

With the coming of spring comes one of the most important festivals on the Sikh calendar. April 13 is the beginning of a New year according to the ancient calendar of India.

In the Punjab it is celebrated by Hindus & Sikhs alike as the last full festival before planting time. At the time of Guru Gobind Singh it became & still is an important religious holiday for the Sikhs.

Unlike the usual New Year celebrations in Canada the Sikh New Year arrives quietly and will be celebrated in a religious manner. In order that more people may take part the festivities are scheduled for the week end of April 17, 18 & 19th which will also coincide with the Christian religious services of Easter.

Beginning with morning worship on Friday and the continuous reading of the Sikh Holy Book through Fri night and all day & night Sat. it will culminate with the main service Sunday morning. All meals will be shared in the church dining hall with everyone pitching in to help with the cooking dishwashing & clearing up.

It was at the Basahi Celebrations at Anandpur in 1699 that Guru Gobind Singh formed the Sikh Army known as the Khalsa Brotherhood. Deciding that peaceful opposition to the tyranny of the Muslim rulers would only continue to result in the martyrdom of many more Sikh leaders Guru Gobind Singh took advantage of his annual gathering for Basahi and asked for volunteers to step forward to give up his life for the honour of Sikhism. One by one they stepped forward until he had 5 in all. Each one was taken inside a tent after which Guru Gobind Singh emerged with a bloody sword asking for another volunteer until he had his 5 faithful devotees.

Suddenly they emerged unharmed and he blessed them as his 5 Chosen Warriors and then initiated a ceremony of Baptism where each drank the sweet nectar known now as Amrit. He then announced his desire to form an army of Baptised Sikhs who would fight against any forms of tyranny or oppression.

He stated that each would take the name ~~Sikh~~ Singh which means lion to give him bravery and each would dress in a distinctive manner with uncut hair & beard to distinguish them from the masses of India. Thousands stepped forward to join his army which he called the Khalsa which means the pure ones.

It was at this time also that Guru Gobind Singh ordered each to keep the 5 K's on his body. ① K E Z - uncut hair & beard ② Kanga - a comb to keep it clean ③ Kara - a steel bangle on the wrist representing the omnipresence of God with no beginning & no end ④ Kirpan - a sword either large or small for protection ⑤ Kachcha - short undermen to be worn under the clothes for chastity.

Shortly before his death Gurmehind Singh decreed that there be no living Gurus after him, but that the Guru Sahib, the Sikh Holy Book, be revered as a living Guru. Any who can now gather at the Golden Temple in Amritsar while others gather at their usual place of worship.

In B.C., Victoria has always been the place to go for the largest Baisakhi celebrations which include sports & other activities. However, the Golden Temple has its own celebrations now as the East Indian population in B.C. has grown to almost 100,000.