

Anand Karaj: Empty ritual?

Anand Karaj, the Sikh marriage ceremony, is a central Sikh institution. The crucial importance of Anand Karaj should bring Sikhs together to fight efforts to devalue its significance. However, as the Sikh marriage institution continues to be attacked and cheapened, there is an unfortunate lack of effort aimed at setting the record straight. Sikhs are regrettably not being educated on the special union that Anand Karaj creates between two Sikhs. Efforts to mimic or imitate this special union without the Guru's blessing often lead to destructive results.

Gurbani and Sikh history make it unmistakably clear that Sikhs of the Guru look upon the opposite gender as fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, sons and daughters. Except for Anand Karaj, nothing can alter this reality. Anand Karaj creates a new relationship, that of husband and wife. There can be no confusion over the reality that Anand Karaj, and Anand Karaj alone is the only avenue for creating this special relationship within the larger Khalsa family.

Disappointingly, many Sikh youth feel that they can replicate a husband-wife like relationship without first seeking the Guru's blessing. Whether one calls it "dating", "a relationship" or "an engagement", Gursikh youth should not fall into some very obvious traps that the reality of adolescence and youth create. While a physical relationship is by far the worst sort of mistake that a Sikh youth can make in this setting, even a non-physical relationship poses the threat of seriously disrupting a Sikh's spiritual journey.

There are many reasons why the brother/sister relationship between Sikh youth should not be violated. The first and most obvious reason lies in the fact that mimicking a husband/wife relationship without the Guru's blessing would clearly be violating the 'hukam' or command of

the Guru. Only the Guru has the power to alter the relationship between a brother and a sister. It would not only be presumptuous but also arrogant for a Sikh to act in a way that only Anand Karaj would permit them to. The Anand Karaj is not an empty ceremony and nothing, not even a so-called engagement negates the fact that a Sikh male and female are still brother and sister unless their status has changed in the eyes of the Guru, something that only Anand Karaj would allow for.

The Guru's Bani speaks frequently regarding the need to control our vices. If we are serious about controlling our vices, it is not difficult to recognize that a number of our vices are triggered in a relationship which is deeply intertwined with physical attraction, with false emotional attachment and, Gursikhs also need to be mindful about the effect that such a relationship would have on our ego. Historically, young Gursikhs never entered into any relationship with the opposite gender (outside of a relationship that was similar to siblings) without the Guru's blessing in the form of Anand Karaj.

Gursikhs who have the right priorities in their spiritual journey, such as Naam Simran, reading Gurbani, and doing Sevaa, will not feel the need to enter into a type relationship that can only be spiritually harmful. Gursikhs recognize this life for what it is; a temporary illusion that can end at any time. Gursikhs have to be vigilant in recognizing Maya at every turn. Even an infatuation that does not lead to an actual relationship is a distraction that Gursikhs would be very fortunate to be without.

An Anand Karaj is a special relationship that cannot be mimicked or imitated. It is a serious commitment that involves raising children, providing Sangat and taking care of one another. Our Guru created this institution for a reason. Pretending as if we have the Guru's blessings before

the Anand Karaj ceremony takes place is not in keeping with Sikh tradition and with the intentions of our Guru. Great Gursikhs in every era of Sikh history, who we should seek to emulate, never engaged in these sorts of relationships and with good reason. Too frequently, Sikh Youth fail to look into our history and recognize that we would be much better off following the great Gursikhs of the past rather than impulsively jumping onto the newest and often most destructive trends of the day. Engaging in relationships that are contrary to Gurmat is only hurtful to those who engage in them. For those Gursikhs who are engaged in a life of Naam Simran, Gurbani and Sevaa, there will be no motivation to engage in any type of relationship that is contrary to Gurmat. The Anand Karaj is not an empty ritual and Sikh Youth must wake up to this reality if they hope to take their spiritual journey with the seriousness that it requires.