



Sikhism is a faith with over 26 million followers, who are Sikhs. 'Sikh' means 'learner' and refers to Sikhs' ongoing challenge to understand God's Truth and live righteously. Sikhism began when God made revelations to a great 15th century teacher and philosopher, Sri Guru Nanak, who lived in the Punjab region. The faith was carried forward by nine other human Gurus. The tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh (1666–1708), said that in the future the Sri Guru Granth Sahib or Adi Granth (the Sikh sacred book of verses) would be the Sikhs' only teacher. Guru Gobind Singh affirmed the Adi Granth as the perpetual Guru of the Sikhs and the Granth then became known as the Sri Guru Granth Sahib.

Main beliefs and practices

- Sikhs believe in one God (mostly called Waheguru), whose name is Truth.
- They believe that Guru Nanak (1469–1539) received God's Word through messages, later compiled in verse form as the Adi Granth, the Sikhs' first holy book.
- Guru Nanak spread God's Word as far as Arabia and south-west China.
- Sikhs pray, read from the Adi Granth and meditate on God's Name in the home and Gurdwara (temple).
- Sikhs are required to be peaceful – without envy or greed; to be honest and hardworking; to care for both family and the community.
- Devout Sikhs wear the Five Ks, introduced by Guru Gobind Singh. These Five Ks are: Kesh (uncut hair), Kangha (wooden comb), Kara (steel bracelet worn on right wrist), Kirpan (short sword), Kachha (short under-trousers).

Language

- The Adi Granth was written in Gurmukhi script, which children study in the Gurdwara. The book includes Bhagat Bani – verses composed by the Gurus' Hindu and Muslim friends.
- The Mul Mantra is Guru Nanak's first, powerful verse:
*'There is only one God
Whose name is Truth
The Creator
Without fear
Without hate
A timeless being, not born
Self-existent
Revealed only the Guru's grace.'*

Catherine Chambers guides you through the basic beliefs of the six core religions. This month: Sikhism

Key dates and festivals

- 1499: Guru Nanak founds Sikhism.
13 or 14 April: Vaisakhi – an annual festival marks Guru Gobind Singh's establishment in 1699 of the first Khalsa ('the pure ones') – a group of five disciplined Sikhs, who defend the faith.
- Festivals for the births, deaths and martyrdoms of the Gurus (gurpurbs) include prayers and readings in the home, extended readings (Akhand Path) from the Adi Granth in the Gurdwara, processions, and offertory sweets called karah parshad (pronounced *pr-shad*).
 - Sikhs celebrate ancient Hindu festivals, such as Diwali (which includes fireworks and lights) in a way that reflects Sikh faith and history.

Points to remember

- All ten Gurus are honoured but only God is truly worshipped.
- 'Sri' and 'Dev' are optional epithets honouring the Gurus. 'Guru' is only used for God, the ten Gurus and the Adi Granth.
- Any devout Sikh can become a member of their local Khalsa. They can also become a 'granthi', a person who reads from the Adi Granth in the Gurdwara.
- Sikhism promotes community welfare. Guru Nanak established the langar – a large eating space within a Gurdwara

providing food and company for Sikh and non-Sikh.

- Sikhs in the UK, US, Canada, East Africa, Malaysia and so on, fit in by attending the gurdwara on each nation's weekly rest day.

Music

- Music (gurbani kirtan) is learned in the Gurdwara from childhood.
- A gurbani kirtan singer performs verses from the Adi Granth, accompanied by harmonium, tabla (drum) and often a stringed instrument.
- Musicians play talas (rhythms), and ragas (moods) such as aafa (effort) and raamkali (calmness).
- Listen to some traditional Sikh music at www.gurbani.org

Art and design

- The Gurus' portraits and deeds are depicted and displayed.
 - A flag and ceremonial fan (chauri) are symbols of Sikhism.
 - The Harmandir Sahib (Golden Temple) of Amritsar is covered with Sikh decorative arts: frescoes, tiny mirrors framed by floral patterns, copperwork, carved marble. A pool of sacred water (amrit) surrounds the Harmandir.
- For more information see www.allaboutsikhs.com ■

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