

Some Misconceptions Regarding the Sikhs

Misconception 1: “The Sikh religion is a blend of Islam and Hinduism or it is a sect of Hinduism.”

Truth 1: Sikhism is a unique revealed religion. It is not a blend of religions nor is it derived from any other religion. Guru Nanak Dev Sahib Jee started a new faith, which has a unique concept of God, revealed Scripture, way of life, and identity.

Misconception 2: “Anyone who has a turban and a beard is a Muslim from the Middle East.”

Truth 2: Sikhs are required to keep their head covered at all times. The turban is donned by a Sikh to cover their hair and head out of respect to God. The turban (1) maintains the dignity of the hair (Kesh), (2) protects the head, and (3) is a Spiritual Crown reminding a Sikh that he or she sits on the throne of consciousness, committed to higher principles.

Misconception 3: “Sikh women have different rules than Sikh men.”

Truth 3: The tenets of Sikhism apply to all Sikhs, regardless of whether one is a Sikh man or a Sikh woman. Sikhism demands the equal treatment and involvement of men and women.

Misconception 4: “Sikhs drink alcohol and enjoy boozing parties.”

Truth 4: The Sikh faith cannot be judged on the basis of the Panjabi community. Sikhism is not something one can be born into, it is a decision one makes to become a Sikh and receive Amrit initiation. Sikhs are strictly forbidden from drinking or promoting alcohol or any other intoxicants.

Misconception 5: “All Sikhs are Indian.”

Truth 5: Sikhism is a religion. Indian is a nationality. Those Sikhs born in the United States, Canada, UK or any other place adopt the nationality of that country. Sikhism, as a religion and way of life spans any such geo-political boundaries.

Where can I read translations of the Sikh Scriptures?

www.SriGranth.org is a good resource to get started.

“The One True Lord Abides Within All”

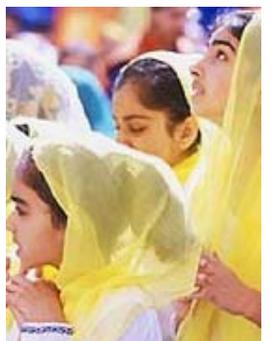
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Who are Sikhs?

Sikhs are a people sharing common religious, social and political institutions. Twenty six million people worldwide identify or associate themselves with the Sikh faith, making it the fifth largest world-religion. The word “Sikh” means disciple of the True Perfect Guru. A Sikh is a person whose sole faith consists of the belief in One God and who follows the teachings of Sri Guru Granth Sahib Jee, the present Guru of Sikhs.

Sikhism is a monotheistic faith that was founded by the first Sikh Guru, Guru Nanak Sahib Jee (1469 - 1539), and shaped by his nine successors in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in South Asia. Sikhism is not a sect of Hinduism or Islam, or synthesis of these two faiths.

Who and what is a Guru?

‘Guru’ literally means ‘the Dispeller of Darkness’. ‘Gu’ means light, and ‘Rū’ means darkness, representing that the Guru dispels ignorance through enlightenment. The Guru has multiple roles. The Guru inspires, leads the community, enlightens and uplifts individuals and society, as well as provides a roadmap for living a complete perfect life.



The Guru is the ‘Shabad’ (Divine Infinite Wisdom) revealed and manifested through the first Sikh Guru and nine succeeding human Gurus who developed the faith and manifested the completed form of the Sikh Nation. Sikhs consider the revelation contained within the Sacred Scripture to be the living Word of God, communicated directly through the enlightened Gurus and Saints (Bhagats) who came from various socio-economic and religious backgrounds that shared the Universal religion of Guru Nanak Sahib Jee and had experienced God. The Sikh Sacred Scripture is the only world scripture written during the times of the Prophet/Guru, ensuring the Divine Word was not adulterated. The Guru used the science of music to convey the Divine message to the minds and souls of individuals. Musicology, languages, and divine poetry are all present in Sri Guru Granth Sahib Jee.

Today the religion is guided by joint sovereignty of ‘Guru Granth’ and ‘Guru Panth’. Sri Guru Granth Sahib Jee, as the *spiritual* manifestation of the Guru, while the Guru Panth is the collectivity of all initiated Sikhs worldwide, as the *physical* manifestation of the Guru.

Sikh Articles of Faith

Sikhs display their commitment to their beliefs by wearing the Sikh articles of faith. The five external items of the Sikh faith each begin with the letter ‘K’ and are referred to as the ‘Five Ks’. ‘Amritdhārī’ (initiated) Sikhs wear this distinct uniform to maintain their physical, moral and spiritual development. The 5 K’s are:

Kesh (hair) covered with Keski/Dastaar (turban)

Sikhs do not cut or forcibly remove any hair from any parts of the body to maintain natural form. The hair is washed regularly, kept clean and neatly tied up, covered by a turban.



Kangā is a wooden comb kept in the hair knot on the head. It is used to keep the hair neat and tidy. The Kanga is a reminder to maintain cleanliness and keep thoughts pure.

Karhā is a circular iron bracelet worn around one or both wrists, worn to remind Sikhs about their actions and that they are bound and linked to the Guru. It is also symbolizes unity, strength and oneness of God.



Kirpān resembles a sword worn in a strap (“gātrā”) by initiated Sikhs (male and female). ‘Kirpā’ means ‘Mercy’ and ‘Aan’ means ‘Honour’. Kirpan is used defensively only, as a last resort if all other means to defend fail. It also symbolises truth and justice.

Kachherā is cotton underwear with cord string worn much like under shorts. Practically it covers the body and ensures a Sikh is always ready and dressed modestly. It is a symbol of high moral character.



Sikh Insignia

The Sikh flag carries the insignia known as ‘Khandā’. It is comprised of:

- Khanda (double-edged sword in centre symbolizing Immortal God, as well as justice and liberty)
- Chakkar (circle symbolizing eternity of God and equality)
- Mīrī-Pīrī (two swords on left and right side symbolizing temporal and spiritual power and sovereignty)



Do Sikhs have to pray everyday?

Sikhs can pray and meditate as much as they like when and where it practically suits them. The basic daily routine of a Sikh is to wake up before sunrise and after bathing, meditating upon the Divine-Name (Naam) given by the Guru in order to see the divine light of God within one's self and others. Morning daily prayers ('Nitnem') follow this. Then in the evening and at bed/night time a Sikh reads prayers. Every Sikh daily prays for the wellbeing of everyone by saying "O' God, in your Name, shower your blessings on everyone". Sikhs are expected to become and remain God-conscious with every breath and live their daily life in accordance with the Guru's Teachings ('Gurmat').



What is the significance of Turban?

Turban is a mark of visual identity, which conveys royalty, grace and uniqueness. The turban represents complete commitment. It is made up of cotton fabric and is usually 3-6 meters long. Practicing Sikh men and women both wear the turban. It is a spiritual crown reminding a Sikh that he or she sits on the throne of consciousness, committed to higher principles. Practically, it keeps the hair clean and protects the head and 'Dasam Dwaar' (spiritual energy gate on top

of the head). The turban is not a hat and should not be referred to as one. It cannot be casually taken on and off. It must be carefully retied each time it is removed. It is considered a grave insult to touch or forcefully remove the turban.

Why don't Sikhs cut their hair?

Sikhs maintain long unshorn hair ('Kesh') as an act of acceptance of God's Will and living as nature intended, sustaining the individual in higher consciousness. Keeping unshorn hair is one of the basic requirements for a Sikh. Unshorn hairs are a marker of Sikh identity. As well as having biological functions and benefits, the hair is sacred due to the fact that spiritual energy abides within each and every pore of hair on the body. The hairs are like electrical wires, which preserve, carry and vibrate energy. When one chants & meditates the Divine-Name (Naam), each hair vibrates. Sikhs do not forcibly or intentionally remove any hair from the body but maintain clean hair with proper washing; tying and keeping them covered are requirements for a Sikh.



What is God according to Sikh belief?

According to the Sikh belief, there is One God who is All-Omnipotent, Omnipresent and Omniscient. God is the sole Creator, Sustainer and Destroyer. He is beyond birth and death. He is both merciful and compassionate. He is beyond fear and enmity. He is self-illuminated and self-existent. All our possessions are a result of His grace. The Sikhs call God 'Wāhegurū', meaning the most 'Wondrous Lord'.

What are core Sikh beliefs?

According to the Sikh belief, a Sikh must worship only God. Daily prayer and devotion to God and His Creation is required. Every one has equal status before God.



Sri Darbaar Sahib, also known as the 'Golden Temple, is located in Amritsar, Panjab.

Sikhism promotes the unity of God, universal love, equality and brotherhood of humanity and strict moral conduct. It rejects idol worship, superstitious belief, inferiority of women, the caste system and any distinction based on class, religion, race, or gender. The Sikh goal is to end the cycle of birth, death and reincarnation, and to unite the separated individual soul with the Universal Soul (God). The only way to attain this goal is through living the teachings of Gurus, walking in the Will of God, and lovingly repeating and meditating the Divine-Name (Naam) revealed through the Guru.

Are Sikhs prohibited from anything?

In Sikhism there are 4 cardinal sins ('Bajjar Kurehats'). Sikhs should not:

- Dishonour their hair (i.e. cut, trim, wax, pluck or dye)
- Have an intimate relationship outside of marriage
- Use tobacco or any other intoxicants
- Eat 'Kutthaa' (slaughtered animal)

Sikhism identifies 5 vices, which a Sikh must regulate and control. These are *Kaam* (lust/desires), *Krodh* (anger), *Lobh* (greed), *Moh* (worldly attachment) and *Ahankaar* (ego-centeredness).

Do Sikhs have any human spiritual leader?

Sikhism does not have a clergy and all human beings are capable of realizing God. In 1699, the tenth Sikh Guru manifested the Order of the 'Khalsā' to establish a society dedicated in the face of all odds to practicing the essential Sikh values. The physical authority of leading Sikhs was bestowed upon Sri Guru Granth Sahib Jee and the Sikh Nation (Khalsa Panth), represented by selected five initiated Sikhs. These five Beloved One's should be fully committed Sikh believers initiated through a special ceremony called 'Amrit Sanskaar'.



Where do Sikhs worship?

A Sikh place of worship is called 'Gurdwārā', which is open to visitors, irrespective of their colour, faith, gender or background. The common translation of the term as temple is not satisfactory, as Sikhism possesses no sacrificial symbolism. Sikhs have neither idols nor altars in their holy places. They have no sacraments and no priestly order. The essential feature of a Gurdwara is the presiding presence in it of the Sikh Sacred Scripture, 'Sri Guru Granth Sahib Jee', the living Guru of the Sikhs. Hence the name Gurdwara (*guru + dwara = the Guru's Door*).



The main function of the Gurdwara is to provide Sikhs with a meeting-place for congregational worship through 'Keertan', the collective singing of God's praise through the Shabads (Sacred Hymns) in Sri Guru Granth Sahib Jee, and seeking support and guidance from the Guru. The Gurdwara also serves as a community centre, a school, a guesthouse for pilgrims, and a base for local charitable activities. Since the Sikh faith does not have an ordained clergy, public worship can be led by any competent initiated male or female Sikh.

An essential part of any Gurdwara is the 'Langar' (free kitchen). The Guru designed an institution in which all people would sit on the floor together, as equals, to eat the same simple food. It is here that all people high or low, rich or poor, male or female sit together to share and enjoy the food, as one expresses the ideals of equality, sharing, and the oneness of humanity.



What is 'Naam'?



A great stress is given on Naam Simran (remembrance of Naam) in Sikhism. 'Naam' refers to the 'Divine-Name' revealed by Guru Nanak Sahib Jee. Naam is also the 'Divine Presence' everywhere, supporting all things at all times - in today's language we could say the energy structure or power of the whole Universe. Essentially it is the presence of Waheguru, which is inside us, and supporting absolutely everything, which is manifested in the Divine-Name given by the Guru to the seeker.

Naam is something to 'Jap' (chant), reflect and contemplate through which Naam becomes woven in the heart of the devotee, and Waheguru becomes imprinted on the heart of the devotee. There is nothing in this world, which equals the value of the Divine-Name. The Lord and His Name are identical. They are one.



'Naam Japnaa' (lovingly living & meditating on Naam) is the only way to attain unity with God. Guru Nanak Sahib Jee established God's golden rules for leading a pure and pious life. He preached the concepts by practically enforcing them in his life first.

A Sikh is required to lead a virtuous, pure and pious life. Always remembering and repeating the Divine-Name with full concentration, breath by breath, can attain this virtue. Naam will awaken the consciousness, and create love and affection for all those who are created by God. It is strongly believed that a pious person would be compassionate and contended. He will aspire to serve the needy. He will have no enmity with anyone, as he knows that God lives in every human being. To serve His Creation is to serve God and remember Him day and night. The individual can merge with God by loving Him, living in Him, by dying in Him, and singing his Divine Praises.

