truth through falsehood. By telling nothing but lies the Mansion is lost.

ਵਿਣੁ ਸਚੇ, ਦਰਬਾਰੁ ਕੂੜਿ ਨ ਪਾਈਐ ॥

ਕੂੜੇ ਲਾਲਚਿ ਲਗਿ, ਮਹਲੁ ਖੁਆਈਐ ॥

AGGS, M 2, p 147.

Without the True One, the false do not attain the Divine Court, Being attached to avarice, the Mansion is lost.

ਇਕਿ ਖੋਟੇ ਇਕਿ ਖਰੇ, ਆਪੇ ਪਰਖਣੁਹਾਰ ॥

ਖਰੇ ਖਜਾਨੈ ਪਾਈਅਹਿ, ਖੋਟੇ ਸਟੀਅਹਿ ਬਾਹਰ ਵਾਰਿ ॥

AGGS, M 1, p 143.

Everyone gathers in God’s Court where one pen records

all deeds. There, accounts are examined and evil doers shall be crushed like seeds in an oil press.

The scene in both verses is that of a court of justice. The simile in the second one is powerful, being taken from an aspect everyday with which most country dwellers would be familiar. In a verse denouncing hypocrisy he says:

ਗਉ ਬਿਰਾਹਮਣ ਕਉ ਕਰੁ ਲਾਵਹੁ ਗੋਬਰਿ ਤਰਣੁ ਨ ਜਾਈ ॥

ਧੋਤੀ ਟਿਕਾ ਤੈ ਜਪਮਾਲੀ ਧਾਨੁ ਮਲੇਛਾਂ ਖਾਈ ॥

ਅੰਤਰਿ ਪੂਜਾ ਪੜਹਿ ਕਤੇਬਾ ਸੰਜਮੁ ਤੁਰਕਾ ਭਾਈ ॥

ਛੋਡੀਲੇ ਪਾਖੰਡਾ ॥

ਨਾਮਿ ਲਇਐ ਜਾਹਿ ਤਰੰਦਾ ॥੧॥

AGGS, M 1, p 471.

You charge taxes for the cow and the Brahmin... You wear a mark on your forehead (tilak), and carry a jap mala but eat the food of the maleccha (unclean, non-Hindu). In your home you perform puja, outside you read the kitaba (the scriptures of Islam), and adopt an Islamic life style. Abandon hypocrisy. By practising Nam you will swim across.

One feels that here the Guru is not only being critical of those who suit their religiosity to the prevailing political situation, he is also concerned with oppression and the use of religion to despoil the poor by such things as taxing the animals on which they relied for sustenance.

The ethical dimension is explicit as in many other passages, which attack religious duplicity, especially regarding caste. Double standards of conduct, religious or social, suggest the reality of duality, something, which the Gurus always denied. Their message was that in place of the four *varnas* there was one, that of humanity. Instead of four *ashramas* or stages of life, through which men (only) progressed, there was again one, that of the householder. The dharmas of the various *zats* were replaced by one, the universal calling to worship God through Nam, and to perform *sewa*.

v) War and Peace

Guru Nanak clearly denounced the rapine that accompanied Babur's invasion of North India. Sometimes Sikh writers have claimed that he was a pacifist and that one of the developments of Sikhism was from a pacifist Panth to a militant Khalsa. This is perhaps too simple. Evidence for Sikh pacifism is lacking.

Ahimsa, non-violence, an important concept among many Hindus is not a part of Sikh teaching, though the Namdhari Sikh movement is largely pacifist. For the early Gurus taking a peace-war stance would scarcely have been possible. The Panth was too small to attract attention or to have much political voice. Guru Hargobind may

have had a small standing army but it belongs to his grandson, Guru Gobind Singh to have made the decisive decision and founded the Khalsa community. When he summoned them to assemble at Anandpur in 1699 he ordered them to come armed.

There are no grounds for claiming that Sikhism was ever a pacifist movement but it did affirm the essential spirituality of all humanity and Guru Gobind Singh felt the need to justify going to war, especially against his nominal liege lord, the Emperor. In a letter called *Zafarnama* the Guru justified his actions and out of it comes a Sikh just war theory. A couplet from it reads:

When all efforts to restore peace prove useless and no words avail,

Lawful is the flash of steel, it is right to draw the sword.'

The five conditions of a righteous war (*dharam yudh*) are:

- 1 It should be a last resort when all other means have failed, (as expressed in *Zafarnama*).
- 2 It should be waged without enmity or the desire for revenge. (Here one might be reminded to the desireless action, *nishkamakarma*, which Arjuna was called upon to pursue by Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita*).
- 3 Territory should not be annexed but returned when hostilities have ended. Captured property should be given back. Looting and the taking of booty are forbidden.
- 4 The army should comprise only soldiers committed to the cause. There should be no use of mercenaries. It should act in a disciplined manner. The *Rahit Namas* of the Guru, codes of conduct, such as no use of tobacco or alcohol, or the molesting of their adversaries women folk, should be adhered to strictly.
- 5 Minimum forces should be used, only sufficient to achieve the objective. This done hostilities should cease.

These rules have always guided Sikhs in their military actions during the Mughal period, in the days of the Sikh Empire, and when they took part in the struggle for an independent India. A Sikh soldier must be a *sant-sipahi*, a 'saint-soldier', with the word '*sant*' coming first in order. The Sikh reputation for courage should never be allowed to overshadow the importance of spiritual principles. Though Sikhs have often been regarded as a warrior nation, especially by the British, many Sikhs have adopted a policy of non-violence in the pursuit of justice, as the Christian missionary, C F Andrews observed [4]. In 1921 during the Gurdwara Reform Movement when Sikhs were claiming the control of

Gurdwaras from private owners who had been granted possession by the British, Sikh reformers staged a non-violent protest at the Guru Ka Bagh Gurdwara near Amritsar. They were met by force from policemen led by two English officers. The Sikhs faced them silently, their hands placed together in prayer. One Englishman felled a Sikh using his brass tipped *lathi*. The demonstrator scrambled to his feet only to be knocked down again. The same treatment was meted out to the other Sikhs by the officers or their men. This unique example of non-violence was followed by the Hindus, and Muslims for ending British rule. When these regulations are considered in the context of normal acts of war in the subcontinent or elsewhere for that matter, their human concern is remarkable.

vi) Ecology

Ecology is a feature of ethics only now coming into prominence. In 2001 it was the subject of a conference in Chandigarh and the Satguru of the Namdhari Sikhs has long been concerned about caring for the planet.

So was the great humanitarian who established the Pingalwara in Amritsar to care for the sick and homeless who were often rejected by their families, Bhagat Puran Singh. He wrote tracts against government policies of deforestation and refused to accept state aid for his institution while such practices continued. The subject, however, is one that can be contentious. Punjabi farmers, in their successful efforts to produce high yields have used methods that have polluted river systems and had other harmful effects upon the population.

vii) Amniocentesis

One of the uses of the modern medical procedures known as amniocentesis is that of discovering the sex of the foetus. Some Sikhs, and other groups, have followed the test by abortion should the child in the womb be female. This, of course, is contrary to the teachings of the Gurus regarding female infanticide. Another consequence of the practice is a decline in the number of females in the population. In the 2001 census there were 874 women per thousand men, in 1991 the ratio was 893 to a thousand, according to figures quoted on Sikh websites. Of course there are no statistics of the incidence of abortion among different religious groups. Not all will be Sikhs but some certainly are. However, female infanticide is denounced in the *Sikh Rehit Maryada* [7].

viii) IVF

In Vitro Fertilization (IVF), Artificial Insemination, of a woman with the sperm of a man who is not her husband is morally wrong. It can lead to all kinds of suspicion and place considerable stress upon a marriage, resulting, often in divorce, something that brings great stigma onto a wife, especially. Perhaps for centuries it has been the custom in

Punjabi communities for a childless couple to adopt, albeit unofficially, nieces or nephews. This solution, however, is becoming increasingly impracticable as the size of families falls as the result of family planning.

ix) Transplant Surgery

It has long been the custom for Sikh medical teams to go from the towns into the villages to treat people who are uncared for. Citing the examples of Guru Arjan and Guru Tegh Bahadur Sikh humanitarians have encouraged families to donate the organs of dead members, sacrificing their lives as the martyr Gurus did for the needs of others.

x) Genetic Engineering

Sikhs believe that human life begins at conception. There is a view among many Sikhs that altering the genetic makeup of a foetus is interfering with nature. Sikhs have great respect for the natural form and believe it should not be tampered with. If a couple knows that there is a risk of passing on a genetic disorder they should use contraceptive means to avoid it. Some consultants, however, think that this scientific knowledge is God given and should be used to benefit humanity. (**Editorial Note:** For more information on Bioethics in Sikhism see Chahal [2])

xi) Khalsa Ethics

The Khalsa had at least two distinctive aspects to it. First, it was intended to recover the authority of the Guru. During recent years the Masands had been increasing their influence. Established to assist the Gurus in organising the Panth they had become venal and independent. Secondly, there was a need to regulate such armed power that existed. Therefore, when in 1699 Guru Gobind Singh created the Khalsa he gave it a distinctive code of ethics and provided a just war doctrine.

Most notable was the requirement to wear the symbolic uniform of the Khalsa, the five Ks at all times. The turban was not one of these but male members were instructed to keep it. Meat might be eaten but not if it had been slaughtered according to Muslim custom. It must be killed by being beheaded with one sword blow. Taking drugs was strictly forbidden, as was the consumption of alcohol and smoking tobacco. Adultery was also condemned.

A Khalsa Sikh should only marry another Khalsa member. This was a sensible instruction; since they should rise early in the morning, in the hour before dawn and during the day recite the five Bani specified. One can scarcely imagine the family conflicts that would arise had one of the partners cut the hair and not respected the five Ks or turban.

(Continued on page 32)

(Continued from page 44)

Particularly interesting is the rule concerning widow remarriage and care for daughters:

'If a woman's husband has died, she may, if she so wishes, find a match suitable for her, and remarry.

.....The remarriage may be solemnised in the same way as the Anand marriage.' (The Anand marriage is one conducted in the presence of the Aad Guru Granth Sahib, strictly speaking the only form of marriage, which Sikhs recognise).

It also decrees: 'A Sikh should not kill his daughter nor maintain any relations with a killer of a daughter' (*Sikh Rehit Maryada*). Dowries and forced marriages were specifically condemned.

It can be seen that the Khalsa ethical code found in the *Rahit Maryada* has influenced Sikh ethics in general. However, for the Khalsa member the obligations are enforced by the Khalsa community. Failure to observe them incurs various penalties. Serious lapses, such as cutting the hair, or taking drugs, *kurahits*, would result in the offender being called an apostate, *patit*. Other members would have nothing to do with them socially, though they should be encouraged to continue to worship in the Gurdwara and take *karah parshad*. No one has a right to exclude anyone else from the possibility of being influenced by God's grace.

Should a *patit* repent they may be readmitted to the Khalsa by full initiation, but the Khalsa Panth would need to be assured of their sincerity. Minor offences, known as *tankhas*, are punished by a requirement for the offender to clean the shoes of the *sangat* for example, or washing up after langar. Great care should

be taken not to humiliate the member. Taking alcohol, dyeing the hair, are examples of *tankhas*.

xii) Raj Karega Khalsa, 'the Khalsa will rule no enemy shall remain. All who endure suffering and privation shall be brought to the safety of the Guru's protection', the famous Sikh acclamation pronounced by the whole *sangat* at the conclusion of *Ardas*, is capable of a number of interpretations. It has often been seen as the battle cry of the Khalsa army. It can also be understood as an affirmation that one day Sikhs will be supreme. There is also the potential for an ethical interpretation; the conduct that Khalsa members are required to embrace will become that of the whole Panth, and humanity. The reign of the Khalsa is, in effect, the universal reign of God, a time when all humankind will live in safety and bliss.

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Future Life

ਆਗਾਹ ਕੂ ਤ੍ਰਾਪਿ ਪਿਛਾ ਫੇਰਿ ਨ ਮੁਹਡਤਾ ॥
ਨਾਨਕ ਸਿਝਿ ਇਵੇਹਾ ਵਾਰ ਬਹੁੜਿ ਨ ਹੋਵੀ ਜਨਮਤਾ ॥੧॥

AGGS, M 5, p 1096.

Nanak says:

*"Think about the future, look not on the past.
Make the present life a great success
Because there is no birth again."*