

Meditating the Sikh Way: Naam Jaap

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Simran is the central theme in Gurbani. The continual repetition of the Lord's Name or Naam Jaap, the practice of invoking the Name of the Beloved One, is practiced by Sikhs to cure dualistic perception and to invite the Creator into our lives. Recitation of the Name of God

Jaap

Jaap means 'recitation.' It is repeating the name of God. It may be verbal or mental. We start with verbal Jaap and develop it into the mental Jaap. Verbal Jaap is the starting or gross stage of Jaap. In it, there is so called a perceptible Naam (perceptible name of God – you know you are reciting it).

Ajappaa-Jaap

Ajapaa-Jaap is a Jaap (recitation) without doing Jaap. In this, recitation of the name of God (Jaap) becomes a habit. It is a Jaap without effort – an effortless Jaap. The Jaap of the Name (Naam – name of God) keeps going on verbally, or silently in the mind. Whatever might one be doing, the act of Jaap is there. The constant Jaap leads to Ajapaa-Jaap. This is the middle i.e. subtle stage of Jaap – imperceptible Naam: the recitation becomes automatic like a habit.

Simran

Simran is remembrance. The mind gets filled with the constant remembrance of the One, and there is no more recitation of the Naam (Waheguru). Only the remembrance of the Divine One is left –

an unbroken awareness of the Infinite One. God is always in the mind regardless of what one might be busy with. It is an advanced stage of the seeker – practitioner (one reciting the Naam). It is the third i.e. transcendental stage of the Jaap. This is the Naam beyond perception (recitation without knowing it – Just the thought).

Dheaan

Dheaan is meditation - contemplation on the Beloved One. It is thinking about God and is different from Jaap - recitation of the Naam. Dhean is the process of thinking about God and may include changing thoughts.

In the Naam-Jaap, there is recitation of the name of the Divine One, and it stays the same without any change. The mind keeps set on God. The mind is set on the Name as it is, without its modification – no changing thoughts, no thinking about various aspects of the Name.

From time to time and depending on the level of advancement, all these stages (starting, middle, advanced) keep overlapping each other, to lesser or greater extent, when doing the practice of Naam – Naam-Jaap. In whatever form – gross, subtle, or transcendental, all is the play and flow of Naam (vibrating or active Naam), may be it is in its perceptible, imperceptible, or so-called 'beyond even imperception' form. We may or may not be able to comprehend it, but there always is manifestation of Naam.

Naam- Waheguru

Naam is the Gurmantar - formula given by the Guru (Prophet) and for the Sikhs, it is the word 'Waheguru.' It means, 'the wonderful one who removes ignorance' i.e. the giver of the light of God – Divine knowledge. It is also called 'Shabad' or "Word." The word 'Waheguru' is not combined with any other word, and Sikhs use it exclusively to do Jaap. For Sikhs only the word 'Waheguru' is the Naam. The pure Naam-Jaap is recitation only of the word 'Waheguru.' In the Sikh world, 'Naam-Jaap' pertains to recitation of the word 'Waheguru.'

PRACTICE OF JAAP

It is right (correct) in any way you recite the name of God, because there is no set or a single method of doing it. Although, basics are the same almost every instructor has a personal technique of practicing the Naam-Jaap, or will modify it according to his or her own experience or some motive, may be selfish - to put his or her own stamp on it. The only thing is to take a start, and the help comes from the Almighty in one or the other way. If there is a problem, consult any practitioner of the Naam. In pursuing a good cause, there can never be any wrong (error), and so no one ever needs to worry about committing a blunder or a sin when doing Jaap without instructions from any adept. The Gurbani is the instructor of the Sikhs. When doing its Jaap, Naam takes away sins, and does not add to them, one may do it in any way. Guru ji (the Sikh scripture) bestows on everyone the right to do the Naam-Jaap. By practicing it, the Guru's orders get followed. The Jaap should be done with concentration, and all other things

should be ignored. Anybody fixing conditions for doing it commits a blunder and a gross wrong.

Important is concentration, not the methods, and this is the fundamental must for resorting to the Jaap of the Beloved One's name. We should go slow but steady, and need to be regular in our practice of the Naam Jaap. The time allotted for each session should be increased gradually so that the mind and body are without strain. We have to go on in sehj - a relaxed way (equipoise, tension-free), and need not be stubborn (obstinate) for our any goal or practice. In doing Jaap, we should move to the next step when we are well versed at the level we are.

According to the occasion and need, instructions are modified. The sequence of different steps and their contents may as well get affected to simplify the subject in an effort to make it easily understandable and applicable.

Preliminaries

Every technique of the Naam Jaap is nothing but an effort to achieve concentration on recitation of the Naam – 'Waheguru.'

There are a few preliminaries for practicing the Naam:

The foundation of Jaap is an ethical life. Jaap itself elevates the man. The desire for an ethical life and Naam Jaap is stimulated and more easily attained in association with a good Sangat – company of the God-oriented people. One has to be humble, compassionate, truthful, sincere, and honest. He or she should have an honest avocation, do

selfless service (sharing), and be selfless with universal love and other good traits. One should be tolerant, adjustable, accommodating and understanding. One should forgive and forget. These qualities are essential to achieve calmness and to stay in peace. In the morning, use rest room - bathroom, brush the teeth, bathe or wash up with cold or warm water depending on your habit or health, put on loose clothes as per season and weather. You may take bed tea if you have the habit. Most of the practitioners stay empty stomach.

Sit down straight back, cross-legged on a thick soft padding, at any calm place, facing any direction. The hands should be resting in the lap with the fingers slightly and lightly crossed.

If, due to some infirmity or handicap, it is not possible to sit cross-legged, or on the hard surface e.g. a floor, use any other seat. A suitable chair may be helpful – it is not a luxury but a dire need.

When sitting cross-legged, never allow your feet and legs to start tingling or to become numbed. This is caused by pressure on the blood vessels and nerves, and can prove harmful – cause weakness of the limbs (paresis). Get up if tingling comes up, move about, and sit down again when it clears up.

Environment. The place should be tidy and clean, and you may keep flowers there, or use a fragrance if you like it. If you have this facility at home, the best place to sit is the room reserved for Guru Granth Sahib - the Sikh Holy Book.

Many of the Sikhs have pictures of the Gurus in their prayer rooms. It is a personal choice and understanding. For the Sikhs, the pictures of the Gurus are not for worship, but provide the ideal role models. These sanctify the environment, boost morale and create a base for imagination. Such things give the place an aura of Naam – spirituality. Right on entering such a room, one becomes eager to sit down for the Jaap.

The pure Gurbani Kirtan: devotional singing. Prerecorded Kirtan without any katha i.e. sermons (preaching), may enhance the effect of environment. The instrumental music may be more helpful. Be still, calm and quiet. The volume should be low enough not to interfere with the Jaap (and imagination).

Before starting the Naam-Jaap, vocal recitation - may be singing of 'Waheguru,' or 'Satte-Naamu - Waheguru,' or some Shabad – Hymn, or Gurbani Parmaans – quotations from the Scriptures, for a while, sets up mood for the Naam Jaap session.

If distracted during the Jaap, may be by sleep, for some time do the loud recitation of the Naam 'Waheguru,' may be after washing your face, and if needed by standing up.

When doing the Naam-Jaap, for concentration bring into the mind (visualize) as many things related to the Jaap as possible. Develop the habit of feeling the presence of Waheguru – God. Try to perceive the sound or imaginary sound of the word 'Waheguru.' The word Waheguru vwiHgurU vwiHgurU itself, or the symbol 'Ik-Onkar' both written as in Gurmukhi $\langle \rangle$ - may be

imagined fixed at a point slightly above and between the inner ends of the two eyebrows – Mid-Brow Point.

Practice of the Naam

Anyone professing another faith may replace the prophet, place of worship, mantra for Jaap, and the symbol to focus on, with the one of his or her own choice. The basic essence of the method of recitation will remain the same for everyone. One may make selections and modifications as per one's own personal discipline, need and demand of the faith.

There are so many ways to do the Jaap of the Naam, and here is the one commonly practiced. Fold your both hands, bow to the Guru or Guru Granth Sahib, and pray, "Bless me with the Naam and concentration on it" etc. Constantly feel that you are in the presence of the Guru. When imagining the Guru, feel that Guruji is there before you. You may bow to the Guru Granth Sahib in a Gurdwara you visit, but this is your choice. Perceive the presence of the One at all the times.

Stage I

You may start with vocally reciting "Waheguru, Waheguru," without any restraint or inhibition. It may be with or without a Mala - rosary, or a musical instrument. Gradually, recitation will become without any Mala, or instrument, and ultimately it will become mental, without making any sound. The musical instruments will enhance the atmosphere of the Naam. The Naam-Jaap in a company (with the Sangat) gives incentive for reciting the name of God. All such things help to bring together the scattered thoughts. The

recorded music, especially instrumental, may be played. Music helps to relax and concentrate the mind. The soft and subtle music is elevating.

Stage II

Sit down properly, as per your convenience. Do the Jaap of "Waheguru," speaking out the Word (loudly), hearing the voice, and concentrating on it. In the background, God is always there in the mind. When well practiced, go to the next step.

Sit down properly. Do Jaap of "Waheguru" in a whisper, lightly focusing both eyes at the tip of the nose. When practiced, close your eyes when focusing. Try to hear your whisper, concentrate on the whispered word "Waheguru," and keep God in the mind. When well practiced, move to the next step.

Whenever focusing eyes at any point, do so free from stress and strain on them, and turn them in very lightly. Turning eyes in too much, and with strain, will lead to headache.

Sit down properly. Do the silent Jaap of the Naam "Waheguru" at the level of your throat (in the throat).

If you can, concentrate on the imaginary sound of the word "Waheguru." Focus your closed eyes at the bridge of your nose (where the bridge of glasses stays normally). When well practiced, move to the next step.

Stage III

Silent Jaap of "Waheguru." Recite "Waheguru" in your heart (mentally), without making any sound.

Concentrate on the Shabad (Word) “Waheguru,” and its imaginary sound. Focus your closed eyes on the space between your two eyebrows, and slightly higher up – Mid-Brow Point.

Link the Jaap to breathing –

When inhaling – breathing in, mentally say “Wahe.”

When exhaling – breathing out, mentally say “Guru.”

When well practiced, move to the next step.

Place Ik-Onkar, as written in Gurmukhi <> at the mid-brow point – a little higher to the inner ends of the both eyebrows.

Focus both the eyes on it.

Do silent Jaap of ‘Waheguru’ linked to breathing –

Inhale ‘Wahe,’

Exhale ‘Guru.’

Concentrate on < Ik-Oankar, on ‘Wahe’ plus ‘Guru’... and on their imaginary sound (if you can imagine).

Completion of the Jaap

Continue the Jaap for your fixed (allotted) time-period. Increase the time of your sittings very gradually. Do not let your legs to tingle or sleep.

Bow at the feet of the Guru, Guru Granth Sahib, and thank, “ Thanks for blessing me with the Naam, and for concentration on it.”

Do five malas: rosaries, of the ‘Waheguru’ recitation, saying it mentally or verbally once at each bead. Do one mala of Mool-Mantar.

Bow to the Guru, Guru Granth Sahib, once again, and thank for the boon of Naam, and ability to do its Jaap. This session of your Jaap is over.

Jaap with Sangat – Congregation

Company of the other practitioners of the Naam, boosts morale and creates eagerness to do the Jaap. It is usually done in the presence of Guru Granth Sahib. It may be –

Verbal Jaap – Doing the Jaap loudly, mostly by singing together. Gradually, gusto and tempo of singing fast and with force is reached, and after that they slow down equally gradually. Such ebbs and tides of singing continue in the form of Naam-Jaap with Kirtan (devotional singing) of the selected Hymns. Mostly, the word ‘Waheguru,’ is mixed with ‘Satte-Naamu - Waheguru,’ the suitable Shabads, Gurbani quotes, and stanzas from the Gurbani. It is accompanied by the forceful musical instruments, especially drums, chhaenae (bronze discs) - cymbals, chimtaae (long iron calipers - tongs), khartaals – wooden strikers, etc. Harmonium is a common instrument for Kirtan - devotional singing. The lead may be given in turn by different individuals or groups, and session may continue for one to several hours, or even overnight called Raen-Sabaee Keertan – Keertan for whole of the night (night vigil).

Loud singing of Gurbani – the Scriptures, immediately lifts the mind to the level of leentaa – attachment to the Naam. For reaching precise concentration, mental (silent) Jaap has its own significance and value.

Mental Jaap – In the Sangat, the Jaap after it becomes soft, becomes a silent Jaap. After ending the silent Jaap, it goes into gusto once again, and is tapered down to stop.

To clarify any point regarding the Naam Jaap, it is best to consult some local Naam practicing Gurmukh – God-oriented person. The study of any advanced material, if available, is also suggested.