22 August 2012

**Sidak 2012: 14 days, 3 tracks of learning, 25 revolutionaries**

San Antonio, TX—The weekend of 4-5 August, 25 young adults hailing from the US, Canada, England and Scotland flew in to San Antonio, Texas, for the tenth year of Sikh Research Institute’s annual leadership development retreat: Sidak – Faith, Courage, Discipline.

As they were arriving on site, getting keys, meeting roommates, acclimating to the heat of a Texas summer, news began to break that there had been a targeted shooting in a gurdwara in Wisconsin. Sikhs were dead and injured, police had been injured in the standoff, the suspect had been killed. Little else was known.

Within 48 hours, the Sidakars planned to change the schedule of events so that they could be a part of national efforts to educate and inform others about Sikhism. Once they were equipped with the supplies they needed and a little free time, they created posters, talking points, and practiced their approaches and answers in preparation to go before the general public. In those moments, the attendees at this leadership development retreat exposed themselves as the leaders they already knew how to be. “In true Sikh spirit, the youth at Sidak grasped the opportunity to engage and build relationships with the San Antonio community in light of the Wisconsin Gurdwara shootings,” said Charandeep Singh, Sikhi 201 participant from Scotland. “A tragic occurrence was met with unwavering unity.”

After attending an interfaith service hosted at Temple Beth El in downtown San Antonio, the Sidakars hit the streets of the city and in less than two hours interacted with more than 100 locals. On the way back to the site that evening, the bus was filled with the excited recounting of the people they had met, the questions they had been asked, the minds that had been opened. The hopeful chatter soon faded into the peaceful recitation of the Rahov (evening prayers).

In addition to the unexpected opportunity to put community organizing to work, the days were filled with the hustle and bustle that defines the Sidak experience. Going through one of three tracks of study—Sikhi 101, Sikhi 201, and Gurmat Gurdwara (Sikhi 101)–participants managed to fit in hours of reading, passionate discussions, vocabulary homework, and paper writing.

The heat of the afternoon was often paused sharing ideas and techniques for memorizing the intricate grammar of Gurbani, practicing sabads together in the divan hall, and preparing for the annual speech competition. “The amazing thing about Sidak is that it incorporates all the aspects of Sikhism into a college-level learning environment. The discipline and dedication required to remain the pace of sixteen-hour days, back to back classes, and morning and evening divans, was a character building challenge,” said Kunerat Kaur, Sikhi 101 participant from California.

Besides those who came to Texas to teach Sidak courses: Inderpreet Singh (Sikhi 101), Harinder Singh (Sikhi 201) and Surinder Pal Singh (Gurmat Gurdwara), and the board members who flew in to assist in the classrooms over the two weeks of Sidak, volunteers from the community came to support students with learning their sabads, to lead sessions on public speaking, to judge the speech competition, and to offer their experience and advice during the first Sidak career day.

The local sangeet also filled the kitchen with laughter and the smells of home cooked meals and snacks three times a day. From fajitas to saag, Italian to Thai, every meal was prepared with careful attention. Evenings were filled with exercise in the pool, nature walks, Sikh discussion and techniques for memorizing the intricate grammar of Gurbani, practicing sabads together in the divan hall, and preparing for the annual speech competition. “The amazing thing about Sidak is that it incorporates all the aspects of Sikhism into a college-level learning environment. The discipline and dedication required to remain the pace of sixteen-hour days, back to back classes, and morning and evening divans, was a character building challenge,” said Kunerat Kaur, Sikhi 101 participant from California.

Midway through the second week, SikhRI hosted the annual Infinite Wisdom Day panel discussion, on the theme “Occupy: Interplay of Faith, Economics & Politics.” There were eight members of the local interfaith community on the panel who spoke to an audience of some 70 people. You can watch the panel recording on SikhRI’s YouTube channel.

Even as the Sidakars were leaving to catch their flights home, there was a sense of mission and purpose that marked another year as a success. “Sidak is not meant to be a vacation from work or school, or a series of lessons that you learn and never have to engage with or reflect on again,” said Jasmine Kaur, SikhRI’s Director of Education and Sidak Coordinator. “It is meant to be a training ground, a source of creative inspiration and passion that is only just beginning in these two weeks. For Sidak to be what it is truly supposed to be, in the eyes of SikhRI, the best should be yet to come as another year of young Sikhs men and women return to their sanges and prepare to put into action their time here.”

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