

Sikhism



Overview of Sikhi (Sikhism)

History



Sikhism was founded by Guru Nanak, who was born in 1469 in Punjab, India. Guru Nanak was born in a time of severe religious and political oppression and persecution. Women, in particular, were treated as second-class citizens. He witnessed tremendous human suffering and offered a revolutionary method of living that gave equality and freedom to all. It is not a branch or blend of any other faith. The word “Sikh” means student and the word “Guru” means enlightened teacher.

Gurus

There were nine human Gurus that followed Guru Nanak. They were instrumental in carrying on his message. They organized congregations and built places of worship. And they made the concept of “langar”—free kitchen, standard at every gathering. They encouraged their followers to earn their living through work. And they encouraged education, physical fitness, and spiritual discipline. They also discouraged fasting, pilgrimages and rituals.

Guru Arjan Dev Ji, the 5th guru, started the compilation of the writings of the previous Gurus to serve as a guide for Sikhs who lived far away. He was also the first Guru to be martyred by the Mughal emperors of the time in an attempt to stop the growth of Sikhism. The 9th Guru, Teg Bahadur Ji, was also martyred for refusing to convert to Islam.

His son, the 10th Guru, Gobind Singh formally initiated the Sikhs and in 1699 created the Khalsa—an army of saint soldiers or spiritual warriors. He gave his followers five articles of faith to identify them, a strict moral code of conduct and asked for a commitment to stand up for injustice.

The 5 Sikh Articles of Faith

1. **Kesh** - hair (respect for God’s creation)
2. **Kangha** - small wooden comb (cleanliness)
3. **Kirpan** - sword (protection)
4. **Kakars** -long underpants (self-discipline)
5. **Kara** - iron bracelet (good deeds)

Turban



Intricately related to the first K, Kesh, is the turban. It is a religious obligation and a crucial part of a Sikh’s identity. It represents sovereignty, royalty and a spiritual commitment to offer help any time it is needed.

The turban has caused many cases of mistaken identity for the Sikhs, especially after 9/11. Sikhs have been mistaken for terrorists or members of other religious groups. But only Sikhs are required to wear the turban as part of their religion. Other cultures and religions may wear it for other purposes but not every day. In North America, almost all people who wear turbans are Sikhs.

“The Guru Granth Sahib” – The Living Guru



Before passing away in 1708, the 10th Guru, Gobind Singh, passed on the role of a spiritual guide to “The Guru Granth Sahib”. This is a collection of writings started by Guru Nanak and continued by the other gurus. Gobind Singh finished it and officially declared it the “living Guru.” It contains poetic writings of the Gurus and some Muslim and Hindu Saints. And it offers guidance on how to live one’s life truthfully.

Sikh Beliefs



- **One God** - We may call the Creator by different names, but, there is only One God.
- **Equality** - Guru Nanak eliminated all distinctions of class, creed, religion, color, and gender. We all come from the same source and we are all equal. Everyone has a right to freedom.
- **Truth and Social Justice** - Guru Nanak advocated a life of truth and action to fight oppression and injustice.

Sikh Names

Because the Sikhs have been persecuted throughout history, Guru Nanak and those that followed him worked to teach that all people are equal no matter their race, sex, class or caste system. Historically, in northern India, people’s social status and class are represented by their last name. Wealthier families and families of a “higher” standing are easily identified simply by their last name. To overcome the judgement and inequality of this system, many male Sikhs change their last or middle name to “Singh” which means “lion.” And female Sikhs change their last or middle name to “Kaur” which means “lioness”. It is common, in a gurdwara, for all males to have the last name Singh. This is to demonstrate that all are equal and should not be judged based on social standing.

Purpose of Life

In Sikhism, this life is seen as an extremely precious gift, an opportunity to unite with God; to reach enlightenment. Guru Nanak taught his followers these rules to achieve this goal:

1. **Kirt karni**- Earn an honest living; being a recluse is not a requirement for spirituality
2. **Naam Japna**—Remember God at all times
3. **Vand Shakana**—Share with others

These goals are carried out through:

1. **Seva**- Selfless Service: to serve the needs of people is to serve God. Service is to be done without regard to race, religion, caste or gender. One must see God in all.
2. **Simren**- Remembrance: to always keep God in your mind throughout the day. This remembrance should guide us towards righteous actions in our daily lives.

Welcome to the Gurdwara



The Sikh place of worship is called gurdwara. The literal translation of the term gurdwara is “the Guru’s door”, but it also means “by means of the Guru’s grace.” The gurdwara is the temple or house in which the Guru Granth Sahib (the Sikh scripture) is kept.

Guru Nanak, the first Sikh Guru, established the first gurdwara in the early 1500s. The Sikh Gurus established gurdwaras as places where a sangat (congregation) could come together to worship as a community by reciting and reflecting upon hymns in the Guru Granth Sahib. Gurdwaras are not only a religious institution for the Sikhs where they can learn about their religion and pray, but is also a political institution where Sikhs can discuss important local and global issues.

Using the gurdwaras as the centers of activity, the Gurus built flourishing cities around them. The gurdwaras have been a focal point of Sikh communities since the time of Guru Nanak and continue to be so even today. They are found throughout the world, wherever a sizable Sikh community exists. A Nishan Sahib, a saffron colored flag with an emblem of a double-edged sword, two other swords, and a sharp iron ring, almost always indicates the site of a gurdwara.



Every gurdwara provides langar, a free communal meal eaten together by everyone visiting a Gurdwara. Started by Guru Nanak and institutionalized by the third Guru, Amar Das, langar exemplifies an important Sikh teaching: all human beings are equal regardless of their socioeconomic status, race or religion. It was mandatory for all to partake in langar before having an audience with the Guru, so that kings and untouchables alike would sit together and eat the same meal.

Appearance

Gurdwaras range from majestic buildings to small rooms in someone’s home. Any place that has the Guru Granth Sahib installed and a sangat present may be considered a gurdwara. Gurdwaras are a dear part of a Sikh’s life because they provide Sikhs with an opportunity to sit with other Sikh followers and promote spiritual growth.

Personnel

Usually, a gurdwara has one or more caretakers who are proficient in reciting the Sikh scriptures. The caretaker is called a Granthi and is usually addressed as Bhai Sahib (brother). Any Sikh man or woman can be a Granthi.

Gurdwara Protocol

- WEAR modest clothing
- REMOVE SHOES when entering the Gurdwara. This is a sign of respect to the sovereignty of the Guru Granth Sahib. All gurdwaras have shoe racks.
- COVER HEAD at all times as a sign of respect to the Guru Granth Sahib
- BOW in front of the Guru Granth Sahib upon joining the congregation. Non-Sikhs are not required to bow, but should enter and quietly join the congregation. (People offer money and, sometimes, other materials towards the operation of the gurdwara; but this is optional.)
- SIT on the Floor
- STAND up during Ardas (prayer to God)
- SIT on the floor during langar and keep head COVERED
- NO alcohol, tobacco, or smoking on the gurdwara premises
- Men and women are seated separately in many gurdwaras. However, this is not required religiously.
- **Prakash** A short ceremony performed when the Guru Granth Sahib is formally opened each day
- **Nitnem** Daily morning prayers
- **Keertan** Hymns and religious sermons
- **Ardas** Prayer to God: everyone stands facing the Guru Granth Sahib
- **Hukam** The order of the day read from the Guru Granth Sahib (Community announcements and discussion, if any.)
- **Langar** Sharing a communal meal from the community kitchen
- **Religious School** Sikh history or gurmukhi classes conducted for Sikh children in most gurdwaras. (Some Gurdwaras hold the classes on Saturdays or early Sunday mornings.)
- **Nitnem** Daily evening prayers
- **Sukh Aasan** A ceremony to formally close the Guru Granth Sahib that signals the end of the services

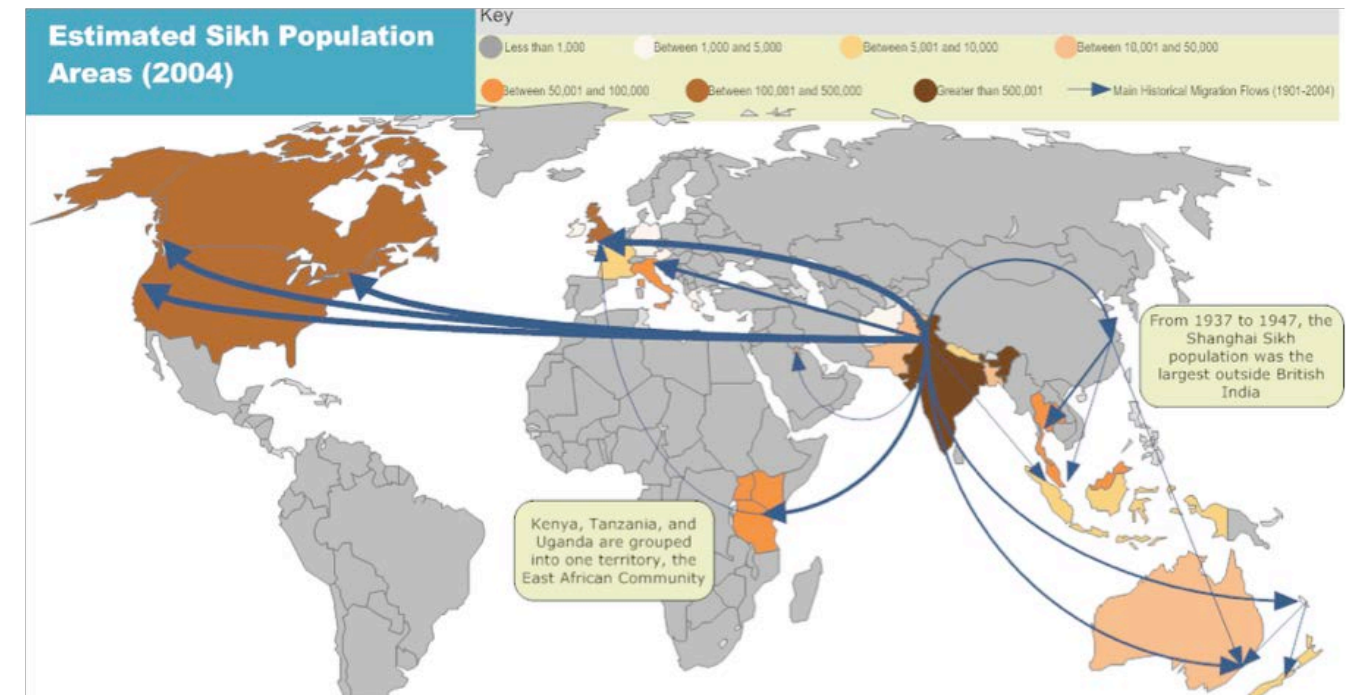
Chronological Outline of a Typical Day at the Gurdwara

Where Do Most Sikhs Live?

Sikhism is the world's 5th largest religion after Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism. It is a distinct, independent and monotheistic religion with over 20 million followers worldwide.

Geographically, Sikhs are concentrated primarily in

- India (90%)
- 83% of those live in the northern Indian state of Punjab
- North America and Canada (2%)
- Western Europe (2%)
- South America (less than 1%)
- Sub-Saharan Africa (less than 1%).



Major Sikh Holidays

What Are the Sacred Days in Sikhism?

Sikh teachings consider every day and every second to be sacred and holy if it is spent in remembrance of the One Almighty and serving Humanity. We are expected to live our lives as if every day is sacred. However, there are certain days that are celebrated to serve as a reminder of our history, the teachings of the Gurus and to gain inspiration.

Major Celebrations



Guru Gobind Singh's Birthday - January 5

Birth of the 10th Guru

Vaisakhi - April 14

On the Vaisakhi day of 1699 (the first day of the month of 'Vaisakh' in the Sikh calendar), Siri Guru Gobind Singh Sahib, the tenth Guru, formalized the concept of Saint-Soldier by introducing the Amrit ceremony (the formal initiation ceremony). The initiates were instructed to keep the five K's and strict moral conduct. They were given the title of Khalsa, meaning those whose life and spirit belonged only to the One Universal Creator.

Martyrdom of 5th Guru Arjan Dev Ji- June 16

In 1606, Guru Arjan Dev Ji was martyred for refusing to preach the message of God as started by Guru Nanak. Sikhs celebrate it as a reminder to stand up for freedom of religion.

The Installation of Sri Guru Granth Sahib as the Eternal Guru- October 20

Guru Gobind Singh installed the Adi Granth as Guru on October 20, 1708. This day is celebrated today as Guru Gadi Divas (Enthronement Day). At the time of his death, he declared that the Word of God embodied in the Siri Guru Granth Sahib was to be Guru for all time. Thus the Word of God, which has manifested as Guru in Nanak, and had passed through the ten incarnations of Guru, was now returned to its form as the Word, the Bani the Shabad.

Bandi Chor Diwas/Diwali - October/November

Diwali means festival of lights and is observed all over India. Like other seasonal festivals, Diwali has been celebrated since time immemorial. In its earliest form, it was regarded as a means to ward off, expel or appease the malignant spirits of darkness and ill luck. Among the Sikhs, Diwali came to have special significance from the day the town of Amritsar was illuminated on the return to it of Guru Hargobind Ji. He had been imprisoned by the Emperor Jahangir in 1617. The Sikhs were desperate to see the Guru and made petition to the Emperor for his release. Each

Major Celebrations



day many Sikhs would come to Gwalior fort where he was imprisoned. Others, including the great Sufi saint Hazrat Mian Mir also petitioned for his release. Jahangir finally agreed and set the release for near Diwali day, 1619. But Guru Hargobind refused to leave the prison unless 52 other princes who were being imprisoned unjustly were also released. Jahangir relented and the day is therefore known as "Delivery from Imprisonment Day" or Bandi Chor Diwas.

Holla Mahalla- March/April

Holla Mahalla was started by the 10th Guru, Guru Singh at Anandpur, the birthplace of the Khalsa. It means "mock battle". On Holla Mahalla mock military exercises are held, including swordplay (Gatka) and horseback riding. It was started at a time when the Sikhs were being heavily persecuted and had to fight many battles.

Martyrdom of the 4 Sons of Guru Gobind Singh ("the Four Princes" or "Chaar Sahibzadey") - December 5

The two older sons of Guru Gobind Singh - Baba Ajit Singh (age 19) and Baba Jujhar Singh (age 17) were martyred during a fierce and protracted battle with Mughal forces in 1705.

His two younger sons- Baba Zorrawar Singh (age 9) and Baba Fateh Singh (age 7) were separated from their father and betrayed by their long time servant. They, along with their Grandmother (Guru Gobind Singh's mother) were handed over to the Governor of Sirhind. They were imprisoned and offered release and riches if they gave up their Sikh faith. They refused and eventually were put to death by being bricked into a stone tomb while still alive.

Sikhs celebrate the martyrdom as a reminder of the bravery and strength in faith of the four sons.

Birthday of Guru Nanak - The First Guru - November 15

Sikhs also celebrate the birthdays of all 10 Gurus and the Enthronement Days of the nine Gurus following Guru Nanak.

Martyrdom of the 9th Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji - November 24

In 1664, Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji was martyred for standing for Hindus who were being forcefully converted by Aurangzeb. Sikhs celebrate as reminder to stand up for injustice.



Famous Sikh Icons



Ajay Banga (1960 -), CEO MasterCard

- Graduated with a BA in Economics Honors from Delhi University and is an alumnus of the Indian Institute of Management in Ahmedabad, India.
- Appointed by President Barack Obama to serve as a Member of the President's Advisory Committee for Trade Policy and Negotiations.
- Chairman of the U.S.-India Business Council.
- Named by The Economic Times of India as the fourth "Most Powerful Indian" in the world.

Gursimran "Sim" Bhullar (1992 -), First Indian American in the NBA

- Canadian professional basketball player who last played for the Sacramento Kings of the National Basketball Association (NBA).
- Played college basketball for New Mexico State University
- The first player of Indian descent to play in the NBA.
- At 7'5", he also became the sixth tallest player in NBA history, being tied with Chuck Nevitt and Pavel Podkolzin for that record.

Dalip Singh Saund (1899 - 1973), Member of the United States House of Representatives

- Campaigned to allow all people of South Asian descent to become naturalized citizens.
- Elected to the U.S. Congress from the 29th California District
- The first Asian American, the first Indian American and first member of a non-Abrahamic faith to be elected to Congress

Milkha Singh (1935 -), Track and field athlete

- Known as The Flying Sikh, is a former Indian track and field sprinter. He was introduced to the sport while serving in the Indian Army.
- The only Indian male athlete to win an individual track and field gold medal at a Commonwealth Games until the 2014 Commonwealth Games.
- Won gold medals in the 1958 and 1962 Asian Games.
- Represented India in the 1956 Summer Olympics in Melbourne, the 1960 Summer Olympics in Rome and the 1964 Summer Olympics in Tokyo.
- Awarded the Padma Shri, India's fourth-highest civilian honour, in recognition of his athletic achievements.

Famous Sikh Icons



Prakash Kaur (1951 -), Champion for Girls

- In a state infamous for female infanticide, Prakash Kaur runs a house in Jalandhar, Punjab for 60 abandoned girls.
- She was abandoned herself -- found a few hours old in a drain.
- Since 1993, she has rescued and raised unwanted and unclaimed newborn girls.
- She represents the many Sikh women fighting for women and girls against abandonment, domestic violence, sexual assault, and forced marriage.

Bhagat Puran Singh (1904- 1992), one of the most prominent Sikh heroes of this century

- Gave most of his adult life to the service of terminal and mentally ill patients, many of whom had been abandoned by their families and society.
- Whenever and wherever he saw a deserted dead body (human or animal), he would immediately prepare a grave and give the corpse a deserving burial or cremation as a sign of respect.
- In 1947, in the violence and poverty arising from the partition of Pakistan and India into two countries, he established a premier care institute in Amritsar, Punjab to provide housing, food, medical care, love and attention to the destitute, sick, and disabled people of the state of Punjab.

Bhagat Singh Thind (1892-1967), Lecturer and activist

- Came to America in 1913 to study at the University of California at Berkeley and served in the U.S. Army during WWI
- Applied for U.S. citizenship, was approved by the district court, but was stripped of his U.S. citizenship because he was not Caucasian. Appealed to the Supreme Court but lost because he was considered to be a "Hindu" who were "aliens ineligible to citizenship".
- Remained in the U.S., completed his Ph.D., and delivered lectures in metaphysics based on Sikh philosophy.
- Eventually, Dr. Thind applied for and received U.S. citizenship through the state of New York.

Common Terms in Sikhism

1. Ardas

A Sikh prayer, addressed directly to God. Ardas is said on several occasions, such as after the completion of morning, evening or night prayers. It is also said at the beginning and/or end of an important event. It is always done while standing.

2. Chaur

A flowing whisk that is respectfully waved over the Guru Granth Sahib to indicate its sovereignty.



3. Diwan Hall

This is the main hall in the gurdwara in which the religious services are held, with the Guru Granth Sahib (see Guru Granth Sahib) placed at the front.

4. Granthi

(loosely) Minister. A Granthi's prime duties include arranging daily services, reading, teaching and explaining the Sikh scripture (see Guru Granth Sahib). More generally, a Granthi is responsible for the care of the gurdwara (see Gurdwara), the Guru Granth Sahib, and also to teach and advise community members.

5. Gurbani

The contents of the Sikh scripture, Guru Granth Sahib (see Guru Granth Sahib) containing the revealed wisdom of the Sikh Gurus (see Guru), in their own words.

6. Gurmukhi

The script of the Guru Granth Sahib, which is also used in modern Punjabi.

7. Guru

Divinely inspired, spiritual, prophet-teacher. Refers to one of the ten founders of the Sikh faith, the Sikh scripture (see Guru Granth Sahib), or God.

8. Guru Granth Sahib

The Sikh scripture, written mostly in the form of hymns and poetry, it includes the writings of six of the Sikh Gurus (see Guru) as well as the devotional writings of 36 other saints, both Muslim and Hindu. It is 1,430 pages long and is the embodiment of the spiritual knowledge and authority of all of the Gurus, and is treated with the utmost reverence by Sikhs.



Common Terms in Sikhism

9. Khalsa

Pure ones - order of initiated Sikhs - most observant order of Sikhs.

10. Kirtan/Keertan

Singing hymns (see Gurbani) from the Guru Granth Sahib (see Guru Granth Sahib), usually accompanied by instruments. The singing of Keertan is a primary form of worship for Sikhs.

11. Langar

The devotional meal eaten by the congregation as part of the religious service. Langar is free and open to all, regardless of religious background, class, color or ethnicity. A central part of Sikh practice, its roots lie in the promotion of equality among all humanity, and the rejection of the Hindu caste system, which forbade people of different castes (social and occupational standings) from eating together.

12. Matha Tekana

Bowing down and touching the floor with one's forehead in front of the Guru Granth Sahib (see Guru Granth Sahib). It is important to note that Sikhs do not bow before the actual book itself, as some type of idol. By bowing, Sikhs are submitting themselves to the scripture: the knowledge and true written words of the Gurus and other saints within. Sikhs perform Matha Tekana as they enter the Diwan Hall. Non-Sikhs are not required to bow, but may enter and quietly join the congregation. Worshippers generally place a donation in front of the scripture, which is used for the management of the gurdwara, but this is not mandatory.

13. Nitnem

Sikh daily prayers. Sikhs are required to pray three times a day, with the longest prayers early in the morning, shorter prayers in the evening, and the shortest prayer just before going to bed.

14. Ragi/Raagi

A musician who is trained in the singing of sacred Sikh hymns (see Shabad and Keertan).

15. Sangat

Sikh congregation.

16. Sat Sri Akal

A common Sikh greeting, meaning, "God is True and Timeless".

17. Shabad

A sacred Sikh hymn.



Common Terms in Sikhism

18. Waheguru ji ka Khalsa, Waheguru ji ki Fateh

Literally meaning “The Khalsa belongs to Waheguru (God), Victory belongs to Waheguru (God).” This is the traditional Sikh greeting. It is said before the beginning of and at the conclusion of programs at the gurdwara like katha, announcements, and keertan. Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Guru of the Sikhs, gave this greeting to Sikhs on the day he established the Sikh baptism ceremony known as Amrit.

Notes...

Faith Tradition: Sikhism

Theme: Rituals


Notes...

Faith Tradition: Sikhism

Theme: Beliefs

Important Concepts to Remember

Below you will find several thoughts or concepts that the volunteers from our Sikhism Journey would like for you to “take away” from the gurdwara- these are ideas that are central to their beliefs, can help you better understand Sikhism or help to clear up any misconceptions you may have about this faith.

1. Sikhs worship in a Gurdwara.
2. The most famous Gurdwara in the world is the Harimandir or Golden Temple in Amritsar, India.
3. Most Gurdwaras have a community meal called Langer that symbolizes equality and service.
4. Sikhism is the 5th largest religion in the world. There are 25-30 million Sikhs worldwide.
5. Sikhs believe in one God, equality of all humankind and social justice.
6. The main pillars of Sikhism are Simren – meditation on God’s name and Seva – service to God’s creation.
7. The founder of Sikhism was Guru Nanak – in 1469.
8. Most Sikhs come from India – and the State of Punjab.
9. The most observant Sikhs are the initiated ones – the Khalsa (the order of the Pure). They have an external uniform they wear that includes 5 articles of faith – unshorn hair, a small comb, a steel bracelet, a ceremonial sword, and a special kind of breeches. All initiated men and some initiated women wear a turban.
10. Many Sikhs, even though not initiated, do not cut their hair and wear a turban.
11. The Sikh turban symbolizes discipline, integrity, humility, and spirituality. The turban is a mandatory part of Sikh faith, not a social custom, or a hat that can be easily taken on or off. In America, 99% of the people wearing turbans are Sikhs.
12. The most common symbols of Sikhism are the khanda  or Ek Onkar (one God) 