

SIKHISM

People — Places — Practices — Philosophies



Symbol of the Sikh tradition is the Khanda showing a union of spiritual and temporal in the oneness of God.

People

Founder: Guru Nanak

Population: 23.8 million (.4% of world population)

Local Leaders: Sikhism does not have an ordained priest class. Local faith communities are administered both men and women. Many are volunteers. Some may be full-time and paid at larger temples.

Historical Leadership: Ten Gurus in human form from 1497 until 1708 with the death of Guru Gobind Singh. From then until today the guru of the Sikh tradition has been the book of scripture: Guru Granth Sahib

Places

Place of Origin: Northwest India (Punjab) and present-day Pakistan

Date of Origin: ca. 1500 CE

Significant Holy City or Place: Amritsar, India

Place of Worship: Temple or Gurdwara (Doorway to the Guru or God)

Protocol for Visitors:

- Shoes off
- Head covered for both men (bandana) and women (scarf)
- When sitting in the main worship room, do not point soles of feet towards the holy book
- Bow before the book
- Take & eat Prasad (means "grace," made of equal parts of butter, flour and sugar.)
- Women sit on the left, men sit on the right.

Practices

Five Ks: Baptized Sikhs are known by five items which are always upon their body. Each begins with the letter "K."

- **Kesh** —Uncut hair that symbolizes spirituality and the original nature one's creation. Because during their lifetimes hair will become very long, men (and some women) wear turbans to keep it tidy.
- **Kangha** —A comb symbolizing discipline and cleanliness. Unlike many Indian ascetics who characteristically neglect their matted hair, Sikhs wash and comb their hair daily. It is a symbol to remind them to keep their lives in order and "comb" away impure thoughts.
- **Kara** —A bracelet that is round like the eternal nature of God, is steel or iron like the strength of God, and is bright and shiny to remind the wearer to be bright and shiny. Worn on the wrist of the dominate hand (or perhaps both wrists) making that hand "the hand of the guru" or "the hand of God." When disciples puts a hand forward to perform any kind of act, they ask if the act they are about to perform is honourable to God who is present.

- **Kirpan** —A ceremonial sword symbolizing commitment to struggle against injustice. The word “kirpan” is made of the two words “kir” which mean grace and “pan” which means dignity. Thus the greatest weapons against injustice are the weapons of grace and dignity. Because enslaved people are not allowed to carry weapons, the kirpan also represents that Sikhs are a free people.
- **Kachha** —A pair of under shorts symbolizing chastity, self-control and high moral character.

Baptism: Through a ceremony known as Amrit Sankar (drinking and anointing with sweetened water) an individual chooses to become a Sikh known as a Khalsa.

Names: All Khalsa Sikh men take the name *Singh* (lion). Sikh women take the name *Kaur* (princess). Some who are not Khalsa may also take these names.

Langar — From its inception, Sikhism has observed the practice of offering a free meal to all visitors to the gurdwara, whether a Sikh or not. This meal is eaten while sitting on the floor to demonstrate equality among all people.

Service: Sikhism emphasizes the importance of service to humanity called *seva*.

Philosophies

Divinity: Sat Nam meaning True Name or Wahiguru meaning Wonderful Lord (monotheistic)

Scriptures: Guru Granth Sahib (present Guru of the faith, consisting of 5,894 hymns) The book of scripture is revered as if it were a living guru by being placed in a bed at night, ceremonially awoken in the morning, sitting on a throne during the day, etc.

Quotation from Holy Book: “There is One supreme eternal God; the True One; Immanent in all beings; Sustainer of all things; Creator of all things; not subject to time; Self-manifesting; known by grace...God has no marks or symbols, no colour or caste, no family line.” *Mool Mantra*

Golden Rule: “I am a stranger to no one and no one is a stranger to me. Indeed I am a friend to all.” *Guru Granth Sahib* p. 1299

Beliefs: Connection to God and one’s true self is through worship and service to others.

Nondiscrimination: Sikhism intentionally breaks down divisions of race, religion, gender, class and caste.

Reincarnation: Sikhism believes in reincarnation.

Three Pillars:

1. Believe in One God
2. Earn a truthful living
3. Share from one’s wealth

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