

In This Episode...

Author and activist Simran Jeet Singh reflects on being a Sikh American and how his faith inspires him to fight racism with love. He speaks with Eboo about his book, "The Light We Give: How Sikh Wisdom Can Transform Your Life," what it was like to grow up as a Sikh in Texas, and the tragedies that moved him to study his tradition and share its light with others.

Episode Guest: Simran Jeet Singh

Dr. Simran Jeet Singh is the Executive Director of the Aspen Institute's Religion & Society Program and an educator, writer, and activist who frequently offers comments and analyses on religion, racism, and justice. He is a visiting professor of history and religion at Union Theological Seminary and a Soros Equality Fellow with the Open Society Foundations, and in 2020 TIME Magazine recognized him among 16 people fighting for a more equal America. His work has appeared in The New York Times, The Washington Post, and CNN, and he is a columnist for Religion News Service.

Suggested Discussion Questions

- Simran and Eboo discuss the natural selfishness of childhood and adolescence, and how they eventually came around to the communitarian ideals of their traditions. Simran says that this didn't really happen for him until the Sikh community faced tragedy after 9/11, and Eboo describes his two children navigating this aspect of growing up. How would you describe the balance between self-focus and community-focus in your own life? Was there an event or tipping point in your life that shifted the balance?
- Eboo and Simran talk about how most traditions encourage people to be less self-centered. What is one way that your religious or ethical tradition encourages you to care for others?
- Simran talks about the Sikh theological premise that everyone is created from the same divine light, and therefore no one can be called good or bad. He says that, although it was difficult, this teaching helped him find common humanity with those who had wronged his community. What helps you find humanity in those who have hurt you?
- Simran argues that, although many people care, we don't have strong models for how we express our concern for others and put it into action, and that we sometimes react to terrible things with anger and hate for lack of better options. Eboo disagrees, positing that models of constructive response from figures in history are still applicable.
- If you were seeking to respond with care towards neighbors, what would be the most important thing? What is the first thing you would do? Do you think this resembles the actions of the people that Eboo mentions, or is it something new?
- Eboo and Simran describe our current discursive culture as one that rewards problematization more than finding solutions. Do you agree with their analysis? Can you think of an instance in recent years where a solution was discussed as much as its corresponding problem?