

Sikhism

Sikhism (/ˈsɪkɪzəm/) *Sikh*, 'disciple', 'seeker', or 'learner') is a Dharmic religion that originated in the Punjab region of the Indian subcontinent around the end of the 15th century CE. Sikhism is one of the youngest of the major religions and the world's fifth-largest organized religion with about 25-30 million Sikhs as of the early-21st century.

The Sikhs call their faith *Gurmat* (Punjabi: "the Way of the Guru").

Sikhism developed from the spiritual teachings of Guru Nanak, the first Guru (1469–1539), and of the nine Sikh gurus who succeeded him. The tenth guru, Gobind Singh (1666–1708), named the Sikh scripture *Guru Granth Sahib* as his successor, bringing to a close the line of human gurus and establishing the scripture as the last eternal 11th living guru, a religious spiritual/life guide for Sikhs.

Guru Nanak taught that living an "active, creative, and practical life" of "truthfulness, fidelity, self-control and purity" is above metaphysical truth, and that the ideal man "establishes union with God, knows His Will, and carries out that Will".

The Sikh scripture opens with the *Mul Mantar*, fundamental prayer about *ik onkar* 'One God'. The core beliefs of Sikhism, articulated in the *Guru Granth Sahib*, **include faith and meditation on the name of the one creator**; divine unity and equality of all humankind; engaging in *seva* ('selfless service'); striving for justice for the benefit and prosperity of all; and honest conduct and livelihood while living a householder's life.

Sikhism emphasizes *simran*, meditation and remembrance of the teachings of Gurus), which can be expressed musically through *kirtan*, or internally through *naam japna* ('meditation on His name') as a means to feel God's presence. It teaches followers to transform the **"Five Thieves" (i.e., lust, rage, greed, attachment, and ego).**

Sikhism was founded in northwestern region of the Indian subcontinent in what is now Pakistan. Some of the Gurus were born near Lahore and in other parts of Pakistan.

History

Guru Nanak (1469–1539), the founder of Sikhism, was born in the village of *Rāi Bhōi dī Talwandī*, now called Nankana Sahib (in present-day Pakistan). His parents were Punjabi Khatri Hindus. According to the hagiography *Puratan Janamsakhi* composed more than two centuries after his death and probably based on oral tradition, Nanak as a boy was fascinated by religion and spiritual matters, spending time with wandering ascetics and holy men. His friend was Mardana, a Muslim. Together they would sing devotional songs all night in front of the public, and bathe in the river in the morning. One day, at the usual bath, Nanak went missing and his family feared he had drowned. Three days later he returned home, and declared: "There is no Hindu, there is no Muslim" ("*nā kōi hindū nā kōi musalmān*"). Thereafter, Nanak started preaching his ideas that form the tenets of Sikhism. In 1526, Guru Nanak at age 50, started a small commune in Kartarpur and his disciples came to be known as *Sikhs*.

The development of Sikhism was influenced by the Bhakti movement and Vaishnava Hinduism. however, Sikhism was not simply an extension of the Bhakti movement. Sikhism developed while the region was being ruled by the Mughal Empire. Two of the Sikh Gurus, Guru Arjan and Guru Tegh Bahadur, refused to convert to Islam and were tortured and executed by the Mughal rulers. The Islamic era persecution of Sikhs triggered the founding of the Khalsa, as an order for freedom of conscience and religion. **A Sikh is expected to embody the qualities of a "Sant-Sipāhī" – a saint-soldier, (Guru Gobind Singh created and initiated the Khalsa as a warrior with a duty to protect the innocent from any form of religious persecution).**

Philosophy and teachings

Sikhism is classified as an Indian religion along with Buddhism, Hinduism, and Jainism. The basis of Sikhism lies in the teachings of Guru Nanak and his successors. ***Sikh ethics emphasize the congruence between spiritual***

development and everyday moral conduct. Its founder Guru Nanak summarized this perspective as: "Truth is the highest virtue, but higher still is truthful living."

In Sikhism, the overall concept of God is *Waheguru* ('**wondrous Teacher**') considered to be *nirankar* ('**shapeless**'), *akal* ('**timeless**'), *karta purakh* ('**the creator**'), and *agam agochar* ('**incomprehensible and invisible**'). In a literal sense, God has no gender in Sikhism, though metaphorically, God is presented as masculine and God's power as feminine. For example, God is repeatedly referred to by the name *akaal purkh* ('**beyond time and space**') and *nirankar* ('**without form**') by the tenth Guru Gobind Singh Ji, but he also refers to God as his father, and God's creative power as his mother.

The Sikh scripture begins with God as *ik onkar*, the 'formless one', understood in the Sikh tradition as monotheistic unity of God. *Ik onkar* (sometimes capitalized) is more loosely rendered 'the one supreme reality', 'the one creator', 'the all-pervading spirit', and other ways of expressing a diffused but unified and singular sense of God and creation.

The opening line of the *Guru Granth Sahib* and each subsequent *raga*, mentions *ik onkar*:

"There is one supreme being, the eternal reality, the creator,
without fear and devoid of enmity, immortal, never incarnated,
self-existent, known by grace through the true Guru."

Worldly Illusion

Māyā, defined as a temporary illusion or "unreality", is one of the core deviations from the pursuit of God and salvation: where worldly attractions give only illusory temporary satisfaction and pain that distracts from the process of the devotion of God.

Sikhs believe the world is currently in a state of *kali yuga* ('age of darkness') because the world is led astray by the love of and attachment to *Māyā*. The fate of people vulnerable to the five thieves, is separation from God, and the situation may be remedied only after intensive and relentless devotion.

Timeless Truth

According to Guru Nanak, the supreme purpose of human life is to reconnect with *Akal* ('The Timeless One'), however, egotism is the biggest barrier in making this connection.

Liberation

Guru Nanak's teachings are founded not on a final destination of heaven or hell, but on a spiritual union with the *Akal*, which results in salvation or *jivanmukti* ('enlightenment/liberation within one's lifetime').

Power and Devotion (Miri and Piri)

He taught that the most important form of worship is *Bhakti* (devotion to Bhagvan). The *Guru Granth Sahib* includes suggestions on how a Sikh should perform constant Bhakti. While emphasizing Bhakti, the Sikh gurus also taught that the spiritual life and secular householder life are intertwined, and not separate.

Singing and Music

Sikhs refer to the hymns of the gurus as *Gurbani* ('Guru's word'). Shabad Kirtan is the singing of Gurbani. The entire verses of Guru Granth Sahib are written in a form of poetry and rhyme to be recited in thirty-one Ragas of the Classical Indian Music as specified. Guru Nanak started the Shabad Kirtan tradition and taught that listening to kirtan is a powerful way to achieve tranquility while meditating; Singing of the glories of the Supreme Timeless One (God) with devotion is the most effective way to come in communion with the Supreme Timeless One.

Remembrance of the Divine Name

A key practice by Sikhs is remembrance of the *Naam* (**divine name**) *Waheguru*. This contemplation is done through *Nām Japna* (**repetition of the divine name**) or *Naam Simran* (**remembrance of the divine Name through recitation**). The verbal repetition of the name of God or a sacred syllable has been an ancient established practice in religious traditions in India.

Service and Action

The Sikh gurus taught that by constantly remembering the divine name (*naam simran*) and through selfless service (*sēvā*) the devotee overcomes egotism (*Haumai*). This, it states, is the primary root of five evil impulses and the cycle of birth and death. Service in Sikhism takes three forms: *Tan* (**physical service, i.e., labor**), *Man* (**mental service, such as dedicating your heart for service of others**), and *Dhan* (**material service, including financial support**). Sikhism stresses *kirat karō*: that is "honest work". Sikh teachings also stress the concept of sharing, or *vanḍ chakkō*, giving to the needy for the benefit of the community.

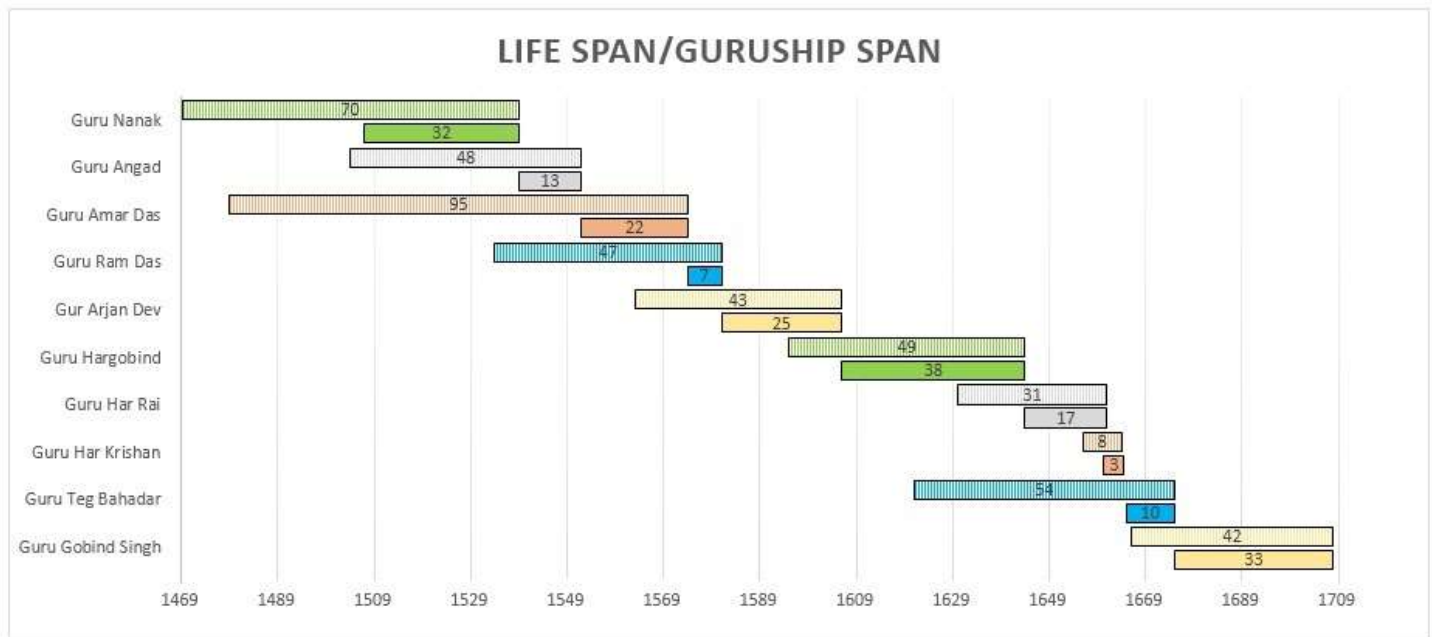
Justice and Equality

Sikhism regards God as the true king, the king of all kings, the one who dispenses justice through the law of *karma*, a retributive model and divine grace.

The term for justice in the Sikh tradition is *niau*. It is related to the term *dharam* which in Sikhism connotes 'moral order' and righteousness (derived from but become distinct from the etymologically related Hindu concept of dharma). According to the Tenth Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, states Pashaura Singh (a professor of Sikh studies), **"one must first try all the peaceful means of negotiation in the pursuit of justice"** and if these fail then it is legitimate to **"draw the sword in defense of righteousness"**.

Ten Gurus and Authority

The term *Guru* comes from the *Sanskrit* *gurū*, meaning teacher, enlightener, guide, or mentor. The traditions and philosophy of Sikhism were established by ten Gurus from 1469 to 1708. Each Guru added to and reinforced the message taught by the previous, resulting in the creation of the Sikh religion. Guru Nanak was the first Guru and appointed a disciple as successor. *Guru Gobind Singh* was the final Guru in human form. Before his death, Guru Gobind Singh decreed in 1708, that the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* would be the final and perpetual Guru of the Sikhs. The Sikh gurus established a mechanism which allowed the Sikh religion to react as a community to changing circumstances.



Life Span		Guruship Span	
Guru Nanak	 15-Apr- 1469 - 22-Sep-1539 : 70 years 05 months and 07 days	 20-Aug-1507 - 22-Sep-1539 : 32 years 01 months and 02 days	
Guru Angad	 31-Mar-1504 - 29-Mar-1552 : 47 years 11 months and 29 days	 07-Sep-1539 - 29-Mar-1552 : 12 years 06 months and 22 days	
Guru Amar Das	 05-May-1479 - 01-Sep-1574 : 95 years 03 months and 27 days	 26-Mar-1552 - 01-Sep-1574 : 22 years 05 months and 06 days	
Guru Ram Das	 24-Sep-1534 - 01-Sep-1581 : 46 years 11 months and 08 days	 01-Sep-1574 - 01-Sep-1581 : 07 years	
Gur Arjan Dev	 02-May-1563 - 16-Jun1606 : 43 years 01 months and 14 days	 01-Sep-1581 - 30-May-1606 : 24 years 08 months and 29 days	
Guru Hargobind	 05-Jul-1595 - 19-Mar-1644 : 48 years 08 months and 14 days	 25-May-1606 - 28-Feb-1644 : 37 years 09 months and 03 days	
Guru Har Rai	 16-Jan-1630 - 06-Oct-1661 : 31 years 08 months and 20 days	 03-Mar-1644 - 06-Oct-1661 : 17 years 07 months and 03 days	
Guru Har Krishan	 23-Jul-1656 - 30-Mar-1664 : 07 years 08 months and 07 days	 06-Oct-1661 - 30-Mar-1664 : 02 years 05 months and 24 days	
Guru Teg Bahadar	 01-Apr-1621 - 24-Nov-1675 : 54 years 07 months and 23 days	 20-Mar-1665 - 11-Nov-1675 : 10 years 07 months and 22 days	
Guru Gobind Singh	 22-Dec-1666 - 07-Oct-1708 : 41 years 09 months and 15 days	 11-Nov-1675 - 07-Oct-1708 : 32 years 10 months and 26 days	

Scripture

Adi Granth

There is one primary scripture for the Sikhs: the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*. It is sometimes synonymously referred to as the *Ādi Granth*. The *Ādi Granth* was compiled primarily by Bhai Gurdas under the supervision of Guru Arjan between the years 1603 and 1604. It is written in the Gurmukhī script, which is a descendant of the Laṇḍā script used in the Punjab at that time. An authoritative scripture was created to protect the integrity of hymns and teachings of the Sikh Gurus, and thirteen Hindu and two Muslim bhagats of the Bhakti movement sant tradition in medieval India.

The thirteen Hindu *bhagats* whose teachings were entered into the text included:

Ramananda, Namdev, Pipa, Ravidas, Beni, Bhikhan, Dhanna, Jaidev, Parmanand, Sadhana, Sain, Sur, Trilochan, while the two Muslim *bhagats* were Kabir and Sufi saint Farid. However, the bhagats in context often spoke of transcending their religious labels, Kabir often attributed to being a Muslim state in the *Adi Granth*, "***I am not Hindu nor Muslim.***" The Gurus following on this message taught that different methods of devotion are for the same infinite God.

Guru Granth Sahib

The Guru Granth Sahib is the holy scripture of the Sikhs, and is regarded as the living Guru. The predominant bulk of Guru Granth Sahib is compositions by seven Sikh Gurus – Guru Nanak, Guru Angad, Guru Amar Das, Guru Ram Das, Guru Arjan, Guru Teg Bahadur and Guru Gobind Singh. It also contains the traditions and teachings of thirteen Hindu Bhakti movement *sants* (saints) such as Ramananda, Namdev among others, and two Muslim saints namely Kabir and the Sufi Sheikh Farid.

The text comprises 6,000 *śabads* (line compositions), which are poetically rendered and set to rhythmic ancient north Indian classical music. The bulk of the scripture is classified into sixty *rāgas*, with each Granth rāga subdivided according to length and author. The hymns in the scripture are arranged primarily by the *rāgas* in which they are read. The main language used in the scripture is known as *Sant Bhāṣā*, a language related to both Punjabi and Hindi and used extensively across medieval northern India by proponents of popular devotional religion (bhakti).

The copies of the Guru Granth Sahib are not regarded as material objects, but as living subjects which are alive.

Dasam Granth

The Dasam Granth is a scripture of Sikhs which contains texts attributed to the Guru Gobind Singh. The *Dasam Granth* is important to a great number of Sikhs, however it does not have the same authority as the *Guru Granth Sahib*. Five versions of *Dasam Granth* exist, and the authenticity of the *Dasam Granth* has in modern times become one of the most debated topics within Sikhism. The text played a significant role in Sikh history, but in modern times parts of the text have seen antipathy and discussion among Sikhs.

Janamsakhis

The Janamsākhīs (literally *birth stories*), are writings which profess to be biographies of Guru Nanak. Although not scripture in the strictest sense, they provide a hagiographic (is a biography of a saint or an ecclesiastical leader) look at Guru Nanak's life and the early start of Sikhism. There are several – often contradictory and sometimes unreliable – Janamsākhīs and they are not held in the same regard as other sources of scriptural knowledge.

Observances

Observant Sikhs adhere to long-standing practices and traditions to strengthen and express their faith. The daily recitation of the divine name of God VaheGuru and from a memory of specific passages from the Gurū Granth Sāhib, (literally *chant*) hymns is recommended immediately after rising and bathing. Baptized Sikhs recite the five-

morning prayers, the evening and night prayer. Family customs include both reading passages from the scripture and attending the gurdwara (physical building). There are many gurdwaras prominently constructed and maintained across India, as well as in almost every nation where Sikhs reside. Gurdwaras are open to all, regardless of religion, background, caste, or race.

Worship in a gurdwara consists chiefly of the singing of passages from the scripture. Sikhs will commonly enter the gurdwara, touch the ground before the holy scripture with their foreheads. The recitation of the eighteenth century *ardās* is also customary for attending Sikhs. The *ardās* recalls past sufferings and glories of the community, invoking divine grace for all humanity.

The gurdwara is also the location for the historic Sikh practice of "Langar" or the community meal. All gurdwaras are open to anyone of any faith for a free meal, always vegetarian. People eat together, and the kitchen is maintained and serviced by Sikh community volunteers.

Sikh festivals/events

Vaisakhi is one of the most important festivals of Sikhs, while other significant festivals commemorate the birth, lives of the Gurus and Sikh martyrs.

Ceremonies and customs

Khalsa Sikhs have also supported and helped develop major pilgrimage traditions to sacred sites such as Harmandir Sahib, Anandpur Sahib, Fatehgarh Sahib, Patna Sahib, Hazur Nanded Sahib, Hemkund Sahib and others. Sikh pilgrims and Sikhs of other sects customarily consider these as holy and a part of their *Tirath*. The Hola Mohalla around the festival of Holi, for example, is a ceremonial and customary gathering every year in Anandpur Sahib attracting over 100,000 Sikhs.

Initiation and the Khalsa

Khalsa (meaning "pure and sovereign") is the collective name given by Guru Gobind Singh to those Sikhs who have been fully initiated by taking part in a ceremony called *amrit sañcār* (nectar ceremony). During this ceremony, sweetened water is stirred with a double-edged sword while liturgical prayers are sung; it is offered to the initiating Sikh, who ritually drinks it. Many Sikhs are not formally and fully initiated, as they do not undergo this ceremony, but do adhere to some components of Sikhism and identify as Sikhs.

Baptized Sikhs wear five items, called the Five Ks (in Punjabi known as *pañj kakkē* or *pañj kakār*), at all times. The five items are: *kēs* (uncut hair), *kañghā* (small wooden comb), *karā* (circular steel or iron bracelet), *kirpān* (sword/dagger), and *kacchera* (special undergarment). The Five Ks have both practical and symbolic purposes.

Sikh diaspora

Approximately 75% of Sikhs live in Punjab, where they constitute over 60% of the state's population. Large communities of Sikhs migrate to the neighboring states such as Indian State of Haryana which is home to the second largest Sikh population in India with 1.1 million Sikhs as per 2001 census, and large immigrant communities of Sikhs can be found across India. However, Sikhs only comprise about 2% of the Indian population.

Sikh migration to Canada began in the 19th century and led to the creation of significant Sikh communities, predominantly in South Vancouver and Surrey, British Columbia, and Brampton, Ontario. Today temples, newspapers, radio stations, and markets cater to these large, multi-generational Indo-Canadian groups. Sikh festivals such as Vaisakhi and Bandi Chhor are celebrated in those Canadian cities by the largest groups of followers in the world outside the Punjab.

Prohibitions in Sikhism

1. **Haircuts:** Cutting or removing hair from any body part is strictly forbidden including shaving or trimming facial and nostril hairs for both Amritdhari (formally baptized) and Keshdhari (non-baptized and practicing) Sikhs.

2. **Intoxication:** Consumption of drugs, alcohol, tobacco and other intoxicants is not allowed for Amritdhari Sikhs and Keshdhari Sikhs. Drugs and tobacco are forbidden for all. Cannabis is generally prohibited, but ritually consumed in edible form by some Sikhs.
3. **Gambling:** Gambling, also called *jooa* in traditional Indian languages, be it in any form like lottery, roulette, poker, American or British bingo, is prohibited in some codes of conduct, such as the Sikh Rehat Maryada.
4. **Priestly class:** Sikhism does not have priests, as they were abolished by Guru Gobind Singh (the 10th Guru of Sikhism). The only position he left was a Granthi to look after the Guru Granth Sahib; any Sikh is free to become Granthi or read from the Guru Granth Sahib.
5. **Eating meat killed in a ritualistic manner (*kutha* meat):** Sikhs are strictly prohibited from eating meat killed in a ritualistic manner (such as halal or kosher, known collectively as *kutha* meat in Sikhism), or any meat where langar is served. It is *patit* for Sikhs to eat anything which is an animal product from a ritualised slaughter. For many Sikhs (and in some Sikh sects, e.g. Akhand Kirtani Jatha) Damdami Taksal, Nanaksar, eating any meat is believed to be forbidden, but this is not a universally held belief.
6. **Having extramarital sexual relations**