Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa, Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh!

Vaisakhi: A Future of Green Nagar Kirtans

As Sikhs marched down Madison Avenue in New York this Vaisakhi, onlookers observed with awe the sea of saffron against the backdrop of urban skyscrapers and traffic lights at the annual Sikh day parade. Each year, Vaisakhi celebrations like the one in New York bring together anywhere from fifty thousand to one hundred thousand Sikhs to the cities of Surrey, Toronto, Southall, Birmingham, and Hyderabad to celebrate the birth of the Khalsa, in Anandpur Sahib, Punjab in 1699.

Vaisakhi celebrations are a time of immense joy for Sikhs, inspiring us to collectively reflect on the meaning and purpose of the Khalsa (the ‘sovereign), the values of miri and piri (spiritual and temporal responsibility) in this life, and to share our Sikh heritage and values to our larger human family through sewa and simran. In many of these nagar kirtans Sikhs again open the community kitchen to all of humanity, where all are welcome regardless of race, religion, class, gender, or social status to enjoy a common meal.

These celebrations are inspiring, however the introduction of modern day packaging and plastics and Styrofoam, means that a lot of waste can be left behind. Being non-biodegradable, these materials can last hundreds of years. They are bad for our health, and pollute our land, water, and air. Many Sikhs inspired the spirit of the Khalsa, have taken steps to care for our environment. In some cities like Surrey, British Columbia, Sikhs have formed a Sikh Green Team to ensure that any plastic or glass used in the nagar kirtans are recycled. Meanwhile Sikhs in Hyderabad ensured that no trash was left in surrounding environs.

How can we follow our lead and make sure that our Vaisakhi embodies the spirit of Sarbat Da Bhalla – the wellbeing of all?

What are green celebrations?

Green celebrations encourage all who attend to appreciate our environment. These include signs with inspiring messages about the earth, the wise use of disposable materials and eco-friendly alternatives, available recycling locations, and activities to engage all in positive environmental practices. Instead of using materials like Styrofoam or plastic, which contributes to the amount of non-renewable disposable waste, green celebrations keep in mind the impact that our celebrations have on our Mother Earth.

How can you make your local Nagar Kirtan green?

If your sangat plans annual Vaisakhi celebrations or nagar kirtans, consider the impact you can have if you voice your ideas and draw up plans to ensure that celebrations respect our Mother Earth.

Get a group of friends together and approach the committee of your regional Nagar Kirtan to incorporate green practices into celebrations:
EcoSikh is working on additional resources so that your ideas are shared, and spread, and next year all can work cleaner and greener Vaisakhi celebrations for all. Bhagat Kabir Ji writes, "Kaho Kabir jan bhae khalse parem bhagat jih jani,'Those humble people become Khalsa who understand loving devotion to the Divine.’ Let Vaisakhi celebrate that Khalsa, which merges with the one, universal Creative Force through loving concern for Creation.

**Sikh Environment Day: Full Report 2013**

This year, Sikhs celebrated Sikh Environment Day, with over 1,500 participants from across the globe. We at EcoSikh are incredibly inspired by the level of engagement and excitement by Sikhs across the world for the environment. Most notably, this year all five Sikh Takhts recognized environmental celebrations on the Gurgaddi Diwas of Guru Har Rai as an annual Sikh event. Sri Guru Granth Sahib World University, Fatehgarh Sahib under the auspices of the SGPC also organized a seminar on Sikhi and the environment, connecting both Sikh scholars and leaders from technical and scientific community, along with many more celebrations throughout Gurdwaras and schools throughout the world.

See more to read the full report on Sikh environment day activities and a thank you list of all those who made the celebrations a success this year!

**Sikhs Run for A Cause**

Over forty Sikh runners joined together this April to run for a cause, inspired by the 101-year old Sikh marathon runner Fauja Singh. The team, the Surat Fauj running club raised over $7,000 for charitable work, with a portion of this funding go towards EcoSikh. Gurpreet Singh of Toronto, who is a seasoned marathon runner who came down from Toronto decided to dedicate the money he raised to EcoSikh, “I appreciate the link between healthy living and a healthy world, and it’s rewarding to take something so personal and give it back to the public.”

Click here to see an article and photos from the run in Riverside Park, in New York published in the Huffington Post religion section.

The next run will be scheduled for this summer. See the Surat Initiative page can learn on how to join, or start your own running club.

**We’re Hiring – Job Opportunity with EcoSikh!**

EcoSikh is hiring a Campaign Manager in Punjab, to advance our goal for a sustainable city of Amritsar in partnership with the Green Pilgrimage Network. We’re looking for a motivated self-starter from Amritsar or Punjab who is able to utilize the knowledge of Sikhi to drive sustainability at the ground level with key stakeholders in the city. We are preferably looking for a candidate with a bachelor’s in journalism, communications, planning, commerce, administration, or management with a strong commitment to detail and a desire to work with others and meet program goals.

If you or a friend live in Amritsar and would be a good candidate for the position, please email your resume with references to admin@ecosikh.org. To view a full job description, visit our homepage here.