

## Hajom Kissor Singh and the Khasi Unitarians

By Margaret Barr, adapted

Margaret Barr was a British Unitarian who spent 37 years working with the Khasi Unitarians on many different religious and educational projects. This is taken from something she wrote about the founder of Khasi Unitarianism in 1943.

The story of how the Khasi, Hajom Kissor Singh, became a Unitarian and founded the Khasi Unitarian Church should have an honored place in the larger story of religion.

Growing up in the 1860s and 1870s, Singh became unhappy with the teachings of the Welsh Calvinist Mission Church. He did not believe that people were chosen by God because they belonged to a certain church and said a certain creed. He felt that message went against the teachings of Jesus as he read them for himself in the Bible.

He also felt that this message was based on fear and would not help his people. The Khasi people had enough fears already: traditional tribal beliefs about evil spirits could be very frightening. Singh believed that the power that would save people from their fears was in the teaching and example of Jesus: the message of God's love and of overcoming evil with good.

Singh tried to convince his fellow Christians that the important part of Christianity was to be found in Jesus' way of life. But he failed, and so he decided to break away from the Mission Church and start a new religion based on Jesus' teachings. The foundation of his new religion was: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God...and love thy neighbor as thyself."

This message runs like a golden thread through the hymn and service book which Singh wrote for his followers, and through everything that he taught them: love for God, the universal Parent, and love for our fellow human beings. He taught that personal spiritual experience was important and that the outcome of that experience should be a life of active goodness. This is what he understood by religion, and on this strong foundation he built his church.

Having started on this lonely adventure, he made an unexpected and thrilling discovery. He was put in touch with Rev. Charles Dall, a British minister then living in Calcutta. From Reverend Dall Singh received many Unitarian books and pamphlets, including a copy of William Ellery Channing's sermons.

This was another turning point for Hajom Kissor Singh. He discovered that he was not, as he had thought, alone in the world, but that other people, people with far more education and knowledge than himself, had the same faith. Many of these people both in America and England called themselves Unitarian, so he also took that name, and to this day the church that he founded has been the Khasi Unitarian Church.