



Sikhism

History and Region

Sikhism was founded by Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji (1469-1538) in the north western part of India. He was followed by ten successive Sikh Gurus. Since 1708, the eleventh and eternal Guru is the Holy Scripture *Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji*. The 'Word is the Guru'. Sikh when translated means 'seeker'.

Sacred Texts

The *Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji* is the Sikh Holy Scripture and is the centre of all Sikh religious ceremonies and devotion. Written in a phonetic language (Gurmukhi), the entire scripture is in poetry and to musical measure in Raagas. Its message is one of inclusiveness, respect, love and sense of belonging to all. It is unique in that it has the teachings of Sikh Gurus, as well as Muslim Sufi saints and Hindu Bhagats. It encourages us to cleanse our hearts and minds of envy, hatred and malice and to control lust, greed, anger, attachment, and ego within us. *Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji* teaches us to focus on the virtues of Truth, Contentment, Compassion, Righteousness, Fortitude and Humility.

Teachings and Beliefs

Sikhism is a monotheistic religion. There is only one God. God is the only true teacher. The entire creation is part of the same light. Humanity is one.

There are 3 pillars that are essential in daily practice for a Sikh:

1. Remember God Always. Be thankful for His bounties.
2. Work hard - earn an honest living
3. Share your earnings with the needy.

Sikhism believes in the equality of all humans before God - men and women, rich and poor, all colours, creeds and races. Sikhism does not believe in the caste system or any other hierarchical social structures or any discriminatory worldly distinction.

Rituals and Practices

Birth: After a child is born, the baby is often taken to a Gurduara for a naming ceremony, known as Nam Karan. Prayers (*Ardaas*) are recited for the newborn child. After reciting *Ardaas*, the *Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji* is opened at random. The hymn on the opened page is read. The first letter of the first word of the hymn is selected as the first letter of the child's name. The word 'Kaur' is added after a girl's name, and the name 'Singh' for a boy. This removes all class distinctions.

Baptism: Guru Gobind Singh Ji (the 10th Sikh Guru) instituted the baptism ceremony known as Amrit Sanchaar (immortal nectar). He initiated 5 Sikhs and in turn requested them to initiate Him into the *Khalsa*. The *Khalsa* is a global human fellowship consisting of Sikhs who dedicate themselves to living by the high ideals and values preached and practiced by the Sikh Gurus. The baptism ceremony takes place in the presence of *Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji* and is performed by five initiated Sikhs. The initiate is required to have 5 articles of the faith (*Kakaars*) which must be worn at all times. The 5 K's are:

1. Kesh - uncut hair. Turbans are a sign of respect and keep the hair in place. A symbol of spirituality.
2. Kangha – a wooden comb to keep the long hair neat and tidy. A symbol of cleanliness and order.
3. Kara – an iron bangle worn on the wrist which acts as a symbol to always act righteously.
4. Kirpan – a small sheathed sword, a symbol of dignity and the Sikh struggle against injustice.
5. Kachera – prescribed shorts, which deters one from engaging in any sexual activity outside of marriage. A symbol of self-control and chastity.

Marriage: The marital ceremony is known as Anand Karaj (blissful event). During this ceremony, the bride, groom and wedding party gather in the Gurudwara. A series of hymns including the hymns of Laavan are sung as the bride and groom complete four wedding rounds around the *Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji*. Each round is a commitment to God and serves as a reminder that God is the centre of their lives.

Funeral: The funeral ceremony is known as Antham Sanskaar (final rites). The ceremony involves praying for the deceased soul and cremating the body. During the cremation verses are read from *Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji*, and at the end the Ardaas (supplication prayer) is said. Elaborate displays of mourning are discouraged as Sikhs accept that death is God's will and is part of the journey towards God.

Holy Days and Festivals

Sikhs holy days consist of community gatherings with prayers, singing hymns and praises of the Lord as well as having Kathas (explanations of the *Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji*) at the Gurudwara. Holy days include:

Vaisakhi: Vaisakhi marks the founding of the Khalsa, the global human fellowship of Sikhs, in the 17th century by Guru Gobind Singh Ji (10th Guru).

Birthdays of Guru Nanak Dev Ji, Gurburab: (1st Guru) - The honouring of the birth of Guru Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji, the founder of the Sikh religion. His birthday is generally celebrated during the month of November.

Birthdays of Guru Gobind Singh Ji (10th Guru): Guru Gobind Singh Ji was the tenth and last Guru of the Sikhs.

Martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev Ji (5th guru): Guru Arjan Dev Ji, the fifth Guru, was the first martyr-guru. He was responsible for the compilation of the Sikh scriptures in 1604. He also helped to build the Harmandir Sahib (Golden Temple) at Amritsar. He was tortured to death under the orders of the Moghul emperor of the day for upholding the right to religious freedom and justice.

Martyrdom of Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji (9th guru): Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji is the 9th Guru of the Sikhs. He was publicly beheaded by the Moghul emperor of the day in 1675 for upholding the rights of the oppressed Hindu faith. He gave his life for religious freedom.

Conferment of Guruship to Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji: Before his physical demise, Guru Gobind Singh Ji (10th Guru) conferred Guruship on the Holy Scriptures, known as *Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji* and comprising of 1430 pages of hymns.

Approved by the Sikh Interfaith Council of Victoria