



## AKAAL SEVA

Strength through Seva, Simran & Unity  
[www.akaalseva.com](http://www.akaalseva.com)

### PRESS RELEASE

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## Akaal Seva presents the 5<sup>th</sup> annual Living Sikhi Camp in Bedford

**Respect.** A concept talked about so widely in society yet a challenging notion to explain and in fact put into practise. This was the thought of focus this year amongst Bedford Young Sikhs – Akaal Seva – strength through seva (selfless service) simran (Remembrance/mediation on God's Name) and unity.

Who are Akaal Seva? We are non-profit independent body who assist and support our local community by promoting social cohesion by recognising similarities across social groups, with compassion being a driving force and respecting one another. Hence holding a camp surrounded around the importance of respect was considered integral.

In our daily lives as Sikhs we hold down the analogy given to us by Guru Nanak Dev Ji (the founder of Sikhism) of living like a lotus flower. Quite simply because just as the flower keeps its blossom over and above the surface of the water, roots remaining fixed within the mud-the Sikh remains spiritually rooted whilst immersing oneself in their community life. Sikhism thus is practised by living in the world and coping with life's everyday predicaments. Thus at Akaal Seva we believe seva – that is selfless service for the good of the community and simran – constant awareness of the True Name of God, in conjunction with unity will help strengthen the development of a cohesively diverse community with mutual respect as the bedrock.

The camp took place at the newly constructed Guru Nanak Gurdwara on the weekend of the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> September 2007. It attracted over 140 children and young adults gathered from a variety of locations stretching from the neighbouring towns of Bedford, Milton Keynes, Northampton, Watford to London and as far as Derby, coming either as campers or helpers (sevadars).

Guest speakers were invited who delivered mini lectures followed by group activities. These encouraged the development of transferable life skills, emphasising the importance of team work, communication, working as team leaders and presenting work to their peers. Additionally campers were separated into three different houses across different age bands to compete for the prestigious top house prize, introducing an element of friendly competition and team effort.

Keeping in line with developing a community spirit it is also integral in our camps that we sit together and share food (langar which translates into free kitchen). As part of our community projects we promote the principles of langar, which expresses the fundamentals of sharing, community, inclusiveness and oneness of all humankind that we can all sit and share food irrespective of religion, caste, colour, creed, age, gender or social status. The campers enjoyed a varied cuisine of sweet and savoury vegetarian food.

Following on from a communal lunch the campers enjoyed an array of sports activities, participating in rounders, football and one legged races. Topped off with ice cream cones for all to cool the players down! Keeping fit is important to us at Akaal Seva and we currently run weekly



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martial arts lessons which are open to all (please see website for further details, [www.akaalseva.com](http://www.akaalseva.com)).

The day ended with some spiritual Kirtan- this is singing of sacred hymns with traditional Indian musical instruments- harmonium (akin to pipe organ) and tabla (hand drums) Akaal seva also run weekly musical sessions for all those who want to learn how to play these instruments.

Day two ensued with mini lectures and seminars comprising of group work and role plays allowing the youth to enact and correct social situations pertaining the respect based on what they had learnt. The concept of "Respect" was analysed with reference to the environment, home life, social life and society in general drawing upon Sikh history, current affairs and peoples experiences making sure what they had learnt could be transferred to their daily lives and thus into practise. Following on from a communal lunch everyone including the helpers enjoyed the bouncy obstacle course and the roller cart races. There was also a treasure hunt around the Gurdwara grounds and team efforts to dress up in traditional Sikh wear (you can catch the photographs on the website).

The day came to an end with a continuation of the anonymous question and answers session from the first day, it allowed the youth in confidence to ask questions in a relaxed non judgmental atmosphere to the speakers, and essentially gave them an open forum of discussion.

Before the journeys' home the campers put together a final assembly demonstrating their Kirtan, special prizes were awarded and all received goody bags comprising of special treats. A final meal was also shared upon departure.

However it was not over! At Akaal Seva we aim for continuity so in addition to the annual camp we have monthly workshops in which the timetable is set by the youth for the youth, these comprise of interactive educational and social activities, with community involvement being key to our agenda. This was reflected in our recent community clean up carried out in conjunction with Bedford county council which cleaned up the local surrounding areas and the river Ouse.

Akaal seva's aim is to strive for equality and inclusiveness of all youth creating an enriched diverse community; enabling the development of our youth irrespective of their cast, creed sex, social status, or race through seva (selfless service), simran (Remembrance/mediation on God's Name) and unity. This camp was our fifth annual camp and we endeavour to go from strength to strength in creating a flourishing community spirit.

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