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SIKH VIEW OF OTHER FAITHS - A MESSAGE OF TOLERANCE AND UNDERSTANDING

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SIKH VIEW OF OTHER FAITHS

A Sikh loves all creation as God's own manifestation. Acceptance of all faiths, and interfaith tolerance and understanding are basic to his faith. History of the Sikhs shows remarkable consistency in the pursuit of these ideals and in the defense of the right to free worship of people of all faiths.

MANY FAITHS

People have tried many different ways to realize God or to achieve perfection. No faith that believes in prayer to God can be false. Emphasizing the essential unity of faiths, Siri Guru Granth Sahib tells us:

> "Don't say the Vedas and the Books (Torah, Bible, Qura'an) are false. False is the one who does not study them." [1, page 1350]
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> "Kabir says this loud and clear, and you should think over it in your own mind. God pervades all person's unseen. He is the same in the Hindu as well as in the Muslim." [1, page 483]

God created all people and all faiths. All worship the same God. The apparent differences in form are indicative of God's glory in revealing Himself to people in language, idiom, and metaphor appropriate for them. For example,

> "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. Some wear blue, others white. Some call themselves Muslims, others Hindus. Some seek bahisht, some suarg. O Nanak, say; whosoever has understood the Hukam (Divine order), has learnt the secret of God, the Master." [1, page 885]
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> "Some shave their heads and become Sanyasis, some become Yogis, some are celibate, and some are known for continence. Some are Hindus and others Muslims, Sunni or Shia. Recognize all mankind as one. The Creator and the Merciful, the Provider and the Gracious are the same God. Do not, in error or doubt, accept any other. All serve the One, He is the One Divine Teacher of all, there is but One Form, let all understand Him to be the same Light.
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> "The temple and the mosque are the same, pooja and namaaz are the same. All mankind is one but appears to be several (groups). (The existence as different entities) of gods, the anti-gods, the yakshas and gandharvs; of the Muslims and the Hindus; is merely the difference in dress (outer appearance) of (people from) different countries. All have the same eyes, the same ears, the same body and the same form. They are all made of earth, air, fire and water. Allah and the Formless God are the same; the Purans and the Qura'an are the same; all are the same appearance, the same form." [2, page 19]

For a Sikh, there are no bad people. All are created by God. They may appear to be different but all are God's creation and part of God Himself. Siri Guru Granth Sahib tells us:

"This entire creation is a manifestation of the Omniscient God and He is everywhere. If one carefully studies the (Guru's) Word, how can one call anyone bad. A person talks about good and bad This entire creation is a manifestation of the Omniscient God and He is everywhere. If one carefully studies the (Guru's) Word, how can one call anyone bad. A person talks about good and bad people only so long as he is caught up in Duality. One who has followed the way shown by the Guru has understood the Unity and is absorbed in God." [1, page 757]

HYPOCRITES IN VARIOUS FAITHS

In every faith there are persons who do not follow the essentials of their professed faith and merely flaunt their dedication to rite and ritual. They mislead people, seek their own personal worldly gain, and are lost in false pursuits. About such hypocrites, Siri Guru Granth Sahib tells us:

"Those who wear three-and-a-half yard long loincloths and triple sacred threads, have rosaries around their necks and polished vessels in their hands, should not be called saints of God. (In reality) they are thugs of Banaras. I do not like such saints. They will eat the trunk along with the branch (for personal benefit they will not hesitate to kill those they profit from). They scrub the utensils before putting them on the fire; they wash the wood they burn; they dig the earth to make two places for fire; but (their actions are such that) they will eat whole humans. They are sinners who always go around committing crimes but claim they never go near Maya. They are always going about in their pride. They ruin themselves and their entire families (followers). However, everyone does what God has engaged him in. O Kabir, one who has met the True Guru is not born again (is liberated)." [1, page 476]

"The Qazi lies and takes bribes. The Brahmin bathes at holy places but hurts people (of low castes). The Yogi too is blind and does not know the correct lifestyle. All the three are in spiritual wilderness. The (real) Yogi is one who knows the way of life and through the Guru's grace understands the One (God). The Qazi is one who turns away from Maya and through Guru's grace become unattached to the world while living in it. The (real) Brahmin is one who contemplates on God and swims across (the ocean of fear) along with all his family (followers). The wise person is one who washes his mind (of sin). A Muslim is one who rids himself of sin. The learned one is he who understands true lifestyle. He is received with honor at (God's) Door." [1, page 662]

"With your tongue you recite (the scriptures) with paraphrasing but you do not have God in you nor do you live a clean life. You preach to others and ask them to understand carefully but you yourself do not follow what you say to others. O Pundit, study the Vedas and get rid of the anger in you. You place the idol before you but your mind wanders in all ten directions. You apply the saffron mark (on your forehead) and fall at the idol's feet but you do all this to please the world. Performing the six good acts, sitting on a cushion and wearing a dhoti (while engaged in prayer); going to a rich man's home and reading the book (for him);

> counting the beads on his rosary and then asking (the rich man) for money; my friend, no one has reached his destination in this manner. He is the (true) Pundit who follows the Guru's word. The Maya of three gunas cannot influence that man. All the four Vedas are in God's Name. O Nanak, (only a fortunate one) comes to the service of such a one." [1, page 887]

INTERFAITH UNDERSTANDING IN SIKH HISTORY

Throughout history, Sikhs have been committed to religious harmony and interfaith cooperation. Siri Guru Nanak Sahib, the founder of the faith, was loved by Hindus as well as Muslims. He was referred to as Pir of the Mussalmans and Guru of the Hindus. The Ninth Nanak, Siri Guru Tegh Bahadar Sahib, sacrificed his life for the right of the Hindus to wear the sacred thread and the saffron mark on their forehead even though he did not believe in those rituals himself. Siri Guru Gobind Singh Sahib writes about it as follows:

> "He protected their (right to wear) the sacred thread and the saffron mark. He did this great act in Kalyug. He did this for the sake of the sadhus; he gave his life and quietly suffered pain. He did this for Dharam. He gave up his head but not his determination." [2, page 54]

Sikh Gurdwaras have always been open to everybody regardless of religion, race, color or caste. Gurdwaras have free kitchens that are open to all and everyone is treated as equal. Harmandar Sahib in Amritsar has doors on all four sides signifying acceptance of visitors from all the four corners of the world. The Gurus spoke against hypocrisy and false emphasis on outer formalisms and practices of every religion but respected the right of all to profess their faith and serve mankind in their own ways.

REFERENCES

1. Siri Guru Granth Sahib, the printed version.

2. Siri Dasam Granth Sahib, the printed version.

