

# THE MEANING OF THE SIKH WEDDING CEREMONY - ANAND KARAJ

All ceremonies in Sikhi are centrally focussed upon spiritual development and contributing to our aim of becoming liberated. The Anand Karaj – or ceremony of bliss 'Anand' is no different. Even though most weddings nowadays are focused on fanfare and pomp, that does not mean this is how we, as Sikhs, should be conducting them. Let us now have a look at what the Guru's instructed for our Anand Karaj.

Firstly we need to clearly establish what the definition of the word 'Anand' is – we define this as 'bliss' in the English language. The Anand Karaj is named after the prayer Anand Sahib which is one of our daily prayers – you can read all of Anand Sahib to see the different aspects of bliss that Maharaj teaches us about. For the purpose of this article we will now look at the definition of the word 'Anand' that the third Sikh Guru, Sri Guru Amar Das Jee wrote about:

**ਆਨੰਦੁ ਆਨੰਦੁ ਸਭੁ ਕੋ ਕਹੈ ਆਨੰਦੁ ਗੁਰੂ ਤੇ ਜਾਣਿਆ ॥**

Bliss, bliss - everyone talks of bliss; bliss is known only through the Guru.

**ਜਾਣਿਆ ਆਨੰਦੁ ਸਦਾ ਗੁਰ ਤੇ ਕ੍ਰਿਪਾ ਕਰੇ ਪਿਆਰਿਆ ॥**

Eternal bliss is known only through the guru, when the Beloved Lord grants his grace.

**ਕਰਿ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਿਲਵਿਖ ਕਟੇ ਗਿਆਨ ਅੰਜਨੁ ਸਾਰਿਆ ॥**

Granting His Grace, He cuts away our sins; He blesses us with spiritual wisdom.

**ਅੰਦਰਹੁ ਜਿਨ ਕਾ ਮੋਹੁ ਤੁਟਾ ਤਿਨ ਕਾ ਸਬਦੁ ਸਚੈ ਸਵਾਰਿਆ ॥**

Those who eradicate attachment from within themselves, are adorned with the Shabad, the Word of the True Lord.

**ਕਹੈ ਨਾਨਕੁ ਏਹੁ ਅਨੰਦੁ ਹੈ ਆਨੰਦੁ ਗੁਰ ਤੇ ਜਾਣਿਆ ॥੭॥**

Says Nanak, this alone is bliss - bliss which is known through the Guru. ||7||

So everyone talks of bliss or happiness and how they experience it. But Guru Sahib says true bliss can only be attained through the Guru who brings you out of the darkness of ignorance and into the light, by granting you wisdom. What is this wisdom of what bliss truly is? This is explained in the last 2 lines of this Shabad:

**ਅੰਦਰਹੁ ਜਿਨ ਕਾ ਮੋਹੁ ਤੁਟਾ ਤਿਨ ਕਾ ਸਬਦੁ ਸਚੈ ਸਵਾਰਿਆ ॥**

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By eradicating attachment to the world we can realise this bliss. What is this attachment? In the twenty-ninth pauni (stanza) of Anand Sahib Maharaj says:



**ਏਹ ਮਾਇਆ ਜਿਤੁ ਹਰਿ ਵਿਸਰੈ ਮੋਹੁ ਉਪਜੈ ਭਾਉ ਦੂਜਾ ਲਾਇਆ ॥**

This is Maya, by which the Lord is forgotten; emotional attachment and a secondary transitory love dwells up in us.

**ਕਹੈ ਨਾਨਕੁ ਗੁਰ ਪਰਸਾਦੀ ਜਿਨਾ ਲਿਵ ਲਾਗੀ ਤਿਨੀ ਵਿਚੇ ਮਾਇਆ ਪਾਇਆ ॥੨੯॥**

Says Nanak, by Guru's Grace, those who enshrine love for the Lord find Him, in the midst of Maya. ||29||

So the illusion (maya) of the world deludes us and we become attached to the material world, this is attachment to both objects and in relationships (here relationships means the full spectrum of friends and family). Then Maharaj has stated we develop a second love (this is for maya – the illusion of the world), our first love was and always has been God – that love was enshrined in us in the mothers womb when we meditated upon God to free us from the suffering in the womb. Maharaj states this at the start of Pauri 29 of Anand Sahib:

**ਜੈਸੀ ਅਗਨਿ ਉਦਰ ਮਹਿ ਤੈਸੀ ਬਾਹਰਿ ਮਾਇਆ ॥**

As is the fire within the womb, so is Maya outside.

**ਮਾਇਆ ਅਗਨਿ ਸਭ ਇਕੋ ਜੇਹੀ ਕਰਤੈ ਖੇਲੁ ਰਚਾਇਆ ॥**

The fire of Maya is one and the same; the Creator has staged this play.

**ਜਾ ਤਿਸੁ ਭਾਣਾ ਤਾ ਜੰਮਿਆ ਪਰਵਾਰਿ ਭਲਾ ਭਾਇਆ ॥**

According to His Will, the child is born, and the family is very pleased.

**ਲਿਵ ਛੁੜਕੀ ਲਗੀ ਤ੍ਰਿਸਨਾ ਮਾਇਆ ਅਮਰੁ ਵਰਤਾਇਆ ॥**

Love for the Lord wears off, and the child becomes attached to desires; the script of Maya runs its course.

Put simply, our Anand Karaj is there for us to further our spiritual journey, in conquering Maya and the illusions/enticements that the world brings. By entering the Anand Karaj the couple are admitting them into the householders life, the first Lavaa states:

**ਹਰਿ ਪਹਿਲੜੀ ਲਾਵ ਪਰਵਿਰਤੀ ਕਰਮ ਦ੍ਰਿੜਾਇਆ ਬਲਿ ਰਾਮ ਜੀਉ ॥**

In the first round of the marriage ceremony, the Lord sets out His instructions for performing the actions of married life (parviri).

The key word above is 'Parviri' which translates to entering the lifestyle of householders as opposed to 'Nirviri' which means to get to God by detaching oneself from everything. So the married couple is to go through the trials and tribulations of being partners, living in the world, raising a family and so forth. So what they are doing is learning how to become detached whilst being fully immersed in the world:

**ਗੁਰਸਿਖ ਜੋਗੀ ਜਾਗਦੇ ਮਾਇਆ ਅੰਦਰਿ ਕਰਨਿ ਉਦਾਸੀ ॥**

Sikhs of the Guru are ever awake and remain detached whilst amidst maya, this is their practice of Yoga. (Bhai Gurdas Jee, Vaar 29, 15).

Now let us also look at the running order that takes place in most Anand Karaj ceremonies across the world. Usually an Ardas (supplication prayer) takes place where the couple stand and ask for permission to begin their Anand Karaj. After that Ardas a Hukamnama is taken – this is Guru Sahib directly answering the prayer of the couple – so the instruction given is of pivotal importance to the couple. This Hukmanama should be noted, read, studied and reflected upon for the couple as it is Maharaj's answer to the beginning of your union.

After that in almost all weddings the 'phlaa' or scarf of the groom is passed into the hand of the bride by the bride's father or another family member. At this point the following Shabad is sung,

**ਹਭੇ ਸਾਕ ਕੂੜਾਵੇ ਡਿਠੇ ਤਉ ਪਲੈ ਤੈਭੈ ਲਾਗੀ ||੧||**

I have seen that all relationships are false, and so I have grasped hold of the hem of Your robe, Lord. ||1|| (963)



The translation of the above is teaching us that all relationships in the world are false, and we are here to now tie ourselves to the Guru. The couple getting married are in effect recognising through this Shabad that, 'we know and recognise the falsehood of relationships and are now seeking your support Guru Jee to escape it'. So this prayer signifies the beginning of the couple's spiritual journey to try and get to the 'Anand' or bliss, the Guru is talking about.

The prayers of the Lavaaa teach us about 4 different spiritual states and each one teaches us of a rising spiritual awareness and capability. I will not attempt to translate or discuss them here as I am trying to stick to the general meaning of the Anand Karaj ceremony. This is for your good selves to learn of and get grounded in from learned Gursikhs in your own time.

The point that needs to be emphasised with the Lavaaa is that you jointly walk around Guru Sahib or do what we call a 'parkarma'. A parkarma (walking around Guru Sahib) signifies your submission to Guru Jee and is a homage to Guru Jee, in that your feet and whole body gets blessed by walking around Guru Sahib, whilst attentively gazing at Guru Jee and humbling yourself. In many historical examples and texts, it states that a Sikh can get their minds desired fulfilled by doing a heartfelt prayer (Ardas) and doing 3 parkarma around Guru Jee. So here doing 4 is highly significant.

After the Lavaa the Anand Sahib (6 Pauris) are read to end the ceremony. A final Ardas is done and a Hukamnama from Maharaj is given to us – this is the message from Guru Sahib for the married couple now that they have entered wedlock. This is the Guru's message for your married life. It should become integral to how you conduct your lives. It should be memorised and reflected upon, again and again whilst you are married.

Let us now dwell on some points here. We come to submit to the Guru and do parkarama. So Guru Sahib's Rumallas should be better than our clothes, as Guru Jee is the one who is the centre of our universe and without Guru Sahib we have no wedding. Secondly, if we are coming in humility to submit – do we need all the westernised additions of page boys, bridesmaids etc – what does this achieve for us spiritually? We have grown to make our weddings extravagant affairs where scant attention is given to what we are actually doing and submitting to, and the rites we are undergoing when in the Darbar (court) of Guru Sahib.

The whole aim of an Anand Karaj is to attain spiritual bliss. The whole point of the Anand Karaj is to then practice what the Guru teaches you and start a spiritual journey with your partner, in which you push each other to develop further spiritually.

Points to consider when planning your Anand Karaj:

1) Keeping your beard then cutting it immediately when you leave the Gurdwara: As Sikhs we are supposed to keep unshorn hair – but why do we keep it just for the wedding? So you present yourself for your wedding to Guru Sahib with a beard and after Guru Jee blessed your union, you shave it off and make the statement you no longer need it. This makes a mockery of keeping one's hair.

2) Clothes worn by everyone at Gurdwaras:

**ਬਾਬਾ ਹੋਰ ਪੈਨਣ ਖੁਸੀ ਖੁਆਰੁ ||**

O Baba, you can wear clothes that make you happy, so long as they don't lead to your spiritual destruction.

**ਜਿਤ ਪੈਐ ਤਨੁ ਪੀੜੀਐ ਮਨ ਮਹਿ ਚਲਹਿ ਵਿਕਾਰੁ ||੧|| ਰਹਾਉ ||**

Don't wear those clothes by the wearing of which the body is ruined (due to tight fittings), and wickedness and corruption enter into the mind. ||1||Pause|| (16)

This Shabad is specifically referring to wearing clothes that do not create vanity in you and/or entice vice into others. Also the wearing of clothes that don't create physical problems is advised – so when we go to the Gurdwara we should wear loose comfortable clothing that we can sit and meditate in comfortably. No one should wear clothes which make them stand out more than Guru Sahib. We have all heard of pyjamas and Lehngas falling down at weddings. If you are to wear traditional dress at least learn how to tie a naala!

3) Are you under the influence? We have many grooms and now even Sikh women coming to weddings still under the influence of alcohol. Please refrain from having parties the night before and develop your lifestyle so you can one day refrain completely from alcohol.

4) Parties after weddings – drinking, singing vulgar songs, eating meat, getting high in the toilets, smoking, drinking etc. This is like saying to Guru Jee thanks for blessing our wedding but we will now go to the after party and commit all the major sins of Sikhi apart from adultery. We know most people will continue regardless but it is our duty to point out the hypocrisy of these actions. We should at the very least practice some restraint.

Now to conclude, our marriage is the beginning of our spiritual quest to develop further love for God and break free from worldly attachments. If we choose not to get married the aim is still the same to break worldly attachment and fall in love with God in order to merge back with God.

We are all at different stages of spiritual development. You need to acknowledge where you are on your path, where you are going and where you intend to end up – what is your goal to achieve. This article has only been written to help us all understand the profoundness of an Anand Karaj and for us all to live better lives by following the path the Great Gurus laid for us and still do via Sri Guru Granth Sahib Jee and Panj Pyare (at Amrit Sanchars).