

Sohila Further Reading - Translations

Nikky Guninder Kaur Singh, *The Name of My Beloved*

KIRTAN SOHILA, "Hymn of Praise", is the finale to the evening prayers. It is recited just before going to bed as the Guru Granth is closed and ceremoniously carried to rest. It is also recited at cremation ceremonies. As with Rahiras, the hymns within Kirtan Sohila have a chorus which is placed in italics after the first stanza.

Kirtan Sohila consists of five hymns. The first three are by Guru Nanak, followed by one each from Guru Ram Das and Guru Arjan. The religious and artistic value of these hymns is superb. The first hymn visualizes the union of the individual self with the Ultimate Reality. The second presents the singularity of the Ultimate despite the endless diversity of scriptures, teachers and philosophies. The third rejects all modes of external piety and rituals, and vividly portrays the entire cosmos making a harmonious worship. Instead of salvers with lamps placed on them with incense and other offerings, the skies become an integrated platter, the sun and moon the lamps, stars the beads, and all vegetation an offering of flowers. Loud chanting is replaced by the inner unstruck melody playing motionlessly. The fourth hymn in the Sohila is by the Fourth Guru and it explains the import of the divine Name through which all suffering and transmigration is annulled. The fifth hymn, by Guru Arjan, celebrates life here in this world: we must avail ourselves of this wonderful opportunity to serve others and to win divine merit. The unknown Mystery becomes known to the enlightened person who thereafter enjoys the bliss and freedom of immortality. (Guru Granth, pp. 12-13.)

Sohila

Rag Gauri Dipaki Mahalla 1

- 1 If there be a home for praise
 and thoughts of the Creator,
 Let that home sing in celebration
 and remember our Designer.

 *You sing a hymn of glory
 to my Fearless One,
 I offer myself to the hymn of glory
 which brings everlasting joy.*
- 2 Ever and ever, all creatures are nurtured
 and cared for by the Giver.
 Your bounty cannot be measured,
 who can reckon that Giver.
- 3 The wedding day is written,
 come friends, come pour the oil together.
 Give me your blessings, my friends,
 that I may join my Sovereign.
- 4 Each and every home receives this marriage thread,
 the invitations are sent to each and all.

Nanak says, remember the Sender,
for the day will come for all.

Rag Asa Mahalla 1

- 1 There are six schools with six leaders and six doctrines,
But there is only One Guru, though in countless guises.

*My old friend, the school that sings the glory of our Creator,
Will bring you honour if you make it your home.*

- 2 Moments become seconds, minutes, hours,
days and months.
The sun is one, however many seasons there may be,
Nanak says, the Creator has so many forms.

Rag Dhanasri Mahalla 1

- 1 The sky is our platter, the sun and moon our lamps,
it is studded with pearls, the starry galaxies,
The wafting scent of sandalwood is our incense,
the gentle breeze, our whisk,
all vegetation, the bouquet of flowers we offer to You.

*What an act of worship!
This truly is Your worship, You who sunder life from death.
The unstruck sound within is the drum to which we chant.*

- 2 You have a thousand eyes yet without eye are You,
You have a thousand faces yet without face are You,
You have a thousand feet yet without foot are You,
You have a thousand scents yet without scent are You,
I am enchanted by Your wonders.

- 3 There is a Light in all, and that Light is You,
By that Light we are illumined.
The Light is revealed through the Guru's teaching,
Whatever pleases You is worship of You.

- 4 My mind is greedy as the bumble-bee,
Night and day I long to drink the ambrosia of
Your lotus-feet
Nanak says, grant nectar to this thirsty bird,
Grant me a dwelling in Your Name.

Rag Gauri Purbi Mahalla 4

- 1 This body is a city teeming with lust and anger.
The company of holy people can shatter these vices.
The meeting with the Guru that is written,
anchors the mind to the immutable Centre.

There is merit in joining our palms to greet holy people,

There is merit in prostrating before holy people.

- 2 The deluded have not tasted the elixir of love,
they are pierced by the thorn of ego.
As they move on, the thorn pierces more painfully.
till the end where death awaits with staff poised to strike.
- 3 But the devotees steeped in the Name
are sundered from the suffering of life and death;
They attain the Everlasting, the Supreme Being,
and they are honoured in regions far and beyond.
- 4 We are poor and low, but we still belong to You,
Highest of the high, protect us and keep us with You.
Nanak says, Your Name alone is my support and sustenance,
the Divine Name alone brings perfect joy.

Rag Gauri Purbi Mahalla 5

- 1 I beg you listen to me, my friends,
now is the time to serve the holy ones,
Divine profits earned here
Bring comfort in the hereafter.

*Our life grows shorter by the day.
My mind, meet with the Guru and fulfill yourself.*
- 2 This world is sunk in doubts and vices,
but the enlightened can swim across.
The one who is woken, the one who is given a sip of elixir,
knows the story that cannot be told.
- 3 Make the transaction for which you came into this world,
through the Guru, deposit the Divine in your mind.
So easily will you find the joy that dwells
within your own self,
and no more will you enter the circle of living and dying.
- 4 Knower of all hearts, our Creator,
Fulfiller of our desires,
Your slave Nanak asks for this happiness,
make me the dust of the feet of the holy ones.

Max Arthur Macauliffe, *The Sikh Religion*

THE SOHILA¹

GURU NANAK, RAG GAURI DIPAKI

IN the house in which God's praise is sung and He is meditated on,
Sing the Sohila and remember the Creator.

Sing the Sohila of my Fearless Lord; I am a sacrifice to that song of joy by which everlasting comfort is obtained.

Ever and ever living things are watched over; the Giver regardeth *their wants*.

When *even* Thy gifts cannot be appraised, who can appraise the Giver?

The year and the auspicious time *for marriage* are recorded; *relations* meet and pour oil on me the bride.

O my friends, pray for me that I may meet my Lord.

This message is ever sent to every house: such invitations are ever issued.

Remember the Caller; Nanak, the day is approaching.

GURU NANAK, RAG ASA

There are six schools of *philosophy*, six teachers, and six doctrines.

The Guru of gurus is but one, though He hath various forms.

O father, preserve the system

In which the Creator is praised that will redound to thy glory.²

As there is one sun and many seasons,

In which there are wisas, chasas, gharis, pahars, lunar and week days, and months;

So, O Nanak, there is but one God, although His forms are many.

GURU NANAK, RAG DHANASARI

The sun and moon, *O Lord*, are Thy lamps; the firmament Thy salver; the orbs of the stars the pearls *enchased* in it.

The perfume of the sandal is Thine incense, the wind is Thy fan, all the forests are Thy flowers, O Lord of light.

What worship is this, O Thou Destroyer of birth? Unbeaten strains of ecstasy are the trumpets of Thy worship.

Thou hast a thousand eyes and yet not one eye; Thou hast a thousand forms and yet not one form;

Thou hast a thousand stainless feet and yet not one foot; Thou hast a thousand organs of smell and yet not one organ. I am fascinated by this play of Thine.

The light which is in everything is Thine, O Lord of light.

From its brilliancy everything is brilliant;

By the Guru's teaching the light becometh manifest.

What pleaseth Thee is the *real* worship.

O God, my mind is fascinated with Thy lotus feet as the bumble-bee with the flower: night and

¹ The collection of hymns called Sohila is repeated at bedtime by pious Sikhs. It consists of three hymns of Guru Nānak, one of Guru Rām Dās, and one of Guru Arjan. The word Sohila is derived from *sowam wela* meaning in the Panjabi language the time for sleep.

² The meaning is that Guru Nanak rejects the Hindu systems.

day I thirst for them.

Give the water of Thy favour to the sarang Nanak, so that he may dwell in Thy name.

GURU RAM DAS, RAG GAURI PURBI

The city³ is greatly filled with lust and wrath; but these are destroyed on meeting the saints.

By predestination the Guru is found, and the soul is absorbed in the region of God's love.

Salute the saint with clasped hands--this is a greatly meritorious act.

Prostrate thyself before him--this is a greatly religious act.

The infidel knoweth not the taste of God's essence; he beareth the thorn of pride in his heart.

The more he moveth, the more it pricketh him, and the more pain he feeleth: his head shall feel death's mace.

The saints of God are absorbed in God's name, and have destroyed the pain and fear of transmigration.

They have found God the imperishable Being, and great honour is theirs in the earth's continents and the universe.

O God, we poor, and wretched, are Thine; preserve us, preserve us, Thou greatest of the great!

The Name is Nanak's support and prop; I have obtained happiness through being absorbed only in God's name.

GURU ARJAN, RAG GAURI PURBI

I pray you hear me, my friends, it is time to serve the saints.

Earn here the profit of God's name, and in the next world ye shall abide in happiness.

Human life groweth shorter every day and night O man, meet the Guru and arrange thine affairs.

This world is involved in wickedness and superstition they who know God are saved.

He whom God awakeneth and causeth to drink the essence *of His word*, knoweth the story of the Ineffable.⁴

Purchase that⁵ for which thou hast come into the world, and God by the Guru's favour will dwell in thy heart.

Thou shalt find a home with comfort and peace in God's own palace, and not return again to this world.

O God, Searcher of hearts, Arranger,⁶ fulfill the desires of my heart.

The slave Nanak craveth the happiness of being made the dust of the saints' feet.⁷

³ The body.

⁴ This and the concluding portion of the preceding line are also translated --He whom the saint knoweth God awakeneth, shall be saved, And Shall quaff the essence of God's name: it is he who knoweth the story of the Ineffable.

⁵ God's name.

⁶ The gyânis often translate Bidhâta--He who gives man the fruit of his acts. The third Guru uses the expression in the same sense.]

⁷ This and the concluding portion of the preceding line are also translated--

He whom the saint who knoweth God awakeneth, shall be saved,

And shall quaff the essence of God's name: it is he who knoweth the story of the Ineffable.