

RajUppal Anand Karaj

The Sikh Wedding Ceremony

On June 2nd, Raj and Aran will have a Sikh wedding ceremony, called an *Anand Kaaraj* (meaning 'blissful union') at the [Guru Nanak Sikh Temple in Wolverhampton](#).

Sections:

The concept of marriage in Sikhi

On the day: Milni

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On the day: Laavan

On the day: After the Laavan

If you haven't been to a Sikh wedding before

The concept of marriage in Sikhi

The ultimate aim as a Sikh is to connect to God (often referred to as 'the One') via the teachings of the Guru. The separation of our soul in this life from the supreme-soul of the One is as temporary as a wave emerging from a body of water. Through divine love, we can reunite the light of our soul with the light of the One.

ਭਈ ਧਰਾਧਤਿ ਮਾਨੁਖ ਦ੍ਰੋਹੀਯਾ ॥

Bhee Paraapath Maanukh Dhaehureeaa

This human body has been given to you,

ਗੋਬਿੰਦ ਮਿਲਣ ਦੀ ਟਿਹੁ ਤੇਰੀ ਬਰੀਯਾ ॥

Gobindh Milan Kee Eih Thaeree Bareeaa

(And so) this is your chance to meet the Lord of the Universe. (Guru Granth Sahib, Ang 12)

ਜਲ ਤਰੰਗੁ ਜਿਉ ਜਲਹਿ ਸਮਾਇਯਾ ॥

Jal Tharang Jio Jalehi Samaaeiaa

As the waves of water merge again with the water,

ਤਿਉ ਜੇਤੀ ਸੰਗਿ ਜੋਤਿ ਮਿਲਾਇਯਾ ॥

Thio Jothee Sang Joth Milaeiaa

So does my light merge again into the Light. (Guru Granth Sahib, Ang 102)

The meeting of an individual with the Divine is repeatedly referred in Sikh scripture as marriage. There are many hymns in the Guru Granth Sahib which reference marriage. The vast majority refer to this marriage with God rather than between two individuals (beware overly literal English translations!). They use the metaphor of a soul-bride longing for her beloved King (common in South Asian literature at the time) to illustrate this.

According to *Gurmat* (literally 'Guru's mind' i.e. Sikh philosophy) the life of a married householder integrated into society for this mission is recommended. From the first lines of

Guru Granth Sahib, the Guru says that one doesn't need to become an ascetic and withdraw from society to achieve connection with God. For Sikhs, spiritual and worldly power go hand in hand; you cannot serve society by detaching yourself from it. However, marriage is not compulsory, and there have been revered Sikhs (both male and female) who remained unmarried.

Marriage serves many purposes in law, politics, and society. The significance of the *Anand Karaj* – the Sikh wedding ceremony - is not just worldly, but also divine. The *Anand Karaj* is between three parties – the bride, the groom, and the Guru. It is the commitment by both the bride and groom to merge their souls in the pursuit of ultimate unification with the One.

ਧਨ ਪਿਰੁ ਏਹਿ ਨ ਆਖੀਯਾਨਿ ਬਹਨਿ ਏਕਠੇ ਹੋਇ ॥

Dhhan Pir Eaehi N Aakheean Behan Eikathae Hoe ||

They are not said to be husband and wife, who merely sit together.

ਏਕ ਜੋਤਿ ਦੁਇ ਖੁਰਤੀ ਧਨ ਪਿਰੁ ਰਹੀਯੈ ਸੋਇ ॥੩॥

Eaek Joth Dhue Moorathee Dhhan Pir Keheei Soe || 3 ||

They alone are called husband and wife, who have one light in two bodies. || 3 ||

(Guru Granth Sahib Ji, Ang 788)

Thus, the *Anand Karaj* is best understood as a marriage leading to an ultimate marriage with the One itself. The *Anand Karaj* itself contains a mixture of *shabads* which reference both types of marriage. The *Laavan* – the main wedding hymns – were composed by the fourth Guru specifically for the purpose of marrying two individuals. But at various points the ceremony also includes *shabads* (hymns) referring to the marriage between us and the One, reminding us of the ultimate purpose.

On the day

Milni

The first event of the day will be following the arrival of Aran and Raj's families at the Gurdwara. The bride and groom's side arrive separately at the Gurdwara in the morning. Either outside or in the foyer, they will conduct the *Milni* – where Raj and Aran's families are formally introduced to each other.

The families will form a circle and one by one, equivalent relatives on the bride and groom's side will approach each other in the middle to exchange garlands. Raj's father will meet Aran's father, followed by other relatives from both sides.

Nowadays, the families have met each other before the wedding day. But traditionally, this would have been the first occasion that the extended families would have met each other. Marriage in South Asian cultures is as much a union between two families as it is between two individuals.

The *Milni* includes an *Ardaas* – a type of Sikh prayer requiring the congregation to be standing. This is a request to the One for the marriage to take place.

After the *Milni*, breakfast will be served in the langar hall. Afterwards, attendees start making their way to the *Darbar* (literally ‘Court of the Guru’) where the marriage ceremony will take place.

In the Darbar

Aran will be sat in the *Darbar* before Raj enters. As guests come in to *matha tek* (bow to Guru Granth Sahib Ji), *Kirtan* (devotional hymns) will be sung by the trio of Gurdwara musicians and singers.

Raj will then enter the *Darbar* with her family. She will sit to the left of Aran at the front of the aisle, directly in front of the Guru Granth Sahib.

Then the following *shabad* will be sung:

ਰੀਤਾ ਲੋੜੀਐ ਕੰਮੁ ਸੁ ਹਰਿ ਯਹਿ ਆਖੀਐ ॥

Keethaa Lorreeai Kanm So Har Pehi Aakheeai ||

Whatever work you wish to accomplish-tell it to the Lord.

ਕਾਰਜੁ ਦੇਇ ਸਵਾਰਿ ਸਤਿਗੁਰੁ ਸਚੁ ਸਾਖੀਐ ॥

Kaaraj Dhaee Savaar Sathigur Sach Saakheeai ||

They will resolve your affairs; the True Guru gives Their Guarantee of Truth.

(Guru Granth Sahib, Ang 91)

Through this *shabad*, the congregation is coming together in humility to seek permission from the One for the wedding to happen.

Then there will be an *Ardaas* for Raj, Aran and their parents only. The rest of the congregation will remain seated in silence as permission is sought for the *Anand Karaj* to formally begin.

Following the *Ardaas*, Raj’s father will approach Aran. Aran will be wearing a sash (called a *palla*) over his shoulder, which Raj’s father will take from his lap and place into Raj’s hands. This signifies Raj leaving her family and the joining of the couple in preparation for the instructions of the *Laavan*.

As the *palla* is being handed over the following *shabad* (hymn) will be sung:

ਉਸਤਤਿ ਨਿੰਦਾ ਨਾਨਕ ਜੀ ਮੈ ਗੁਭ ਵਫਾਈ ਛੋੜਿਆ ਗੁਰੂ ਰਿਝੁ ਤਿਆਗੀ ॥

Ustat ninda Nanak Ji, Mai hab vañiee hab kijn tiaagi

I have totally discarded praise and slander, O Nanak; I have forsaken and abandoned everything.

ਗੁਭੇ ਮਾਰ ਬੁਝਾਵੇ ਡਿਠੇ ਤਉ ਧਲੈ ਤੈਭੈ ਲਾਗੀ ॥੧॥

Habhe saak kurraave dithe, tou pallai taidai laagi

I have seen that all relationships are false, and so I have grasped hold of the hem of Your robe, Lord. || 1 ||

(Guru Granth Sahib, Ang 963)

This shabad is a reminder that even though two people are joining, ultimately all worldly relationships are false. Together, Raj and Aran will be 'acting out' their own, now collective, desire of grasping the metaphorical hem of the Guru's robe.

ਆਪਿ ਲੀਏ ਲੜਿ ਲਾਇ ਦਰਿ ਦਰਵੇਸ਼ ਸੇ ॥

Aap Leeeae Larr Laae Dhar Dharavaes Sae

Those whom the Lord attaches to the hem of Their robe, they are the true dervishes at Their Door

(Guru Granth Sahib, Ang 488)

Laavan

The Guru Granth Sahib is unique in being organised by music. Before author, chronology, or poetry type, the scripture is divided by *Raag* – an ancient South Asian musical concept akin to melody or mood. Each *raag* signifies a different emotion, and is defined by rules about which notes are to played, and in which order (the concept of *raag* has no Western equivalent).

The wedding verses are called the *Laavan*. They consist of four stanzas. Each stanza will be read from the Guru Granth Sahib, then it will be sung as *Kirtan*. While each stanza is read, Raj and Aran will remain seated, listening. When the stanza is then sung, they will stand up and walk clockwise around the Guru Granth Sahib. This circumambulation signifies their acceptance of the Guru and the teachings they have just heard. Raj will walk behind Aran with the *palla* joining them. Equality between them is symbolised in two ways: just as Aran can lead, by holding the *palla*, Raj can prevent. Thus, any movement (i.e. decision in life) requires the willingness of both. More importantly, in their circumambulation of the Guru Granth Sahib, this way both will be equidistant from the Guru. This would not be the case if they walked side by side. During the *Laavan*, Raj may ask her brothers to stand around the Guru Granth Sahib. This is a cultural practice and is entirely up to the bride if she wants to include them in this way.

This act of both reading the *Laavan* and singing it goes to a central concept of the Sikh faith. Singing the Divine words in the Guru Granth Sahib according to their *raag* awakens the soul and enables the connection to the One itself. Extreme importance is placed on music in Sikhi; the Gurus even invented instruments. Singing the divine praises of the One – as revealed by the Guru – is priceless.

The *Laavan* are found in *Raag Suhi* – the *raag* of adoration. True adoration of God comes when our ego is dispelled. The four stanzas of the *Laavan* are four steps to dispel our ego so that we can experience complete, divine love. By the end of the fourth *Laav* there is nothing but the One, and we feel nothing but divine love and bliss.

First laav

ਸੁਹੀ ਮਹਲਾ ੪ ॥

Soohee Mehalaa 4

Heading: Raag Suhi, revealed by the Fourth Guru

ਹਰਿ ਧਰਿਲੜੀ ਲਾਵ ਧਰਵਿਰਤੀ ਕਰਮ ਦਿਰੜਾਇਯਾ ਬਲਿ ਰਾਮ ਜੀਉ ॥

Har Pehilarree Laav Paravirathee Karam Dhrirraaeiaa Bal Raam Jeeo

In the first round of the marriage ceremony, the Lord sets out His Instructions for performing the daily duties of married life.

ਬਾਣੀ ਬਰਹਮਾ ਵੇਦੁ ਧਰਮੁ ਦਿਰੜੁ ਧਾਧ ਤਜਾਇਯਾ ਬਲਿ ਰਾਮ ਜੀਉ ॥

Baanee Brehamaa Vaedh Dharam Dhrirrahu Paap Thajaaeiaa Bal Raam Jeeo

Instead of the hymns of the Vedas to Brahma, embrace the righteous conduct of Dharma, and renounce sinful actions.

ਧਰਮੁ ਦਿਰੜੁ ਹਰਿ ਨਾਮੁ ਧਿਆਵਹੁ ਸਿਮਰਤਿ ਨਾਮੁ ਦਿਰੜਾਇਯਾ ॥

Dhharam Dhrirrahu Har Naam Dhhaavahu Simrith Naam Dhrirraaeiaa

Meditate on the Lord's Name; embrace and enshrine the contemplative remembrance of the Naam.

ਸਤਿਗੁਰੁ ਗੁਰੁ ਪੂਰਾ ਯਾਰਾਧੁ ਸਭਿ ਕਿਲਵਿਖ ਧਾਧ ਗਵਾਇਯਾ ॥

Sathigur Gur Poora Aaraadhahu Sabh Kilavikh Paap Gavaaeiaa

Worship and adore the Guru, the Perfect True Guru, and all your sins shall be dispelled.

ਸਹਜ ਅਨੰਦੁ ਹੋਯਾ ਵਡਭਾਗੀ ਮਨਿ ਹਰਿ ਹਰਿ ਮੀਠਾ ਲਾਇਯਾ ॥

Sehaj Anandh Hoaa Vaddabhaagee Man Har Har Meethaa Laaeiaa

By great good fortune, celestial bliss is attained, and the Lord, Har, Har, seems sweet to the mind.

ਜਨੁ ਕਹੈ ਨਾਨਕੁ ਲਾਵ ਧਰਿਲੀ ਯਾਰੇਭੁ ਰਾਜੁ ਰਚਾਇਯਾ ॥੧॥

Jan Kehai Naanak Laav Pehilee Aaranbh Kaaj Rachaaeiaa

Servant Nanak proclaims that, in this, the first round of the marriage ceremony, the marriage ceremony has begun. ||1||

The first *Laav* is a spiritual awakening for the bride and groom. It introduces the concepts that should now become the centre of married life: the rejection of other religious systems; striving towards righteousness; meditating on the One; and worshipping the Guru. Through these actions, we become aware of the need to dispel our ego. This *laav* is the stage of becoming aware of divine destiny.

Second laav

ਹਰਿ ਦੂਜੜੀ ਲਾਵ ਸਤਿਗੁਰੁ ਪੁਰਖੁ ਮਿਲਾਇਯਾ ਬਲਿ ਰਾਮ ਜੀਉ ॥

Har Dhoojarree Laav Sathigur Purakh Milaaeiaa Bal Raam Jeeo ||

In the second round of the marriage ceremony, the Lord leads you to meet the True Guru, the Primal Being.

ਨਿਰਭਉ ਭੈ ਮਨੁ ਹੋਇ ਹਉਮੈ ਮੈਲੁ ਗਵਾਇਯਾ ਬਲਿ ਰਾਮ ਜੀਉ ॥

Nirabho Bhai Man Hoe Houmai Mail Gavaaeiaa Bal Raam Jeeo ||

With the Fear of God, the Fearless Lord in the mind, the filth of egotism is eradicated.

ਨਿਰਮਲੁ ਭਉ ਧਾਇਯਾ ਹਰਿ ਗੁਣ ਗਾਇਯਾ ਹਰਿ ਵੇਖੈ ਰਾਮੁ ਹਦੁਰੇ ॥

Niramal Bho Paaeiaa Har Gun Gaaeiaa Har Vaekhai Raam Hadhoorae ||

In the Fear of God, the Immaculate Lord, sing the Glorious Praises of the Lord, and behold the Lord's Presence before you.

ਹਰਿ ਆਤਮ ਰਾਮੁ ਧਰਮਾਇਯਾ ਸੁਆਮੀ ਸਰਬ ਰਹਿਯਾ ਭਰਪੂਰੇ ॥

Har Aatham Raam Pasaariaa Suaamee Sarab Rehiaa Bharapoorae ||

The Lord, the Supreme Soul, is the Lord and Master of the Universe; He is pervading and permeating everywhere, fully filling all spaces.

ਅੰਤਰਿ ਬਾਹਰਿ ਹਰਿ ਧਰੁ ਏਰੇ ਮਿਲਿ ਹਰਿਜਨ ਮੰਗਲ ਗਾਏ ॥

Anthar Baahar Har Prabh Eaeko Mil Har Jan Mangal Gaaeae ||

Deep within, and outside as well, there is only the One Lord God. Meeting together, the humble servants of the Lord sing the songs of joy.

ਜਨ ਨਾਨਕ ਦੂਜੀ ਲਾਵ ਚਲਾਈ ਅਨਹਦ ਸਬਦ ਵਜਾਏ ॥੨॥

Jan Naanak Dhoojee Laav Chalaee Anehadh Sabadh Vajaaeae || 2 ||

Servant Nanak proclaims that, in this, the second round of the marriage ceremony, the unstruck sound current of the Shabad resounds. || 2 ||

Now that the mind has become aware of the One, the second *Laav* takes us to who will deliver us to it: the Guru. Throughout the *Laavan* and the *Guru Granth Sahib* generally, the Guru is referred to as *SatGuru*, which is translated to 'the true Guru'. This translation is unfortunate because it does not distinguish between conditional and unconditional truth. The statement 'I am wearing a red tie' is only true if I'm actually wearing a red tie – its truth is conditional on that fact. The truth of the Guru however is true regardless of everything else: this is *Sat*. *SatGuru* blesses us with *SatNaam* – not just the name of God, but the connection to the One (through meditation and the singing of hymns in *raag*) which is true for all beings and for all times. It is through *SatGuru* we realise how the One pervades all and that the world is ultimately temporary. For our spiritually, this world is only as real as dream. When we realise the futility of outside pursuits, we can connect to the light of the One inside us.

Third laav

ਹਰਿ ਤੀਜੀ ਲਾਵ ਮਨਿ ਚਾਉ ਭਇਯਾ ਬੈਰਾਗੀਯਾ ਬਲਿ ਰਾਮ ਜੀਉ ॥

Har Theejarree Laav Man Chao Bhaeiaa Bairaageeaa Bal Raam Jeeo ||

In the third round of the marriage ceremony, the mind is filled with Divine Love.

ਸੰਤ ਜਨਾ ਹਰਿ ਮੇਲੁ ਹਰਿ ਧਾਇਯਾ ਵਡਭਾਗੀਯਾ ਬਲਿ ਰਾਮ ਜੀਉ ॥

Santh Janaa Har Mael Har Paaeiaa Vaddabhaageeaa Bal Raam Jeeo ||

Meeting with the humble Saints of the Lord, I have found the Lord, by great good fortune.

ਨਿਰਮਲੁ ਹਰਿ ਧਾਇਯਾ ਹਰਿ ਗੁਣ ਗਾਇਯਾ ਮੁਖਿ ਬੋਲੀ ਹਰਿ ਬਾਣੀ ॥

Niramal Har Paaeiaa Har Gun Gaaeiaa Mukh Bolee Har Baanee ||

I have found the Immaculate Lord, and I sing the Glorious Praises of the Lord. I speak the Word of the Lord's Bani.

ਸੰਤ ਜਨਾ ਵਡਭਾਗੀ ਧਾਇਯਾ ਹਰਿ ਰਬੀਯੈ ਯਕਥ ਰਹਾਣੀ ॥

Santh Janaa Vaddabhaagee Paaeiaa Har Kathheei Akathh Kehaanee ||

By great good fortune, I have found the humble Saints, and I speak the Unspoken Speech of the Lord.

ਹਿਰਦੈ ਹਰਿ ਹਰਿ ਹਰਿ ਯੁਨਿ ਉਧਜੀ ਹਰਿ ਜਧੀਯੈ ਮਸਤਕਿ ਭਾਗੁ ਜੀਉ ॥

Hiradhai Har Har Har Dhhun Oupajee Har Japeei Masathak Bhaag Jeeo ||

The Name of the Lord, Har, Har, Har, vibrates and resounds within my heart; meditating on the Lord, I have realized the destiny inscribed upon my forehead.

ਜਨੁ ਨਾਨਕੁ ਬੋਲੇ ਤੀਜੀ ਲਾਵੈ ਹਰਿ ਉਧਜੈ ਮਨਿ ਬੈਰਾਗੁ ਜੀਉ ॥੩॥

Jan Naanak Bolae Thejee Laavai Har Oupajai Man Bairaag Jeeo ||3||

Servant Nanak proclaims that, in this, the third round of the marriage ceremony, the mind is filled with Divine Love for the Lord. ||3||

Through the Guru, the mind has found divine love and the third *Laav* describes how it begins to feel the feeling of separation from the One. It stresses the importance of *sangat* – the congregation – who help us break our ego and cultivate humility, thereby increasing our capacity to be filled with divine love.

Fourth laav

ਹਰਿ ਚਉਥੜੀ ਲਾਵ ਮਨਿ ਮਗਜੁ ਭਇਯਾ ਹਰਿ ਧਾਇਯਾ ਬਲਿ ਰਾਮ ਜੀਉ ॥

Har Chouthharree Laav Man Sehaj Bhaeiaa Har Paaeiaa Bal Raam Jeeo ||

In the fourth round of the marriage ceremony, my mind has become peaceful; I have found the Lord.

ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਮਿਲਿਯਾ ਸੁਭਾਇ ਹਰਿ ਮਨਿ ਤਨਿ ਮੀਠਾ ਲਾਇਯਾ ਬਲਿ ਰਾਮ ਜੀਉ ॥

Guramukh Miliaa Subhaae Har Man Than Meethaa Laaeiaa Bal Raam Jeeo ||

As Gurmukh, I have met Him, with intuitive ease; the Lord seems so sweet to my mind and body.

ਹਰਿ ਮੀਠਾ ਲਾਇਯਾ ਮੇਰੇ ਧਰੁਭ ਭਾਇਯਾ ਯਨਦਿਨੁ ਹਰਿ ਲਿਵ ਲਾਈ ॥

Har Meethaa Laaeiaa Maerae Prabh Bhaeiaa Anadhin Har Liv Laae ||

The Lord seems so sweet; I am pleasing to my God. Night and day, I lovingly focus my consciousness on the Lord.

ਮਨ ਚਿੰਦਿਯਾ ਫਲੁ ਧਾਇਯਾ ਸੁਆਮੀ ਹਰਿ ਨਾਮਿ ਵਜੀ ਵਾਧਾਈ ॥

Man Chindhiaa Fal Paaeiaa Suaamee Har Naam Vajee Vaadhhaae ||

I have obtained my Lord and Master, the fruit of my mind's desires. The Lord's Name resounds and resonates.

ਹਰਿ ਧਰੁਭਿ ਠਾਕੁਰਿ ਰਾਜੁ ਰਚਾਇਯਾ ਧਨੁ ਹਿਰਦੈ ਨਾਮਿ ਵਿਗਾਸੀ ॥

Har Prabh Thaakur Kaaj Rachaaeiaa Dhhan Hiradhai Naam Vigaasee ||

The Lord God, my Lord and Master, blends with His bride, and her heart blossoms forth in the Naam.

ਜਨੁ ਨਾਨਕੁ ਬੋਲੇ ਚਉਥੀ ਲਾਵੈ ਹਰਿ ਧਾਇਯਾ ਧਰੁਭੁ ਅਵਿਨਾਸੀ ॥੪॥੨॥

Jan Naanak Bolae Chouthhee Laavai Har Paaeiaa Prabh Avinaasee || 4 || 2 ||

Servant Nanak proclaims that, in this, the fourth round of the marriage ceremony, we have found the Eternal Lord God. || 4 || 2 ||

In the fourth and final *Laav*, the Guru introduces the concept of *Sehaj* – which is translated as ‘peace’. *Sehaj* is that state where one experiences neither highs nor lows, through living in acceptance of *hukam* (divine law) and divine love. This peace called *Sehaj* is obtained when we no longer look to the outside world to validate our emotions or actions – to the extent we see praise and slander alike. It is when we have no worldly desires, even when living within it. It is the stage when our divine love overtakes external triggers and divine love seems sweet even in the most testing of times. The *laav* uses the word *meetha* (sweet) to describe this – the same word that the following Guru used even when being tortured to death. At this stage, the Lord and Their bride become one and the lights merge to become indistinguishable.

After the Laavan

Once Raj and Aran complete the fourth *Laav* they will be married.

Then six *paurees* (stanzas) of *Anand Sahib* will be sung followed by an *Ardaas*. This is the usual conclusion of every Sikh occasion in the *Gurdwara*.

There will be two more *shabads* (sometimes these are sung straight after the *Laavan* before the *Ardaas*):

ਵੀਆਹੁ ਹੋਆ ਮੇਰੇ ਬਾਬੁਲਾ ਗੁਰਮੁਖੇ ਹਰਿ ਧਾਇਯਾ ॥

Veeahu Hoaa Maerae Baabulaa Guramukhae Har Paaeiaa

My marriage has been performed, O my father. As Gurmukh [somebody who accepts the authority of the Guru], I have found the Lord.

ਅਗਿਆਨੁ ਅੰਧੇਰਾ ਰਟਿਆ ਗੁਰ ਗਿਆਨੁ ਧਰੁਚੰਡੁ ਬਲਾਇਯਾ ॥

Agiaan Andhhaeraa Kattiaa Gur Giaan Prachandd Balaaeiaa

The darkness of ignorance has been dispelled. The Guru has revealed the blazing light of spiritual wisdom.

(Guru Granth Sahib, Ang 79)

And:

ਧੁਰੀ ਆਸਾ ਜੀ ਮਨਸਾ ਮੇਰੇ ਰਾਮ ॥

Pooree Aasaa Jee Manasaa Maerae Raam

My hopes and desires have been fulfilled, O my Lord.

ਮੇਹਿ ਨਿਰਗੁਣ ਜੀਉ ਮਭਿ ਗੁਣ ਤੇ ਰਾਮ ॥

Mohi Niragun Jeeo Sabh Gun Thaerae Raam

I am worthless, without virtue; all virtues are Yours, O Lord.

(Guru Granth Sahib, Ang 577)

Both are of the theme of thanks that the wedding has happened and to express the (anticipated) joy of achieving Oneness with God.

The ceremony will end with another *Ardaas* to give thanks that the wedding has happened. Following *Ardaas*, *Karah Prashad* will be distributed and there will be a *hukamnama*. The Guru Granth Sahib will be opened at random (this may have already happened early in the morning before the wedding, so they'll just turn to the relevant Ang) and the first shabad on that page will be read. *Hukamnama* literally means 'command of the day' and that shabad will contain the Divine message from the Guru themselves for Raj and Aran's marriage.

Following the *hukamnama*, guests can depart the *Darbar*.

If you haven't been to a Sikh wedding before

The Gurdwara is an inclusive, welcoming space but there are a few rules:

1. You must cover your head at all times: males usually tie a coloured bandana and females usually wear a scarf over their heads.
2. Upon entering a gurdwara remove your shoes and put them in shoe racks (you may keep your socks on).
3. Being intoxicated and the possession of intoxicants (including cigarettes) is strictly forbidden inside the Gurdwara.

Other things to be aware of:

- When people enter the *Darbar* the first thing they do is pay their respects to the Guru Granth Sahib – the scriptural Guru. It contains divine revelation and the scripture in its entirety has the full status of the Guru. It will be on a throne, covered in the finest fabrics with a canopy above it. Sikhs will *matha-tek* – (literally 'place forehead' i.e. kowtow) – in front of it and make a monetary offering in the box before it. If you're a non-Sikh, don't worry about bowing or the monetary donation - but if you would like to do either you're very welcome to.
- Like a church service, there will be a mixture of standing and seating. For most of the service, you will be seated, apart from the *Ardaas*. Stand when everybody else around you stands and you'll be fine. The *Ardaas* lasts for between five and ten minutes. At various intervals during it the congregation will say *VaheGuru* – the name of God.
- Men and women sit on separate sides of the aisle in a Gurdwara in the West. This gender segregation stems from the colonial era and is an effect of the British trying to make Gurdwaras like churches with an altar at the back. If you go to pre-British Raj

Gurdwaras in India the Guru Granth Sahib is in the centre of the *Darbar* with families sitting together all around it. One way of showing respect in South Asian cultures is circumambulation, which you'll see in the main part of the wedding ceremony.

- You will be sitting on the floor for around an hour, if not a little longer. For this reason, it is advisable not to wear something too tight fitting. Most people sit cross-legged. In any case, you shouldn't point your feet towards the Guru Granth Sahib at the front.
- At the end of the service, people will come around distributing *Karah Prashad* – a sweet foodstuff made of three equal parts: flour, butter and sugar. It is blessed during the final *Ardaas*. Individuals, while remaining seated, will cup their hands and the *Prashad* will be dropped into it. You should take some, though you can indicate that you only want a small amount. *Karah Prashad* isn't vegan, so if you are vegan you can hand yours over to somebody else.