



Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa, Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh

In these times of self-isolation and social distancing we must pray; we must pray alone and also find new ways of using technology to pray together. We are seeing Gurudwaras, Mosques, Churches, Temples, Synagogues and even people's homes being used as makeshift sacred broadcasting studios. Whilst we may be physically isolated, we should remain spiritually connected in prayer and remembrance. As Sikhs we are compelled to be always optimistic and in the current climate we would encourage all to be positive where possible and be there for each other.

Today, humanity faces an imposing array of global issues. A pandemic, economic meltdown, abject poverty, food scarcity, political upheavals, social and societal challenges, oppression, apathy, extremism, terrorism and exploitation are all driving a climate of uncertainty and fear. With schools and workplaces closed and UK charities stretched to their limits in ways that are akin to humanitarian projects in the developing world, April this year is very different to previous years.

During these challenging times we must remember all those on the frontline who are serving humanity and those who have lost their lives or lost loved ones to the pandemic. The frontline workers are demonstrating enormous strength of character and values; despite the tsunami upon them, they bravely serve all. Let us express gratitude to the government, to healthcare staff, volunteers and key workers in all areas who are helping to combat the coronavirus outbreak.

On the 30th March 1699, 321 years ago, a unique model of a good human being was created. This model was enshrined in the order of Khalsa, with the *Panj Kakaar* (5Ks) and the *Dastar* (turban) marking its distinct identity. The Khalsa's birth was on Vaisakhi day, the first day of the month of Vaisakh, which coincides with the blossoming and rejuvenation of nature in spring. The Khalsa was established to set free the human spirit, to bring about a rebirth through a spiritual re-kindling which would ignite in people's hearts and minds the virtues of utter humility, compassion, forgiveness, steadfastness, selflessness, altruism, truth, commitment, contentment and love.

The Khalsa was to embody Guru Nanak's message, that peace-building starts with establishing peace within ourselves. To establish such peace, we need to live in a state of constant connection with God. Our spiritual disconnection spells death and destruction. '*Akha jeeva visray mar jao, akhan aukha sach naa...*' - one is only truly alive and awakened when one is connected and attuned to the Infinite Creator. The Khalsa embodies a commitment to lead a God-conscious life and to serve creation.

To the faithful, Vaisakhi, is a time of great religious significance, to inspire and to build up faith, to widen our orbit of human relationships and to foster virtues and values which enrich human lives. It is a time for turning a new leaf, for being spiritually reborn, by taking the Khalsa initiation known as *amrit sanchar*. It is also a time for joyous celebrations, reflections and resolutions, a time for expressing gratitude, a time to commit to being benevolent and ever-ready to make sacrifices, as well as a time for exercising an abundance of compassion, forgiveness and love for all. All of this should enable us to engage and deal with life and society with renewed depth of character, wisdom, courage and vision.

May Vaisakhi inspire us to dream of - and make possible - a better world, which is one of the greatest challenges of our time. May it remind us too that, whilst strength may come with power, only love - which touches human hearts and minds - gives true authority. May we better understand that it is not holding on to power that is important. More important is the way that power can be lovingly exercised to discover that in diversity there is unity and that in unity there is strength. As humanity now faces an unprecedented common threat, may we firmly realise that together, we all have a shared responsibility. May we remain hopeful, knowing that, in our global village, we have unprecedented opportunities to share knowledge and ingenuity for the common good.

Finally, at Vaisakhi, I am impelled to remind myself and my brethren that we need to be authentic Sikhs and discard hypocrisy. We need to reflect upon the primary goal of life, not just the desire for wellbeing, for pleasures and individual freedoms alone. We need to realise more than ever that we are all inter-dependent and interconnected. It helps us to remember that, from a spiritual perspective, we are not alone in managing our lives - '*Guru mere sang sada hai nalay*' - for the Guru is always with us, by our side, continuously there to help, guide and direct us. As the Guru's Sikhs, we are required to serve the Creator and God's entire creation to the best of our ability. Let us wish happiness, prosperity, success and peace to all people of this world without exception:

'Nanak naam chardi kala, tere bhaanay sarbat da bhalla.'

May the qualities and characteristics of the first Sikh Vaisakhi resonate within our human minds today in the 21st century, individually and collectively, for the universal good of all.

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