

## HISTORIC SIKH TERCENTENARY CELEBRATIONS

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This October, the Sikhs around the world are celebrating the Ordination of Sri Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh Holy Scripture, as the Eternal Living Guru of the Sikhs as commanded by the Tenth and last Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singh in 1708 A.D.

This October also marks the three hundredth anniversary of passing of Guru Gobind Singh at Nanded, India when his Light merged with the Divine Light in 1708 A.D.

### GURU GRANTH SAHIB AS THE LIVING GURU

Originally compiled by the Fifth Guru of the Sikhs, Guru Arjan Dev and dictated to Bhai Gurdas, The Adi Granth was installed at Sri Harimander Sahib, Amritsar on August 30, 1604 A.D. The present Scripture, Sri Guru Granth Sahib, includes the hymns of Guru Teg Bahadur, the Ninth Guru of the Sikhs, was personally prepared and dictated to Bhai Mani Singh by the Tenth Sikh Guru, Gobind Singh at Damdama Sahib in 1706 A.D.

By some counts, there are 5,894 Shabads: inspired and revealed hymns and compositions enshrined in the final compilation of Sri Guru Granth Sahib. Each hymn is assigned one of the 31 Ragas: meters and rhythms, patterns of music in traditional Indian musical scales and measures and are organized accordingly (except Japji Sahib in the beginning and Raagmala at the end which have no Raaga designations) beginning with Sri Raag and ending with Raag Jai Jaiwanti, across 1430 pages. Written in Gurumukhi script and exalted poetry, Sri Guru Granth Sahib is a treasury of many languages and regional dialects that include Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic, Prakirt, Marathi, Bengali, Punjabi Khari Boli and Dakhni.

This unique and interfaith Sacred Scripture of the Sikhs honors the inspired hymns of six Sikh Gurus - Gurus: Nanak, Angad, Amar Das, Ram Das, Arjan Dev, and Teg Bahadur, and twenty Hindu (Namdev, Jaidev, Ramanand, Ravidas, Trilochan, and others) and Muslim Saints (Baba Farid, Bhagat Kabir) from various regions, castes, and spiritual traditions. A rich and colorful diversity of languages, poetic styles, musical measures, and the selected compositions forms the composite sacred body of the Sikh scripture, Sri Guru Granth Sahib (SGGS).

Every Word enshrined in the SGGS reverberates with an unmistakable message of Unity, Universality, Eternal Truths, and Oneness of the One Supreme Immaculate Reality from before the beginning of Life and Time, and His Laws and Command govern all Creation. God is Self-Created, Self-Illuminated, All-Knowing Lord who cares for all His Children as a Compassionate and Benevolent Mother and Father. Guru Granth Sahib recognizes and honors the sanctity of all faiths and spiritual traditions, advocates respect and preservation of Nature as the Crowning Handiwork of the Creator, and passionately enunciates that the purpose of life is to know God and the way to know God is through righteous living, Naam Simran, and Seva ( selfless service).

The investiture of SGGS as the henceforth Guru, the Living Spiritual Teacher and Guiding Light of Sikhs, was ordained by the Tenth and last Sikh Guru, Gobind Singh, just before his departure for his Heavenly Abode on October 7, 1708 A.D. at Nanded, Maharashtra, India. Sri Guru Granth Sahib is regarded as The Shabad Guru: Word of God and a Living Personification of the Ten Sikh Gurus and accorded an uncommon reverence by the Sikhs. It is the spiritual anchor of their faith, devotion, conduct, and celebrations. SGGS rests in a throne-like setting in congregation halls of every Sikh Temple and the people walk up to it in humility and deep gratitude to pay their obeisance for the Divine Light and Wisdom, and the immense pride, blessings, unique history, and spiritual heritage that SGGS represents to the faithful and pilgrims of Spirit.

Today, with increased travel, internet and communication revolution, and the availability of translations of the Sikh Scriptures in many world languages, the universal message of SGGS provides another Guiding Light and a rich spiritual resource for all humanity. Sri Guru Granth Sahib revealed and advanced many revolutionary precepts; offers its own testimony of timeless spiritual wisdom that finds similar echoes in other sacred texts and revealed inspirations. SGGS offers an amazing imagery of the God's unfathomable Creation (especially in Guru Nanak Dev's *Japji Sahib*), and the indescribable Majesty, Mystery, and Attributes of Waheguru (Wonderful Lord), Akal Purakh (Immortal Being), especially in Guru Gobind Singh's sacred writings: *Jaap Sahib* and *Akal Ustat*.

#### ANCHOR AND CENTRAL CORE OF SIKH FAITH

Sri Guru Granth Sahib, the sacred Bible of the Sikhs, today forms the central core of Sikh faith, inspiration, reverence, rituals, and ceremonies. In Sikh Temples, SGGS is placed on an elevated platform under elaborately decorated Palkis and Chandoas (canopies) and covered with layers of brocaded silks, and is given the honor of a Royal Personage. The Sikhs regard SGGS as a Living Shabad Guru and know that the full measure of "God's Eternal Truth is revealed to us by the Grace of the Guru: Enlightened Teacher." The Sikh history is full of testimony of incredible sacrifices made by the followers to uphold the sanctity and preserve the honor of SGGS, major shrines, and universal ideals. For Sikhs, SGGS is the visual and spiritual embodiment of their Gurus, living testament of their faith and spirit, a Spiritual Anchor and much more. I offer my homage and reflection based on my very limited understanding of this awesome Scripture blessed to humanity:

#### A JEWELLED REPOSITORY OF SPIRITUAL WISDOM

A Jeweled Sacred Repository, an Interfaith Treasure:  
A revealed and inspired Spiritual Wisdom,  
A Sacred Mosaic in Poetry, inlaid with Music;  
Compiled by Guru Arjan at Amritsar in 1604,  
Given final shape, exalted status, by Guru Gobind;  
A Raagmala of indescribable Beauty, Grace, Majesty;  
A Reference Library on matters of Faith and Conduct,  
A Document of unparalleled Divine Insights:  
All-Embracing, Unifying, Universal in Spirit;  
Transforming, Illuminating, Enlightening,  
Rich in uplifting thoughts, colorful Images of God:

God as an Immaculate Reality, Eternal Truth:

Self-Created, Self-Illuminated,  
Before the beginnings of Creation, Time, Life;  
All- Knowing, yet Unknowable,  
Indescribable, yet with myriad descriptions;  
Master Architect of all that we see, imagine,  
Also all that we cannot imagine, nor fathom;  
Embodiment of all virtues, Pure, Omniscient,  
Father and Mother, Guardian of all Creation,  
Compassionate, an Eternal Benevolent Presence  
Through all the eons and epochs, past and future;

Know that God as the Cause of all things:  
Hears all petitions, knows innermost thoughts;  
He places thoughts, lessons, to grow in spirit,  
Commands us to recognize all Humanity,  
Diverse Cultures and Languages,  
Faiths and Spiritual Traditions,  
Regions and Realms,  
Darkness and Light; Day and Night,  
Music and Sound; Nature and Seasons,  
Mystery and Manifestations,  
His unbound Gifts and Blessings,  
As our Common Heritage to share in Faith;

Seeing Life as a precious gift to know God:  
Make Naam-Simran as a True Anchor,  
Meditation, as the daily discipline,  
Understanding, to unravel profound mysteries,  
Awaken our consciousness and conscience  
And knowing Right from Wrong;  
Respect other thoughts, diverse life-rhythms,  
Wisdoms we encounter in earthly journeys,  
Make Faith, Love, Service, and Sacrifice,  
Humility, Honest Labor, Generous Sharing,  
As the Keystones of our earthly conduct,  
As Life-Transforming Power Centers to lead;

Seeking Harmony with Nature and Man:  
Extending Prayers and Goodwill towards all -  
At every chance encounter, ordained crossroad;  
Celebrating, honoring, embracing all Creation  
As God's beautiful Handiwork, His Playground;  
Manifestations of His Majesty and Marvels;

Surrendering to God's Will in all things:  
Lifting up our countenance in hope, in trust;  
Our thoughts and gifts for each noble cause;  
Seeking Truth, Justice, in a solemn resolve,  
Prayer, Simran, abiding Faith as guiding Light  
Along the dark, uncertain, rocky shores of Life;

Recognizing sanctity of Life and Traditions:  
Honoring people, cultures, without distinction;  
In worthy and mandated purest understanding,  
Translation, celebration of our shared humanity,  
Our Testament to Love and lessons learned,  
As humble offerings at God's Exulted Altars;

Sri Guru Granth Sahib offered images, revelations of mighty Heavens centuries before the modern science and technology made it possible for us to see those wonders:

The Heavens are bursting forth with a continuous *Naad*: celestial music, sacred sound currents that are reverberating throughout the unfathomable Universe that stretch across countless Solar Systems, Celestial Continents, Suns and Moons, and Earths and Planets: "His Stars are strung across the great Sky; His Light radiates and illumines the limitless cosmic expanse and Realms." All Creation moves in total obedience of His Will and Pleasure, and God takes joy in all that He has Created, Sustains, and Nurtures.

Today, we know from the scientific research and visual images beamed to Earth by the Hubble Telescope that our Universe is continuing to expand, and that the Universe is an ever-changing, limitless lightyears of space teeming with millions of galaxies, each studded with billions of stars. We see, imagine, cosmic corridors with amazing wonders: dazzling light and sound shows, garlands of galaxies as if in Celestial Temples of Praise, giant stars and heavenly bodies taking birth, spinning, and transforming, and hurtling through space, at speeds, in orbits, to destinations we cannot imagine, nor fathom.

#### GURU GOBIND SINGH: A BRILLIANT LIFE AND LEGACY

According to Bachittar Natak, an autobiographical account attributed to Guru Gobind Singh (some Sikh scholars dispute its authorship), the accounts and testimony offered by other eminent scholars about the history and events surrounding the life and time of the Guru Gobind Singh, we are simply awed by life and legacy of the Tenth and Last Sikh Guru. These accounts reveal and portray that The Great Guru was a rare Spiritual Light sent by the Command of God Almighty Himself to establish Dharma, uphold justice, defend universal sacred rights, uproot evil, and end tyranny against the innocents. The Guru's sacred mission and mandate was to awaken the spirit and unite the complex and divisive social fabric of India into a casteless and class-free Khalsa (an army of the pure of spirit). The Command for the Khalsa was to end once, and for all, the unconscionable assaults on human dignity, injustice, outrageous acts of oppression and persecution, and uplift the fallen, "Recognize all humanity as One Brotherhood," liberate the Motherland from its centuries of slavery and subjugation under foreign invaders, and restore the God-given freedoms for all India's masses.

Fulfilling this impossible mission was no small task in the face of a very demoralized and caste-divided India ruled by a powerful and intolerant Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb and overrun by his religious zealots ferociously intimidating and forcibly converting the non-Muslims into the folds of Islam, or face death. The odds of stemming this tyranny were formidable, but then Gobind Rai, the son of the Supreme Martyr and Champion of Universal Human Rights, the Ninth Guru of the Sikhs, Guru Teg Bahadur and Mata Gujri, was no ordinary Messenger of God. Guru Gobind Singh, as a visionary and strong

leader of men, personally and abundantly exemplified what he preached and asked of his followers.

Bhai Nand Lal, some contemporaries, and other prominent scholars like Bhai Gurdas, Giani Gian Singh (*Panth Parkash*), Senapati, Mahakavi Bhai Santokh Singh (*Gur Partap Suraj*), Dr. Bhai Vir Singh (*Guru Kalghidhar Chamatkar*), and others offer us a glimpse of the life, legacy, attributes, personality, magnificence, and the brilliant Spiritual Light that was Guru Gobind Singh. They provide a portrait that leaves us breathless that such a person walked the earth, lived among us, taught us through his writings about God and the ways of True Khalsa, and offered us an incredible testimony of righteous daring and defiance, courage and sacrifice that has few equals in human chronicles.

*Nasroo Mansoor Guru Gobind Singh*: Guru Gobind Singh is the support of others and is blessed by God Almighty Himself

*Badshah Durvesh*: A Mighty King and a Pious Soul who practices renunciation

*Baikashan da Yaar*: A Friend to those without friends, worldly support or spiritual anchor

*Huq huq Iyena Guru Gobind Singh*: Guru Gobind Singh is the Mirror through whom one could get a Darshan (sacred glimpse) of God

*Huq ra Ganzoor*: Master of the Keys to the Temporal and Heavenly Treasury of God

*Jumala Faize Noor*: Entrusted with the Temporal and Spiritual Lights by God

Other colorful descriptions and accolades that define Guru Gobind Singh:

Father and Founder of Khalsa: The Creator of the 'Army of the Pure' in the Service of Almighty.

*Aapay Gur Chaila*: Himself the Guru (Enlightened Master) and the Exemplary Disciple

*Sant Sapahi*: A Saint and a Soldier; an extraordinary fearless General and a Saint that followed the Command of God in full obeisance to God's Will in all things

*Kalghidhar Patshah*: The Royal King who wears a jeweled Plume in his Dastar (turban)

*Neela Ghoray Walay*: The Rider of the rare and magnificent Blue Horse

*Chitiyan Bajan Walay*: The One who sports the White Hawk (a royal sport and symbol)

*Talwar dey Dhani*: Master of the sword, ancient weapons, and martial arts

*Sarbans Dani*: The One who sacrificed his entire family for the cause of Humanity

Guru Gobind Singh was also a Man of the Arts and Letters: a consummate poet, scholar, musician, and patron of the arts. Guru's poetical compositions include *Jaap Sahib*, *Sawaiye*, *Shabd Hazare*, *Akal Ustat*, *Zafarnamah*, *Bachittar Natak* (some dispute the authorship of this autobiographical account) among other writings that form *The Dasam Granth* and provide a glimpse of Guru's uncommon gifts, radiant persona, his prayers and passions, creative genius and brilliant imagination. They offer an unmistakable reflection and affirmations of a divinely-blessed Messenger carrying a formidable earthly mission at a critical time in Indian history. His life and Light belong to the Ages.

GURU GOBIND SINGH (1666-1708 A.D.)

Place of Birth: At Patna Sahib, Bihar, India (today, a magnificent Sikh Temple, one of the Takhts: Spiritual Thrones of the Sikh Faith marks the site) December 22, 1666 A.D.

Guruship: At Anandpur Sahib, Punjab on November 11, 1675 (upon the Martyrdom of Guru Teg Bahadur at Chandni Chowk, Delhi) to October 7, 1708 A.D.

Jyoti Jot (Merging with the Divine Light): October 7, 1708 at Nanded, Maharashtra

There are several significant Sikh shrines and historic sites associated with the events and life of Guru Gobind Singh during his brief time at Nanded. Today, a magnificent Sikh Temple, Sachkhand Sri Huzur Sahib Abchalnagar (one of the Takhts: Spiritual Thrones of the Sikh Faith) marks the hallowed ground sanctified by the presence of Tenth Guru.

This majestic Sri Hazur Sahib Temple Complex and the town of Nanded will be the focal point of celebrations in October 2008. Millions of Sikh pilgrims, and people of every faith tradition, from around the world are expected to visit the majestic Temple and this historic City to participate in two landmark Tercentenary Commemorations: The Ordination of Guru Granth Sahib as the Eternal Spiritual Guru of the Sikhs and the passing of Guru Gobind Singh at Nanded on October 7, 1708 A.D.

*Sri Guru Granth Sahib:* Guru Gobind Singh dictated the final version of Sri Guru Granth Sahib to Bhai Mani Singh at Damdama Sahib, Punjab in 1706. Upon receiving Guru's Zaffarnamah (Epistle of Victory), in which the Guru scolded the Emperor of the treachery and deception of his generals in his name and violating their oaths on the Holy Quran, Emperor Aurangzeb invited the Guru to meet him. The Guru departed South (India) with a few trusted followers in October 1706 to meet the Emperor who was in Deccan to quell a rebellion. The Tenth Guru spent last few months of his earthly life in relative tranquility at Nanded, Maharashtra, situated on the banks of River Godavari. That peace did not last very long. One evening as he was resting in his tent, an assassination attempt by hired assassins of Wazir Khan, the Ruler of Sarhind, mortally wounded him. A short time later, knowing that his end was near, he called all the Sikhs for a final sermon and blessing. Dressed in full regalia, the Guru circled and bowed before the Holy Granth and formally conferred Eternal Guruship of the Sikhs to Sri Guru Granth Sahib with the immortal words we repeat in our daily Ardas:

*“Aagya bhayee Akal Kee tubhe chalayo Panth,  
Subh Sikhian ko Hukam hai Guru manyon Granth.  
Guru Granthjee manyon Purgat Guran kee Deh,  
Jo Prabhu ko milbo chahey khoj Shabad mein leh.”*

“By the Order of God Almighty, The Khalsa Panth was created,  
All Sikhs are commanded: Honor The Granth as the Guru henceforth;  
Recognize Sri Guru Granth: As the Living Body of the Ten Gurus,  
Those who wish to meet God: Find Him in the Shabad (sacred hymns).”

Soon thereafter, the Light of this “*Baadshah* (Royal King) *Darvesh* (Holy Man free of all worldly temptations and attachments) *Guru Gobind Singh* (Enlightened Teacher, God's Light, and Lion),” having served in deep humility and obedience to God's Command and sacrificing his all in the service of humanity, merged with the Divine Light on October 7, 1708 A.D. at Nanded, Maharashtra at the young age of 42 years. The Guru left behind a brilliant trail across humanity's spiritual skies and sacred footprints of an unmatched living legacy for every generation to marvel at his commitment to the cause of humanity and devotion to the Will of Almighty.

## GURU GOBIND: A BLAZING DIVINE LIGHT

A rare and Spiritual Light, a Prophet  
Pure of Spirit, a blazing Sun radiant in Divine Love;  
A personification of Courage, Lion of Heart;  
An embodiment of Humility, Grace, Righteousness,  
A Saint, a Soldier, a Spiritual Emancipator  
Charged with a higher calling from the Highest;

He came to Earth at the Command of Almighty,  
As a True Servant to God, a Fearless Leader of Men,  
A Champion of Equality, Justice, Sacred Rights,  
Defender of Freedoms of Thought, Dignity, Spirit;

Resolutely defiant against injustice and oppression,  
He infused fire into the hearts and minds of men,  
Shackled, subdued, oppressed and demoralized,  
Terrorized with fear, death, daily moral outrage  
Against non-Moslem subjects by unjust rulers;

Gobind baptized frightened souls into fearlessness,  
Taught them the art of war, rights of self-defense,  
Confronting tyrants, injustice in any form,  
Freeing the Motherland of foreign invaders,  
Reminding: that "When all else fails, it is righteous  
To take up the sword in self-defense, restore justice"  
Restore peace, justice, freedoms in the land;

Seeking blessings from the *Sarb Loh, Kharag Ket,*  
*Amitoj ShehanShah, Sri Aspaan:* One Supreme God,  
For God is always on the side of Truth, His Khalsa;  
Pursuing ideals that honor our Benevolent King,  
Never abandoning the field in a fight for Justice;  
Always remembering, in deep humility and grace:  
The Khalsa, Guru, and all victories belong to God;

## SIKH TERCENTENARY COMMEMORATIONS: PERSONAL REFELCTION

As I thought and reflected upon the significant events associated with the life and times of Guru Gobind Singh, other Nine Gurus and their sacred heritage, my mind and spirit are overwhelmed with a sense of awe, humility, as to what those events truly represented:

We know that we are the proud custodians of the rich legacy, history, and great heritage of the era of our beloved Guru. As of now, the historians and scholars do not agree on many of the intimate details of the momentous events that occurred over three hundred years ago. Their accounts, in many cases the originals are lost and in others cases inscribed many years later, cannot fully capture the true reality of happenings: intensity, passions, and challenges of those who personally witnessed and participated in those historic events. We can only imagine and wonder:

I imagined the long-awaited birth of Gobind Rai on December 22, 1666 at Patna Sahib, into the House of Guru Teg Bahadur and Mata Gujri on December 22, 1666 at Patna Sahib, Bihar; the arrival of the Muslim mystic, Syed Bhikhan Shah from near Ambala to have a glimpse of the divinely-blessed child and rightly affirming that this holy child was sent by God to do great things for humanity. Some accounts suggest that the Bhikhan Shah saw a bright light in the Eastern sky, bowed his head in that direction, and set out on his journey to welcome and have a *Darshan* of this child. When Syed arrived in Patna, he saw a child who radiated an aura of uncommon greatness, an emancipator for the troubled times, and a friend to all nations. We know from history that the Bhikhan Shah and his family remained devoted to Guru Gobind Singh.

I imagined the Town of Anandpur as a living witness to Sikh history, many celebrations and much anguish; its enchanting location amidst the rugged Shivalik Hills and as the playground of Gobind's childhood and youth; the arrival of the Sis (martyred head of the Ninth Guru, Teg Bahadur) in November 1675 when Gobind Rai was only nine year old. Gobind being annointed as the Tenth Guru of Sikhs to lead them through very troubled times. I imagined Anandpur as the site of annual Hola Mohallas where the bravest and best fiercely competed, excelled in the use of weapons and were rewarded by the Guru Gobind. The amazing Kautak (sacred miracle) surrounding the Birth of Khalsa at the historic Baisakhi on March 30, 1699 A.D. I tried to imagine the scenes of incredible hardships, the deafening thunder of fierce battles during the long and tortuous siege of Anandpur by the forces of Moghul Emperor and Hill Rajas. The painful abandonment of Anandpur on December 5 - 6 (some accounts suggest a later date) 1705 A.D. that unleashed untold suffering to the Sikhs and family of the Guru. If only the walls could speak, reveal and tell us what they saw unfolding before their eyes!

My mind wandered to the Mud Fortress at Chamkaur Sahib, the site of a valiant stand by around 42 Sikh braves under the Command of Guru Gobind Singh against the hordes of marauding Mughal forces. What courage and strength it must have taken for the Guru to send his few trusted braves and two young sons, Ajit Singh (age 17) and Jujhar Singh (age 14) into the raging battle against such formidable odds and witnessing with his own eyes his Sikhs giving an incredible measure of their bravery and face martyrdom. My mind does not fully grasp the gravity of the moment, nor of the agonizing days and cold nights in December 1705 A.D. This brave stand for human dignity and defiance against tyranny and injustice will inspire generations of nations until the end of time.

I tried to imagine the scene in the Court of Nawab Wazir Khan, Governor of Sirhind: the trial of the two youngest sons of Guru Gobind Singh, Fateh Singh and Zorawar Singh (ages 6 and 8); the reported exchange between the Sahibzadas and cowardly murderers, and merciless intimidation of the young souls to embrace Islam; the final cruel verdict to brick the young lions alive and putting them to death on December 13, 1705 A.D. I could not think of anything more horrific, unconscionable, and unpardonable as a crime against humanity. My spirit is outraged each time I think that this was one of the darkest deeds in human history against innocent children. The Sahibzadas stand among the bravest of the brave, immortalized by their unparalleled courage and sacrifice.

After the decisive victory in the battle against the Mughal forces near Mukatsar, Guru Gobind arriving in Sabo Ki Talwandi, present-day Damdama Sahib, on January 20, 1706 for some much needed rest and undertaking the formidable task of preparing the present

Sri Guru Granth Sahib. I tried to imagine the Guru dictating the entire Granth to Bhai Mani Singh, the spirit and reverence that must have marked the noble, yet arduous task, and the jubilation that must have followed the completion of the sacred Granth.

I tried to imagine Guru Gobind Singh as the Spiritual King sending the Zafarnamah (the Epistle of Victory) in Persian to Emperor Aurangzeb and reprimanding the Emperor for the treachery and cruelty of his officials in violation of their sacred oaths on the Holy Quran. I imagined the arrival of the invitation from Aurangzeb and the Guru's decision to journey from Punjab in October 1706 to meet Emperor Aurangzeb in Deccan where the Emperor at the time was engaged in quelling a rebellion. I tried to imagine the scenes of separation from his beloved Sikhs, the pain and anguish of the events of the last several months, the places he visited and people he met along the way, and his meeting with Emperor Bahadur Shah, the eldest son of Emperor Aurangzeb, at Agra on July 23, 1707. The Guru's onward journey South and setting up camp on the banks of River Godavari at Nanded, Maharashtra at the end of August 1707. I tried to imagine the daily arrival of faithful to his Spiritual Darbar at Nanded and his discourses during this brief period of relative tranquility as he prepared Banda Singh Bahadur for his mission to Punjab to punish those guilty of some of the most heinous crimes against humanity.

I imagined the assassination attempt by two Pathans deputed by the Nawab of Sirhind, Wazir Khan, as the Guru lay resting in his tent one evening after the Rehras Sahib; the mortal wounds caused by the assassin leading to his letting his faithful know that time is near for his departure from among them. I tried to visualize the scene and emotion of Guru's last sermon, his reverentially encircling and bowing before the sacred Granth, and conferring the Eternal Guruship of the Sikhs to Sri Guru Granth Sahib, and leaving the stunned Sikhs for his Heavenly Abode on October 7, 1708 A.D.

My mind got lost in the maize of history and emotions as I tried to imagine:

The hours alone in Machhiwara jungle following his being ordered by the few surviving Sikhs to leave the besieged fortress at Chamkaur Sahib to fight another day.

Guru's time at Paonta Sahib on the banks of River Yamuna surrounded by poets and scholars and penning some of his own immortal compositions that form our daily Nitnem; his hunting expeditions, and meditation upon the events about to unfold.

The settlement of Anandpur Sahib, the throngs of pilgrims from far-flung places, the Guru training his Sikhs in war games and the martial arts competitions, the building of forts around Anandpur Sahib in preparation of an imminent attack by Mughal forces and Hill Rajas alarmed by the growing influence and military strength of the Sikhs.

Seeing a group of Kashmiri Pandits in the Spiritual Court of his father, Guru Teg Bahadur, young Gobind Rai inquiring the cause of his father's pensive state and deep concern and giving an unmistakable signal to his father to champion their cause before the Emperor; and be the defender of the sacred rights to practice their faiths in freedom. I tried to imagine the scene, crowds, and spectacle in Chandni Chowk, Delhi on November 11, 1675 and the martyrdom of Guru Teg Bahadur to uphold human rights.

I tried to imagine the Guru Gobind's thundering voice exhorting his Sikhs to come forward and offer their head to their Guru at the massive Baisakhi gathering on March 30,

1699 at Anandpur Sahib and the ceremonial highlights: Five Beloveds, Sikh Symbols, Baptism, and events that marked and followed at the time of The Creation of Khalsa.

My mind travelled to the thousands of martyrs who sacrificed their life in the battles and murderous rampages during the times of the Guru and for the righteous causes since.

A kaleidoscope of images flashed across the canvass of my memories of the events and episodes connected with the life of the Great Guru that I had read and heard as I was growing up. I find strength and reassurance in those faith markers in our new and often challenging environment far from those settings where they originally occurred. I am in greater awe every new day of the incredible images and timeless lessons that our faith has placed before us to serve as our guideposts. I remember that ten extraordinary Spiritual Kings nurtured our spirit by their personal testimony, gave us the sacred Granth as our Living Spiritual Guide, and call each of us to brave new daring pursuits in the service of humanity. They taught us lessons that make it possible for us to interface with cultures and traditions different than our own, find uncommon ground, and build a more peaceful world where the dignity of each is respected as a matter of living our faith.

For me, an honorable tribute and commemoration of this October's landmark anniversaries would be to enshrine the Light and lessons of the Great Guru as our proud heritage and walk in his footsteps in deep humility and gratitude. I do not have to imagine that Satguru is with us! I believe in Satguru's promise that he will always be with us. Time and destiny have brought us to new places and now it is up to us to witness our faith by excelling in the Holla Mohallas of our times: be the best in our chosen fields, be passionate ambassadors of our faiths as we honor our shared humanity.

With the science and technology available to us at this time, we must preserve and protect our priceless and fragile Sikh heritage: architectural monuments, historic sites, Bungas Havelis, corridors, markers, natural elements; religious artifacts, Hukamnamas, sacred writings, priceless artworks, weapons and related important treasures associated with the life and times of our Gurus, and others who significantly nurtured and advanced the young faith over the last five centuries. Much has already been lost in wars, careless storage and handling, and due to ignorance of its special place and value to our future. Neglect of the surviving resource is shortsighted, its destruction, very unfortunate. They are not just brick, stone, paint, a tree stump, or an object of metal. They are the reflection and music of the soul of those who created them and those who are associated with them. Our heritage is our mirror as to who we are, a window to our past and our contribution to Man's collective cultural tapestry. It is a powerful visual link to our history and our Gurus and their timeless and enlightening spiritual legacy for all mankind. Our past is also a part of the collective heritage of our civilization. Its preservation and safekeeping is a community trust and an important responsibility going forward. There is much that today's science can reveal that can further enhance our knowledge, appreciation, and pride of our heritage and those who made it possible.