

REHIT MARYADA (CODE OF CONDUCT) VAAK LAINA (TAKING OF WORD)

EDITORIAL NOTE

It has been noticed that a verse read at random at the end of the Diwan in Gurdwara or of any ceremony is commonly called Vaak by some Sikhs while the others call it Hukm or Hukmnama. The Sikh Rehit Maryada published by the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), Amritsar is using "Vaak laina" (taking of word), 'Hukm laina' (taking of order or command), and 'Awaaz laina' (taking of sound or voice) indiscriminately. Let us find out what is it? Vaak, Hukm or Awaaz. S. Manmeet Singh reported his observations on the Internet on this topic. Those observations are reproduced here. In this connection I requested S. Nirmal Singh Kalsi to give his academic views on this topic.

Devinder Singh Chahal, Editor-in-Chief.

Observation of S. Manmeet Singh:

(akalsahai@hotmail.com) reported to the cyber-sikh@singnet.com.sg; sangat@sikhlink.net on Tuesday, December 15, 1998 at 10:02 AM are as follows:

This issue, the procedure of taking a *Vaak/Hukmnama*, has been raised in the past. The *Sikh Rehit Maryada* published by the SGPC says as follows:

- (e) For taking the command (*Hukm*), the hymn that is continuing on the top of the left page must be read from the beginning. If the hymn begins on the previous page, turn over the page and read the whole hymn from the beginning to the end. If the scriptural composition that is continuing on the top of the left hand page is a *var* (ode), then start from the first of the *Slok* preceding the *pauri* and read up to the end of the *pauri*. Conclude the reading at the end of the hymn with the line in which the name 'Nanak' occurs.
- (f) '*Hukm*' should be taken at the conclusion of the congregational session or after the *Ardaas*.

I have been getting the daily *Hukmnama* (*Vaak*), from Darbar Sahib, Amritsar and observed that the procedure for taking *Vaak* does not fit in the above-mentioned format. These are random *Vaaks* chosen from even page number (left-hand side page) or odd page number (right-hand side page) and sometimes only a page of the *Aad Guru Granth Sahib* (AGGS) is turned. It is taken at will, as a personal choice. For examples,

1. The *Hukmnama* from the Darbar Sahib (Harmandir Sahib), Amritsar for **December 1, 1998** was from even page number (left-hand side page), i.e. 714 of the AGGS and ends with the name of 'Nanak':
ਟੋਡੀ ਮਹਲਾ ੫ ॥ ਨਿੰਦਕੁ ਗੁਰ ਕਰਪਾ ਤੇ ਹਾਟਿਓ ॥ ...

ਆਗਮ ਨਿਗਮੁ ਕਹੈ ਜਨੁ ਨਾਨਕੁ

ਸਭੁ ਦੇਖੈ ਲੋਕੁ ਸਬਾਇਆ ॥ ੨ ॥ ੬ ॥ ੧੧ ॥

AGGS, M 5, P 714.

2. On **December 2, 1998** it was from odd page number (right-hand side page), i. e. 653 and ends with the name of 'Nanak':

ਸਲੋਕੁ ਮਃ ੪ ॥ ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਅੰਤਰਿ ਸਾਂਤਿ ਹੈ

ਮਨਿ ਤਨਿ ਨਾਮਿ ਸਮਾਇ ॥ ...

ਨਾਨਕ ਨਾਮੇ ਰਤਿਆ ਨਾਮੋ ਪਲੈ ਖਾਇ ॥ ੧ ॥

AGGS, M 4, P 653.

3. On **December 4, 1998** it started from the end of even number page and ended at the beginning of the odd page numbers, i. e. 692-693 but does not end with the name of 'Nanak':

ਗਹਰੀ ਕਰਿ ਕੈ ਨੀਵ ਖੁਦਾਈ ਉਪਰਿ ਮੰਡਪ ਛਾਏ ॥ ...

ਕ੍ਰਿਪਾ ਕਰੀ ਜਨ ਅਪੁਨੇ ਉਪਰ

ਨਾਮਦੇਉ ਹਰਿ ਗੁਨ ਗਾਏ ॥ ੪ ॥ ੧ ॥

AGGS, Nam Dev, P 692-693.

Views of S. Nirmal Singh Kalsi

It is really appreciable to start constructive academic discussion of *Vaak* versus *Hukmnama*, because the potential dynamics of these terms does not seem to be fully grasped by the Sikhs in general.

In a nutshell: The Divine Hymn read from *Aad Guru Granth Sahib* (AGGS) before or after the *Ardaas* of *Diwan* in Gurdwara or any other ceremony is called *Vaak* not the *Hukmnama*. *Hukmnama* is a misnomer for *Vaak*. No doubt, *Hukm Laina* (taking the order or command) is also in vogue as compared to the more traditional and apt saying of *Vaak Laina* (taking the Word). But, why? Spiritual knowledge can be attained through intuition developed as a result of meditation (*Dhian*) and dwelling on the Divine Word (*Sabd*).

Vaak is the Word, which is a vehicle of mystical experience. Words are inward and spiritualized

Words. To call them secular words is blasphemous. *Vaak* in Sikhism means the Mystic Word or Words – *Bani* embodied in the AGGS. *Vaak* has a profoundly exalted place in Sikh religious and mystical discipline and practices. God was speaking to humanity through the Guru. Guru Nanak says:

“I relate, O Lalo, as the Divine Words comes to me.” (AGGS, M 1, P 722)

“Nanak speaks the Word of Truth.”
(AGGS, M 1, P 723)

What are we to understand by the term *Sabd – Vaak*? For mystics, it is a superconscious entity. A *Vaak* (Word) is the be-all and end-all of man’s journey towards the Eternal Truth.

“God is revealed through the true Word (Sabd).”
(AGGS, M 1, P 597)

The word *Sabd* has been expressed in the AGGS as *Naam* and *Bani* as well. In other words, *Sabd* is Word of God, the Heavenly Sound or the Divine Power. This spiritual “Sound Current” emanates from the Supreme Being, creates and reverberates in all planes and is the source of all life and the fountain-head of all consciousness. In this mundane world, an assemblage of two or more sounds constitute ‘a word’, also called *Sabd*. When the spoken sounds are symbolically given the form of letters of alphabet of any language and put together in a meaningful manner, speech takes place, but when put down on the paper, words take birth. The sounds we utter are actually the appearances and thus must not be considered real. The real sound (*Sabd*) is the supreme Reality and the uttered sounds cannot, in fact, adequately express the real. A letter or an *Akhar* (a symbol or sign on paper, etc. that stands for any of the sounds that make up words) is an imperishable sound. If viewed properly, these uttered sounds can lead one to the Real Sound. Therefore, when the word *Naam* occurs in the Sikh Scripture, it invariably refers to the Ultimate Sound or *Sabd*, though its apparent character is not lost sight of. The Absolute resides in *Naam*, the All-Pervading Divine Spirit. The name that we utter is a way to approach the Absolute.

In the stages of spiritual ascent, when the typical sound of the written Word, which is efficacious for achieving the Vision of God, is pronounced and heard or conceived, is called *Vaak*. In other words, *Vaak* is the sound-body of God. When there is vibration in its sounds, it is straight away linked with God. This Divine Power of *Sabd* comes down to the level of outward sense-organ through the medium of articulate sound called *Vaikhari Vani*. But the *Gurmukh* has to introvert his propensities and make progress in the spiritual ascent to unite with the Almighty God. This

is the first stage of *Naam Simram*. In conclusion: it is appropriate to say: *Vaak Laina* or *Gur-Vaak Laina*.

Hukm: *Hukm* is an Arabic word which means Order or Judgement of God, Prophet, Ruler, or Judge. But, the term *Hukm* used by the Gurus signifies the Laws of God. *Hukm* is the over-all control of Almighty God. The Laws of God work in every sphere i.e. physical, moral, and spiritual. These are:

1. The Physical Law of Causation: Combination of hydrogen and oxygen will form water.

2. The Law of Karma is the Moral Law of Causation. Our present life is the outcome of past actions and the past and the present actions will mold our future life.

“As the mortal sows so does he reap. This body is the field of actions.” (AGGS, M 5, P 706)

“As man sows, so shall he reap. As he is reaping now, what he in primal time has sown.”(AGGS, M 4, P 309)

3. The most significant law is the Spiritual Law of Love and Grace. The devotion of the Lord is the love of the Lord and this love with Grace of the Lord results in Realization. Gurus conceive God as a God of Will (*Hukm, Raza*) and Grace. “Everything happens within the ambit of His Will” (*Jap*). In short, I would conclude *Hukm* of God is His Ordainment. Hence, it does not seem apt to say ‘*Hukm Laina*’.

Hukmnama: Edicts or encyclical letters from the Gurus to the Sangat of a particular area or an individual is known as the *Hukmnama*. *Hukmnamae* from our Gurus are of great historical importance. The term *Hukmnama* is purely confined to the worldly matters. Hence, to substitute *Hukmnama* for *Vaak* is benightedness.

Is *Vaak* His Ordainment? The Laws of God work in every sphere, i.e. physical, moral, and spiritual. So, His ordainment (*Hukm*) is the over-all control of Almighty God.

“Under the Lord’s Hukm, the man is born and under His Hukm, he dies. The world is seen to have come into being under His Hukm.” (AGGS, M 1, P 1037).

The Fifth Guru also says, *“You have obtained the privilege of human birth, now is your only opportunity to meet God.”* (AGGS, M 5, P 12)

Gurbani avers that human will is a part of Universal Will. But man’s free will is operative so long as he lives in the egoistic plane. In fact, only those persons, who have attuned their will to the Will of God, know the true working of the Ordainment (Will) of God. His

Ordainment (*Hukm*, Will, *Raza*) is there. *Hukm* is given out, not taken. Ordainment is to be followed, accepted or rejected. In other words, Ordainment is not taken. *Vaak* is not His Ordainment. But, “*the Vaak (Word) is realized with His Ordainment, O dear, and man goes in His presence adorned in the robe of honour.*” (AGGS, M 1, P 636)

The Sikh Gurus are in favor of spiritual education. For them the (*Vaak*) verbal testimony is the vital source of knowledge. The fifth Guru certifies in *Gurbani*: “*The Granth is the abode of the Lord.*” (AGGS, M 5, P 1226)

No doubt, the code says that *Vaak* should end with the name of Nanak. But I agree with those scholars who say that *Vaak* can also end with the name of *Bhagat* or *Bhatt*. As far as any violation of the code is concerned, the code itself is contradictory. How? Let’s look at the code paragraph (a) of *Rehit Maryada* written in our own language, Punjabi.

Hukm Laina: (a) The act of paying obeisance to the Guru Granth Sahib, taking with reverence the glimpse of the congregation, an embodiment of the Guru’s aspect and taking or hearing the Voice (*Awaza Laina* or *Sunna*) constitutes the view of the *Satguru* (Immortal destroyer of darkness, the true Guru). Just raising the scarf, covering the *Aad Guru Granth Sahib*, for merely taking a look or making others take a look at the exposed page, without taking the *Vaak (Vaak*

Laina) is contrary to *Gurmat* (Guru’s way).

Under the heading ‘*Hukm Laina*’, we see in the first paragraph (a): *Awaza Laina* or *Sunna* and *Vaak Laina* but the heading obviously say *Hukm Laina*. Which phraseology out of these three is correct for the Sikh devotees to stick to?

In my opinion, the *Rehit Maryada* needs sagacious clarifications. It is imperative that the scholars of the Sikh Panth must pay attention to revise and issue a new recension of the *Rehit Maryada*.

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ਸਬਦੁ ਗੁਰੂ ਸੁਰਤਿ ਧੁਨਿ ਚੇਲਾ ॥

AGGS, M 1, P 943.

**"Sabd (word) is the Guru,
 Consciousness and intention toward it (Sabd)
 Make one its disciple (Sikh)."**