

The Legacy of Surendra Nath

Gobind Sadan mourns the death of Sri Surendra Nath, Governor of both Punjab and Himachal Pradesh, his wife Gargi Devi, their son Vikram and daughter Jyotsana, and their spouses and children. On July 9th, ten members of this extraordinary family died together when the small plane carrying them on a family outing crashed in bad weather. India's loss is profound, for Surendra Nath was a statesman of unparalleled integrity and ability. During his tenure, Punjab began to experience a period of peace after years of turmoil. His government service was firmly grounded in spirituality, under the blessing and guidance of his beloved teacher, Baba Virsa Singh Ji.

When interviewed in 1992 by BBC World Service about the potentially positive rather than negative relationship between religion and government, Surendra Nath said, "I do not have the slightest doubt in my mind that whatever successes I might have achieved in my life and career were entirely due to the strength which I derived -- strength of mind, strength of spirit — from the fountainhead of spirituality, which is faith in God.

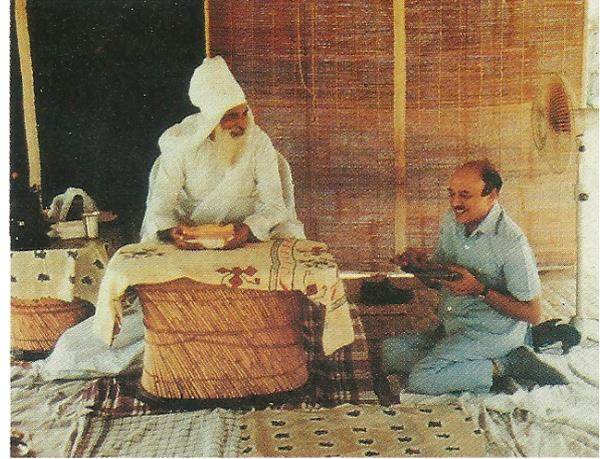
What is life about? What is the goal of life? Why do we come into this world? Is it only to be born, educated, get married, produce children, and then go into oblivion, or is there some deeper purpose?

As part of that quest, I did search, even in my student days, for the answers. I went to the Himalayas because our folklore is that there are great enlightened souls living in the Himalayas. I met lots of highly enlightened individuals for whom I have tremendous respect. But I did not find the one person for whom I was looking.

As per my understanding, that should be a person who is himself God-realized, who is himself in communion with God, who has been there — who therefore is truly competent to tell you the path and maybe lead you by the hand, help you to take a few steps on that path.

For me, that search, that quest ended when I met Baba Virsa Singh Ji. What impressed me was that though Babaji in the worldly sense is a totally uneducated, unlettered person, yet when I went to him with the most complicated, obtuse questions--spiritual, metaphysical — he would just close his eyes and give an answer which would be a complete answer. How could a man who is unlettered, uneducated in the worldly sense, be so thoroughly knowledgeable, so immensely wise? The answer is

that he taps that fountainhead of all knowledge by virtue of his constant communion with God, from whence comes all that exists in this universe."



The late Sri Surendra Nath with Baba Virsa Singh Ji

Babaji speaks at the Last Rites: Surendra Nath as a Model of Dharam

"We feel great sadness that Surendra Nath is no longer with us, no longer speaking with us as he did before. But we can also feel inspired by his memory, for Surendra Nath was living proof of the great change that comes in a person who has faith in *dharam* — the eternal truth of religion, of righteousness beyond any sectarian divisions. Dharam does not mean that you should leave your work and family life in order to devote yourself to religion. On the contrary, we are to do our duty with great belief in dharam.

Early in the morning after awaking, Surendra Nath used to pray, recite scriptural lessons, and meditate before the sacred fire. Thereafter, while doing his public work, he followed the commandments of God and always kept dharam before him. As he gave instructions regarding the country and its official administration, he repeated the principles of dharam again and again. He was convinced that a person who firmly believes in dharam can become a good ruler, a good officer, a good manager, making good decisions. His whole life, his character, was molded by dharam.

Indian religion, revealed through enlightened vision, teaches us that a person never dies, that the soul is eternal. The body must some day be cast aside, and the soul moves into a new body. Even the

prophets, seers, and saints cast aside their bodies. But one thing always remains in the world — our actions — and their effect never ends.

The whole country has now suffered a great loss. But the good deeds that Surendra Nath left behind will never be forgotten by this country. When he used to come to me, he always asked me to pray for three things: 'Babaji, please pray that our country may become strong, that law and order should become strong in our country, and that our people should have faith in God.'

When Surendra Nath was called to be Governor of Punjab, he came to ask me, 'What is the hukam (God's order)?' The hukam was, 'It will be a very difficult path, but you will go. When at the Governor's Mansion havan will be conducted, Jaap Sahib recited, and Guru Granth Sahib installed and read with great respect. God will bring complete peace in Punjab. Dharam will change the people's minds.'

Surendra Nath asked with a smile, 'Alone, what can I do?' I answered, 'You will not be alone. When there will be recitation of Jaap Sahib, havan, and reading of mantras and Gurbani (the Gurus' teachings), then the King of Spirit, the One Whom we call God, will change all the souls.'

Dharam is not a matter of sectarian divisions. Dharam is universal. It never creates anger, never makes a person emotional, never deprives people of their rights. Dharam will bring forth justice in society, and good character in individuals. The person who follows dharam will always exemplify truth and keep law and order firm. A person who believes in dharam will wish good for everyone, will love everyone, will think well of everyone. He will be concerned about others, praying, 'Oh God, give them good food, good clothes, good housing. Grant them Your Love and let them love each other.' Religion has nothing to do with slogan shouting or self interest. The person who believes in God will see no one as an enemy, for he will think that God is sitting in everyone, speaking in everything.

When Surendra Nath came here to Gobind Sadan, he used to shake hands with people no matter what their position, and kindly ask, 'How are you?' People were wonderstruck that such a great person was shaking hands with them. But he used to say, 'I am nothing. Whatever I am today is due to the blessings of Maharaj and the grace of God?'

Our homage to God should be expressed in our practical life. We are not merely to bow our heads at gurdwara, temple, mosque, or church. We are to leave our sins and act justly. If we are loyal to our country, our state, our department, then God will bless us and be merciful to us.

Once Surendra Nath said to me, 'Babaji, I realize that God has promoted me to this position with-the expectation that I will deal justly with people. If we have good dealings with people, God will be happy and the public will also be happy.' A person who stays within God's orders will rise to great heights, but if his self-interest leads him away from God's orders, it will be very difficult for him to maintain his position.

Surendra Nath was a statesman, but the public also recognized him as a spiritual person. Thoughts of God had entered every pore, every hair of his body. People of all religions asked him to speak at their functions. He was called to officiate at Sikh festivals, to speak at Christian churches, to speak at Hindu temples.

Today there is a great need for everyone to understand that religion is one, that there are not two religions or two ethical codes. Every religion has said that there is One God, and that we should love that One. There is One God, Who says, 'Have compassion for all,' for as Gurbani says, '*Sabhe sajiwal sadain tun kisai na dise bahra jio* — All are partners; to you, no one is an outsider.' God is in all things, in each leaf, but we humans create boundaries, walled forts. We have become divided, and our divisions have led to clashes among us.

Guru Nanak says, '*Ek Pita, ekas ke ham barik*--There is one Father and we are all His children.' We are all the family of God. We are brothers and sisters, but to understand this, we must follow dharam.

To understand dharam's great power, you must meditate, recite scripture, worship. Do not forsake dharam because of what you see in the conduct of priests and would-be 'saints.' The priest who accepts offerings and sets himself up as a guru is always the enemy of God. In India the word 'saint' has come to mean 'thief,' for the self-professed saints take money from people. They use God's Name to intimidate people. Therefore on one hand there are those using their political authority to oppress people, and on the other hand, there are those using their religious authority to oppress people. By contrast, God's person fills people with love and becomes the visible expression of God's love.

Whatever religion you believe, I request you all to give it practical form in your own life. You can all become like Surendra Nath if you take your stance firmly within dharam. But if you just perform the outer rituals of religion, it will be very difficult to become like Surendra Nath, for he applied religious teachings to his own life, developed them within his own character.

We all have to leave this world some day. Let us go after doing such good deeds that people will always remember us, that the very earth on which we were standing may remember us forever, that the air into which we had been speaking so sweetly and the trees under whom we were talking about God will always remember us. Neither our soul nor our actions are ever finished."

Order and Justice based on Dharam

A continual stream of government officials from all parties and positions come to Baba Virsa Singh for his blessings and his guidance. He teaches them that dharam will provide a good path for them to follow. He asserts that government must promote love, communal harmony and peace, that the rule of law and justice for all sectors of society should be upheld, and that genuine development projects should be undertaken for the uplift of the poor. He blesses them with Jaap Sahib to develop their own connection with God. He emphasizes to them that God's grace gives the power and energy for both spiritual and worldly development.

Babaji points out, "India's foundation is dharam. Our heritage is based on the ancient teachings of the rishis, munis, darveshes, prophets, Vedas, and Puranas. At that time, no one used dharam for their own purposes. They used dharam as the wellspring for love, good conduct, honest work, and communion with God. It pervaded all of life. What has changed? Religious places have become centers merely for rituals, and people have been divided by conflicts aroused in the name of religion."

Charge to the Press: Incite love and truth, not hatred and ignorance

At a press conference in Lucknow called by Rai Singh, Uttar Pradesh State Secretary of Welfare, Baba Virsa Singh emphasized to representatives of the major media the potential of the press to open the doors to love rather than divisive hatreds in society. The following are some excerpts from his press conference:

"When I spoke on national television in the Soviet Union, I gave this message: 'God is a Force of love, of kindness, Who gives us energy and compassion. You cannot leave that Force and expect people to work for good. It will never happen.'

When priests use the name of God for personal benefit, they are working against God's will. Similarly, some religious authorities have opposed the prophets' teachings. Then they build temples to commemorate the prophets' memory and sit there to live off the offerings that the faithful bring. They turn religion into a business. They give education, medicine, clothing, and food to people in need — and then when the people have become attached to them, they tell the people to convert to their religion.

Instead of following the teachings of their own prophets, they try to establish a majority. They take obscure spiritual terms that are little understood and use them to manipulate the people for their own advantage. This is not religion; this is not dharam. Dharam is love, with no selfish motive. In God's house there is no policy, no cleverness, no business, and yet this is the way religion is run today."

Press question: "The clergy have become an extension of the political system; they are being bought by the politicians, so they are not giving the true message of religion. What is the solution to this problem?"

Babaji: "I sense that everybody does feel that we have been wrong. If this is put forth on the television and newspapers, tens of millions of people will receive the message. Truth is very powerful. When you place truth before people, no one can deny it.

It isn't that all people are bad. The populace in general is very good. There are only a few mischievous people who continually mislead the public. But it is not so difficult to change this situation. You all know that this system put forth as religion is something which humans have created; it has nothing to do with God. If a building has a firm structure, it is very difficult to shake it. But the structure by which priests take alms for themselves has no base at all.

You cannot blame this situation on the politicians. It is actually our fault. We act as if we have no sense and mindlessly accept religious 'authority,' following like sheep. Give it a little thought — A place of worship should be a place for enlightenment, for development of inner wisdom.

The real struggle going on in the world today is between the founders of each religion and their followers. The disciples have turned themselves into gurus, and there are no followers left. God's messengers say one thing and their disciples say the opposite. If you place the true spiritual heritage before the public, peace will ensue.

Religious 'leaders' have all come under the influence of worldly power. Why? God only knows.

There is no political figure who has not visited Gobind Sadan. No one feels that this is a place for only one group or religious sect; everyone comes. What is our relationship with these political figures? I offer them spiritual teachings and give them Jaap

Sahib. I tell them, 'Here, recite this scripture, take God's blessings, don't mislead people, and don't fool yourself. Whatever you give to someone else will definitely come back around to you. Therefore, send good things to others.'

Why do people bow before these worldly powers? It is beyond my understanding. After all, they are just human beings. They are first graders who are just picking up their books for the first time. They really don't know anything about dharam. If the principal of the school goes out to receive these new students with garlands, how will the students feel, and what does that say about the principal? It is possible that the religious figures' motive in garlanding politicians is to attract a lot of people and collect a lot of money. What else could it be?



Babaji addresses government officials in Lucknow

The greatest danger comes from inciting people against each other. The whole world is aflame. Why should people take pride in adding more wood to the fire? But to talk to people about meditation, to teach that people of all religions should live as brothers and sisters, that the message of all the prophets is the same — this is the responsibility of us all, because this is the greatest need of the time. Let us bring home those things which are in short supply, not those things of which we already have a surplus.

There is already plenty of hysteria, anger, and fighting. Husband, wife, children, neighbors-- everyone is fighting. We need to be told how we can learn to live together. The prophets of all religions have so much to teach us on this subject. If someone speaks the truth, you should all support him. Let us stress those things from which eternal life will spring."

Nam in the U.S.A.

Baba Virsa Singh's spiritual programme is the same for everyone: seva (hard work on behalf of others), recitation of Jaap Sahib (Guru Gobind Singh's praises of the Formless One), and meditation (in which by reciting God's Holy Name — *Nam* — we are drawn to listen to the voice of God within us). He recommends this simple but powerfully effective path to God to people of all religions, encouraging them to develop a closer relationship with the prophet of their own religion and to put their prophet's teachings into practice.

The Nam offered by Babaji is a universal affirmation of the reality of God: *Ik Onkar Sat Nam Siri Wahe Guru* ("There is one God, Whose Name is Truth, Supreme and Wondrous beyond words, Master of both light and darkness"). People of all faiths and all walks of life attest to the transformative power of repeating this prayer. Joginder Kaur of Gobind Sadan U.S.A. in northern New York State offers it to her coworkers at a department store. They tell her that is changing their lives, that everything goes smoothly so long as they silently remember Nam.

For example, Ella Reese says, "Great things have been happening. When I say the prayer I just feel so good inside. Now I don't worry about as many things as I used to. I just keep saying the prayer, day and night, sometimes out loud, sometimes to myself. As long as I can speak I'll keep saying it."

Amy Cole says, "Joginder gave me this prayer when I was in a state of desperation in my life: My marriage had gone bad, I was pregnant and alone. I took the prayer home and started saying it almost all day long in my heart. At home I would say it out loud. After a time things started to get better. Even though my marriage has ended, I accept that as what God wanted. I had a beautiful, happy, healthy child. I thank God ever so much for my son; he is wonderful. And the loneliness in my life was filled by my many friends and family. I keep on saying this prayer and good things just keep on happening. I think praising God and doing as he wants is the only way to live a truly good and fulfilling life."

Gobind Sadan sponsors a practical programme of service and meditation for all faiths and all walks of life, under the inspiration of Baba Virsa Singh Ji, with farms in India and the U.S.A. (Gobind Sadan USA, RR 2, Graves Road, Box 383, Central Square, New York 13036, U.S.A.).