

Simran as silent Prayer

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NAAM-SIMRAN IN ONE SENSE is to invoke peace in prayer. As such, *simran* is a meditative prayer wherein God's name is repeated lovingly in short phrases. *Simran* is potentially a transcending *mantra* that serves to direct our thoughts - better, our energies - towards God while lucidity interposes imperceptibly between the recesses of our minds.

Invocation: "Wahe Guru, Wahe Guru, Wahe Guru Ji / Sat Naam, Sat Naam, Sat Naam Ji" is prelude to *Naam-simran*, the recitation of God's name. This particular verse is customarily sung from the moment the *vaak* - a reading from the Guru Granth Sahib - has concluded, to the moment the holy *bir* is ceremoniously for repose. Although *simran* may be intended for internal practice the community aspect in this instance, where the entire *sangat* - the congregation - repeats the above *mantra* in unison for five minutes, is itself an edifying experience. And if this does not adequately constitute spiritual sustenance then perhaps we can say it engenders a sense of harmony.

As one sits among the *sangat*, it ostensibly makes no difference whether one is an amritdhari, sehajdhari, or even a Sikh. All that should matter is one's commitment to *simran*, be it during *kirtan*, *ardas* or *vaak*, all these being potentialities for transcendence. In joining the *sangat*, the Sikh practice demands, in fact, two commitments, the first being *simran*; the second is *seva* - voluntary work in the service of the *sangat*, *pangat* and the Guru. *Seva* is evident and ever-present though often partaken by only the few, whereas *simran* is internal and could pass unnoticed. *Seva* is for community, composing a model for societal ideals.

Integrating: *Simran* is personal, prefiguring a foundation by which one might relate to God. Of course, Sikhism is comprised of ideals, the practice of which is very simple, simple enough that it is often forgotten, or taken for granted, so simple in fact that they might be misconstrued as not religious. The pieties inherent to *seva* may suffer now from such evolutionary missteps. *Simran*, however, even if misunderstood, has not been displaced. Nominally, it remains the crux of the Sikh religion, faint yet ineradicable. The lucidity of *simran* is gently superceded as mind's prevailing thoughts emerge from their sabbatical to contend with real life. The sociable linger in the hall and talk with friends in small clusters. The politicians sitting in a wide circle on the carpet hold brief, oftentimes vociferous, meetings in a corner. The pious, exit the room slowly; they socialize minimally, assist in serving the food, and enjoy modest portions of langar, their consciousness possibly still ensconced in *simran* by the time they weave their way to their cars through a parking lot of luxury cars and - most precious of all - pent-up children.

Faith: Where there is piety there must also be reverence. That which they revere is also that to which they pray. Into their prayers they sneak their pleas. They have faith that these shall be heard; they have faith that it is not a vice to hope. Some come from a hundred miles away every Sunday so their pleas might be better heard and better serviced. There are those who would call it an act of primitive religiosity to make pleas to God, to importune God to make their lives better than they presently are because, what they presently are, is likely good enough. And the pleas do come,

to be sure, in antithetical tandems – some demure, some importunate; some large, some small; some material, some spiritual; some selfish, some selfless. Typically, however, people do not make their pleas during *simran*. Because they shouldn't. It is not that sort of prayer.

Humility: In *simran*, God is revered. God's name is God's praise. God's name is a portal, a vessel, its repetition an act of humility. Where we do not plea we are closer to God. Where we come as someone laid bare, we are closer to God. *Simran* confers peace upon our minds. Horizons are superceded: we are closer to our Self. *Simran* inspires proximity to God. Yet, we can not hope for this nor do we plea for this. Faith, the solvent, our minds dissolve fractionally toward a beatitude stripped of description. We detach. From everything: our words, our places, our wants, everything to which we have been bound. *Simran* is a spiritual conduit made nearly unnavigable, some might say, by our own disruptive thoughts, reveries, and pleas – aspects of *maya* - all of which impede the way to our *atman*.

Simran is also a conduit which grants - not destination but - proximity not to godliness but to God, His farthest reaches not an abstract cosmology but the ether of the deepest recesses of our souls, our Selves – *atman*. With this, if we can attain it, we must be content. What propels us through nothingness where one need not ascend nor transcend when that which propels is the same that disrupts is our submission to nothingness, obedience to the Law - *Hukam* we cannot comprehend.

In *simran*, there is no propulsion toward proximity. Divested of hope and effort, we sedate our thoughts, coax our mind to its barest essence, and discover a less tenable truth: that we are proximate, that *atman* is the intersection of Self and God, and that this resides latently inside us, virgin and inchoate. God is not our likeness but that which binds the interiors of all our likenesses and unlikenesses alike. We endeavor to discover this - and seldom do.

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