

Sikh Dharma - The Path of the Student

by Sat Siri Singh Khalsa

*"Thousands and hundred-thousands of clever ideas,
not even one of them will go along with you."*

- Guru Nanak, Japji Sahib, 1st Pauri (SGGS ang 1)

Encountering the Sikh aspect of Kundalini Yoga, some of us see mainly just another religion with its culturally, historically and politically coloured rules and rituals, another label to find identity and affiliation as "Sikh" in contrast and separate from "Christian," yogi or teacher. Maybe we see a foreign display of piousness, which, according to our understanding, has only little to do with yoga.

However, some of us are also touched by something incomprehensible from underneath the surface of all of the above, which transcends and dissolves all labels of the outer appearance of things and happenings. Maybe it came from inside the strange music in the temple, maybe from the eyes of a person we see serving humbly but with genuine devotion, or maybe from listening to or reciting Japji Sahib in the early morning. And we feel a powerful, original energy calling from inside ourselves. A recognition, revelation, reunion with something identical to our own essence. And we desire to give ourselves, merge in purpose, our soul belongs, our mind is confused and humbled.

The Guru

Guru Nanak was not the founder of the Sikh religion, neither was Jesus the founder of Christianity. They were beings in human form who have delivered and rekindled the message and call of the origin and essence of existence back to the surface of our everyday lives. They were divine wakeup calls to stop our inner dialogue of labelling, judging and separating everything in clever duality and habitually lying to ourselves about ourselves and the creation. The first words after Guru Nanak's resurrection were, *"There is not Hindu, there is no Muslim,"* meaning nothing is what it seems. The surface of this world is an illusion. If we keep buying and selling it, we keep misunderstanding and suffering. Instead, they laid out a path of cultivating compassion of heart, surrender of mind, and meditation into the true self. Much of the rest of the stories around the saints of human mankind was man-made afterwards.

In essence, every sincere follower of any so called religion does the same thing and follows the same inner rules, even if they might look differently on the outside. They are students seeking to learn how to pierce through the state of illusion and experience truth by applying a distinct lifestyle. This lifestyle and process, in which the incarnated consciousness is trying to "realign to its origin" is called "religion." The student is driven by the frustrated karma of many lifetimes and life forms, and the desire for the ultimate satisfaction and ecstasy in union with pristine existence. The word Sikh means student.

One crucial point in the essence of all teachings is that this process and goal cannot be achieved by only the effort of the being itself. Maybe this can be understood in terms that liberation and enlightenment consist in the dissolution and death of what the being wrongly believes to be - the ego. But every effort in its own name would automatically increase but not diminish the ego. In other words, the process of yoga describes a union into oneness, which requires the illusion to die into the truth; the ego to die into the true self. But the ego doesn't want to die. On the contrary, every effort it makes to advance on the "spiritual path" will automatically be used for the ego's very own establishment; it turns into a "spiritual ego," no matter if "we" actually consciously allow this to happen or not.

Therefore, the first and foremost attitude which the student has to acquire is humility, which he or she ultimately finds in the submission to a teacher, the Guru, and in unconditional service to creation, Seva. For the western ego-mind, the confrontation with the idea of surrendering its own cleverness and obeying to do or not do things it doesn't agree or even

understand feels like a great assault and insult. Maybe it is the faint notion of all this that makes us shy away from all too happily embrace this mysterious aspect of the yoga lifestyle.

Swami Satyananda: *"When one has been practicing Kundalini Yoga for a couple of years and suddenly starts to have beautiful experiences, one tends to think oneself superior... To protect yourself from this, you must place yourself in the calibre of a chela or disciple [student or Sikh; added by the editor]. A disciple remains a disciple, there is no promotion. Many people think that after twelve years of discipleship they will be promoted to guruhood, but this is not so."*

For the successful treatment of the ego, a greater framework is needed. This is provided by the Guru, the force that pierces through from the darkness of illusion and ignorance to the light of truth and ecstasy "Waheguru." Guru is the vehicle that crosses this gap between the illusionary experience of our separated being and our true transpersonal identity "Satnaam." The student becomes an eternal lover and servant of the Guru, the Christ, the Buddha.

There is only one Guru, because the Guru sees with the eye of oneness. Jesus: *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."* (John 14.6) Guru Amardas: *"In attachment to Maya, they have forgotten the Father, the Cherisher of the World. Without the Guru, all are unconscious, they are held in bondage by the Messenger of Death. Nanak, through the Guru's Teachings, you shall be saved, contemplating the True Name."* (Siri Raag, ang 30). The human mind sometimes likes to misunderstand this because it sees with the two eyes of duality, hence arguments and war between religions.

The Student and the Marriage

But like a man who commits to one out of many women in marriage can transcend the illusion of multiplicity and its temptations, a student, who is married to one out of many forms of the Guru, will ultimately see with the eye of oneness Waheguru in everything. The marriage with the Guru (baptism) happens quite similarly to the marriage between husband and wife. We do not really choose with our own intellect and cleverness, but our heart and soul choose, and we are chosen. Both unions are training grounds for the ultimate marriage of the soul in death. Therefore, life gets its meaning through its end and in preparation for death, and the lifestyle of the student is called remembrance of death (rehit mar-yada).

Though laid out for all humans, the path of the student is not always easy. Guru Amardas sings in Anand Sahib (Raamkali, ang 918):

ਭਗਤਾ ਕੀ ਚਾਲ ਨਿਰਾਲੀ ॥

The way of life of the devotees is unique and distinct.

ਚਾਲਾ ਨਿਰਾਲੀ ਭਗਤਾਹ ਕੇਰੀ ਬਿਖਮ ਮਾਰਗਿ ਚਲਣਾ ॥

The way of life of the devotees is unique and distinct, they follow a difficult path.

ਲਬੁ ਲੋਭੁ ਅਹੰਕਾਰੁ ਤਜਿ ਤ੍ਰਿਸਨਾ ਬਹੁਤੁ ਨਾਹੀ ਬੋਲਣਾ ॥

They renounce greed, the pride of ego, and desire, and they do not talk much.

ਖੰਨਿਅਹੁ ਤਿਖੀ ਵਾਲਹੁ ਨਿਕੀ ਏਤੁ ਮਾਰਗਿ ਜਾਣਾ ॥

Their path is sharper than a sword, finer than a hair.

ਗੁਰ ਪਰਸਾਦੀ ਜਿਨੀ ਆਪੁ ਤਜਿਆ ਹਰਿ ਵਾਸਨਾ ਸਮਾਣੀ ॥

By the grace of the Guru, they renounce their ego, their desire merges in the Divine Har.

ਕਹੈ ਨਾਨਕੁ ਚਾਲ ਭਗਤਾ ਜੁਗਹੁ ਜੁਗੁ ਨਿਰਾਲੀ ॥੧੪॥

Says Nanak, the way of life of the devotees is unique and distinct through all ages. ||14||

Yet, the beauty and charm of the path of the student is also in its simplicity. Guru Nanak's basic teachings are:

1. Naam Japa: meditate continuously on the essence of existence though it's word and name
2. Kirat Karni: live and work in the world with honesty
3. Vand Chhakna: share everything you have, and consume in community

The Shabad

The Divine is transcendent AND immanent, Karta-Purkh, Akaal-Murat. The Divine is inseparable in the timeless undying AND in the transient form. Different religions differ in the transient form that inspires Divine Love for the timeless undying. The students of Nanak mainly use his utterances in music, the Shabad Guru, for this purpose. Their worship is mostly centred around the musical utterances of the Bhagats and Gurus who have broken through the veil of illusion and taken the eternal bath in the essence, singing from there the hymns that serve us to follow them across. Guru Arjun: *"The Guru's Word abides with my soul. It does not sink in water, thieves cannot steal it, fire cannot burn it. It is like wealth to the poor, a cane for the blind, and mother's milk for the child. I have found the boat in the ocean of the world, the Merciful One has bestowed His Mercy upon Nanak."* (Dhanasri, ang 679) To absorb this treasure of Guru into our being, we repeat the Shabad as often as possible: Japji means repeat (continuously) for the sake of the soul.

Sikh Dharma is the path of the Lover of the Divine, united with the Divine Lovers of all times, realms, colours and languages. Where there is Divine Love there is no question. All the various facts of the world which inspire our minds to hold disputes and arguments pale away when the One Sun of Truth rises in the Sky of existence, inspiring awe, wonder, devotion, surrender and ecstasy. Guru Ramdas: *"All these alliances are mere extensions of the love of Maya. Only fools argue over Maya. They are born, and they die, and they lose the game of life in gamble. My alliance is with the Divine who embellishes all, here and beyond."* (Asa, ang 366)

Sikh Dharma is the way of life of the student within every outer form of religion, and it is also an outer form of religion itself. And this can be said about every dharma and religion. But our mind mostly sees the duality of the surface, unable to pierce through to the oneness of the essence, and we divide and choose what we want to believe and what not. Yet ultimately, we have no choice but to let ourselves be chosen and embraced by the Truth in whichever form It reveals Itself to teach us. And become a student.