

MYTHICAL AMRIT: Ever since the dawn of history, man has been searching for a liquid which if taken by him will make him immortal. Despite his best efforts, the man has not been able to find such a liquid which actually is against the fundamental principles of Nature because only God is eternal and everything else will come to an end someday including the whole universe. The Hindu gods are said to have churned the ocean to get Amrit, and they are said to have succeeded, but no Hindu god is alive today. So, what kind of Amrit was that?

Gurbani believes in only one kind of Amrit which is the word of the Guru containing the praise of God (Waheguru). If someone moulds his life according to the Teachings of the Guru, and recites Waheguru's Naam (sings His praise) with full devotion, he will become a part of the Waheguru who never dies. This is how you become eternal and therefore Guru's Word is the only Amrit. There are quite a few holy Shabads in Guru Granth Sahib about such an Amrit. A couple will be quoted here.

ਸ੍ਰੋਤ ਮ:੨ ॥ ਜਿਨ ਵਾਦੀਅਯੇ ਤਾਯਰੇ ਨਾਮ ਕੇ ਤਾ ਰੁਤਾਯ ਮੁਨ ਮਾਏ ॥ ਨਾਨਕ ਅਮਰਿ
ਏਕੁ ਹੈ ਦੂਜਾ ਅਮਰਿ ਨਾਏ ॥ ਏਕੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਅਮਰਿ ਮੁਨਾਯ ਮਾਏ ਪਾਏਏ ਗੁਰ ਪਰਸਾਦ ॥

§ Sloak M:2 (1238). Jin vadiaayee tayre Naam kee tay ruttay mun maahe. Nanak Amrit ek hai dooja Amrit naahe. ----- Nanak Amrit munaay maahe paayeeye Gur persaad.

Meaning: Oh my Waheguru! Those who sing Your praise are imbued in Your Naam. (Guru) Nanak says Your praise is the only Amrit and there is no other Amrit. ----- (Guru) Nanak further says that Amrit is present in every heart, oh Waheguru! (Because You reside there), but can be realized only by the grace of the Guru.

ਬਿਹਾਗਰਾ ਮ:੪ ॥ ਅਮਰਿ ਹੁਰ ਹੁਰ ਨਾਮੁ ਹੈ ਮੇਰੀ ਜਿਨਦੁਰੇਏ ਅਮਰਿ ਗੁਰਮਤਿ ਪਾਏ ॥ ਰਾਮੁ ॥ ਹਾਮੈਨੁ ਮਾਯਾ ਬਿਖੁ ਹੈ ਮੇਰੀ ਜਿਨਦੁਰੇਏ ਹੁਰ ਅਮਰਿ ਬਿਖੁ ਲੇਖੁ ਜਾਏ ॥ ਰਾਮੁ ॥

§ Bihaagrra M:4 (538-9). Amrit Hur Hur Naam hai meri jindurreeye Amrit Gurmat paaye Ram. Haumein maya bikh hai meri jindurreeye Hur Amrit bikh leh jaaye Ram.

Meaning: Oh my mind! Waheguru's Naam is the real Amrit which can be realized only by acting on Guru's advice. Selfishness (on the other hand) is a manifestation of Maya and is a poison which can be killed by Waheguru's Naam Amrit.

So, it is clear that there is no such liquid which will make a living being immortal. Only Waheguru's Naam is the real Amrit.

KHUNDA AND BAATA AMRIT (Pahul of a double edged dagger and steel bowl)

Now, you may ask the question: If Guru's Word or praise of Waheguru is the real Amrit, then what is the significance of the "Khunday Baatay da Amrit" which was initiated by Guru Gobind Singh Ji and was administered to the five beloved ones for the first time? It has its own great significance and is still administered by five Singhs. At the time of Guru Gobind Singh Ji, it was called Paahul (primer), but later came to be called "Amrit". You know that when a new fabric, especially cotton, is to be dyed, it is first treated with a paah (primer) like alum before it is dyed with the desired colour. The chemical in the primer binds the final dye to the fabric which results in a shiny and fast colour. Without the primer, the colour is dull and not that fast. Similarly when we paint wood or walls, we apply a primer with before the actual paint for the same reason. Exactly the same way, before the mind of an individual is imbued in Waheguru's Naam, the mind must be prepared for the permanent bonding with Waheguru. If a mind is unsure of the existence of Waheguru or of the importance of the Guru in connecting the individual with Waheguru, the individual will never get connected to Waheguru. The Amrit (more appropriately Pahul) of Khunda and Baata serves the same purpose as a primer before the actual paint.

The Pahul is prepared by mixing water and pataasay (bubbly sugar cakes) in a steel bowl and stirring the mixture constantly with a double-edged dagger while reciting holy Gurbani with full respect and concentration. Five Sikhs hold the rim of the bowl and only one of them recites Gurbani. The holy baanis of Jap Ji Sahib, Anand Sahib, and Sohila Sahib, Jaap Sahib and Chaupayee are recited. The last two baanis are from Dasam Granth which is NOT an authentic holy book. So, many Sikhs are now against the inclusion of the Chaupayee, at least least, in the five holy Baanis while preparing the Pahul. The Pahul is administered to the Sikhs to baptize them (I am using this term for lack of another suitable term to initiate them into Sikhism).

Kesh: Hair is God's gift to us and we cannot show any disrespect to it by trimming or shaving. It also gives the Sikhs a unique identity which is very important for distinctiveness and our survival, otherwise we will be swallowed by the main stream religion. □ Above all, it is Guru's commandment to all the Sikhs and must be obeyed.

Kangha: Its function is simply to keep the hair clean all the time and not allow it to get dirty or change it into rope-like strands.

Kirpan: It serves as a reminder of a couple of important functions. First, it is a symbol of power and as such serves as reminder of the all-powerful Waheguru whom we must remember all the time. Second, it reminds the Sikh of his responsibility to struggle against injustice and aggression which may be directed at him or anybody else. Sikhs have laid down their lives defending the rights of others. Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib's martyrdom is a great example of such a struggle when He gave his life against the injustice of the Mughal Emperor, Aurangzeb who was forcibly converting Hindus into Islam.

Kurra: must be of steel and worn on right hand. It symbolizes a handcuff which means it serves as a reminder that the Kirpan must NOT be used against innocents or for aggression. It is only used to protect your rights.

Kuchhehra: It is worn to serve as a constant reminder that a Sikh cannot be allowed to engage in immoral behaviour. The Sikh must have high moral values.

By wearing the five Ks, the Sikh takes the oath of respecting all the reminders, and thus develops a strong faith in Guru and Waheguru. When a Sikh takes the Pahul and the oath to lead the life of a noble Sikh, the Guru puts His kind hand on the head of the Sikh and with His grace, Waheguru's Naam takes root in the Sikh's mind which leads to his salvation.

So, taking the Pahul is very, very important for each and every Sikh as long as it does not become just a ritual.

AMRITSAR or AMRIT SROVAR

Sar and Srovar mean the same thing, and in Punjabi each means a pool of water. Thus Amritsar or Amrit Srovar means a pool of Amrit or liquid of immortality. We have already discussed that Gurbani does not recognize any such liquid, and the only Amrit is the praise of Waheguru. So, Amritsar or Amrit Srovar is the gathering of holy people (devotees of Waheguru) where Waheguru's praise is sung with devotion. According to Gurbani, Waheguru, Himself, is present in such a gathering. Again, there are hundreds of holy Shabads in Guru Granth Sahib which clearly prove this conclusion, but only a couple will be quoted here.

ਮਾਨਸ ਸਾਗਰ :1, ਗੁਰੂ ਸਾਗਰ ਅਮਰਿਤਸਰ ਜੋ ਚਿਚਾਏ ਸੋ ਫੁਲ ਪਾਏ ॥
ਨਾਮ ਪਦਾਰਥ ਅਮਰ ਹੈ ਹਿਰਦਾਯ ਮੁਨ ਵਸਾਏ ॥

§ Maaru M:1 (1011). ----- Guru saagar Amritsar jo ichchay so ful paaye. Naam pdaarath amar hai hirdaiy munn vasaaye.
Guru seva suda sookh hai jis nu huqam mnaaye.

Meaning: The Guru is the ocean, the pool, of Amrit; a devotee who serves the Guru with dedication acquires the eternal Naam of Waheguru in his heart, and he can have any of his desires fulfilled. Serving the Guru is the source of all comforts, but only those serve the Guru to whom Waheguru is kind.

ਮਾਨਸ ਸਾਗਰ :1 ਸੇਵਹੁ ਸਾਤਗੁਰ ਸਮੁੰਦ ਆਥਾਹਾ ॥ ਪਾਵਹੋ ਨਾਮ ਰੁਤਨ ਧੁਨ
ਲਾਹਾ ॥ ਬਿਖੀਯਾ ਮੁਲ ਜਾਏ ਅਮਰਿਤਸਰ ਨਾਵਹੋ ਗੁਰ ਸਰ ਸਾਂਤੋਖ
ਪਾਯਾ ॥

§ Maaru M:1 Solhe (1042). Sevhou Satgur smoond athaaha. Paavho Naam ruttan dhun laaha.
Bikhiya mul jaaye Amritsar naavho Gur sar santokh paaya.

Meaning. Serve the Perfect Guru who is the limitless ocean (of Waheguru's Naam), oh my friend! As a result, you will earn the profit of the invaluable wealth of Waheguru's Naam. If you take a dip in the Guru-Ocean who is the source of contentment as well, all your filth of Maya will be removed.

NOTE: The city of Amritsar or the holy pool of water around Harmandir Sahib (the Golden Temple) did not exist at the time of Guru Nanak as the pool was dug by the Fourth Master, Guru Ram Dass Ji. So, clearly the term, Amritsar, used by Guru Nanak Sahib does not imply the holy pool of water around Harmandir Sahib. IAs already discussed it means the praise of Waheguru or the source of such praise – the Guru or a gathering of holy men.

There are many more such holy Shabads which prove that Amritsar is simply Waheguru's praise or its source.

RAM DASS and Ram Dass SROVAR

The word Ram has been used for Waheguru (God) countless times in Guru Granth Sahib, and is the mostly used word for Waheguru. Dass means a slave (devotee) of Waheguru. So, Ram Dass srovar means a gathering of holy men (devotees) where Waheguru's praise is sung. It just happens that the name of the Fourth Master was also Ram Dass (which shows humility), but in as much as we respect the holy pool of water around Harmandir Sahib, Ram Dass Srovar as used in Guru Granth Sahib does not refer to that holy pool of water which was dug by the Fourth Master in the city of Amritsar. It rather means the gathering of the devotees. Many raagis (professional reciters of the holy Shabads) erroneously leave the innocent people with the impression that Ram Dass - Srovar as used in Gurbani means the pool of Guru Ram Dass. So, people believe that by taking a dip in the holy pool around the Golden Temple will remove all their sins – which is simply NOT the message of Gurbani. So, we must be careful.

However, I am not downplaying the importance of the holy Pool, we have tremendous reverence for the Pool because of a number of factors. First, it was built by Guru Ram Dass Ji and by Guru Arjun Dev Ji. Secondly, the recitation of the holy Gurbani goes on

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for 24 hours every day in Harmandir Sahib which makes the water in the Pool worthy of taking a dip in. The environment around the Pool is spiritual and taking a dip in the Pool does provide mental peace.