

Editor's note: By request, the first name of Mr. Singh has been withheld.

My Testimony

By: ... SINGH

My Religious Journey

I have altered my beliefs according to the evidence I came across. At first I was a Satsangi, believing in the Radha Soami teachings – as a young person, just believing what my parents told me. When I came across evidence in favour of Christianity, I changed religions. Later on, I came across evidence against Christianity, including history, archeology, and modern science, which contradicted both Christianity and the Bible.

I have had to swallow a large pill called Pride, which was very difficult to do, in order to change my set beliefs and worldview, for each and every time I was presented with updated evidence.

My Early History

I was born in New Zealand, and raised in Sydney, Australia, since I was 5. Knowing about all the ups and downs in life, I wanted to make the best of my life. When I was about 12 or 13, I remember telling a friend that I wanted to become a disciple of Jesus, just like those found in the gospels, as if it were a profession to be learnt and practiced after I completed my high school. At that age I saw the Bible as a modern day material, documenting the life of Jesus and about God's guidelines for life. I didn't think of it as another ancient document. I just read it at home, not knowing or questioning where we got it from. It was a copy of the Gideon's Psalms and Gospels only, not the rest of the Bible.

During my teen years, my parents attended weekly Satsang meetings, and took us kids with them. My brothers and my sister and I just went to play around with other kids that were there, not giving much attention to what was being taught. As the years passed, I began to take a more serious look at this philosophy that my parents and some relatives were learning about and practicing. I bought some books that were on for sale on the stands at the end of the meetings and read them thoroughly at home.

The meetings we attended were of the Radha Soami *path*. It is an offshoot of the Sikh religion, which emphasizes meditation and vegetarian living. Some Sikhs consider this group and their "perfect living master" as cult, or a false religion. Since the teachings of

Radha Soami are almost identical to some forms of Sikhism, I thought of our *path* as just another denomination among the many Hindu and Sikh traditions that exist in India. Also my parents are of Sikh heritage – a number of Indians that follow this *path* are Sikhs.

Since almost no one in Australia had heard of the Radha Soami, I always referred to myself as a Sikh. There are many Hindus, Sikhs, and Christians on this *path*, and they always referred to themselves as Hindus or Sikhs or westerners respectively. The Radha Soami master always stated that he is not starting a new religion, rather we are to become better Hindus, or better Muslims, or better Christians etc.

When I was about 18, I decided to follow this *path* seriously, so I started to live a vegetarian lifestyle, being honest in all my dealings, spending time reading their books as well as other New Age material that agreed with the teachings, not mixing with the wrong crowd, abstaining from alcohol, drugs, smoking, and pre-marital relations. I saw myself as a clean living individual, as a more highly evolved soul compared to many others who didn't have the spiritual level. I did everything to understand these sublime teachings. I almost became a "spiritual snob."

I couldn't start my meditation practice until I got officially initiated into the Radha Soami path for which I would have to be 24. I thought starting the rest of it early would give me a head-start on the *path* until when I eventually received Nam (initiation), which would then allow me to advance my spiritual journey faster.

Radha Soami teachings

The group is known by many names such as: Radha Soami path, Surat Shabad Yoga, Sant Mat, the path of the masters, science of the soul, and Satsang. Each of these names has spiritual meanings, which convey the message from the so-called perfect living masters teach.

Here is a basic list of facts about the group and what it teaches:

- There are about 7 Radha Soami groups in northern India.
- The main one (which we were part of) is based in Beas, in Punjab, India.
- The Beas group has a worldwide membership of around 2 million (as of 2000).
- They teach reincarnation, karma, and vegetarianism. They emphasize avoidance of alcohol, smoking, drugs, and pre-marital relations.
- Spending two and a half hours per day on meditation, using the secret names given at the time of initiation to repeat and concentrate on to achieve a higher level of consciousness.

- That there are different levels or planes of existence, with our earthly materialistic world being among the lower forms, but not the lowest.
- The aim of meditation is to practice the process of death, making the soul leave the physical body and being guided by the image of the master (the shabd, word, or logos) towards the higher levels of consciousness, until we get rid of our bad karma or sins, and eventually be re-united or merged with the ultimate reality which is God.
- Our individual souls are likened to a drop of water, which is to be reunited to the great ocean of water known as God or a ray of light to be reunited to the Sun.
- When I left the *path* (around 1999/2000) the minimum age for initiation was 24 (I have heard it is higher now).
- That this knowledge of the *path* must be taught and guided by a perfect living master or guru, and not through a holy book, or rituals, or priesthood or a dead prophet – the spiritual teacher must be alive for this initiation and meditation to work.
- That salvation can be reached within this lifetime or within a maximum of four human births or lives.
- That it is not a new religion, but a better way to practice the religion you already have.
- That all religions originally taught this *path*, until the founder or prophet died, and then the generations and priests that followed changed the teachings through lack of spiritual insight that the founder had or other misunderstandings.
- During this meditation one sees a great light and hears a sound, which you are to follow.
- There are 5 deadly sins (egotism, anger, greed, lust, and attachment).
- Only a select number of souls get awakened to follow the *path* (this is not for everyone).

Why I left the Radha Soami path

Soon after my marriage, I discovered some Indians who claimed to follow no religion at all. They included Sikhs as well as Hindus. I honestly didn't know that non-believers among the Indians existed. I thought India to be a vast land of wisdom, where everyone meditated and practiced yoga, and lived peaceful with one another, and that the West and others should learn from Indian spirituality. This is how naïve I was!

Occasionally I would meet people who were not vegetarian--Meat-eaters--who were so much nicer than some vegetarians I knew. I met others who were Christians and atheists, and others which I would have then called spiritually backward people, but some were so much friendlier and nicer than those in my own religious group. I couldn't understand it, if we had the truth, then shouldn't we be more like the masters, gurus and prophets, and be nicer than anyone else in the world.

My attendance to the Satsang meetings and following the Radha Soami path gradually slowed down. I was also feeling guilty all the time for small-time sins which I couldn't stop doing. For example: Thinking of money, looking at a beautiful girl passing by, or even being angry at someone who'd pissed me off. I stopped going to Satsang altogether shortly after September 11, 2001. I had heard comments on TV like the Jews, Christians and Muslims believed that America deserved this punishment because God was angry at it. But what about all those innocent people who died? Did they deserve this?

Although I could understand that some people give their religion a bad name (there are good and bad people in every community), when they do something bad, I couldn't accept it anymore. I already knew of the Catholic inquisitions of the middle ages, the Protestant vs. Catholic wars in Europe over the centuries, so called Christians enslaving the Africans and almost wiping out the natives of America and Australia, and Christians involvement in fostering imperialism, the Islamic invasions and forced conversions in India centuries ago, and a long list of other atrocities done in the name of religion all over the world.

But 9/11 was the final straw. I told my parents that religion sucks and that science is the only credible thing to believe or know.

My Journey into Christianity

By late 2003, I stumbled across some Jehovah's Witness material that I had accumulated over the years. These dated back to when I had a bible-study with them during 1995/1996. Back then I rejected everything they taught, mainly because they said we have no 'soul' that survives beyond death. This "soul" was a basic fundamental belief in my own path at the time, otherwise how would we travel along the other planes of existence or higher conscious states without one? How would reincarnation be true? I concluded that these bible-guys were too spiritually immature to understand the real philosophical truths about life, and that's why they accepted the bible as literal truth. Although I did learn from them that the other churches are part of what they called "spiritual Babylon" – or churches that have deviated from biblical truth, as they saw it. This led me to reject those forms of Christianity as well.

Over the years since 1996, we had various friendly Jehovah's Witnesses visit us and give us *Awake* and *Watchtower* magazines, which constituted the material I collected.

A few of these articles rekindled my interest in spiritual things, but I remembered how I rejected all religions a few years before, so I set about to sort out this confusion of religions we all encounter. My aim was to discredit each and every religion, so I could answer and argue with religious people and get them out of their delusion. I also remember the visit by a couple of American Mormons back in 1992/93 who had tried to convert us within one week, after their fourth visit. I knew from the start that their religion was ridiculous because they taught that the Native Americans came from ancient Israel, but I knew from history lessons that they came from Asia. (genetics, archaeology and culture can confirm this), and that some people go to the sun, moon and some other planet when they die. I knew this was childish and rubbish even at a young age.

Anyway, the easiest religions to discredit were (with some basic reasons):

Mormons – for the above reasons, and that their prophet Joseph Smith invented it.

Roman Catholic – inquisitions indicating they're not from God, and the pagan traditions incorporated into it, pedophiles among them, and celibacy not being natural.

Hindu – everyone knows that Hinduism is just Indian paganism largely based on myths, also that gurus are just charlatans, and that an ascetic life of sadhus isn't natural.

Islam – didn't know much about it at the time, but like the Catholics, murderous religions don't come from God.

Traditional tribal religions around the world – just myths and legends.

Theosophy and other New Age – borrowed from other sources and partially invented to sound good and make sense of the world, basically pick and choose from here or there and believe whatever you want.

Others weren't so easy to discredit, but here is the basics of what I found:

Jehovah's Witnesses: – just study their background on the internet, they break families apart, and ridicule other churches which isn't constructive.

Jains – unnatural life of ascetics.

Buddhism – beautiful teachings, but covered up with so much Asian paganism, that it couldn't be recognized, also I have yet to meet anyone who has achieved nirvana.

Radha Soami – they just copied and borrowed from other religious sources (Bible, Sikh & Hindu scriptures), and invented the rest.

Some may think of the above descriptions as shallow, but I really did do the hard reading and studying them. The above is just a summary since space doesn't allow me to explain each and every detail. I then began the task of going to the scriptures of each major

religion to see how they measure under the 3 rules of measurement: common sense, science, and history. The “holy books” would have to satisfy each of these criteria to be acceptable.

During my studies, I found that almost every holy book contained myths and supernatural legends, but I was willing to accept them if evidence was provided. I turned this research into searching for which ones “could” or “may” be true.

When I stumbled upon bible prophecy, the evidence for Jesus, and the arguments used by some Christians to prove their beliefs, I was astounded. I read many books, including “*The Case for Christ*” and “*The Case for Faith*”, both books authored by Lee Strobel, an American legal journalist who used his cross-referencing skills to determine whether the gospels were true or not. I began asking many questions to various Christian friends, and they had greatly impressed me with their answers. I did get a bit jealous though.

Being from a Sikh background, I felt a somewhat upset that my religious background couldn't be the truth. For example, I found that the Sikh scriptures don't spell out the details of creation like the Bible does, nor does it claim to be God's word like the Bible does so many times, especially when the Bible states that “thus says the Lord...” so many times. After studying the lineage of the Sikh gurus, I thought that the blood relations from the 3rd guru to the 10th guru was a bit of a family business, just like the various Radha Soami groups in existence in India today, where the guru passes on his successorship to his son or nephew or grandson etc. I saw this as keeping it (\$\$\$) all in the family. I also found that some Sikhs had created miraculous stories surrounding their various gurus, especially the first one, and I could see the similar patterns of “miracles” along the other religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism.

For the above reasons only I slowly began to realize that even my own religious background (Sikhism/Radha Soami) was as faulty as many other religions. But some things stood out such as: the great amount of rationalism within the Sikh scriptures, the fact that the Sikh scriptures were penned by the actual teachers/founders of that religion, and that there was little if any mythological verses within its scripture (the miracle parts I mentioned earlier do not form part of its scripture).

A quarter of the way through 2004, I came across a Seventh Day Adventist bible worker, who helped me understand the Bible through a personal bible study for about 8 months. I gradually grew into believing everything that the SDA (Seventh Day Adventist) taught. I was especially attracted to their precise interpretation of prophecy of Daniel and Revelation. We went through the prophecies of the first coming of Jesus, as well as the prophecies leading up to his Second Coming.

I noticed that the SDA worshipped on Saturday, because they kept the Sabbath, which is the fourth commandment, among the Ten Commandments. This made sense, because if the bible is based on the Ten Commandments it would make sense to follow all ten, not just nine like other Christians do. I was surprised to learn that these guys knew more about the law, including the hygiene laws of the ancient Israelites, together with their

knowledge of prophecy as compared to any other Christian group, including the impressive Jehovah's Witnesses.

As I began keeping the Sabbath, I could actually "feel" that I was doing God's requirement and I felt uplifted because of this. I actually looked forward to each Sabbath, going to church and learning as much as I could. I became like a sponge, soaking in so much information regarding Christianity and especially the SDA doctrines.

Besides keeping all the Ten Commandments, the SDA also believe in soul-sleep, meaning that our physical bodies are soul, and that our spirit is just our breath which goes back to God when we expire/die. Saved Christians are unconscious under the ground as dust until Jesus returns to "awaken" them from their sleep at the time of his Second Coming, which is called resurrection day. The wicked also are unconscious under the ground and are not to be sent to hell forever and ever, but await judgment and will be thrown into a lake of fire which will eventually burn out once it has no more bodies left to burn up. This meant that the lake of fire (hell) was only temporary and this made more sense to me compared to loving and merciful God torturing sinners in hell forever. Imagine Cain (who murdered only one person – his brother Abel) was in hell for six thousand years longer than Hitler (who killed millions). This makes so much more sense than the other Christian denominations confusing beliefs of souls and heavens and hells and so on. Also the division of clean and unclean meats, originally for health reasons, was also to be kept, but they prefer full vegetarianism – which was good for me as I have been brought up as a vegetarian.

The SDA really likes to point out that the Roman Catholic Church is the head of "spiritual Babylon" – which is what I liked to hear, since I never liked them for their atrocities committed over the centuries anyway. They pointed out the many pagan practices and beliefs that had been infused within Catholicism over the centuries, and that even the Protestants who originally tried to clear out or de-paganise their religion through reforms, didn't go far enough.

All the above differences with other forms of Christianity made them stand out. They had a lot of bible scripture to back up their beliefs, and it also made sense to me.

Finally, I had found the truth. God had heard my prayers to find the truth, and saw that I was diligently seeking to know the truth.

I had some difficulty explaining to my employer that I needed to take Saturday off from now on to worship at the Church. It took many months and a lot of explaining to achieve this.

Our Baptism

In November 2006 my wife and I were baptized. It felt like the best day of my life, I felt the Holy Spirit within me, and I knew I was a citizen of the kingdom of heaven from here

on. With so many prayers that seemed to be answered and the new view of history and the world, I knew that I was saved.

There was one time when I was watching a video presentation of a highly regarded Adventist preacher who was also a scientist – who covered many topics ranging from archeology and history to exposing freemasonry to health to various bible topics, and I was so impressed by some of them that once I literally felt the presence of God right in my living room where I was watching. It was a terrific experience, I felt insignificant in the midst of God – he wasn't malignant or anything, but made me feel that he is looking after me, and wanted me to know that he is leading me along a path that I am genuinely seeking. I thought of moving away from the living room because of the overwhelming and awesome power I felt, but then thought, if it's God, I cannot run from him, so I stayed put until the presence left. This happened a couple of years before my baptism.

Soon after our baptism, I was assigned some duties within the church, most of which were easy, such as being the head librarian of a small library, a deacon, and part of personal ministries team. But the most difficult position was of assistant treasurer – which eventually lead me to being the head treasurer a year later.

I was grateful that the church members entrusted me with such high responsibilities, but I protested a number of times, explaining that it is very difficult to do these tasks while being in full time work as well as looking after my 2 children at church as well. My wife was also assigned a position of one of the children's Sabbath school teachers – which she also found difficult due to looking after young children also.

I was happy to do these tasks for almost 2 years. I stayed after the baptism mainly because I was doing the work that God would have wanted me to do. It was kind of like a community service. I quickly learnt all roles very well, clearing up much of the treasury work to make it streamlined and easy to do. I was commended for my good work by all church members, especially the leaders and elders. They told me that because we had such a small membership, mostly made up of fragile elderly people, that there was no one else to perform some of these tasks. So out of duty to God and to help the church I continued.

Problems at Church

The problem in my mind was that I felt that if I am going to do all this work for the church, including being heavily involved in evangelistic campaigns as well as inviting friends and family members to church for outreach purposes, then the rest of the congregation should at least act like Christians – well that was our religion anyway. Some were rude to my friends, not only in our church, but also one of the larger ones in another suburb. This disturbed me greatly. What also let me down big time was that there were a couple of people who continued in their conflict against each other, not following the forgiveness rule that Jesus taught. It still continues today. Also, at the larger churches I noticed a very cold attitude amongst the people there. They didn't even greet each other, the doorman and the Pastor were the only ones who would shake anyone's hand, but the

rest either gave cold looks or ignored me and each other. How weird! I had read or heard about, or saw with my own eyes, many Adventists who either drank alcohol, smoked, ate pork or other non-kosher food, used foul language, engaged in pre-marital relations before marriage and other general non-Christian attitudes and behaviours. These things really made me feel sad and very upset. It was very discouraging.

I had always put down other religions when talking about spiritual issues with my dad or friends, so I expected my religion to be perfect, since it was part of the body of Christ, who himself was perfect.

I always wondered why other non-Adventist Christians could be so much nicer people than my own Adventist brothers and sisters, when they didn't have the truth. But I soon realized that they also faced many of the same problems. I also saw first hand the attitude of some at our Sydney conference level. If these guys who are so high up in the church, at the conference level they can be so un-Christian, then why are they our leaders?

Leaving Adventism

The last time I went to church our Sydney conference president was preaching at our little local congregation. He is a very nice gentleman, and his very Christian character almost prevented me from leaving.

From the start of 2008, I gradually built up inside of me (unconsciously) a vile hatred for everything Christian. I became aware of this negative attitude towards church by midyear, and tried to gather up enough courage to tell my Pastor. I did eventually tell him and a number of people at church, and they were all very shocked and saddened. I gave them the reasons to which they agreed there was a problem, but didn't understand how I could have grown cold, since I was the most "on fire for Christ" person at church for years.

I told them that amongst other reasons, I doubt today's Christians are Christ's followers, as Jesus has said in the bible, "you will know my people by their fruit" – (Matthew 7:16). This means that one can recognize God's people by their actions, but I didn't see or hear the high ethical standards as set forth by Jesus by the many Christians I encountered over the years amongst many different denominations. I know that the majority do try, but there is a significant and influential minority who are wolves in sheep's clothing. I simply don't accept this, even if some say that its part of God's plan that His people, the wheat (the good ones), will be amongst tares (the bad ones).

I really didn't feel comfortable in being at church. I didn't want to pick up the bible, or sing hymns at church, and almost refused to pray once when I was leading in prayer at one of the services. I was even asking God to reveal himself to me like he had done many times over the years past, because I didn't know if my mind was right, so I earnestly prayed to God for help, either to change the characters of the people or to change me.

What also really disgusted me were the Pentecostal preachers who teach that Jesus wants us to be Millionaires -- this is just to justify their own high lifestyle. Their idiotic speaking in tongues, being slain in the spirit, so many other showbiz like behaviours made me hate that side of Christianity too. Adventism, just like the Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and some others always criticized these practices amongst the umpy jumpy charismatic folks, but they weren't perfect either with their lax lifestyles. I soon realized that I was a bit of a fundamentalist. After many discussions with my Muslim friends, I sub-consciously wanted a stronger brotherhood of believers who actually followed their faith, just like the Muslims, but every time I saw a bit of this unity, I looked further and deeper, and saw that I was just deluding myself, it was just superficial.

There are many other serious events and incidents which I witnessed amongst various Christian groups that I won't mention here, but I will say that it disappointed me so much to the point that I stopped going to church by the end of September 2008.

With the trouble of re-arranging my life around the Sabbath (Saturday) – done to focus on God's Commandments and build our life around them, and the hard work I was doing at church, even with a busy family and work life Schedule, and the ridicule I faced from others, mainly my relatives for converting to Christianity, I decided it wasn't worth it, when so many Christians today don't walk the talk – why should I try so hard or even have to pretend brotherhood with them if it doesn't work.

Leaving Christianity

I still believed in the theology of Adventism for a few months after leaving, until I decided to take a serious look at why I believe what I believe. To my amazement I saw Ellen White, the prophetess and part founder of Adventism in a new light. I could now accept criticism of her teachings, both contradictory and absurd, without the bias in favour of the church. I was neutral. I was not against her, since her writings (now proven to be plagiarized) brought all who read them closer to God. I really liked her Godly ways and teachings especially her commitment to Christ and her health message. In previous years, when I came across a lot of her criticisms, I rejected it – not out of pride, but out of loyalty as well as because of apologetic writings.

After reading the information against her again, it all soon fell apart. I felt like I had been duped again, just with a different religion this time. What a loser. I then went backwards in history to see what else was not true. From Modern Adventism to the founding pioneers in the early – mid 1800's, to Protestantism in the middle ages, skipping the joke of a religion called Catholicism (its either totally made up or its Satan organization), to early first century Christianity, to the New Testament – Paul, the Gospels, the Apocryphal writings, Constantine, and early church fathers and the “voting” in of the canonical scripture, to the Old Testament writings, Prophets, and the historicity of Moses and the Patriarchs.

I took another look at the so called prophecies of the first coming of Jesus, as supposedly stated in the Old Testament. They aren't really there, since the New Testament writers, as

well has today's bible scholars base their prophecies on the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Old Testament dating back to 200 BC, instead of the more accurate Hebrew scriptures, which don't have many of the verses pointing towards Christ. I won't go through the non-existent first coming prophecies, since there are plenty of documents in libraries around the world as well as on the internet for you to research yourself.

Also, I ask all Christians to read the Old Testament...where God promotes rape, pillage, dashing babies' heads, genocide, and other jihads. The cruelty in the Old Testament is usually skipped over or left out of bible study discussions, but it is still there – we cannot hide from it. Bible believers must answer for it and acknowledge that not only is the Koran a book that teaches hate and murder, but the Bible also does the same. Want proof, simply read the Bible.

These are books I highly recommend all people, for both Christian and non-Christian alike, to read:

'Born of a Woman',
'A New Christianity for a New World' &
'Sins of Scripture' –all authored by Bishop John Shelby Spong

'The Moses Legacy: The Evidence of History' by Graham Phillips

'The Bible Unearthed – Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of its Sacred Texts' – by Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman

'The God Delusion' – by Richard Dawkins

All the above books promote rational thinking, with hard evidence to back up their claims. All the books see history and scripture with a viewpoint that scripture was gradually developed according to the historical, political, and some environmental factors, besides other factors. Rather than the way the Christian fundies think (I know since I was one of them) – that “the bibles says it, I believe it, so that does it” – attitude.

I have also researched many writings of atheists and talked personally to some of them, and come to the conclusion that they have valid arguments, based on rationality, common sense, and science. They are not the boogie monsters that I once thought they were, and they are not hypocrites like those people of religion can be.

I looked into to see if there's any difference in behaviour between atheists and theists in all fields of life such as marriage, friendliness, charity, ethics, broad-mindedness, tolerance of others and so on, and what I found startled me. They are no different, if not better, than religious Christians, Muslims, or Hindus that I personally know.

Where I am Now

I've just not attended church, and have changed my viewpoints to such an extent, that I can no longer consider myself a believer. I have had a few phone calls from the people at church, asking about how I am and giving their regards, but this has gradually slowed down over the months. Those who I expected to call haven't, and those who I didn't expect to have called. Those that have are the general followers at church, whereas those who didn't bother calling me are those in charge of church operations. This just goes to show (proves) that the church flock or followers are the deceived and deluded, and the leadership are the deceivers and greedy power hungry people who only seem to show a qualified friendship with others.

Basically I left Church because of what I witnessed Christian's behaviors, now I don't go to Church also because of what they say or believe.

I'm much happier now that I'm out of Christianity. My morals and ethics are based not on getting a reward or fearing punishment, but on genuine care.

Over the last few months, I have taken another look at the religious background of my parents and grandparents, which is Sikhism. At the same time I have looked at Taoism, and Buddhism, as well as modern humanistic philosophies and ethics. So far I am very impressed, and this time round, I will take on board any ethical or philosophical teachings without being officially attached to any religion.

Since leaving religion, I have felt a great sense of freedom, and now I can love others without dividing humanity into believers and non-believers, or Adventists and non-Adventists as I used to do. I am neither Christian nor Radha Soami.

This reminds me of some of the first words spoken of by the great teacher, Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikh philosophy, - 'Of religion I have broken free.... I am neither Hindu nor Muslim', *and in my case, nor am I Christian.*

Thank you.