

Q. What do we understand by the term 'Gurdwara'?

A. Gurdwara is one of the most important institutions of the Sikhs. During his odysseys, wherever Guru Nanak went and established his congregation, he founded a "Dharamsaal". Over time the Dharamsaal evolved into what is now known as a Gurdwara. The meaning of the term 'Gurdwara' is: through Guru or Guru's door, e.g.,

ਗੁਰੂ ਦੁਆਰੈ ਹੋਇ ਸੋਝੀ ਪਾਇਸੀ ॥ SGGS, P. 729.

(One can attain enlightenment through Guru).

Our Gurdwara is a school for students, a spiritual teacher for seekers, a hospital for patients, a refractory for the hungry, a resting place for travelers and above all, an impenetrable fort for the *panth* (the Sikh nation).

The sentence recited in our daily supplication, "those who gave sacrifices for the service of Gurdwaras, ----- remember their deeds and utter O Khalsa, Waheguru (glory to God)", clearly indicates the great regard and respect the Sikhs hold for the sanctity of Gurdwaras. This ultimate regard is further substantiated by the following stanza that has been added in our daily Ardas (supplication), after the partition of India, when many historic Gurdwaras went into the newly formed country now known as Pakistan. The new sentence is: O ever kind and benevolent Father, please grant the boon to your Khalsa for unrestricted pilgrimage and care of Sri Nanakana Sahib and other Gurdwaras that have been separated from the Panth (due to the partition of the country).

Gurdwara is an essential part of the life of a Sikh. According to Guru Amar Das, the third Master:

ਗੁਰਦੁਆਰੈ ਲਾਇ ਭਾਵਨੀ ਇਕਨਾ ਦਸਵਾ ਦੁਆਰੁ ਦਿਖਾਇਆ ॥ SGGS, P. 922.

(The tenth door is revealed to those who have devotion to the Master's guidance).

According to Rehat Naamas (Sikh code of conduct), whenever one is feeling melancholy and is in low spirits, one should go to the Gurdwara. In a Gurdwara, Sri Guru Granth Sahib must be opened everyday and stay open as long as devotees are coming. At night the Guru Granth Sahib should be closed and placed in its resting room. Only in the case of an 'Akhand Paath' (the non-stop recitation), should it remain open for 48 - 50 hours.

To clasp the legs of the bed of Guru Granth Sahib, to rub noses against the walls or pillars of the Gurdwara, to keep water under the resting throne, to keep idols in the Gurdwara, to bow before the pictures of the Gurus or any other Sant are considered self-directed practices and are prohibited according to the Sikh code of conduct.

There is no restriction for any one to enter a Gurdwara, irrespective of his/her caste, color, creed, race or country. But he/she should not possess tobacco or any other intoxicants, should cover their head and take off their shoes. To sit on a raised cushion, chair, cot, pedestal, throne etc. in the presence of Guru Granth Sahib is prohibited. Sitting bareheaded or wear a veil on one's face is contrary to the teachings of Sikhism.

Every Gurdwara should have the Sikh banner (unfurled triangular *kesri Nishaan Sahib*) and a drum, which should be beaten at appropriate times.

One should remember that during *keertan* (hymn singing) using poetical compositions other than Gurbani are improper. Only the hymns from the scriptures should be used as the basis of the *keertan*. At a time only one activity should be followed. For example, if a non-stop recitation of Guru Granth Sahib is in progress, then the *keertan* should not be sung.

Rehat Nama of Bhai Chaupa Singh describes the attributes of a Granthi (the care taker of the Gurdwara). According to him, a Granthi should be humble, free from greed, generous, truthful, compassionate, loving, patient, hospitable, clean, fond of doing service to Guru and Sikhs, strict observer of Sikh code of conduct, alert, observer of fidelity to his/her spouse and should take care of travelers who come to the Gurdwara.

According to Bhai Desa Singh, a Sikh who wishes to be a Granthi should not crave for excessive offerings. He/she should use whatever is necessary for living and should distribute the remaining (to the needy).