**Nora Sullivan**

**Sikh Responses to Suffering**

When Sikhs are confronted with suffering, many of them would say that their religion encourages them to use it as a form of empowerment. Rather than dwelling in sorrow, or feeling punished and defeated by suffering, Sikhs are taught to learn from it and find its benefits. Sikhs are also taught to use instances of suffering to practice forgiveness. In line with the Sikh mentality that righteousness comes foremost from actions, rather than beliefs, Sikhs believe that suffering should be a tool to inspire positive action. Suffering is also seen as a test of faith, and when Sikhs are able to withstand inflicted suffering, the process strengthens their conviction towards God.

In Sikh thought, self-centeredness, or *haumai*, is the root of suffering. God has incomprehensible reasons for allowing suffering, and Sikhs recognize this mysterious divine will, known as *hukam*, but they realize that it is their own self-centeredness, coupled with the retributive belief of *karma-samsara,* that explains the existence of suffering in their lives. In order to avoid suffering, Sikhs are encouraged to think of God at all times, and meditate on His name. This will lead them away from their inevitable egocentricity, and lead them closer to godliness. Prayer is the primary way that this is accomplished.

There are many instances of suffering throughout the history of Sikhism, including the oppression by the Mughal Empire that led to the creation of the Khalsa, and the tragedy of the shooting at the Sikh temple in Milwaukee last summer. In the creation of the Khalsa, it appeared as though Sikhs responded to their suffering through militarization, but most modern Sikhs would argue that the creation of the Khalsa was merely a rejuvenation of the faith, and a chance for Sikhs to revive their love for God and one another. Currently, in response to the massacre in August, Sikhs are responding by strengthening their sense of community among themselves, attempting to forgive the perpetrators of such hate, but also by trying to educate non-Sikhs on the realities and nature of Sikhism. Sikhs have had to learn to respond to suffering in myriad ways, and their faith has provided them with the ability to do so.