

# A teacher's guide to Sikhism

<b>Religion Name</b>	Sikhism
<b>Followers are called</b>	Sikhs
<b>Founder</b>	Guru Nanak Dev
<b>When was it founded?</b>	15th Century CE
<b>Holy/Special book/s</b>	The Guru Granth Sahib
<b>Holy/ Special building/s</b>	Gurdwara
<b>Main Symbol</b>	 The Khanda

## Beliefs about God

- Sikhs believe in one God. He is the same for all people of all religions. Many Sikhs use the name Waheguru to refer to God.
- God is without form, or gender.
- Sikhism emphasises that one should remember God at all times.
- Everyone has direct access to God, Sikhs believe that God is inside every person.
- Everyone is equal before God.
- Most Sikhs believe that God can't be understood fully by human beings, but by looking at creation and reflecting on the teachings of the Gurus and the Guru Granth Sahib we can begin to get closer to God.

## Beliefs about the world including creation

Sikhism teaches the existence of one God. Guru Nanak taught that the creator and creation are inseparable in the way that an ocean is made up of its individual drops. Guru Nanak also wrote that God's creation consists of a multitude of universes and that no one knows for certain how, or when, creation took place.

## Beliefs about the Afterlife

Sikhs believe in reincarnation. God is inside every human – a concept similar to a soul. This part of us is reincarnated through many lives. This process is affected by karma – if you do good you will move closer to God through the process of reincarnation.

As a human you have the opportunity to reach God and escape the cycle of death and rebirth – escaping this cycle is called Mukti and this is the aim of Sikhs.

## Other key beliefs

Sikhs believe that the way to lead a good life is to:

- always keep God in heart and mind
- live honestly and work hard
- treat everyone equally
- be generous to the less fortunate
- serve others

Equality - For Sikhs, the guiding principles are their belief in equality and selfless service to others. Sikhs believe that all humans are equal.

Sewa - refers to selfless service, it is a way of life for many Sikhs and is part of their daily routine. Sikhism teaches that sewa is an act of service towards Waheguru and therefore must be done regularly in order to become closer to Waheguru. It helps Sikhs to become gurmukh (god centered) and show their faith towards Waheguru.

### Important stories

Guru Nanak – three days in the river (see <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00w5lnd> for a video of this story)

Guru Nanak and the boulder – (see <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p02mx3t9> for a video)

The formation of the Khalsa – Guru Gobind Singh (see <https://www.truetube.co.uk/film/formation-khalsa> for video)

Also see: world of animated faiths, life of Guru Nanak

The Sikh missionary society also produce a free book of Sikh stories

### How should we treat others?

Sikhs believe that all people are equal and therefore believe that all faiths are inclusive and must be treated with respect and equality.

### Holy Buildings

A Gurdwara is the place where Sikhs come together for congregational worship. The first Gurdwara in the world was built by Guru Nanak in 1521-2 at Kartarpur. There are about 200 Gurdwaras in Britain.

The literal meaning of the Punjabi word Gurdwara is 'the residence of the Guru', or 'the door that leads to the Guru'. There are no idols, statues, or religious pictures in a Gurdwara, because Sikhs worship only God, and they regard God as having no physical form. Nor are there candles, incense, or bells, or any other ritualistic devices.

The focus of attention, and the only object of reverence in the main hall (or Darbar Sahib) is the book of Sikh scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib, which is treated with the respect that would be given to a human Guru.

The Guru Granth Sahib is kept in a room of its own during the night and carried in procession to the main hall at the start of the day's worship.

The book is placed on a raised platform (Takht or Manji Sahib, meaning "throne") under a canopy (Chanani or Palki), and covered with an expensive cloth when not being read.

There are four doors into a Gurdwara, known as the Door of Peace, the Door of Livelihood, the Door of Learning and the Door of Grace.

These doors are a symbol that people from all four points of the compass are welcome, and that members of all four castes are equally welcome.

There's always a light on in a Gurdwara, to show that the Guru's Light is always visible and is accessible to everyone at any time.

Every Gurdwara has a Langar attached to it where food is served to anyone without charge. The term Langar is also used for the communal meal served at the Gurdwaras.

Gurdwaras fly the Sikh flag outside. The flag is orange/yellow and has the Sikh emblem in the middle.

### Places of pilgrimage

Many Sikhs do not place importance on pilgrimage as what is most important is focussing on God no matter where you are. However, many Sikhs will visit the Golden Temple in Amritsar.

The Golden Temple has the largest Langar in the world, serving over 50,000 meals each day.

### Holy books

The teachings of the Sikh religion were passed down from Guru to Guru and then written down in a very special book, the Guru Granth Sahib.

The Guru Granth Sahib is used to guide the everyday thoughts and actions within a Sikh family and the rituals involved. It is kept off the ground and never in a stack. It is written in Punjabi and consists of poems and hymns. It does not contain specific rules on how to live your life, instead Sikhs interpret the poems to get this information.

### Important people within the tradition

Guru Nanak

Guru Gobind Singh

### Festivals

**Baisakhi, or Vaisakhi**, is the festival which celebrates Sikh New Year and the founding of the Sikh community in 1699, known as the Khalsa. It is celebrated on 13 or 14 April and began as a harvest festival in the Punjab before it became the Sikhs' most important festival. This festival holds importance for Sikhs today as it reminds them of the birth of the Khalsa (community that considers Sikhism as its faith) and the significance of joining the Khalsa in the Sikh community.

**Diwali** is particularly important for Sikhs because it celebrates the release from prison of the sixth guru, Guru Hargobind, and 52 other princes with him, in 1619. ... Sikhs celebrated the return of Guru Hargobind by lighting the Golden Temple and this tradition continues today.

### Rites of passage/important life events

Naming Ceremony – The Guru Granth Sahib is used to select the name of the baby.

Amrit Ceremony - Sikhs who have been through the Amrit Ceremony of initiation become baptised Sikhs, take new names, and wear the 5 Ks.

The ceremony takes place in a Gurdwara, before the Guru Granth Sahib, and in the presence of 5 initiated Sikhs. During the ceremony, hymns are recited from the Sikh scripture, prayers are said, and the principles of Sikhism are affirmed. Then amrit is prepared, a mixture of sugar and water that has been stirred with a double-edged sword. The candidates for initiation drink some of the Amrit and have it sprinkled on their eyes and hair. Each then recites the Mool Mantra (the fundamentals of Sikhism).

### Important practices

#### Wearing of the 5 Ks:

Initiated Sikhs will wear 5 symbols of their faith, these are:

Kesh: Uncut hair.

Kirpan: Small sword or knife.

Kara: Steel bracelet

Kanga: comb

Kaccha: underwear/shorts

Sikhs will often wear a turban, however, this is not one of the 5Ks.

### Other important information

### Key term glossary

Term	Definition
Amrit	The ceremony of initiation into the Khalsa
Caste	A system of social grouping
Diwali	Sikh festival of lights.
Guru	Teacher
Guru Granth Sahib	Sikh holy book
Kara Prashad	Sacred food
Karma	Law of action and consequence; that each action has a corresponding consequence; belief that these actions create our future life experiences
Kirtan	Devotional hymns sung individually or in groups
Langar	Communal meal at gurdwara; act of sewa
Mukti	Liberation from rebirth
Panj Piarre	The 5 beloved ones. The first members of the Khalsa
Sewa	Selfless service
Sikh	Student/disciple
Turban	head covering consisting of a long length of material wound around a cap or the head
Vaisaki	Sikh festival; commemorates establishment of Khalsa
Waheguru	A Sikh name for God