

## Blueprint Framework – A Sikh Perspective – Nov 2013

### Introduction

"The Sikh Dharam\* promotes a society based upon mutual respect and cooperation, providing opportunity for individuals to grow spiritually. It regards a cooperative society as the only truly religious society, as the Sikh view of life and society is grounded in the worth of every individual as a microcosm of God. Therefore, an individual must never be imposed upon, coerced, manipulated, or engineered:

*"If thou wouldst seek God, demolish and distort not the heart of any individual"*  
(SGGS 1384).

All life is interconnected. A human body consists of many parts; every one of them has a distinct name, location, and function, and all of them are dependent upon each other. In the same way, all the constituents of this universe and this earth are dependent upon each other. Decisions in one country or continent cannot be ignored by others. Choices in one place have measurable consequences for the rest of the world. It is part of the same system. Life, for its very existence and nurturing, depends upon a bounteous nature. A human being needs to derive sustenance from the earth and not deplete, exhaust, pollute, burn, or destroy it. Sikhs believe that an awareness of that sacred relationship between humans and the environment is necessary for the health of our planet, and for our survival. "

*Sri Singh Sahib Manjit Singh, Jathedar of Takhat Sri Kesgarh Sahib*  
(one of the five spiritual and temporal seats of authority in the Sikh Dharam)

Living an ethical and morally pure life is the rightful duty of every human being whether they believe in God or not. Everyone has an innate sense of what is right and wrong.

"Cause not suffering to another and you shall return to your (heavenly) home with head held high" (SGGS 322).

The term suffering means to cause any form of distress or discomfort to another, whether at the point of interaction between individuals or later at a seemingly dislocated time. Thus, every point of interaction between individuals has to be handled with utmost care lest the seed of suffering be sown. This is even more important when individuals act on behalf of corporate institutions, in case suffering is caused unknowingly when personal responsibility towards the customer seems to be displaced by the employees duty to the employer. For a business to be ethical, every single employee, from the lowest janitor to the Chairman of Board, must each and every one accept personal responsibility for his/her actions.

Notes: Sri Guru Granth Sahib (SGGS) is the name given to the Sikhs' revered 'eternal Guru', their Holy Scripture. SSGSJ contains hymns written by not only the preceding Sikh Gurus but also saints of the Muslim and Hindu faith. It is comprised of 1,430 Ang (*lit. limbs*) and these Ang references are generally given in brackets after quotes. It is considered impossible to translate SGGS into other languages - the metaphorical and philosophical nature of the hymns means that the message is diluted at best, or distorted at worst. Nevertheless, English interpretations of certain verses are given to the best of our abilities.

\*Dharam – analogous to “faith” or “religion” with emphasis on one’s duties and responsibilities to family, community, society and the environment – i.e. God and all of His/Her Creation

## **1) Each person is a someone, not a something (DIGNITY & VALUE OF PEOPLE)**

*Show respect for the dignity of each person and for the whole person; never use people merely as a means to achieving business objectives. Respecting the whole person includes thinking of people in all their various roles in relation to the business: as employees, customers, suppliers, investors and citizens. Demonstrating respect means setting a purpose and seeking outcomes that enable each person to reach his or her full potential, not least being able to contribute fully to building relationships and communities both within the workplace and beyond. Such purposes and such outcomes engender trust between people and between business and society.*

When Guru Nanak Dev Ji was asked as to what the highest faith is, the Guru replied: "To see all mankind as equals – this is the highest faith" (SGGS 7)

Guru Arjan states in no uncertain terms, "We are all children of the same Holy Father" (SGGS 611), so how can one be deemed inferior to any other?

"The Lord Allah made all (each and every one), so who is to be called high and who is to be called lowly. His light shines in all equally." (SGGS 1349)

"Recognize the Lord's Light within all, and do not consider social class or status; there are no classes or castes in the world hereafter." (SGGS 349)

Guru Gobind Singh Ji said: 'Recognise the whole human race as One'.

## **2) Aiming for a better pie, rather than a bigger share (THE COMMON GOOD)**

*Genuinely aim to promote the good of society as a whole through the provision of goods and services that benefit society ; never use stakeholders, and society as a whole, as a mere means to business success This gives meaning to the purpose of the business within society and demands innovation to achieve that purpose alongside a financial return. Society and communities of people determine the licence, and freedoms, of business to operate and grow ; these will be broader if business produces goods that are truly good and services that truly serve.*

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Guru Nanak taught that one should lead an honest life, working hard with remembrance of God’s name in the heart and then share what you have earned with others less fortunate. He not only preached this but showed this in practice throughout life, not least when he took up employment as a storekeeper for the local governor in Sultanpur. In older age, he lived as a farmer, preaching and sharing both divine knowledge and the food grown on his fields. In many ways this was the earliest Sikh example of a working co-operative.

Guru Ram Das was orphaned at the age of 7 and had to take up selling boiled chick pea snacks as a street vendor to earn meagre pennies to survive. Once he had earned enough for the day, he would distribute the rest of his snacks freely to the poor and needy. When asked by a passer-by one day as to why he doesn’t sell the rest and make more money for the next day also, the young child replied that: “I have faith in God, that He will provide again tomorrow, as He has done today. My God is not going to disappear overnight.”

When Guru Ram Das founded the city of Amritsar in 1579, he promoted 52 tradesman to come and helped set up their families and businesses. He created a truly co-operative business environment where everyone flourished. Many of the businesses are still going strong today, some 400 years later. He helped all who came regardless of their race or religion.

It was his son, Guru Arjan who enshrined the principle of Daswandh in Sikh faith. This is the principle of donating ten percent of whatever one has been blessed with, whether it be money, skills, time or service for the benefit of others without regard to the colour or creed

of the recipient. This is the bedrock upon which the countless charitable endeavours to be found across the globe engaged by Sikhs on a daily basis.

"He who eats what he earns through his earnest labour and from his hand gives something in charity; he alone, O Nanak, knows the true way of life" (Guru Nanak Dev, SGGS 1245)

Guru Arjan Dev says: "Dhanwant naam key vanjaarey"

"God's treasures are ever flowing, without end, so earn together and share together for the benefit of all"

"Where there is honest endeavour, God's blessings reside and there can only be good fortune for all; O Brothers, meet and eat and spend together, these (God given) resources do not diminish; they continue to increase" (SGGS 185)

### **3) Other people matter (SOLIDARITY)**

*Judge decisions as good, or not, in the context of the best values, expectations and needs of those with whom we should seek to build relationships. Do not make decisions in a self-interested, self-determined, closed world that does not weigh sufficiently the impact on others. Make a fair contribution to society and avoid actions that cause inequality.*

*Opportunities should be sought to serve the broadest community, including the underserved, the underprivileged and the excluded; not to emphasise the divide but rather to bring people together, through new job opportunities, innovative goods and services and new markets.*

From the outset, Guru Nanak preached and practised the free service of others without regard to the race, caste, colour or creed of the recipient. It is the foundation stone of the Sikh Dharam that recognise the light of God in others and hence to serve others is to serve God.

Sikhs, in the UK for example, have shown this in all aspects of their dharam based life. In business many co-operatives can be found in one form or another. All Sikh businesses will be setting aside a proportion of their earnings for the purpose of charitable donation to help others less fortunate.

Sikh businesses create wealth for the community, create jobs for the unemployed, help spread wealth through the supply chain to other local businesses.

#### **4) Freedom with responsibility (SUBSIDIARITY)**

*Allow people to develop by being able to contribute to making decisions at all levels. Do not create dependency through reserving decisions unnecessarily to higher levels in the hierarchy, or lose accountability through inappropriate delegation. Give people the freedom to take on the risk of decision making and to have a voice in their work, thus fostering innovation, creativity and a sense of shared responsibility.*

From the outset, Guru Nanak set out to fight the social injustices that shackled the people into socially unjust hierarchy of caste. At every level of society Sikhism promotes the freedom, sovereignty and equality of every individual. Guru Nanak fought the hypocrisy of the corrupt religious elite of the time no matter what their faith (see the many sermons to the Muslims at Sultanpur, Mecca and many others, the many many encounters with Hindus, Yogis, Jains etc). In each and every one, he promoted the rights of the individual in direct opposition to the subjugation by the priestly classes. He was only opposed to the corrupt practice of the faiths and not the faiths themselves. 'Call not the faiths false, but those who commit sins through the corrupt practices' Guru Nanak reminds us.

In the world of business, this teaches us that there is no room for hypocrisy. What is set out as good for all in the company policies should be adhered to by all. Even though employees have differing roles and responsibilities, each and every one has a value and their opinions should count equally.

When it came to the second guru, Guru Angad, he formalised a simple written form of the language of the common people and ordered that holy scripture be written in such a way that the word of God be freely accessible to all thus liberating and empowering a whole population from exploitation by the educated priestly classes.

This teaches us that communications by business should be accessible to all especially when it pertains to how the company interacts with its clients and employees. This is not to say that there would, of course, not be a variety of documents which have restricted circulation, but even these should adhere to strict ethical guidelines in their content.

The third guru, Guru Amar Das went further and shifted the decision making and other powers, to smaller assemblies nearer the grass roots, by setting up autonomous quasi-diocesan bodies.

The tenth guru, Guru Gobind Singh, went even further in declaring that each and every Khalsa Sikh has equal rights in the Dharam. Furthermore, any resolution passed by five such Sikhs, would be respected by all others. This was an immensely liberating philosophy for those times. Even the Guru himself had to bow to the will of five Sikhs when they issued a command to him at a most dire time in Sikh history.

The business world can learn from this model of sharing power within the organisation, thus empowering people lower down the chain of authority and fostering innovation, creativity and a sense of shared responsibility.

## **5) Building trust and trusted relationships (RECIPROCITY)**

*Start with basic honesty and integrity so that each and all receive what they are entitled to or can reasonably expect. This is the first stage of building trust. Then go beyond this minimum, using knowledge and capabilities to provide benefits that people desire and value but cannot expect or demand. Fair and efficient markets depend on trust and trusting relationships.*

The very first word in the Sikh Dharam is an absolute affirmation in the One Creator who is omnipresent. This carries with it the message that everyone carries the same light of God inside, therefore to whom can we be dishonest.

The very next word is 'Sat' which derives from Sanskrit word 'satya' meaning 'truth'. This is the most important virtue which Sikhs try to develop during their life. God is Truth and by trying to 'practise truth' (i.e. live a truthful life), Sikhs believe that they can live in accordance with God's will which teaches that: *Truth is not just about speaking the truth but also about recognising and living in line with the true nature of reality.* Acting justly towards others, honesty, treating everyone as equals and avoiding criticising others are all examples of truthful living for Sikhs.

"What good is social class and status, truthfulness is measured from within" – Truthfulness is higher virtue than worldly status.

Any business organisation with practices based on this virtue cannot do anything but good in this world. Success need not be at the expense of the welfare of others. What is good for all is good for the business. As Sikhs pray every day "May there be goodness for all".

## **6) Valuing diversity and building bridges (PLURALITY)**

*Be clear as to what you stand for, combining this with an openness to enrichment from others, valuing diversity of thinking and cultures. Favour curiosity and inclusion over suspicion and exclusion for those who think differently. Maintain consistency of purpose and values whilst embracing diversity, thus encouraging closeness to people, markets, innovation and growth.*

The Sikh faith does not believe that any one religion can claim superior knowledge over another. All are but different paths on the path towards union with the Creator.

"One who recognizes that all spiritual paths (faiths) lead to the One shall be emancipated."  
SGGS 142

Sikhs celebrate diversity whilst acknowledging the brotherhood of man. Each individual is on his/her own spiritual journey and it is his actions that will determine his rewards.

"Do not say that the Vedas, the Bible and the Koran are false. It is those who do not practise what they say that are false. "

An account of Guru Nanak's visit to Mecca tells

*Qazi and maulvis got together and began discussing religion.*

*A great fantasy has been created and no one could understand its mystery.*

*They asked Baba Nanak to open and search in his book whether Hindu is great or the Muslim.*

*Baba replied to the pilgrim hajis, that, without good deeds both will have to weep and wail.*

*By being a Hindu or a Muslim in name only, one cannot get accepted in the court of the Lord.*

*As the colour of safflower is impermanent and is washed away in water, likewise the colours of religiosity are also temporary. (Bhai Gurdas Vaar, c1600)*

### **7) Stewardship of people, values and resources (SUSTAINABILITY)**

*Acknowledge and seek to measure the impact the business has on people, values, resources, and the environment. Take responsibility for those impacts and take steps to develop people, nurture values, preserve and restore existing resources and create new ones where possible so that others may enjoy their benefits.*

Life, for its very existence and nurturing, depends upon a bounteous nature. A human being needs to derive sustenance from the earth and not deplete, exhaust, pollute, burn, or destroy it. Sikhs believe that an awareness of that sacred relationship between humans and the environment is necessary for the health of our planet, and for our survival.

“False is the body which does not do good to others,” (SGGS 269)