

The Unitarian Universalist Church in Meriden Building a New Way

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Yes. Indeed there is more hope
somewhere

Often times we look to the future for this hope
but sometimes.
sometimes it can be helpful to look to the past.
because here we can know of the pain, the dream –
and then the reality they birthed together

It helps us know it really is possible,
for pain and a dream to create a new reality.

And today we can receive that message from Guru Nanak.
And from the stories of present day Sikhs in the US.

Last Thursday, Sikhs around the world celebrated
one of their most important holidays,
the birth of their founder and the first of the 10 Gurus,
Guru Nanak.

Last Thursday was his 545th birthday.
Not too old.

This makes Sikhism
the world's 5th largest world religion with about 25 million members,
and also the newest great world religion.

Sikhs all around the world celebrated
by gathering together for worship,
reading the entire holy book, the Guru Granth Sahib,
sharing the community meal,
langar together after worship, as they always do,

and in some larger gatherings
having teachings and parades.

More than 3000 were expected to make a pilgrimage to Pakistan
where the guru was born.

So why are we talking about this here today?

Well I think there are some really great messages we can learn
from Guru Nanak, and from Sikhism.
About creating the kind of world we want to be in.

And I think this and have this bias
because as an undergraduate I was able to work with
the Sikh communities in the Boston, MA and Washington, DC areas.

I talked with and listened to many Sikhs about their faith
and their gurdwaras, the name for the place of worship
I got some of the knitty gritty politics and family feuds that affected
the Indian American Sikh community, just as it does all places of worship.
I got to eat really amazing food after worship services,

and I learned about the horrifying and horrible
discrimination Sikhs face on a daily basis.

And I want to spend a couple minutes now talking about this
because it seems important to honor this on the Gurus birthday
to hear of the pain of others, so we might better understand it
and be moved by it.

Because many Sikh men wear turbans,
many in America associate them
with images they have seen of Osama Bin Laden on the news

they assume Sikhs are associated with him
they assume Sikhs are muslim
and because of this, they face so many hardships.

It's ridiculous enough to associate Muslim Americans

with Osama Bin Laden
but Sikhs who are by-and-large Indian Americans?

It's just absurd.

One of the most disturbing things I learned was from
Valerie Kaur, a Sikh American woman
and then student at Harvard Divinity School.
She made the movie *Divided We Fall*,
documenting the hate crimes directed at Sikh Americans
after September 11th.

From her I learned that
The first person killed in a hate crime after 9/11
was a Sikh man in Arizona
killed outside of the gas station he owned.

This was just the beginning of hate crimes Sikhs
have received in the fear full aftermath after 9/11

In August of 2012,
a gunman opened fire on a gurudwara in Wisconsin
and killed 6.

Some of you might remember this,
and Standing on the Side of Love,
the Unitarian Universalist Association's anti-oppression movement
collected notes of care from UU communities from across the country
and sent them to this gurudwara.

So when I read that last Thursday was Guru Nanak's birthday,
I wanted to be able to talk about this with our community here
Because I had been so moved by the work of Valerie
and the Sikh communities I had gotten to know.
And I know there is a Sikh gurudwara close to us here,
just down the road in Southington
And so I felt moved to share these stories with you all.

In a recent article about Guru Nank's birthday
Valarie was interviewed.

She told the press that “for many
the holiday is a profound time to reflect on
Guru Nanak’s vision of Oneness—
the oneness of the divine and the oneness of humanity
and his message
‘I see no stranger’”

So it is fitting today, that we might remember those among us
and outside these walls who have faced discrimination
because we have seen the other as stranger, as strange
as scary and threatening.
Or just as not worth getting to know.

We have probably all been discriminated against.
And we have all discriminated against another.
Discrimination, we know, is not always so violent and obvious.
It can sometimes even come with a smile.

So may we think about the Sikh community
And how we can stop perpetuating this
and stand up against religious discrimination and hate crimes
and all discrimination and hate crimes.

And may we allow ourselves to get upset. and sad and mad.
May we think about those Sikh Americans who have suffered
And all who have suffered from others’ fear, hatred and ignorance.

And

Will you sing with me?

There is more peace somewhere
There is more peace somewhere
I’m gonna keep on, till I find it
There is more peace somewhere

So thank you for listening.
This violence towards Sikhs
And Islamaphobia
This is one of those things that upsets me, make me sad and mad
And because I have hope that you all can and will make a difference
for Sikh Americans, for your neighbor, for yourself.

And also. I'm the one here in the pulpit,
so you all had to listen to me preach about it.

And I hope to hear you preaching and teaching
about your sads and mads more too
getting us all to move towards a better reality

AND because it's not my holiday,
let us also talk about something that upset Guru Nanak and Sikhs:

The caste system that was so important in India and to Hinduism at the time.

This caste system was different classes,
and if your family was in one class
you always had to be in that class.
Because your family would forever be in that caste
and everyone knew where you stood because of your family name.

Now Guru Nanak saw the human race as one,
and imagined a world where mankind lived without any distinctions
based on birthright, religion or sex.

He did not go about trying to start a new religion
he was just trying to spread the message of equality for all,
specifically equality for women
and abolishing the caste system.

A thousand years later
the Sikh religion which had begun from his teachings
as a religion distinct from Hinduism
took a very recognizable stand against this caste system.

All Sikh men were to take one last name: Singh
spelled s-i-n-g-h
And all women were to take another: Kaur
spelled k-a-u-r
And the women would not change their name if they married

Now not all Sikhs did then or do now do this
and I will add that not all fit easily into our gender binary.

We can see some of the problems that could result
but let us take off for a moment
our critical hats and marvel at this:

In a world where women were identified by the family
they married into, or perhaps failed to marry out of
this is remarkable.

In a world where every single person
was identified and categorized
by their caste that could be told from their name
this is remarkable.

This is such a striking example
of how a problem became a vision
and eventually, with a lot of work
and a lot of time
became a new reality.

And it became a reality within one religious community
within one religious community this incredibly subversive act!
They created something new!

As part of a world that determined your worth
based on your family name
Sikhs declared,
No.
we are all one family with one name
all of worth.

This began as in-group, internal designation,
declaring one another equal together
But their names also had to be recognized by others
It shook up the system completely,

and demanded others take notice.

How remarkable.

Creating the world we want right here,
and helping that to grow?

What a model. And yet.

We know

There is so much to tackle.

Certainly we have a caste system of our own here in America
that keeps far too many men and transwomen of color in prisons
that makes it so hard to for people to have economic mobility

We have discrimination, hate crimes and bigotry.

We have all of what makes us sad and mad.

We have a lot of inspiration
we might say, to dream from.

And we have in Sikhism a model
of how a religion can actively be
a culturally subversive community
that creates a new world within itself
and then causes waves of change.

I wonder, dream and pray:

What could we do, with a model like this?

Now it doesn't mean we'll get it all right,
history can humble us and assure in this way, too

but it does mean we can do something
together, right here.

build something in our vision together right here.

It won't be perfect, but it can be better.

What might we be able to make together?

Please join me. in getting upset,

dreaming,

working,

hoping,
building,
and right now,
singing together:

Song 1017 in *Singing the Journey* the lighter blue book,
We are Building a New Way