

# The Sikh Wedding Ceremony

## Welcome to the Gurdwara

The Sikh's place of worship. The term *Gurdwara* literally means "the door to the Guru". It is a place where the *Guru Granth Sahib* (our 'holy Scripture') is present. It is open to every one regardless of age, sex, caste, or creed and is the centre for congregational worship of Sikhism. It also plays a socio-economic role in the Sikh community; attached to every Gurdwara is a free kitchen where *Langar* is prepared and served.

## Gurdwara Etiquette

Before entering the hall

- ◆ Take off your shoes
- ◆ Cover your head
- ◆ Think of God

Upon entering the hall (where the *Guru Granth Sahib* is present)

- ◆ Fold both your hands and walk slowly.
- ◆ Bow humbly and touch your forehead to the ground to show obedience and respect for the *Guru Granth Sahib*.
- ◆ As you bow, place your offering respectfully before the Guru, it may be money, a flower, or a word of thanks. Any sincere expression of gratitude is equally acceptable.
- ◆ After bowing and offering, sit in the 'Sangat' (the congregation) quietly without disturbing others.
- ◆ Usually men sit on one side and women on the other side.
- ◆ Sit comfortably and peacefully, the cross legged position is commonly used, but do not point your feet in the direction of the *Guru Granth Sahib*.
- ◆ Do not talk.

*"The four steps in the development of a life of Love are Awe, Love, Restraint and Harmony"*

*They are not to be called husband and wife who only sit together; rather they are husband and wife who have one spirit in two bodies.*

p.788 Guru Granth Sahib

## The Sikh Wedding

The marriage ceremony is known as *Anand Karaj*, "Blissful occasion"

The usual sequence of events during the wedding ceremony (service) in the

Gurdwara is:

*Arrival of Barat:* The groom and his family and friends are greeted upon their arrival at the Gurdwara by the Bride's family and friends.

*Milni:* Close family members of both parties greet each other usually with a Hug and the Sikh Greeting: "Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa, Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh" also "Bole so-nehaal - Sat Sri Akaal"

After tea all the guests will assemble in the main Gurdwara hall.

*Kirtan:* Hymns (all from the *Guru Granth Sahib*) will be sung in the congregation.

Once the Bride arrives in the hall, both, Bride and Groom will be seated in front of the *Guru Granth Sahib*.

*Ardas:* The Bride, Groom and their parents will stand and a prayer - supplication is said, asking

God Almighty for blessings for the forthcoming ceremony.

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12 Sussex Place, London W2 2TP UK  
Tel: +44 (0)705 064 8307  
Email: [fauj@sikhspirit.com](mailto:fauj@sikhspirit.com)  
Web: [www.fauj.org](http://www.fauj.org) [www.sikhspirit.com](http://www.sikhspirit.com)



### The Ceremony

*Laavan:* This is the hymn that is read during the marriage ceremony. It describes marriage as a rite of passage into higher and higher circles of existence. In Sikhism marriage is both literal (the union of 2 people) and also metaphorical (the union of the individual with God). In Sikh belief it should be the Goal of every Sikh to attain God or Self Realisation and this is often described as merging with God, *Mukti*, or Salvation. The marriage vows are therefore a commitment of both partners to travel the path together as One.

*The Vows:* The Laavan hymn has 4 verses explaining the four steps in the development of a life of Love. These are Awe, Love, Restraint and Harmony. (The hymn is found on page 773-4 of Sri Guru Granth Sahib). *Laav* means “the activity/process of breaking away.” At the time of marriage the individual breaks some old bonds and forges a new bond with his/her partner. On a spiritual level old bonds have to be broken before union with the divine.

The first verse is read out, the couple will then bow in front of the Guru Granth Sahib to accept the vow and then stand and walk slowly around the Guru Granth Sahib while the verse is sung by the Raagis (religious singers). The couple will return to their places and bow once more.

*The first verse* is a resolution to act *rightfully*. A successful marriage is built on the partners understanding their duty to each other, their families and community. The hymn then tells that

Remembering God, the True Guru, all our misdeeds are dispelled and Bliss is attained. “Everything happens through the blessings of the Creator”... “this is the first stage of breaking away from old norms, and consequent union with the spouse, and the divine.”

After each verse is read the couple will circle around the Guru Granth Sahib and it is on the final circle that the couple are said to be wed.

*The second verse* describes a higher state wherein the Ultimate Reality (God) is recognised. We sacrifice our whole being, a personal bond with the Creator (and Spouse) is formed.

*In the third verse* the Guru declares that the feeling of unquenchable love wells up so that any separation from the divine, or our spouse, renders us incomplete.

*The fourth verse* states that the mind is balanced and divine sweetness begins to pervade the entire self. In the case of marriage, we attain blissful union because we comprehend our spouse, as if the two minds have become one. The Guru proclaims that in the fourth stage one attains imperishable union with the immortal Creator.

*Conclusion:* The Raagis will then sing the Anand Sahib (*Hymn of Bliss*). Finally the entire congregation will stand for the Ardas, prayer. This is followed by the Hukam (*order of the day*) which is a passage read at random from the Guru Granth Sahib. Finally Prasad (*sweet pudding*) is distributed to the congregation. This will conclude the religious part of the wedding.

## The Sikh Way of Life - Gurmata (the Path of light)

Sikhism is a modern progressive religion well ahead of its time when it was founded by Guru Nanak Dev Ji about 500 years ago.

There were 9 succeeding Gurus, until the final Guru, Guru Gobind Singh Ji bestowed the Guruship upon Sri Guru Granth Sahib and the Guru Khalsa Panth (the brother/sisterhood of the Sikhs). The Guru Granth Sahib is unique among religious scriptures as it was written by the Prophets of the religion during their lifetimes. Writings of enlightened persons of other religions are also included in the Guru Granth

Sahib. It is the Shabad (or holy Word) that is the spiritual Guru (teacher) of the Sikhs.

**Truth is High, but higher  
still is Truthful living  
Guru Granth Sahib**

The basic Sikh belief is that:

There is One Universal Creative Force (God). God can be attained by all - no matter their sex, social status or well being. Sikhs Worship and Pray to the One Almighty Lord and none other.

The way to Realise God is to lead a Truthful Life. A Truthful Life is made up of Remembrance of God, Honest Hard Work, Sharing your Wealth and Helping Others.