

THE SIKH STATEMENT

on

NATURE



Rejoice in the Lord who dwells in nature.

(Rehras)

Air is the Guru, Water the father, Earth the great
mother. Day and night, male and female nurses, in
whose lap the whole world plays.

(Japji Sahib)



SIKHISM IS ONE of the youngest living faiths and it has existed in its present form for about five hundred years. Founded by Guru Nanak who was born in 1469 it has had ten human gurus. The last, Guru Gobind Singh appointed the Holy Book, the Guru Granth Sahib to be the word teacher of the Sikhs. The principal tenets in the Guru Granth Sahib and within Sikhism proclaim the glory of God in nature and the environment.

Guru Nanak said:

Nature we see
Nature we hear
Nature we observe with awe, wonder and joy
Nature in the nether regions
Nature in the skies
Nature in the whole creation
Nature in the sacred texts (Vedas, Puranas and Qur'an)
Nature in all reflection
Nature in food, in water, in garments and in love for all
Nature in species, kinds, colours
Nature in life forms
Nature in good deeds
Nature in pride and in ego
Nature in air, water and fire
Nature in the soil of the earth
All nature is yours, O powerful Creator,
You command it, observe it and pervade within it.

(p.464 Adi Granth)

Nature is the manifestation of God who pervades in all that exists.

Since the beginning of the Sikh religion in the late 15th century, the faith has been built upon the message of the "Oneness of Creation". Sikhism believes the universe was created by an almighty God. He himself is the creator and the master of all forms in the universe, responsible for all modes of nature and all elements in the world. The Sikh Holy Book, the Guru Granth Sahib claims:

Humans, trees, holy places
Coasts, clouds, fields
Islands, continents, universes
Spheres and solar systems
Life forms — egg-born, womb-born, earth-born, sweat-born
Only God knows their existence,
in oceans, mountains, everywhere
Nanak says God created them
and God takes care of them all.

(Japji Sahib)

Sikhism firmly believes God to be the source of birth, life and death of all beings. God is the omniscient, the basic cause of the creation and the personal God of them all.

From the Divine command occurs the creation and the dissolution of the universe.

(p.117 Guru Granth Sahib)

Before God created the world there was no earth or sky, no sun or man; neither Brahma nor Vishnu. The cycle of birth and death, pleasure and pain and the sacred scriptures were all non-existent. No creatures, no humans, nothing at all existed. God alone existed in this Akhand Smadhi (unbroken trance), until he decided to create our world. He, the creator brought all the worlds and the underworlds into existence through His word. In the Japji Sahib Guru Nanak said, "God spoke once and there was creation." The situation before is described as:

For millions and millions of countless years was spread darkness
When existed neither earth nor human but only the Limitless
Divine Ordinance.
Then existed neither day nor light nor sun or moon.
The Creator into unbroken trance was absorbed,
Then were not Brahma, Vishnu or Shiva
None other than the sole Lord was visible.
Neither existed then female or male or caste or birth
None suffering or joy received
Then were not instituted recitation of scripture or

Keeping of Vows, fasts or worship offerings.
Creating continents, spheres and nether worlds
The hidden He made manifest

(pp. 1035-36 Japji Sahib)

As their creator, the natural beauty, which exists and can be found in all living things whether animals, birds, fish, belongs to Him and He alone is their master and without His Hukum (order) nothing exists, changes or develops.

Having brought the world into being, God sustains, nourishes and protects it. Nothing is overlooked. Even creatures in rocks and stones are well provided for. Birds who fly thousands of miles away leaving their young ones behind know that they would be sustained and taught to fend for themselves by God (Guru Arjan, in Rehras). The creatures of nature lead their lives under God's command and with God's grace. Guru Nanak applauds their closeness to God and His creation in this hymn:

If I were a doe living in the forest, eating grass
and leaves, with God's grace I will find God.

If I were a cuckoo living in the mango tree, contemplating
and singing, God reveals through this mercy.

If I were a female snake, dwelling in the ground, let God's
word be in my being, my dread would vanish.

Eternal God is found, light meets light.

(Rag Gaur Bairagan)

For Sikhs there are five elements of which nature and the environment are comprised. These are air, water, earth, fire and space.

He created night and day, seasons, time and occasions. So also air, water, fire and nether regions. Amidst these has He fixed the earth, the place for Righteous Activities.

(p.7 Guru Granth Sahib)

A balance between all elements in nature is necessary for the continuation of the universe. Any disruption to the balance brings distress and disaster. Water as the primary element has great symbolic meaning for Sikhs.

The first living thing is water whereby is each object sustained.

(p.472 *Guru Granth Sahib*)

Sikhism was founded in Punjab, North West India. The geographical situation of Punjab (the region of the rivers) is such that rainfall is essential and therefore always welcomed. The monsoon having travelled a great distance, its arrival in the form of rainfall is the occasion for celebration and rejoicing. Water is seen as a source of life, that produces vegetation which is used as food for humans and fodder for animals. The element of water is therefore a primary link in the interdependence of humanity and nature.

Sikhism teaches that the natural environment and the survival of all life forms are closely linked in the rhythm of nature. The history of the Gurus is full of stories of their love and special relationship with the natural environment — with animals, birds, vegetation, earth, rivers, mountains and the sky. There is also a very strong vegetarian tradition.

It is for this reason that in Sikhism, those who kill for lust of hunting, eating or to make sacrifices are condemned. In Sikh hymns God is often referred to as the provider for all life, which God loves and is loved by. God as both father and mother guarantees equality to man and woman in faith and compassion towards all beings and nature.

Nature informs us that there is no difference between the human sphere and the sphere of nature. Both were simultaneously created from the same light. Therefore we share the world with nature and our fellow beings. Sikh Gurus have attempted to warn those who desire to control nature and the world in which we live.

It is said:

God is the sole creator and judge, God is the ordinance operative in the universe. Keep Him ever in mind. Nothing but God has any power.

(p.83 *Guru Granth Sahib*)

The Gurus have strongly made us aware of our responsibility towards this earth, i.e.:

You are the master of this earth and responsible for all life forms.

(*Guru Granth Sahib*)

This message has in recent years been ignored. As we have become selfish and egotistical in our zealotry to acquire ultimate control over our environment, we have become power-mad and forgotten our responsibility towards others, so much so that now we can see the destruction of the balances in nature. Today the imbalance is being exacerbated by our blind race for profit, to the detriment of the rest of creation. We must know the eternal truth of our true place in the universe. Environmental balance can only be achieved if the conservation designed by God is maintained and it can only be maintained by adherence to ethical behaviour as prescribed in the holy scriptures. The key principles of the faith are highly in tune with natural existence. They are:

- Pray to God — remember Him and His authority always;
- Earn an honest living — do not take what does not belong to you, or more than you need — essential truths for a proper relationship with nature;
- Share with others — this includes all creation, not just human beings.

If these principles were followed, then the exploitation of the natural world would cease. This is the known will of the wonderful Lord. We are the highest order in God's creation. To us He has spoken. We must now try to live in accord with His will and return to the balance that He established.