

Gurmat: Some frequently asked Questions

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Scripture for daily recitation: *Nitnem Banis*

Q.1 What are the *nitnem banis*?

A. The *nitnem banis*, adopted by the Sikh Panth, and published by the SGPC in the Sikh Rahit Maryada, are:

Morning: Japji, Jaap Sahib, 10 Swaiyyé (*Srawag Sudh*)

Evening: *So-Dar Rahiras* - nine *shabads* of Guru Granth Sahib (from *So-dar* to *Saran parey ki rakho sarma*); Benaty Chaupai Patshahi 10 (from *Hamri karo hath dey rachha to dusht dokh tey leho bachai*); Swaiyya (*payé gahey jab te tumrey*); *Dohra* (*sagal duar kau chhaad kay*); Anand Sahib (first five *pauris* and the last *pauri*); *Mundhavani* and *Salok M'hla 5* (*tera keeta jato nahi*).

Night: *Sohila*. *Ardaas* must be performed after morning and evening *nitnem*.

Q.2 Who decided *nitnem banis*? Who selected various *shabads* falling under various heads as in *Rahiras* and *Sohila* and who serialised them?

A. *Japji Sahib* has been recited from the time of Guru Nanak who revealed this Seminal *Bani*. *Rahiras* (first 5 *shabads*) and *Kirtan Sohila* were a part of the *nitnem* during the time of Guru Arjun Dev ji who recorded these *banis* along with *Japji* in the beginning of *Sri Adi Granth* compiled by him in 1604 CE.

The last four *shabads* of *Rahiras* were added presumably after Guru Arjun Dev or even during his life time after the compilation of the *Adi Granth*.

Benati Chaupai and *Jaap Sahib* according to tradition were recited at the time of preparation of *Amrit* in 1699, and became a part of the *nitnem*.

Anand Sahib as well as the *Mundhavani* has traditionally been recited to conclude all functions. The practice seems to have come in vogue even before Guru Gobind Singh's time.

In order to answer the questions like the above and those relating to *Rahit Maryada*, the SGPC set up a committee of topmost scholars. They submitted a report which was discussed openly by all the major Sikh organisations as well as individuals. As a result the SGPC published *Rahit Maryada* in 1945 with unanimous approval of the *Panth*, which is currently being followed. Under the doctrine of Guru Granth -Guru Panth, the decision is considered Guru's decision. Thus the regime of *nitnem banis* prescribed above, enjoys the required authority.

Q.3 Why only 5 *pauris* of *Anand Sahib* are included and not whole *Anand Sahib*? Is it not a sacrilege?

A. Inclusion of only 5 *pauris* for *Anand Sahib* is based on purely practical considerations, and does not constitute sacrilege.

Q.4 Out of 5 *banis* in *nitnem*, three of them, (*Jaap Sahib*, *Swaiyya*, *Benati Chaupai*) are attributed to the tenth Nanak (Guru Gobind Singh). He did not include any of his *banis* in Guru Granth Sahib, to which *gurgaddi* has been given by him. Then why his *banis* have been given so much importance in *nitnem*, that out of 5 *banis* three are his selections?

A. *Jaap Sahib*, *Swaiyya* and *Chaupai* are attributed to Guru Gobind Singh. The Guru decided not to include any of these in Guru Granth Sahib. That did not, however, debar him, or the Guru Panth, to subsequently include a particular *bani* in the *nitnem*. The importance of a Guru's *bani* is not related to/determined by the number of compositions selected for a particular occasion. *Banis* are prescribed on the basis of their inspirational power and relevance to particular occasions.

Moral Discipline or Rahit Maryada:

Q.5 We have *Rahit Maryada* published by SGPC, but who reads it and how many Sikhs are aware of it?

A. The SGPC has been publishing and distributing the document in large numbers. I have a copy before me which was published in 1997, when 22nd edition appeared, with 1,00,000 copies. Subsequently, I have been informed, 6 more editions have come out with 1.5 lakh copies each, so that, upto-date over 12.5 lakh copies have been distributed free, by the Dharam Parchar Committee of the SGPC.

Q.6 Sikhs are ordained to partake of *amrit*, whereas *Gurbani* says "*amrit eko naam hai*" Then, is this initiation ceremony not like the Christian baptism, Muslim circumcision or Hindu *janeu*? How is Sikh ceremony different? Guru ji says "*Manas ki jaat sabhay ekay pehchanbo*".

A. In the verse, *amrit eko naam hai*, the word *amrit* has been used in spiritual sense, meaning something that bestows eternal life. In that sense *naam* is indeed *amrit* for the soul. This verse was actualized in Guru Gobind Singh's time when the Khalsa was created and a ceremony for initiation prescribed. This ceremony was also termed *amrit ceremony*. There is no contradiction involved. Khalsa is committed to *manas ki jaat sabhay ekay pehchanbo*. The *amrit* ceremony is a pledge as a member of the Khalsa order to live a life of virtue, service to mankind and sacrifice in the divine cause. The fact that Christians and Muslims have their initiation ceremonies does not obviate the need for *amrit* ceremony of Sikhs.

Spirit of Guruship

Q.7 Is it true that after 3rd Guru (Guru Amar Das) all successor Gurus belonged to one and the same family? Is it not then like any trust or *math* of hereditary priestly class?

A. All successor Gurus, after Guru Amar Das, *happened* to be related to/descendents of previous Guru. However, the conclusion that it is "like any cult or *math* of Hindu's priestly class where chief Mahantship goes from father to son" is untenable, because:

(a) This assertion is factually incorrect. Guru Amar Das ignored both his sons, and selected Guru Ram Das, his son-in-law. Guru Ram Das ignored his two elder sons, Prithi Chand and Mahadev, and selected the youngest son. Guru Hargobind selected his grandson, ignoring his sons. Guru Harkrishan selected his grandfather's brother, ignoring his own brother who even laid his claim to *guruship*.

(b) The Gurus selected their successors on the basis of merit alone. That, however, did not debar those connected with Guru's family. Birth in Guru's family cannot be considered, a disqualification for succession to *guruship*.

(c) Sikhs are not supposed to question the Guru's selection. However, from study of history of the period, can anybody point out a more deserving candidate who was ignored?

(d) The achievement of the successors, the excellence of spiritual and temporal leadership provided, the unparalleled sacrifices made by them, and as a result of all that, the creation of the Khalsa, confirm the soundness and perfection of the Guru's judgement.

(e) The Gurus never wanted to perpetuate the *guruship* in their family. This is clear from the historical fact that Guru Gobind Singh passed on the Guruship to the Khalsa, while his sons were alive.

Q8. There were internal family feuds/fights to capture *gurgaddi* because of financial offerings (which increased year after year) and status symbol, but still *gurgaddi* continued in family?

A. There were certainly feuds/fights sometimes in the family. But the *gurgaddi* never went to those who resorted to such means to capture it, showing again that only merit decided succession.

Egalitarianism & Caste:

Q9. Sikhs preach casteless society, but how come all Gurus married their sons/daughters in high caste (*khatri*) and none joined low-castes in marriage?

A. The Gurus preached and practised a casteless society. This means that they did not consider any caste superior or inferior to others. It would be ridiculous, however, to demonstrate this through marriage. It must also be borne in mind that marriage has a social and temporal dimension, besides spiritual union. It is a function of social cultural values which determine the success of an 'arranged' marriage, which was in vogue at that time. As per the prevailing practice, offer for marriage came only from one's own caste. We are not aware of any instance in history when the Gurus *rejected* an offer from other castes.

