

Meaning and Importance of the Ardas

The word Ardas is derived from the Persian word 'Arazdashat', meaning a request, a supplication, a prayer, a petition or an address to a superior authority.

The Ardas is said while standing still with folded hands before and after performing any relevant task. The prayer is a plea to God to support and help the devotee with whatever he or she is about to undertake or has done.

Ardas is a unique prayer as it is one of the few, well-known prayers in the Sikh religion that was not written in its entirety by the Gurus.

The Ardas cannot be found within the pages of the Guru Granth Sahib due to the fact that it is a continually changing devotional text that has evolved over time in order for it to encompass the feats, accomplishments, and feelings of all generations of Sikhs within its lines. The basic purpose of this prayer is an appeal to Waheguru for his protection and care, a plea for the welfare and prosperity of all mankind, and a means for the Sikhs to thank Waheguru for all that he has done.

The Sikh Ardas is different from the prayers of the other religions. A Sikh cannot make prayer for seeking personal property, comfort, benefits and other material blessings. A Sikh must bow before the "Will of God" (Hukam). A Sikh however, may make Ardas seeking from the Almighty, the strength to live a truthful life.

When Does One Say Ardas

A Sikh makes Ardas at least twice a day: in the morning after reading five Banis and in the evening after Rehiras Sahib.

In a congregational setting (i.e. in Sangat), the ardas is recited by a gyani with everyone standing respectfully, hands folded, facing the Guru Granth Sahib Ji

Ardas is read at;

- Parkash Before the moving and opening of Guru Granth Sahib Ji in the morning.
- Sukhasan Before the moving and closing of Guru Granth Sahib Ji in the evening.
- Akhand Paath Before, middle and the end of the full reading of the Guru Granth Sahib Ji.
- Hukamnama Before Hukum from Guru Granth Sahib Ji is taken
- Naam Sanskaar Naming ceremonies
- Amrit Sanchaar Panj Pyare perform the ardas during the ceremony where initiates take Amrit (are baptised) in order to become Sikhs/ members of Khalsa Panth.
- Anand Karaj Beginning and end of the marriage ceremony
- Antim Sanskars Death ceremony
- In special circumstances in order to pray to Waheguru for help in ones' endeavors.

History and education within the Ardas

Ardas incorporates a variety of images and ideas within its folds. It acts as a bridge that transgresses time to report the cruelties that have been inflicted upon the Sikh people while at the same time serving as a way for the Sikh people to seek guidance from Waheguru and thank him for the blessings that he has bestowed upon them. These events as they are portrayed in ardas provide the Sikh people with a sense of pride for their heritage and culture. They are able to take strength from the martyrs and continue to support their faith secure in the knowledge that nothing could befall them that would be any worse than those crimes, which befell the martyrs. The dignity and courage that each of the persecuted people possessed through all of their suffering serves as an example for the Sikh people as a community. The rich and pure history in the ardas also serves as a means of educating the Sikh people. It is this quiet fervor that helped to shape the Sikhs as people and mould them into what they are today.

The Ardas is a prayer that asks us to reflect on all that it took for the Divine to create this pure Shabad Guru on earth and all that the Sikhs had to endure in order to protect the Shabad Guru and insure that it made it into the hands of future generations.

The Ardas recounts historical events that are deeply and profoundly moving, showing that the spirit of the Divine within the human being is capable of great acts of courage and sacrifice. The Ardas is a total meditation of the hundreds of years and thousands of people that acted in the Will of God in order for us to have the gift today of meditating upon and understanding the Guru's wisdom.

It also blesses the sangat today that they will do what it takes to make sure the Shabad Guru is handed to the future generations intact.

Conclusion:

Ardas is a request by an individual or congregation, with a specific objective, and with faith for it's fulfilment to the Almighty through the Guru. But these days it has become a formality in Gurdwarai to be done by a Gyani. The effectiveness of the Ardaas depends upon the state of mind of the Ardaasya and Sangat. If they do it from the bottom of the heart, fully recognizing the presence of the Almighty Guru, with full conviction that it is being heard and it shall be answered, after taking a Hukam from Siri Guru Granth Sahib Ji. Preparation for Ardaas is to be serious and we must not lose informality.

Following are the main features and benefits of saying the Ardas:

- It is a petition to God, the merciful creator of the universe.
- It lowers ones ego and brings calmness to ones mental state.
- Teaches one Nimrata (Humility), Daya (Compassion), fearlessness and Chardi Kala.
- One is reminded of the level of dedication required to become a better human being.
- It gives one inner strength and energy.
- It links the mind with the 'pure ones' from human history.
- It elevates ones spiritual state and builds ones confidence.
- It brings a sense of "community" to the person.

