

Guru Nanak

Guru Nanak was a very influential person during his lifetime. He lived during an age of change, and much of that change was due to his teachings. His main goals involved making the world a better place and trying to ensure that all people were equal. His ways of teaching were very effective and they challenged the way that people saw the world that they lived in. Guru Nanak's lifetime can be divided into three parts; family life, travels, and retirement. It is during his travels that he did most of his teaching and during his retirement that he developed the basis for Sikhism.

Guru Nanak's father wanted him to take over the family business and become an accountant, but Guru Nanak wanted exactly the opposite. He wanted to lead a religious life and stay detached from worldly attachments (Gurnukh Nihal 36). While he was growing up, Guru Nanak spent a lot of time with both Hindu and Muslim saints. During his childhood, he would gather his friends and discuss the power and greatness of God. He was not concerned with following what everyone else did; he followed his own path. For example, when it was his turn to participate in the Sacred Thread Ceremony, he refused to wear the traditional thread and said that he wanted one that would last for his entire lifetime (Gobind Singh 18). His father wanted to change Nanak's perspective and decided to arrange his marriage to force him into a 'typical' life. Nanak was married early and his wife gave birth to two sons.

Guru Nanak spent the next ten years caring for his family (Gobind Singh 20). During these years, he spent a fair amount of time praying, as he still wanted to lead a religious life. One day after he was finished his prayers, he entered a cave and fell into a trance that lasted for three days. When he awoke from this trance, he ran out of the cave

shouting “There is no Hindu and no Musalman.” With this phrase, it is believed that Guru Nanak had three meanings (Gurnukh Nihal 37). First, that all men are equal, regardless of religion or race. Secondly, that Hindus and Muslims had forgotten the true meanings of their religions and therefore no true Hindus or Muslims existed. Thirdly, that he felt he needed to end the hostility between the two groups. With this, he began his life as a missionary.

First he headed east for twelve years. He wanted to visit places that were holy in Hinduism. Along the way, he questioned Hindu practices and challenged the reasons for participating in such practices. Next, he travelled south for five years to see some important places to the Buddhist and Jain religions. After travelling south, he travelled north to the Himalayas for two years. Lastly, he travelled west to the Muslim countries for four years before coming home to spend his last years with his family. During his last years, he nominated his closest disciple, Bhai Lehna to be his successor (Gurnukh Nihal 46).

It is important to note that although Guru Nanak grew up in a society where Hinduism was very prevalent, his teachings and ideas are not based on the Vedas or the Upanisads (Seshagiri 5). His concepts are based on his own thoughts and ideas, which he formed throughout everyday life; they “came to him as and illuminations of his entire life” (Seshagiri 5). Despite this, some of his ideas agree with the Vedas and the Upanisads. For example, both Guru Nanak and the Upanisads oppose being materialistic and self-centered (Seshagiri 5). On the other hand, Guru Nanak rejected the idea of rituals as he focused more on the internal and spiritual aspects of religion. He believed that the reason for living was only the search for Truth, (Seshagiri 5) and that a chaotic

and impulsive life is not the way to find Truth. He is claimed to have said, “Truth is the highest of all but higher still is truthful living” (Seshagiri 6). But, what is this Truth that he speaks of? Guru Nanak believed that God is Truth; anything related to God is Truth (Seshagiri 7).

As most people do, Guru Nanak had strong views on God, creation, and the soul. He believed that there was one God who was the creator and governor of the world. He believed that the creator God was responsible for all the other gods and goddesses. It was his view that the God is able to create all things, and the God is fearless and infinite. He also believed that the God has no mother, father, son, wife or relative (Gobind Singh 7). With regards to creation, he thought that everything came into being at the God’s command and that how He did it is beyond our understanding (Gobind Singh 10). Also, he claimed that the limit of the creation is unknown. Guru Nanak thought that the God had created earth as a school for man to learn dharma. Guru Nanak was a strong believer that everything that we do, whether it is good or bad, makes an imprint on our soul (Gobind Singh 12). The imprints combine to form habits and therefore, have an affect of how we live our lives. He also believed that the soul does not die with the body, but transfers to the next body and continues in the next life (Gobind Singh 13). While Hindus believed that there are four different dharmas for the four different *varnas*, Guru Nanak believed that there is only one religion, and that religion is Truth and that Truth is for all (Seshagiri 8). One of his most apparent beliefs was that men should not be divided by race, religion, or any other such division (Seshagiri 8). He said that there are two different kinds of men; God oriented and self-oriented. Guru Nanak thought that a man’s religion is not defined by words such as ‘Hinduism,’ or ‘Buddhism,’ but by the actions

that he performs. He also believed that by thinking of and remembering God alone, the heart becomes pure.

In Guru Nanak's lifetime, there occurred many social, political, and spiritual advancement, and Guru Nanak is honored for many of these advancements. He helped people notice the flaws that existed in their ways of life. He made it a goal to help people improve their lives and improve the way they treated the people around them. Overall, he tried to expose and correct the negative aspects of life that he saw developing around him. Politically, people were ignorant as to what was going on around them. He began to show people what was really going on and encourage them to change it for the better. Guru Nanak's goal was to change the outlook people had on life. This increased religious tolerance. He had made a strong impact with his messages and any future attempt to change things back to the way they were before were expected to meet great resistance.

Guru Nanak influenced many lives and many aspects of life that continue to the present. He was a man of action and refused to sit by the side and let the world continue as it was. He had many strong ideas to get his world to live at peace and he did his best to spread those beliefs.

Bibliography

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1. The Sikhism Home Page
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