

SIRI GURU¹ ARJAN SAHIB

Introduction

The Sikh Religion was founded by Siri² Guru Nanak Sahib³ (1469 – 1539 C.E.). He was succeeded by nine other gurus up to Siri Guru Gobind Singh Sahib. Sikhs often use the word “Satguru” meaning the “True Guru” for “Guru”. The Gurus are also addressed as “Saccha Patshah” or “The True King.”

Siri Guru Arjan Sahib was the fifth in line starting with Siri Guru Nanak Sahib. Each of the Gurus took the name “Nanak” in his compositions. Their compositions are distinguished by use of the word “Mahla” or the “Body”. Thus, Siri Guru Arjan Sahib’s compositions are designated as “by the Fifth Body”. This emphasizes that even though the ten Gurus had different bodies, they embodied the same divine light as Siri Guru Nanak Sahib, the founder of the faith.

Satguru Arjan Sahib’s Sojourn on Earth

Siri Guru Arjan Sahib came to this world in 1563 C.E. as the youngest of three sons of the fourth Guru, Siri Guru Ram Dass. In 1581 C.E., before his light merged with the Divine Light, Guru Ram Dass designated Siri Guru Arjan Sahib as his successor Guru.

During his stewardship of the faith, Siri Guru Arjan Sahib continued his predecessors’ work of spreading Siri Guru Nanak’s message of faith, hope, prayer, and love and the unity of all faiths. He continued the tradition of service to all people regardless of their socio-economic status or religious belief. During his reign, the city of Amritsar grew significantly, and Harmandar Sahib was completed. He also founded the cities of Hargobindpur, Kartarpur, and Taran Taaran. Thriving communities developed at each of these places.

Compilation of the Aad Granth Sahib

Perhaps the most significant gift Siri Guru Arjan Sahib gave

mankind was his compilation of the Divine Word brought by him and the preceding Gurus, along with selections from the works of several Hindu and Muslim “Bhagats”⁴ (including Kabir and Sheikh Farid) and bards into a single volume. This was the Aad Granth. Later, the Word brought by the ninth Guru was added. The completed volume was invested with the status of Eternal Guru by the tenth Guru Siri Guru Gobind Singh Sahib in 1708 C.E. It is referred to as Siri Guru Granth Sahib.

Guru Arjan Sahib’s Message: A Selection

One God, the Creator, the Doer, All-Pervading

"We should praise only the One God, who is beyond *Maya*⁵ and is present in all. God is the Source of the Creation and whatever He wills, happens. He creates and destroys in a moment, there is none besides Him. In all countries, islands, the entire universe, and the nether regions, in all creation he is present. Only he whom God Himself so wishes understands this. Only he is a pure person." [page 706⁶]

Unity of Creator and Creation

"All this creation is various forms of the One God. Pervading all, He is Himself doing everything. Whichever way we turn we see Him. Only a rare person attains to this wisdom. The countless manifestations are all of the One *Nirgun* (beyond the three *gunas*⁷ of *Maya*). He Himself is the water and the waves upon it. He is Himself the temple and the devotee. He is the Deity (in the temple) and also the worshipper. He is Himself the *Yogi* as well as the means of *Yoga*. Nanak's God is always untouched (by *Maya*)." [page 803]

And,

"Countless waves arise on water (but they essentially remain water). Many types of ornaments are made out of gold (but they still remain gold). Sowing a seed one sees many types (of growth) but when the fruit ripens, it is seeds again. (The same way all the creation arises from God but yet remains part of Him and is ultimately Him)." [page 736]

Divinity of the Human Soul

"The individual soul has the attributes of God. The story (of God's praise) is wonderful and without parallel. He does not get old nor is He young. He has no suffering nor fear of death. He does not die or go away. He has been pervading all since the beginning of time. He is never hot (with desires) or cold (with worry). He does not have friends and enemies. He does not have sorrow or joy. Everything belongs to Him and He has the ability to do anything. He does not have any father or mother. He is beyond everything and has always been. He is untouched by sin and good deeds. He is present in everybody and is always alert. He has created the *Maya* of the three *gunas*. The great *Maya* is His shadow. He cannot be cheated or pierced; His secret cannot be understood; He is the Abode of Mercy. He is Abode of Mercy to the downtrodden; He is always the Abode of Grace. What He is and how great He is cannot be realized. Nanak is amazed at Him." [page 868]

God is Devotee’s Only Support

"My friendship is with the One God and I love only Him. God alone is my friend and He is my only companion. I converse with God alone, He never has a frown on His face. He knows all that worries me and never turns His back on me. God alone, with the power to create as well as destroy, is my only adviser. He, who has His hand on the heads of all the givers in the world, is my only Giver. The One God, who has power over all, is my support. The Guru has placed his hand on my head and united me with God, the source of peace, the One who is Savior of the whole world. O Nanak, one's heart's desires are fulfilled and one finds the True Name⁸ if the union is ordained (by God) to start with." [page 958]

Purpose of Life

"You have received human life: this is your opportunity to meet⁹ God. Nothing else that you do is worth anything: remember God's Name in a congregation of devotees. Get busy in getting across the ocean of fear: life is being wasted in love of *Maya*." [page 12, 378]

Prayer to Merciful God

Merciful, the Master is Merciful. My Master is Merciful. He provides for all beings. O man, why are you worried, the Creator will protect you. The One who has created you, is the One that provides support. The One who has created the

¹ The word ‘guru’ in Indian languages means teacher or guide. However, in Sikh religion, the Guru occupies a special position. The Guru and God are practically identical. According to Siri Guru Granth Sahib: “Know Guru and God to be one and the same.” While God is unknowable and unborn, the Guru is the Perfect Being people can communicate with and from whom they receive advice. The Guru is not in the cycle of birth and death but comes to the world for the salvation of mankind. His mission is to bless people with God’s Name and to unite them with God.

² Siri is an honorific/reverential expression added before a name

³ Sahib meaning “Master” is an honorific/reverential expression added before or after a name

⁴ Bhagat is one engaged in Bhagati, the worship of God. The Guru gives one the gift of Bhagati.

⁵ *Maya* means the world of physical experience.

⁶ Page references are to the printed version of Siri Guru Granth Sahib

⁷ The three *gunas* of *Maya* are *tamas gun*, *rajas gun*, and *satv gun*.

These are three stages of activity in the world of *Maya*. One who is imbued with God’s love rises to the fourth stage of *sahaj*, or equipoise.

⁸ The word “Name” means God’s name.

⁹ “Meeting God” means seeing God the Creator in all his creation and realizing that all creation serves God’s Will.

universe is also the One who cares for it. He is in everybody, the Master of all hearts, the True Provider. His work, His value, cannot be understood. He is the Great Carefree One. O man, make obeisance to Him as long as there is breath in your body. O God, You are Powerful, Indescribable, beyond physical experience. Body and soul are Your creation. In Your mercy I have found comfort. This is Nanak's prayer. [page 724]

God's Devotee is at Peace with All, Sees God in All

"A happy person sees everyone as happy. A sick (wicked) person sees every one as sick (wicked). The Master (God) has the power to do anything and to get His creatures to do as He wishes. He holds spiritual joy and sorrow in His hands. O my mind, to one who has overcome his doubt and has seen God in all His creation, no one is lost. One whose mind is at peace after meeting the Guru sees peace in the entire world. However, one whose mind is pervaded by the sickness of ego is miserable and is dying while alive." [page 610]

"Through meeting the Guru, I have given up dependence on others. I have dug a deep pit and in it buried pride, love of *Maya*, and desires of my mind. The Guru gave me (God's) Name which liberates me from bondage (to *Maya*). I have come to the Guru and all worries have been forgotten from my mind. I have no enemies left (I do not see anyone as an enemy) and I am not anyone's enemy. I have understood that all the creation is God Himself, that He pervades all. I got this understanding from the True Guru. I have befriended everyone and I am friend to all. When the feeling of separation (from God) went away from my mind, my King united me with Himself. My stubbornness is destroyed, I find Guru's Word to be sweet. It gives eternal life and has come to abide in me. O Nanak, on land, on sea, and in the air, I have seen the All-pervading God." [page 671]

"I am a servant of all God has created. My God resides everywhere. There is no enemy or opponent. I walk hand in hand with all. We are all brothers." [page 887]

Interfaith Understanding and Harmony

"The Vedas and the Books (Torah, Bible, Qura'an) all stand and worship You. Countless people are at Your door. Numerous *Brahmas* and *Indras* with their thrones, *Shivas* and incarnations of *Vishnu* sing God's glory and so do many *Pirs*, Prophets, *Sheikhs*, and holy men. You pervade all completely and are fulfilling Yourself in all. Falsehood destroys and people can reach You only if they follow the correct way but we all do what You Yourself get us to do." [page 518]

"Some people call you *Ram*, others call You *Khudaa*. Some serve *Gosain*, some *Allah*. O Merciful Creator and Doer, have

mercy upon me. Some bathe at holy places and others go for *hujj*. Some do *pooja* others bow their heads. Some read the Vedas, others the Books (Torah, Bible, Qura'an etc.). Some wear blue, others white. Some call themselves Muslims, others Hindus. Some seek *bahisht* (persian for heaven), some *suarg* (sanskrit for heaven). O Nanak, say; whosoever has understood the *Hukam* (Divine order), has learnt the secret of God, the Master." [page 885]

"This world is like a flower-garden and God is the gardener. He cares for all and ignores none. Each flower has the fragrance that the gardener has put in it. It is known by the fragrance the gardener has put in it." [page 1187]

Martyrdom

Akbar the Great, Emperor of India during the later half of the sixteenth century, was a benevolent ruler. During his time, the Sikh faith flourished and a growing number of people came to the Guru for guidance. However, after Akbar's death in 1606, his son Jehangir bowed to pressure from extremist elements among the Muslims and issued an order declaring the faith preached by Siri Guru Arjan Sahib as "false", accusing Guru Sahib of having given his blessing to the rebel prince Khuro, and ordering that he be put to death and his property and family handed over to Murtaza Khan, the governor of Lahore. Guru Sahib was called to Lahore, tortured to death and his body thrown in the river Ravi.

Observance of anniversary of Martyrdom

The only parallels to the unwarranted execution of Siri Guru Arjan Sahib on frivolous charges are the crucifixion of Jesus Christ and the death by poison administered to Socrates. A messenger of love of God and among all people was executed because of his growing popularity. Sikhs often refer to Siri Guru Arjan Sahib as "*Shanti de Punj, Shaheedan de Sartaj*" meaning "The embodiment of peace, the supreme martyr."

The martyrdom took place during the hottest part of the year and the torture is said to have included seating Guru Sahib on a hot griddle and pouring hot sand over his body. Sikhs observe the anniversary of Guru Sahib's martyrdom with congregational prayer, taking out processions singing prayers, and serving cold refreshing drinks to all. The drink traditionally consists of diluted milk sweetened with sugar and often flavored. Cool-aid and lime-aid are often used as well. At times, other soft drinks and, of course, cold water are offered.



Siri Guru Arjan Sahib, The fifth Nanak: Life, Message, and Martyrdom

by

Ranbir Singh

June 2006

Distributed by:
Sikh Educational and Religious Foundation
P.O. Box 1553, Dublin, Ohio 43017