

# JOURNEY WITH SIKHISM



Guru Granth Sahib  
(Holy Scripture)



Ek Onkar - The Sikh Symbol Meaning  
"One God - All Pervading"



Golden Temple, Amritsar (India)  
Gurudwara - Sikh place of worship

## Sikh Turbans



## Five Essentials of The Sikh Uniform



Kesh:  
Unshorn or retouched hair

Kara:  
A steel bracelet

Kirpan:  
A small ceremonial sword



Kachera:  
Loose-fitting shorts



Kanga:  
Iron whistle

## Sikhs & Sikhism

**Sikhism-** The 5<sup>th</sup> largest religion in the world was established by **Guru Nanak**, born in 1469, and nine other **Gurus** who shaped and established a new path to attain God. The Sikh society is based on the principles of equality, human dignity and mutual respect. Their teachings have been the guiding principles for the entire international Sikh community which is also known as **The Khalsa Panth**.

**Who is a Sikh-** **Sikh** is a student, a lifelong learner, a seeker of truth and justice, who lives by the 3 golden rules: First is **Kirat Karni**- to do hard and honest labor/work, then **Vand Chakna**- sharing one's things with everyone including the less fortunate, and finally **Naam Japna**- reciting and contemplating on the name of God and meditating upon the virtues. A Sikh's purpose of life is to realize and work towards understanding the oneness of the Creator and the creation, therefore viewing everyone as equal. Some core values for Sikhs are love for all, selfless service, humility, compassion, equality and justice for all.

**Sikh Identity-** 99% of the people wearing a turban in The United States are Sikhs. The Turban or **Dastaar** is a head covering and it can be worn by male or female. Sikhs have long uncut hair known as **Kesh**, males have the hair tied up under a turban and females have it braided or tied up in a bun but some females choose to wear a turban. A young Sikh kid starts covering hair with a small turban known as a **Patka**. Initiated Sikhs also displays the **5Ks**, the articles of faith which are; **Kara** the iron/steel bracelet representing God, **Kanga** is special wooden comb for discipline, **Kirpan** is a small sword representing justice for all, **Kachera** is a pair of special shorts representing high moral character and **Kesh** representing simplicity and discipline. All Sikhs have a common last name; Males- **Singh** meaning lion and Females- **Kaur** meaning princess.

**Gurdwara** - Sikh place of spiritual learning and fellowship. The Sikh service commences with **Sangat**, everyone sitting on the floor together reading and reciting verses from the Holy Scripture, **The Guru Granth Sahib**. Music plays a very prominent part in a Sikh service, hymns are sung from the holy book using prescribed scales of music and this is called **Kirtan**. The Sermon of the day is read at the conclusion, called **Hukum** and that is the order of the day. **Ardaas** is the final Sikh prayer asking for the wellbeing and upliftment of the entire world by saying **Nanak Naam Chardi Kala- Tere Bhane Sarbat Da Bhala**. Gurdwara has two institutionalized mechanisms; one that of imparting a sense of equality - **Sangat**, a congregation of all sitting together and second that of joining together as equals known as **Pangat** and eating a community meal called **Langar** at the end of the service.

**Guru Granth Sahib-** The Holy book has 1430 pages with divine messages and writings by the founders of the faith and enlightened Hindu and Muslim saints. It is a prime example of

interfaith harmony and understanding. Therefore making this into the most universal religious text. The Holy Scripture is organized in a poetic format and the language is **Gurmukhi**. Daily prayers are the **Nitnem Bani** and the hymns are **Shabads**. **The Guru Granth Sahib**, the wisdom of the Word is considered the complete and final embodiment of the **Guru** for a Sikh.

**Sikh Population-** Currently about 26 million Sikhs around the world, majority live in Punjab, India, and they are also found in other parts of the world. 1 million Sikhs reside in North America. 99% people seen wearing turbans in North America are Sikhs.

**Language-** Spoken is Punjabi, and Written is Gurmukhi

**Clothing-** Males- **Kurta pyjama**, and Females- **Salwar kameez** and **Dupatta**, Western clothing on daily basis.

**Foods-** **Roti, Daal**, yogurt, curries both vegetarian and non- vegetarian

**Sikh Holidays:**

**Basakhi- Birthday of the Sikhs**, when they got their identity and it is beginning of the harvest season

**Gurpurab-** Birthday of Sikh Guru

**Jyoti Jot Samay Diwas-** Martyrdom of Sikh Guru- **5<sup>th</sup> Guru, Arjan Dev**, compiler of the Sikh Scriptures was martyred in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century and **9<sup>th</sup> Guru, Tegh Bahadur**, who sacrificed his life protecting the faith of other non- Sikhs.

**Sikh Ceremonies:** Most ceremonies and important days like birthday, marriage and death remembrance take place at home or **Gurdwara** in the presence of **Guru Granth sahib**.

**Anand Kaaraj-** Marriage ceremony

**Dastaar Bandhi-** when a youth starts wearing the big turban

**Charni Lagnaa-** when a Sikh starts reading the Holy Scripture

## Did you know!

- Founded only 500 years ago by Guru Nanak (1469-1539), Sikhism is one of the youngest world religions.
- Sikhism is a separate religion from Hinduism and Islam
- Sikhism is the 5<sup>th</sup> largest religion of the World religions
- More than 95% of people with head covering know as Turban are Sikhs
- About 1 million of the 25 million Sikhs worldwide, live in North America
- Fauja Singh, 104 year old Sikh is the world's oldest Marathon runner
- Sikhs first came to America in 1890 and developed the Railroads.
- The first Asian American to be elected to the US congress was a Sikh.
- Sikhs officers have received exemption from the US army to keep the Turban and beard.
- Bhagat Singh Thind fought as an American Soldier in WWI and fought for his citizenship in 1923.
- Dalip Singh Saund firmly established the pioneering spirit of Sikhs when he became the first Asian to be elected to the U.S. Congress in 1956, and then was re-elected in 1958 and 1960.

## Frequently Asked Questions About Sikhs and Sikhism

1. What is the significance of uncut hair?

Uncut hair is considered part of one's identity for an observant Sikh, and that standard has been set by the founders of the Sikh faith. It is a symbol of spirituality and one's commitment to the Sikh path.

2. At what age does a man or woman get their turban?

That depends on when they are able to take care of themselves. Generally, kids between the ages of ten and thirteen will start wearing a regular turban, while younger kids start by wearing a smaller version of the head dress called the **patka**.

3. What is the significance of covering your head in Sikhism?

Sikhs believe that God is present everywhere. Therefore, to show respect in the Sikh tradition, one must keep one's head covered.

4. What are the dimensions of a turban?

Sikh turbans can range in length from 6 feet (1.8 meters) long to 23 feet (7 meters), depending on age, size and style.

5. Are people who cut their hair considered less of a Sikh?

Those who cut their hair are still considered part of the community, and those who do this are aware that keeping unshorn hair is a requirement of being a Sikh as prescribed by the code of conduct. Many choose to come back in full form by re-starting the process of not cutting their hair.

6. Where and when did the Sikh faith emerge?

The Sikh faith started with the birth of Guru Nanak in 1469, and got more organized when Guru Nanak was 30 years old and started his missionary journey. At that time, Guru Nanak had a revelatory experience of being one with God. After this, he declared that his life's mission was spreading God's name and the message of love.

7. How did Guru Nanak become a Guru?

People started calling Nanak **Guru** after he had a revelatory experience of being one with God in the holy river Bein. He resigned from his government job, and set on a long spiritual journey of spreading the message of Love and God's name. His followers came to be known as **Sikhs**, the Punjabi word for "disciples" or "students" of the Guru.

8. Is Sikhism a cross between Hinduism and Islam?

No, Sikhism is different from both Islam and Hinduism, and has been interpreted wrongly as being a cross between Hinduism and Islam. Guru Nanak was born in a Hindu family, and yet he refused to follow the dictates of his own family tradition. He revealed his own unique teachings. Sikhism is an independent spiritual path with its own precepts, social principles and organization.

9. What is the impact of the Sikh faith on the social structure of the Sikhs?

The Sikh social structure and culture are driven by the **Guru Granth Sahib** (Sikh Holy Scriptures). The Scriptures support freedom of worship and the equality of all humans, and explicitly reject discrimination on the basis of caste, creed, and gender. For example, visitors of any religious, racial or socio-economic background are welcomed at any Sikh **Gurdwara** (house of worship), where **langar** (vegetarian food) is served to people of all origins, who then sit together on the same level of the floor. Any trained teacher can teach

from the Scriptures, as there is no hierarchy in the Sikh place of worship.

10. How are important decisions made in Sikhism?

There is no hierarchy in the Sikh community. It is left to each local community to make its own decisions by choosing any five respectable persons to resolve any given issue or to set a direction. However, issues of major importance are referred to five Sikh spiritual heads based in India. They, in turn, deliberate and issue edicts, which are morally binding on the community worldwide.

11. What is written in the Guru Granth Sahib?

The writing in Guru Granth Sahib is called **Gurbani**: Word of the Guru. It is a collection of wisdom of the Sikh Gurus and also of many enlightened Sikhs and non- Sikhs whose philosophy conformed to the spirit of Sikh thought. It is solely the praises of God in poetical form, and the hymns are set to Indian classical musical scales. Besides praises of God, the Gurbani lays out a system upon which Sikh society is based and from which each Sikh can seek guidance.

12. How was Guruship passed on in Sikhism?

The Guruship was passed on to the next human Guru after the preceding Sikh Guru had concluded that the succeeding Guru was fully prepared to lead and had become spiritually enlightened. In some cases, each candidate had to go through a rigorous qualification process.

13. What does the **Ik Oankar** mean?

It means that there is one infinite God, present everywhere.

14. What are the Sikh Core beliefs?

Sikhism is open to all regardless of background and it emphasizes equality and justice for all. Every Sikh is enjoined to work for spiritual, economic, and political uplift of all in society.

Sikhs believe in the oneness of God, and that the world is God's manifestation. Each human being has a Divine origin, and can merge with the Divine source by living a life based on three moral principles. The **Three Golden Rules** which Sikhs follow are to remember God constantly, to earn an honest livelihood, and to share their earnings with everyone through charity. Sikhs show commitment to their faith by adopting a way of life which requires them to wear the **Five K's**.

15. What is the significance of the Five Ks?

The Five K's are:

- **Kesh**- unshorn hair (symbolizing spiritual commitment)
- **Kanga**- small wooden comb (cleanliness)
- **Kara**- round steel or iron bracelet (commitment to God)
- **Kachera**- special shorts (chastity and commitment to moral behavior)
- **Kirpan**- small sword (symbolic of one's commitment to justice for all).

They are considered articles of faith, and an initiated Sikh is supposed to carry them at all times.

16. Why do people carry the kirpan and what is it used for?

A kirpan is a small sickle-shaped sword and it is an article of faith for an initiated Sikh who chooses to take a vow to follow Sikh principles more closely. It symbolizes one's commitment to justice for all. It represents divine power and it is never used as a weapon.

17. How does Sikhism regard other religions?

The Sikh Scriptures have writings from many saints who belonged to other faiths. Sikhs not only respect other religions, but accept other faiths as legitimate paths to God.

18. Why do Sikhs learn **gatka** (the Sikh martial arts)?

Gatka is a Sikh martial art using wooden sticks and shields that is learned in alignment with the belief that the body is God's temple and needs to be taken care of (physical fitness).

19. Who is God, according to Sikhs?

God is defined in the Sikh scriptures as One, Infinite, the Ultimate Reality, the Creator, without fear and enmity, Timeless, Unbound to a life cycle, Self-illuminated, or Attained by the Grace of the Guru.

20. What is the difference between the Sikh Gurus and God?

While God is the ultimate truth, the Guru is someone who has experienced oneness with God. The Guru guides one to become closer to God, and takes one from the darkness of ignorance to the light of wisdom. (**Gu** is "darkness" and **Ru** is "light").

21. Do Sikhs believe in reincarnation?

Sikhs, like believers of all other Indic faiths, believe in transmigration of the soul. Each lifetime is an opportunity for one to break the cycle of life and death through living a life of devotion to God and being ethical in one's conduct. God's grace is central to one's ascension. Sikhs believe that the purpose of human life is to be one with the Divine, and it is only through this unity that one can achieve salvation.

22. Do Sikhs believe in One God? Then why are there multiple Gurus?

Yes, Sikhs are believers in one God and believe that one can achieve oneness with the Supreme Power through the Guru's guidance. Sikhism started with Guru Nanak's experience with the Divine, and then this revelation continued through nine other human Gurus (for a total of ten human Gurus). Finally, the Guruship was passed on to the Holy Scriptures called the **Guru Granth Sahib**.

23. What is the status of women in Sikh communities?

Women are considered equal in all aspects of the Sikh faith community. This is one of the core beliefs of Sikhism. They have played and continue to play a leading role in shaping the community's affairs.

24. What is the impact of religion on the Sikh social structure (community)?

Sikhs gather in a place called a **Gurdwara**. This provides a center for Sikhs to gather and organize their affairs. It serves as a place of learning, gathering, and worshiping together. There are local bodies and national groups which come together around an issue, but otherwise the Sikh community is loosely organized. There is no hierarchical system in Sikhism.

25. What is the religious place of Sikhs called?

The Sikh place of worship is the **Gurdwara**. It literally means an institution or a place of learning. In Sikhism, the prayers can be held at any place or time, but Gurdwaras are made for congregations. The most essential part of the Gurdwara is the presence of the Guru in the form of the **Guru Granth Sahib**, the Sikh Scriptures. Any person may lead the Sikh service, but the interpretation is done by a trained Sikh preacher.

26. What is the Sikh service like?

A Sikh service is held in the presence of the Guru, the Holy Scriptures. During the service, there is hymn singing, readings from the Scriptures, and also congregational prayers for the



community-at-large seeking the well-being of all the world. The attendance at the place of worship is voluntary and open to all communities.

In the Gurdwara, one is required to take off one's shoes, cover one's head, and sit all together in the congregation. Head coverings are provided for those who do not have one.

All Sikh services conclude with a vegetarian community meal called the *langar*, which is prepared by volunteers and shared with everyone in attendance, even non-Sikhs. This tradition stresses social equality.

#### 27. How do Sikhs view pluralism?

Sikhism, since its inception, has emphasized a pluralistic society where everyone is entitled to their belief system. This includes a social order where each person has the basic right to worship and the right to prosper.

Human rights, social justice, and religious freedom are at the core of Sikh beliefs. The founders of Sikhism encouraged interfaith dialogue and discussions based on mutual respect.

#### 28. Is there a religious law that Sikhs follow?

Sikhism does not propose any law which supersedes local laws based on democratic principles. It does not propose any theocratic setup, and it does not have dogmas that it would want to impose on non-Sikhs.

Sikhs believe that government should be compassionate toward the downtrodden, and must create a system by which each one is given equal opportunity. In other words, Sikhs believe that society's rules should be influenced by universal moral principles.

The founders of Sikhism instructed Sikhs to use common sense and be practical in dealing with issues arising in each new age. Sikhs do not proselytize, and do not believe in imposing their beliefs on others, either through state force or individual conversions.

#### 29. What does Sikhism teach about social responsibility?

Service to the greater community is one of the chief tenets of Sikhism. Sikhs are constantly engaged in projects such as community meals, clothing drives, help for seniors, serving the homeless, and rendering help in natural disasters. Each Sikh must contribute time and money, depending on their individual circumstances, but they must be given in the spirit of selfless service without any personal gain.

30. How does one become a Sikh?

One becomes a Sikh by believing in One God, following the principals of Sikhism laid down by the Gurus, and having a Sikh identity in the form of long uncut, unshorn hair and having a head covering. The final step is to become an initiated Sikh by adopting four additional articles of faith.

31. What is the role of the family in Sikhism?

Sikhism is a householder's religion, and family life is central to the social structure of Sikh society. A Sikh has to be fully involved in family life, and an ascetic or monastic life is not allowed.

32. How long have Sikhs been in the United States?

Sikhism started in northern India in the state of Punjab, and the majority of the Sikh community still lives there. Sikhs have been in North America for the last 100 years. They built their first Gurdwara in 1912 in Stockton, California.

Sikhs have played a role in all walks of life in America. They have included the first Asian Pacific American Congressman (Dalip Singh Saund), who represented the 29<sup>th</sup> District of California from 1957 to 1963.

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***These materials were prepared by Sikh Kid to Kid (<http://sikhkid2kid.com>), with the help of the Guru Gobind Singh Foundation (<http://ggsfusa.com>) and the Sikh Council on Religion and Education (<http://sikhcouncilusa.org>).***

***Anyone may share or use this information for public education purposes.***

*“As a Sikh, we say that everything happens by the grace of God.”*

## **Sikh and Sikhism Vocabulary:**

Sikh- student

Singh- Lion/Brave

Kaur- Princess

Dastaar- Turban/head covering

Kesh- Unshorn Hair

Kanga- Woodn comb

Kachera- Special shorts

Kirpan- Sword

Kara- Iron Bangle

Gurdwara- Institue of learning

Guru- Teacher

Gurbani- Sacrad Word

Keertan- Singing of hymns

Shabad- Word/ Hymns

Langar- communal meal

Sangat- congregation

Pangat- Sitting together

Seva- service

Guru Granth Sahib- Gu- Dark/ Ru- Light Granth- Sacrad book/Scriptures Sahib- title for the revered Guru

Nitnem- daily prayer

Ardaas- Sikh prayer

Nanak naam chardi kala Tere Bhane Sarbat da bhala – An ending part of daily Sikh prayer meaning *May God's name continue to infuse positive energy in us and may the entire humanity be graced with God's blessing.*

Sat Sri Akaal – A shorter Sikh greeting – Timeless God is true!

**Additional Resources and excerpts of content retrieved from:**

www.sikhkid2kid.com

Movie- Sikh kid to Kid <https://vimeo.com/106399912>

www.kaurfoundation.org

Movie: Cultural Safari

www.sikhcouncilusa.org

www.saldef.org

www.ggsfusa.com

www.gnfa.org

www.google.com (images of Sikhs)

sikhkid2kid – 2014 calendar images

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