

Reflexions on Ahimsa (Non-Violence) and the Depreciation of "Other" Religions

In the spirit of Tisarpanth's article "The Warrior who was Nanak", I was inspired to write the following comment.

You do not necessarily have to read the article first to make sense of the comment, but you can, of course, by following this link: <https://tisarpanthdotcom.wordpress.com/2016/02/09/the-warrior-who-was-nanak/>. However, the day after I posted this comment on the article's page (which invited to do so), I was banned from the blog, and have no access any more since. This blog has possibly disappeared now entirely, as did similar blogs (for maybe similar reasons) of the same author previously.

As I understood it, the bottom line of the article was, that, based on the teachings of the Sikh Gurus, the silence and passivity of most "Sikh saints" and Sikh community leaders in the face of today's political, economical and ecological developments is questionable. One would wish that, following the example of the Gurus' lives and teachings, they would at least stand and speak up more against social injustice and unethical and corrupt leadership, and not only collect followers.

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Waheguru ji ka Khalsa Waheguru ji ki Fateh

Thank you for this article.

I very much agree with its direction, message and bottom line, and I couldn't agree more about its relevance today.

In your article, I found some points, occasionally occurring in Sikh literature, that I would like to comment on. I feel there are some common misconceptions and misunderstandings caused by the difference between worldly human language and the same language used to speak about the unspeakable, the Divine and Its Dharma. I would like to shortly elaborate on only two aspects:

1. Ahimsa

I believe that ahimsa (usually translated as non-violence) as an aspect of dharma (life according to the Divine will, Divine law, righteous living) is often misunderstood as simply forbidding the application of physical, verbal, emotional or mental force. I disagree.

Firstly, Monier-Williams translates "himsaa" as "injury, harm, hurt, mischief, wrong, bearing malice, abusive language, acts of violence", therefore, "force" as repeatedly and almost exclusively used in the above article might give a too limited perspective.

All rules, ways of life etc, that express a dharma come from the level of the origin and essence of existence (Oneness, Timeless, Infinite, Soul, Purusha, Akaal Purakh, etc) and are designed for having their ultimate effect on that very same level. However, their applications and implications are executed on the level of the creation (manifold, mortal, finite, matter, energy, mind, prakriti, tattwas, gunas, moorat, etc). The point is that what seems to have one effect on one level can have a very different effect on the other level, which is a major cause of misinterpretations and misunderstandings of sacred texts. Hence, they always come with the warning that they convey the unspeakable, and can never be taken too literally and rigidly.

Ahimsa as an aspect of dharma is a guideline to serve and promote the undying soul, not the mortal body and mind. Every action done in service of the soul, by the command of dharma, hukam, righteousness and not defiled by any other lower, personal motivation therefore adheres to the idea of ahimsa.

Did Guru Gobind Singh adhere to ahimsa? Absolutely yes. He never acted based on an emotion or impulse of aggression, revenge, anger, hatred, personal power or similar, but purely out of dharma, protecting the dharma. For example, killing somebody who is about to destroy the dharma (if there is no other way of stopping them) would be a service to the dharma (and therefore to human mankind) as well as to the individual in question. It would be an act against dharma (and therefore karma) to indulge in passivity, laziness, or fear (what the above article might refer to as "Quietist Attitude") and allow somebody to destroy the dharma. Human mankind would lose the dharma and therefore a possibility and way to fulfil lives, and the person who is about to destroy the dharma would incur terrible karma.

Another beautiful side aspect that illustrates the serving attitude in Guru Gobind Singh's actions on the battle field are the golden tips on the arrows to provide compensation (at least somewhat) to the bereaved ones, or the example of Bhai Khanaiya.

Any use of physical, verbal, emotional or mental force that hurts or "insults" the personality or worldly honour of the addressed person, but was done purely out of love for the soul to wake up the person from darkness and disservice would adhere to ahimsa. Obviously, this requires some degree of purity and skill on part of the "awakener".

However, any act or words spoken, no matter how nice and sweet outwardly, done with a motivation that includes any anger, lust, greed, revenge, personal gain etc (even if just subconsciously) must be seen as a violation of ahimsa. One might say that even without doing or saying anything, harbouring hurtful feelings for somebody (including oneself) could be seen a violation of ahimsa, even and maybe especially when occurring during so called spiritual practice and meditation.

Therefore, in case the above article uses the occasion of Guru Nanak roasting a deer at a Kurukshetra fair as an example of violating ahimsa (and hence proving it irrelevant or wrong), I disagree, and also think it is bit far-fetched since there are other more obvious and relevant points made in this story.

2. Islam (or any "other religion")

This refers to "If he (Guru Nanak, my insertion) had truly perceived any good in Islam he would surely not have denounced its cardinal pillars in such candid terms."

I find the looking down on what is usually perceived as "other religions" extremely prevalent even among the most educated of writers.

Firstly, I have never found any quote in Gurbani that would allow the understanding that any Guru perceived Islam as no good. Instead, what the Guru criticises is the way religion (and yoga) was usually practiced in those days, that is to say hypocritical and useless if measured against its original purpose, lost in a too literal sense of rules and regulations which were often bent and abused to serve a completely different agenda, and devoid of the actual work demanded and necessary. But the seemingly unavoidable and too prevalent corruption and abuse of religion and its language is not the fault of the religion or their igniters or scriptures, but of the people doing it. In this sense we should also ask ourselves sometimes what Guru would say and do to us would They see how we practice Their dharma today.

I think that the quote of Guru Nanak's Gurbani given in the article - and many similar passages in Gurbani - are designed to wake up the listener from wrong understanding and practice, to re-discover the truth behind the language of their teachings and scriptures, and hence become a true devotee of the Divine.

My faith and understanding is that there is only One Existence, One Divine, One human mankind of brothers and sisters, therefore, there is also only One Religion, One Dharma, One Guru. Ultimately, there is no "other religion" and there is no "other". "The other is hell" (based on Jean-Paul Sartre's famous quote, very differently meant, but perfectly true here). The One Dharma manifests in many forms at different times, in different languages and cultures, but

always as an the expression of the One Dharma. But we, due to the nature of our somewhat under-developed minds, can mostly see and think only in duality, and what is One seems many.

The Sufi Hazrat Inayat Khan writes: "For him (a person who has seen the other side of the wall, my insertion) all the things to which people attach great importance and value seem nothing. For that person truth and fact are two things; for everybody else truth and fact are the same. [...] All differences and disputes are caused by the knowledge of various facts, which are different from one another. There are many facts and one truth. There are many stars and one sun; when the sun has risen, the stars pale. The one before whom the sun has risen, to whom the truth has manifested - for him facts make little difference. The light of truth, falling upon the facts, makes them disappear."

Many writers compare their insight and understanding of genuine aspects of their own dharma or religion with completely corrupted misunderstandings of another, and then take satisfaction in concluding that theirs is superior. Again, this behaviour is rooted in the duality of the mind and comes from the fear to be on the wrong side of a fact (precisely in the above sense). The human mind tends to draw a line and is then anxious to be on the right side. This feeling of being right (forever) is then provided by pointing at the people who are allegedly and seemingly on the other side of the line and by denouncing them as wrong.

I would like to suggest a change of approach in theology and religious studies, away from focusing on the differences, which always seem to produce more confusing facts, and more towards finding the similarities and common ground, which should serve better in pointing us into the direction of truth and right understanding, mutual respect, tolerance and appreciation of cultural differences.

Cherdi Kalaa

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