



Yatra Information

Gurdwara & Temple Protocol

We will be visiting many Sikh Gurdwaras and Temples along the way. So I am including excerpts from Bibiji's Protocol book of how to conduct one's self in a Gurdwara, if you would like to familiarize yourself with it, especially those of you going on to Amritsar after the Hemkunt Trek. These modes of conduct would also apply for any sacred space or temple in India.

Gurdwara means "The Door to the Guru," or "The Guru's Gate."

When we enter Gurdwara, we are in the actual Presence of our living Guru, the Siri Guru Granth Sahib. Siri Guru Granth Sahib is the embodiment of the Word, the Shabads, and contains the Songs of worship and prayer of the Gurus. Guru Nanak, the first of the Sikh Gurus, received the Guruship from the Word of God, and transmitted It to all mankind. The Mantle of Guruship passed through ten bodies, until Guru Gobind Singh, the Tenth Master, compiled these sacred teachings into their present form, and gave the Guruship back to the Word of God, where it now resides, and will for all time.

When we enter the Presence of the Guru, we do so with ultimate respect and humility. All that we think and say and do in the Presence of the Guru should reflect this attitude of gratitude and humility.

The key to all behavior in Gurdwara is grace. Whatever you do, maintain your grace. Gurdwara is a group meditation – please respect the devotion and the love of the other members of the Sadh Sangat, the Company of the Holy. They are in Gurdwara to experience the Guru, to receive His Blessing, and grow in consciousness.

Preparing Yourself for Gurdwara

Prepare yourself for Gurdwara just as you would if you were going to meet Guru Ram Das, or Guru Gobind Singh in person. Prepare yourself mentally – center your mind in meditation, let go of your mental distractions, and prepare to receive Guru's Blessing. In addition to mental preparations, there are details of physical preparation to attend to:

WASHING: Before entering Gurdwara, one should have bathed or showered within the past twenty-four hours; hands and feet should be freshly washed. Most Gurdwaras have sinks at the entrance for hand and feet washing. Many other Gurdwaras customarily set out wash basins at the door for washing hands and feet. There should be separate washing areas for hands and feet. Obviously, to wash one's feet, socks and stockings must be removed. The injunction prohibiting shoes while in Gurdwara is taken by many Sikhs to include the removal of socks and stockings. This makes a great deal of sense for two reasons: for cleanliness, and for the nerve endings, as described in the next section.

SHOES: Shoes are always removed before entering Gurdwara. This serves two

purposes: first, it keeps the Gurdwara floor clean, and second, it allows the 72,000 nerve endings in the feet to receive energy unimpeded. To further facilitate this, it is advisable for one to enter Gurdwara barefoot, without socks or stockings obscuring the feet.

CLOTHES: It is traditional to enter the Guru's Court in one's finest clothes. Guru Gobind Singh gave us bana or uniform, as a means of elevating our consciousness, and it is appropriate for us to wear full bana when entering Gurdwara, if this is possible. Kurta, churidaars and cummerbund are traditional. If one is dressed for work, it is appropriate to come to Gurdwara in clean work clothes.

HEAD COVERING: It is mandatory for one's head to be covered in the Gurdwara. There are no exceptions to this. A full turban for men and a turban draped with a chuni for women are most appropriate. It is also permissible to wear house turbans or work turbans, and a chuni is not required. Visitors to Gurdwara who do not normally wear turbans may cover their heads with any full head covering.

THE DUST OF THE HOLY: Many Sikhs, upon entering Gurdwara, bend over and touch the dust left by the feet of other Sikhs as they have entered the Gurdwara. They apply this dust to their foreheads, to remind themselves of the selfless sacrifice and humility needed to live the Guru's Teachings. This should not become an empty ritual.

DO NOT BRING INTO GURDWARA or any other sacred space tobacco, alcohol or intoxicants of any kind. Anyone refusing to comply with this directive should be prevented from entering the Guru's Presence. This also applies to any person who is visibly intoxicated.

BOWING TO THE GURU: One's first act in Gurdwara is to bow to the Guru. Approach the Guru gracefully and consciously, and wait until anyone ahead of you has completed his or her salutation and offering. It is an effective centering technique to press one's palms together, while keeping the breath long and deep. When we bow, we bring our foreheads to the ground at the Feet of the Guru. It is not enough to touch the turban or the nose – the meridian at the third eye must touch the ground. The blessing of being able to bow to the Guru, the Word of God, is something which comes only by blessed destiny. When we touch our forehead to the ground at the Feet of the Guru, our destiny is activated.

Once Guru Gobind Singh was asked by a Sikh how it was that He could change a person's destiny, if it had been pre-ordained by God from the very beginning of time. The Guru showed him a ring, which had a design imprinted upon it. It was used to seal certain documents. He showed the Sikh that the ring had the design backwards, so that when it was pressed onto the hot wax, the design was set correctly. The Guru explained that one's destiny is written upon one's forehead, but it is latent, waiting to be activated; this is what occurs when one bows and touches one's forehead at Guru's Feet. It is our great blessing to have this opportunity.

The Siri Singh Sahib Yogi Bhajan once said, "...a man who doesn't have an altar where he can bow his forehead, that human cannot have any other technology to change the

destiny written on the forehead."

OFFERING: We bring an offering and place it at the Feet of the Guru. Just as we offer ourselves spiritually, we bring a material offering to complete the exchange of energy. This offering is for our own benefit. The Guru needs nothing; we need to offer something which we have gained from the material world, so that we may participate and support the activities of the Sadh Sangat. Such offerings may be monetary, or materials used in the maintenance and beautification of the Gurdwara, or other activities connected with it, such as preparation of Guru-parshad, the Guru-ka-Langar, ramalas, rest houses, free kitchens, etc. As you give so shall you receive. If you have little to offer, even just a flower, offer it with sincerity and the Guru will accept it with equal sincerity. Offerings should be placed gracefully at the Guru's Feet, and not thrown at the Guru.

After making an offering, some Sikhs customarily perform a Parkarmaa, a walk around the Guru. This should always be done in a clockwise direction, approaching the Guru from the left side of Gurdwara, in order to maintain the correct energy flow.

In the Sadh Sangat

The Guru speaks, again and again, of the supreme blessings of the Sadh Sangat, the Company of the Holy, or the Self-Disciplined Saints. Whatever individual limitations we may have, when we bring ourselves to the Guru's Feet, our faults are covered and we are lifted up. Our graceful conduct allows us, as well as others, to experience the group meditation of the Sadh Sangat.

Kirtan

The greater part of most Gurdwara programs is devoted to Kirtan. The entire Sangat is strongly encouraged to join in singing Kirtan.

Gurbani: The Words of Siri Guru Granth Sahib. These Words are expressed in Naad Yoga, the Technology of the Sound Current. When we speak and sing the Words of the Gurus, we may experience the elevation of consciousness which the technology of Naad Yoga induces. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

Other Banis: Banis of the works of Guru Gobind Singh (Dasam Granth). Also poetry of certain Sikhs approved by the Gurus themselves: the Vars of Bhai Gurdas and the poetry of Bhai Nand Lal.

Mantras of Gurbani: A mantra is made up of words which are pure sound current, giving the mind a rhythm and carrying it from duality to Infinity. The entire Siri Guru Granth Sahib is perfect, pure sound current. Certain excerpts of Gurbani are of such power that they have been selected to be sung repetitively as part of Kirtan and in our meditations by the saints and sages through time. Some examples include the Guru Mantra (Wahe Guru), Mul Mantra, the Guru Gaitri Mantra (Gobinday, mukhanday, udharay, uparay, hariung, kariung, nirnamay, akamay), Aad Guray Namaih, Ang Sang Wahe Guru.

Guruprashad

Traditionally, Guruprashad is distributed to the Sadh Sangat at the end of each Gurdwara program or ceremony. It is given to the Sangat after the Hukam is read. It is symbolic of the abundance and sustenance that we receive from the Guru, and that everything coming to us in life is the Guru's gift (prashad) and is therefore sweet. Guruprashad is received with cupped hands, as one is receiving the Guru's blessing.

The Greatest Meditation

by Siri Singh Sahib Bhai Sahib Harbhajan Singh Khalsa Yogiji

"My subject today is "The Greatest Meditation." The greatest meditation is coming to the Guru. There is no meditation which can beat it. There's no technology which can make up for it. There's no grace which can be earned other than this.

But what is this meditation? Procedurally, it's a very simple situation. Coming to the Gurdwara, at the Gate of the Guru, I have seen some people, like myself, who touch the dust of those who have gone before and who leave the dust for those who are to follow. They call it "dil hees." Dil means the heart. Hees comes from the word "haj" —going to a place for the specific purpose of purification. It is the haj of the heart. So, when a person comes and takes the dust from the feet of those who have gone to the Guru, and leaves the dust for those who shall come, it is a continuous, vibratory, elementary, elevated, conscious action.

But what is the meditation? The meditation is not just coming to the Guru. The meditation is like this: Suppose on Sunday we are to come and present ourselves to the Guru. On Saturday, we start preparing for it. That's how it works. Twenty-four hours earlier than the action of infinity, if a person starts thinking cosmically that he has to go and present himself to the Guru, and starts purifying and preparing himself, they call it meditation. "Pooran praan tapaa"—remember this technique of words. Pooran means complete. Praan means praanaa, the life force. Tapaa means the action of purification. It is known as Pooran praan tapaa. It is a kind of meditation.

But in the meditative role, those who want to learn the reality of meditation, not the ritual, don't come to the House of the Guru as a ritual. Don't come. If you come, you will be blessed. That's not my problem. But I would like to share with you what I learned when I was very little: that a person who doesn't have an altar where he can bow his forehead, that human cannot have any other technology to change the destiny written on the forehead. And if a man shall bow to the man, then man shall be influenced by man. This is why the Father of the Khalsa gave the Khalsa the Siri Guru Granth, the Word of God-like men, so that the destiny of the human can be changed and re-written with the word of God-like nature and characteristic."