

Divali – Keeping the flame of freedom alight

Sikhs throughout the globe will celebrate Divali on 28th October. Divas/lamps will be alight, a jovial festival atmosphere will prevail. Sweets and samosas will be enjoyed, fireworks will set alight the moonlit sky. But why do we really celebrate? Apart from the annual calendar significance? What does Divali mean for us as Sikhs?

The sixth Guru, Sri Guru Hargobind Sahib Jee was falsely imprisoned for spurious reasons by the Mughal Emperor Jahangir. After some months it was declared that Guru Jee could walk free. Like Guru Jee there were other prisoners of conscience in Gwalior Fort (the prison), specifically 52 Hindu Kings who made a heartfelt plea to Guru Jee begging him to negotiate their release also. The ocean of mercy Guru Jee listened attentively to their plea and showered his grace upon them and told them not to worry and that he would negotiate their release.

Guru Jee told the Emperor he would only leave the prison on the condition that the 52 Hindu Kings are freed also. The Emperor being a man entangled in his own ego and pride of intelligence, replied that Guru Jee could walk free with as many Kings who could hold onto his clothing on the day of his release. Guru the fountain of knowledge easily got around the condition by getting a robe tailored with 52 tassels on it. On the day of His release Guru Jee walked out of Gwalior Fort with all 52 Hindu Kings holding onto one tassel each, this auspicious occasion is referred to as "*Bandi Shorr Divas – the day of emancipation.*" Guru Jee did not only free the 52 Hindu Kings from prison, He also showered His grace upon them and freed them from the transmigration of the soul, freeing them from the cycle of births and deaths. Each and everyone of us also begs for this freedom:

Forsaking all other doors I have come to your door. Preserve my honour by offering the support of your arm, liberate me, I am your humble servant. (Sri Guru Gobind Singh Jee)

I have come to the sanctuary of the formless and emancipating Lord, who destroys all sufferings. (Sri Guru Arjan Dev Jee, Limb 624 – Sri Guru Granth Sahib Jee)

May Guru Jee bless us with spiritual and physical liberation also.

Bandhi Shorr Divas was months prior to Divali. Upon release from Gwalior Fort Sri Guru Hargobind Sahib Jee made a tour of Delhi and other regions, then arrangements to go to Sri Darbar Sahib (Golden Temple), Amritsar were made. When he reached Amritsar Sahib it was Divali and the Sikhs celebrated the release of Guru Jee with fireworks and festivities.

Relevance today

The world over there are countless prisoners of consciousness, held under false fabricated charges and/or those held for standing up for justice, freedom and righteousness. Please light a candle for these prisoners, non-Sikhs and Sikhs, don't forget Guru Jee's example of freeing Hindu Kings. He was benevolent, humane and had a profound love for one and all, may we develop such divine virtues. May we all endeavour to assist and support such

prisoners and at the very least we can all make a heartfelt prayer that Guru Jee blesses all prisoners with Chardi Kala/High Spirits.

One cannot begin to imagine losing freedom of movement and action, we can only try to empathise with such prisoners. Regardless of the regime and its tyranny, no man-made authority can imprison the Sikh Spirit and Sikhs still happily go to the gallows for standing up for justice, freedom and righteousness. The Sikh Spirit cannot be imprisoned. Prominent Sikhs currently imprisoned include Dr. Davinderpal Singh Bhullar, Bhai Deya Singh Lahoria, Bhai Balwant Singh, Bhai Paramjeet Singh Bheora, Bhai Jagtar Singh Hawara, Bhai Paramjeet Singh Dhadhi and the list goes on and on. Just imagine being the parent of a child who entered militancy or quite simply '*disappeared*' in the 80's and 90's in Punjab. Many of these parents light a candle at Divali, praying and wishing that the light of hope may still bless them with a vision of a fit and well son or daughter. Or they pray in despair that may God nurture their offspring wherever they may be.

So when you light a candle and eat a sweet at Divali, please spare a thought, that you are free and are not bound by the restraints of prison life. Lest we forget, lets light a lamp to ensure the rays of freedom shine through all of humanity.

Harjinder Singh

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