

## **FESTIVALS IN JUNE 2005**

### **Martyrdom of Guru Arjan Devji (16<sup>th</sup> June – Sikhism)**

Guru Arjan Dev was the youngest son of Guru Ram Das and Mata Bhani. He was born at Goindwal on April 15, 1563. In 1579 Guru Arjan was eventually married to Ganga Devi daughter of Krishan Chand. Eventually Arjan Dev was invested with the Guruship by his father Guru Ram Das in 1581

The Guru laid the foundation of the Harmandir Sahib (Golden Temple) in the middle of the tank at Amritsar. All of the Sikhs desired that it should be the tallest building in the new town. Guru Arjan Dev however felt otherwise. He reminded his followers that humility should be a great virtue. The temple was therefore built on as low an elevation as possible. To counter the Muslim belief that God's House is in the west and the Hindu belief that it is in the east where the sun rises, the Harmandir Sahib had entrances on all four sides. Guru Arjan Dev exclaimed; "My faith is for the people of all castes and all creeds from whichever direction they come and to whichever direction they bow." To help raise money for these monumental public works projects, the Guru declared that all Sikhs donate 1/10th of their earnings to charity.

Guru Arjan in his humility asked his wife Ganga Devi; "If you need a boon, ask not me but a pious Sikh like Baba Buddha, the aged seer and devout disciple of Guru Nanak". She proceeded with a large entourage and much fanfare to Baba Buddha who lived in a jungle near Amritsar. There she presented him with many delicacies to eat. Baba Buddha resented this and refused to provide any blessings. Upon hearing what happened, Guru Arjan Dev told his wife to return this time on foot, with a simple meal prepared by herself. This time Baba Buddha was delighted and partook of the simple food. He prophesied; "A son will be born to thee who will crush the enemies of Nanak's house, just as I have crushed this piece of onion with my hand."

Guru Arjan Dev collected original manuscripts of the Guru (Nanak)'s from Mohan (son of Guru Amar Das), Datu (son of Guru Angad) as well as Sri Chand (son of Guru Nanak).

Unlike any other religious book in history, Guru Arjan Dev decided to also include the compositions of Hindu and Muslim saints which he considered consistent with the teachings of Sikhism and the Gurus'. Guru Arjan Dev included the works of such Hindu Bhaktas as Kabir, Jaidev, Namdev, Dahanna, Ravidas, Pipa and Ramanand. The Guru also included the works of such Muslim divines as Farid, Mardana, Satta and Balwand, the Guru's minstrels, as well as several bards (Bhatts). Bhai Gurdas was invited by the Guru to include his own verses, but declined out of modesty.

The monumental task was finally completed. This first edition of the Guru Granth Sahib known at that time as Pothi Sahib was installed on a high pedestal within the Harmandir Sahib in August 1604. Guru Arjan Dev seated himself at a lower level and instructed all Sikhs to bow before it, not as an idol, but as the book of divine inspiration which instructed living men in the ways of God and dedicated secular life.

When Guru Arjan received the summons to appear before Moghul emperor Jahangir, he knew that it was not a good sign. Upon reaching Lahore, Jahangir demanded that Guru Arjan Dev revise the Holy Granth, removing all references to Islam and Hinduism. This of course the Guru refused to do. Since Jahangir was on his way to Kashmir, he asked Murtaza Khan to deal with the Guru.

Murtaza Khan immediately jailed the Guru, and ordered the Guru Arjan Dev to be tortured to death if he did not agree to remove the alleged derogatory references in the Holy Granth. The Guru was cruelly tortured. He was made to sit on a red hot iron sheet. They poured burning hot sand on his body. The Guru was dipped in boiling water. He bore all of these brutalities with calm serenity, for five long days. When the torturers found the Guru unresponsive to their torture they did not know what to do. On May 30, 1606 the Guru asked for a bath in the river Ravi by the side of the Mughal fort. Thousands of followers watched the Guru who could barely walk to the river with tears in their eyes. His bare body was covered with blisters, Guru Arjan Dev repeated over and over; "Sweet is Your Will, O God; the gift of your Name alone I seek." The Guru then calmly walked into the river bank, bidding his farewell to his followers and was gone forever, his body carried away by the currents. This act of brutality in ending such a saintly life with such cruelty was to forever change the course of Sikhism.

# FESTIVALS IN JUNE 2005

## BUDDHA PURNIMA (23<sup>rd</sup> June – Buddhism)

*Buddha Purnima* or *Buddha Jayanti* means the 'full moon of the Buddha and is celebrated sometime in April/May. Called Vaishakha Pooja in the *Theravada* tradition, it is the most important of all Buddhist festivals.

Commemorating the birth, enlightenment and death of the Buddha, the day is considered more auspicious than any other day of the year. Observed on the full moon day of the 4th month of the Tibetan calendar, corresponding to *Vaishakha*, Gautama Buddha was born in 544 BC in Lumbini, Nepal.

According to a Tibetan belief, Buddha Kashyapa had prophesied that he would be reborn in human form. This would happen when the life span of people living on earth became 100 years. His immortal incarnation would be *Buddha Shakyamuni* and he would be a teacher to both the gods and humans.

Legend has it that on the full moon day of Vaishakha 544 BC, the Buddha's mother, Queen Mahamaya, happened to be on her way from the capital Kapilavastu to her parents' home in Devdaha. During the journey, she stopped under the shade of two sal trees at Lumbini, where she gave birth to Buddha. When she returned to Kapilavastu, an old *sanyasi* (sage) named Asit, who was also the court astrologer, came to the palace and predicted that the child would redeem the world.

Gautama was a serious-minded child who instead of playing with other children would sit alone, lost in his own thoughts. When Prince Gautama came of age, his father arranged his marriage to the beautiful **Princess Yashodhara** and saw to it the prince was kept occupied with diverse amusements and pleasures of life. None of these, however, succeeded in diverting Gautama's mind from his quest for truth.

Though Prince Gautama was a *Kshatriya*, he never hunted and instead tried to protect animals and birds. There were other things about the world that began to trouble Gautama. One day, when passing through a street, he saw a man who was so old that he could not walk. Another day, he saw a very sick man lying unconscious on the ground. He asked himself, "What is pain? Why is there so much pain and suffering in the world? Is there a way of avoiding these?"

Then Gautama came across an ascetic who looked so calm that he seemed to have found the answers to the problems of old age, sickness and death. Gautama decided to renounce the world and became an ascetic. He discarded his royal robes, snipped off his long curling tresses and went out into the dark night to seek the light of knowledge.

Gautama went from one religious centre to another and from one hermitage to the next seeking answers to his questions in vain. Finally, in a forest at the edge of the river Niranjana near Gaya, Gautama practiced meditation and penance for six years. He then realised that enlightenment could not come through mortifying the flesh. That very day a woman named Sujata offered him, a bowl of *kheer* (rice pudding) and a grass cutter gave him a stack of grass to sleep on. Gautama accepted both these gifts. He then took his seat under a **Bodhi (Peepal) tree** and resolved to stay there until he found the answers to his questions.

One Vaishakha full moon night, he found the answers to the four truths of life-the existence of pain and suffering, their causes, the need to overcome them and the means of doing so. Thus, he became **Gautama the Buddha** or the **Enlightened One** on his thirty-fifth birthday.

From Gaya, the Buddha proceeded to Sarnath near Vanaras. Here five men became his disciples. He taught them the truths he had discovered and formed the first sangh or community. Thereafter, he travelled everywhere preaching the truth and gained a large following consisting of scholars, sanyasis, kings and their ministers. He also went to his home as a '**bhikshuor**' (someone who begs for food) monk. His father, stepmother, wife and son joined his sangh.

## FESTIVALS IN JUNE 2005

In 483 BC, on the same day that he was born, and had attained enlightenment, the Buddha attained **Nirvana** (liberation).

*Do not pollute your mind with worldly desires. You have attained this human birth as a result of meritorious deeds done in past lives. Do not misuse it. Human life is highly valuable. Keep up its value by practicing human values. This was the teaching of Buddha. People aspire to attain Nirvana. In order to attain Nirvana, one should have a pure heart. True Nirvana lies in having love for God, fear of sin and morality in society. Animals do not know what sin is. Therefore, they do not have fear of sin. However, you should have fear of sin, as you are aware of what it is. You should have control over your senses. Recapitulate all that you have heard and experienced here. Charge your spiritual batteries by joining good company. Only then, will you progress in life and become ideal.*

***DIVINE DISCOURSE: 7 May 2001***

---