

**Transcript of Interview with Connecticut Sikh Association
7 September 2014
At Gurdwara Guru Nanak Darbar
Southington, CT**

Board Members asked not to be identified as individuals but as official representatives of the Association. Any reference to "One person" or "Another person" indicates that person was not speaking for the group but from a personal point of view.

- **What do Sikhs believe or understand about human being? What is our nature? What is our purpose and how do we live it? How are we related to other beings?**

Equality! The most important belief we have about humans is their equality.

Our purpose is to help all mankind. Our daily prayer finishes with: Nanak says, "O Lord, your Name, is great! and it should always be uprising! We pray for the well-being of the whole of humanity."

Whenever we are concerned with others, we are doing what we are meant to do. It is why we were given birth on this earth. It's only with a human life that we have a chance to chant God's name and do mercy in the name of Almighty God. That is our sole meaning in life on this earth.

The purpose of life is to get out of the cycle of death and rebirth and be in union with God. The only way to do that is through a human life. Other creatures in nature don't have this opportunity.

We believe in soul and the human body is a costume. All other species are also costumes for souls—you could be reborn in another form. So that's how we are related—every species on the planet is soul in costume. Your best chance to get out of the cycle of rebirth is human *because* in this one you can chant God's name.

- **What do Sikhs believe or understand about divinity or ultimacy? What is its nature? How is it expressed, discovered, or known?**

Our religious belief is in one God and this should really be the first question! We chant "Waheguru" to acknowledge this. "Waheguru" means Wonderful (Wahe) Teacher (guru).

Ultimately, you want to escape the cycle of death and rebirth so you can unite with God, the Supreme Soul. God is infinite, not in the cycle of death and rebirth. God is timeless and beyond this cycle. God is also without any shape or form. God is only goodness. God only does the right thing even if we do not understand God's actions. We say, "Whatever You do is acceptable to me!"

We learn that God is the Supreme Soul through our Holy Scripture, through our prayer and services, through our teaching. The Holy Scriptures guide us in learning about God.

We also experience God's presence and learn about God through meditation. We can meditate at home or in the car or in congregation. There are no restrictions or rules on when we can meditate, but it is different from our morning and evening prayers. It is only through the Divine that we can feel this presence; the feeling comes from God.

Joy is the most important thing in the practice of our religion. If you are on the street and look glum then nobody wants to talk to you, but give somebody a smile and it's different. It's like you've provided moral support to someone. First of all, you should be happy and then you can make the rest of the world happy.

- **What do Sikhs believe or understand about the world and the cosmos? What is its nature? How are things related? What should this tell us about ourselves?**

In our Holy Book, there is a description of millions of subsurfaces and superskies; it teaches us that creation is unquantifiable. God's creation is beyond human being to understand. The cosmos is too vast and powerful for us to understand fully. Yet, things that we thought were too fantastic in our Holy Scripture, science is now discovering. Sikhism is a very pragmatic and scientific religion.

Our faith says that all of these heavenly bodies are related and connected. And the whole thing is in unison doing prayer for the Lord. In a sense, the entire cosmos is like an infinite number of candles doing prayer for the Lord—the moon, the stars, the sun are like lights of prayer. They are like candles in a plate that are used for Aarti in the evening in the Hindu religion. It is not a coincidence that the Universe works this way; there is a power, a God behind nature making it all happen. From the sun rising to the way the moon goes away, the whole nature has this power behind it; it's not accidental. We especially enjoy our evening prayer because we don't have to use the tools of Aarti, we can just enjoy what God has set in nature.

One person: I think this tells me that in the Universe that has existed for millions of years already and will exist for an unknown period of time, we live for an extremely short period of time. In terms of the size of Cosmos, we are miniscule in our ability to do anything. And we are compelled to wonder, "What can we really do in such a short span of time and space? The best we can do is pray to God and try to merge with God."

Another person: It's unbelievable in that such a short span of time in the self or in life, that the human being is given that much power by the Almighty God. With what we are seeing in how the technology is growing and how we are able to communicate around the world and we are searching for the inner stuff of life, I think if we live for a hundred years (for example) it's more than enough time if you want to do something. We are blessed by the God that we are enjoying that right now.

- **What are the most important mental models for describing the Sikh way of life? What cultural problems did the teachers/ founders address in their teachings?**

Everything is in God's will.

One person: To me everything is in God's whole will and the duty to follow that will—willingly or unwillingly! The guidance comes from the Holy Scripture. That is the one thing we have together so if I have some doubts or I'm unhappy, I have to go the Holy Scripture to look for answers.

We believe whatever Guru has written in that book, that is it! It is a message from the Lord documented in Holy Scripture. As a message from the God, none of us can change it. And we believe it is the most recent Scriptures—the Bible and others are all prior to this one. It is beautiful in its grammar, appearance, and knowledge; we are neither permitted nor qualified to change it.

Another person: For myself, I have been to mosques and to churches and I am Sikh by choice. It's not because I was born into a Sikh family; the Holy Scripture provides me with God's message.

The first social issue the Sikh life addresses is equality. It manifests in many forms like equal rights for women and no caste. Another very important one is to help the needy and to share with them.

- **What do Sikhs consider essential practices? What must you do or be to live as a Sikh? Is it possible to become a Sikh?**

The essential practices are: First, is honest earning or an honest living. Second, is sharing with the less fortunate. Third is prayer and meditation.

This is a very simple and practical religion: Do these three things and treat all people equally.

For Gurdwaras, anywhere around the world, *Langar*, a free kitchen is essential. We are feeding non-Sikhs all the time. When you come to the free kitchen you could be eating with anyone.

At the Golden Temple in Amritsar, we feed 100,000 people every single day. For us, the Golden Temple is like Mecca for the Muslims or the Vatican for Catholics. And even there we feed anyone who comes.

Yes, anyone can become a Sikh—first you start believing it and then doing it. In fact, if you are doing the three things, it doesn't matter where you are or what language you're speaking, you are living as a Sikh. You may not look like a Sikh, but you're practicing Sikhism.