



THE SIKH MESSENGER

A MAGAZINE OF THE
NETWORK OF SIKH ORGANISATIONS UK

IN THIS ISSUE

**OXFORD UNION DEBATE
INDIA'S EXTRAJUDICIAL MURDERS
MESSAGE TO KING CHARLES**

SPRING - SUMMER 2024

NETWORK OF SIKH ORGANISATIONS UK

QUIZ FOR ALL YOUNG SIKHS

ETHICAL TEACHINGS OF DIFFERENT RELIGIONS AND BELIEFS

RELIGION	EQUALITY OF HUMANITY	GENDER EQUALITY	BELIEF THAT GOD DOES NOT HAVE HUMAN ATTRIBUTES LIKE FAVOURITISM & JEALOUSY	SERVICE TO OTHERS	STANDING UP FOR THE BELIEFS & RIGHTS OF OTHERS	TOLERANCE& RESPECT FOR DIFFERENT FAITHS & WAYS OF LIFE	CONCERN FOR FUTURE	ADVICE AGAINST MISLEADING RITUALS & SUPERSTITIONS
BUDDHISM								
CHRISTIANITY								
JUDAISM								
HINDUISM								
ISLAM								
SIKHISM								
HUMANIST								

Place ticks in the above boxes to show commitment to the above ethical principles. Research the teachings of different religions **and give examples** of supporting ethical teachings, **embedded in religious texts or founders lives**, for each tick placed in the above boxes. Exclude subsequent cultural/social changes.

With Compliments

to

The Network of Sikh Organisations

from

Guru Nanak Trust

Jasvinder Singh Kohli
Tel: (Mob.) 07957 362 66 44

With Compliments

From Amar Subhag Kaur and
Sundeep Singh Maker
Maker Properties

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

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EDITORIAL

House of Lords Debate on Holocaust Memorial Day

A Sikh view on preventing genocide.

Lord Singh of Wimbledon

My Lords

I speak from a Sikh perspective, and I apologise if what I say does not agree with some people. I have visited Auschwitz, and a small mountain of children's shoes will be for ever etched in my memory. The shoes were taken from children who went laughing and skipping into showers, on the promise that they would be given new clothes. The showers were not of water; they were of deadly gas.

On Holocaust Memorial Day, we remember the horror of the systematic killing of Jews in the 1940s with the lighting of candles and the words "never again". The words "never again" have echoed in subsequent commemorations, only to be followed by the horror of further genocides, including the forgotten Indira Gandhi Government's massacre of Sikhs in 1984 and now, ironically, Israel's excesses against the people of Gaza, condemned by the United Nations, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and other human rights agencies.

"Never again" will continue to be a distant aspiration in a world that has lost its sense of direction and is still living with 19th-century norms of powerful countries pursuing strategic and economic dominance. Friends and enemies are decided by the support they give in return for a readiness to turn a blind eye to their abuse of human rights. To get to "never again", we urgently need to reset our moral and political satnavs to the realities and ethical imperatives of the very different world in which we now live.

Sikh teachings remind us that, despite superficial cultural differences, we are all members of one human family with equal rights and responsibilities. The UN declaration of human rights, drawn up in the aftermath of the Second World War, is an echo of this 500-year-old Sikh teaching. People of India and Pakistan, Russia and Ukraine, Israel and Palestine, and even Americans, are all part of our one human family, with a common desire for peace for themselves and for their loved ones.

In earlier times, talk of one human family was considered impractical idealism; today it is an imperative. The 21st century is, as I have mentioned, very different from earlier eras, with people in once distant parts of the world now sharing common problems such as global warming, the misuse of scientific advance and a world awash with arms. There is urgent need to look beyond ourselves to the needs of others, or, in the closing lines of the Sikh daily prayer, to look to the well-being of wider humanity.

We urgently need to look at why religion has become a major source of conflict and genocide. Religion is designed to give us guidance for responsible living, but all too often, claims of superiority and exclusive relationships with God, and with dated and divisive social and cultural rituals, are seen by many as more important than the uplifting ethical teachings. The Sikh Gurus were very concerned about such false divisions in the India of their day. In

Sikh scriptures, the Guru Granth Sahib, deliberately include verses of Hindu and Muslim saints to show that no one religion has a monopoly of truth. Today, we should be highlighting the important ethical teachings found in our different faiths. The reality is quite different. 'We British', even at interfaith gatherings, never discuss religion out of fear of offending religious sensitivities.

Religious holy books are not the word of God in a literal, possessive sense, but reflections on a godly way of life, interspersed with social and cultural practices and negative attitudes to others. Today, most religious people in the UK skip the dated social and cultural texts and focus on the underlying ethical teachings. But for some, dated culture is all too often more important than ethical guidance, and negative attitudes to others are food and sustenance to the religious extremist.

A Christian hymn reminds us:
*"New occasions teach new duties,
Time makes ancient good uncouth."*

Today, religious leaders urgently need to do a bit of spring cleaning to take out, or put in context or true perspective, the negative teachings and highlight ethical teachings that have much in common with those of faiths that we see as different. It is a big ask, but it is the only way to go if we really want our one human family to get to "never again".

Sikh Concern Over Growing Anti-Semitism in the UK

Letter written by Lord Singh of Wimbledon to the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust

As someone who admires the Jewish people and had a close friendship with the late Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks (including a visit to Israel as his guest), I am writing to express my concern over growing antisemitism in the UK arising from Israeli action in Gaza. I refer to concerns expressed by the UN Secretary General, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, MSF, UNICEF, and other humanitarian agencies. Unhelpful comments made by some Israeli politicians are equally worrying.

I believe a strong statement before, or on Holocaust Memorial Day dissociating British Jews from an understandable but at times unhelpful response to the evil action of Hamas, would do much to curb antisemitism and enhance the positive image of Jews in the UK.

I shall be grateful if you could come back to me urgently on my suggestion. I would be happy to help draft a statement in support of a community that I and members of the Sikh community much admire.

OXFORD UNION DEBATE 23-11-23

THE IDEA OF GOD IS DELUSION

Opposing the Motion -Lord Singh of Wimbledon

Madam President Ladies and gentlemen.

What strikes me most about the motion before the House, and the arguments made for it, is the arrogant assumption, that because some do not understand or agree with what religions say about God, the idea of God must be a delusion.

In opposing the motion, I do however have some sympathy for those unhappy with the way God is described in Abrahamic religious texts, and how this has been used to divide what Sikhs see as our one human family.

God, the creative force behind all that exists, is shown in Abrahamic texts as a sort of elderly male with superhuman powers, who also has very human failings of jealousy, anger, and favouritism. God is shown to benevolently overlook the misdeeds of some, while, vindictively punishing those not favoured by him- consigning them to everlasting suffering in the blistering heat of Hell. Some texts take this further, suggesting that skin burnt by the heat will re-grow, and be burnt again to inflict further continuing punishment. The reward for those God favours, is everlasting bliss in a place called heaven-where Muslims men enjoy some added extras.

Members of the Abrahamic faiths, and their various subsets, each claim that they are God's favourites, the chosen people, leading to horrendous conflict and unbelievable atrocities between sister faiths as seen in Gaza and other parts of the Middle East today. When asked to comment on God creating man in his own image, the philosopher Voltaire wryly commented. It is we who have created God in our image.

This portrayal of God as a being who inflicts dire punishment for supposed bad behaviour, was used in a more superstitious past, as what Conrad describes as 'a constables handbook' to scare people to lawful and responsible behaviour but is widely ignored today.

This view of God is a million miles removed from the Sikh concept of God being the name given to the unknowable creative force behind all that exists. Some here today, will bristle at my suggestion that some things are beyond our understanding. They will argue, that if **they** cannot understand the idea of God as a creative force beyond our comprehension, the very idea of God is a delusion. The renowned scientist Isaac Newton was more modest when he said, 'my achievements are no more than playing with a few pebbles on the shore, while a vast ocean of knowledge lies before me undiscovered'. The scientist JB Haldane put it even more succinctly when he said, 'the universe is not only more complex than we suppose, but more complex than we can suppose'.

The teachings of Guru Nanak on our inability to fully understand the nature of God, the creator or creative force behind all that exists, are in line with the views of these famous scientists.

In the opening lines of the Sikh scriptures, Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh faith, writes:

*There is one God
The creator of all that exists,
The ultimate truth and reality
Beyond emotions of fear and enmity
Beyond time, birth, gender, or human frailty.*

For Sikhs the aim of life is not to seek salvation, but simply to live in harmony with what we call hukum, or 'the will of God'. Sikh teachings require honest living, standing up against injustice, rejecting all notions of race or religious superiority, recognising gender equality and, in the closing words of our daily prayer, 'working for the wellbeing of all humanity'.

Shakespeare also recognised the importance of living in consonance with what Sikhs call the will of God. In Julius Caesar, he refers to what Sikhs call 'hukum' as a tide, saying:

*There is a tide in the affairs of men.
Which taken at the flood leads onto fortune
Omitted, all the voyages of their lives.
Are bound in shallows and miseries.*

Sikhism does not look to an afterlife of punishment or reward, but simply in our responsibility to leave the world a better place for our having lived.

Coming back to the motion before this House. I again quote Shakespeare, with Hamlet reminding Horatio, that 'there are more things in heaven and earth that are dreamt of in your philosophy'.

Unless like 'the clever Mr Toad' in 'Wind in the Willows', you believe, we know all there is to be 'known'; and are prepared to forget the unbreakable scientific link between cause and effect, and irrationally believe in the absurdity, that at first there was nothing, and then suddenly, without cause, it all exploded to create infinite time space and matter, we have to accept the existence of a power or force beyond our comprehension that Sikhs refer to as God.

I therefore urge you to vote **against the motion that God, the creative force behind all that exists is a delusion.**

INDIA'S TRANSNATIONAL EXTRAJUDICIAL MURDERS

Dr. Tarunjit Singh Butalia USA

I am a Sikh activist committed to peace, justice and reconciliation who has lived in the United States since 1989 and actively worked on interfaith engagement for over three decades. Never before have I felt as in danger here as I do now.

In October 1984, five years before I came to the United States from India, an American of Taiwanese descent, Henry Liu, was gunned down outside his home in California by two men. Mr. Liu had published a biography critical of the then-Taiwanese president. The U.S. government traced the killings back to an intelligence officer in the government of Taiwan. Within three months, the Taiwan government admitted to its role in the murder of a U.S. citizen on American soil and then worked with the U.S. government to put guardrails in place so this would not happen again.

I recently published an article in which I argued that India must be held accountable for the death of Sikh Hardeep Singh Nijjar, a Canadian citizen killed in Vancouver on June 18, 2023. While Canada's response to this incident was to stand up for its sovereignty and "rules-based international order," India's response has been aggressive, geo-political and retaliatory, accusing Canada of being a "haven for terrorists."

Now, the U.S. Department of Justice has filed charges in a plot to assassinate a Sikh activist and lawyer in New York City. An Indian government intelligence officer was implicated in directing the plan to kill Gurpatwant Singh Pannun, a Sikh activist and dual U.S.-Canadian citizen. The senior Indian intelligence officer worked with Indian citizen Nikhil Gupta to arrange a hitman. The hitman hired turned out to be an undercover U.S. informer.

The U.S. now has evidence that a day after the murder of Nijjar in Canada, the Indian conspirators had conversations indicating it was time to murder Pannun in the U.S. next. Both Nijjar and Pannun were involved with Sikhs for Justice, which was established to hold Indian politicians responsible for the genocidal anti-Sikh pogroms in India in the 1980s.

And then there are two other unresolved recent killings of Sikh activists — Avtar Singh Khanda, allegedly poisoned to death in mid-June 2023 in the United Kingdom, and Paramjit Singh Panjwar, shot dead in early May 2023 by masked gunmen in Pakistan.

Why would the Indian government target four Sikh activists in four different countries in a matter of two months? Human rights organizations have documented over 50,000 Sikhs who were subject to extra-judicial killings or enforced disappearances in Punjab from 1980 through the mid-1990s, including the murder of human rights lawyer Jaswant Singh Khaira. Now that the peace of the graveyard has been established in Punjab, it seems the Indian government has turned its attention to the transnational extra-judicial murder of Sikh activists.

We have learned to expect such repressive and dangerous behavior from countries like Iran, North Korea, Saudi Arabia and Russia. But now we see that a democracy such as India — long an ally of the U.S. and Canada — has been caught "red-handed." India needs to follow the example of Taiwan rather than pursuing its current policy of "attack is the best form of defence," which is classic authoritarian playbook politics.

So, what does the U.S. government need to do in this case? As has been rightfully demanded by government officials, those responsible for directing the murder plots in the

Indian government must be held accountable, and new guardrails must be put in place. This is a matter of global religious nationalism, the rule of law, human security and holding democracies to account.

But there is a deeper issue in U.S.-India relations that needs parsing. The two countries' relations have been based on "shared interests," especially the need to counter the China-Russia alliance, rather than on "shared values." This marriage of convenience has to end. As a nation that respects human dignity and upholds democracy, the U.S. must focus on strategic alliances with countries that share our values and uphold democracy instead of on short-term geo-political gains.

The transnational extra-judicial killings of Sikh activists abroad are also reflected in the recent rise of right-wing Hindu nationalism here in the U.S., not just in India. America has long been admired for constitutionally recognizing secularism and protecting the flourishing of diverse and vibrant religious life. Therefore, as Americans, we have to push back against all forms of religious nationalism in our country.

My own commitment to peace, justice and reconciliation is grounded in a verse from Siri Guru Granth Sahib, "soora so pehchaniyae jo larae deen ka hait" (brave is the one who struggles for the weak and oppressed).

I will continue working with others to put up "shops of love in the bazaars of hate" — no matter what the future holds.

*(Tarunjit Singh Butalia is a founding trustee of the **Sikh Council on Interfaith Relations**, executive director of **Religions for Peace USA** and vice-chair of **Faith in Public Life**.)*

RAM MANDIR BUILT ON THE SITE OF A RAZED MOSQUE

Peter Frankopan

Professor of global history Oxford University

Four years ago Narendra Modi visited Ayodhya, a town on the banks of the Sarayu river in northern India, to mark the start of works on a massive temple complex to be built in the mythological birthplace of Lord Ram, one of the most important and revered Hindu deities. By the time the Indian prime minister returned on Monday to preside over the consecration of the Ram Mandir (Ram temple), not only had the structure been completed but the city had also been transformed beyond all recognition.

The 7,000 VIPs accompanying him flew into a gleaming new airport and many of the tens of thousands of pilgrims who came to witness the historic proceedings arrived at an upgraded train station. Leading political figures in India claim it will be to Hindus what the Vatican is to Roman Catholics and Mecca to Muslims. But many Indians worry there is a price to pay for this bullishness, concerns that were magnified last week.

Does India's secular constitution still truly protect all Indian citizens equally, they wonder, or is the Hindu majority now favoured at the expense of other religious minorities? Attacks on Muslims by hardline Hindu vigilantes have risen in frequency in recent years, raising tensions and fears of worse to follow. Targeting of other communities has grown too,

including Punjabi Sikhs and Christians, who were the subject of more than 400 attacks in the first half of last year alone.

The Ram Mandir is a highly contentious project. It occupies the former site of the Babri Masjid, a mosque purportedly built on the personal instructions of the 16th Century Emperor Babur, the founder of the Muslim Mogul dynasty that ruled much of the subcontinent until it was dissolved by the British in 1858. After independence in 1947, Ayodhya was the location of growing tensions between Muslim worshippers and Hindu ascetics, who were enraged that a mosque stood on the spot where they believed Lord Ram was born. Hindu nationalists waged a campaign to dismantle the mosque and replace it with a temple. The issue helped to power the rise of Modi's party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), as a national political force. In December 1992 Hindu radicals attacked the mosque and demolished it with hammers. Sectarian violence erupted around the country and claimed more than 2,000 lives. The legal fallout lasted for decades until in 2019 — five years after Modi came to power — India's Supreme Court granted Hindus possession of the site and opened the way for temple's construction.

The opening ceremony left little room for doubt about the government's vision for the future of India as Modi prepares for elections this year. The "divine India" that he spoke of is one squarely centred on the premises and teachings of Hinduism. "Today our Lord Ram has come. After centuries of waiting, our Ram has arrived," Modi said. Where that leaves the many others in India with different beliefs — or none — is not clear, especially after the BJP spokesman Sudhanshu Trivedi said that any critics of the temple opening were driven by "jealousy, malice and inferiority complex" towards Modi and were opposing both India and God.

Hindus for Human Rights Demands the Immediate Restoration of 141 opposition MPs in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha

December 19 2023

Hindus for Human Rights demands the immediate restoration of 141 opposition MPs in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha. The opposition MPs have been suspended from the Lok Sabha for causing disruptions after they raised concerns about the Indian government's response to a security breach in Parliament.

India, the mother of Democracy, has always encouraged healthy debates and open discussions among its politicians, and this rich tradition is undermined by the suspension of MPs.

The importance of dissent in a democracy cannot be overstated. It is through dissent that new ideas emerge, existing policies are challenged, and change is instigated. Dissent ensures that all voices, no matter how small or unpopular, are heard. Dissent holds power to account and prevents the onset of autocracy. Democracy thrives not when we silence the opposition, but when we listen to it, engage with it, and challenge it. We strongly urge the Indian Parliament to immediately reverse its decision to suspend opposition MPs and allow them to serve the remainder of the winter session.

UK Police warn Sikhs about the Indian Government's Targeting of Sikhs

Jan 2024 - Sikhs in West Midlands given 'threat to. life' warnings (Osman warnings) as activists fear targeting by India. Three members of a family receive notices from police amid concern about separatist campaigners' safety.

SIKHS AND ETHNICITY IN THE 2021 CENSUS

Lord Singh of Wimbledon

Any study of Sikh teachings and Sikh history will show that the Gurus' teachings differ from other religions in that, while giving advice on responsible living, they also reach out to recognise important commonalities between faiths.

Sikh teachings emphasise 'sarbat ka bhalla', looking to the wellbeing of all members of our one human family. The far-sighted teachings of our Gurus predate, by some four centuries, the UN Declaration of Human Rights drawn up in the aftermath of the Second World war as essential for the survival of what the Declaration also terms, our one human family.

Sikhism is a religion that is open to all, not only for personal improvement, but also with a commitment to work for the wellbeing of wider society. It has nothing whatever to do with ethnicity, which by definition refers to transient differences in social and cultural practices.

Why then the obsession with ethnicity among some Sikhs?

The Mandla Case

In the early 80s, a Sikh schoolboy was sent home from school on the grounds that wearing a turban was against the school rules. The turban was a religious symbol and under the 1976 Race Relations Act religious discrimination was perfectly legal.

Ethnicity however was a protected characteristic. I advised the then Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) that as most Sikhs then in the UK were born in the Punjab, we had a good chance of winning protection on the grounds of Punjabi ethnic origin. We won protection of Sikh religious identity through the **loophole of ethnicity**.

Today, the loophole of Punjabi ethnicity would not apply as most Sikhs in the UK were born in the UK. Nor is it necessary because discrimination against religion is now against the law.

Ethnicity and the 2021 Census

Cynically ignoring the Gurus' teachings on the oneness of our human family, the Sikh Federation have spent hundreds of thousands of sangat money promoting themselves as defenders of an exclusive Sikh ethnicity, ignoring the fact that religious belief has nothing to do with ethnic origin. Gurdwaras in places like Wolverhampton and Southampton have been depleted of gurdwara funds.

Sikh Responses in the 2021 Census

Census responses showed that the UK Sikh community totally rejected the Sikh Federation attempt to conflate ethnicity with religious identity. 99.7% of Sikhs confirmed their commitment to Sikhism.

Only 0.3%- 1,725 identified with ethnicity rather than with Sikh identity. Of this group, more than half did not record their religion and 13.6 per cent said they were Muslim, 8.7 per cent Christian, and 12 per cent no religion.

Discussion of Census findings on Punjab Broadcasting Channel ‘Think Tank’ chaired by Dr Gurnam Singh.

- **Dabinderjit Singh** Plucking figures from the air, stated the ONS was wrong in recording the UK Sikh population to be some 526,000. It is, he maintained it was nearer 900,000.
- **Dr Jasdev Rai** acknowledged that the Federation campaign to declare Sikhs an ethnic group had come to a ‘dead end’. His cunning plan was to say that Sikhs are not members of a religion but a ‘quaam’ or ‘dharam’, and, as that these words have no English translation, he maintained, with Baldrick logic, Sikhs should be given a special status.
- **Dabinderjit Singh**, who based the Sikh Federation claim on non-UK ethnicity, went on to contradict himself by stating 3/4 of UK Sikhs were born in the UK.
- **Dr Jasdev Rai**, setting aside his own ‘think tank’ credentials, claimed that intellectuals were responsible for all the problems in the Sikh community.
- **Dabinderjit Singh** when challenged by S Gurnam Singh said he would be happy to give a full account of the spending of hundreds of thousands of pounds of sangat money in campaigning and litigation for a Sikh ethnic tick box – if the NSO gave figures for their spending in promoting Punjabi ethnicity.

NSO Comment

The NSO have consistently stated that Sikhism is a world religion open to all and not limited by ethnicity. We have not spent a single penny promoting Punjabi ethnicity. Can we now have details of Sikh Federation’s spending on their claim that Sikhs are an ethnic group?

No response has been received or figures given.

DYNAMICS OF LEADERSHIP IN PUNJAB CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

A talk to the Sikh Forum India

Lady Kanwaljit Singh - Chair Global Sikh Council

Sikh leadership in Punjab, India, faces a complex mix of religious, political, and socio-economic challenges which require a clear and positive response. Clear thinking in line with Sikh teachings is urgently required to meet these new challenges to the wellbeing and prosperity of Punjab.

Economic and environmental crises, such as agrarian distress and environmental degradation, have fuelled discontent. Allegations of human rights violations and suppression of dissent have been raised against the government. Mass migration for foreign shores is adding a new dynamic. Punjab is in financial deficit, under a huge debt and unemployment is rising. Unaddressed social, religious, economic, and environmental issues contribute to the growing unrest in Punjab. The Indian government and Punjab state authorities have responded with heavy-handed measures, including mass arrests and internet shut down.

Addressing Root Causes: By focusing on socio-economic reforms and environmental issues, the government could alleviate some of the underlying causes of discontent but does not seem aligned with this.

Promoting Inclusive Leadership: Encouraging moderate and inclusive Sikh leadership could help bridge the gap between the community and the government, but the leadership has to build its stature and also be dedicated to the Panth and Sikh ethical imperatives, which are not always reflected in political government.

In Punjab, Sikhs are in a majority and Punjab governments have often been led by Sikhs. Strong and committed leadership leads to the growth of strong and committed followers, lions led by lions working for the wellbeing of wider society.

SGPC the popularly elected body to manage the Sikh gurdwaras has been described as the mini- Parliament of the Sikh community, a state within a state and the pre- eminent institution of the Sikhs because of its exclusively Sikh electorate. It has 191 members of which 170 are directly elected from an only Sikh electorate every five years.

However, the Sikh Akali leadership from late 60s after getting Punjabi Suba has failed to adhere to earlier ideals, choosing short-term expediency over the ethical imperatives of Sikh teachings enshrined in the Guru Granth Sahib. The leaders became more interested in self than sarbat the bhalla. Corruption became rife among the leaders; self interest became large like the ocean that could never be filled. Leaders became selfish and corrupt, and unthinking followers followed. Now the situation is take as much as possible for 'self' and forget Sikh teachings of service and enlightened social responsibility.

Blinkered materialism has weakened both leaders and the followers. The leaders to maintain their leadership look to short-term political expediency, while followers look to material gain. The SGPC must become more proactive in preaching Sikh values which should underpin politics in Punjab and in a wider world that has lost its ethical direction.

Sadly, Sikh leaders in Punjab who should follow the ethical values taught by the Guru Granth Sahib, are today turning a blind eye to social evils: such as caste system. No high or low by birth. This results in some Dalit and other lower castes not being considered part of the Khalsa Panth, not allowed in the same gurdwaras, same cremation grounds, not allowed to take Amrit or even eat langar with others assumed to be high caste Sikhs. Leaders have become manmukhs leading the manmukhs.

This discrimination has also led to unethical conversions by Christian organisations. Global Sikh Council have given written letters to Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) requesting to educate villagers about Sikh religion so that they do not fall prey to false faith healings, promises of helping them to go to foreign lands. We have written to Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann to pass anti conversion law in the lines of other states to stop unethical conversions. Requested SGPC to support Sikligarh Sikhs, Tamil Sikhs who are from so called low castes. SGPC should take its responsibility of preaching Sikhism in villages so that they are not hoodwinked by the false propaganda of the Christian missionaries.

Sikh leaders are not promoting equality of women by welcoming baby girls into the families and denouncing Dowry. The Guru says how can you call women low who give birth to all great human beings, men and women.

Sikhs after 10 years of struggle got Punjabi Sabha, but Punjabi language is still not promoted as the state language. People from other states are given important jobs who cannot speak

Punjabi and as lack of communication between the public and the officers, poor villagers suffer.

Promotion of education and free education given to poor families so that they become employable and don't run to foreign countries looking for employment. This has also decreased the number of Sikhs living in Punjab.

Sometimes, people say that we Sikhs are still in the 18th century and not in the 21st, I would say that we are still in the 15th century before Guru Nanak Sahib's birth.

First challenge is to make Sikhs committed followers of the Gurus teachings. SGPC members must work for the wider wellbeing of all. A welfare state as the Gurus envisioned, no one goes hungry, have a roof to sleep under, medical aid, education, Panchs to be appointed to support the members in spreading the Guru's message, monitored that people are doing their jobs properly.

SGPC created to manage Punjab gurdwaras in the 20th century needs to be revamped to meet the very different needs of Sikhs in Punjab, other parts of India and the wider world with minister-type roles to cover all aspects of Sikh life and challenges on the lines of government ministries. Women and overseas Sikhs should be included, not as token representatives, but for the contribution they can make in different roles.

Modern management considerations, like value for money and the potential downside of policies should be used in formulating policies. Initiatives for dialogue and reconciliation between different stakeholders in the Punjab -from the moderate to the extreme, from those pro-state to those pro-Sikh freedom in building a joint strategy to achieve the goals of the community in and outside of Punjab, in the short run and the long run are imperative, rather this should be the first step.

There should be a concerted initiative to identify and build new leadership, grounded in Panthic ideals and modern democratic systems, with an understanding of geopolitics, world affairs, and UN systems.

To conclude, the radical change I am asking for may seem a bit of a tall order but it is one required of us by our Gurus to make not only Punjab, but the wider world a fairer and happier place for all members of our one human family.

WITHDRAWAL OF GOVERNMENT FUNDING TO THE INTERFAITH NETWORK UK

Statement in the Lords by Lord Singh of Wimbledon 22-2-24

'My Lords, I speak as a founder member of the Inter Faith Network back in the 1980s, when it was very difficult to get people of different religions into the same room to talk to each other. That initiative owed much to Brian Pearce, a former civil servant.

The Inter Faith Network has done some remarkably good work, particularly in the celebration of the millennium and getting religion in the census. There has been a difficulty in this country in that people are reluctant to discuss religion—people from different religions would come together and talk about anything but the commonalities and differences in their religions.

There has been movement in the direction of actually discussing the importance of commonalities and building on them.

It is sad that this closure is happening at this time, especially as the reason given is that the board contains a member of the Muslim Council of Britain. The Muslim Council is not a proscribed organisation, and it is better to have people with different views talking together to move the country forward in respect for one another.'

LORDS DEBATE ON THE KING'S SPEECH -DEFENCE

Lord Singh of Wimbledon

Defence in foreign policy has little to do with defence of the realm. There is no threat from a foreign power wishing to invade our country. Billions spent on what is called defence are used to protect or expand political and trade interests around the world.

This concept of defence includes the arms trade—the manufacture and selling of horrific means of killing to other countries. The UK, the USA, Russia and China are all involved in selling weapons to countries with sometimes deplorable human rights records to fight their neighbours, who are equipped with similar weaponry. Future generations will look at our involvement in this sordid trade with the loathing and contempt that we today reserve for the slave trade.

The United States, Russia, the UK and China are all members of the so-called Security Council, created to end global conflict. Instead, members of the Security Council are themselves the main perpetrators of conflict and human rights abuse. In industry, such abuse of power for personal gain would result in instant dismissal. We toppled Colonel Gaddafi in Libya but left the country in ruins. We used the excuse that Saddam Hussein was manufacturing weapons of mass destruction, knowing it to be false, to attack Iraq, brutally treating the civilian population and causing Sunni Muslims to flee to Syria. Russia, seeking political advantage, cynically came to the aid of the Syrian regime, adding to already horrific suffering. Then there was our failed intervention in Afghanistan. When Theresa May, on a visit to Washington, stated that we must stop trying to be the world's policeman, the 22 countries that we have not yet got around to invading must have breathed a collective sigh of relief.

We are all moved by the suffering of the hapless people of Gaza, who are experiencing not only a blockade of food, fuel, water and medicine but bombardments of hospitals and refugee camps by Israel with weapons supplied mainly by the United States and us. Astonishingly, we and the United States, in our refusal to call for a ceasefire, give our tacit approval to Israel in its collective punishment of the people of Gaza for the sins of Hamas. Why? United States President Biden put it succinctly:

"Israel is an important ally".

This dated concept of dividing the world into friend and foe, in a 19th-century game of political chess using smaller nations as expendable pawns, is the root cause of continuing

conflict in the world today. Guru Nanak, whose birthday Sikhs celebrate this week, looking at the mainly religious conflicts of his day, taught that groupings that promote hatred and violence are unacceptable and reminded us that we are all members of one human family.

Recognition of this truth was an idealistic concept 500 years ago. Today, in our smaller, interdependent world, faced with common natural and manmade problems, it is an imperative.

To move to peace in our troubled world, we must look beyond factional politics and work together to resolve underlying issues, a theme that was taken up the noble Lord, Lord Stone. We could do it by what Mary Parker Follett, an industrial engineer, described as looking to the 'law of the situation.' This approach of recognising and addressing common concerns, a common yearning for peace and a freedom to live, work and travel is the direction in which we must go in the Middle East and elsewhere. In the words of the daily prayer that we say this House, we must set aside all factional interests and work together for the well-being of our one, somewhat dysfunctional, human family.

CONTRIBUTIONS IN THE HOUSE OF LORDS

17 April 2023 - People of African Descent in the United Kingdom

Lord Singh of Wimbledon

'My Lords, does the Minister agree that, in discussing serious issues, we should avoid using terms that blur meaning and fog issues, including words such as "racist", "race" and "racism", which suggest that there is a number of finite races in the world? The reality is that there are as many races as there are human beings on earth. Does the Minister further agree that what we are talking about is irrational prejudice, which has to be tackled in schools and the workplace?'

Baroness Scott of Bybrook

I agree with the noble Lord's last point that, where there are issues in workplaces, in education or in health, we need to tackle them. I also agree with him that there are many races in the world and that everybody is equal.

24th April 2023 – Hate Crime

Lord Singh of Wimbledon

'My Lords, would the Minister agree that the whole point of collecting statistics on so-called hate crime is to use them to determine remedial action? But we already know the causes and the action required. So-called hate crime is unacceptable behaviour, not only against the five listed strands, but also against the very tall, the very short, the thin, the fat, people with red hair—anyone seen to be different from a questionable norm. We do not need statistics to lay down norms of acceptable behaviour in schools, the police and wider society.'

10th May 2023 - Israel: Palestinian Civilian Casualties

Lord Singh of Wimbledon

'My Lords, does the Minister agree that Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories in the West Bank and Gaza is illegal and immoral, and that land confiscation and the demolition of homes are a direct provocation to violent protest? Should not His Majesty's Government be far more robust in condemning Israel's flouting of international law?'

8th June 2023 - Schools: Curriculum Update

Lord Singh of Wimbledon

'My Lords, does the Minister agree that the building of character and resilience does not require the appointment of a commission? Teachings of right and wrong, and of responsibility and resilience, are common in our different religions and other world views, but are, sadly, badly obscured in formal RE, with its overfocus on rituals, artefacts and the shape and size of religious buildings. Does the Minister further agree that much greater emphasis should be put on the important ethical commonalities between religions?'

12th June 2023 - General Practitioners: Recruitment and Retention

Lord Singh of Wimbledon

My Lords, I declare an interest as someone who has children and grandchildren in the medical profession. Would the Minister agree that there is something terribly wrong in the recruitment and retention of doctors when newly qualified doctors from Nigeria are paid more than those in this country when doctors find it easier and more profitable to do locums than stay in a fixed career path; and, finally, when doctors are being inundated with attractive requests from Australia and New Zealand to emigrate to those countries, leaving a dearth in this country?

15th June 2023 - Ukraine: Ministry of Defence Strategy

Lord Singh of Wimbledon

'My Lords, does the Minister agree that the best strategy for the people of Ukraine is to look towards a peace settlement? In this House we are used to Orwellian language, where we refer to defence and mean offence. The long-suffering people of Ukraine will benefit if there can be a peace settlement in which all Russian troops are withdrawn and some guarantee given to the Russians that the West has no hostile intentions towards them. It would, incidentally, be the end of Putin.'

26th June 2023 - Sudan

Lord Singh of Wimbledon

'My Lords, does the Minister agree that while humanitarian aid is urgently required for the long-suffering people of Sudan, it is also important to stop the flow of arms getting to the combatants from countries such as Russia, China, Egypt, the UAE and Iran, fuelling the conflict for sordid economic and political gain?'

Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park

'The noble Lord makes an important point, which relates to the question I was asked earlier about the nefarious activities sponsored directly or indirectly by Russia. He is right that we

continue to invest in solutions in the region, but we are also using every diplomatic lever at our disposal.'

27th June 2023 - Asylum: Channel Crossings

Lord Singh of Wimbledon

'My Lords, refugees escaping the horrors of war and arriving in the UK in small boats last year constituted less than 5% of the annual number of immigrants. Can the Minister explain why, despite Christian teachings—with which we begin proceedings in this House—requiring that they be treated with care and compassion, the Government are making their harassment and deportation, at £170,000 a head, a national priority?'

29th June 2023 - Employment Gap: Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic, and White, Workforce

Lord Singh of Wimbledon

'My Lords, prejudice in society should be tackled not simply for economic reasons but because it is wrong. We all like to believe that it is those people out there who have prejudices and it is not in us. The reality is that prejudice—wariness of difference—is ingrained in us all, in our very genes. But we have to tackle irrational prejudice based on the assumption that people of different colour or who look different are inherently different and inferior to us. What steps are the Government taking to make sure that that irrational prejudice is tackled in schools and universities, particularly in religious education, to emphasise what Sikhs constantly repeat about the oneness of the human family?'

Lord Johnson of Lainston

'I greatly appreciate the noble Lord's comments. Clearly, this is a government priority. Continuing on the theme of the original Question, we have developed a number of different action plans, including a work panel process to assess how we can, for example, give more support to employers on ensuring inclusivity. I am pleased to say that we committed to launching that inclusion at work panel and the first meeting is today.'

11 July 2023 – Wagner group

Lord Singh of Wimbledon

'My Lords, does the Minister agree that while the existence of mercenary groups such as the French Foreign Legion—which was involved, along with other countries in the West, in expanding into Africa and creating colonies and wealth—was acceptable in the 19th and 20th centuries, it is totally unacceptable in the more moral climate of the 21st century?'

Baroness Goldie

'I have always been clear in my remarks from the Dispatch Box how much the Government find Wagner to be a repugnant, discredited organisation, and how much we deplore attempts to interfere in sovereign states' political systems and Wagner's attempt to exploit these countries. That is why we are doing everything we can to play our part in calling it to account and constraining what it does.'

Schools: Admissions – 17 July 2023

Lord Singh of Wimbledon

'My Lords, I was present when the then Education Secretary Michael Gove, on a visit to the Guru Nanak school in Hayes, applauded Sikh respect for other faiths, shown in assemblies and teaching. This and high academic performance lead to oversubscription for entry. Does the Minister agree that greater support should be given to faith schools that teach respect and inclusivity over those grounded in the divisive belief that their faith alone has a monopoly on the truth?'

Baroness Barran

'I do not accept that there are faith schools that have the kind of perspective that the noble Lord set out. We work hard with all our schools, and schools work together in local areas, to make sure that those values of respect—particularly for those of any other faith or none—are upheld. That is part of our citizenship curriculum and our fundamental British values.'

18 July 2023 - Counter Disinformation Unit

Lord Singh of Wimbledon

'My Lords, as I understand it, the Orwellian-sounding Counter Disinformation Unit was set up to counter disinformation threats to our democratic way of life. Can this unlikely-sounding unit—if it really exists—be used to counter the Government's appeal to latent racism, with their suggestion that hordes of refugees are coming to our shores in small boats, threatening our way of life, when in reality they constitute less than 5% of annual immigration?'

12th September 2023 - Mr Jagtar Singh Johal

Lord Singh of Wimbledon

'To ask His Majesty's Government whether the Prime Minister raised the case of Mr Jagtar Singh Johal, currently imprisoned in India, with the government of India during his recent visit to that country.'

The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
(Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon) (Con)

'My Lords, I can confirm that my right honourable friend the Prime Minister raised Mr Johal's case with Prime Minister Modi on 9 September in Delhi, on the margins of the G20 summit. We will continue raising Mr Johal's case and any related concerns directly with the Government of India, including his allegations of torture and his right to a fair trial. I regularly raise Mr Johal's case directly, including with External Affairs Minister Jaishankar on 29 May.'

Lord Singh of Wimbledon

'I thank the Minister for his reply, but neither it nor the Prime Minister's response to Questions in the Commons yesterday showed any sense of the outrage expressed by more than 100 Members of the Lords and Commons over India's abduction and six-year arbitrary detention and torture of Jagtar Singh Johal, a British citizen. Does the Minister agree that it does nothing for Britain's standing in the world when a British Prime Minister, looking for a favourable trade deal, expresses admiration for a man who was barred from entry into the United States and the UK for atrocities against Muslims in Gujarat, whose Home Minister refers to Muslims as "termites" and whose party is committed to turning India into a Hindu state, to the detriment of minorities?'

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon

'My Lords, I assure the noble Lord that we raised Mr Johal's case. We have a wide-ranging relationship with India, and in that regard we have a very constructive dialogue, including, as I have raised directly on a number of occasions, on a wide range of human rights issues. I am sorry, but I do not subscribe to the noble Lord's description of either India or the Prime Minister of India. I declare an interest as someone who has Indian heritage and is Muslim by faith.'

22nd November 2023 - Refugees and Asylum Seekers: Safe Routes

Lord Singh of Wimbledon

'My Lords, I have seen figures that suggest that those who come in small boats to seek asylum constitute less than 5% of net annual immigration. Can the Minister explain why the Government are obsessed with trying to exclude those fleeing persecution and seeking refugee status in this country, while ignoring the Christian teaching of welcoming refugees?'

Lord Sharpe of Epsom

'The answer is twofold. First, we have welcomed over half a million people, so that is very much a vindication of the Christian principle. Secondly, we are not obsessed with the asylum seekers themselves; we are obsessed with putting criminal gangs out of business, and I make no apology at all for that.'

4th December 2023 - Asylum Seekers: Deportation from France

Lord Singh of Wimbledon

'My Lords, deciding whether an asylum seeker is dangerous is subjective. Does the Minister agree that our system is less discriminatory in treating all asylum seekers as a lesser form of life?'

Lord Sharpe of Epsom

"I am afraid not"

18th December 2023 - Refugees: Notice Period for Home Office Accommodation

Lord Singh of Wimbledon

'My Lords, I add my support to the modest proposal of the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of London. Asylum seekers given the right to remain must be given a realistic timeframe to move out of temporary Home Office accommodation, bearing in mind the trauma that they have suffered and their lack of familiarity with their new surroundings. Sikh teachings on the need to help such people echo Christian sentiment, which pointedly reminds us that Jesus and his family were themselves refugees in Egypt.'

7th February 2024 - Ukraine Conflict

Lord Singh of Wimbledon

'My Lords, according to both Ukrainian and Russian media, former PM Boris Johnson, in a visit to Kyiv in 2022, persuaded President Zelensky to reject a peace deal with Putin that would have led to the withdrawal of Russian troops in return for an undertaking that Ukraine would not join NATO. Does the Minister agree that this was an opportunity missed and has since cost thousands of lives?'

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon

'My Lords, I am not going to respond to media speculation.'

21st February 2024 - Hate Crimes

Lord Singh of Wimbledon

'My Lords, the current practice of giving government funding to more vocal communities to collect figures to show that they are more hated than others is a waste of that funding. Does the Minister agree that a better approach would be to tackle the underlying ignorance on which prejudice thrives by stressing, in the teaching of RE in schools and elsewhere, the large number of important ethical commonalities between different faiths to show that the superficial differences are very insignificant?'

Baroness Penn

'My Lords, the Government committed to break down the recording of hate crime first by religion and then more recently by race. That provides us with an important insight into the experiences of different communities, which can be quite different across the country. Where I agree with the noble Lord is that part of the solution to some of these issues is focusing on where we have more in common, particularly in our schools.'

House of Lords Question on Threat to Democratic Freedoms in India 14-3-24 Lord Singh of Wimbledon

My Lords, last year the Canadian Government expelled Indian diplomats for their involvement in the murder of a Canadian Sikh. This was followed by an attempt in America by the Indian Government to assassinate an American Sikh. In this country, the death of a Sikh in suspicious circumstances in Birmingham led West Midlands Police to warn prominent Sikhs of a possible threat to their lives at the hands of Indian agents.

Prime Minister Modi, shown in a BBC documentary as having a responsibility for the Gujarat riots in which thousands of Muslims were killed, is now planning a citizenship law that will disadvantage thousands of Muslims in a so-called secular state. Are the Government not being a little hypocritical in not voicing their criticism of India's abuse of human rights in the same strident terms they reserve for Russia and non-Commonwealth countries?

75th ANNIVERSARY OF THE UN DECLARATION HUMAN RIGHTS

Lord Singh of Wimbledon

Preamble

Recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.

Sikhs and the Declaration

The Declaration was made at the end of WW2 in which millions of lives were lost in conflict and unspeakable atrocities between communities not recognising the sentiments of the above Declaration and seeing others as lesser beings.

Sikh teachings on human rights predate the Universal Declaration's emphasis on the oneness of our human family, by some 500 years, with their rejection of caste and race, emphasis on gender equality and, in the closing words of our Ardas: 'sarbat da bhala' – concern for the wellbeing of all humanity.

As Sikhs, we are therefore concerned that the Universal Declaration has been universally ignored in the last 75 years. Numerous horrific conflicts have resulted in the shameless pursuit of power, so-called strategic interest or worse, and bigotry of belief – something condemned by Guru Nanak who taught the one God of us all was not in the least bit interested in our religious labels, but in what we did for our fellow beings.

The Conflict in Gaza

The brutal attack on Israel on October 7 and the taking of hostages was followed by the no less brutal Israeli attack on Gaza with the continuing killing of thousands of civilians, hospital strikes, and an attack on mosques and refugee camps, along with the denial of food, water, power, or humanitarian assistance.

The Universal Declaration and the way to peace

Old fashioned concepts of dividing countries into friend and foe in our one human family are totally contrary to the spirit of the Universal Declaration. Looking the other way when those we see as allies abuse human rights is not the best way forward. Nor is the much vaunted two state solution talked about for decades practicable, when Israeli 'settlers' acquire Palestinian areas. This British government concept of dividing people because of supposed difference is not only contrary to the Universal Declaration of one human family, but also doomed to failure as seen in the conflict in Northern Ireland, and that seen in the Indian subcontinent.

The only way forward is for the West to help ensure equal human rights of freedom of movement and belief, as well as the right to residence and employment in one country, that is both Israel and Palestine. When I suggested this at a meeting in Parliament a few years back, I was told that this will happen at the second coming. I retorted, 'why wait?'

A peace effort on the lines on inherent common identity as mandated in the Universal Declaration would be the best way to celebrate this important anniversary. All Sikhs and non-Sikhs should give it their full support.

NETWORK OF SIKH ORGANISATIONS STATEMENT INTERFAITH WEEK 2023

In celebrating Interfaith Week this year, we are all saddened by the plight of the people of Gaza, suffering a military onslaught and a blockade of essential supplies in collective punishment for atrocities against Israel, including the kidnapping of hostages, by ruthless members of Hamas. We still have far to go for peace, harmony and understanding between our different faiths.

Interfaith week also coincides with Sikh celebration of the birthday of Guru Nanak. The Guru, who lived at a time of similar violence between faiths, said in his very first sermon:

Na koi Hindu, na koi Mussalman

There is neither Hindu nor Muslim, and by today's extension, neither Christian, Sikh nor Jew. Guru Nanak taught that the one God of us all is not interested in our different religious labels but in what we do to serve creation. He taught that our different faiths had overriding ethical commonalities on our responsibilities to our one human family. It is a message for today.

Happy Interfaith Week.

Lord (Indarjit) Singh CBE Director Network of Sikh Organisations UK

CORRESPONDENCE

1. Letter to HRH King Charles 111 for a Speedy Recovery

His Majesty King Charles 111
Buckingham Palace
London SW1A 1AA

6-2-24

Your Majesty,

I am writing to say how sorry I was to hear that you have been diagnosed with cancer. I hope the early diagnosis will result in a speedy cure and that you will soon be able carry on your wonderful work of enlightened guidance and selfless service to people of all communities.

You have graced Sikh functions for many years, and I look forward to you doing so for many more. It is my good fortune to know you as a friend and inspiration in working for harmony between people.

Others in the Network of Sikh Organisations UK will be writing to you separately but on my own behalf and that of my family, please accept our best wishes and prayers for a speedy return to full health and many years of continuing service to the UK and the wider world.

With best to Queen Camilla at this difficult time,

Indarjit
Lord Singh of Wimbledon
Director Network of Sikh Organisations UK

Response

A message was received on 19 February conveying HRH King Charles's 'heartfelt thanks' for the kind letter of support.

2. Defining Extremism. Letter in the Times 18-3-24

Sir, The debate on defining extremism takes me back to the Indian government attack on the Golden Temple in 1984. Thousands of Sikhs were killed. The Indian army newspaper Bath Chit described all practising Sikhs as terrorists.

Soon after, two Scotland Yard officers arrived at our front door, and I invited them in. With appropriate gravitas, they asked, "are you an extremist or a moderate?" I replied that I was "extremely moderate". Confused, they asked "are you a fundamentalist?" I replied, "well I believe in the fundamentals of Sikh teachings like the oneness of the human family, gender equality and the right for others to hold different beliefs, yes, I suppose that makes me a fundamentalist".

Subjective definitions of extremism do little to address underlying concerns. There is an urgent need to tackle the dated and divisive culture embedded in religious texts that wrongly passes for religious belief, distorting ethical imperatives.

Lord Singh of Wimbledon
House of Lords

A Summary of Sikh Teachings

The Sikh religion was founded by Guru Nanak who was born in Punjab in 1469. It was a time of hostility between the weak, majority Hindu community and Muslim invaders from the North, bent on forced conversion. Each claimed that theirs was the one true religion.

Against this background, Guru Nanak, in his very first sermon taught:

'The one God of us all isn't in the least bit interested in our different religious labels like Hindu or Muslim', or by today's extension, Christian, Sikh or Jew. God, the Guru taught, is only concerned with what we do in life, particularly to help the disadvantaged and oppressed.

Sikhism teaches that different religions are simply different paths to our understanding of God and our responsibilities in life. The Sikh teaching that we are all equal members of the one human family naturally follows from this, as does the emphasis on the full equality of women. Sikh women often lead congregational worship and are encouraged to fully participate in all walks of life.

Guru Nanak instituted a system of successor Gurus who showed by the example of their own lives that the principles of Sikhism remained relevant in different political and social circumstances. It wasn't easy, and two of the Gurus were cruelly martyred for teaching tolerance and the right to freedom of belief. The first of these martyrs was Guru Arjan, the 5th Guru and main author of the Sikh scriptures, the Guru Granth Sahib, in which, in addition to compositions of the Sikh Gurus, he also included verses of Hindu and Muslim saints to emphasize that no one religion has a monopoly of truth.

The 9th Guru, Teg Bahadur, though disagreeing with some aspects of Hindu worship, was publically beheaded for defending their right to freedom of worship against attempts of forced conversion by the Mughal rulers. At the time, Sikhs had no distinguishing symbols and were too cowed to be identified as Sikhs and claim their Guru's body, which was eventually removed by stealth.

The 10th Guru, Gobind Singh, son of the martyred Guru, thought long and hard about this lapse of courage, and how to ensure Sikhs always stood up for their beliefs. On the Spring festival of Baisakhi 1699, he challenged Sikhs to come forward if they were ready to stand up for their beliefs even at the cost of their lives. Sikhs readily came forward. The delighted Guru knew that Sikhism could now flourish without the guidance of further living Gurus. He gave Sikhs a distinct identity as a constant reminder of a commitment to live true to Sikh values at all times. The most noticeable of Sikh symbols is uncut hair covered with a turban. Others are a small comb as a reminder of the need for cleanliness, a steel bracelet, a kirpan or short sword, and shorts or trousers to replace the cumbersome Indian dhoti. The Guru then added verses of Guru Teg Bahadur to the Holy Granth and asked Sikhs to follow the teachings of the Guru Granth Sahib as they would a living Guru.

A Sikh place of worship is called a gurdwara, and essentially consists of a prayer hall and an area for communal eating, the langar hall. All people, regardless of race, religion or social standing are always welcome to join Sikhs for langar, which in larger gurdwaras is served from dawn to dusk.

Sikhism is not a religion of renunciation, but one of a commitment to positive action for self-improvement and improvement of society as a whole. Sikhs are expected to follow the threefold path of *naam japna*, *kirt karna* and *wand chakhna*, that is: reflecting on spiritual guidance, earning by honest effort and using talents, wealth and experience to help others. Sikh teachings see people in three categories: 'manmukhs' who care only about themselves, then there are those who, while doing little harm to others, do little to make the world a better place, and at the positive end of the spectrum, there are the 'gurmukhs', those committed to working for the wellbeing of others who leave the world better for they having lived. The whole thrust of Sikh teachings is to move us to the gurmukh end of the spectrum.

Lord (Indarjit) Singh Director Network of Sikh Organisations UK

NETWORK OF SIKH ORGANISATIONS UK

The Network of Sikh Organisations (NSO) is a registered charity no.1064544 that links more than 130 UK gurdwaras and other UK Sikh organisations in active cooperation to enhance the image and understanding of Sikhism in the UK

Some of the things we do:

- Promote unity and cooperation between all Sikh organisations in the UK, whether or not affiliated to the NSO
- Enhance the image and understanding of Sikhism throughout the UK through broadcasts on radio and television and articles in UK dailies and the social media
- Promote and participate in inter-faith dialogue and the active promotion of tolerance and respect between faiths.
- Through the Sikh Chaplaincy Service (SCS) provide spiritual and pastoral care to all Sikhs in prison establishments in the UK
- NSO is the Endorsing authority for Mandeep Kaur, Sikh Chaplain to the Armed Services
- Support Sikh chaplains in hospitals,
- NSO is the recognised authority for the inspection of Sikh faith schools and is represented on the Religious Education Council and the All-party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Religious Education. Deputy Director NSO Education Dr Karwaljit Singh OBE. provides training and guidance to Sikh schools.
- NSO is actively engaged in the protection of human rights and religious freedom with NSO Director serving a Vice Chair of the APPG for international religious freedom. The 'NSO is also supported by Deputy Director Jesbir Uppal of "Freedom Declared."
- Work with government and other statutory and non-statutory bodies to ensure that the views and concerns of UK Sikhs are fully represented.
- Counter the numerous sants, babas and politically motivated individuals who seek to distort the Gurus' teachings and establish their own 'maryada'

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