



Sikhi

Faith Guide

A short introduction to the Sikh Faith, its origins and population in the UK

A Short Introduction to Sikhi

Origins of Sikhi

Sikhi (Sikh faith) is rooted in the teachings of the ten Gurus, the first of whom was Guru Nanak Dev Ji (1469-1539), who was born at Talwandi in Panjab (West Panjab – part of Pakistan). He is regarded to be Guru from birth, as he received and disseminated the divine message ‘Na ko Hindu, na Musalman,’ (meaning that, God is not interested in labels; we are all children of one God, whom Hindus call ‘Ram’ (all pervasive; not to be confused by the deity Ram of Ayudia) and Muslims call ‘Allah’ (unborn and beyond human perception). At the age of around thirty, he received a call to preach the Word of God. He travelled far and wide preaching the divine message in India and abroad including to the Middle East – Mecca, Madina, Baghdad, Turkey etc.

His message emphasised the oneness of God and oneness of humanity (regardless of gender, caste, colour or creed) and the importance of honesty and integrity in the practice of any religion. The community which he founded became known as Sikhs, meaning disciples, or learners. Both men and women are held equal and can hold high offices.

In 1699, the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, instituted Kande di Paul (Amrit Pahul) which is open to anyone (males or females of any background) who wants to be initiated as a Sikh into the Khalsa Panth, the community of initiated Sikhs.

Central Aspects of Sikhi

The Nature of Sikhi

The Sikh Raht Maryada (Sikh Code of Conduct and Conventions) based on Shiri Guru Granth Sahib’s teachings, is the governing document, published by Dharam Parchar Committee of Amritsar-based Shromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee - SGPC). SGPC organises and administers many gurdwaras, hospitals and other Sikh institutions within Punjab. The Raht Maryada defines Sikh as any human being who faithfully believes in:

1. The Akal Purakh (the one eternal God),
2. the ten Gurus (from Guru Nanak Dev to Guru Gobind Singh inclusive),
3. the Shiri Guru Granth Sahib,
4. the utterances and teachings of the ten Gurus, and
5. Amrit Pahul bequeathed by the tenth Guru, and who does not owe allegiance to any other religion, is a Sikh.

Transgressions

The followings are regarded as major apostasies in Sikhi:

1. Dishonour the hair (cutting, shorning, or dyeing) from any part of its body
2. Eating of halal/kosher (ritually prepared) meat
3. Cohabiting with a person other than one's spouse
4. Using tobacco (or other intoxicants, like alcohol and drugs etc).

In the event of aberration of any of these apostasies, the transgressor must be rebaptised (re-initiated); however, unintentional transgression carries no penalty.

The Divine

Sikhi is monotheistic religion and God is known amongst Sikhs by a variety of names including Akal Purakh, Ram, Mohan, Gobind, Gopal, Hari, Nirankar, Allah, although Satnam (meaning “eternal name/glory”) and Waheguru (meaning “Wonderous Lord”) are among the most commonly used.

The Mool Mantar (the basic belief) encapsulates the essence of God, as

“There is one God, with eternal Name, the Creator all-pervasive, devoid of enmity and fear, eternal image, non-transmigration, self effulgence, realised by the grace of the Guru.”

The Gurus

The Ten Gurus and their teaching, known as the Gurbani or Gurshabad, is viewed as a unity. The Ten Gurus are:

1. Guru Nanak Dev (1469-1539)
2. Guru Angad Dev (1504-1552)
3. Guru Amar Das (1479-1574)
4. Guru Ram Das (1534-1581)
5. Guru Arjan Dev (1563-1606)
6. Guru Hargobind (1595-1644)
7. Guru Har Rai (1631-1661)
8. Guru Har Krishan (1656-1664)
9. Guru Tegh Bahadur (1622-1675)
10. Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708)

Before his departure, the tenth Guru, vested the spiritual authority in the revealed word of God in Shiri Guru Granth Sahib (The Scripture) and commanded all Sikhs to regard SGGS as their eternal living (spiritual) Guru, whilst temporal authority was vested in the Khalsa Panth, instituted by initiation of the Panj Pyare (five beloved ones) by Guru Gobind Singh in 1699. SGGS also contains revealed compositions of other saints from both Hindus and Muslims traditions, who adhered to one immortal God and oneness of humanity concepts. Prior to Guruship, the scripture was also known as Pothi Sahib and Aad Granth and it is written in Gurmukhi script of Panjabi.

Scriptures

Other main sources include the Dasam Granth which incorporates the work of a number of poets and also writings of Guru Gobind Singh, Varan (Odes) by Bhai Gurdas Ji, and compositions by Bhai Nand Lal Ji.

Khalsa Panth

The Khalsa Panth is seen as a community of equality that recognises no distinction of caste or gender. One who has taken amrit is known as an Amritdhari Sikh (an initiated Sikh).

Keshdhari is a term that can be used of Sikhs who adopt a beard, uncut hair and turban whether or not they have taken amrit. They may also be called Sahajdhari (literally, “slow adopters”). Patit (fallen) Sikh is regarded as one who cuts his/her hair.

Along with other personal and family names which they may use, all Sikh men have the religious name of Singh, which means “lion”, whilst Sikh women have the religious name of Kaur, meaning “princess”.

Being a member of the Khalsa Panth is outwardly marked by the wearing of the 5 Ks of Sikhi (the articles of faith; they should not be called symbols or jewellery, each of which has both spiritual and practical significance). It infuses the concept of Miri and Piri (the temporal and spiritual powers) and encourages a Sikh to be a Saint-Soldier, to voice against injustice.

They are known as the 5Ks because in Panjabi each word begins with the “K” sound. The 5 Ks are:

1. Kesh (an uncut bodily hair, regarded as a living part of the body - to obey the will of the God, giving a saintly appearance. The hair on the head tied up into a knot called jurha or gutta, under the turban)
2. Kangha (a small wooden comb worn behind the knotted hair – for cleanliness)
3. Kara (an iron or steel bracelet – to protect the wrist; reminding universality of God and a covenant with the Guru, to restrain from committing evil act)
4. Kacchahera (also known as kachchha or kachha – a knee length cotton or linen shorts, slightly baggy around the waist and tight around the thighs, worn under clothes, to cover one's modesty)
5. Kirpan (a ceremonial sword – signifying justice, courage and leadership).

Ethics

Sikhs are called upon to live in accordance with the teaching of SGGS. They are

1. Nam japna (remembrance of the Nam/glory of God; God consciousness)
2. Kirat karni (earning by honest labour)
3. Vand cchakna (to share with the others)

Human life is seen as an opportunity for achieving mukti, or redemption from the cycle of rebirths, based upon the karam (actions and their consequences of previous and present life). Without the practice of Gur-shabad (Guru's teaching), salvation from this worldly ocean is not possible, and it is to be achieved while one lives this life (and not after death). Sikhi does not recognise salvation through any of the rituals (like pilgrimage bathing at any holy places, fasting, penance, or ancestral worship etc); they are strictly forbidden. The only pilgrimage recognised is that of the Nam (the glory of God) in which the mind should bathe internally within the divine knowledge to be sanctified from vices/passions.

There is no concept of heaven or hell; where Lord is being praised (within sadh-sangat – congregation of Gurmukhs – God conscious individual) it is heaven, and where it is forsaken (Manmukhs – self-centred individuals) it is hell. The transmigration cycle of birth and death operates in accordance with the divine command (Hukam) of the Lord; the mission of human life is to escape from this with the help of the Guru, to infuse one's soul with that of Lord's effulgence (who is unborn).

The barriers to this are seen as:

1. Kam (lust – an excessive use of sex for self-gratification)
2. karodh (anger)
3. lobh (greed)
4. moh (worldly attachment to living and non-living things)
5. hankar (pride)

To overcome these barriers, the following qualities/virtues are needed to be practised:

1. sat (virtuousness)
2. santokh (contentment)
3. daya (compassion)
4. dharam (righteousness)
5. nimarta (humility)

Sikhi advocates five stages of the journey to divine:

1. Dharam Khand (the Realm of Righteousness)
2. Gian Khand (the Realm of Divine Knowledge)
3. Saram Khand (the Realm of Perseverance)
4. Karam Khand (the Realm of Divine Grace)
5. Sach Khand (the Realm of the Eternal)

Worship

In any Gurdwara, Shri Guru Granth Sahib is placed upon a high platform with kingly regalia, like the canopy overhead and waving of the Chour Sahib (a hand-held icon, which is waved upon the SGGS as a sign of Sovereignty; it is erroneous to call it a fly-whisk or a fan, since none of these purposes are the reason why it is waved upon SGGS). Usually armours (like swords and a double edged sword and a chakar – circular weapon) would be placed in front of SGGS and with attendant standing behind, waving the Chour Sahib. The revealed words of the SGGS are regarded as the eternal truth that is worthy of worship; statue/picture of any deity/Gurus for worship is strictly forbidden.

A Sikh has both personal and a congregational obligations. Personally, one should practise the three fundamentals stated above (Nam Japna, kirat karni and Vand Cchakma) and maintain the daily routine of prayers; congregationally, a Sikh joins in remembrance of Nam/glory of God, kirtan (praising God through singing of hymns from SGGS) and listening to the discourses upon the divine word. Sharing of a langar (free meal for all), by sitting on a carpeted floor, as per need, is an important aspect of it, to mark equality and to denounce ranks and caste discrimination; chairs and tables may be provided to the more senior citizens, but are not recommended as a practice to the others. Langar is seen as a basic need of all, and is offered to all, regardless of one's religion/belief.

Within the Gurdwara, Sewadars (volunteers – both men and women) may be seen providing services in the congregational hall (Diwan Hall), the kitchen (Gur ka Langar) and depositing of the shoes (Jorha Ghar). Sewa and Simran (performing self-service by being God conscious) are an important aspect of Sikh's life.

Major shrines and Takhts (Thrones) of Sikhi

The major shrines of Sikhi include Shri Harmandir Sahib (The Golden Temple, Amritsar), Nankana Sahib (birth place of Guru Nanak Dev), Kartar Pur Sahib (where Guru Nanak Dev demised) and Panja Sahib. The five Takhts (Thrones) are Shri Akal Takht, Amritsar (The seat of the Immortal – where political decisions are taken that are binding upon all other Takhts, Shri Keshgarh, Anandpur Sahib (birth of the Khalsa in 1699), Shri Damdama Sahib (where SGGS was completed), Shri Patna Sahib, Bihar (birth place of Guru Gobind Singh) and Shri Hazoor Sahib, Nanderh (where Guru Gobind Singh demised and bestowed Guruship upon SGGS).

Diversity within Sikhi

Sikhi does not acknowledge the validity of traditions based on varying doctrines, the only doctrine that is followed is that of Nam/Naam (Panjabi word, means praising God), although there are groupings whose roots are to be found in various revivalist movements founded by individuals known by such titles as Sant, Bhai or Baba.

Within the community, there are also social groupings, such as Ramgarhia and Bhatra, which are related to economic categories and family histories.

There are also a range of groups and movements which understand themselves as being within the Sikh community but whose self-understanding in this regard is disputed.

Sikh Origins

An exiled young Sikh prince called Maharaja Dalip Singh was one of the first Sikhs to live in Britain, acquiring the Elveden Estate, Norfolk. He was the son of Maharaja Ranjit Singh (Lion of Panjab - whose Sikh Kingdom included united Panjab (East and West), Himachal, Kashmir and Afghanistan (1799-1839); young Dalip Singh, was exiled by the British in 1849, once the Sikh Kingdom had fallen.

The majority of Sikhs arrived as migrants in the 1950s and 1960s, directly from Punjab, although a significant minority also came from East Africa and other former British colonies. The vast majority of Sikhs are of Panjabi ethnic origin.

Sikh religious teachings emphasise that there should be no distinctions between people and therefore it rejects the concept of caste system as having no religious significance. However, social groups do continue to play a role in the life of the community.

In recent years, the Network of Sikh Organisations has been founded to try to and support national networking and representation of the Sikh community.

Sikhs in the UK

Sikh Populations

Global	c. 23,927,000
UK	432,429
England	420,196
Wales	2,962
Scotland	9,055
Northern Ireland	216

As a proportion of the population in local authority areas, the 2011 Census shows that, in England, the greatest concentration of respondents identifying themselves as Sikhs is to be found in:

	% of Population	Total Numbers
Slough	10.6	14,889
Wolverhampton	9.1	22,689
Hounslow	9.0	22,749
Sandwell	8.7	26,934
Ealing	7.9	26,778

Sikh Organisations

	UK	England	Wales	Scotland	Northern Ireland
Local	57	42	4	9	2
Regional	6	4	0	1	1
National	25	0	0	0	0

Sikh Places of Worship

UK	240
England	226
Wales	3
Scotland	9
Northern Ireland	2

Acknowledgement of Sources

UK Sikh population data is sourced from the Office for National Statistics' Table QS210EW (Census 2011: Religion [Detailed], Local Authorities in England & Wales, Crown Copyright 2012), the Northern Ireland Statistics & Research Agency's Table QS218NI (Census 2011: Religion – Full Detail), and the National Records of Scotland's Table AT_001_2011 (Census 2011: Religion [Detailed], Crown Copyright 2013). Crown copyright material is reproduced with the permission of the Controller of HMSO.

Estimates for the global Sikh population are taken from Todd M. Johnson and Brian J. Grim (eds.), *World Religion Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed January 2012).

Data on the number of Sikh places of worship in England & Wales is taken from 'Marriages in England & Wales (Provisional), 2012 Release' (Office for National Statistics, Crown Copyright 2014) and reproduced here under the terms of the Open Government Licence.

Estimates for the numbers of Sikh organisations in the UK and places of worship in Scotland and Northern Ireland are taken from P. Weller (ed.), *Religions in the UK: A Directory, 2007-10* (Derby: Multi-Faith Centre at the University of Derby, 2010). The section on 'A Short Introduction to Sikhism' summarises and abstracts from the same publication's chapter on 'Introducing Sikhs in the UK' (pp. 247-264), which was developed with input from a range of consultants (pp. 329-338).

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Written by Professor Paul Weller

Revised by Dr. Hardial Singh Dhillon





The Multi-Faith Centre

The University of Derby
Kedleston Road
Derby
Derbyshire
DE22 1GB
United Kingdom

mfc@derby.ac.uk
01332 591 285
www.multifaithcentre.org