



THE SIKH PROTOCOL OF CELEBRATING THE LIFE OF A LOVED ONE

A reference for Sikh residents of Victoria, Australia
Compiled by Sikh Interfaith Council of Victoria Inc.



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Chapter 1. Introduction

This information guide is about conducting the last rites upon death of an individual, including legal, commercial and religious aspects of the process. It is meant to help members of the bereaved family understand the procedures to arrange for the funeral and cremation of the deceased, handling of the remains and the prayers thereafter.

At this point in time there is no central organization in Victoria, Australia that handles such matters. The local Gurduara should be the point of contact for assistance. A list of Gurduaras and their contact details are available in Annex 3. This hand book has been prepared as a guide to conduct a Sikh funeral, keeping in mind the requirements as stipulated in the Sikh Rehat Maryada (Sikh Code of Conduct).

According to Sikh rites however young the deceased may be, the body should be cremated. However, where arrangements for cremation cannot be made such as death at sea on board a ship, then the body may be disposed of as per procedure of Sea Burial in the sea which will be conducted by Ship staff.

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SICV is an incorporated organisation, with a vision to create greater awareness and understanding of Sikhs and Sikhi in the Australian community.

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Chapter 2. Registration of Death

i. Scenario A: If Death occurs in a Hospital

Contact a Funeral Director (see Annex 2 for funeral homes with washing facility)

In Australia the Funeral Director (referred to as "Director" here on) provides a wide variety of services that will assist the bereaved family.

The Director can come to the home of the bereaved and discuss the funeral arrangements.

The Director will coordinate:

- the transfer of the body from the hospital to the funeral home;
- embalming of body if required;
- provision of hearse and other transport vehicles required for the funeral;
- provision of coffin;
- provision of flowers or petals;
- placing of death and funeral notices in newspaper(s);
- assistance during the washing of the body;
- transport from the funeral home to the residence of the deceased or relatives (if required) and/or to the crematorium including times of arrival and departure;
- the timing of washing the body, booking of chapel and crematoria (with option to view the cremation); and
- lodging the required paperwork with the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages and ensuring all required paperwork is completed.

Once all funeral arrangements have been confirmed, (normally the date, times and details are made in consultation with the family or a nominated representative)

- liaise with the local Gurdwara and make the necessary arrangements for a person or the Granthi to perform all necessary religious requirements at the cremation;
- book the Gurdwara to do the Alahniya da Paath after the cremation; and
- make arrangements to hire a boat after confirming with the Director time of collection of ashes.

(Note: weather conditions may cause delay in dispersion of ashes)
Refer Annex 4 for contact details.

The Director will require details of the deceased including place of birth, date of birth, marriage, children, name of parents, etc.

Once all arrangements are agreed the Director will provide an estimate of funeral expenses. Each funeral home has a different policy for payment, however a pre-payment either prior to or on the day of the funeral is generally required.

A copy of the arrangement contract including the estimate should be provided by the funeral director at the time of arrangement. The final account showing the costs already paid will be forwarded to the family following the funeral.

ii. Scenario B: If death occurs at home

- Contact 000 for an Ambulance;
- Police are to be contacted if the death is suspicious or unexpected;
- If it is a natural or expected death, then the treating doctor can be called to certify the death and issue a medical certificate cause of death, which the funeral director will collect.

Contact a funeral Director (see Annex 1 for funeral homes with washing facility). See Scenario A above.

iii. Scenario C: Foreign National

If the body is to be taken back to the country of origin of the deceased, then

- Death certificate from the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages is required;
- Airline booking has to be done;
- Embalming Certificate obtained;
- Permission from the Department of Health to transport deceased out of the country is required;
- Consular approval if required;
- Address of family and funeral director in country of origin is required; and
- Funeral account is to be paid in full prior to deceased leaving the country.

If cremation is to be conducted in Victoria see Scenario A above.

Chapter 3. Funeral Procedures

i. Washing of Body

- The Director will inform where the body is located and will ensure that the necessary facilities are provided as discussed
- Show respect and maintain dignity of the deceased during this process. Keep covered the private parts of both male and female using a towel as their clothes are removed. Alternatively a Kachera can be worn. Any bandages could also be removed if there is no risk of bleeding. (This could be checked with the doctor who treated the deceased or ask for advice from the Funeral Director) The body is first washed with water, using shower cream/soap. Hair can be washed using shampoo and oil or yoghurt (to make combing of hair easier).
- The body is then dried with a towel and dressed in clothes brought for the purpose (used clothing is acceptable). For an Amritdhari Sikh, it is mandatory that the body is dressed with Kachera, Karra, Kanga and Kirpaan. For a male it would be easier to tie the Turban (Dastaar) before the body is put in the coffin. The Director will have his staff ready to assist if needed. Female staff can be requested in advance should the deceased be a female.
- The washed and dressed body is then placed in the coffin. (Line the coffin with a white piece of cloth with the sides extending out. After placing the body in the coffin, cover the body with overflowing cloth – see items to be procured.)
- Satnam Waheguru Jaap (Recitation) or any other Gurbani Paath can be done during this process. A Keertan CD can also be played while the body is being washed.

ii. Embalming of body

- Embalming requirements can be discussed with the Director if there is a need to embalm.

iii. Loading the coffin into the Hearse

- The coffin/casket should be placed into the hearse, foot first.

iv. Viewing of body at Home/Funeral Home

- At the option of the deceased's family, the body may be brought home for viewing or viewing can be done at the funeral parlour.
- At such instances, keertan/prayer recordings are played, whilst the body is lying in state. Sukhmani Sahib Paath (1.5 hours) may be recited, followed by Ardaas before the coffin is loaded into the hearse and taken to the crematorium.

v. Offloading of coffin at Crematorium

- Upon reaching the crematorium, the coffin is off loaded from the hearse and taken to the chapel. It is the choice of the family either to carry the coffin or use the trolley provided by the Director.
- If the coffin is to be carried, 6 to 8 pallbearers will be required.

vi. Family paying Respect

- The coffin is placed on the trolley in the chapel and family members pay their respects first.

vii. Japji Sahib/Keertan

- Time permitting, Satnam Waheguru Jaap (Recitation) can be done during this process. Alternatively a keertan CD may be played.
- For families wishing to recite Japji Sahib paath, it would be more convenient to do it either at home or in the Funeral Parlour as the time allotted at most Cremation Chapels is only 45 minutes.

viii. Placing of Blanket (Optional)

- Family members may place a blanket on the deceased. (It is advisable that one thin cotton sheet be used on behalf of all family, friends and relatives.)

ix. Friends/Relatives offering Respect

- If there is a viewing in the Crematorium, relatives and friends may pay their respects by placing flowers/flower petals in the coffin.

x. Eulogy

- If the family wishes to have a eulogy, this has to be done just before the Sohila and Ardaas

xi. Sohila and Ardaas

- Sohila Paath is recited followed by Ardaas (seeking permission from Almighty to cremate the deceased).
- Family members gather around to pay their last respects before the coffin is transported to the Cremation Chambers.
- Family members may wish to witness the cremation.

xii. Announcements of Prayers

- Following the conclusion of the Ardaas, an announcement can be made to cover the following:
 - a. Date/Time/Place of the Sehaj Paath/Akhand Paath and Bhog; and
 - b. Requesting all to proceed to the Gurduara for a short prayer following the cremation.

xiii. At the Gurduara

- At the Gurduara, there will be recitation of Alahniya da Paath, Anand Sahib and Ardaas. If a Sehej Paath is to be conducted, the first five Pauris of Japji Sahib are recited. This part of the ceremony concludes with the Hukamnama and distribution of Degh.
- A simple meal (not mandatory) may be served as Langgar, following conclusion of the Ardaas.
- The family may prefer to have an Akhand Paath which may commence after this ceremony at the Gurduara or at home.

xiv. Prayers at Home/Gurduara

- The family will liaise with the Gurduara regarding the commencement of an Akhand/Sehej Paath, Bhog and Antim Ardaas.
- If it is decided to do the Akhand Paath, then the Bhog would be held approximately 48 hours after commencement of the Paath.
- If it is decided to have the Sehej Paath, then the Bhog may be held at anytime after the Paath is completed, which may be after one week, ten days or even longer).
- The Akhand Paath/Sehej Paath may also be done at home and the Bhog and Antim Ardaas at home or in the Gurduara. Ramkali Sadh is to be recited during the Bhog ceremony.
- A simple langgar is normally served upon conclusion of the prayers.

Chapter 4. Post-Funeral Activities

i. Collection of Ashes

- Members of the deceased's family and friends accompanied by the person doing the Ardaas are to collect the ashes from the crematorium at the time arranged with the Director.
NB. Only the person responsible for signing the paperwork for the cremation is authorized to collect the cremated remains. Proof of identify is usually required.
- It is likely that metal objects (karra and/or kirpan) on the body of the deceased will remain in some form. These should be collected with the ashes and disposed of accordingly. Inform the Funeral Director that these will be collected with the ashes.
- The appointment to collect the ashes is made by the family directly with the crematorium.
- First an Ardaas is done seeking permission from Guru Ji to start the ash collection. The ashes will be received in a plastic container placed in a box. Remove the plastic container from the box and transfer the contents into a drawstring cloth bag (which can be of any colour). Flowers/petals may be added to the cloth bag or dispersed separately at sea. The plastic container which will contain some remnants of the ashes should be taken along for disposal at sea.

ii. Disposal of Ashes

- Once the boat is in the open sea, the Granthi will do an Ardaas seeking permission from Waheguru Ji to submit the ashes to the sea. Before releasing the ashes, please be aware of the wind direction and release them in the same direction of the wind. In this way the ashes will all go towards the sea and not fly back on to the boat.
- One of the family members will empty the ashes from the cloth bag into the sea, followed by flowers, the cloth bag and the plastic container. A Jaikara (Bole So Nihaal, Sat Sri Akaal) is sounded by all. (Family should be advised not to release personal artifacts of the departed into the sea.)
- The family members and the Granthi return to the home of the deceased where an Ardaas is recited as a conclusion to the immersion proceedings before having a meal.

Annex 1: Items To Be Procured

	ITEM	REMARKS
1.	Khafan Set Hair Oil/Comb, perfume	White piece of cloth, approximately 3 metres Oil and perfume from supermarket
2.	Kachera, Karra, Kangga, Kirpaan	For an an Amritdhari Sikh, Kachera, Karra, Kangga and Kirpan are mandatory
3.	Towels: 4 large & 2 small Shower Cream/soap for body Shampoo, oil/yoghurt for hair	From supermarket
4.	Turban/suit for deceased	These can be provided by the family and need not be brand new
5.	For Ash Collection Pail (Bucket) flowers/petals Cloth bag	Pail from Supermarket Flowers/petals from florist shop Cloth – can be purchased from Spotlight or any local textile shop and sewn with a drawstring (approximately 18 x 12 ins)
6.	Keertan CD	For the Chapel Service

Annex 2: Contact Details of Funeral Directors

Suburb	Funeral Director	Address	Phone
Box Hill	LePine	1048 Whitehorse Road, Box Hill	9890 0404
Brunswick	Victoria Funerals	415-417 Victoria Street, Brunswick	9381 2200
Burwood	WD Rose	339 Warrigal Road, Burwood	9808 8888
Camberwell	LePine	981 Burke Road, Camberwell	9882 2321
Coburg	Mulqueen Funerals	825 Sydney Road, Coburg	9354 3215
Croydon	LePine	132 Mt Dandenong Road, Croydon	9725 7777
Dandenong	LePine	137 Princes Highway, Dandenong	9794 0511
Echuca	Tobin Brothers	457 High Street, Echuca	5480 1111
Eltham	LePine	848 Main Road, Eltham	9439 0401
Epping	White Lady	25 Cooper Street, Epping	9408 4200
Frankston	Tobin Brothers	210 Sladen Street, Frankston	5996 7211
Glen Waverley	LePine	388 Springvale Road, Glen Waverley	8587 5700
Greensborough	LePine	513 Greensborough Road, Greensborough	9434 1666
Lilydale	LePine	440 Maroondah Highway, Lilydale	9735 1500
Mitcham	Bethel Funerals	2d Cochran Street, Mitcham	9873 8866
Mitcham	Selwyn Allen Funerals	(Office) 2d Cochran Street, Mitcham	9888 1672
Mordialloc	LePine	21 McDonald Street, Mordialloc	9580 8447
Noble Park	Tobin Brothers	505 Princes Highway, Noble Park	9558 4999
North Melbourne	Tobin Brothers	189 Boundary Road, North Melbourne	9328 3999
Pascoe Vale South	CG Moody & Daughter	413-415 Bell Street, Pascoe Vale South	9350 5060
Preston	Ern Jensen Funerals	6 Bruce Street, Preston	9480 1477
Seymour	Howard Squires	12-14 Emily St, Seymour	1300 881 691
Shepparton	Kittle Bros	129 Maude Street, Shepparton	5821 2108
St Albans	Ern Jensen Funerals	2 Arthur Street, St Albans	9364 3466
Thomastown	Glen Funerals	33 Commercial Drive, Thomastown	9466 2166

Please note this list has been compiled based on AFDA Melbourne Metropolitan locations, plus Shepparton.

All AFDA Members across Victoria would endeavour to fulfil the request of a family (where possible) to wash and dress the deceased.

Please visit <http://www.afda.org.au> to find your closest AFDA Funeral Director

Annex 3: List of Gurduaras in Victoria

- **Gurduara Sahib Blackburn**
127 Whitehorse Road,
Blackburn VICTORIA 3130 (Tel: 9894 1800)
- **Gurduara Sahib Craigieburn**
344 Hume Highway,
Craigieburn VICTORIA 3164 (Tel: 9305 6511)
- **Gurduara Sahib Keysborough**
198 -206 Perry Road,
Keysborough VICTORIA 3073 (Tel: 9798 1313)
- **Gurduara Sahib Hoppers Crossing**
417 Sayers Road
Hoppers Crossing VICTORIA 3029 (Tel: 9749 2639)
- **Gurduara Sahib Tarneit**
560 Davis Road
Tarneit VICTORIA 3029 (Tel: 8015 4707)
- **Nanaksar Thath**
430 Evans Road, Lynbrook VICTORIA 3975 (Tel: 9799 1081)
- **Gurduara Sahib Shepparton**
240 Doyles Road
Shepparton VICTORIA 3603 (Tel: 5821 9309)

Annex 4: Contact Details for Boat Hire

- Royal Brighton Yacht Club
253 Esplanade MIDDLE BRIGHTON
VIC 3186 Tel: 9592 3092
- Royal Geelong Yacht Club
Eastern Beach GEELONG
VIC 3220 Tel: 5229 3705

Annex 5: Frequently Asked Questions

What other Paath can be done at home when the body is brought home?

If time permits Sukhmani Sahib Paath which takes 1.5 hours can be done. Otherwise Japji Sahib, Chaupai Sahib, or any other Paath or a Keertan CD can be played.

What is the seating capacity on the boat?

Depends on the size of the boat hired but recommended that about 6-8 persons including the Granthi be involved.

Can a family member sit in the hearse with driver when the body is being driven to the crematorium?

Yes, but advisable to confirm with the Funeral Director.

Can you cook or light fire in the house while mourning?

There is no prohibition of doing so. In earlier days people used to assist the bereaved family and thus no cooking was done in the house.





Sikh Interfaith Council of Victoria Inc.

