

Respecting Religious Diversity

The foundations of Sikh dharma are the respect for diverse religious and spiritual thought and indeed the 9th Sikh Master gave his life to for the freedom of Hindus to practice their religion freely.

Modern Christians are very liberal and accepting people with a commitment to freedom of religion. However the teachings of the bible have supported intolerance towards people with other beliefs at passages such as Exodus 22:20, Deuteronomy 13:6-10, Deuteronomy 13:12-16, Mark 6:11.

Equality between Men and Women

Christian views of women vary considerably today and have varied even more throughout the last two millennia. The Bible and Christianity in general have been interpreted as prescribing separate gender roles, with women being commanded to submit to male's authority and excluded from Church leadership.

Sikh dharma promotes complete gender equality between the sexes. There is no position reserved solely for a male and no prescription of separate gender roles.

The Ultimate Sacrifice

The Bible says that when Jesus was on the cross, he experienced separation from God and he said *"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"*

Sikhs have also had to endure huge hardships and two out of the ten Sikh Gurus were martyred. However, the Sikh Masters and all their disciples never experienced separation from God. Guru Arjan Dev Ji, the fifth Master, was tortured for five days and five nights. He was made to sit in boiling water and made to sit on a scorching iron plate with sand poured over his body. The Guru tolerated this pain and sat there repeating, *"All is happening, O Lord, according to Thy Will. Thy Will is ever sweet to me."*

Attitudes Towards Self Defence

'Turn the other cheek' is a famous phrase taken from the Sermon on the Mount in the Christian New Testament. In Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus says: *"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for*

a tooth.' But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also."

Sikh dharma does not solely support turning the other cheek as this will only work with people who have a conscience. Turning the cheek is not a tool to be used against dictators like Hitler. This is why Guru Gobind Singh Ji, the tenth Master said, *"When all means of exhausting injustice have failed then it is indeed righteous to draw the sword"*. When the sixth Master, Guru Hargobind Ji, was asked about the unusual mix of martial arts and meditation, the Guru said, *"I am internally a hermit and externally a prince. Arms mean protection to the poor and destruction to the tyrant. Baba Nanak had not renounced the world but renounced Maya (materialism) and ego."*

Heaven and Hell

The standard Christian position is that anyone who rejects Christ will end up in Hell where they will be punished for eternity. However, if they profess a belief in Christ then they will be given ever lasting life.

Sikh dharma supports the theory of karma and reincarnation. An all-loving God would not condemn a soul to eternal punishment. Every soul will get the opportunity to attain Oneness through many incarnations in the precious human form.

The Key to Salvation

Christians believe that Jesus died on the cross for the sins of humanity, so effectively our sins have now been paid, so long as we accept Jesus as our Saviour.

Sikhs do not support the idea that by belief alone or a religious label, one can attain salvation. The Sikh Gurus have taught that our good actions will give us liberation. The SGGSJ says, *"Those who receive His Mercy obtain the True One. The Gurmukhs (those who follow the Guru's Teachings) dwell forever in balanced restraint. By true actions, the True Lord is met, and the Guru's Teachings are found. Then, they are not subject to birth and death; they do not come and go in reincarnation."*



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Sikh Dharma And Christianity A Comparative Study

Sikh Dharma

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Introduction

There are common and principles ideas in all religions of the world and this is also true for Sikh dharma and Christianity.

A Christian is someone who lives according to the teachings of Jesus. The word 'Sikh' is derived from the Sanskrit word 'Shishya' meaning disciple or student of truth (spirituality) and is someone who follows the teachings of the 10 Sikh Masters, which are all embodied in the 11th and final master, which is the Shri Guru Granth Sahib Ji (SGGSJ), the Word.

Similarities

Oneness of God

Both Sikhs and Christians accept that God is one. In Christianity this is described as the trinity consisting of God the Father, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, three aspects of a single deity. Sikh dharma teaches that God is both within the Creation and separate from it at the same time. The SGGSJ says, *"You have thousands of eyes, and yet You have no eyes. You have thousands of forms, and yet You do not have even one. You have thousands of Lotus Feet, and yet You do not have even one foot. You have no nose, but you have thousands of noses. This Play of Yours entrances me. Amongst all is the Light-You are that Light. By this Illumination, that Light is radiant within all."*

The Humility of Christ and The Sikh Gurus

Before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that he would soon return back to God, he gave his disciples a lesson in humility by washing their feet.

Sikh history and the Sikh scripture is full of examples of the importance of humility and gentle sweetness. The SGGSJ says, *"O Inner-knower, Searcher of Hearts, O Primal Being, Architect of Destiny: please fulfil this yearning of my mind. Says Nanak, Your slave, begs for this happiness: let me be the dust of the feet of the Saints."* Also, the SGGSJ says, *"Those contented souls who meditate on the Lord with single-minded love, meet the True Lord. O Siblings of Destiny, become the dust of the feet of the humble Saints. In the Society of the Saints, the Guru is found. He is the Treasure of Liberation, the Source of all good fortune."*

Temple of God

The human body is described as the temple of God. The Bible says, *"Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?...For God's temple is holy, and that temple you are."*

This is the same view supported by the Sikh way of life, and this is why a Sikh abstains from alcohol, drugs and smoking because the temple must be maintained and respected in order to serve others effectively.

Purpose of Life

Christians believe that God created humans to have a relationship with God. This is why God created a universe fit for human life, and why God laid down guidelines for how to live our lives. So it would follow, that the purpose of human life is to have a relationship with God.

Sikh dharma expands on the concept of a relationship with God by saying that the goal of human life is to merge soul (Atma) with God (Paramatma) through love, devotion and service.

Charity

Giving to the poor, widows and orphans has historically been an important part of Christian charity.

Sikh dharma also stresses the importance of giving, both at a personal and a community level. At a personal level, a Sikh is encouraged to give ten per cent (Dasvandh) of their income and time to noble causes. At a community level, Sikh dharma encourages the running of free community services such as the Langar, or free kitchen, which serves meals to everyone.

Differences

Prophets and Children of God

Christianity focuses on the teachings of Jesus alone, and considers Jesus the only son of God.

Sikh dharma does not consider Jesus to be the only son of God. The SGGSJ says, *"He cherishes all His beings and creatures, as the mother cares for her children. The Destroyer of pain, the Ocean of Peace, the Lord and Master gives sustenance to all."*

Sikh dharma respects the divinity and contribution of all the sages, prophets and spiritual teachers but

instead focuses on the teachings given by the ten Sikh Masters which are considered to be the essence of all religious teachings.

Harmonisation of Science and Religion

It took the Catholic Church more than 300 years to apologise for imprisoning the great 17th Century astronomer Galileo Galilei because his research went against the Church's teachings. The Bible also contains many unscientific ideas such as the seven day creation story called Genesis. In Genesis the light and the sun happened independent of each other, and there were 'days' before the sun was created for the Earth to rotate around. Also, the order in which animals, plants and other elements of life appear to contradict the order that appears in the fossil records. Finally, the order of creation of the stars, the sun and planets also contradict what we know scientifically.

Sikhs encourage the development of technologies and science for the benefit of humanity. There are many passages from the Shri Guru Granth Sahib Ji which show its harmony with modern science. An example is, *"Having created the creation, He watches over it. By His Glance of Grace, He bestows happiness. There are planets, solar systems and galaxies. If one speaks of them, there is no limit, no end. There are worlds upon worlds of His Creation. As He commands, so they exist."*

Authenticity of the Religious Scripture

The Bible was not authored by Jesus and has gone through uncountable translations and changes over time. This has meant that although the gist of the message is still present, it is unclear what is the revealed Word of God and what is manmade opinion.

The Sikh scripture has only ever had two versions and both of these were compiled, reviewed and installed by the fifth and tenth Masters, Guru Arjan Dev Ji and Guru Gobind Singh Ji respectively. The message is presented in poetry format with a unique poem-author numbering system, which makes it difficult to modify, add or subtract content. Thus the Sikh scripture is the only one of its kind to be authored by the founders of the faith.