

Anand Karaj - to be read at weddings (after Laavan)

Vaheguru Ji Ka Khalsa, Vaheguru Ji Ki Fateh!

It's wonderful to see you all here today. We're all blessed to be here and to celebrate the **Anand Karaj (meaning Blissful Union)** between: **SINGH & KAUR** - two souls who are joined in a spiritual union blessed by Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji.

Let's just reflect on the ANAND KARAJ so we can have a better understanding of what we've just witnessed.

You're probably wondering why the couple are **not facing each other**, something which is common in other faiths. Here, the couple sit side by side **facing Guru Sahib**. This is because the Guru is most important in a Sikh's life, at all times. In other faiths, the weddings are conducted by a preacher, but for a Sikh, the Guru Himself graciously undertakes the union. Similarly, it is by the Guru's blessings that a Sikh merges with Vaheguru - which we will see, is **actually what the Anand Karaj is all about**.

During the Anand Karaj you will have seen the couple walked around Guru Sahib **FOUR times. Each encirclement is called a Laav, Laav literally translates to "go around"**. By walking around the Guru, the Sikhs are acknowledging that the Guru is the centre of their lives. Just as the Earth goes around the sun, the giver of all life, a Sikh walks around the Guru, the true giver of all gifts. The **FOUR Laavan** collectively represent the 4 spiritual stages of awakening, the 4 spiritual stages which we go through in merging with Vaheguru (God) and let's just briefly explore these together.

In the first Laav, Guru Sahib educates us about the importance of righteous actions.

Guru Sahib explains to us that the first step towards spiritual awakening is through performing good deeds, which then leads on to meditating on God's name, **Vaheguru**. Through meditating, a sweetness begins to develop in your mind. **This is called Simran**, to meditate on the Creator's Name. Guru Sahib tells us this is the highest of all actions: the most righteous - we will come back to this in a moment.

In the second Laav, Guru Sahib talks to us about having fear of the fearless Creator.

In this second stage of spiritual awakening, the Sikh continues to sing the praises of **Nirankaar**, the formless Vaheguru. **This is called Kirtan** - which literally translates to: "that love!" With fear of Vaheguru in mind, and singing of the Guru's Verses, a wonderful thing happens - the ego starts to fall away. It is our ego that keeps us separate from Vaheguru. As our ego is broken down, through chanting the Name Vaheguru, we are moving ever forward and progressing spiritually towards that union with Guru Sahib and Vaheguru.

In the third Laav, Guru Sahib talks about the beautiful spiritual state of "Bairag", meaning "without love" for the material world; when one has a longing to be with Vaheguru instead. In this state, the Sikh has found Vaheguru, and is in love with only the True Giver, leaving all other desires behind. Having reached this third stage, the Sikh has little need for worldly pleasures, as these cannot quench the thirst that exists to merge with and experience Vaheguru. Guru Sahib tells us many times that true happiness and contentment is found by undertaking an INWARD journey of discovery, instead of searching for happiness OUTSIDE. We can look inwards through meditation and selfless service. In this third Laav, Guru Sahib also talks about having found saintly company. This is called Sangat. Guru Sahib often talks of the importance and value of being in the company of the Sangat, which is why it is so wonderful to see you all here today, and why coming to the Gurdwara regularly is so important.

In the fourth Laav, the fourth stage of spiritual awakening, Guru Sahib describes the state of being of that Sikh who has become one with Vaheguru. This blissful union occurs with intuitive ease by Guru Sahib's grace, which brings joy and supreme happiness.

Gurbani talks a great deal about the union of the soul with Vaheguru. Guru Sahib refers to us **ALL** as **Soul Brides** and Vaheguru as the **Husband Lord**. Whilst we are here to celebrate the blissful union of the Couple and Guru Sahib; perhaps we should also reflect as individual souls and **consider OUR OWN spiritual journey** and what steps we can take to bring us closer to Guru Sahib and **SPIRITUAL UNION** with Vaheguru.

Considering the first step of spiritual awakening, righteous actions, our first step may be that we start coming to the Gurdwara more often and serving the Sangat. Or our first step may be to begin to do **Simran**, to meditate on the **Gurmantar** which is: **VAHEGURU**. This is the Name of God delivered to us by Guru Nanak, which translates to "**wondrous destroyer of darkness, bringer of light**". Doing Simran, calling out to Vaheguru, as we have heard, is the most important action for a Sikh and is key to spiritual awakening.

Our first step may be to listen to sweet explanations of Gurbani by learned Sikhs, to obtain a deeper understanding of the Guru's teachings. **This is called Katha**. There has never been a time in history where Katha has been more accessible to us all than right now, this very moment. Organisations such as Basics of Sikhi, Sikh2Inspire and Sri Guru Granth Sahib Academy are providing detailed English translations and Katha on YouTube and Soundcloud and the like - making the Guru's message easier for us to engage with. **Let's take this opportunity to experience the bliss of spiritual awakening.**

We are now going to take a moment to meditate on the Gurmantar, "**Vaheguru**" 5 times together, as Sangat before Guru Sahib. I humbly suggest that we all place our focus on Guru Sahib, and focus on being blessed, that you may take a **positive step**, maybe one which we have just considered, or one personal to you, which will bring you closer to Guru Sahib, to experience your own blissful union.

VAHEGURU ... VAHEGURU ... VAHEGURU ... VAHEGURU ... VAHEGURU

If this message speaks to you and you would like to discuss your own spiritual journey, or would like some advice about how to get closer to Guru Sahib, there are volunteers here today who will be outside the Darbar for some time after the **Ardaas**. Please do come and have a chat, so we can support each other. If I have made any mistakes, please forgive my shortcomings. Guru Sahib has blessed us with an understanding of the steps to become One with Vaheguru: may we all be blessed to take these steps and experience **ANAND KARAJ**, the blissful union as **SOUL BRIDES WITH OUR HUSBAND LORD, VAHEGURU**.

Finally, it is left for us all to give congratulations to the couple. [LOOKING AT THE COUPLE]: **Of all the gifts you may receive today**, know this: the greatest gifts come from **Guru Sahib** before you. May you be so blessed to receive the Guru's blessings, that you may have **TRUTH, CONTENTMENT, COMPASSION, FAITH** and **COURAGE IN YOUR ACTIONS TOWARDS EACH OTHER** AND FOR THE WHOLE CREATION.