

April 29, 1979

Wahe Guru ji ka Khalsa
Wahe Guru ji ki Fateh

Sadh Sangat ji,

I have been invited to take a few moments this morning to address the sangat -- and especially the English-speaking guests in the sangat -- on one aspect of Sikh religion. At the suggestion of Mr. Piara Singh Bains, whose Bhog we have been celebrating, I have gathered together and hope to share some thoughts on the Ardas, the prayer which comes at the conclusion of the Sikh service.

The word "ardas" itself means "prayer." Its origins lie in the Sanskrit root, "ard", meaning "to ask" or "to beg" and in the Persian word, "arzdast", meaning "a petition or address made by an inferior to a superior."

The Ardas is thus a prayer offered to God by the sangat (or congregation). At the time when the prayer is offered, the congregation stands as a sign of respect and humility, palms together, facing the Holy Scriptures, the Guru Granth Sahib. Any member of the congregation (but usually the granthi) may rightfully come forward to offer the prayer on behalf of the sangat. The atmosphere generally reflects the channeling of the collective energies of the congregation who find expression of their individual prayers in this communal offering of supplication.

The prayer itself is composed of three parts. The first section begins with the words of the Tenth Master, Guru Gobind Singh, taken from his collected writings, the Dasam Granth. In this section, the Sikhs are told to remember God and the ten Gurus. Special mention is made of the boy Guru, Har Krishan (the healer), his successor, Guru Tegh Bahadur (the pious), and the last of the human Gurus, Guru Gobind Singh (the protector).

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The congregation is then told to keep the Guru Granth Sahib, the repository of God's word, as the visible form of the Guru. They are told to remember the faithfulness of other devout Sikhs and are reminded of the many Sikh martyrs who have given their lives in loyalty to the Sikh cause. In this section as well, the congregation is reminded of the central seats of Sikh religious authority. And finally in this section, the Khalsa (or Brotherhood of the Pure) is praised and exhorted to do God's will.

Moving from invocation to supplication, the final section of the Ardas asks God to keep the Khalsa faithful, to bless the whole of mankind, and to heed individual petitions. Particular items may be added to this part of the prayer. For example, the sangat may remember its sick, bereaved, or newly married members or special petitions may be put forth to bless the actions of the Sikh Panth (or community) or to acknowledge recent events in its history.

The significance of the Ardas is thus two-fold. For the individual, it allows for a complete surrender of the self into the collective consciousness of the sangat. And for the sangat as a whole, it reflects a unity with the Sikh Panth which transcends the particulars of time and place.

This last point is especially interesting since it reflects the special Sikh awareness of its historicity. The Ardas does not simply sanctify the events of an earlier Sikh history but as an open-ended prayer it can take into account the fact that Sikhism (the world's youngest major religion) is a dynamic faith with not simply a glorious past but with an active present and future as well.

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