




Information on Sikhism

by Mandy Barrow

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Sikhism

 Sikhism is one of the world's youngest religions being founded just over 500 years ago. Despite being so young, it is the fifth largest religion in the world with over 20 million followers.

Sikhism is not derived from any other religion.

The word 'Sikh' in the Punjabi language means 'disciple', Sikhs are the disciples of God who follow the writings and teachings of the Ten Sikh Gurus.



Place of Origin	The Punjab (Panjab or Panj), an area of Northern India
Founder	Guru Nanak
Sacred Text	Guru Granth Sahib
Sacred Building	Gurdwara
Holy Place	Nankana Sahib, where the founder of the Sikh religion, Guru Nanak Dev was born.
Major Festivals	<p>Hola Mohalla - February/March - a time for contests when Sikhs show their skills at athletics, horsemanship and martial arts.</p> <p>Baisakhi - March/April - New Year's Day in the Punjab.</p> <p>Diwali - October - a festival when the story of Hargobind, the sixth Guru, is told.</p> <p>Guru Nanak's Birthday - October/November- The Guru Granth Sahib is carried through the streets by five men.</p>

Where did Sikhism originate from?

Sikhism was revealed to Guru Nanak over 500 years ago in the Punjab, the Sikh Homeland in South Asia.



Who is the founder of Sikhism?



The Sikh faith was founded by **Guru Nanak** (1469-1539) and shaped by his nine successors in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in South Asia.

The last Guru, Guru Gobind Singh (1666- 1708), did not appoint a human successor. Instead, he transferred his authority jointly to two institutions:

- **the Guru Granth Sahib** (the Sikh scripture)
- **the Guru Khalsa Panth** (the community of committed Sikh believers initiated through a special ceremony)

What do Sikhs believe?

Sikhism teaches that all human beings are equal and can realise the divine within them through devotion to God, truthful living and service to humanity.

The core beliefs

One God

All Are Equal

Men and Women have the same rights/responsibilities

Meditation

Remember God

Live Honestly

Sikhs are supposed to work hard and live honestly

Share with Others

Give to the needy

Sikhs do not believe in the following:

Fasting, superstitions, ritualism, caste system, alcohol, smoking and drugs

What is the Symbol of Sikhism?

The symbol or emblem of Sikhism is known as the **Khanda**. It is made up of:



- **The Khanda** - a double edged sword. This represents the belief in one God.
- **The Chakkar**, like the Kara it is a circle representing God without beginning or end and reminding Sikhs to remain within the rule of God.
- **Two crossed kirpans** (swords) representing spiritual authority and political power.

Where do Sikhs worship?

Sikhs worship at home and in the Sikh temple called the **Gurdwara** ('Gateway to the Guru').



Gurdwara Nankana Sahib

All Gurdwaras across the globe have:

- **The Sikh scripture** - Guru Granth Sahib
- **Community Kitchen** - langar
Food is cooked by the members of the community and served by members of the community, to all people at the Gurdwara. The idea is to demonstrate equality of all people, irrespective of caste, creed, religion, race or sex.

- **Four Doors**

The gurdwara usually has four doors to show that it is open to all.

- **The "Nishan Sahib,"** a yellow (saffron) triangular flag bearing the Sikh symbol of "Khanda" flies from every Gurdwara. The term 'nisan' means 'flag' and 'sahib' is a term of respect.



Nishan Sahib

Visitors irrespective of their religion can expect shelter, comfort and food at all Gurdwaras.

Everyone who enters a gurdwara must cover their head and take their shoes off. Hands are washed and in some Gurdwaras there are feet washes.

There are no chairs, everyone sits on the floor.

Men and women do not sit together. The women sit on one side of the Guru Granth Sahib and men on the other. (In some smaller Gurdwaras, men and women may be seen sitting mixed in the congregation.)

Three main functions are carried out in all public Gurdwaras:

- **Kirtan** - the singing of hymns from the Guru Granth Sahib
- **Katha** - the reading of the Guru Granth Sahib and explanations.
- **The Langar** - free community kitchen for all visitors of all religions.

Along with these main functions Gurdwaras around the world also serve the Sikh community in many other ways including, libraries of Sikh literature and schools to teach children Gurmukhi and the Sikh scriptures.

What are the spiritual leaders called?

The Sikh faith does not have an ordained clergy, any woman or man from the congregation may lead religious services.

Granthis are people who have studied the Sikh scriptures extensively and are available in the Gurdwaras as teachers.

Guided tour of a Gurdwara

What is the Sikh Holy Book called?

The Sikh Scripture is called '**Guru Granth Sahib**'. It is a collection of teachings and writings by Guru Nanak and other Gurus as well as Sikh, Hindu and Muslim saints.



Photo of a Sikh man in attendance to the Sri Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh Holy scripture. Photograph by Hari Singh

The '**Guru Granth Sahib**' is the living Guru of the Sikhs (The tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh declared that there would be no other living Gurus but instead Sikhs could look to their holy scriptures for guidance.)

The Guru Granth Sahib teaches through divine poetry that is set to a formal system of Sikh classical music.

The Guru Granth Sahib is kept under a special canopy in the Gurdwara.

Sikhs take off their shoes in the presence of the holy scriptures and also never turn their back on them.

At every festival, the scriptures are read continuously from beginning to end, which takes about 48 hours.

As the scriptures are being read, the reader or an attendant will periodically wave a **chauri** over the scriptures. This is a sign of respect for the authority of the Guru Granth Sahib which is treated like a living Guru or teacher.

The chauri is a ceremonial whisk which is made from the tail hair of a white horse or yak set in a wooden or silver handle. It is a traditional Indian symbol of authority and Hindu gods are often shown being fanned with a chauri.

Interesting Fact

The Sikh scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib, is the only major religious text which contains writings by teachers of other faiths. This is because the Sikh Gurus taught that there are many different ways of achieving a connection with the God. The Sikh way is one of these ways.

The 5 five articles of faith - Panj Kakkar

Sikhs display their commitment to their beliefs by wearing the Sikh articles of faith. The five articles of faith start with the "k" alphabet in Punjabi, and are thereby referred to as the **5 K's**.

They are:

1. **Kesh** (uncut hair)
2. **Kangha** (comb)
3. **Kara** (steel bracelet)
4. **Kirpan** (sword)
5. **Kaccha** - Kachhera (soldier's shorts)

Uncut Hair (Kesh) - SPIRITUALITY

Sikhs do not cut their hair (kesh) but let it grow as a symbol of their faith. Because during their lifetimes it will get very long Sikh men wear turbans to keep it tidy.

Sikh women may either wear a turban or a scarf.

Comb (Kanga) - CLEANLINESS

The kanga is similar to a small comb and affirms its bearer's commitment to society. It is tucked neatly in a Sikh's uncut hair.



Kanga

Just as a comb helps to remove the tangles and cleans the hair, the Kanga is a spiritual reminder to shed impurities of thought.

Steel Bracelet (Kara) - GOOD DEEDS

The kara is worn around one's wrist like a bracelet and its circular shape reminds a Sikh that the Creator (God) is infinite—without a beginning and without an end



Kara

The Last two are a reminder that Sikhs are warriors and always fight for righteousness.

Scimitar (Kirpan) - PROTECTION

The kirpan resembles a sword and symbolises the protection of the weak by Sikhs. It is hung near a Sikh's waist with a shoulder strap.



Kirpan

Soldiers long Undershorts (Kaccha) SELF DISCIPLINE

The kaccha (also spelt Kachhera) is similar to a soldier's undershorts, a loose, white, cotton undergarment. It reminds the Sikh of the need for self-restraint over passions and desires.

Rites of Passage

When a baby is born a special prayer is read and a drop of Amrit (holy sweet water) is placed on the baby's tongue.

Nam Karan - Naming of a Child

At a ceremony at the Gurdwara, the name of the baby is chosen by taking the Hukam, the granthi randomly opens Sri Guru Granth Sahib to any page and reads the hymn on that page. The first letter of the first word of the hymn is picked. The child's name is then chosen beginning with that letter and is announced to the congregation.

Singh ('Lion'), a reminder to be courageous, is added to boys' names while **Kaur** ('Princess'), to stress dignity, is added to girls' names.

Dastaar – the Sikh Turban

Sikhs MUST wear the turban

Dastaar Bandi

When a person is aged between 14 and 16, an initiation ceremony called the Dastaar Bandi (wearing of the first turban) takes place. Before the ceremony, kids generally begin by experimenting with their turbans, learning how to hold the weight on their heads, get comfortable with it, and then slowly begin tying it everyday.

When they are 14 years old, young Sikhs are allowed to join the Khalsa. Khalsa Sikhs observe the Five Ks. A special solution of sugar and water, known as **Amrit**, is prepared in an iron bowl whilst the five Banis (special prayers) are recited by five Sikhs in the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib. During the ceremony the Amrit is blessed and sprinkled on the hair and eyes, a prayer is said and a meal is eaten together.

Marriage ceremony

The Sikh marriage ceremony is called **Anand Karaj**. It is performed in the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh scripture.

In a Sikh wedding, scripture is read from the Granth Sahib, and after each section the bride and groom walk around the Guru Granth Sahib, showing their commitment to the teachings being read. This is done four times.

Following this, a communal prayer is said for the couple and religious hymns are sung.

Funerals

Sikhs burn their dead. As the body is bathed and clothed in fresh clothes by family members, Sikh prayers are said. The ashes are usually gathered afterwards, and put afloat in a flowing body of water — returning the person's last physical remains to nature.

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Woodlands Junior School, Hunt Road Tonbridge Kent TN10 4BB

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