



Dialogue with Muslims

Gobind Sadan's mission transcends all religious and political boundaries. Thus at a time of heightened tension between India and Pakistan, a beautiful spiritual dialogue is nonetheless continuing between His Holiness Baba Virsa Singh and Mr. Mir Nawaz Khan Marwat, Assistant Secretary General of Motama' Al-Alam Al-Islami (World Muslim Congress), whose headquarters is in Pakistan.

Mr. Marwat had written to His Holiness to express his appreciation for his message and his work, and to point to historical connections between Islam and the Sikh Gurus. He wrote, "I highly appreciate the efforts of His Holiness Baba Virsa Singh alias Babaji for bringing understandings amongst the followers of various religions as well as serving his own community in the best possible manner.... Let me corroborate that the basic theme of all religions of the world is almost common. The main theme of all the religions is love for mankind, mutual understanding, piety, righteousness and justice to everyone irrespective of caste, creed, colour or religion and above all answerable to Almighty God for one's deeds and his treatment towards fellow human beings... It is heartening to learn that His Holiness Baba Virsa Singh said before the followers of various religions at Gobind Sadan that you celebrate the important days of all the holy personalities of various religions with the same zeal and enthusiasm. I strongly believe that it will lead to understanding and tolerance amongst the followers of various faiths. Let us direct our energies and efforts towards the service of mankind and carry the message of peace and love to every nook and corner of the world, sticking to our own religions without interfering in the faith of others, and render our obligations and services towards mankind in order to please Almighty God."



In his reply to Mr. Marwat, His Holiness Baba Virsa Singh stressed that all should celebrate all holy days as is done at Gobind Sadan. He explained,

"The Source from which all nabis and prophets have come is God. This is a point where we can all unite. This is our goal. We are all here to say that what Guru Gobind Singh did was against oppression, and what Hazrat Muhammad Sahib did was also against oppression. We can all agree that just as Guru Teg Bahadur gave his head but did not give up his mission, Jesus ascended the cross but did not accept his accusers' demands; he held fast to his mission."

"In the Holy Qur'an, God has been called 'Allah' and 'La Sharik'—the One without equal. Similarly, Guru Nanak Sahib has said, 'God is One, God is true, and He has no equal. Allah is the Purest of pure. There is no room for doubt; it is not otherwise.' God is pure and He creates more pure ones. Who is good? Who is bad? Jails have been born of the same Nur (divine Light), then how can anyone be good or bad? It is their deeds which make them so."

"There is one Allah. Jesus proclaimed the same. The Vedas have likewise said that there is one God, and that He is beyond description. In the Vedas, there are these words: 'Neti, neti, neti' ("beyond this, beyond this, beyond this"). Neti means that there is one God; we cannot say what is His size or form or color, but He exists. In Vedas He has been described as Samrag, meaning Omnipresent. Hazrat Muhammad Sahib has called Allah the Master of the earth, the Master of the skies, the Master of the universe. He said to pay homage to Allah who could create such a beautiful human being out of a mere clot. Thus in reality, religion, enlightenment, and God are one. The priests of religions have divided them.

There is a very important passage in Guru Gobind Singh's Jaap Sahib in which it is written that God is "the Chastiser of the tyrants, the Source of all livelihood, ever Beautiful, ever Resplendent, the Source of all

intellect, the Emperor." All these descriptions which have been written in Jaap Sahib have been written in the Holy Qur'an also. Here the Jaap Sahib is recited twenty-four hours every day, and I feel that the entire Qur'an is being recited when Jaap Sahib is being read. People in their ignorance find differences.

Who is unjust? One who is mu'min (a believer) never commits tyranny. Only a person full of ego and personal power can be a tyrant, whether he occupies the position of a ruler or an officer. But the dervishes are filled with compassion alone. Whatever rulers have done, they must face the consequences. But the dervishes have never committed any tyrannical acts, and the Holy Qur'an does not teach any such thing. It teaches us only muhabbat (love); it teaches us to love everyone and not to hurt anyone. It tells us to wait eagerly for guests, because a guest is God's blessing to you. The guest who comes to your home should be fed well. You should also insure that every slave is free, and should not enslave anyone. Guru Gobind Singh likewise said, 'Let everyone speak freely.'

All of Guru Gobind Singh's actions were meant for raising the status of good people and thwarting the will of Satan. All of Hazrat Muhammad's actions were likewise against Satan, rather than against any community or caste, because at that time evil-mindedness was widespread.

We cannot compare the prophets to anyone else. We can only affirm that their sacrifices became immortal, that their struggles helped religion spread. Their fight was always for freedom of religion, freedom of thought, service of humanity. As Jesus says, 'Look in the flowers and you will see my God; look in the earth, look in the trees, look in the hills, and you will find my God.'

By celebrating the holy days of these great people, we receive many blessings. The earth becomes fortunate; the trees and the public are all fortunate to receive the blessings of these great beings whose actions are of such magnitude. Their Nazar (merciful glance) falls upon us, and we are forgiven and receive their rehamat (blessings). By celebrating their holy days, our karma improves. The trees, the mountains, the air, the rivers are always celebrating them, but fortunate are we to get a chance, a time to celebrate the days of these great people.

We give feasts to celebrate their days, but there is no difficulty in doing so. Everything belongs to them; we take from them the means to give feasts in their honour. Every thing belongs to Him. Everything that has been given to us has been given by Him. I can only say to you with love that you must celebrate the days of these great prophets with love and respect. With this, religion, enlightenment, and muhabbat will spread in the world.

Let us open our doors. There is now no scope for small doors or windows. Make such large doors that even elephants can pass through. Love Hazrat Muhammad Sahib from within, and when Guru Gobind Singh's day comes, love him as well. Love Guru Nanak Sahib, love Moses, love Abraham, love Jesus, for Hazrat Muhammad Sahib has proclaimed that Jesus is a nabi (prophet). Let us do what our scriptures tell us, what our prophets speak about. Then we will see that after some time the fights will cease, hatred will end, and love, service, and mercy will come forth in us as the nabis wanted."

In reply, Mr. Marwat wrote, in part, "We are at the threshold of the twenty-first century and it is incumbent upon all the learned and right-thinking persons of different faiths to put their concerted efforts together and remove all misunderstandings through dialogue and resolve our problems peacefully and amicably. Let us enter into the 21st century with religious tolerance and respect for each others' rights, turning this planet into an era of peace, love, tolerance, understanding and coexistence.... Human family is like an ocean and different religions are like rivers and streams.... I am always inspired and delighted to know the efforts put by His Holiness Baba Virsa Singh for collecting the representatives of various religions on a common platform by observing and celebrating the holy days of different religions. I wish him all success and pray for his long life."

On the Guru Granth Sahib

In preparation for an interview of a Gobind Sadan representative by BBC, His Holiness Baba Virsa Singh recently spoke at length about the special reverence with which Sikhs regard their holy scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib. It contains the inspired hymns of the Sikh Gurus plus those of many Hindu and Muslim saints. This collection may have been begun by Guru Nanak, the First Sikh Guru. The first edition was dictated by Guru Arjun Dev, the Fifth Sikh Guru, to Bhai Gurdas. The final edition was compiled under Guru Gobind Singh's supervision and before he passed on in 1708, he commanded his followers to regard the holy scripture thenceforth as their Guru. His Holiness Baba Virsa Singh asserts:

"The greatest aspect of the Guru Granth Sahib is that it was dictated by the visionary Guru of that time to another person who was also God-realized. If there was the slightest difference of even a letter, it was corrected on the spot. Whatever has been spoken cannot be changed; whatever words God has transmitted through His messengers by revelation cannot be doubted. It was not necessarily spoken regarding one particular religion or people, or about the people who were sitting there at the time. It is enlightened wisdom and is applicable to the whole world.

Every religion has emphasized that a disciple will not become enlightened until he or she respects the Master. Whoever respects their Master's commandments and tries to act according to them will receive strength, willpower, and determination to follow truth. Therefore it is commendable that people carry the Guru Granth Sahib on their heads, consider it as their Guru, place him on a throne, and wave whisks over him.

In reality, what is the Guru? The words of the Master spoken through vision are the Guru. The Word of God passes through the body of the Master. It is the Word which comes from divine inspiration; it is the Word which is spiritual. Therefore you can refer to that Word as the Guru.

The Master is respected and people prostrate before him because the Word of God has passed through him. Actually, why do we bow before the Gurus? They are like human beings. But the power of God which we call shabd (the Word) or gian (enlightened wisdom) has passed through them. The Source from which the Word has come is worshipped. That body through which it has passed is also worshipped. All the movements of that body are worshipped. Even the places where the Master has placed his feet are worshipped, for the waves of vibrations have purified the very earth on which he has walked. Wherever his glance has gone into the skies, the trees, the land, has also been purified. Why is this person considered higher than other human beings? Because God's Power has passed through him.

The enlightened wisdom in my mind explains that the Word is worshipped in every religion. A person believes in the Holy Qu'an, it is because it has come through revelation of the Word. How has that revelation come? Through the Nabi, the Prophet. Why is the Prophet worshipped? Because the revelation has passed through him.

The Word is worshipped in all holy places, but this worship is somewhat different among Sikhs. Whereas people of other religions consider their scripture a book, Sikhs began worshipping the scripture just as a Guru is worshipped in his manifest form. They began waving a whisk over it, bowing before it, singing sacred songs near it, sitting respectfully on the floor before it, putting beautiful cloths on it, placing it on pillows under a canopy, feeling that the Guru is present in the Guru's words.

Everything in the material world eventually comes to an end, but the Word will never end. The body passes away at a certain point, but the enlightened Word will never end. Thus all people should treat their scripture with the respect which Sikhs regard the Guru Granth Sahib."

Condolences

His Holiness Baba Virsa Singh always reminds us that we must all leave this mortal frame some day, for this is part of God's system. Nevertheless, His Holiness sends his special condolences to members of the International Association for Peace through Culture since its international President, Valentin Sidorov, has passed away. Mr. Sidorov had worked for many years to introduce Russians to aspects of Indian spirituality, especially the teachings of Baba Virsa Singh. His Holiness Babaji says, "He died with good thoughts, so he will surely pass onward in a good way. He is very loving, and he did great service for this mission. He will definitely be given a very happy new birth in his next life." According to the orders of His Holiness, the entire Guru Granth Sahib was read at Gobind Sadan in honor of Mr. Sidorov, special prayers were said for him, and a special meal offered to hundreds of poor people in his memory.

New Trees, New School

In the continuing effort to make Gobind Sadan's New Delhi centre a more beautiful setting for the mission of His Holiness Baba Virsa Singh, some 3000 new trees have been planted along all the roads and over the rocky ridge by order of His Holiness. Despite a great drought, they have survived by the grace of God and by the hard work of Gobind Sadan's sevadars and gardeners, who have often had to carry buckets of water to each of the trees by hand. Now an old tractor from His Holiness's childhood farm has been brought to pull a water wagon around to water the trees. They have been donated by the government as part of its reforestation efforts and include some 20 varieties of flowering, fruit-bearing, shade-giving, and ornamental

trees. One of the varieties, Kalaysia, has so quickly taken hold and flourished that it is already flowering, with tall yellow spikes of color and paired leaves that fold together like hands in prayer every evening. Upon walking reverently through one of Gobind Sadan's gardens, members of the Italian spiritual community, Comunita di Etica Vivente ("Community for Living Ethics"), whispered, "We feel we have come back to the Garden of Eden."

The dedicated masons and gardeners who are working so hard to beautify Gobind Sadan are mostly illiterate. To help them advance in life, an informal night school has been developed at Gobind Sadan. They themselves built the shelter of whatever materials were at hand. One of Gobind Sadan's sevadars, Sukhbir Singh, took "teacher training at the government Resource Centre. Excellent books for adult literacy courses and copybooks were purchased, a guest from England donated a rug, and the classes began nightly after work. The total expenditure so far for the school is only US\$65, demonstrating again how much can be done with small means when the blessing of God is there. Kettar, the guesthouse care taker who had to leave school at the age of 7 when his mother died but who now studies whenever he has spare time, says, "I feel it will be very useful to be able to read and write. I'll be able to write letters and to understand what I see around me."

Statement from the President

Mr. Swaranjit Singh, President of the Gobind Sadan Institute for Advanced Studies in Comparative Religion, has been asked to make a policy statement about Gobind Sadan's interfaith position. He frames his response in terms of dharam, the Punjabi word meaning the eternal way of religion and righteousness, beyond sects: "Dharam is love and is faith in God. Dharam is serving people with no selfish motives. All religions are to be fully accepted and respected. Everyone should be free to follow his own faith. Teachings of all religions are one and the same."

Search Gobind Sadan's website

Through the dedicated efforts of Larry Polly in New York State in maintaining www.gobindsadan.org, people can now find out what His Holiness Baba Virsa Singh has said about particular subjects by using the Gobind Sadan Search Engine. After one types in a word, such as "Jesus" or "mind," the Search Engine quickly lists all the places where that word can be found in the extensive archives of His Holiness's words which have been placed on Internet. Each of those entries can then be immediately opened and read. This is an extremely effective method for organizing access to the archives. And once one opens the relevant entries, one is struck by the great treasure of enlightened wisdom which His Holiness is sharing with the world.

Another boon: Singh has typed in the entire text of the authoritative out-of-print book on Baba Siri Chand by Giani Ishar Singh Nara in Punjabi plus other articles on Baba Siri Chand. People around the world now can have direct access to this information through the Gobind Sadan website at www.gobindsadan.org/sirichand.

Call for stories of Maharaj Those of you who have had extraordinary experiences of the impact of His Holiness Baba Virsa Singh in your own life are still invited to write these stories and send them immediately to Joginder Kaur, 1736 Rt. 5 East, Elbridge, New York 13060, USA. She is assembling the letters into art album and a book to be presented to His Holiness on his birthday in 2000.

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