



KIRPAN

JASDEV SINGH RAI

BRITISH SIKH CONSULTATIVE FORUM

WHO WEARS A KIRPAN

AMRITDHARI SIKHS ARE REQUIRED TO WEAR A KIRPAN AS PART OF THE FIVE KAKKAR

TAKING AMRIT IS AN INITIATION SERVICE INTO DEEPER COMMITMENT TO THE TEACHINGS OF THE TEN GURUS AND GURU GRANTH SAHIB

AMRIT IS NOT SAME AS BAPTISM IN SENSE OF CHRISTIAN BAPTISM

Generally a Christian Baptism is considered a confirmation that an individual is a Christian and accepted Jesus Christ

PERHAPS BETWEEN BAPTISM AND ORDINATION

SIKHS DON'T HAVE A FORMAL SYSTEM OF CLERICAL ORDER

ANY AMRITDHARI SIKH CAN CONDUCT SERVICES OR LEAD IN PRAYER

SIKH definition

THERE ISN'T A 'BAPTISM' INTO BECOMING A SIKH.

The accepted definition of Sikh according to Sri Akal Takht Sahib, the authoritative seat of Sikh interpretations and decisions within worldwide Sikhs, at Sri Darbar Sahib (Golden Temple Complex) is, anyone

1. who faithfully believes in the One Immortal (God), the ten Gurus and Sri Guru Granth Sahib
2. and who believes in being initiated into the order of the Khalsa by partaking in the initiation ceremony (Amrit Sanchar) originated by Guru Gobind Singh ji
3. and does not owe allegiance to any other religion.

There are variations on this definition. All Sikhs are expected to at least aspire to taking Amrit. Many take Amrit at various stages of their life and calling.

WHAT DOES AN AMRITDHARI DO

Taking Amrit is a commitment to the teachings of the Ten Sikh Gurus embodied in Sri Guru Granth Sahib practiced in a highly disciplined life of ethics, values, honour, spiritual development and physical wellbeing.

An Amritdhari Sikh commits to reciting and meditating prayers regularly.

3 times a day, early morning, evening and before going to bed. The morning and evening meditative recitations are long. They can take 45 -60 minutes in some cases.

Amritdharis try their best to adhere to this, however lifestyles, such as shift work and on call duties can make it difficult at times.

THE AMRIT CEREMONY

Before taking Amrit a person undergoes preparations beforehand for some days and even months and years in the form of teachings and discussions to explain the meaning and commitments a Sikh makes in taking Amrit. Sikhs realise that taking Amrit is a big commitment and a hard one for that.

The Amrit Ceremony is conducted by 5 Amritdhari Sikhs known as the Panj Pyaare – the 5 loved ones in the presence of Guru Granth Sahib and a Granthi present. The ceremony is long.

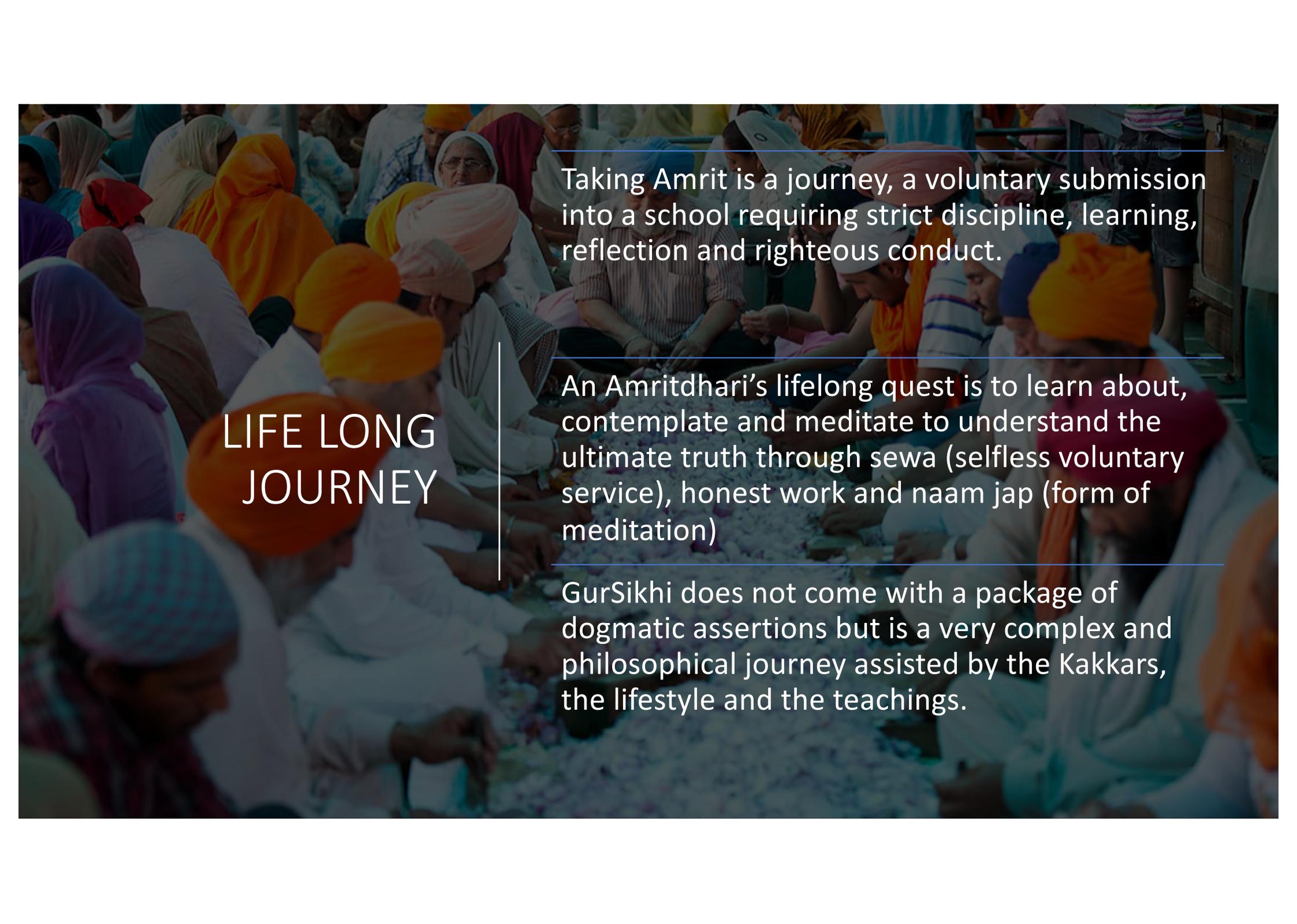
It involves drinking sweetened water from a common iron ore vessel. The water is swirled with a double-edged sword called Khanda, as prayers are recited. The sweetened water, the prayers, the ambience, the presence of the five Amritdharis is considered to change the water into Amrit – ambrosial water. Amrit is drunk with cupped hands.

COMMITMENT AT AMRIT

At Amrit the recipient is given a talk on the responsibilities and commitments. Amritdhari Sikhs are required to maintain the five Kakkars, namely unshorn hair, kara, Kachera (a form of breeches), Kanga (a bracelet), and the Kirpan. The significance of the Kakkars are explained to the Amritdhari.

Commitment is made to a code of conduct called the Rehat Maryada as was agreed at Sri Akal Takht Sahib. It is quite extensive and details the personal conduct that an Amritdhari Sikh should try to observe.

Some schools of thought have variations requiring further discipline and practices.



LIFE LONG JOURNEY

Taking Amrit is a journey, a voluntary submission into a school requiring strict discipline, learning, reflection and righteous conduct.

An Amritdhari's lifelong quest is to learn about, contemplate and meditate to understand the ultimate truth through sewa (selfless voluntary service), honest work and naam jap (form of meditation)

GurSikhi does not come with a package of dogmatic assertions but is a very complex and philosophical journey assisted by the Kakkars, the lifestyle and the teachings.

THE AMBITION

An Amritdhari Sikh aspires to decimate the ego, or homae and assimilate it into the One, that is one ness of all existence and non-existence, naadh- anaadh.

The journey of an Amritdhari is to reach a state where he or she sees no other, but interconnectivity or oneness in all of existence. Ultimately there is no enemy or hatred. An Amritdhari should not get angry.

An Amritdhari Sikh does not hate people or others, but is concerned about actions that are unjust, oppressive or violate freedoms. The Kirpan needs to be seen in that context.

KIRPAAN KIRPA-AAN

"Kirpa" meaning compassion, and "Aan" meaning honour.
KIRPAAN

Guru Gobind Singh Ji, the tenth Guru of the Sikhs, who created the Khalsa Order, ordained that Sikhs should wear the Kirpan bounded with the ethical responsibility and oath of living up to the principles and duties undertaken at initiation, to uphold justice, to defend the weak and oppressed, and to behave with mercy and compassion with all living beings.

The Kirpan is categorically not to be used for aggression or as offence

For an Amritdhari Sikh, the Kirpan is a very precious article of faith, which holds significance of mercy and justice, and reflects the Khalsa's ideal of the 'Saint-Soldier' -humane and compassionate, yet fearless conviction.

THE CONTEXT

All this background is important to understand the context around the Kirpan. The preparations, the ceremony and the commitments.

An important matter to appreciate is that the focus should not be on the Kirpan but the character who is wearing the Kirpan.

Just as security officers wear a weapon, protecting a Prime Minister or another leader, are trusted because of their emotional and physical training, so should an Amritdhari be trusted due to the constant discipline of mind, contemplation and reflection on the teachings of the Gurus.

The Kirpan places a perpetual responsibility upon the Sikh that he or she is ultimately the keeper of his/her own conscience based on the teachings of Guru Granth Sahib and cannot abrogate that decision to some other authority.
It is a state of mind.



MISAPPROPRIATION
&
CORRECT
TERMINOLOGY

Much of the misinformation, misunderstanding and apprehension about the Kirpan stems from looking at it and mistranslating the word Kirpan into dagger/sword/knife etc which are descriptive terms for a similar appearing items.

Words such as ‘sword’, ‘dagger’ or ‘knives’ imply aggression, fighting and killing.

The Kirpan on the other hand is compassion and honour. It is an extension of a highly disciplined and spiritually aware person.

A KIRPAN IS A KIRPAN

There is perhaps no equivalent word in English for Kirpan. And no other word can convey the full significance of the Kirpan in the mind of the Amritdhari Sikh or to others.

Don't look at the Kirpan, but look at the Amritdhari, the discipline, the teachings and the context. It is an extension of a highly balanced and nuanced state of mind rather than a weapon in the hand of an untrained mind.

THE RESPONSIBILITY

The Kirpan is never used in action.

It reminds the Sikh to maintain a very strong hold on his or her emotions and show great responsibility.

The evidence shows that offensive use of the Kirpan is virtually unknown in the UK or indeed in other countries.

An Amritdhari Sikh is very conscious of never bringing the Kirpan into disrepute, because for him or her, it is the equivalent of disrespecting the Gurus.

LAW AND INTEGRATION

From the *legal* perspective, the Kirpan is an issue of the right to believe in and practise one's religion. It is enjoyed under religious freedom, a freedom guaranteed by Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

To exclude a Sikh for wearing the Kirpan from any public place or work is to exclude the Amritdhari Sikh from being an active citizen in the life of the nation and community.

IMPORTANT QUESTIONS, SIZE AND MATERIAL

There are a variety of views within the Sikh community on the length and size of the Kirpan. Within reason, this should be maintained. It can also be a point of discussion between authorities and Sikhs.

The Kirpan is not a symbol. Hence it cannot be made as replicas in any other material.

Kirpan must have a steel blade. It is the emotional connection between the steel blade and the disciplined mind that compliments and builds the character of an Amritdhari in accordance with the teachings of the Gurus. Hence replicas are not acceptable.

PRIVILEGE AND PERSPECTIVE

Amritdhari Sikhs realise that the Kirpan is a privilege both from the Gurus and the authorities who accept the necessity of an Amritdhari to wear one.

Amritdharis enrich the community, the workplace and the nation.

They bring a perspective based on high morals, ethics, justice and fairness.

IN SUMMARY

An Amritdhari is a Sikh who makes a fuller commitment to the Sikh way of life and worldview, lives by the teachings of the Ten Gurus and Guru Granth Sahib and strives through a life of discipline, meditation and practical living to let go of the ego and subsume it in the oneness of all existence.

An Amritdhari Sikh's commitment requires to recite and meditate on prayers and the Naam at least three times a day and keep the five Kakkars. One of these is the Kirpan.

The Kirpan is a gift of the tenth Guru to the Sikh. Misuse of the Kirpan would be contrary to the teachings of the Gurus and betrayal of the Tenth Master Guru Gobind Singh ji.

The Kirpan is treated with extreme reverence by the Amritdhari and the Khalsa Panth. Its misuse is viewed with extreme hostility by the Sikh community.

PLEASE REMEMBER



Do not look at the Kirpan but the Amridhari Sikh.

The Kirpan is an extension of the character of the Amritdhari Sikh and not an item in itself.

Once we understand that, we see that there is no rationale in preventing an Amritdhari from fully participating in every walk of life with his or her Kirpan