

# The Beauty and Experiences at the Golden Temple

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It is a must for not only for Sikhs but others to visit The Golden Temple and pay your homage. Not only the experience will be blissful but it also has a healing effect both on their mind and physical body. It is difficult to quantify the blessings and what one takes with them after their visit to the temple.

**This is what the wandering Earl had to say:**

*“Once in Amritsar, just walk through the main entrance of the Golden Temple – the holiest temple for the Sikh religion – and try not to be blown away by the structure before you. And try not to be blown away by the beautiful mix of colours all around you as well, by the traditional music (kirtan) being played over the entire complex and by the happy and friendly Indians strolling along the marble walkway that surrounds the main temple (parikrama of*

*pathway-four rectangular cubicles), locals who are typically from the countryside and who have rarely, if ever, seen a foreigner.”* Luckily, you can spend hours inside the Golden Temple without ever getting bored of the unique atmosphere. You can even eat a free meal at the langar hall (pilgrimage dining hall) and you can also spend a night or two at one of the temple’s Gurdwaras (pilgrim guesthouses).

The temple is open twenty-four hours per day.

**Yogi Madschri, a Danish living in London met me and described his personal experience of joy.**

*“As part of a half-year long journey through ashrams, yoga schools and holy places in India I was able to stay five days in Harmandir Sahib in February 2015. Years earlier in London I had qualified as a teacher of Kundalini Yoga through which I had encountered the sounds and science of Sikhism. I value these teachings and the growth I have experienced through my own daily practice of Sikh Dharma.*

I was brought to visit and stay in The Golden Temple pilgrim accommodation through Divine grace. I spent hours by the pool in meditation and prayer every day, I offered my sewa and took langar. I queued and entered the Shrine late at night, in the early morning, in the daytime. I spent time in the Gurdwaras of the compound, I visited the Museum of Sikh History, and I engaged in conversation with visitors, students, pilgrims and holy men during my time there. In the early morning hours, under the New Moon, I performed my sacred dip in the pool.

It does not take long to become immersed in the vibrating spirit of Consciousness at the temple compound. The sewadars emanate selfless service, thus making every interaction a meeting with God. Hundreds of men, women, and children go about the many chores of cleaning, cooking and caring with a delightful merry energy. Every meal served, every drop of water poured, every marble slab cleaned, it is all a manifestation of God’s love. The

Kirtan threads itself through it all, through every moment of every dimension, through day and through night.

*I acknowledged to myself while staying at The Golden Temple that I was having this divine experience yet I had not foreseen what happened at my departure. I was mentally and spiritually at ease with leaving in order to continue my travels, but my physical body did not like it! As I got up and walked away from the pool a wave of sadness washed over me, and I had to allow my body to shake, weep and sob a bit. Truly, it was the sweetest experience of sadness ever.”*

**Craig and his partner described their experiences as they** “*rose early and headed over to the temple to spend the morning exploring before eating lunch prepared by the Sikhs living and working there. The temple itself is part of the larger Harmandir Sahib (or Darbar Sahib) complex in Amritsar. The temple shines in gold, sitting out in a tank that pilgrims from around the world come to bathe in called the Amrit Sarowar (Pool of Nectar). Most of the men bathe in the open, public areas, while there is a private, enclosed space for women to use for bathing. The water in the tank is considered to be sacred.*

Seemingly floating in the sacred water is the temple itself. Lonely Planet India notes that the temple is ‘a blend of Hindu and Islamic architectural styles, with an elegant marble lower level adorned with flower and animal motifs in pietra dura (marble inlay work, as seen in the Taj Mahal).’ The second level of the temple is ‘topped by a dome gilded with 750 kg of gold.’ All throughout the day and until about 22:30 hours at night, leaders and musicians chant from the Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh holy book. There was never a moment during our visit that the chanting was not happening in the complex.

After taking in most of the complex, it was time to join pilgrims, locals, tourists, and anyone else who was hungry for lunch. At the southeast end of the complex sits the Guru-Ka-Langar, which is a

huge dining area where 60,000 to 80,000 people are fed for free every day. As we sat down on the floor to eat, everyone from rich Western tourists to Indian pilgrims to poor, begging children sat down together to share a meal. Upon entering the hall, you are given a plate and utensils and then directed to the next line of people to sit in. Sikhs come around with food (including seconds!) to fill your plate. For the number of people they have to feed each day, the food was surprisingly delicious. It was such an experience to sit with people from all walks of life and enjoy a meal together. Despite their social standing, wealth (or lack of), caste, etc. outside of the temple, for a moment, everyone was equal (sangat and pangat)

While I have volunteered in soup kitchens before (and not that there is anything wrong with doing so), the experience at the Golden Temple was a very different feeding and eating experience. The service came with no expectation and no judgment. It wasn't middle class suburban Christians coming into the inner city to feed some homeless people a meal and then retreating back to the safety of their neighbourhoods. The feeling of the dining hall was so distinct from these experiences. My lunch at the Golden Temple felt like community – actual community. Despite cultural and language barriers. Despite concerns over whether the food was “safe” for western tourists to eat. Despite knowing at some point that the little girl sitting beside me might approach me on the street asking for money, for a moment, we were the same. Just two girls sitting down for lunch served by those dedicated to their faith in the shadow of their holiest shrine. The sense of community I felt at lunch in the Golden Temple is one that I think many churches strive for in their outreach ministries but never quite find. My lunch amongst the Sikhs was both a humbling moment and a moment of revelation. After eating lunch, Craig and I returned to the tank to walk around the complex again. As the sun rose in the sky, we found a place to sit among locals and pilgrims in the shade. As we sat down

amongst them, we joined their dosing and resting in the shadow of such a pillar of their faith. One of my favourite moments of the day was resting against the side of the complex, slipping in and out of a light sleep, feeling the faith of those sitting around me. *We had another great experience at the temple that evening. Just sitting alongside the tank and watching the people who went by, we met Vishali, a young girl who was at the temple with her parents. She practiced her English with us and translated a few questions that her parents had for us, as well. (Where we were from, how we liked India, what our plans were for our 6 weeks in the country, etc.) We also posed for pictures with a few locals and pilgrims who were visiting the site. Later, a man around our age and a few friends sat down with us. He was a Sikh and became very interested in talking to Craig after learning that Craig had been a pastor. With the Golden Temple in the background, Craig and his new friend discussed religions in India vs. the U.S., Sikhism vs. Christianity, and a number of other topics.”*

**As also someone else described their experience:** *“The food is free and available to all at every Sikh temple. An army of volunteers prepares everything and at the Golden Temple, where some 100,000 people visit daily, it’s truly an impressive operation. The food is simple, dhal (lentils), raitha (yoghurt), rice pudding, and chapattis (roti/bread). I had all but two meals at the temple the weekend I was there. They were good, everything seemed hygienic, it was some of the best process management and operation work I’ve seen in India and it was generally a great environment. It’s all-you-can-eat, but you are not allowed to leave with food on your plate. Kind of rude to take the free food and waste it, no? But yes, you can refuse or stay stop when being served. I helped wash dishes one day after dinner one night. I was impressed with the process – an initial wash to wash away all the solids, then two more washes in two separate tubs, then rinsing. In a place infamous for its bad hygiene, three washing ensure a proper job is done. I only washed dishes for 60-90*

*minutes, but it was while washing the dishes that I realized just how many thousands of people eat there daily. There was a constant stream of plates, bowls, and spoons. Constant. Incredible.*

I also wondered if this was the only place in India where you can see men washing the dishes...

*I would say I stayed one day longer than necessary. There aren't many things to see in Amritsar. Still, it was nice to be in such a tranquil place, full of positive energy. I'll be the first to admit that it can be a little intimidating being somewhere you feel so out of place, but with the Sikhs you need not worry. You are always welcome. Literally."*

**Experience described by other visitors in their own words: It tells you the inner story of an individual:** *"Best place to visit once in a life time". As the name suggests, one feels to be near almighty. It's a beautiful place to visit. Everything is so touching right from the religious chanting to the arrangements you will find something special to visit this place. It was my 06th visit to golden temple and every visit is far beautiful than other. One of the best places to visit in lifetime."*

### **Meditate at the temple**

*"Go at amrit vela at 03:00 hours to really experience the devotion. Amazing place to meditate on the third floor of the Temple itself and at any of the small rooms where the Granth is being read behind the Akal Takhat or inside Akal Takhat on second floor. Real peaceful energy."*

### **Beautiful!!**

*"Harmandir Sahib is just amazing. The whole temple is made of gold. The temple is surrounded by water and is right in the middle of the water, which makes the Gurdwara look amazingly beautiful. Without a question, it is the most beautiful Gurdwara in the whole world!!! It's a must visit!!"*

## **HEAVEN ON EARTH**

*“If you are in search of true peace, visit Harmandir sahib and seek the blessings of Sikh Gurus. It’s a place where you get all the answers to your questions about the real meaning of your life.”*

My personal experience is very similar to others but every time, I visit The Golden Temple, I am overcome with feelings of joy and happiness. The serenity of the shrine brings tranquillity to my mind. The crowd or the sangat as they are called brings unity to all the souls. Sadly, at times my mind also wanders to the tragic raid by the Indian Army in 1984, which brought the daily programme at The Golden Temple to a standstill, and innocent souls were killed at the site. The beauty of the The Golden Temple was ruined with grave consequences later. I try to wipe this out of mind and focus on my naam whilst sitting on the parikrama and watching the birds flying by and finding their own peace and solitude. Not forgetting my distress and tears of the lost souls, which still lingers in my mind.

I speak about my experience to others and usually people are eager to listen and they tell me that a visit to The Golden Temple is on their agenda. It should be on everybody’s agenda as mystically you only benefit from the visit in many ways.

The Golden Temple has become part of my existence and whenever I am in India, something in my inner self drives me to visit The Golden Temple. I love to live there and be part of it. The soothing kirtan, peaceful souls and the spirit and intense love for Waheguru. I suppose absence makes the heart grow fonder as those living in close proximity do not even enter The Golden Temple; they pass by and take it for granted. It is more beneficial even though briefly to have darshan (blessings) as one do not know what benefit you gain from the visit, as we are unaware of all the mystic powers.

It is definitely worth paying your obeisance to The Golden Temple, if you are in Amritsar !!!!!

**Daljit Singh**

This article is courtesy of Sikhnet

# Ishnaan Seva at the Golden Temple

Posted July 19, 2016 by Guruka Singh Khalsa & filed under Our Authors, Your Stories.



**This is a true story about how sometimes something looks like one thing but it is actually something quite different.**

I remember Siri Singh Sahib Ji speaking in Gurdwara about three kinds of stories we should all be telling each other: inspirational stories of our personal experience, stories of our history and stories of duty. This is the first kind of story. It's a very personal story. This story took place in 1999.

Some of us have been blessed to go to the Golden Temple in our physical bodies, and some have not. In April of 1999, I went for the first time. While in Amritsar I was blessed to do the Ishnaan Seva each night – to wash the floors of the Golden Temple with milk and water. The Ishnaan Seva starts around midnight and finishes about 1:30 in the morning.



It's a funny thing, when I first came to Amritsar I was overcome with a desire to not sleep. Those of you who've been there may understand, but I just didn't want to sleep very much, and you know, I didn't seem to mind it at all. Sometimes I would just put my shawl under my head and lie on the marble of the Perkarma – listening to the kirtan.

The beautiful thing was that each night when we finished the Ishnaan Seva, about 1:30 in the morning, the entire Golden Temple had been cleaned out: all of the rugs removed, all of the brass railings, the flowers, the Palki, all were removed. After the cleaning, the process of setting everything back up begins, and there's a period of about an hour when there's no kirtan. It's the only time during the entire 24 hours of each day when there's no kirtan going on at Darbar Sahib.

That first night we finished the seva and I didn't know what to do with myself, so I walked up one of the little spiral staircases to the roof. The roof of the Golden Temple is all marble inlaid with designs in colored stones and there's a little Gurdwara up there on the roof. It's the large gold dome you see from a distance. I found a spot about a meter behind the Gurdwara where there was a lotus flower made out of colored stones inlaid into the roof. This spot is the exact geometrical center of the Golden Temple. If you were to drop a plumb line vertically down through that lotus flower, that line would go exactly through the center of the marble square on the first floor where the Palki sits when [the Guru](#) is in Prakash.

So I sat down on that spot and put that lotus flower right at the base of my spine and I meditated. And in my inner eye I saw that the whole Golden Temple was burning with a blue light – just as we have when we're doing White Tantric Yoga. It's a blue electric aura. And there was a bright beam of light that went right down through the center of the Golden Temple and up into the universe. And I realized that the earth has two axles. It has the magnetic axle – the north and south pole – but it has another axle, which is

the spiritual axle of the earth. This axle goes right down through the center of the Golden Temple.

In my mind's eye I saw the earth suspended in space with the Golden Temple at the top and this beam of light coming right out of the top of the Golden Temple, so it looked like this heavenly Christmas ornament hanging in space with this shaft of blue light coming out of the top like a string. And as I extended my awareness out around the Perikarma, I saw that each of the [Akhand Paths](#) that were going on all around the Perikarma, and there are many of them, each one had a blue light just like the blue light that was coming out of the Golden Temple. And so you could see this big blue light and all these smaller funnels of blue light – like strings going up into the heavens from out of each [Guru Granth Sahib](#) as it was being read in each of the [Akhand Paths](#).

As I watched this, I understood something which, to me, was very profound, which is that if you love someone very, very, very much... if you love someone so much that your breath is their breath, and your blood is their blood, and their blood flows in your veins, and your heart beats as one with them... then sometimes you feel moved to give them a gift. And that gift has to be something *really wonderful*. Especially if you're going to leave your body, and you want to give a unique gift that profoundly penetrates to the very essence of the one you love.

And I understood that that's how [the Guru](#) loves his Sikhs. And that the gift he gave may look like a book – but it's not. Not at all. It's a portal, it's a Stargate. It's an opening into another dimension. And when we open that portal, that blue light is formed through the vortex of the sound current of the recitation of the Gurbani and something very profound takes place. That connection between heaven and earth is formed and energy pours onto the earth from the heavens through that funnel of blue light.

In our Gurdwara in Espanola, as we do our Akhand Path every week, the same thing happens. That blue light shines, radiates and penetrates. And it penetrates not just through this Gurdwara, but through all of our community here. And everyone in our family here is sustained, protected and blessed by that blue aura which comes from [the Guru](#).

And as I sat there on the roof of the Golden Temple, tears filled my eyes, and I felt so grateful for such a gift from such [a Guru](#) who loved me so much.

And then each night – each morning – all the rest of the days that we were in Amritsar, I would go up and sit on that exact spot on the top of the Golden Temple and meditate. And I felt that I was on top of this wonderful ship that was floating on this ocean covering the face of this planet that was sailing through space suspended on this incredible thread of light.

## Journey to Goindwal Sahib

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by Gurprasad Kaur Khalsa, Courtesy of [True Tales: On the Spiritual Path...Memoirs and Writings](#)

“Beloved God bless us to keep up in this endeavor. Please give us the strength and courage to gracefully complete this meditation. And please bless Nav Jiwan Kaur with healing.”

The words of the Ardas brought peace and surrender to my apprehensive mind. It stilled the worrisome thoughts, which had begun to take over, after a gradual advent in the final hours before our arrival at Goindwal Sahib. Months of excited anticipation had given way to a cascade of fears and doubts. I had maintained absolute steadfastness in my birthday prayer to complete the steps at Goindwal, but with the growing realization of the magnitude of the undertaking, dread had started gnawing at me. Would I be able to chant Japji Sahib and dip 84 times, keeping up through the long and cold night and into the projected 17 hours that it would take?

7:00 pm

We were starting at night in order to coordinate all the various elements of our trip and make them fit. I was the last one in our group to arrive at the [Baoli Sahib](#). In my flurry of last minute angst I was still unsure of what to bring with me, in the end grabbing everything; a blanket, a bunch of towels, a bathrobe, my Nitnem, as well as the laminated copy of Japji Sahib given to me by Hargobind's mother, Amarjit Kaur. Our band of pilgrims had dispersed. I could hear the echo of voices from the men's side, and wondered if Sat Purkha Singh, my husband and son had already begun their meditations. Nav Jiwan Kaur had also descended and only Simran Kaur and Hargobind remained at the top.

Photo Credit: Siri Ved Kaur Khalsa

As we stood together for the Ardas and the remembrance of relying on God for everything flooded back into me, my certainty returned. No matter what happened, Guru would see us through this and whatever the experience was, it would be the right one. "Some people take 30 years to complete the steps," Nav Jiwan had said.

"Well, I can't imagine that would give you the same experience," Sat Purkha and I had both intoned. "I really think you have to do it all at once to get the most benefit."

"That sounds fanatic," Nav Jiwan replied. "Let's not talk about it." Cold and smooth, the white marble steps beneath my feet descended into the timeless domain. Deep stillness immediately enveloped me, punctuated by resonating devotion rising from the depths and vibrating off the walls. Down, down, down I dropped, growing ever closer to the center of the Universe, to God's heartbeat. "I'm here, I'm really here," was all that kept circulating in my consciousness. "Oh God, thank you for getting me here." My hands shaking, I hung up all my paraphernalia, took the laminated copy and slowly walked down the last 10 steps. As I

stood in ankle-deep water, about to begin my first Japji, panic struck again. "I've got to use my own Nitnem. I know it will get wet but the print is large and I want the English translation too. It is my rock." After rushing back up to get it, the three of us, Nav Jiwan Kaur, Simran Kaur and I, stood together on Step 1 and began Japji.

"How fast can you read Japji?" Simran had asked me earlier.

"Well, it is really hard for me to do it in under 12 minutes...I just jumble all the words up." I had replied. "But I'll see if I can do it in less. And should we be chanting out loud or silently? I know you can do it faster if it's silent, but I connect more if I can hear what I'm saying. As I began my first recitation, exhilaration and anticipation coursed through me at the same time that I could feel the weight returning to my shoulders. Oh my God, am I really going to be saying this 83 more times?

I had a list of people for whom I wanted to dedicate a step, and I tried to summon a prayer to begin that process, but it was all that I could do to keep my focus on what I was doing and not flip out into negativity or fear again. This is hard, I thought. This is really going to be hard. I'll start praying for others after I get into my rhythm, after I get my own bearings. I could hear Nav Jiwan and Simran chanting faster than I was...I was already falling behind. The first dip was a bit of a shock. The water wasn't that cold, but it was so wet that the cold night air turned it icy. Dripping water, I went for the towel that I had hung up at the bottom and then put on my terrycloth bathrobe. There, that would dry me off and keep me warm. It wasn't until much later that I noticed that the Punjabi women who were reciting were not drying off after each dip, but sat down on their step, soaking wet and shivering.

By the fourth or fifth step or so, my two comrades had passed me and we were all on different steps. I was still not over the shock of dipping. I would warm up as I was chanting, but that would all end with my next dip. Shaking from the cold, it would take me half of Japji to generate enough heat to stop, and then I would start to

dread coming to the end and returning to the water. And besides the cold, I was really getting into the bliss of chanting Japji Sahib. I just wanted to chant and chant and never stop. It was feeding my soul and pulling me into a very elevated space where God was holding me. I could feel my heart opening up in gratitude for this opportunity and gift to be imbibing the Name at such a visceral level. A taste of heaven and I felt myself leaving my body behind, expanding, soaring. Please don't let it end, God, please don't let it end. And then all of a sudden, I was plunged back into the physical plane with such a jolt that heaven evaporated and I was dealing with the agony of the body and all my limitations. Just a microcosm of life, I mused, just life intensified.

Photo Credit: Siri Ved Kaur Khalsa

## Step 22

My bathrobe was soaking wet, as were all my towels and my blanket. I could now not control my shaking, almost convulsively, from the cold. Time had completely disappeared; it could be any hour of the day or night. I reckoned that it was sometime in the amrit vela...it just had that feeling. I had to go to the bathroom and I truly wanted relief from the cold. My dripping bathrobe around me, I climbed, or rather hobbled up the stairs, feeling as though I were passing from a womb experience into a strange world, only this time the womb was freezing cold. The world was foreign and remote, but it could take care of a bodily need that the womb could not. I entered the nivas and found my husband and son asleep. They had done 11 mul mantras on each step and had made it to step 39, before retiring at midnight, I found out later. The 39 Steps, that's a famous movie I told Dev Amrit. My husband woke to find me bent over and shaking like a leaf. He urged me to get into bed and I didn't wait to be invited twice. I climbed into bed next to Siri Shiva, hungrily searching for warmth. I really only intended to thaw out briefly but found myself seduced by the relief of just being able to relax my tense muscles, which

I'd held in a defensive position against the cold...It was 3 am, he told me. Maybe just an hour or two, I've already broken the continuity. It's OK, it's OK I told myself, drifting off into another zone, not quite sleep, but something close to it. I kept shivering, and the hours passed and I was still unable to get completely warm. I found myself deciding to wait till the morning and some sunlight before my return.

Some time later, Sat Purkha Singh came into the Nivas saying he was done; he couldn't do it anymore. He was completely cooked, although more accurately the term would be completely frozen. I could understand, I muttered, noting the irony that the two who had insisted on doing it all at once, were going down in icicles (frozen flames!) while Nav Jiwan was going the distance. I had watched her face as she passed me, climbing up, gradually putting more and more distance between her step and mine, and I had noted the determination and the strength of character that were deeply etched there. If anyone can do it, she will, I thought. She absolutely will.

**8:00 am**

I am finally back on step 22, where I left off. But it was a false start. Having replaced my soaking bathing suit for kacheras, it wasn't long before they were as soaking as everything else I had. The shaking had returned and my resistance was low. Siri Shiva Singh called from the top and bade me come up. There's langar, he said. Nice hot langar. It might be just what you need. My dear husband, I thought. Always taking care of me. The only problem was that now all the clothes I had brought were soaking wet. Bundled up in the one remaining dry blanket, savoring the hot langar, I hatched a plan. I would dry myself in the sun. I would walk in the sun and chant and my clothes would dry. I would say all the prayers for all the people for whom I had originally intended. And so began my two hour walk outside the nivas. Finding a thin patch of sunlight, which later grew into a huge



chunk, I walked back and forth, praying fervently for those I had put on my list and for others I hadn't. I prayed for myself, I prayed for strength and fortitude. It was a time of grace. An island of repose in a tumultuous sea. Some warmth returned to my limbs and my clothes got almost dry. I would return to the steps and I would finish.

I couldn't believe how close to the top Nav Jiwan was, somewhere in the high sixties, and Simran not far behind. Wow, I thought, different realities. They had kept going through the long cold night and they were still going. I was truly humbled by their endurance. "I know it looks close but I still have at least 3 more hours," Nav Jiwan told me. Three hours, that's nothing when you're looking at a minimum of 11 more hours. But of course if you've been going 14 hours straight already, then it's an eternity. "You really don't have to dip all the way," Simran told me. "I muscle tested myself and got that I would get the same benefit by just doing a sprinkle instead of a full dip." "I'm there," I said. No more purist here."

## Step 30-something

The daytime energy was very different than the night. It was loud and crowded. Heavy traffic on the road to salvation. Lots of families with children and grandmothers. All shapes and sizes. Mounds of flesh and sweaty bodies. Sometimes the line to dip was formidable. But I had found my groove. Determination flowed into me. This, the third time, I would do it. Nothing would stop me from finishing, not cold, fatigue, hunger or bodily functions. I was in it, God willing, and by Guru's grace, till completion or death, whichever came first.

And so the hours passed and one step melted into the next. The forties gave way to the fifties. My descent to dip was growing longer and longer. Nav Jiwan came to say goodbye after her three hours had slipped away. She had not left the Baoli from the time

she entered it 17 hours earlier. Not to eat, not to go to the bathroom. She had done the whole meditation without a single break, dipping all the way each time. What steel lay beneath that mild-mannered exterior? I marveled, absolutely awe-struck. How can God not hear her prayer? She retired to do her hour of bound lotus, I found out later, falling asleep in that position.

Two hours later Simran finished triumphantly and I was left alone with the hordes and two other faithful pilgrims also doing the recitations, one close to the top and the other close to the bottom. Our bond grew over the course of the next 6 hours. I shared the joy of the first one to finish and empathized with the one behind me. It was from the latter that I learned the proper way to dip. She was fully clothed and she went in all the way and dripped her way back to the next step. A tiny young woman, her thin frame shook as she recited Japji, soundlessly.

And there was another one of my faux pas. I had kept up a quite audible recitation from the beginning, which in the night hadn't seemed to matter with the reduced traffic and others employing the same method of staying awake. But I hadn't reduced my volume with the daylight multitudes and I was severely admonished by the sevadar to chant silently. It was amazing how I understood the streams of Punjabi that came my way. Another time it was that I shouldn't leave my Nitnem on the step, even though it was wrapped in my shawl, but I should wedge it in the banister. And my third scolding came because of my lack of modesty in wearing kacheras to the upper steps where I was visible to someone who might be passing by. By that time I was so oblivious that I hardly knew what I was doing. I dutifully put on my one polyester dress, in a last-ditch attempt to repel the water. I had now moved into a different realm. Now it was no longer me moving my aching body or directing my numb lips to chant. It was God. God was directing everything. I was His and I surrendered to His Might and His Will, because it was only that which would allow me to finish. Certainly there was nothing that I could do anymore,

except just be there. I was God's marionette. He was doing it all. I felt pain and I felt exhaustion but I didn't relate to it anymore. I just kept going.

## Step 60-something

Chanting on and on until the evening shadows grew long once again and my husband came to check on me. He and Dev Amrit had finished hours before. And Sat Purkha was almost finished. He had returned to the steps before I; he had quit again and resumed once more. What a saga. And now he was approaching the last few steps. I would be at least 3 more hours I told him, remembering how long it had taken Nav Jiwan from the same spot. I had been the last to arrive and would be the last to leave. I was the one for whom everyone else had to wait, and wait and wait.

I don't remember much about those last 3 hours except that I clung to Japji like it was my life preserver on an endless churning ocean. Towards the end, it got harder and harder to pronounce all the words and my vision was starting to blur. Grateful once again that I had my own Nitnem with me, I turned to the English transliteration. I had thoroughly exhausted any facility I had in reading Gurmukhi. My Nitnem was now swollen with water-logged pages. I'm so glad, I thought. I will literally be taking some of Goindwal Sahib home with me.

## Step 84

As I stood on that last and final step, and looked down, a million thoughts and images and nothing at all, came rushing in, both at the same time. Completely full, completely empty, ecstatic and desolated, exhilarated and exhausted. It's all God... it's all God. I slowly and deliberately walked down 84 steps, savoring each one, to take my final dip. When I got there, I plunged myself all the way in, releasing 8.4 million lifetimes of karma, liberating the generations behind and the ones to come. It was an awesome purge and it felt so good. Water, I finally understood the

significance of water to the Sikh. The nectar tank at the Harimander Sahib and at every gurdwara, the river where Guru Nanak spent 3 days and emerged chanting the Mul Mantra; water was the genesis and the final destination, healing, cleansing, liberating. Water poured off me at each of the 84 steps all the way back up. I nodded goodbye to the lone, remaining devotee and made my way back to the Nivas.

I am filled with the deepest gratitude to the Siri Singh Sahib ji, who recognized the longing for exaltation of the soul in each one of us and who led us to the promised land. My heart belongs to Guru Amar Das ji, who built Goindwal Sahib and the 84 steps as a symbol of undying love for the Infinite and a profound tool of transformation and liberation of the human spirit. And all my respect, admiration and affection is for fellow travelers on this path, who, if only just once, reach for the heights in whatever way, small or large, to touch the beauty and majesty of their own soul. This story from Gurprasad Kaur Khalsa is courtesy True Tales: [On the Spiritual Path... Memoirs and Writings](#)

## Reflections on the Gurumat Chetna Yatra

Posted July 8, 2016 by Shanti Kaur Khalsa & filed under 11-Siri Guru Granth Sahib, Events, Our Authors, Your Stories.



Shanti Kaur Khalsa

In 1995, Snatam Kaur, Shanti Kaur, Sat Kirin Kaur and Bibiji were in India and had the blessing of participating in a walk from Anandpur Sahib to Damdama Sahib. Here is an article written by Shanti Kaur about that experience:

The dust of a hundred vehicles snaked for miles down the narrow village road as the Gurumat Chetna Yatra wound its way through rural Punjab. Up and down the caravan of vehicles the call of ‘Boley So Nihaal, Sat Siri Akal, Deg, Teg, Fateh!’ could be heard over and over and over again, as the Sangat called out in joy.

Along the village streets, people came from miles to greet the yatris offering prashad with folded hands in an outpouring of love that held no reservation. In the extreme heat, in the pouring rain, the yatris smiled – their hearts set free. Their faces were red from the sun, their feet were brown from dust, but their hearts were luminous with the Guru’s radiance.

The Gurumat Chetna Yatra began in Anandpur Sahib on August 6th with a program that would travel through Ropar, Fatehgarh Sahib, Patiala, Bhatinda and the towns and villages of southeastern Punjab. The yatra culminated in Damdama Sahib on August 18th, bringing hundreds of devotees that had joined along the route. I felt very privileged to join Bibiji on the yatra along with Snam Kaur and Sat Kirin Kaur, ladies of our Gurbani Kirtan Jatha.

Most days held more than twenty programs, stopping every few kilometers to address the gathered sangat. The weather was hot and the days were long, challenging the endurance of all the yatri. The first four days of the yatra proceeded at a dynamic pace. Our American Sikh jatha received a warm welcome everywhere we went. For some, we were a curiosity in our turbans and white bana, but for many we served as an inspiring role model of a Khalsa woman. We played Gurbani Kirtan each morning and evening, sharing the devotion and the love of the sangat. The Jathedar of Akal Takhat Sahib inspired the crowds who gathered and Saropas were given at the many stops along the way.

Word began to spread and people came from miles to hear his uplifting speeches. So moved by his talk, one man came to the stage and pledged to do anything that Singh Sahib asked. There is something very important you can do, replied the Jathedar. But don't do this for me, do it for yourself. Stop trimming your beard and proudly grow a full beard with the dignity of a true man.

Walking with the people all along the route through the rain and the mud, the Akal Takhat Jathedar tirelessly led the yatra. Once we entered in the rural areas, we were face to face with the reality of how much the Sikh Panth had suffered over the past ten years. These hardships had taken a huge toll on the spirit of our people and the status of our communities. At one stop along the way we visited a Dera, welcomed by the beatings of the Nagara Sahib and a beautiful display of horsemanship. However, when we

arrived, we were stunned with the sight of the Sangat bowing on hands and knees to the Sant of the Dera. Even though I had heard stories of such things occurring, it was shocking to see this with my own eyes. Beautiful Gursikhs in the bana and grace of Guru Gobind Singh were on their knees with their head touching the floor in front of a mortal man.

When faced with the situation, the Jathedar struck out with an electric response. The yatris rushed from that place, moving directly to the gurdwara in the next village and the shelter of the True Guru, the Siri Guru Granth Sahib. As the Jathedar stood to speak his eyes flashed fire, "What has become of my Punjab?" he implored to the Sangat. "Have you forgotten the strength of the young Sahebzadi of Guru Gobind Singh who would bow to no man? Have you forsaken the Light of the world, the only True Guru, the Shabad Guru?", he asked. The tears of anguish ran down his face as he demanded a response to these unanswerable questions.

Not a voice could be heard. Not a rustle of cloth, only the whirling of the fans as the Sangat sat in emotion filled silence. In that silence the Jathedar sunk to his knees before Siri Guru Granth Sahib ji and laid his forehead on the Rumala Sahib as sobs of grief wracked his body. From that moment on, the yatra irreversibly changed course.

Chetna means awakening and what started as a small light grew until the hearts of all who touched the yatra began the blissful process of inner awakening. Amrit Prachar became the mission in each town and at each stop. People responded by the hundreds, coming forward to receive kesari Saropas and call before the Sangat 'Boley So Nihal.'

Singly and in groups, men and women joined the yatra on its way to Damdama Sahib and the Amrit Sanchar. Heads that hadn't worn turbans since childhood filled the crowds with proud paghris and the new stubble of an uncut beard. Grandfathers who had lived as Sikhs their entire lives anxiously came forward to finally

give their heads to Guru Gobind Singh. Entire families vowed to live as Amrit Dhaari and come to Damdama Sahib to receive Amrit. More than twenty-five of the accompanying police force were so moved that they came forward to receive saropas and pledged to live as Khalsa. No one was immune to the thundering heartbeat of the Khalsa.

Wahe Guru ji ka Khalsa, Wahe Guru ji ki Fateh.

–Excerpted from 8/28/1995 Espanola Lecture

[Click here to read the full lecture and see the video where this article was read](#) (the reading of the poem starts at 44:00)

This is a video of another yatra from Anandpur Sahib to Damdama Sahib in the 1970s

**Guru Gobind Singh Marg - Anandpur Sahib to Damdama Sahib a Journey...**

## An Experience of Seva at the Darbar Sahib

Posted July 19, 2016 by Sikh Dharma International & filed under Your Stories.





Written by HarKiren Kaur, Courtesy of Sikhnet

**The below text is a funny and illustrated description shared by Harkiren Kaur from Malaysia about some of her experiences doing seva at Harimandir Sahib and being a Sikh woman. It is from 2006.**

“I think I’ve mentioned that I have joined the school ([Miri Piri Academy](#)) in Amritsar for 40 days of seva (service) at Darbar Sri Harimandir Sahib (the Golden Temple). These lists are the result of 22 days of experience and observation from seva at Darbar Sahib. Care to look through my looking glass?”

### **Job List**

**Job Title:** **Bucketeer**

**Job Description:** You shall stand on the second step in the sarovar (nectar tank). It is your duty to fill up the bucket brought to you by the Bucket Carrier.

**Job Title:** **Bucket Carrier**

**Job Description:** You shall carry a bucket. It is your duty to walk to the sarovar, get the bucket filled up and take it to the Water Splasher.

**Job Title: Water Splasher**

**Job Description:** You shall splash water (no, duh!). It is your duty to take a filled bucket from a Bucket Carrier and splash it where you see fit.

**Job Title: Water Directors**

**Job Description:** You shall direct water. It is your duty to use your brooms to push water towards the draining holes.

**Job Title: Squidger**



**Job Description:** You shall dry the parkarma. Once the Bucketeers, Bucket Carriers, Water Splashers and Water Directors have cleared, you, armed with your own personal 6-foot long Squidgy, will dry off the parkarma by pushing the rest of the water into the draining holes.

Clearly, there is no doubt as to who is at the top end of the food chain. The Squidgers. They are an elite group and you absolutely need to know the right people before you can even get close to a Squidgy. (Once I saw a 3-foot long Squidgy. This was obviously

someone on probation. We shall see how he turns out in a few weeks.)

Clearly, there is no doubt as to where I am on the food chain.

Right at the bottom!

***I am a Bucketeer.*** Actually I am probably the first bucketeer in the history of Darbar Sahib, seeing as I created the word in the first place and subsequently employed myself first :)

### **3 Levels of Buckteering**

- 1 Elementary:** To fill up buckets to a respectable level of water.
- 2 Intermediate:** To fill up two buckets at the same time (talk about a challenge!).
- 3 Advanced:** To fill a/ two bucket/s without completely drenching yourself and the person in front of you.

After I mastered Level 1, I kind of speeded through Level 2 (read: I've never actually done this yet :p) and am now at Level 3.

Which, I might add, is a true accomplishment seeing as I have a regular returning clientele of Bucket Carriers, and unlike my other colleagues, our little group is without a doubt drier than any of the others. So there.

Did I mention that seva is selfless service and we should not let our ego get in the way? That is Super Advanced Level 4... still working towards that one!

After being here for a while, you start to identify the regulars. And not just regulars in terms of who comes for seva. Oh no my naïve dears, not those good, wonderful souls.

I mean regulars in terms of their criminal classifications. We are continuously compiling a collection a mug shots to better our identification process.

### **A list of Offenses**

**Hoggers** – they struggle with two buckets and unnecessarily spill water because of imbalance, even when there are clearly others

who would like a share of the work. They say: You stay away from my buckets you! (In the background: splash, splash, splash, splash).

- **Flooders** – they have no sense of balance whatsoever (even if only carrying one bucket). They tend to be of an over-enthusiastic nature. They believe in literally washing their sins (and the sins of those around them) away.
- **Punjabi skinheads**– they walk away from a white Sikh and wait for a Punjabi to fill their bucket. My personal record is so far having 3 buckets waiting to be filled while my 2 friends stood on either side, jobless.
- **Head shakers** – they disapprove of the women rolling up their trousers to their knees while doing seva. Apparently it's not respectful. Uh huh, yeah whatever. And all those Singhs wandering around in their knee-hang kasheras clearly define being proper. Oh please, save the double standards for 500+ years ago, before Guru Nanak was born.
- **Pigs** – they systematically avoid having a woman fill up their bucket. I am not kidding. Apparently we are lesser mortals not worthy of filling up buckets (how ridiculous does that sound?). If there is row of women, they will walk all the way to a man and then backtrack to where they started off. That is such a moronic thing to do, it just has to be a man's idea!

OK, I think I'm list-ed out for now.

**A prayer:** God give them understanding and wisdom and me compassion and patience.

*With love, Hari Kiren Kaur*