

Guru Ram Das

His Life and Teachings



THE LIFE & TEACHINGS OF

**GURU
RAM DAS**

AMRITA SHARMA

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Dedication
To dearest Ritu,
“If wishes were horses,
We would ride”

A HUMBLE BEGINNING

It was September 24, 1534. A baby boy was born in a simple Khatri family of Chuna Mandi, in Lahore.

The parents, Hari Das and Anup Devi (known to all as Daya Kaur), were overjoyed. They had waited twelve long years for a child, and now their prayers were finally answered. The couple could not help crying tears of joy. They had been deprived of this happiness for a long time, and now as they looked lovingly at their beautiful bundle of joy they thanked God with their heart.

Soon, the whole locality heard of the birth, and everyone gathered at Hari Das's house to congratulate him.

All those who saw the baby were struck by the kind and serene look on his face. Everybody blessed the newborn. They all felt so good after looking at the child that they blessed him heartily.



When the time came to name the child he was formally named Ram Das. But the ecstatic parents were so overwhelmed by their first child that they began calling him *Jetha* or the first born. From then on he was Jetha to all his near and dear ones.

As a child, Jetha was playful but never naughty. He never fought with anyone, and had lots of friends.

His friends liked him for his easy going and friendly nature, while the elders adored him for being quiet and humble.

He also liked to spend a lot of time in the house with his parents, helping his mother with the household chores and running errands for his father.

He often sat by his parents when they said their daily prayers, and never missed it. Even when he was playing outdoors, he would run home if it was time for prayers. Their family was quite religious in nature.

His parents were devout Sikhs who earned their living by honest means. Though they were not very well off, Hari Das and Daya Kaur never failed to give alms or food to the poor. They were always willing to help anyone in need.

This was the environment which surrounded Jetha in his growing years. His

decent and pleasant manners won him the love of everyone he met. His amiable nature and natural charm touched everyone.



IN SEARCH OF GOD

As Jetha grew up, he began to appreciate the simple things in life. He wanted to know more about God and the different religions of the world. He would often ask his parents all sorts of questions about things he could not understand such as the caste system, the scriptures, the creation of the world and the like. When his parents were unable to provide satisfactory answers, he would turn to the learned men who could.

The search for answers led Jetha to priests, to scholars, and other holy men who happened to pass Chuna Mandi. He began finding their discourses so interesting that he would spend more and more time with them. At first his parents encouraged him hoping that he would become a better person through his association with holy men. But as he grew up they began to get worried. They realised that Jetha was spending more time with these men than on his vocation. They feared that he



would become an ascetic, if he continued mixing with the holy men. Thus, they asked him to take up some work so that he could earn a living, and get involved in household affairs. Though Jetha was not interested in all this, he nevertheless obeyed his parents. He asked them what he was supposed to do. His mother thought hard. It so happened that their neighbour used to peddle roasted gram in the nearby market, and earn reasonably well from it. Daya Kaur decided that her son could do the same. When they told Jetha about it, he agreed dutifully.

On the very next day, Daya Kaur prepared a bagful of roasted gram and gave it to Jetha to sell. Taking their leave, Jetha went on his errand with his wares. But as he passed by the bank of the river Ravi he happened to see a group of *yogis* (holy men). Pleased to see them he decided to stop by, and pay his respects. During the course of their conversation he gathered that none of them had eaten anything since morning, and had no hope of finding anything to eat for the rest of the day. Jetha was so pained after hearing this that he decided not to go to the market at all. Instead he offered the yogis his bag of grams. As the hungry yogis began eating the



grams they thanked young Jetha, and blessed him. It pleased Jetha to have fed the hungry yogis who otherwise would have gone to sleep on an empty stomach. But then he suddenly realised that his parents would be very upset when they would hear that instead of selling the grams, he had donated it to a group of yogis. He was still wondering what to do when he spotted a group of Sikhs passing. He learned that they were heading towards Goindwal to pay their respects to Guru Amardas, who was the third Guru of the Sikhs.

When Jetha heard this he was so thrilled at the prospect of meeting the Guru that he immediately decided to join the group, instead of going back home. To him, nothing seemed more important than seeing the Guru in person, and seeking his blessings. He left Lahore without giving it a second thought, and eagerly looked forward to meeting the Guru.

THE TURNING POINT

When the group reached Goindwal they asked for an audience with Guru Amardas. They were immediately brought before him. For Jetha, it was the turning point in his life.

As he sat with the other Sikhs and listened to Guru Amardas, he could feel a change in himself. The golden words of Guru's teaching had a profound impact on him. He suddenly realised that all the questions that had so far disturbed him, seemed so simple now. He felt the divine light, he so desperately sought in all the holy men of his village, now shining right before him. All his doubts and questions seemed to fall in place. He could feel a certain peace descend upon him as he gazed into the serene eyes of the Guru. All his restlessness suddenly seemed to settle down, and he felt relaxed. This one meeting with the Guru was the most enlightening experience for him. He now knew what he really wanted to do with his life. He decided to dedicate it to the Guru,



and spend his days in his service. His heart glowed with love and reverence for the Guru.

Guru Amardas could not help noticing the young boy introduced to him as 'Bhai Jetha' by the group from Lahore. The Guru noticed the spark in his eyes, and his ardour when he was serving him. Soon he was won over by his devotion. He noticed that the young boy never sat idle. He was forever busy doing something or the other. He used to be either cleaning the utensils in the kitchen or sweeping the house or something else. He was always around to help other people. He was loved by one and all, including the Guru and his family.

Soon, Guru Amardas became so fond of him that he began guiding him spiritually. When he realised that the young boy was truly a slave of God, he began to dote on him. Bhai Jetha, on the other hand, took it upon himself to serve the Guru in every way, and he began looking after the Guru's personal comforts by himself. He would clean the *dharamsala*, serve the food, press the Guru's feet, massage his body, and sometimes even wash his clothes with great pleasure. All this endeared him greatly to the Guru, and he grew really fond of Bhai Jetha. The boy too felt very happy and content when he was with the Guru, in his service.



When the whole party returned to Lahore, Bhai Jetha stayed back in Goindwal to serve the Guru. He knew his parents would initially be upset at his decision, but he also knew that with time they would accept his decision, and even appreciate it. They were as religious minded as he was, and lived by the teachings of the Gurus. He decided that one day he would go himself and explain his decision to them, but for now he had to stay by his Guru's side.

He continued to perform all sorts of tasks without any consideration for himself. He was always doing something either for the Guru or for the other people, and also the dharamsala. It was not long before he actually became part of their family.

It so happened that Guru Amardas's wife, Masa Devi, was looking for a suitable boy for her younger daughter, Bibi Bhani. She would often ask the Guru to look for a good match for their daughter. She would suggest a few from their community but no one appealed to the Guru.

One day, as they sat discussing all this Guru Amardas asked his wife what kind of a boy she was looking for. At this, Masa Devi began listing qualities that would make their



daughter happy. Just then Bhai Jetha happened to pass by. He was, as usual, absorbed in some work, and unaware of what they were discussing. Quietly he completed his work, and then respectfully took their leave. Just as he left Masa Devi casually commented that she wanted someone like Bhai Jetha for her daughter. At this Guru Amardas suddenly sat up and told his wife that why not Jetha himself, who was as fond of them as they were of him. Hearing this, Masa Devi's happiness knew no bounds since Jetha was an ideal match for Bibi Bhani. Guru Amardas too was very pleased with the idea.

Soon he spoke to Bhai Jetha himself, who felt most honoured by the proposal. He immediately touched his Guru's feet, and gave his consent. The Guru and his wife blessed him over and over again. Soon Bibi Bhani and Jetha were married.

According to the custom, the bride was supposed to leave her father's house, and live with her husband in his house. But Bhai Jetha was so intent on serving his Guru that he continued to live with him. Even after becoming the son-in-law he continued to serve the Guru with as much devotion as before.



Not once did he falter in his duties as the Guru's humble servant. He immersed himself wholeheartedly in the Guru's religious activities, and worked in the langar with complete devotion and humility.

Sometimes he would even be the butt of other people's jokes. They would laugh at the menial tasks he performed. Very often they would mock him by saying that the son-in-law was treated like a servant. But he paid no heed to them. To him, his source of joy lay in serving his Guru. He never did think of Guru Amardas as his father-in-law, but only as his Guru. It was because of this attitude that Bhai Jetha felt no shame doing menial jobs in the Guru's house.

Around this time, the Guru decided to build a "bawli", which is a well with steps leading to the water, for the benefit of the whole village. Bhai Jetha worked with all the labourers as one of them. He would carry vessels of mud on his head like the others. Often his feet would be sore, his clothes soiled and his face dusty, but he did not mind all that. He was happy to be of service to his Guru and the village.

MEETING WITH THE EMPEROR

It was during this time that Guru Amardas received a summon from Emperor Akbar to appear in the Mughal court. He had received complaints that the Sikh Guru was maligning the Hindu faith and misleading the people. He wanted the Guru to explain himself. After a lot of thinking, Guru Amardas deputed Bhai Jetha to go and represent him in Akbar's court.

On reaching there, Bhai Jetha not only pacified the Hindu priests and scholars gathered there, but also impressed everyone in the Mughal court with his wide knowledge of the Hindu mythology and the *Vedas*. He explained that the Sikh faith did not deny that a man could cleanse his body by bathing in the holy waters of Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati, but it also believed that a man's mind could become pure only in the company of learned and holy men. Bhai Jetha also read out lines from their holy book and explained



its meaning to the emperor and others present in the court. No one could refute him as it advocated oneness of God and brotherhood of man. He went on to describe how their religion tried to inspire love and devotion in everyone, and that instead of maligning any particular religion it strove to bring Hindus and Muslims together. He also stated that their Guru believed that all men are equal, regardless of the caste they were born into.

When Akbar heard all this he was deeply moved, and found great similarity between his own way of thinking and that of the Guru. More so, this was exactly what he wanted to bring about through his new religion, *Din-i-ilahi*, which would bring people together.

The emperor realised that the religion posed no threat to the Mughal kingdom as informed to him by his courtiers. Instead, he was pleased to know that such a peace-loving and secular religion existed in the country. He even felt honoured to be acquainted with a learned man like Bhai Jetha, and expressed his respects for the Guru. He acquitted Bhai Jetha with full honours, and sent his regards to Guru Amardas through his esteemed disciple.

THE GURU IS CHOSEN

During one of his visits to Lahore, Emperor Akbar stopped at Goindwal, and visited the Guru about whom he had heard so much. There he actually sat down with the Guru and all the other Sikhs, and ate the common food, served to all. He was impressed with the idea of a free kitchen which was being maintained and supervised by Bhai Jetha. Akbar even offered to grant a *jagir* by which the kitchen ration could be obtained. But the Guru refused saying that the food was donated by the devotees themselves. However, the king insisted on presenting a few villages to the Guru's daughter as a wedding gift.

When the papers of the villages finally arrived, Guru Amardas immediately sent for Bhai Jetha and handed them over to him. While handing the land over he told Bhai Jetha that he wanted him to set up a new township on the land presented to him by the emperor. Bowing to the Guru, Bhai Jetha

immediately took his leave and set off to act on his Guru's orders. He surveyed the various tracts of land and finally chose one, situated near a pond, not too far from Goindwal. He decided to set up the new township there.

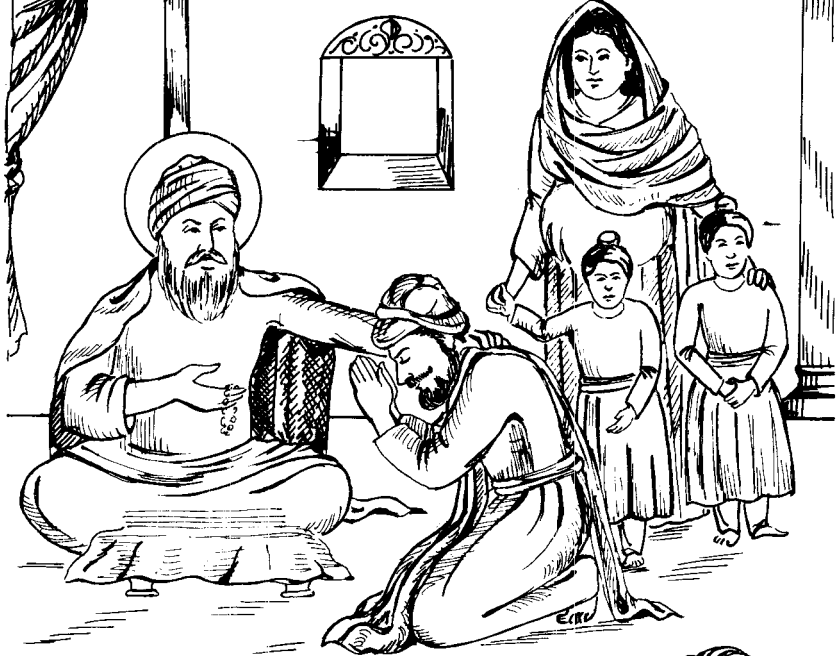
Within no time he had men working on clearing the place. At first, he got a small house built there, where he stayed with all the other men who worked there. This house came to be known as *Guru-ka-chak* or *chak-Guru*, and included not just the house but even the surrounding area. Bhai Jetha even decided to have a tank dug there to develop a settlement around it. Soon he started work on the tank after obtaining the Guru's approval. One by one, people started settling there, and the area began to bear the look of a small town.

Bhai Jetha, however, still spent most of his time at Goindwal beside his Guru, and allotted just enough time to supervise the construction work. Guru Amardas was very pleased with the progress on the new township, and confided to Bhai Jetha that this new city would prove to be a landmark in the history of Sikh religion. This indeed proved to be true since that area which came to be known as 'Amritsar' or the 'pool of

nectar' became the most sacred city of the Sikhs, in times to come.

Though the order to establish a new township was made privately, it was a clear indication that Guru Amardas had chosen his successor. This became even more evident when one day, a very rich devotee came to visit the Guru. As a mark of respect he presented a very expensive pearl necklace to him. But Guru Amardas declined it saying that he had no use for. Instead, he asked to put it on one that resembled him the most. A puzzled devotee could not understand this, and he handed the necklace back to the Guru asking him to give it to anyone he thought was his mirror image. Soon the whole crowd gathered there speculating whether it would be one of the Guru's two sons. But the Guru surprised them all when he asked Bhai Jetha to come up to him. Then, placing the necklace on him, he declared that no one resembled him more in looks and nature than Bhai Jetha. This was an open indication to the people that Bhai Jetha would succeed Guru Amardas.

Meanwhile, Bhai Jetha had had two sons, and Bibi Bhani was expecting her third child. Guru Amardas was as fond of his daughter as



he was of Bhai Jetha, and one day in his fatherly affection asked Bibi Bhani to make a wish. At this, Bibi Bhani requested her father that the guruship remain in her family from then on.

On hearing this, Guru Amardas was a little disturbed. Till then all the Gurus were chosen on merit alone, and not by birth. He feared that making the guruship hereditary, would create problems. Though he had already chosen Bhai Jetha as his heir, he was not too sure if his children would be worthy enough. Bhai Jetha already had two sons, and Guru Amardas knew that they were both incapable of guruship. But now since he had already given his word he could not back out. Thus he granted her wish, but also added, sadly, that there would be unpleasantness and heart burning at every step. Bibi Bhani who was thrilled at the boon did not pay much attention to the rest, till her third child, Arjan, was born. The minute Guru Amardas looked at the newborn child he realised that the future Guru had come into the world. There was rejoicing in his house and the Guru too was very pleased.

But Bibi Bhani could not help noticing that the Guru's two sons, Mohan and Mohri,

were not too pleased since they too had children. Even her own two sons, Prithi Chand and Mahadev, were not pleased at all. In fact, they did not take to their new brother very well.

One day, when Guru Amardas was taking his afternoon nap young Arjan went up to him and woke him. When Bhai Jetha asked the attendant to take him away the Guru smiled and told him that this grandson would one day cruise people across the ocean of life. Bhai Jetha was extremely pleased, and so were the people around him. But Bibi Bhani could see that not many in her family were pleased. She recalled the ominous words of her father, and it troubled her to no end.

By now, Guru Amardas realised that it was time to leave the earthly abode and announce his successor formally to the people. Though there was no doubt in his mind about the successor, he still wanted the people to know why he had chosen Bhai Jetha. Since most people considered his other son-in-law, Sriram, to be a prospective Guru. So Guru Amardas decided to put the two men to test before a gathering of a few hundred Sikhs. He went along with them to the place where the 'bawli' was being constructed. There he asked the two men to erect a platform each.



Soon they got to work, and both erected a nice looking platform. But Guru Amardas looked at each platform critically and shook his head in disapproval. He asked them to break it down and erect new ones. Again they made new platforms and again the Guru asked them to rebuild it. This went on for a long time, and the people were wondering what the Guru really wanted.

By now Sriram was running out of patience, and signs of irritation were showing on his face. But Bhai Jetha, on the other hand, went on making and breaking the platform calmly and quietly. When Guru Amardas objected again, Sriram openly confronted him and questioned him as to where the fault lay. He even refused to break it down again. Bhai Jetha, on the other hand, immediately fell on his Guru's feet and pleaded to be given yet another chance to make one platform which he hoped would please him. At this, Guru Amardas embraced him and turned to the assembly of people gathered there, who by now had understood the purpose of this test.

The Guru then announced that he was going to appoint Bhai Jetha as the next Guru because he was not only the most deserving,



but like the other Gurus he had the patience to strive for the very best. He also told the public that Bhai Jetha carried the flame of Guru Nanak in him, and was the true heir to the throne of the Sikh Gurus. He declared that from then on, Bhai Jetha would be called Guru Ram. Das.

Thus, in 1574, Guru Ram Das became the fourth Guru of the Sikhs, amid great rejoicing and celebrations. Everyone was pleased with the decision except Guru Amardas's son, Mohan, who felt that as the Guru's eldest son he was the rightful heir to guruship. Although the Guru explained to him that he lacked the virtues of humility, patience, perseverance and devotion which Guru Ram Das possessed, Mohan was not satisfied.

However, the whole Sikh community rejoiced, and looked to Guru Ram Das for all their spiritual guidance. Guru Amardas who had seen how well Guru Ram Das fulfilled his duties felt sure that the legacy of Guru Nanak was in safe hands.

AMRITSAR: THE POOL OF NECTAR

After the death of Guru Amardas, Guru Ram Das began working on the township with greater devotion and urgency. He was aware that it was the heartiest wish of his Guru that the township be established soon. So it became his first priority. The town which came to be called Amritsar or the pool of nectar became the shrine of all the Sikhs. There is a very interesting story about how the miraculous power of the pool in this city came to be known to the people there. It goes like this:

In the small town of Patti, an old settlement near Goindwal, there lived a *kardar* or the revenue collector. He had five daughters, all beautiful and young. While no one in the family, least of all the father, was religious, the youngest daughter was a staunch devotee of God. She spent her time in prayers and in other religious activities. Soon all the girls, except the youngest, were

married and gone. The father would often taunt her undying faith in God and his ways. He felt that she was never grateful for all that he did for her, and attributed it all to God. When he spoke to her about her marriage she would say that God would take care of it. Irritated by her faith in God, the proud man decided to teach her a lesson. He got her married to a crippled leper, and told her that God had decided such a sorry fate for his devotee. But the girl was unaffected. She calmly accepted her fate and left town with her husband.

So strong was her faith in God that she took care of her husband lovingly and devotedly, believing that God must have a good reason for this. She nursed her husband as well as she could, and together they went from place to place. Once, on their way they stopped by the pond, near the tank that was being constructed by Guru Ram Das. The girl made her husband sit under a tree, and went to fetch some food.

While she was away the leper saw something very strange. He saw a pair of crows taking a dip in the water. When they surfaced they had turned into beautiful swans. He watched in amazement as they



flew away before his very eyes. He suddenly realised that there was some special power in the pond. Unable to stop himself he tried to move towards it in his crippled state. He dragged himself with great effort, and finally, managed to take a dip in the water. When he came out he could not believe his eyes. His whole body had become clean and healthy. He looked at his reflection in the clear water and saw that even his face had cleared up. He cried out in joy and jumped around in glee.

Just then his wife returned, and began looking for her husband. Seeing her, the man ran up to her and told her the whole story. But the girl did not believe a word of what he said. She panicked at the thought that this good looking young man might have killed her invalid husband to get to her. She began crying and yelled at him for being so evil, while the man kept insisting that he was none other than her husband.

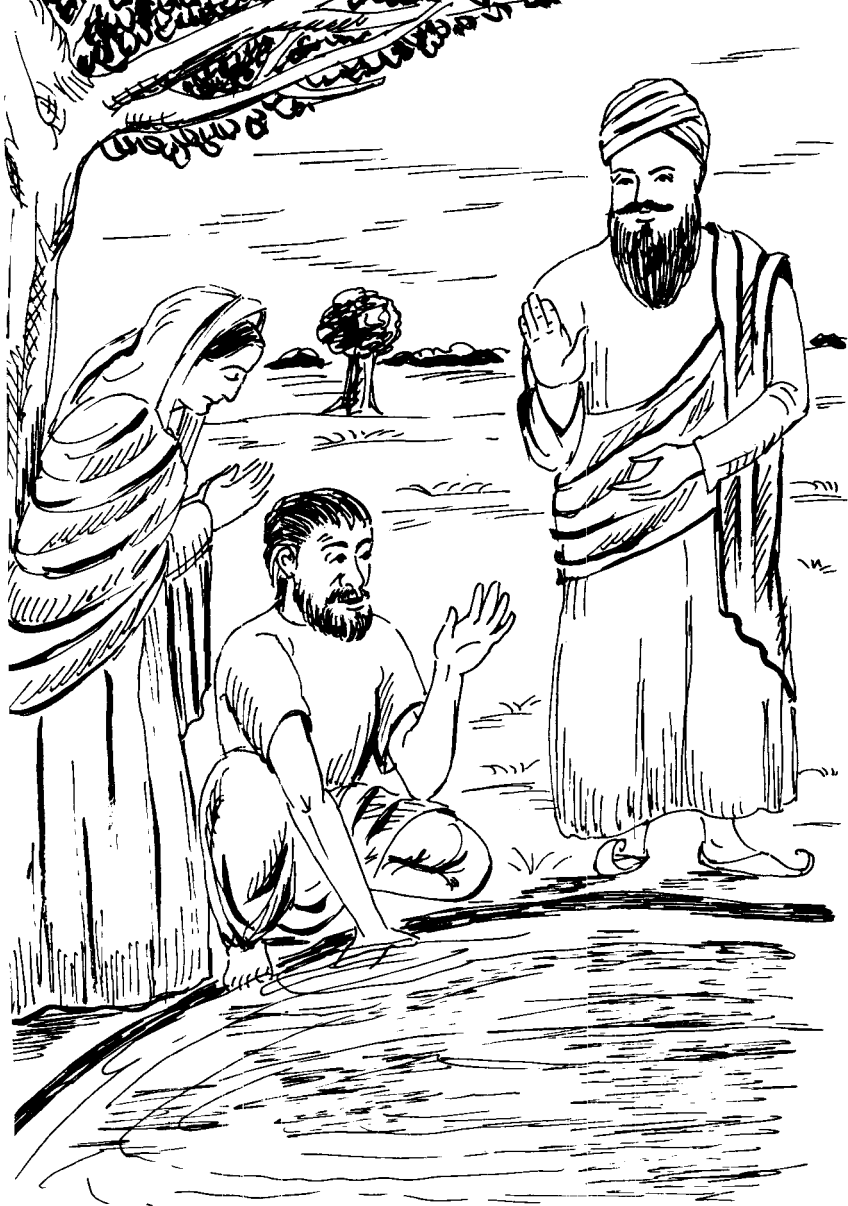
Meanwhile, Ram Das was on the other side of the pool supervising the tank construction. She decided to go to him and seek justice. Her husband too followed her. When the Guru saw them approaching he smiled at them, and began praising the ways of God. The girl was surprised when the Guru told her that her husband was indeed cured

by the healing pond. But somehow she still could not believe it.

So Guru Ram Das asked the young man to put forth his hand. The girl saw that one of his fingers was still stricken with leprosy. He then asked him to dip it in the water so that his wife could be satisfied. When the man did so, the girl was amazed to see that it had become as clear as his body. She was thrilled with joy, and along with her husband they sought the Guru's blessings. This is how the city around that pool came to be known as 'Amritsar'.

The news of this miracle spread far and wide. People from all corners of the country came to visit the holy tank, and seek the blessings of the Guru. Whoever came to meet the Guru did not leave without becoming a better Sikh. They were so taken in by his deep and lucid teachings that stressed on love and service to all living beings, that it changed their lives. Whoever came to Amritsar wanted to contribute, in some way or another, to the good work that the Guru was doing. Some of them stayed back to lend a helping hand with the construction work, while others contributed food for the langar.

Many people who visited Guru Ram Das were impressed and inspired by the fact that



he believed and followed Guru Nanak's teachings so faithfully. Like Guru Nanak, he too believed in active life. When the devotees saw the Guru working with them they began to take great pride not only in this holy work, but in every other work. This is what Guru Ram Das wanted most from his devotees, since he believed that the daily chores of life were as holy as any other religious work, and should be done with as much devotion.

Following these teachings, the Sikhs learnt to love and respect their work. It even gave them the courage to continue with their work even in the face of failure. Soon more and more people came to the holy city of Amritsar to have a glimpse of the Guru. Within no time Amritsar became the centre of Sikh activity in the country.

THE DIVINE WORK

Of all the people who came to visit Guru Ram Das one was Bhai Gurdas, who was a noted scholar and poet of the times. When he met the Guru he was struck by his simplicity and humility, and so immediately offered his services to him. Guru Ram Das too, in the course of their meetings, realised that Bhai Gurdas was not only very pious and sincere, but also a staunch devotee.

When Bhai Gurdas begged the Guru to formally make him a Sikh and bless him, the Guru was very pleased. He not only accepted Bhai Gurdas into his fold, but also entrusted him with a task. He asked Bhai Gurdas to leave for Agra and take care of the spiritual needs of the Sikhs there on his behalf. He explained the daily routine that he wanted all the Sikhs in Agra to follow.

As per the usual routine in his dharamsala all the men were to rise early in the morning, and take a dip in the holy waters to rid

themselves of all sins. Then they were to recite verses from the holy scriptures, and repeat God's name in every activity that they undertook, however big or small it would be. He also added that God would be kind to those who performed their duties well. With these instructions he blessed Bhai Gurdas, and asked him to take up the holy responsibility as soon as possible. Bhai Gurdas not only felt honoured, but also blessed for being entrusted with such a responsible duty. He touched the Guru's feet, and went forth on his spiritual mission to Agra.

It had been a long time since Guru Ram Das visited his home town, Chuna Mandi, in Lahore. He decided to take sometime out and meet his parents. When the news of his arrival reached the people in Lahore they thronged the roads to welcome the 'Saccha Badshah' or True King as they called him. He was overjoyed to meet all those people he had known as a child. For the few days that he was there he got all the Sikhs together for the daily prayers and meditation. It was then that he decided to build a dharamsala there, so that all Sikhs could assemble together daily for prayers. He also wanted to start the free langar like in Goindwal, since it was one of the things that Guru Nanak really wanted

for his devotees. He thought a lot about it, and finally, decided to convert his ancestral house into a dharamsala. All the Sikhs in Lahore were really pleased with his decision, and they thanked the Guru heartily for it.

Soon the house was converted into a dharamsala, and now Guru Ram Das was prepared to leave for Amritsar where the construction work was still in progress. Since he could not stay any longer he entrusted the maintenance of the dharamsala to the Sikhs of Lahore till he got somebody else to take care of it. At the time of departure all the people came to him for his blessings, and fondly bade him farewell.

Meanwhile, the work on the tank went on in full swing. People came from far and near to help the Guru with the work. There was no dearth of volunteers, but Guru Ram Das realised that they needed hired labour to hasten up the work. He also realised that they needed more funds for it. So he sent his agents to all parts of the country to collect funds for the holy tank, and for the langar or free kitchen which was so much a part of the Sikh tradition.

These agents, known as *masands*, left for their duties assigned to them by their beloved Guru, after seeking his blessings. They went



to different cities, towns and villages to collect funds. When the people came to know that these were Guru Ram Das's agents they contributed willingly. There were many who wanted to see the Guru in person, but due to some problem or the other they could not. So, they donated whatever they could, feeling partly content that if they could not meet the Guru they could at least participate in his holy work in some way. There were even people who sold some items from their house to contribute to the masands. Some women even donated their jewellery to be able to add to the funds. They considered it as an honour to be able to do something for their Guru. So, after traversing many places the masands finally returned to the Guru with more funds than they had even anticipated.

Guru Ram Das was very pleased not just with the funds collected but also with the fact that the people held the holy tank in such reverence. He felt that the people were finally united for a common cause. He was also touched by their devotion to him and blessed all those who had contributed, however little the amount may be. With this money the Guru hired professional labourers, as a result of which the construction work speeded up remarkably.

THE VIRTUE OF HUMILITY

The Guru now divided his time between supervising the construction of the holy tank, and looking after Guru Amardas's work at Goindwal where he continued to serve the Sikh community with the same devotion as before. The Guru's message of humility, patience and simplicity had spread far and wide. Even those people who had initially not approved of Guru Amardas's choice, were won over by Guru Ram Das's humility.

Even Baba Sri Chand, Guru Nanak's eldest son, had heard about Guru Ram Das. He had turned *vdasi* or a recluse as a mark of protest, when his father did not appoint him the Guru. He had since then stayed out of the Sikh community in anger, and had refused to see or meet any of the Guru after his father. But he had heard a lot about Guru Ram Das and his humble nature, and when he saw how devoted the people were to him he decided to meet the Guru out of sheer curiosity.

He soon reached Goindwal. When the news of his arrival reached the Guru he went to receive Baba Sri Chand himself. When Sri Chand first set his eyes on Guru Ram Das he was amazed at the strong resemblance that the Guru bore to his father. Guru Ram Das welcomed him heartily and invited him to his house, which Baba Sri Chand willingly accepted.

As they sat talking, Baba pointed towards Guru Ram Das's long beard and asked why he had a long, flowing beard. The Guru replied with all humility that his long beard was to wipe the feet of holy men like Baba Sri Chand. Hearing this, Baba was not embarrassed, but realised the greatness of the Guru. When the Guru actually got down to wipe Baba's feet with his beard he got up, and embraced the Guru. He then told Guru Ram Das that he now realised the wisdom of his father's choice, and admitted that humility and devotion had made him realise why he was overlooked by his father. That day, Baba Sri Chand lost all his grievances against his father and became a better Sikh, thanks to the Guru.

Like him, there were many people who developed strong faith in God after meeting

Guru Ram Das. In fact, his devotees came from different cities, towns and villages.

In one such village lived an aged couple who had no child. They wanted a child very badly and had visited all the holy shrines and fakirs, but no one could grant their wish. They had almost given up hope when they happened to meet a Sikh who told them about Guru Ram Das. Full of hope, the old couple headed towards Goindwal.

On reaching there, they were told that the Guru would be at the site where the tank work was underway. There they saw the Guru and all the Sikhs busy at work, and so they decided to wait. It was the cold winter months, and everyone present was shivering. Seeing their discomfort the old man went to the forest, and cut loads of firewood. He then took it to the Guru's langar so that the freezing men could warm themselves. All those present crowded around the fire, and thanked him heartily as they felt warm. The old man was very pleased and felt satisfied that he could be of some help to these men.

At that time Guru Ram Das, who had been away to a nearby place for a while, returned to the site. He was surprised to see the huge bonfire and the Sikhs comfortably seated

around. When he enquired as to who had got the firewood they pointed towards the old man. Guru Ram Das was so pleased and overwhelmed by his generosity that he called him to his side, and thanked him for it. He could see that the man was a pious devotee, and one with a kind heart. Expressing his gratitude the Guru asked the aged man to ask for a boon. Though the man badly wanted to ask for a son he could not bring himself to say it. He did not want the Guru to think that he had done the good deed for the reward alone. So, he lowered his eyes and did not say anything.

However, when he came home and narrated the whole incident to his wife she assured him that the Guru would never think bad of his good deed, and that he should have asked for his heart's desire. So, the next day, the couple went again to the Guru and finally, expressed their wish for a son. At this, Guru Ram Das told them that he would definitely pray for them, but he also added that he could not change their destiny. But the aged couple fell at his feet and pleaded with the Guru to grant them their one wish.

Amazed at their deep faith in him the Guru finally told them that he himself was

destined to have four sons, but now he would grant one to them and have three instead. Saying this, he blessed the couple and asked them to name the boy Bhagtu, who he said would become a great worshipper of God and make them all proud. The aged couple cried tears of joy, and touched the feet of the Guru.

In due course of time, they were indeed blessed with a son. Not a day passed when they did not thank Guru Ram Das for it, and they remained his devotees till their death.

CHOOSING HIS HEIR

Meanwhile, the holy tank was more than half done, and a big settlement began to grow around it. As the tank got into progress, the town gained popularity as 'Amritsar'. Now the Guru spent more and more time supervising the tank. He began to feel that his days were numbered now. He was also troubled by the feeling that he might not live to see the completion of this holy tank.

Around this time, one of his cousins, Sahari Mal, came to Amritsar to invite the Guru to his son's wedding. But the Guru was much too occupied with the tank and expressed his inability to accompany Sahari Mal. However, he told him that he would send one of his sons on his behalf. For this, he called his eldest son, Prithi Chand, and asked him to go with Sahari Mal to Lahore. But Prithi Chand, who was aware that his father was contemplating choosing an heir to the Guru's throne did not want to be absent at

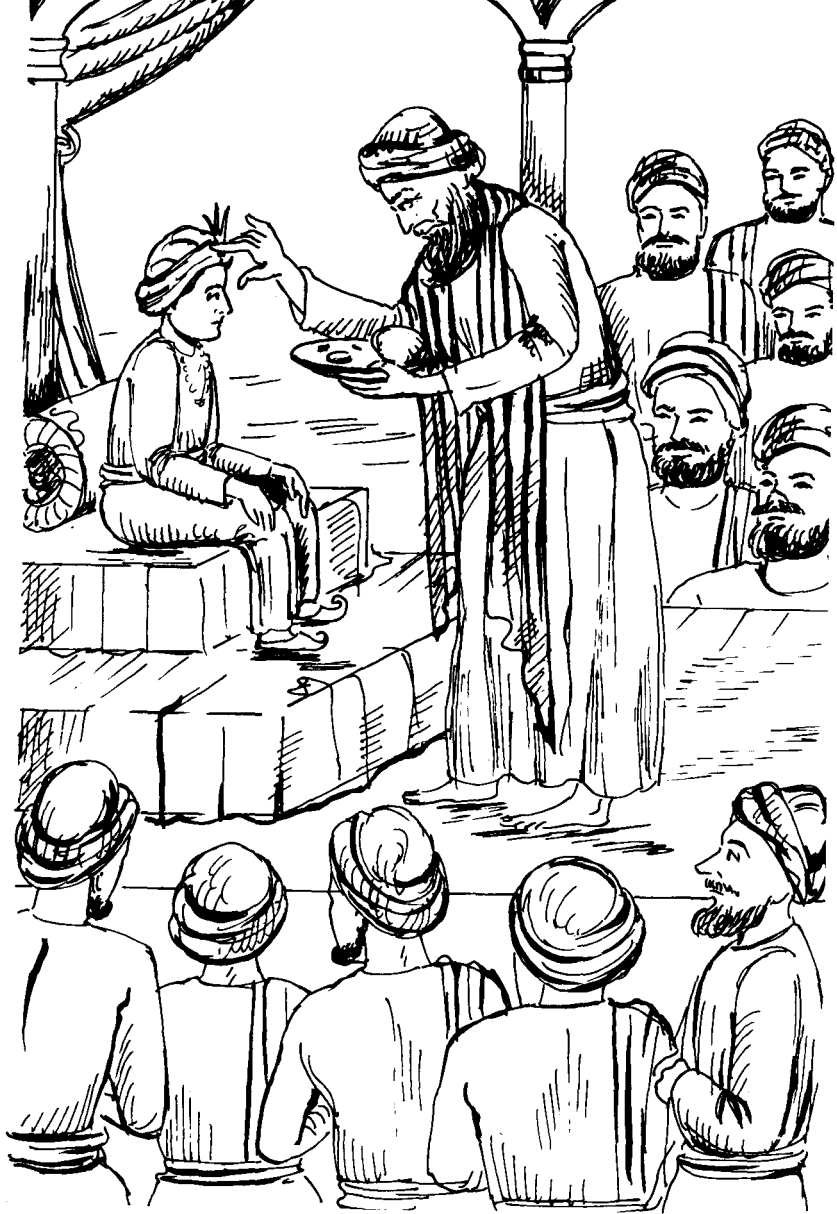
this time. He was afraid that his father would install his younger brother, Arjan, in his absence, and so he refused to go. This really pained Guru Ram Das, and so he called his second son, Mahadev, to go instead. But he too excused himself on some pretext. Guru Ram Das, who was well aware of what was brewing in their minds, did not reprimand them at all. Finally, he sent for his youngest and favourite son, Arjan. He explained the whole situation to him and asked him to go. Arjan, without a word, packed his bags and left for Lahore to attend the wedding as his father's representative. Guru Ram Das also asked him to look after the dharamsala at Lahore and to stay there until he sent for him.

Several months passed and the Guru was so engrossed in the construction work of the tank that he forgot he had asked Arjan to wait in Lahore, till he was sent for. Meanwhile, Arjan was getting restless since he had not seen his beloved father for a very long time, and was dying to have a glimpse of him. But he could not disobey his father's orders to return without being sent for, and hence he stayed on. After yet another month of waiting, he decided to send a message to his father through a servant, expressing his wish to

return. Unfortunately, it so happened that when the servant arrived Guru Ram Das was resting, and the letter was received by Prithi Chand who said he would pass it to the Guru. He then dismissed the servant after sending the message that Arjan was to stay there a little longer. Again when a few months passed and there was no news from his father, Arjan wrote again seeking permission to return. But again, Prithi Chand who was always on the lookout for messengers from Lahore took the letter, and sent back the same message.

A few months later Arjan decided to send a message again, and this time he asked him to deliver the letter personally to his father. When the Guru read the letter he realised that it was Arjan's third letter. After enquiring, he was told that all this while Prithi Chand had been taking the messages and not passing it to him. The Guru was really angry and he immediately sent for Prithi Chand, who at first denied everything but was found guilty when the Guru had his room checked.

Guru Ram Das then ordered Prithi Chand to go with Bhai Budha, one of their old and trusted priests, and bring Arjan back with full honour. When Arjan was finally brought back



to Amritsar, Guru Ram Das declared to that he was appointing Arjan as his successor. Everyone present was very pleased with the Guru's decision, since they were all as fond of Arjan as the Guru himself.

Bhai Budha then applied the tilak on Arjan's forehead, and the flame of sovereignty passed on from Guru Ram Das to Guru Arjan, who became the fifth Guru of the Sikhs. It was the year 1581, and it marked a new chapter in the history of the Sikh Gurus. From here onwards the nomination of Guru came to be based on both heredity and merit. It gave a whole new meaning to 'guruship', and brought more power and authority to the succeeding Gurus.

TIME TO DEPART

The year 1581 was a year of both joy and sadness for the Sikhs. They had gained a meritorious and saintly Guru in Guru Arjan, but they had also lost their beloved Guru Ram Das.

Guru Ram Das had been aware for quite sometime that his end was nearing, and so he placed Guru Arjan on the throne when he felt that the time was right. Though Prithi Chand constantly created problems the people stood by and applauded the choice made by Guru Ram Das.

But Prithi Chand was not to be silenced like this. He began to raise a public outcry against Arjan's installation on the Guru's throne. He not only accused his father of favouritism, but even tried to organise a rebellion against him by getting a few people on his side. The people, however, were unaffected and paid no heed to his rantings. Prithi Chand not only pointed fingers at his

father, but also made it difficult for Arjan. Though Arjan took it all very calmly, Guru Ram Das could not bear it for long. When he crossed all limits, Guru Ram Das publicly condemned him and announced that no one who was so arrogant, proud and conniving, could be a part of his community.

Seeing the growing rift between the father and son, Arjan requested his father to hand over the throne to Prithi Chand. At this, Guru Ram Das assured him that he had made him the Guru not because he was his favourite son, but because he deserved it due to his dedication, and his sincere efforts to carry on the work of Guru Nanak.

Soon after, Guru Ram Das began feeling more and more unwell, and realised that his end was near. He was very depressed and regretted the fact that he could not complete the task of constructing the holy tank as Guru Amardas had wanted. He knew that God had some reason for taking him away so early in life. He was only forty-seven years old, and he felt he had still a lot to do. But then, he finally resigned to his fate as God's wish. He was satisfied that he had at least passed on the flame of Guru Nanak to Guru Arjan, who was as worthy of the throne as all his predecessors had been.



With that responsibility having been fulfilled Guru Ram Das decided that he could leave his earthly abode. Soon after, he sent for his family and all the Sikh community. He expressed his sincere love for them, and blessed everyone from children to the aged.

Finally, with the name of God on his lips he left the world of mortals. It was September 1,1581, and yet another glorious chapter came to an end in the history of the Sikh religion, heralding a new one in the form of Guru Ram Das's son and successor, Guru Arjan.

EPILOGUE

Guru Ram Das was the fourth Guru of the Sikhs, and he remained much loved and respected for seven years of his guruship. He did the work assigned to him by Guru Amardas with great dedication and devotion, and thus added a lot of glory to the Sikh religion and community throughout the country.

He had won many people over with his simplicity, his faith in his religion, and by his utmost respect for all the other religions of the country. He had even succeeded in diffusing all misunderstandings and ill-feelings in the minds of other scholars. Even Emperor Akbar realised the affinity he shared with Guru Ram Das about a common religion for all mankind. He had earned the emperor's respect and admiration not just for his religious ideas and activities, but also for his humility.

In fact, it was this very humility in his nature that he did not leave any record of his

life and work behind. Guru Ram Das believed that a man's work and actions, in his lifetime, were his true legacy.

Like his predecessors he had composed quite a few devotional hymns which were later included in the *Adi Granth*, the holy book of the Sikhs. But that was never his priority. For him, the only meaning of his life was to serve his people, his Guru, and carry on the work of Guru Nanak to the best of his abilities. Almost all his time was spent in looking after the religious work at Goindwal and Amritsar, looking after Guru Amardas's work and supervising the construction of the holy tank, along with the establishment of the new city.

He taught his disciples the virtues and values inherent in the Sikh religion and in the teachings of their Gurus. He not only emphasised the value of service, but even inspired his disciples to serve their fellowmen by one's life and work. He worked hard to see that the langar or the free kitchen was never short of food for his people, and that everyone irrespective of caste, religion and creed could partake of food in his kitchen.

Guru Ram Das was the epitome of patience, devotion and humility, and his

devotees grew in large number because he treated them like his children. He had great faith in his people, and his devotees had great faith in him. They came from all corners of the country to seek his blessings. The Guru made them all feel special and endeared them to him. Anyone who met him began to treat him as his Guru. He wielded a lot of power over people, by love and not by force. He was a humanitarian, a healer, and a sage in the true sense.

Guru Ram Das practised what he preached. What he practised was what Guru Nanak had taught, and passed down the ages for all Sikhs. He believed that God helped those who have endurance and patience. He was of the opinion that it is in the service of man and God that real joy could be found. It was in this service that he gave up his life. He believed in whole-hearted service and paid no heed to his health as he moved from Goindwal to Amritsar to Lahore to serve his people. This is what took its toll on him, and he left the world at the young age of forty-seven.

Just like the Sun that forever sends out its revitalising and life-giving rays, Guru Ram Das's life continues to inspire people to this day.