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First-Year and Common Reading Guide

The Light We Give

How Sikh Wisdom Can Transform Your Life

By Simran Jeet Singh

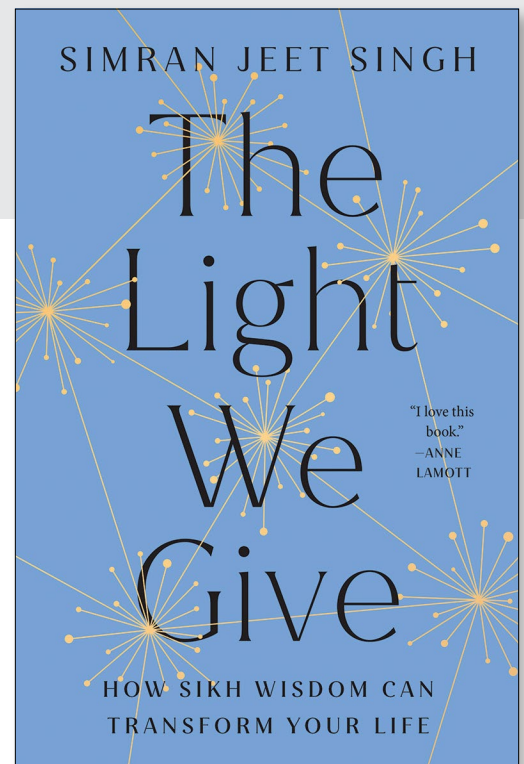
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Also available in e-book and audio formats

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The Introduction begins with an epigraph from James Baldwin that reads, "If I love you, I have to make you conscious of the things you don't see." What did you make of this quotation when you first encountered it? How has your understanding of it deepened through reading *The Light We Give*?
2. The book's prologue opens with a parable about a lantern that challenges the darkness. How does this story reflect the author's approach to living? How might adopting this approach change how we live?
3. The author experienced racism early and often while growing up in South Texas, but as he shares, these experiences intensified after the terrorist attacks of 9/11. Many saw his turban, beard, and brown skin and assumed him to be the enemy. What did he learn in the first 22 years of his life about dealing with the hate that came his way (Part I)? How might some of these lessons apply to your life?
4. Singh shares that his approach to dealing with racism shifted after 9/11. Whereas he used to turn the other cheek, he realized that ignoring racism was itself a privilege. "For myself and for my loved ones, taking on hate was no longer a choice. It was a matter of survival" (p. 39). What does this perspective reveal about some of the privileges we take for granted?
5. The author describes the strangeness of his experience in terms of visibility. People notice him everywhere he goes, which he describes as feeling hyper-visible. And while people often make assumptions about him, they don't actually *know* him. He describes this as feeling invisible (p. 16). In what ways have you felt hyper-visible or invisible? Are there any times you might have caused others to feel this way?



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (CONTINUED)

6. The underpinning of Sikh philosophy is the teaching of interconnectedness (*ik oankar*). What are some ways in which learning to see and feel our oneness can radically shift how we treat one another and the world around us (Part II)?
7. Singh shares a hilarious story of identifying his values through a family exercise. He notes that this session has paid unexpected dividends over the years, and he encourages readers to identify what's most important to them (Chapter 37). What would you identify as your five core values?
8. A significant portion of the book follows the author's struggle to see the humanity in a white supremacist who massacred innocent people in his community (Part II). Why did Singh feel so committed to this process? What were some of the barriers he encountered? What did he ultimately gain from it?
9. Singh speaks often of humility and its importance for cultivating curiosity and compassion. One of the quotes he shares draws from Christian theologian CS Lewis: "Humility is not thinking less about yourself. It's thinking about yourself less" (p. 186). How have you seen humility embodied in the people around you? What do you see as the relationship between humility and justice?
10. The final section of the book (Part V) is devoted to seva, a practice of service infused with love and oriented towards justice. The author makes the case that this approach is nourishing and sustaining and protects us from burnout. How does this approach differ from what you see in the world around you today? How do you see an approach to activism rooted in love and oneness might have a different effect in our movements for justice?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Simran Jeet Singh, Ph.D is a writer, educator, activist, and father. Growing up as a brown-skinned, turban-wearing, beard-loving Sikh in Texas, Simran learned early that marginalized groups won't lecture their way into dignity, and that empathy is only built when we open ourselves to one another.

Singh is the Executive Director for the Religion & Society Program at the Aspen Institute, a visiting professor of history and religion at Union Theological Seminary, and Senior Adviser for Equity and Inclusion for YSC Consulting, a part of Accenture. He is also a Soros Equality Fellow with the Open Society Foundations, a Fellow with the Atlantic Fellowship for Racial Equity, and a Senior Fellow for the Sikh Coalition. In 2020, *TIME* Magazine recognized him among sixteen people fighting for a more equal America. Simran's writing appears regularly in various outlets, including *The Washington Post*, the *New York Times*, and *Harvard Business Review*. Singh is the author of the award-winning children's book *Fauja Singh Keeps Going*. He lives in New York City with his family.



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