

The Real Bargain

A story of caring and sharing - helping others gives us the best value

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In the far away land of India, a long time ago, a father thought it was time to teach his son the fine art of trading. But his son was no ordinary boy. He was wise beyond his years and was kind and loving towards everyone. He grew up to be known as Guru Nanak.

In those days, people who had a lot of money or power didn't care about those who were poor. What's more everyone was separated according to where their family lived or the kind of work they did. Outside of necessary business, the farmers and the bakers, the soldiers and the merchants would never associate with each other. The priests or the kings wouldn't eat with common people and people of different religions were always fighting over who was right. Even as a little boy, Nanak was always thinking how he could help people. He couldn't understand many of the customs of the land which kept people apart and didn't even allow all the children to play together. His father naturally wanted his son to pay more attention to his daily chores and lessons so he would become successful when he got older. "Why are you always daydreaming?" he would say. "You should pay more attention to your chores."

But the boy wasn't daydreaming. He was always thinking about the BIG questions, how could he help people live in peace? So the father decided on a plan, which he was sure would keep the boy's mind occupied with what he considered the more important things of life. He called his trusted servant and said, "I think the time has come to teach Nanak a real skill. I want you to take him to the market and keep him busy bargaining with the shopkeepers. Once he learns how to make a good deal, I'm sure he'll stop his daydreaming and settle down."

The bazaars in India are lined with carts and stores filled with wares of dazzling colors, tasty fruits and sweets, clothes and shoes of all sizes, and just about anything you could want. And what you couldn't find, you were sure to find someone who could make it for you. It was a shopper's virtual paradise. Unlike stores here, there were no prices on anything. Young and old alike would delight in bargaining with a shopkeeper for the best price. And no one would ever pay what the shopkeeper asked. It was a kind of game that everyone learned to play. Nanak's father was sure that the boy would enjoy the lure of the trading game. Not only was it fun, but finding bargains in the marketplace was one of the most important skills anyone could learn. The one who recognized the best value succeeded most in business.

So the father called his son and said, "Son, you are now old enough to go to the market by yourself and learn how to make a good bargain. And I am sending our servant along to help and keep you safe." Then he handed the boy a big bag of money. Nanak was very happy and promised his father he would make a great bargain. Money in hand, the boy and his trusted servant set off for the market. They hadn't gone far when Nanak saw a group of hungry people sitting along the road. He turned to the servant, "Look at those people, they look hungry. Let's buy them some food." The servant cautioned, "Your father will be very angry if you come home without a good bargain. Don't waste your money this way." But he loved the boy very much and knew his nature. So the boy hurried off to the market and began bargaining with the merchants for food. Soon his arms were filled. "Look, I've made such good bargains that I have enough left over to buy some clothes as well."

They gathered up the goods and hurried back to where the people were sitting. "Please accept this gift of food," he said, and Nanak began to serve them. The people were very happy, and as was the custom, they gave their blessings to the boy. It was getting late and his father was beginning to worry. He was

pacing back and forth and kept looking down the road. Finally, he saw the boy and the servant coming, but there was no cart behind them. “What have you done with the goods from the market?” he shouted. “You have taken so long and still come home empty handed?” The boy was still very excited about his successful day. He told his father the whole story. But the more his father listened, the angrier he became. “You have wasted my hard-earned money. You should be beaten.” But as he raised his hand to strike the boy, Nanak just smiled and replied, “Father don’t be angry. You should be happy with me. I made two real bargains. With just a little money I was able to get enough food and clothing to help many poor people. And secondly, I’ve brought blessings to our home.” When the father saw the light in his son’s eyes, he realized the true value of this bargain.

Thoughts:

And so my fellow travelers, what’s valued the most are your good deeds. The most valuable bargain doesn’t necessarily have the biggest price tag. What count the most are your good deeds.

Essential Question:

Why is it important to share?

Background:

This story comes from the Sikh tradition and is used to teach and reinforce one of the three basic tenets of the faith: “Share with those in need.” Based on this story, every Gurdwara (temple) around the world has a free open kitchen, “langar,” where all visitors sit together on the ground, and are served a simple meal. Guru Nanak, the first of ten Sikh Gurus, lived from 1469 to 1539 in what was then Northern India. He traveled as far West as Mecca, in what is now Saudi Arabia, and to the northern, eastern, and southernmost boundaries of the Indian subcontinent. He taught people from all walks of life, and all religions, to live together in peace. He said, “I see no one as an outsider. Everyone is part of my community.”