

ARDAAS

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ABSTRACT

Ardaas or Prayer is the pivot of a religious way of life. But unfortunately it is one of the most misunderstood and misused concepts. It has been distorted to such an extent that the way some people say their prayer or Ardaas takes them miles away from the true spirit of a religious life. A humble attempt has been made in the present article to explain the concept of Ardaas with the help of teachings of our Gurus enshrined in the Aad Guru Granth Sahib.

INTRODUCTION

Every one prays. It will be hard to find a person in this world who has never prayed in his/her life. So much so that we find now prayer chains running on various Web sites promising a sure shot answer to your prayer within a set time frame. Some of these prayer chains tend to promote superstitions. But prayer in itself is not at all a superstition. It is the only way of communicating with God. Here a question may arise that since God has been described in Gurbani as follows:

AIK Apwr AgMm Agocr nw iqsu kwlu n krmw]
AGGS, M 1, p 597 [1].

God is unknowable, infinite, unapproachable and imperceptible. God is not subject to death or Karma.

Then how can we communicate with God? The problem and its answer are in the translation of word *Agamm* as ‘unapproachable’ or ‘inaccessible’. In fact this translation of word *Agamm* fails to articulate its true meaning. It means something beyond the reaches of our intellect, something that we cannot master with our intellect. This is how Bhai Kahn Singh [2] has explained this word in his *Mahan Kosh* at page 41 of 1990 edition. God is not unapproachable, that is why It has been described in Gurbani as parent, a husband, a friend, etc. So “*Agamm*” does not mean that we can have no communication with God. Prayer is the way to communicate with God. That is why it is a part and parcel of every religion. Prayer does not require a language to communicate. Prayer can be successfully done in silence. Mute prayer can be more powerful than the verbal prayer. Prayer is a kind of communication that does not require any medium. Every one whether he/she is a literate or illiterate, deaf or dumb can pray and listen to the answers from God. God has kept Its communication lines open with every

one 24 hours a day, seven days a week. God never hangs up.

DISCUSSION

Praying to own individual gods through the agent:

Every one prays. However, if ask the question, do we pray to the same God? The answer will be a definite “no”. It will be hard to find a Hindu who will pray to Christ and a Christian who can say a prayer to Ram or a Sikh who will pray to Allah. The concept of prayer has been distorted to such an extent that in a way now all the prophets are treated like middlemen between their followers and God. To borrow a metaphor from modern life, for most people God is the Big Boss sitting in a place somewhere not known to them, and their prophets are the only persons who have direct access to Its office and can get the things done. So whenever they are in trouble or need something, they have to go through these prophets. And some clever people (commonly known as *Sadhs*, etc.) have opened their shops and have declared that they are the sole authorised agents of these prophets. Any application (read prayer) has to be vetted by them before it is submitted to God through these prophets. They charge hefty fees for their services from the common man. Like all agents they also have an organized network of sub agents. They are doing very good business. If the prayer is answered this network ensures that the credit goes to the Agent and in case the prayer is not answered then the blame is conveniently apportioned between the person who prays and God.

Against this background, it will be interesting and illuminating to have a look at this aspect of our religion. Sikh Gurus have discussed every aspect of prayer or *Ardas* in detail in the Aad Guru Granth Sahib (AGGS). The word ‘*Ardaas*’ occurs well over more than hundred times in the AGGS. In a way the entire

AGGS is a prayer to God. The literal meanings of word 'Ardaas' is 'humble request or application'. Some people translate it as 'supplication'. As per Bhai Kahn Singh [2] the word 'Ardaas' has its origin in Persian language and is a combination of two words 'Ard' + 'asht'. It means to request or to seek. Our Gurus have used this word in unique sense, which will become evident as we go further into this discussion. Sikhism believes that a person starts praying to God even before he/she is born.

ਉਰਧ ਤਪੁ ਅੰਤਰਿ ਕਰੇ ਵਣਜਾਰਿਆ ਮਿਤ੍ਰਾ ਖਸਮ ਸੇਤੀ ਅਰਦਾਸਿ ॥

O my friend, you prayed in upside down posture while in womb.

.....

ਖਸਮ ਸੇਤੀ ਅਰਦਾਸਿ ਵਖਾਣੈ ਉਰਧ ਧਿਆਨਿ ਲਿਵ ਲਾਗਾ ॥

AGGS, M 1, p 74 [1].

You prayed to and meditated on God in womb.

SALIENT FEATURES OF ARDAAS

Who Should We Pray to?

It has been unequivocally stated in the AGGS that, the only door we should knock at in case of need, is the door of God or *Satgur*. (*Satgur* or *Guru* means *Sabd Guru*.)

ਜੇਤਾ ਦੇਹਿ ਤੇਤਾ ਹਉ ਖਾਉ ॥ ਬਿਆ ਦੁਰ ਨਾਹੀ ਕੈ ਦਰਿ ਜਾਉ ॥

ਨਾਨਕੁ ਏਕ ਕਰੈ ਅਰਦਾਸਿ ॥ ਜੀਉ ਪਿੰਡੁ ਸਭੁ ਤੇਰੈ ਪਾਸਿ ॥੩॥

AGGS, M 1, p 25.

I get only what You give me, I have no other place to go to. Nanak completely surrenders to You and humbly says this prayer.

ਮੈ ਤਾਣੁ ਦੀਬਾਣੁ ਤੂਹੈ ਮੇਰੇ ਸੁਆਮੀ ਮੈ ਤੁਧੁ ਆਗੈ ਅਰਦਾਸਿ ॥

ਮੈ ਹੋਰੁ ਥਾਉ ਨਾਹੀ ਜਿਸੁ ਪਹਿ ਕਰਉ ਬੇਨੰਤੀ ਮੇਰਾ

ਦੁਖੁ ਸੁਖੁ ਤੁਝ ਹੀ ਪਾਸਿ ॥੨॥

AGGS, M 4, p 735.

You are my strength, I am answerable in Your court, I pray to You only, I have no one else to whom I can relate with and share my pains and pleasures.

ਅਵਰ ਓਟ ਮੈ ਕੋਇ ਨ ਸੂਝੈ ਇਕ ਹਰਿ ਕੀ ਓਟ ਮੈ ਆਸ ॥

ਕਿਆ ਦੀਨੁ ਕਰੇ ਅਰਦਾਸਿ ॥

ਜਉ ਸਭ ਘਟਿ ਪ੍ਰਭੂ ਨਿਵਾਸ ॥

ਪ੍ਰਭ ਚਰਨਨ ਕੀ ਮਨਿ ਪਿਆਸ ॥

AGGS, M 5, p 1304.

I got no other support or hope. What else a meek person like me can pray for? You live in every body. Grant me a place in your feet.

And it has been repeatedly reiterated in the AGGS that *Guru* is the only place where we will find an answer to all our problems. If somehow we are rejected at this

door, no other door can welcome us.

ਸਤਗੁਰੂ ਕਿਆ ਫਿਟਕਿਆ ਮੰਗਿ ਥਕੇ ਸੰਸਾਰਿ ॥

ਸਚਾ ਸਬਦੁ ਨ ਸੇਵਿਓ ਸਭਿ ਕਾਜ ਸਵਾਰਣਹਾਰੁ ॥੧॥

AGGS, M 3, p 34.

You have not mediated on Sabd, which is a cure all, and have been rejected; now you will exhaust all the other avenues for cure in vain.

Time and Place for Prayer

It is to be noted that prayer or *Ardaas* is unto God, hence can be said at any time and at any place. No paraphernalia is required to say a prayer. There is no special place or time for saying a prayer. What is important in prayer is how you say it, not where and when you say it. Prayer in a particular Gurdwara or Temple or *Dargah*, by a particular priest, for a particular wish is against the teachings of the AGGS. It is tantamount to indulging in *Karm Kand* (ritualism) that has been condemned in the AGGS. What is required is opening out your heart to God, meditate and reflect about God, feel Its presence inside out, and seek an answer to your prayer.

God is everywhere and hence it is ridiculous to seek God at some special place to say a prayer. Bhagat Kabir makes it abundantly clear for us:

ਅਲਹੁ ਏਕੁ ਮਸੀਤਿ ਬਸਤੁ ਹੈ ਅਵਰੁ ਮੁਲਖੁ ਕਿਸੁ ਕੇਰਾ ॥

ਹਿੰਦੂ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਨਾਮ ਨਿਵਾਸੀ ਦੁਹ ਮਹਿ ਤਤੁ ਨ ਹੇਰਾ ॥੧॥

AGGS, Kabir, p 1339.

Both Hindus and Muslims are wrong when they say that God resides in a Mosque or in an Idol.

This message is not just for Muslims or Hindus. This is for all. God is not confined to any particular religious place including Gurudwaras. He is everywhere:

ਬਾਨ ਬਨੰਤਰਿ ਰਵਿ ਰਹੇ ਨਾਨਕ ਕੇ ਸੁਆਮੀ ॥

AGGS, M 5, p 819.

God is permeating and pervading at all places and interspaces.

It is a tragic irony that Sikhs have started to pray to the photos of *Guru Nanak* ignoring his teachings. Those who have seen the movie *Bend It Like Beckham* would be able to recollect the scene where the mother of the heroine prays to the framed painting of *Guru Nanak* before she opens the envelope containing the school results of her daughter. Prayers like this are a mockery of the teachings of Sikh Gurus but unfortunately these are common among Sikhs. Similarly, it is common among many Sikh scholars to call *Darbar Sahib* at Amritsar as a sanctum sanctorum of the Sikh religion. It might or

might not display their knowledge of English language but it does bring about their ignorance of Sikhism. Darbar Sahib at Amritsar and many other places associated with Gurus are extremely important for their historical, social, cultural significance to Sikhs all over the world. But when we judge them on the scale of sanctity, Darbar Sahib and any Gurudwara in any remote place anywhere in the world are equal. Prayer at Darbar Sahib or at Mecca carries the same weight as a prayer in any remote Gurudwara or Mosque.

How do we pray?

Prayer is not a ritual and there are no formalities attached to it. God is not your boss with whom you are required to be formal. God is your father, mother, relative, friend, lover (*yaar*), etc. with whom you have the liberty of being informal. In fact, in a sense, this is what makes *Ardaas* a difficult task and at same time works as a safeguard. It is very easy for clever people to master the procedures for any formal process, but it is the most difficult thing to master something that is not formal. So the clever people would have used (or should we say misused) *Ardaas* to their advantage. Exactly this is the reason why these people are hell bent on transforming *Ardaas* into something very formal, something that only a few can specialize, something which only the professionals can do, so that they can (and they do) exploit the ignorant and gullible people. Prayer is not a skill to be acquired but a way of life to be lived. Every one is entitled to and can say a prayer to God. Sikhism does not recognise any middleman between God and human beings.

If we want to pray to God and want our prayer to be answered, we must connect to God. We must establish a relationship, which is conducive to a meaningful dialogue. The only way to do so, as described in Gurbani, is to praise, appreciate and be thankful to God. It has been described in Gurbani as *Sifat Salaah*:

ਨਾਨਕੁ ਆਖੈ ਏਹੁ ਬੀਚਾਰੁ ॥ ਸਿਫਤੀ ਗੰਢੁ ਪਵੈ ਦਰਬਾਰਿ ॥੨॥

AGGS, M 1, p 143.

Nanak says this after deep reflection that praise is the way to establish a bond with God.

It has been repeatedly said in the AGGS that the *Sifat Salaah* is the way to say a prayer. In fact this is the only thing that we can offer to God. Guru Nanak has made it clear in *Jap*. All that we have got in life (Money, etc.) is a gift from God to us. It will be ridiculous if we seek to return back the same gift to God as our offering in prayer. Some people do not even stop at this. They enter into a business deal with God. They offer a paltry sum of money in prayer and in return ask to grant them a huge amount. They also do not forget to make a big show of

what they offer to God. Guru Nanak has explained this in *Aassa Di Vaar* as follows:

ਦੇ ਦੇ ਮੰਗਹਿ ਸਹਸਾ ਗੁਣਾ ਸੋਭ ਕਰੇ ਸੰਸਾਰੁ ॥

AGGS, M 1, p 466.

They make a show of what they donate and also ask for thousands times more.

Now if all that we got with us is a gift from God, then what should we offer? Guru Nanak resolves this dilemma for us. The only thing that we can offer is doing *Sifat Salaah* (to praise, appreciate and be grateful to God). Meditating on Its greatness in this life is the only way to our salvation.

ਆਖਹਿ ਮੰਗਹਿ ਦੇਹਿ ਦੇਹਿ ਦਾਤਿ ਕਰੇ ਦਾਤਾਰੁ ॥

ਫੇਰਿ ਕਿ ਅਗੈ ਰਖੀਐ ਜਿਤੁ ਦਿਸੈ ਦਰਬਾਰੁ ॥

ਮੁਹੋ ਕਿ ਬੋਲਣੁ ਬੋਲੀਐ ਜਿਤੁ ਸੁਣਿ ਧਰੇ ਪਿਆਰੁ ॥

ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤ ਵੇਲਾ ਸਚੁ ਨਾਉ ਵਡਿਆਈ ਵੀਚਾਰੁ ॥

ਕਰਮੀ ਆਵੈ ਕਪੜਾ ਨਦਰੀ ਮੋਖੁ ਦੁਆਰੁ ॥

ਨਾਨਕ ਏਵੈ ਜਾਣੀਐ ਸਭੁ ਆਪੇ ਸਚਿਆਰੁ ॥੪॥

AGGS, Jap 4, p 2.

We always beg from God who continues to give us Its gifts. What should we offer to God to earn a place in Its royal presence? What words should be used to attract God's loving attention? This is the right time to contemplate on Its greatness and sing Its praises that will lead us to salvation. Nanak says it be known that True one is everywhere.

Guru Nanak has used the word '*Ardaas*' for the first time in the AGGS as follows:

ਨਾਨਕੁ ਏਕ ਕਹੈ ਅਰਦਾਸਿ ॥ ਜੀਉ ਪਿੰਡੁ ਸਭੁ ਤੇਰੈ ਪਾਸਿ ॥੩॥

AGGS, M 1, p 25.

Nanak says his prayer after surrendering to God completely.

It is noteworthy that in this verse and at many other places in the AGGS where *Ardaas* is discussed, it is invariably stated that *Jeo* (Mind), *Pind* (Body) and *Dhan* (Money) belong to God. This describes a state of mind of complete surrender to God in which a person becomes humility incarnate. It is humble acknowledgment God that whatever we have in this life has been given by God.

At some places in the AGGS the person saying the prayer is required to have his/her both hands pressed together and be in a standing posture. We will be misreading this if we think that here our Guru is prescribing any standard manner/posture of saying the prayer. Emphasis is on humility and not on posture.

During prayer, one must feel the immanent presence of

God. To pray is to enter into the fullness of God's existence in this universe. *Sifat Silah* is the door to enter into the realms of this experience. *Sifat salah* stems from the *Gurmat* (philosophy of the Guru) way of life in which we renounce our limited wisdom and follow Guru's universal wisdom:

ਗੁਰਮਤਿ ਸਾਚੀ ਹੁਜਤਿ ਦੂਰਿ ॥ ਬਹੁਤੁ ਸਿਆਣਪ ਲਾਗੈ ਧੂਰਿ ॥
ਲਾਗੀ ਮੈਲੁ ਮਿਟੈ ਸਚ ਨਾਇ ॥ ਗੁਰ ਪਰਸਾਦਿ ਰਹੈ ਲਿਵ ਲਾਇ ॥੧॥
ਹੈ ਹਜੂਰਿ ਹਾਜਰੁ ਅਰਦਾਸਿ ॥
ਦੁਖੁ ਸੁਖੁ ਸਾਚੁ ਕਰਤੇ ਪ੍ਰਭੁ ਪਾਸਿ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ

AGGS, M 1, p 352.

True knowledge ends ambivalence. Over cleverness soils the mind. Dirty mind is cleaned by True name. With Guru's grace, you can remain attached to the God. God is ever present; offer your prayer to God.

What do we seek in prayer?

A look at *Ardaas* as described in Gurbani shows that the things sought from God in *Ardaas* include among others, eradication of ego, truth, *Naam*, blossoming of the name of God in heart, meditation on God day and night, service of saints, company of good people, *bhagti*, riddance from rituals, true Guru, attainment of *Naam* through *Sabd* etc. (For detailed study of the subject matter of prayer in the AGGS, refer to following links in the AGGS: M 4, p 42; M1, p 55; M 2, p 148; M 5, p 389, 392 and 395; M 1, p 415, 421; M 1, p 722; M 5, p 737, 741, 742, 747 and 749; M 1, p 752, 762; Kabir, p 792; M 5, p 811; M 5, p 894, 896, 900; M 5, p 1017; M 5, p 1211; M 5, p 1271; M 5, p 1340.)

It is evident that all the above things are spiritual in nature. Before we go further in this discussion it will be pertinent to analyse another aspect of Sikh religion, because on the face of it, this aspect might look contradicting the subject matter of prayer as discussed above. But when we reflect deeply we find that both these aspects do not contradict but instead complement each other. Sikhism does not ask you to shun this world for the pursuits of spiritualism. Then how come the subject matter of *Ardaas* in AGGS is spiritual? Let us have a close look. Sikhism is a practical and pragmatic philosophy of life and believes that salvation is possible while living a normal family life.

ਨਾਨਕ ਸਤਿਗੁਰਿ ਭੋਟਿਐ ਪੂਰੀ ਹੋਵੈ ਜੁਗਤਿ ॥
ਹਸੰਦਿਆ ਖੇਲੰਦਿਆ ਪੈਨੰਦਿਆ ਖਾਵੰਦਿਆ ਵਿਚੇ ਹੋਵੈ ਮੁਕਤਿ ॥੨॥

AGGS, M 5, p 522.

After you find the true Guru, Salvation comes while living you normal life.

And Kabir has said that it is not possible to worship with an empty stomach

ਭੁਖੇ ਭਗਤਿ ਨ ਕੀਜੈ ॥ ਯਹ ਮਾਲਾ ਅਪਨੀ ਲੀਜੈ ॥

AGGS, Kabir, p 656.

It is not possible to worship God when you are hungry.

Bhagat Dhanna has asked from God food, shelter, a good partner and conveyance (horse).

ਦਾਲਿ ਸੀਧਾ ਮਾਗਉ ਘੀਉ ॥ ਹਮਰਾ ਖੁਸੀ ਕਰੈ ਨਿਤ ਜੀਉ ॥

ਪਨੀਆ ਛਾਦਨੁ ਨੀਕਾ ॥ ਅਨਾਜੁ ਮਗਉ ਸਤ ਸੀ ਕਾ ॥੧॥

ਗਊ ਭੈਸ ਮਗਉ ਲਾਵੇਰੀ ॥ ਇਕ ਤਾਜਨਿ ਤੁਰੀ ਚੰਗੇਰੀ ॥

ਘਰ ਕੀ ਗੀਹਨਿ ਚੰਗੀ ॥ ਜਨੁ ਧੰਨਾ ਲੇਵੈ ਮੰਗੀ ॥੨॥੪॥

AGGS, Dhanna, p 695.

O God, grant me good food like lentils, butter spread; good quality shoes and clothes; good dairy animals; fine quality horse and a good partner.

Is there a contradiction here? No. Sikhism believes that we need to survive in order to worship God. Good healthy life is a right and duty of every creature. All the above verses establish the fact that Sikhism recognizes the material needs of our body. Guru Nanak recognises the requirement of body for spiritual attainment.

ਇਹੁ ਸਰੀਰੁ ਕਰਮ ਕੀ ਧਰਤੀ ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਮਥਿ ਮਥਿ ਤਤੁ ਕਢਈਆ ॥

AGGS, M 1, p 834.

This body is a field in which a Gurmukh ploughs hard to harvest the fruit of spirituality.

That is why the needs of our body are also treated as sacred in Gurbani.

ਜਪੀਐ ਨਾਮੁ ਜਪੀਐ ਅੰਨੁ ॥ ਅੰਭੈ ਕੈ ਸੰਗਿ ਨੀਕਾ ਵੰਨੁ ॥

AGGS, Kabir, p 873.

Meditate of God's name; meditate on food grain that looks beautiful when mixed with water.

Sikhism recognises that a healthy body is one of the prerequisites of a healthy religious life and our body needs food, shelter and clothing to survive. However what distinguishes Sikhism from many other religions is the fact that it has laid stress on *Kirat* or honest labour to earn food, shelter and clothing for our body. That is why *Kirat* is one of the fundamental principles of Sikhism is honest labour (*Kirat karn*). All these Saints and our Gurus did *Kirat* to live. It will be against *Gurmat* if we pray and wait for an angel to appear out of nowhere to fulfil all our wishes in a split second. God is our parent. God has sufficiently provided for all of us. God has provided us with this body to work for our living. It is the best gift from God and if we do not take care of this Gift (By the way, "*Kirat*" is the best way to maintain it), it would be an insult to God. Besides prayer in Sikhism is not a tool to bring about miracles. *Gurmat* appreciates the miracles that are happening every second in our life,

but miracle as interference into Laws of Nature is alien to *Gurmat*. God is always merciful and kind. It has been said that giving, not taking, is in Its nature. We read daily in '*So Dar*' about these virtues of God:

ਨਾ ਓਹੁ ਮਰੈ ਨ ਹੋਵੈ ਸੋਗੁ ॥ ਦੇਦਾ ਰਹੈ ਨ ਚੂਕੈ ਭੋਗੁ ॥
ਗੁਣੁ ਏਹੋ ਹੋਰੁ ਨਾਹੀ ਕੋਇ ॥ ਨਾ ਕੋ ਹੋਆ ਨਾ ਕੋ ਹੋਇ ॥੩॥
AGGS, M 1, p 9.

It is in the nature of God Who always gives and never takes. Only God has this virtue. No one else is like God.

Prayer in *Gurmat* is not something that you say only when you need something or when you are in soup. It is not an option to fall back upon but the main activity and pivot of the life of a Gurmukh. It is not a cheque that you can draw on the Bank of God, whenever you are hard put to meet your needs. It is not a series of isolated requests. Prayer in *Gurmat* is a way of life. It is like *Nitnem* (daily routine). It is something that you breathe with, something that you breathe in and breathe out. Only then it fructifies.

ਤੀਨੇ ਤਾਪ ਨਿਵਾਰਣਹਾਰਾ ਦੁਖ ਹੰਤਾ ਸੁਖ ਰਾਸਿ ॥
ਤਾ ਕਉ ਬਿਘਨੁ ਨ ਕੋਊ ਲਾਗੈ ਜਾ ਕੀ ਪ੍ਰਭ ਆਗੈ ਅਰਦਾਸਿ ॥੧॥
AGGS, M 5, p 14.

God is the treasure house of pleasures; Who kills our pains and cures the diseases of our body, mind and society. Those who always pray to God do not face any obstacles in their way.

ਤੂੰ ਸਮਰਥੁ ਅਕਥੁ ਅਗੋਚਰੁ ਜੀਉ ਪਿੰਡੁ ਤੇਰੀ ਰਾਸਿ ॥
ਰਹਮ ਤੇਰੀ ਸੁਖੁ ਪਾਇਆ ਸਦਾ ਨਾਨਕ ਕੀ ਅਰਦਾਸਿ ॥੪॥੩॥
AGGS, M 5, p 724.

O God, you are omnipotent, inaccessible, and imperceptible, my soul and body is Yours. I can find peace only in your mercy. This is the everlasting prayer from Nanak.

Are all our prayers answered?

It is often said that prayer is always answered. This statement does not go well with our experience in life. All of our prayers are never answered. Some are answered and some are not. This is because this statement is true but it does not tell the whole truth. The first line of the following couplet is often quoted in Gurdwaras with emphasis on the first half.

ਬਿਰਥੀ ਕਦੇ ਨ ਹੋਵਈ ਜਨ ਕੀ ਅਰਦਾਸਿ ॥
ਨਾਨਕ ਜੋਰੁ ਗੋਵਿੰਦ ਕਾ ਪੂਰਨ ਗੁਣਤਾਸਿ ॥
AGGS, M 5, p 819.

God never bounces back prayer from humble servants. However, all the powers are with God, which implies that to answer a prayer is God's prerogative.

The first part of the second line (ਨਾਨਕ ਜੋਰੁ ਗੋਵਿੰਦ ਕਾ - *Nanak jor Govind ka*. God has all the power) makes it clear that it is the discretion of God to answer a prayer. This has been made clear at many other places in the AGGS.

ਬਿਨਤਿ ਕਰਉ ਅਰਦਾਸਿ ਸੁਨਹੁ ਜੇ ਠਾਕੁਰ ਭਾਵੈ ॥
AGGS, M 5, p 1386.
O God! Listen to my prayer if it pleases you.

ਗੁਰ ਭਾਵੈ ਸੁਣਿ ਬੇਨਤੀ ਜਨ ਨਾਨਕ ਕੀ ਅਰਦਾਸਿ ॥
AGGS, M 4, p 996.
O Guru! If it pleases you listen to my prayer.

Ardaas is a sure shot click only when it comes from a *Jan, Sant, Sikh, Sewak* etc. Wherever, it has been stated in the AGGS that *Ardaas* is answered, the sayer of prayer has been invariably qualified as *Jan, Bhagat, Sant* or *Sewak*.

ਅਰਦਾਸਿ ਸੁਣੀ ਦਾਤਾਰਿ ਪ੍ਰਭਿ ਹੋਏ ਕਿਰਪਾਲ ॥
ਰਾਖਿ ਲੀਆ ਅਪਨਾ ਸੇਵਕੋ ਮੁਖਿ ਨਿੰਦਕ ਫਾਰੁ ॥੧॥
AGGS, M 5, p 818.
God took mercy on me and answered my prayer. God saved his servant and punished the slanderer.

All prayers are not answered. Every one prays. Some pray even against each other. If all prayers are answered then there will be chaos. The Brahmin who tried to kill young Hargobind must have prayed to his deity before he left his home for this mission. But he died himself. Guru Arjan has recorded this in the AGGS:

ਹਰਿ ਜਨ ਰਾਖੇ ਪਾਰਬ੍ਰਹਮਿ ਆਪਿ ॥
ਪਾਪੀ ਮੂਆ ਗੁਰ ਪਰਤਾਪਿ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ

...
ਜਨ ਨਾਨਕ ਕੀ ਪਰਮੇਸਰਿ ਸੁਣੀ ਅਰਦਾਸਿ ॥
ਮਲੇਛੁ ਪਾਪੀ ਪਚਿਆ ਭਇਆ ਨਿਰਾਸੁ ॥੪॥੯॥

AGGS, M 5, p 1137.
God saved his humble servant, and the sinner died. God answered the prayer of his servant and all hopes of dirty sinner were frustrated and he died.

Prayer from an arrogant mind is also not answered.

ਮਨ ਕੀ ਮਤਿ ਮਤਾਗਲੁ ਮਤਾ ॥ ਜੋ ਕਿਛੁ ਬੋਲੀਐ ਸਭੁ ਖੜੋ ਖਤਾ ॥
ਕਿਆ ਮੁਹੁ ਲੈ ਕੀਚੈ ਅਰਦਾਸਿ ॥ ਪਾਪੁ ਪੁੰਨੁ ਦੁਇ ਸਾਖੀ ਪਾਸਿ ॥੨॥
AGGS, M 1, p 351.

When the mind is arrogant like a drunken elephant, all you say is wrong. What face you will put on to say your prayer, when your virtues and vices are witnessing everything.

Prayer from a person who has turned his back on the Guru and has surrendered himself to the whims of his mind is not answered:

ਮਨਮੁਖ ਮੁਹਿ ਮੈਲੈ ਸਬਦੁ ਨ ਜਾਣਨੀ ਕਾਮ ਕਰੋਧਿ ਵਿਣਾਸੁ ॥
ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਕਾ ਭਉ ਛੋਡਿਆ ਮਨਹਠਿ ਕੰਮੁ ਨ ਆਵੈ ਰਾਸਿ ॥
ਜਮ ਪੁਰਿ ਬਧੇ ਮਾਰੀਅਹਿ ਕੋ ਨ ਸੁਣੇ ਅਰਦਾਸਿ ॥
ਨਾਨਕ ਪੁਰਬਿ ਲਿਖਿਆ ਕਮਾਵਣਾ ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਨਾਮਿ ਨਿਵਾਸੁ ॥੨॥

AGGS, M 3, p 586.

Those who follow the dictates of their minds are ignorant of Sabd and rot in anger and sexual desires. Because of their stubborn ego, they have no fear of true Guru and as a result their efforts are fruitless. Their prayers are not answered and they are punished. Nanak says, this is their destiny and the only way out of it is turning to the Sabd Guru.

Those people who proclaim that they have attained special powers by doing *Simran* are in a way doing *Hath* before God. Their stubborn ego is throwing up a challenge to God. Guru Amar Das has clarified here that it does not work. (ਮਨਹਠਿ ਕੰਮੁ ਨ ਆਵੈ ਰਾਸਿ ॥ AGGS, M 3, p 586). Prayer by such people is a sort of challenge to win something from God. Such prayers are bereft of experience of the love of God and tend to become mere private yearnings.

Gurmukh (Guru-oriented) prays to Guru to grant him power to control his mind, *Manmukh* (self-oriented) is under the control of his mind and prays as per the commands of his mind. But whatever he prays to please his mind is not accepted:

ਆਪਣੈ ਭਾਣੈ ਬਹੁਤਾ ਬੋਲਹਿ ਬੋਲਿਆ ਥਾਇ ਨ ਪਾਇ ॥

AGGS, M 3, p 1283.

Whatever you say as per the dictates of your mind is not accepted in the court of God.

Mind has been compared to King in Gurbani. Those who follow their minds are mistaken if they think they are acting on their free will. They are under the grip of Maya that guides their actions through their minds. Their mind assumes a separate identity and dictates them like a King. On the other hand the mind of *Gurmukh* is always humble and subservient to the wisdom of Guru and hence is liberated from the shackles of Maya. Sikhism believes that only Guru can help us control our minds. No other education and rituals can help us in this matter.

ਅਖਰ ਪੜਿ ਪੜਿ ਭੁਲੀਐ ਭੇਖੀ ਬਹੁਤੁ ਅਭਿਮਾਨੁ ॥
ਤੀਰਥ ਨਾਤਾ ਕਿਆ ਕਰੇ ਮਨ ਮਹਿ ਮੈਲੁ ਗੁਮਾਨੁ ॥
ਗੁਰ ਬਿਨੁ ਕਿਨਿ ਸਮਝਾਈਐ ਮਨੁ ਰਾਜਾ ਸੁਲਤਾਨੁ ॥੪॥

AGGS, M 1, p 61.

Except Guru no one can bring our mind to senses.

Can any one pray for us?

Gurmat makes it clear that no one can pray for any one else. If it were so then it will be recognition of middleman between God and other human beings. However, in practical life we come across so many people who are masquerading as experts in performing *Ardaas* for others. These people have succeeded in adulterating the concept of *Ardaas* to such an extent that even its original ingredients are missing now. As a result it is probably the most misused and misunderstood concept among the Sikhs. Common man has been tricked to believe that God only listens to these tricksters. Some even go to the extent that they can force God due to the powers they have attained by what they call *Simran*. Guru Nanak has made it clear in *Jap* that we cannot compel God to do any thing.

ਆਖਣਿ ਜੋਰੁ ਚੁਪੈ ਨਹ ਜੋਰੁ ॥ ਜੋਰੁ ਨ ਮੰਗਣਿ ਦੇਣਿ ਨ ਜੋਰੁ ॥
ਜੋਰੁ ਨ ਜੀਵਣਿ ਮਰਣਿ ਨਹ ਜੋਰੁ ॥ ਜੋਰੁ ਨ ਰਾਜਿ ਮਾਲਿ ਮਨਿ ਸੋਰੁ ॥
ਜੋਰੁ ਨ ਸੁਰਤੀ ਗਿਆਨਿ ਵੀਚਾਰਿ ॥ ਜੋਰੁ ਨ ਜੁਗਤੀ ਛੁਟੈ ਸੰਸਾਰੁ ॥
ਜਿਸੁ ਹਥਿ ਜੋਰੁ ਕਰਿ ਵੇਖੈ ਸੋਇ ॥ ਨਾਨਕ ਉਤਮੁ ਨੀਚੁ ਨ ਕੋਇ ॥੩੩॥

AGGS, Jap 33, p 7.

To speak or to be silent; to beg or to give; to live or to die; to rule with wealth or with mental powers; to understand and discuss deep philosophies; to escape from life – is not in our control. Everything is in God's control. No one on this earth can dictate God for anything and no one is big or small in his eyes.

But does this mean our prayer will never be answered. No. All that is meant here is that everything is in God's control.

Further there is no evidence in history to show that our Gurus prayed on behalf of any one. But you don't have to search long and wide to find cheats in this world, who dares to proclaim that if they say a prayer it will work for sure. It is a big lie. Their one and only motive is personal gain. They do not pray. They prey and are looking for a prey. Unfortunately many people fall an easy prey to them. Such people attach so many unnecessary rituals to *Ardaas* that the common man starts thinking that it is not his cup of tea. These cheats are cheating the public, but in a sense, are also cheating themselves. No one can harm or benefit another person by saying a prayer against or for him/her. God is not under control of any one and does not take orders from any one. No one can change the Laws of Nature.

ਜੇਤੇ ਜੀਅ ਲਿਖੀ ਸਿਰਿ ਕਾਰ ॥ ਕਰਣੀ ਉਪਰਿ ਹੋਵਗਿ ਸਾਰ ॥
ਹੁਕਮੁ ਕਰਹਿ ਮੂਰਖ ਗਾਵਾਰ ॥ ਨਾਨਕ ਸਾਚੇ ਕੇ ਸਿਫਤਿ ਭੰਡਾਰ ॥੪॥੩॥

AGGS, M 1, p 1169.

Every one is under the Laws of Nature (God), the one who thinks he can dictate God is an idiot.

That is why it has been said in the AGGS that:

ਸਾਹਿਬ ਸੇਤੀ ਹੁਕਮੁ ਨ ਚਲੈ ਕਹੀ ਬਣੈ ਅਰਦਾਸਿ ॥

ਨਾਨਕ ਹੁਕਮੁ ਨ ਚਲਈ ਨਾਲਿ ਖਸਮ ਚਲੈ ਅਰਦਾਸਿ ॥੨੨॥

AGGS, M 2, p 474.

God does not accept dictates, you can only pray to God.

In fact as per Gurmat to say a prayer is also not under our control. We say a prayer only when God makes us to do so.

ਨਦਰਿ ਤੁਧੁ ਅਰਦਾਸਿ ਮੇਰੀ ਜਿੰਨਿ ਆਪੁ ਉਪਾਇਆ ॥

ਤਾ ਮੈ ਕਹਿਆ ਕਹਣੁ ਜਾ ਤੁਝੈ ਕਹਾਇਆ ॥੨॥

AGGS, M 1, p 566.

You created everything, it is totally up to You to grant it, I can only seek to pray. Even when I say something, I say only what you make me to say.

The only way to “compel” God is to love him, praise him, appreciate and be thankful to him like his *Bhagat, Jan, Sant, Chera* or *Sewak*. We do not need any intermediary to reach God. God is not far away. God is watching and listening to everyone. God is very close to all of us.

ਸੁਨਤ ਪੇਖਤ ਸੰਗਿ ਸਭ ਕੈ ਪ੍ਰਭ ਨੇਰਹੂ ਤੇ ਨੇਰੇ ॥

ਅਰਦਾਸਿ ਨਾਨਕ ਸੁਨਿ ਸੁਆਮੀ ਰਖਿ ਲੇਹੁ ਘਰ ਕੇ ਚੇਰੇ ॥੧॥

AGGS, M 5, p 547.

You are close to everyone. You watch and listen to everyone. O God! Listen to the prayer of this servant.

You don't have to involve any other person. Feel God's presence everywhere, inside and outside. You don't have to go anywhere for help to pray for you. God personally listens to our *Ardaas*.

ਜਤ ਕਤ ਦੇਖਉ ਤਤ ਤਤ ਤੁਮ ਹੀ ਮੋਹਿ ਇਹੁ ਬਿਸੁਆਸੁ ਹੋਇ ਆਇਓ ॥

ਕੈ ਪਹਿ ਕਰਉ ਅਰਦਾਸਿ ਬੇਨਤੀ ਜਉ ਸੁਨਤੋ ਹੈ ਰਖੁਰਾਇਓ ॥੧॥

AGGS, M 5, p 205.

I believe and feel Your presence everywhere. Since You listen to my requests directly, then why should I go to any one else.

No one can force God. But at the same time God is very kind and loving parent. It has been said at many places that God listens to our prayers and calls us to sit on Its side and fulfils our wishes.

ਸੇਵਕ ਸੇਵਹਿ ਕਰਹਿ ਅਰਦਾਸਿ ॥

ਤੂੰ ਆਪੇ ਮੇਲਿ ਬਹਾਲਹਿ ਪਾਸਿ ॥

AGGS, M 3, p 1067.

This is the prayer of your humble servant. Allow me to

sit on your side.

Features of a True prayer

True prayer or a prayer that is definitely answered, always comes from the depths of heart and is bereft or devoid of selfishness and cheating, and is said with absolute surrender and dedication to God. This is the kind of prayer that is said by *Bhagats* or *Jans*. Guru encourages us to say and welcomes our prayer whenever we are in some trouble. But at the same time he advises us to renounce all sort of cleverness.

ਜੀਅ ਕੀ ਬਿਰਥਾ ਹੋਇ ਸੁ ਗੁਰ ਪਹਿ ਅਰਦਾਸਿ ਕਰਿ ॥

ਛੋਡਿ ਸਿਆਣਪ ਸਗਲ ਮਨੁ ਤਨੁ ਅਰਪਿ ਧਰਿ ॥

AGGS, M5, p 519.

If you are in trouble, pray to Guru. But renounce your cleverness and dedicate your mind and body to Guru.

ਤੁਧਨੋ ਨਿਵਣੁ ਮੰਨਣੁ ਤੇਰਾ ਨਾਉ ॥ ਸਾਚੁ ਭੋਟ ਬੈਸਣੁ ਕਉ ਥਾਉ ॥

ਸਤੁ ਸੰਤੋਖੁ ਹੋਵੈ ਅਰਦਾਸਿ ॥ ਤਾ ਸੁਣਿ ਸਦਿ ਬਹਾਲੇ ਪਾਸਿ ॥੧॥

AGGS, M 1, p 878.

To believe in God is the true worship. Truthfulness procures a place in God's presence. Prayer with truth and contentment is answered and God blesses you and asks you to sit Its side.

Gurmukh renounces his wisdom and always reflects on Guru's Sabd before making his decisions. His/her prayer is answered.

ਸਾਚੁ ਨਾਮੁ ਗੁਰ ਸਬਦਿ ਵੀਚਾਰਿ ॥

ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਸਾਚੈ ਸਾਚੈ ਦਰਬਾਰਿ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥

ਸਚਾ ਅਰਜੁ ਸਚੀ ਅਰਦਾਸਿ ॥

ਮਹਲੀ ਖਸਮੁ ਸੁਣੇ ਸਾਬਾਸਿ ॥

ਸਚੈ ਤਖਤਿ ਬੁਲਾਵੈ ਸੋਇ ॥

ਦੇ ਵਡਿਆਈ ਕਰੇ ਸੁ ਹੋਇ ॥੨॥

AGGS, M 1, p 355.

Gurmukh reflects on the revealed Word and is adjudged true in God's court. The true prayer is answered and the God blesses him.

There is no point in being clever with God. We can never cheat God. Just as he listens to our unsaid prayers, similarly he knows immediately what we say but do not mean. God knows everything.

ਸੁਣਿ ਸੁਆਮੀ ਅਰਦਾਸਿ ਜਨ ਤੁਮੁ ਅੰਤਰਜਾਮੀ ॥

ਬਾਨ ਬਨੰਤਰਿ ਰਵਿ ਰਹੇ ਨਾਨਕ ਕੇ ਸੁਆਮੀ ॥੨॥

AGGS, M 5, p 819.

O God, You are everywhere and know everything. Kindly listen to my prayer.

He knows even when we do not verbalise our prayer.

ਬਾਬੀਹਾ ਸਗਲੀ ਧਰਤੀ ਜੇ ਫਿਰਹਿ ਉਡਿ ਚੜਹਿ ਆਕਾਸਿ ॥
 ਸਤਿਗੁਰਿ ਮਿਲਿਐ ਜਲੁ ਪਾਣੀਐ ਚੂਕੈ ਭੂਖ ਪਿਆਸ ॥
 ਜੀਉ ਪਿੰਡੁ ਸਭੁ ਤਿਸ ਕਾ ਸਭੁ ਕਿਛੁ ਤਿਸ ਕੈ ਪਾਸਿ ॥
 ਵਿਣੁ ਬੋਲਿਆ ਸਭੁ ਕਿਛੁ ਜਾਣਦਾ ਕਿਸੁ ਆਗੈ ਕੀਚੈ ਅਰਦਾਸਿ ॥

AGGS, M 3, p 1420.

Humans wander about all over the world like a rain bird, but thirst is quenched only when they meet the Guru and surrender completely to God. God knows even when they do not verbalise their prayers as God resides in everybody but can be known only through the wisdom of Sabd.

This is for the last time that word *Ardaas* appears in AGGS. Guru Amardas has told us that God knows everything even if we do not pray. This does not mean that we should not pray. This only means that prayer is independent of any language or speech.

CONCLUSIONS

- Prayer is part and parcel of every religion as it is the only way to communicate with God.
- But due to our misunderstanding of the concept of prayer we have reduced it to a ritual performed differently in different religions.
- However prayer is said unto God or Satguru only.
- No paraphernalia is required to say a prayer.
- It is one on one communication. No middleman is required to say a prayer.
- Truth, contentment and humility are some of the salient features of a prayer.
- There is no special time or place to say a prayer.
- Prayer from an arrogant mind is never answered.

- You can never cheat or outsmart God.
- He knows even when you say something and do not mean it.
- At the same time prayer is independent of any language or speech.
- Even unsaid prayers are answered.

In the end it will be in order to quote a verse from *Anand Sahib*

ਸਾਚੇ ਸਾਹਿਬਾ ਕਿਆ ਨਾਹੀ ਘਰਿ ਤੇਰੈ ॥
 ਘਰਿ ਤ ਤੇਰੈ ਸਭੁ ਕਿਛੁ ਹੈ ਜਿਸੁ ਦੇਹਿ ਸੁ ਪਾਵਏ ॥
 ਸਦਾ ਸਿਫਤਿ ਸਲਾਹ ਤੇਰੀ ਨਾਮੁ ਮਨਿ ਵਸਾਵਏ ॥
 ਨਾਮੁ ਜਿਨ ਕੈ ਮਨਿ ਵਸਿਆ ਵਾਜੇ ਸਬਦ ਘਨੇਰੇ ॥
 ਕਰੈ ਨਾਨਕੁ ਸਚੇ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਕਿਆ ਨਾਹੀ ਘਰਿ ਤੇਰੈ ॥੩॥

AGGS, M 3, p 917.

O God, you have everything to give, but only those get who you desire to give. God's Name blossoms in the mind of those who always continue to sing Its praises and an ethereal melody wells up to bless them with all they want.

Note: The meanings of verse, stanzas and phrases of Gurbani quoted here are not literal or word-by-word translation but convey the inner theme.

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Deliberation of Bani

ਬਾਣੀ ਬਿਰਲਉ ਬੀਚਾਰਸੀ ਜੇ ਕੋ ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਹੋਇ ॥
 ਇਹ ਬਾਣੀ ਮਹਾ ਪੁਰਖ ਕੀ ਨਿਜ ਘਰਿ ਵਾਸਾ ਹੋਇ ॥

AGGS, M 1, p 935

*Only rare Guru-oriented will deliberate/
 contemplate on the Bani (word).*

*This Bani (Word) is of the pre-eminent preceptor,
 That is to be imbibed in one's own mind
 (only through its deliberation).*