



# THE SIKH MESSENGER

A QUARTERLY MAGAZINE OF THE  
NETWORK OF SIKH ORGANISATIONS, U.K.

## IN THIS ISSUE:

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- **Peter Bell Memorial Lecture -Role  
of Religion in Today's Society**
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Ajit Singh of Cambridge**

**With Compliments**

to

**The Network of Sikh Organisations**

from

**Guru Nanak Trust**

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From Amar Subhag Kaur and  
Sundeep Singh Maker  
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*The Lord first created Light :*

*From the Lord's play all living creatures came,  
And from the Divine light the whole creation sprang.*

*Why then should we divide human creatures*

*Into the high and the low?*

*G G S p 1349*

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# THE SIKH MESSENGER

THE QUARTERLY MAGAZINE OF THE NETWORK OF SIKH ORGANISATIONS

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Spring/ Summer 2015

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# EDITORIAL

## SELF INFLICTED WOUNDS

Unthinking Distortion of Guru Nanak's teachings

Indarjit Singh

### **1. The Akal Takht is the supreme religious authority of the Sikhs.**

No it is not. The supreme religious authority is the Guru Granth Sahib. The Akal Takht achieved prominence during the Missl period when matters affecting the Sikh community would be discussed there. The Jathedhar of the Akal Takht is now appointed by the SGPC, the body responsible for managing gurdwaras in Greater Punjab. Pronouncement of the Jathedhar or the SGPC are only of religious relevance if these are in consonance with the teachings of the Gurus and the Guru Granth Sahib. We should not forget Guru Gobind Singh's injunction: 'Guru manio Granth'.

### **2. Promotion of New Age Brahmins**

Should those who have taken amrit from an exclusive sect, parade themselves as special amritdharis, and, ignoring the Gurus' teachings on equality, claim superiority to other Sikhs, refuse to eat with or associate with Sikhs, consider food polluted if touched by those outside their sect be considered 'gursikhs (true Sikhs)?

Astonishingly, the Sikh Council, and a body called the Federation of Sikh Organisations, say they should. In letters written to the Prison Chaplain General, without consultation with the Sikh Chaplaincy Service (SCS) or its parent body the NSO, both bodies refer to a group of such people as gursikhs, and complain that the Sikh Chaplaincy Service is not looking to their special dietary needs.

Chaplaincy and pastoral care for all Sikhs in prison is provided by the NSO through the Sikh Chaplaincy Service (SCS). This is a mainly voluntary service to remind Sikhs in prisons of their Sikh teachings and assist them to in getting work, shelter and support when they leave prison to minimise the risk of re-offending. (The re-offending rates for Sikhs is now less than 2% compared to a national average of more than 50%).

Over the years, the SCS has been instrumental in transforming an almost wholly Christian Chaplaincy into one that provides for all faiths. We have provided 'Sikh Prison Service Instructions' for all prison staff explaining: Sikh teachings, the celebration of Sikh festivals and guidance on food. Ahead of the rest of the country, we have ensured that if halal meat is served, a suitable non-halal alternative must also be provided.

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Contrary to the thinking of the Council and Federation, the SCS does not have it in their gift to insist on special diets to meet the whims of different prisoners on request. The claim of these prisoners that they have had a special amrit and therefore cannot touch food handled by others or eat with other Sikhs, goes against the whole grain of Sikh teachings. Despite this the SCS has provided members of the sect with the iron bowls requested and has also asked the prison concerned to do what it can to meet their needs.

### **3. Promoting the writings of the so-called Dasam Granth and placing them on a par with the Guru Granth Sahib.**

#### **Reality**

The Dasam Granth is a compendium of assorted texts compiled by Hindu Brahmins more than 70 years after the ascension of Guru Gobind Singh. It contains some reflective verses that could possibly be genuine writings of Guru Gobind Singh or other Sikhs, but in the main the writings are completely at odds with the teachings of our Gurus. The compendium includes writings on sexual depravity and extreme denigration of women. There is also the distinctly Hindu assertion that God has appeared 24 times on Earth. Much of the contents of this compendium is a complete antithesis of Sikh teachings and should be resolutely rejected by all Sikhs. Similar advice has been given by many scholars over many years, particularly at the time of the Singh Sabha movement. Today the same compendium is being touted by mischievous elements seeking to take us back to a pre-Guru past, and sadly by unthinking Sikhs who have never read a single page.

The noted scholar, Daljeet Singh in a detailed study, observed that much of the Dasam Granth was rooted in the mythology of a pre-Guru past and as such has no relevance in Sikh teachings. He concluded with these words:

**‘When Guru Gobind Singh gave us the far-sighted edict ‘Guru Manio Granth, he gave us the scales by which we should measure the value or worth of other teachings. If they are in consonance with those of the Guru Granth Sahib, we should respect and value them; if they are not, like much of the content of the Dasam Granth, they should be firmly rejected.’**

### **4. The Sikh calendar.**

Sikhs are not superstitious over supposed auspicious dates or phases on the moon. For a number of years Sikhs have been using the Nanakshai Calendar which is tied to the common solar calendar. This enables us to insert the dates of important Sikh festivals into the diaries of governments and institutions of the different countries in which we live. Those seeking to appease the Hindu majority and draw us back to the confusion of the Hindu calendar should be firmly resisted.

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# THE ASSISTED DYING BILL

## A Grotesque Challenge to Sikh Teachings on Compassionate Care

Indarjit Singh and Hardeep Singh

The British Medical Association (BMA), allied healthcare professionals and religious leaders are united in pressing for better palliative care for all. Sikh teachings emphasise the responsibility of society to care for the elderly and vulnerable, whilst making them feel loved and valued members of the community. As Sikhs we should remember the example of Guru Har Krishan who saw the care of victims of a smallpox epidemic in Delhi of greater importance than his own life. The importance of 'assisted living'; caring for those around us is central to Sikh teachings.

It is therefore a matter of real concern that Rob Marris MP, Chair of the All Party parliamentary Group (APPG) for Sikhs, will be introducing legislation in Parliament in early September, that cuts across Sikh teachings on our collective responsibility to care for all members of society (sarbat ka bhalla), and instead assist vulnerable people to take their own lives.

Marris MP for Wolverhampton South West tabled a Private Members Bill 'Assisted Dying (No.2)', in June 2015. This follows on from a similar Bill introduced by Lord Falconer last year, which didn't get past the third reading in the Lords. Some Peers expressed concerns about the 'financial incentives' involved in ending the lives of the terminally ill. The Bill was also described as a 'breeding ground for vultures.'

Many see the dangers of depressed individuals at a low ebb, surrounded by uncaring relatives, feeling morally pressurised to stop being a burden on others by seeking help to end their lives. Hundreds of letters received by Lord Singh and many other parliamentarians from disabled people and others in poor health, underline their fear and concern over the proposed legislation. In a debate on 'assisted dying' last year, Lord Singh speaking on the earlier attempt to introduce such legislation said:

**“In attempting to show compassion to a few, it neglects due compassion to many thousands of others. It has created immense fear in vulnerable people that they are being seen as a problem by society, with consequent damage to their sense of self-worth.”**

### ACTION REQUIRED

1. All Sikhs should lobby the Chair of the APPG for Sikhs, Rob Marris (whose majority is only a few hundred) to withdraw his ill-considered and demeaning bill. The undeniable strength of the Sikh Federation on the APPG could be particularly helpful.
2. All Sikhs should lobby other members of parliament not to support a Bill that cuts across our responsibility as human beings and the whole thrust of Sikh teachings to assist vulnerable people to live with dignity and good palliative care.

**In the concluding line of our Ardas we pray for the wellbeing of all our fellow beings.**

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# PETER BELL MEMORIAL LECTURE

## Religion and Society -A Sikh Perspective

Lord Singh of Wimbledon

Friends, it is a real pleasure to join you this evening to give the Peter Bell Memorial lecture. I had the good fortune to have met Peter a few times and I really appreciate all the work he did in promoting good inter faith relations, and it is a particular honour to be asked to give this memorial lecture.

I've been asked to speak this evening on the relevance of religion in society. I would like to place particular emphasis on how we can help our children become responsible citizens in a fast changing world. In the Sikh view, education is all about preparing our children to make a positive contribution to the well-being of the world around. While we rightly teach our children the 3 Rs: to be literate and numerate, we seem to place less emphasis on the other equally important 3 Rs which are the essence of religious teaching; namely right wrong and responsibility.

Many believe that this responsibility lies with parents; others assume it lies with the school. In the Sikh view it's the responsibility of both parents and teachers to help children to grow up to be considerate and responsible members of society. Unfortunately, it sometimes slips between the two and children are left to develop their own sense of right and wrong, guided by irresponsible advertising, internet chat lines, TV soaps and so-called comedies, in which infidelity is seen as something of a giggle, that ignores the hurt that transient, adult relationships, can cause to children.

Until very recent times, we could all grow up in the comfort and security of a religion and culture that we shared with those that lived around us. It was common and patriotic (it still is for some), to go into raptures about our way of life compared with the inferior ways of foreigners. Many believed that even God acknowledged our natural superiority, and was always on our side. And schools, in the teaching of literature and history often contributed to the promotion of false ideas of superiority and difference.

Remember the famous words of John of Gaunt in Shakespeare's Richard II, which we learnt at school.

This royal throne of kings, this sceptred isle,  
This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,  
This other Eden, demi-paradise,  
This fortress built by nature for herself  
Against infection and the hand of war

This happy breed of men, this little world,  
This precious stone set in the silver sea  
Which serves it in the office of a wall  
Or a moat defensive to a house  
Against the envy of less happier lands  
.....And more!

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We learnt to criticise the literary style, the use of figurative language. We never thought to criticise the xenophobic insularity of its general sentiment. Nor did the possibility occur to us that other nations might have different explanations of God's purpose in isolating the British. Seriously though, it's important to understand that this sort of thinking was common to most nations and cultures. Many in India even argued that even to leave the shores of the subcontinent would pollute them for ever.

In the past, we could strengthen our sense of cohesion and identity, including religious identity, by misrepresenting the ways and beliefs of others, or describing them in disparaging terms. For example, the dictionary definition of heathen is 'those who are not Christian, Jew or Muslim'. So you can see where that leaves me!

We all grow up with in-built prejudices and are reluctant to see the good in others. I recently met someone from the Department for Education who reminded me of my very first Radio 4 'Thought for the Day' broadcast, I'd like to share it with you. At the time, I was working with a large civil engineering contractor in their London office, on the 7th floor of an 8 storey building. My talk was about my end of day experience.

We were home civil engineers and above us were the international civil engineers. They saw themselves as superior people with stickers of Seychelles, Hong Kong or other exotic places on their brief cases.

At the end of the day we would head to the lift and as the lift door opened, those inside, the superior people from the 8th floor, would stick their stomachs out a little to give the impression that the lift was fuller than it was. Undeterred, we'd barge in, and the 8th floor stomachs would grudgingly recede. We were now all civil engineers, working for the same Company.

When the lift reached the floors below inhabited by the lowest of the low, the Department of Health and Social Security, we would mutter 'cripples, why can't they walk down a few flights of stairs'? As the lift door opened, we would stick out our stomachs to deter this lower form of life entering our lift.

Undeterred, these civil servants and bureaucrats, who did nothing but drink tea all day long, would get into our lift. Grudgingly, we pull back our stomachs and we all went down to the ground floor, where we got out, all differences forgotten, until the next day. We see where prejudice can take us; it wasn't tea, but coffee!

We see the same sort of behaviour when we get on a train, or a bus. Those inside become 'us'. Recent immigrants are loudest in opposing new immigration. There is a law of life, which I'll call Indarjit's law: that when two or more people find sufficient in common to call themselves 'us', they will find a 'them', to look down on, to strengthen their sense of unity. When a person leaves a group of people who have been chatting together, the odds are that the chap that tose left will strengthen the unity of the remaining group by talking negatively about the person who just left.

You see this search for unity at the expense of others, in a milder form with conflict between football supporters, but, all too easily, it can lead to active hatred of whole communities. I saw a reminder of this descent to evil, on a visit to Auschwitz in Poland, where many Jews blamed for all the ills in Europe, were murdered. While going round the former concentration camp, I

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saw the shower area where new arrivals were asked to wash before receiving promised new clothes and food. Once in, the doors would be closed and deadly gas fed in through vents in the ceiling. I saw the gas canisters, the conveyer to the incinerator and mounds of human hair; but what really got to me was a huge pile of infants' shoes. In my mind's eye, I could see little children skipping and laughing, blissfully unaware of what was to befall them.

I once did some work for Amnesty International, looking at genocide and human rights abuse in a number of different countries; abuse which often involved unbelievable depravity. Almost as bad as the abuse, was the realisation that those who we learn to trust are often the perpetrators: police and soldiers, and, even worse, priests and teachers and previously friendly neighbours. Why do people behave in such ways?

Goulding in his book 'Lord of the Flies', about a group of children marooned on a remote island, puts forward a ***thesis that without moral and ethical guidance, children, and by implication, adults, gravitate "to less civilised behaviour.*** It is a disturbing view that unfortunately, has the ring of truth.

It's not only so on fictional islands, or other countries. We see such behaviour in this country, in for example, the murder of an old lady for the few coins in her handbag, and in appalling crimes against children.

**The reality of human nature, and the evidence is all around us, is that we humans do not come with preloaded software of right, wrong and responsibility. Decent responsible behavior has to be taught and learnt. We cannot have a better society without better people. We cannot have better people without responsible teaching. The question is, who should do the teaching?**

It is important to differentiate between two levels of behaviour. The first is behaviour that keeps us out of trouble. For the small child it's not throwing food about, or not kicking aunts and uncles in the shins. For adults it's being reasonably polite to those around us, and complying with those in authority and the rules and laws of society.

Is religion necessary for teaching behaviour at this level? Of course not. No more than it's necessary to involve religion in teaching a dog to stand on its hind legs, or a dolphin to perform tricks. Sanction or reward, are sufficient motivators. In many ways, the teaching of citizenship to help children understand and appreciate the society in which they live, falls into this category. It's important for children to learn about national institutions, democracy, the media, ethnic identity and the consequences of bullying and racism. These teachings of citizenship, or conforming behaviour, are not however the same as the teachings of religion.

Conforming behaviour, or the social norms of society are constantly changing. For example, unlike the law in this country, the law of the land in France prohibits the wearing of the hijab for Muslim girls and the turban for Sikh boys, in state schools. Citizenship education in French schools would support such a policy. The reality however, is that the prohibition is bound to harm integration, and hurt self-esteem by forcing children to have one identity at school and another at home. State policy in France is at odds with both common sense, and the ethical imperative for its citizens to understand and respect different ways of life. It is a policy that has rightly been condemned by the Catholic Church, and others.

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Some of you will recall that in this country in the 60's, accommodation ads in shop windows often had the words 'no blacks or coloureds or Irishmen'. perfectly legal at the time. Citizenship teaching at the time would not have criticised such behaviour.

I'd like to believe the changes brought about since then, were all due to enlightened thinking but studying the literature of the time, it is apparent that it was more a fear of social unrest that that led to anti-discriminatory legislation.

Religion, unlike citizenship, bases its teachings on what it sees as fundamental truths that unlike the law of the land do not change with time and place. In his very first sermon, Guru Nanak declared Na koi Hindu, Na koi Mussalman that in God's eyes there is neither Hindu nor Muslim, and by today's extension, neither Christian Sikh nor Jew. God, he taught, is not interested in our religious labels, but in the way we behave. I'll give other examples to show how religion aims to move us towards, not only to being better citizens, but to a better and fairer society.

Citizenship skills help an individual's material progress and standing in society. The teachings of our great religious leaders on the other hand, frequently challenge social norms. Religious teachings have nothing to do with conformity, or, equally importantly, individual or material advancement. They are about improvement of society **as a whole**. Religion takes us away from obsession with self, to active concern for others.

Guru Nanak taught, where self exists there is no God, where God exists there is no self. Or as a Christian theologian put it, it's the 'I' in the middle of 'sin', that makes it sin. Religion then, is fundamentally different from civics or citizenship in that far from conforming, it has its own standards and frequently challenges existing social norms in looking to deeper truths. On a personal note, it wasn't conformity to society norms that led to me challenging apartheid in South Africa long before it became fashionable.

Let's now look then at how can we make ours a more cohesive and caring society. Voluntary effort and increasingly government and other statutory effort are becoming more alert to social ills in our society. But in focussing on problems, rather than more holistically on causes, we sometime tend to look through the wrong end of the telescope, and seek to treat spots and sores of social maladies, rather than look further to underlying causes.

Let me give some examples. If problems resulting from drug abuse take up too much police time, the call is legalise their use and free police time, rather than question why the use of drugs has risen so dramatically. The huge rise in child and teenage pregnancies is met with a call to issue ever more explicit sex education in schools rather than teach old fashioned respect, consideration and courtesy. It is no surprise that Britain has one of the highest rates of teenage pregnancy in Europe. Increasing alcohol abuse? Let's extend or abolish licensing hours to spread the incidence of drunken or loutish behaviour. Result a rise in binge drinking. Too many people ending up in prison? Lets build more prisons. Extend this thinking, of looking to the wrong end of a problem, to the behaviour of little junior who greets visitors to the house by kicking them in the shins. Solution: issue said visitors with shin pads as they enter the front door!

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Today in our preoccupation with things material, we have forgotten the importance of balance between material and spiritual and, as a result, have previously unheard of prosperity side by side with escalating crime, rising alcoholism and drug dependency, loneliness, the homeless and broken homes and other disturbing evidence of social disintegration.

Sikhs believe that our different religions should take the lead in addressing the real causes **of our** social ills - starting with the role of the family. We see marriage, fidelity and the family as central to the health and well being of society. It is easy to allow understanding, compassion and support for those in different situations to blind us to the importance of an ideal. TV comedy in which infidelity is seen as something of a giggle, blinds us to the hurt that transient, adult relationships, can cause to children.

A short true story makes the point better than any words of mine.

**Two** small boys were fighting, hammer and tongs in the school playground. With great difficulty, a teacher finally managed to prise the two apart demanding to know what it was all about. Looking at the teacher, with eyes swollen with tears, one of the children said it was because the others dad had taken his mum away.

While we should not condemn those who chose different lifestyles, there is a need for clearer highlighting of responsibility and the benefits of stable family relations. Both those in political life and leaders of faith communities have much to do here.

Sikhism sees other religions as different paths to a truer understanding of God; like paths up a mountain. We can start from different points, but still reach the same goal. Nor are the paths mutually exclusive. They frequently merge in ways that give us a heightened understanding of our own faith.

Take for example the Sikh teaching 'There is an inner-light in all; and that light is God.' Exactly the same sentiment is conveyed in the line of the Christian hymn 'to all life Thou givest, to both great and small; in all life thou livest the true life of all'. It is important to remember that that a major benefit of our study of other religions is that it gives us a wider view of religion and a new and fuller perspective on our own beliefs. We learn that different religions are not barriers between people, but gateways to a greater understanding and enrichment of life.

Far from accepting the status quo on social practices, Guru Nanak was boldly critical of divisive practices such as the caste system or superstitious, dietary customs, and taboos on eating with, or socialising with those of other faiths. He and his successor Gurus taught the oneness of our human family and in this, emphasised the dignity and complete equality of women; teachings wholly at odds with the practices of the day.

I believe the founders of our different faiths intended to remind us of ethical imperatives for peace, harmony and social justice that should underpin all secular decision making. The first step to making this a reality is to recognise that life has both spiritual and material dimensions, and if we neglect either of these, it will be to our ultimate regret. This fundamental truth has long been recognised by our religious founders. Jesus Christ taught that man cannot live by bread alone. He recognised the need to look to the material side of life, but taught the folly of looking to material comforts to bring meaning and contentment to life.

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Sikhism gives the story of the miser Dunning Chand who spent all his time amassing wealth until he was given a needle by Guru Nanak to take into the next world. He then realised the folly of greed and meanness.

On another occasion, the Guru gently chided some so-called holy men who had left their families to go in the wilderness in search of God. The Guru told them that God was not to be found in the wilderness but in their homes in looking to the needs of their families and others around them.

Today there's not much wilderness left, but it is all too easy to spend our life in a virtual wilderness, surfing the internet for hours on end, or in front of television, or, in other pursuits that leave us little time for those around us.

An important second step is to carry out a drastic spring-cleaning of what today often passes for religion. Today there is an urgent need for the discarding of rituals, superstitions and dated customs and practices that have nothing to do with teachings. Practices that here over years become falsely attached to religion and simply serve to distort teachings. Practices and customs that have no relevance to life today. Not easy. Religious texts sometimes contain xenophobic attitudes to others. Possibly understandable in the context of persecution suffered at the hands of other communities, but in no way either right or relevant to the world of today. The problem is that some believe that every word in their scriptures is the word of God, and we have to go on hating or looking down on others.

Today, we have to knock down the false barriers of belief and exclusivity between religions. When, in the course of redevelopment, a building is demolished in a familiar area, we see the surrounding landscape in a quite different light. In the same way, when false barriers of bigotry are demolished through dialogue and understanding, we will see our different religions as they really are: overlapping circles of belief, in which the area of overlap is much greater than the smaller area of difference. In that area of overlap, we find common values of tolerance, compassion and concern for social justice: values that can take us from the troubled times of today, to a fairer and more peaceful world.

Whenever I undertake any sort of do-it-yourself activity, I inevitably get into difficulties. When all else fails, and only then, I turn to the book of instructions. Today, our do-it-ourselves efforts for a fairer and more contented society have clearly failed. It's time to turn to the book or books, of instructions on balanced and responsible living.

Finally, I'd like to emphasise that one of the greatest gains in our study of the actual teachings of our different religions, is the discovery that they are not all that different. Our different religions are in essence, overlapping circles of belief and ethical guidance, in which the area of overlap is far greater than the smaller areas of difference.

Sikhs believe that in that area of overlap lie common values of tolerance, justice and compassion. Values that make us more considerate and responsible human beings; Values that should be the essence of both British identity and wider human aspiration; values central to our different religions that are the key to both personal happiness, and the wellbeing of wider society.

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# WESTMINSTER ABBEY TALK: STAND UP AND BE COUNTED

Talk given by Lord Singh of Wimbledon to inter faith participants  
as a prelude to the Commonwealth Service March 2015

Most people know that Sikhs wear a turban, but fewer people know that it is a visible symbol to remind us, and others of Sikhism's total commitment to Sikh ideals like emphasis on the equality of all human beings including the dignity and full equality of women; putting the concerns of others before our own and importantly, standing up for rights of all faiths and beliefs.

The origin of the wearing of a turban by Sikhs, lies in our 9th Guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur, standing up for the rights of the Hindu community at a time of forced conversion to Islam by the Mughal rulers. The Guru was tortured and publically beheaded in the centre of Delhi for standing up for the right to freedom of belief of a sister faith. The Mughal rulers then challenged Sikhs in the crowd (who then had no distinguishing appearance) to come forward and claim their master's body. Sikhs, cowed by fear hesitated to do so. The 10th Guru, Guru Gobind Singh later decided to give Sikhs a distinct identity including symbols like the turban, to remind us to stand up for the human rights of all people, particularly the vulnerable.

Sikhs are not alone in such commitment. All of our faiths remind us to put principles before expediency. It is not easy to stand up for basic human rights against unthinking public opinion. But, I believe this is the true role of religion. As a Christian hymn reminds us:

*Though the cause of evil prosper yet tis truth alone that's strong.*

*Though her portion be the scaffold, and upon the throne be wrong.*

The hymn also reminds us, that despite difficulties, with faith, we can all help 'turn the iron helm of fate'.

A little personal story. I grew up in England and first went to India in the early 60s as a newly qualified mining engineer and stayed in Delhi for a few weeks before taking a job as a Mining engineer. At the time, all States in India were allowed to have their own regional language except Punjab, where Punjabi the language of the Sikh scriptures was being replaced by Hindi. Sikhs were angry and upset by this deliberate discrimination, but had no media voice. I thought that this was unfair - worse, not British!

I knew a letter in the national dailies from a Sikh would never get published, so I took on the name of a neighbour in England, Victor Pendry. A legacy of Raj deference ensured that my highly critical letter was published causing a stir in the Sikh community. My wife knew of Mr Pendry before she ever met me. A letter supposedly from my old Head, Sylvanus Jones followed, supporting Mr Pendry. Using a telephone directory, in my first interfaith initiative, letters from Hindus and Muslims rapidly followed drawing attention to the injustice against the Sikh.

The point of the story is that in different ways, we can all make a difference by standing up to injustice in bullying at school or the office or workplace, or in a constant striving for greater social or political justice.

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And there is much to do. Today materialistic secular society has pushed religion to the margins of society as irrelevant. In a debate in the Lords, a member commented 'religion is out of step with society'. I responded that to me, it was like someone saying 'my satnav is not following my directions'. Religion is often blamed as a cause of conflict. It is not. It is the misuse of religious sentiment to promote irreligious ends. Religions are ethical satnavs to lead to an understanding of right, wrong and responsibility, while politicians increasingly pander to our material desires in their attempt to win votes.

It is not easy to go against this materialistic tide with its unthinking pursuit of individual happiness to the neglect of responsibility, but people of religion have a duty to move towards balance living and ensure that consideration of ethical implications informs all we do. . We can do this individually, but our input into society will be much more effective if our different religions synchronise ethical satnavs to highlight common ethical values through real and meaningful inter faith exploration.

## **Sikh Reading at the 2015 Commonwealth Day Service in Westminster Abbey on the Theme of Young People.**

Sikh teachings emphasise commonalities between our different faiths. In the following verse, Guru Gobind Singh, our 10th Guru reminds us that we should not to let superficial differences deflect us from serving the one God of us all.

*God is in the temple as He is in the mosque  
God is in the Hindu worship as He is in the  
Muslim prayer  
Despite superficial differences, we are all one  
The one Lord made us all. -Akal Ustat*

Young people today increasingly accept this belief in the oneness of our human family, and have much to contribute to promoting this understanding in the Commonwealth and in the wider world.

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# THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

## Talks on BBC Radio 4 Today Programme

11-3-15

At the start of the Millennium, some of us from different faiths met in Lambeth Palace to reflect on the record of the 20th century in which more people were killed as a result of war than in the rest of recorded history. Not knowing the horrors of the conflicts that lay ahead, we resolved that people of all faiths should adhere to common values and we set out to establish what those should be. After a series of meetings we published a grandly titled document 'Common Values for the New Millennium'. The list included looking to the needs of others, considering responsibilities as well as rights and understanding and respecting diversity.

We thought we had formulated a Holy Grail to lasting peace and social justice. But after a short burst of publicity, the document was soon forgotten. On reflection perhaps we were being simplistic and naive. As Sikh scriptures reminds us, we can't effect change by simply wishing it.

A few years later, I attended another meeting in the very same room in Lambeth Palace to hear a lecture by a visiting American Preacher on working for lasting peace. He declared 'what we need are common values!' And now a high powered Commission is engaged on yet another extensive consultation exercise to define British values.

All the values in the Lambeth list are found in Sikh teachings and are also evident in other faiths. The real problem is how to embed these in the fabric of a society that looks to individual fulfilment rather than the needs of society as a whole. How can we walk the talk, or as Sikhs put it, how can we move in a gurmukh or Godly direction. Not easy. A colleague in the Lords reminded me of this when he stated in a debate that religion was out of step with society. To me it was a bit like saying 'my satnav isn't following my directions'.

Sikh teachings on the need for cooperation between different faiths suggest that if we synchronise our ethical satnavs, we can begin to make a real difference. Perhaps the first step would be to recognise that despite following different road maps, in reality, we all share common aspirations and concerns, and should resolve to work together to make these central to social and political action.

18-3-15

Yesterday, a Department of Health taskforce published a report recommending sweeping changes in the funding and operation of mental health provision for children and adolescents. The report follows a series of Times articles on a growing epidemic of mental health problems in children and adolescents resulting in a huge rise in children resorting to self-harm and exhibiting symptoms of anxiety and depression in schools.

Many are seeking treatment for mental health problems in hospitals, or worse ending up in prisons. In one of these articles, the columnist Libby Purves highlights the urgent need for parents, to re-set their priorities and recognise the ground realities of pressures on their children.

Her comments reminded me of a story of Guru Nanak meeting with a group of people in a

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mountain retreat searching for an understanding of God. They greeted the Guru with the words ' how goes the world below' the Guru was not impressed and told the group that God was not to be found in the wilderness but in the service of family and wider society.

Today there's not much wilderness left for retreat – selfish or otherwise - but it is all too easy to spend all our time on personal pursuits or lose, ourselves in the virtual wilderness of the internet to the neglect of those around. Worse, in the absence of comfort and support from parents, children may look to friendship, love and support on internet chat lines oblivious to the dangers of grooming, blackmail and the hurt that can be caused by on-line bullying.

While yesterday's promise of enhanced provision will help, Sikh teachings and those of sister faiths suggest that the real remedy lies in the home.

Reflecting on parental responsibility, Guru Nanak reminded us that the birth of a child comes with an attached responsibility for the child's care and comfort that continues even if parents split. It is the family rather than on the internet that children should share both triumphs and concerns and receive time consuming but necessary encouragement and support. Today, obsession with personal fulfilment has replaced a search for God. Our different faiths remind us that both personal fulfilment and God can be found in looking beyond ourselves to the care and support of those around us.

2-6-15

The weekend news of 17 bodies being pulled out of the Mediterranean and the rescue of more than 4000 people in just 3 days, reminds us of the unbelievable suffering in the Middle East. Refugees, from brutal rule in Libya, Syria and Iraq are continuing to take their chance in leaky boats to escape further persecution. Their plight is mirrored by that of the Rohingya Muslims from Myanmar, starving and adrift in ships for months at an end, because no one will give them sanctuary.

A common feature of such tragedies is the manipulation of religious sentiment to further political power, with selective quotation of religious texts written hundreds of years ago being used to justify brutal behaviour. Paradoxically, similar selective quotation is used to argue that religions teach only peace.

Most religions suffer this problem of selective quotation to justify different views. Sikhism is a comparatively new religion with the founder, Guru Nanak born in 1469. The teachings of the Gurus were couched in lasting ethical principles and were recorded in their lifetime. Sikhs were asked to follow only these recorded teachings. Despite this clarity, we still suffer from selective quotation on emotive issues such as meat eating, and more worryingly, in attempts to introduce new teachings which many Sikhs feel to be of dubious authenticity.

Today, religious leaders now have the additional task of disentangling advice, given to meet the particular social or political climate of several centuries ago, from more lasting and timeless ethical teachings.

As a line from a favourite hymn reminds us

*New occasions teach new duties; time makes ancient good uncouth  
They must upward, still and onward who will keep abreast with truth.*

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It is a line that resonates with the Sikh belief that our religious labels, or membership of different sects count for nothing in the eyes of the one God of us all. It's what we do to counter poverty and work for peace and justice that really counts.

The challenge is not easy, but it is essential in our need to ensure that religion is what the founders of our different faiths intended it to be, guidance for responsible living, and the cure rather than the cause of conflict.

9-6-15

A weekend report that the Principal of Cheltenham Ladies College was considering ending homework to help reduce depression in children underlines the seriousness of a problem recognised by many. I'm not sure that the Head's idea of ending homework will prove a solution but there's no doubt there is a problem. A recent report found that whereas the peak of depressive illness used to be in the late 20s, it is now in the teens.

With conflicting pressures and distractions of social media, internet chat lines and other peer pressures it's perhaps harder than ever for young people to distinguish between the trivial and the important in their own attitudes to life. Calls on young people are very real and can at times be overwhelming.

It's a challenge for all of us; parents too have difficulty juggling with priorities – 2 wage earners in a household can mean less time available – no wage earners brings other stresses. Parents separating, can also have a devastating effect on children.

Similar challenges in deciding underlying priorities for balanced and responsible living existed in the less frenetic times of Guru Nanak some 500 years ago with the need for balance frequently giving way to extremes. Some saw their goal in life as a single-mindedly amassing of wealth, while others would live by begging in a search for spiritual wisdom.

Guru Nanak taught that the key to a balanced life was to live by three golden rules. The first of these is to establish priorities through reflecting on scriptural guidance to help us all distinguish between the meaningful, and trivial obsessions which can dominate our thinking. The second golden rule is earnest effort in all we do. The third and most important rule is the need to look outwards, to the needs of others.

This can take many forms such as the Sikh institution of langar; food for all served at our gurdwaras. Then there's the importance of giving time to the needs of the vulnerable. Today, coming back to the pressures faced by the young, there is a particular need to give time to our children and, in line with a common teaching of our different religions, provide a stable and supportive family life. It's now more important than ever to help the young distinguish between false and fleeting priorities, and the genuine challenges and responsibilities that lead to a contented and fulfilling life.

16-6-15

Today is the anniversary of one of the most important events in Sikh history; the martyrdom of Guru Arjan, the 5th Guru of the Sikhs. There are two important aspects of this anniversary: the circumstances that led to the martyrdom, and the traditional way it's commemorated.

Guru Arjan was a renowned poet and scholar who lived at a time of acute religious bigotry

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not very different from that in many parts of the world today. The Guru made it his life's mission to replace suspicion and hatred between faiths with tolerance and respect.

Guru Arjan was the main compiler of the Sikh scriptures known as the Guru Granth Sahib. In it he included some Hindu and Muslim verses to emphasise a fundamental Sikh teaching that no one religion has a monopoly of truth. The Guru took this respect further by asking a Muslim saint to lay the foundation stone of the famous Golden Temple at Amritsar and also placed a door on each of its four sides as a symbol of welcome to all from any spiritual direction.

Such sentiments proved too much for the rulers of the day who taught there was only one true religion and the Guru was slowly tortured and killed in the heat of an Indian June.

In the traditional Sikh commemoration of the martyrdom, there is no show of anger or bitterness, but a simple remembrance of the Guru's suffering by serving cool sweetened lime water or other soft drink to all who pass by Sikh homes or gurdwaras.

I thought of the Guru's teachings, his martyrdom and the lack of bitterness while attended a huge political rally in Paris over the weekend as part of a delegation of parliamentarians from different parts of the world. The rally of more than 100,000 was organised by Iranians who had fled persecution in Iran. In an echo of Guru Arjan's teachings, the leader of the rally, a woman Maryam Rajavi, spoke of the need for open democracy and freedom of belief for all faiths.

Many of the speakers had themselves suffered torture or imprisonment, or the loss of near ones at the hands of the present rulers, but there was no bitterness in their contributions; only a desire to move on. To me this gives us a glimmer of real hope in the otherwise all-pervading gloom of intolerance in our strife- torn world.

### Visit to Amritsar

*☞ The place is enchanting  
And Beautiful is the Pool  
The waters are ambrosial  
And full is the Pool*

*At daytime the holy Granth  
Was enthroned and read  
It was laid to rest at night  
After prayers were said*

*The much cherished Granth  
Became central to the Sikh way  
The Guru and the Granth  
Are our guide night and day ☞*

*A poem from the book 'Sikh Gurus' by the  
late S Jaswinder Singh Chadha*

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# SIKHS AND PARLIAMENT

## HOUSE OF LORDS HUMAN RIGHTS DEBATE

Lord Singh of Wimbledon

My Lords,

Article 18 of the 1948 UN Declaration is unambiguous in its guarantees of freedom of religion and belief. Yet we live in a world where all too often those rights are all too frequently ignored.

We have been recently remembering the horror of Srebrenica where 20 years ago 8,000 Muslim men and boys were rounded up by Serb forces and ruthlessly murdered, simply for being Muslims. Last year Sikhs commemorated the 30th anniversary of the brutal murder of thousands of Sikhs in India, simply for being Sikhs. The Middle East has become a cauldron of religious intolerance and unbelievable barbarity. The number of Christians has dwindled alarmingly, and we hear daily of thousands fleeing religious persecution in leaky, overcrowded boats with little food or water.

Where have we gone wrong? In commerce or industry if a clearly desirable idea or initiative fails again and again, it's back to the drawing board. Today we need to ask ourselves, why the widespread abuse of the right to freedom of belief? This important right, like others embedded in the UN Declaration, needs the total commitment of countries with political clout to make it a reality. Unfortunately, even permanent members of the Security Council, frequently put trade and political alliances with countries with appalling human rights records, above a commitment to rights. There are many examples, but time permits me to mention only a couple relating to our own country.

During the visit of a Chinese trade delegation in June of last year, a government minister said 'we should not allow human rights to get in the way of trade'. His statement undermining the UN Declaration, went virtually unchallenged.

At about the same time, we had a statement in your Lordships House that the government was pressing for a UN led inquiry into human rights abuse in Sri Lanka. Fine. But when I asked if the government would support a similar inquiry into the mass killing of Sikhs in India (a bigger trading partner), I received a brusque reply: 'that is a matter for the Indian government' I have asked the same question on five occasions: why does the UK government regard the systematic killing of Sikhs in India to be of no concern, only to receive the same dismissive non-response. My Lords, I ask it again today, and hope your Lordships and Britain's half million Sikhs will get the courtesy of a properly considered reply. The great human rights activist Andrei Sakharov rightly said that we must be even-handed in looking at human rights abuse.

My Lords, if our country, one of the most enlightened in the world, puts trade above human rights, it is easy to understand why other countries turn a blind eye to rights like freedom of belief; a right so central to Sikh teachings that our 9th Guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur gave his life defending the right of Hindus, a different religion to his own, against forced conversion by the then Mughal rulers.

My Lords, we can list human rights abuse forever and a day without it making a jot of difference, if we and other great powers continue to put trade and power block politics above human rights.

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We start each day in this House with prayers to remind us to act in accord with Christ's teaching. He, like Guru Nanak reminded us never to put material gain before concern for our fellow beings. We need to act on such far-sighted advice.

## **LORD SINGH FLAGS ATTACKS ON SIKHS IN ONE-SIDED 'ISLAMOPHOBIA' DEBATE**

The Director of the Network of Sikh Organisations (NSO) Lord Singh of Wimbledon has asked the government for parity in tackling hate crimes against all communities, not just Muslims.

A Muslim Peer, Baroness Afshar tabled a question leading to a debate last week:

"To ask Her Majesty's Government what measures they have put in place to counter the impact of Islamophobia and stigmatisation on young Muslims."

### **During the debate Lord Singh asked the government:**

"My Lords, is the Minister aware that ever since 9/11 there has been a huge increase in the number of attacks on Sikhs and Sikh places of worship in cases of mistaken identity? The most recent case was a machete attack on a young Sikh dentist in south Wales, which was described on "Newsnight" as Islamophobia. Does the Minister agree that hate crime is hate crime against any community, and that it should be tackled even-handedly, irrespective of the size of the community?."

**Baroness Williams of Trafford**, The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Communities and Local Government responded in agreement:

"The noble Lord is absolutely right—hate crime is hate crime."

### **NOTE**

Hate crime resulting from a backlash to Islamic extremism, has particularly affected the Sikh community as a result of mistaken identity with bigots targeting the 'Muslim looking other' in the wake of atrocities like 9/11 and 7/7.

Last Week Mold Crown Court found Zack Davies a 'white supremacist' guilty of trying to behead a Sikh dentist in a machete attack in Wales. Davies is reported to have taken inspiration from Jihadi John. He is reported to have chosen his victim because of his race, not religion.

The government has pledged it will support the recording of anti-Muslim incidents as well as anti-Semitic, across all UK police forces. There are no current plans in place for hate crime victims from other minority faiths.

The Network of Sikh Organisations has written to the government in light of the current strategy, which we believe urgently requires a more inclusive approach.

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# SIKH SACRIFICES IN WORLD WAR 1

## Talk given in St Martins in the Fields in a Service Commemorating Action in Gallipoli

**The Service was an Initiative of Harbinder Singh Rana and the Anglo  
Sikh Heritage Society**

**Lord Singh of Wimbledon**

Many will be aware that the last part of the subcontinent to be conquered by the English was the Punjab, and it was there that Sikhs put up the fiercest resistance in the Anglo Sikh wars. Both the British and the Sikhs developing admiration for the courage and fighting skills of their former enemy. The British appreciated Sikh commitment to belief in one God, their teachings on the equality of all human beings and the importance they gave to the needs of others. They began recruiting Sikhs to the British Indian Army. For their part, Sikhs appreciated the respect shown them by their former foes and were happy to enlist.

By the time of the outbreak of the First World War, Sikhs, though only little over 1% of India's population, made up to about 20% of the British Indian army. By the end of the war around 130,000 Sikhs had seen active service.

They fought on most of the war's major fronts with exemplary courage. More than one quarter of the Sikh soldiers became casualties in a war which many hoped would end future wars. Today we particularly remember the ill-fated Gallipoli Campaign in which the 14th Sikh Regiment fought with great distinction suffering heavy casualties. In a moving tribute, their commanding officer General Ian Hamilton wrote "their devotion to duty and their splendid loyalty, make a record their nation should look upon with pride for many generations".

Many other plaudits were showered on Sikh soldiers by the British and their allies, and rightly so. Their courage and record in battle is second to none and we should remember them with pride. They have set the bar high and we and succeeding generations must show we are equal to their challenge.

But today the challenges to us all are new. A fragile peace in 1918 was shattered within a generation with the outbreak of a second world war and millions killed, including many civilians.

When King George V visited the war cemetery at the site of the battle of the Somme, he was moved to describe the rows and rows of crosses as the 'massed multitude of silent witnesses to the desolation of war'. Last month we were again reminded of this in the VE Day remembrance service in Westminster Abbey. Speaking at the service, the Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby, recalled the poignant words of King George VI.

*We shall have failed and the blood of our dearest will have flown in vain, if the victory which they died to win does not lead to lasting peace founded on justice and goodwill.*

Since then we have witnessed countless other conflicts across the globe and repeated denials of human rights leading to the death of millions. A third world war has been avoided more

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by a fear of mutual annihilation rather than the justice and goodwill hoped for by George V. It is said that those that do not learn from history are doomed to see it repeated. The lesson of history is that for true and lasting peace, we must look beyond the short-term expediency of political alliances for economic or territorial advantage-- to underlying ethical imperatives for true peace and justice for all. We owe so much to those who gave their lives in trying to defend peace far from home at Gallipoli and other countless other battlefields. As people of faith we have a special responsibility to honour their memory by working for the true and lasting peace they so earnestly desired.

## THE VALUE OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Neeta Singh Baicher

I am a British Asian woman from the Sikh community. I wish to share with you some of my beliefs as a Sikh, especially in relation to the importance of teaching Religious Education in our schools and why this knowledge is important later in life.

The literal meaning of the word Sikh is 'disciple'. In that sense as a Sikh we are required to follow a moral code to guide us through life. This is universally essential for individuals and for a community it is the basis of civilization. All religions include a moral code amongst their other beliefs and dogma. So the inclusion of religion forms a useful and structured way of learning at a very early stage of life, the rights and wrongs that we as a society believe in.

Religion also encourages children at an early age to think of higher ideological and philosophical issues. RE discusses real questions of meaning such as Why was the universe created? Who created the Universe? What happens when we die? It gives another dimension to a child's thought processes. It can also broaden a child's mind. There are many beliefs and religions and other ideas like atheism, which are interesting to compare and think about. The inclusion of RE can encourage a child to question and learn and formulate his/her own set of beliefs and ideas.

In today's society it is important to have an understanding of Religious Education in order to have an appreciation of the viewpoint of others. Pupils are very interested in the subject and it is one of the most discussed subjects on internet forums. So whether one believes in religion or not, an understanding of the beliefs and practices of others and discussion about the divisions and religious problems in our society makes it easier to understand other people's viewpoints and to discuss them with some empathy. Lack of knowledge of other's views is always a stumbling block.

Guru Nanak believed in the virtues of understanding of the world around us and awareness of the disparity of individual beliefs as long as this leads towards parity of gender, social order and equality of all human beings dedicating our lives to the pursuit of the true peace and justice in our strife torn world.

### Footnote.

During a discussion in the Lords on Religious Education, **Lord Singh said:** 'the teachings of gender equality and respect for other faiths is obligatory in Sikh faith Schools. Does the Minister agree that any school that fails to do this should be treated as a failing school?'

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**Lord Nash** (the Minister) replied: 'I entirely agreed with the Noble Lord. I have visited a number of Sikh Schools and have been extremely impressed with the education that they provide, which is not surprising given the ethics and ethos of community and service in Sikhism.

## **OBITUARY**

### **REMEMBERING PROFESSOR AJIT SINGH**

**Talk at Remembrance Service at Cambridge Gurdwara - Lord Singh of Wimbledon**

I first met Professor Ajit Singh at a Sikh student's conference in Oxford in the 70s where we had both been invited to give talks. He spoke with both passion and knowledge on the socio-economic condition of Sikhs in the Punjab. Although an acclaimed, he spoke of ground realities answering questions with an easy humour. We seemed to see eye to eye on most problems facing the Sikh community and we became firm friends. In his humility, courage and commitment to living the Gurus' teachings, he was in every way a true Sikh.

When our daughter Rema went to Cambridge to study medicine and told us of his quiet advice and support in re-vitalising the University Sikh Society and she became aware that he always seemed to find time for others despite being cruelly struck down with debilitating Parkinson's disease. Somehow or other Ajit found out that, in what seems like a previous incarnation, I had studied economics as part of an MBA and he would send me complex papers on economic theory inviting my comments. Not easy in a subject in which we are reminded to both save more as individuals, and spend more for the nations good at the same time! I'm not sure if my comments were too helpful, but I was fascinated by the way his papers always focussed on ground realities and concern for the common good.

Ajit was delighted when I was made a life peer and was fulsome in his praise. I invited him to lunch in the House of Lords and he promised to come with his carer, but later apologised when a deterioration in health prevented him. We fixed up another day, but it was not to be. Ajit Singh was a true Sikh; courageous in his fight against ill-health and totally committed in his fight for wider social justice. We are all the poorer for his leaving us.

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# THOUGHTS FROM GURBANI

## **Jab Eh Man Mai Kari Gumana**

*When a man's mind is obsessed with vanity  
His self-conceit distorts his reasoning. He wanders in error.  
When he thinks himself as dust at the feet of others,  
Then he beholds the Lord in every one.  
The fruit of humility is unforced joy;  
This is the gift the Guru bestowed on me.*

*When a man judges his neighbor to be evil,  
He is himself the victim of evil thoughts.  
When he discards the distinction of 'mine' and 'thine'  
No man is then his enemy.*

*When a man clamours: 'It is mine, it is mine.'  
Then his is in the midst of many  
When he recognizes the Supreme GiveR and Doer.  
Then he is free from pain and free from sorrow.*

*When a man binds himself to worldly attachments,  
He is caught up in the endless cycle of deaths and rebirths;  
When all his worldly delusions are dissipated,  
He attains to oneness with God.  
When a man considers his selfhood as separate from God's.  
He suffers agony and grief. Should he recognize the One Spirit  
Then he has grasped the ground of all manifestation*

*The hunger for worldly wealth is never satisfied  
The world's thirst is not quenched  
But let a man detach himself from worldly attachments,  
And after his trial he shall prosper.*      **GGGS Page 235**

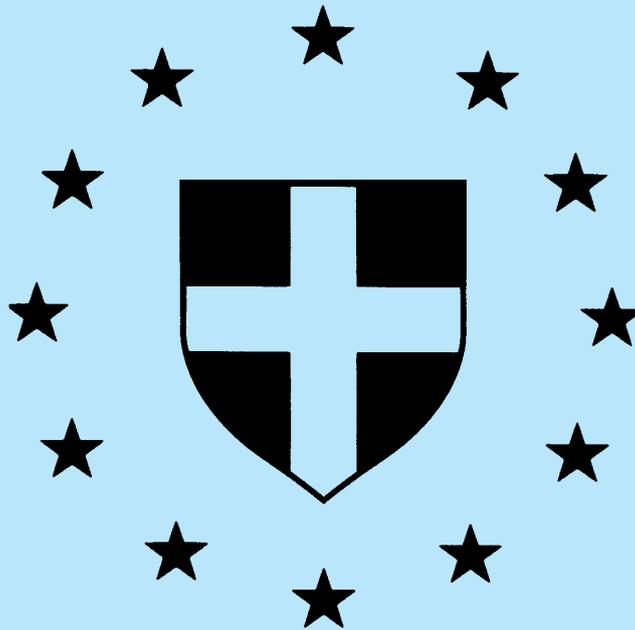
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*With Best Wishes*

*from*



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