

# SIKH DHARMA

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## RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

**Required Daily Observances.** Sikhs recite the following *Mul Mantra* every morning as part of their devotions. This is the Sikh creedal affirmation:

There is one Supreme Being, the Eternal Reality. He is the Creator, without fear and devoid of enmity. He is immortal, never incarnated, self-existent, known by grace through the Guru. The Eternal One, from the beginning, through all time, present now, the Everlasting Reality.

A devout Sikh also attends the Gurdwara to recite hymns from the scriptures. The Sikh scripture continues:

Meditate upon Who was True before the Creation, Who was True in the beginning

of the Creation, Who is True now, and O Nanak, Who shall be True forever.

It is customary for a Sikh to cleanse him/herself every morning – to clean and purify the body before coming into the presence of God, where the cleansing of the sinful mind takes place.

**Required Weekly Observances. Congregational Worship Service (Gurdwara).** The Sikh worship service takes place in a Gurdwara, which means “Gate to the Guru.” The primary focus of prayer is upon the **Siri Guru Granth Sahib**, the Sikh Holy Scripture. Covered in cloth, written in Gurmukhi, it is placed at the front of the room in an elevated position. Sikhs bow in humility to the sacred scripture, as it contains the Infinite Word of God. Everyone attending worship sits on the floor as an act of equality, humility, and respect. To facilitate meditation, worshippers sit with legs crossed. The service consists of:

- Songs of Praise (*kirtan*).
- Community Prayer (*ardas*).
- The Scripture Reading (*hukam*), first in Gurmukhi, then English.
- The Congregational Meeting (*Sangat*).

Worship Protocol:

- Remove shoes.
- Keep head covered.
- Wash hands and feet prior to entry into the Gurdwara to purify oneself before the **Siri Guru Granth Sahib**.

**Required Occasional Observances.** Most Sikh religious days of observances commemorate events in the history of the faith. The festivals are determined through the Nanakshahi Calendar, a Sikh calendar.

June 4: The day holds in memory the attack by the Indian government on the *Akal Takhat*, a Sikh fortress representing the temporal authority of Sikhs, between June 1-4, 1984. Adjacent to the *Akal Takhat* is the *Harmandir Sahib*, also known as the Golden Temple in the town of Amritsar. The Harmandir Sahib is the center of Sikh spiritual authority. These two sites are the most revered places in the Sikh world.

Each of the birthdays of the 10 Sikh Gurus are celebrated throughout the year.

- Guru Nanak                      Varies each year

- Guru Angad April 18
- Guru Amar Das May 23
- Guru Ram Das October 9
- Guru Arjan May 2
- Guru Hargobind July 5
- Guru Har Rai January 31
- Guru Har Krishan July 23
- Guru Teg Bahadur April 18
- Guru Gobind Singh January 5

Several additional days are observed.

- *Maghi*, in January. This day, observed on the first day of the 10th month of the solar year, commemorates a battle in which 40 Sikhs (the immortal ones) laid down their lives for their Guru, Guru Gobind Singh.

- *Martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev* in May/June. Arjan was the first Sikh martyr and fifth Guru.

- *First Parkash* – September 1. Commemorates the installation of the **Adi Granth**, the first edition of the Sikh Scriptures.

- *Bandi Chor Divas* in October/November. *Bandi Chor Divas*, which means “the day of the release of the prisoner,” commemorates the return of the sixth Guru to Amritsar, the holy city, after his release from detention. This celebration coincides with the Hindu festival of Diwali.

**Holy Days.** These two holy days are days of work proscription:

- *Vaisakhi*, April 14, is both a spiritual and temporal holy day. It is the first day of the Sikh New Year. The spiritual commemorates the formation of the *Khalsa* in 1699 by Guru Gobind Singh, when he baptized the five Sikh disciples. The temporal commemorates the harvest as an agricultural festival.

- *Guru Gaddi Day*, in October/November, celebrates the passing of the Guruship from Guru Gobind Singh, the 10th Guru, to the **Siri Guru Granth Sahib**, the Sikh sacred scriptures.

## RELIGIOUS ITEMS

### Personal Religious Items

- Prayer Book, called *Gutka*.

- **Siri Guru Granth Sahib.**
- *Kesh*: Turban.
- *Kangha*: Wooden comb (small).
- *Katchera*: Specially made cotton underwear.
- Religious medallion, the *Khanda*, and chain.
- Sikh teaching and study materials.

**Security note: *Kesh*.** The turban for the correctional environment is about 3 yards long and usually made of muslin. It is known as the house turban and is a least restrictive alternative to the more formal turban (6 yards long). No special provisions need to be made for cleaning the turbans.



*Khanda*

**Security note: *Kara* and *Kirpan*.** The *Kara* (steel bracelet) and *Kirpan* (sword or small dagger) are not authorized to be worn in BOP institutions. As a least restrictive alternative, the *Khanda* (Sikh insignia) medallion containing the sacred circle and sword symbolism is authorized.

**Security note: The *Khalsa*:** The *Khalsa* is a spiritual community of Sikh men and women devoted to purity of thought and action. Each *Khalsa* vows to wear the five K's: *Kesh*, *Kangha*, *Katchera*, *Kara*, and *Kirpan*.

**Congregate Religious Items.** These items would not be procured by the Religious Services Department. Pastoral leadership for a Gurdwara and use of religious accouterments are accommodated on an as-needed basis.

**Searches.** Staff are expected to show the same respect for religious articles of the Sikh faith as for religious items belonging to other traditions. Religious articles are not to be mishandled, thrown, placed on the floor, or brought into the bathroom.

Sikh inmates place great value on their religious turban (seeing it as an extension of their being). Searches involving the removal of the turban should be performed by an officer of the same gender in a private area.

For institution visitors (family, attorneys), removal of headwear should occur only after metal detector/wand screening and only if there is reasonable suspicion of the introduction of contraband. Under these circumstances, the Warden must approve further inspection (pat search or removal of religious headwear). If the visitor submits to further examination, the headwear will be removed by the visitor under direct supervision of a staff member of the same gender in a private area designated for that purpose containing a table and mirror.

## REQUIREMENTS FOR MEMBERSHIP

**Requirements.** Everyone is welcome. A commitment to the Sikh community comes through two initiatory steps.

- In a religious ceremony, primary initiation into membership involves vows of:
  - ▶ Celibacy within marriage.
  - ▶ A no-flesh religious diet (vegan encouraged).
  - ▶ Daily meditation and prayer.
  - ▶ Wearing the five symbolic elements denoting a commitment to the faith.
  - ▶ Financial support of the Sikh community.

■ When one determines to make a total commitment to the Sikh way of life, the disciple participates in a secondary initiation, a baptism service called *Amrit*. A baptized Sikh is called *Amritdhari* Sikh.

**Total Membership.** Sikh Dharma has 23 million members worldwide and 310,000 members in 260 Gurdwaras or Temples in the U.S.

## MEDICAL PROHIBITIONS

None.

## DIETARY STANDARDS

The religious diet of Sikh Dharma inmates can ordinarily best be met through self-selection from the mainline, which includes the no-flesh option.

## **BURIAL RITUALS**

The burial ritual is cremation within three days of death. Sikhs prepare the body for cremation through a ritual bath, prayer, dressing the deceased in new clothes, and adorning the body with the five symbols of the *Khalsa*. There are no prohibitions concerning autopsies.

A congregant prayer service, usually led by a Sikh minister, is held throughout the cremation. Ashes must be handed to the nearest family member for disposition.

## **SACRED WRITINGS**

**Siri Guru Granth Sahib.**

## **ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE**

**Location of Headquarters.** Western Hemisphere Offices:

Sikh Dharma International  
P.O. Box 351149  
1649 South Robertson Boulevard  
Los Angeles, CA 90035  
(310) 552-3416

## **HISTORY**

Sikh Dharma is among the youngest of the major world religions – it is about 500 years old. The faith originated in the Punjab region of North India. Its founder, Guru Nanak, was born in 1469. Guru Nanak spread a simple message of “*Ek Ong Kar*,” “We are all one,” created by the One Creator of Creation. This teaching occurred when India was being torn apart by castes, sectarianism, religious factions, and fanaticism. He, and each Guru to follow, denounced oppression based on creed, class, color, or sex. Guru Nanak aligned himself with no religion, and respected all religions. He expressed the belief that there is one God and many paths. The name of God is Truth, “*Sat Nam*.”

Guru Nanak’s followers were Sikhs, which means “seekers of truth.” He taught them how to bow only before God, and to link themselves to the Guru, the Light of Truth, who lives always in the direct consciousness of God, experiencing no separation. Through words and example, the Guru demonstrated to followers how to experience God within themselves, bringing them from darkness into light. Guru Nanak was a humble bearer of

the Light of Truth. He opposed superstition, injustice, and hypocrisy. He inspired his followers through singing songs thought to be divinely inspired. The songs were recorded and formed the beginning of the Sikhs' sacred writings, known as the **Siri Guru Granth Sahib**.

Guru Nanak taught his way of life to his followers. Three key elements were passed on:

- *Nam Japa*: To get up each day before sunrise, clean the body, meditate on God's Name, and recite the Guru's hymns to cleanse the mind. Throughout the day continually remember God's name with every breath.
- *Dharam di Kirat Karni*: To work and earn by the sweat of the brow, to live in a family way of life, and practice truthfulness and honesty in all dealings.
- *Vand Ke Chakna*: To share the fruits of one's labors with others before considering oneself. To live as an inspiration and support for the entire community.

The foundation of Sikh Dharma was laid down by Guru Nanak. Guru Nanak infused his own consciousness into a disciple, who then became a Guru, subsequently passing on the light to the next Guru. The word Guru is derived from the word "Gu", which means darkness or ignorance, and "Ru", which means light or knowledge. The Guru is the experience of Truth (God).

There were 10 Gurus in human form. The "11th Guru" is the **Siri Guru Granth Sahib**, the Sikh scriptures that continue to teach truth to the Sikh adherents. As a result, no living Guru is needed – this Guru will last from 1708 until the end of time.

When the British empire collapsed in India, the country was divided along religious lines. Pakistan became a new country composed mainly of followers of Islam; the rest of the subcontinent became India where Hinduism was the dominant religion. Instead of separating into a third country, the Punjab region, which was primarily Sikh, remained part of India. This historical development led to many bloody battles between the Sikh minority and the Indian government.

The beginnings of Sikhism in America can be traced to the early 1900's. However, its real growth as a religious movement in America started with the arrival of Siri Singh Sahib Yogi Bhan in 1969.

## **THEOLOGY**

**Concept of God.** The definition of God is given in the opening sentence of the **Guru Granth Sahib**, called the *Mul-Mantra* or the Preamble of *Japji*, the essence of the whole **Guru Granth Sahib**.

ੴ ਸਤਿਨਾਮੁ ਕਰਤਾ ਪੁਰਖੁ ਨਿਰਭਉ ਨਿਰਵੈਰੁ  
ਅਕਾਲ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਅਜੂਨੀ ਸੈ ਭੈ ਗੁਰਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ ॥

There is but One God

He is the Eternal Truth

The Creator, All-Pervading Divine Spirit

Unfearful, without hate and enmity

Immortal Entity, Unborn, Self-Existent, and

He is realized by His Own Grace.

The next verse is often called *Sach (True) Mantra*,

Meditate upon

Who was True before the Creation

Who was True in the beginning of the Creation

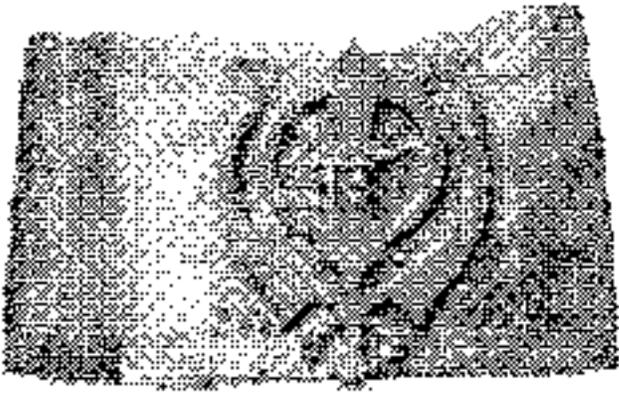
Who is True now, and

O Nanak, Who shall be True for Ever.

God is both impersonal and personal. God is impersonal; formless and beyond human reach. When God reveals himself through his creation, he becomes related and personal. When God made himself manifest, he first formed himself into *Nam* (Divine Name), then created nature. *Nam* is a mystic word used in practical religious life and in the discipline of meditation. Prophets have given Divine Names to the nameless God that reflect his presence in the consciousness of people. *Nam* sustains all beings and the universe. *Nam* is the cure of all suffering. Nothing is so perfect that it could or would exist apart from *Nam*.

In the Sikh scriptures, the concept of God is described as a trinity of *sat*, *chit*, and *anand*. God is omnipotent and omniscient. God is the initiator and the End. God is the Self-Creator and the Self-Propellor.

**The Gurus.** The word “Guru” is a Sanskrit word meaning teacher, honored person, religious person, or saint. In the Sikh tradition, the word Guru took on a very specific meaning. Guru meant the descent of divine guidance to humanity provided through 10 special, enlightened masters. Only 10 men in the Sikh religion were called Guru, beginning with Guru Nanak in 1496 and ending with Guru Gobind Singh in 1708. The divine spirit was passed from one Guru to the next. The **Adi Granth** (as the Sacred Scriptures are sometimes called) states, “The light of a lamp which lights another does not abate. Similarly a spiritual leader and his disciple become equal, Nanak says the truth.” The Guru is a perfect prophet or messenger of God in whom the light of God shines fully, visibly, and completely. The Guru is in union with the Divine. Through him the glory of the lord is transmitted to humanity. The Gurus lead devotees into a spiritual birth. On account of divine prerogatives, the Guru is human in form but divine in spirit.



### ***Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji.*** The **Guru Granth**

**Sahib** was first compiled by the fifth Sikh Guru, Arjan Dev, in 1604 in the city of Amritsar. The second and last version was compiled by the 10th and last human Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, and completed in 1708. The **Guru Granth Sahib** contains 3,384 hymns. When the **Guru Granth Sahib** was translated into other languages, a standard format was agreed upon. Regardless of language, the length of the sacred scriptures is 1,430 pages; it is divided into 33 sections. Each page contains the same information.

Unique to the **Guru Granth Sahib** are the songs, hymns, and sayings of a wide variety of saints and sages. Included are compositions of Hindu bhaktas, Muslims, Sufi poets, and people of other faith traditions. The idea of Guru Arjan was to affirm the fundamental unity of all religions and the unitary character of mystic experience. Contributors to the **Guru Granth Sahib** came from all castes prevalent in India between the 12<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. This became highly symbolic of the egalitarianism that is the essence of the creed of the Sikh.

Guru Gobind Singh stated upon completion of the **Guru Granth Sahib** that no human Guru was needed any longer. Thus the **Guru Granth Sahib** is viewed as the 11th Guru that will guide humanity until the end of times. A translation of **Guru Granth Sahib** is the

last Guru forever. The **Guru Granth Sahib** contains the *Gurbani*, or the Divine Word. There is no place in the Sikh tradition for a living Guru today; Sikhs have the *Guru Granth Sahib* as the authoritative guide for life.

The Sikh tradition gives a very high place to its scriptures. In the Gurdwara, and also in homes of individual Sikhs if they can afford it, a room is set aside where the sacred book is kept. In the Gurdwara, the book is provided with a bed, a light, and a fan.

The Sikh philosophy as described in the **Guru Granth Sahib** is mainly a philosophy of action, deed, and consequence. The emphasis in Sikh life is on shared communal experience, and on purposive and idealistic involvement.

**Moral Life.** For a Sikh, moral life is not a matter of a few commandments, a code, or a ritual, but the fruit of a life directed towards spiritual quest involving much discipline. The **Guru Granth Sahib** states, "Greater than Truth is Truthful Living" (p. 62). In contrast to the practices of Hinduism, asceticism, fasting, pilgrimages, and yoga are rejected. Although spirituality is to be developed, it is expected to be developed in society. Normal family life is encouraged; to achieve salvation one need not be separated from the world or be celibate. Each Sikh is expected to live in the world, yet be pure in mind, and be a soldier, scholar, and saint.

The five cardinal vices are: *Kam* (lust), *Krodh* (anger), *Lobh* (greed), *Moh* (worldly attachment), and *Ahankar* (pride). These cardinal vices keep an individual apart from God. The purpose of life in the Sikh tradition is to seek God and be united with Him. To the degree that one can be free from the influence of the cardinal vices, a believer is closer to union with God. Human life is an opportunity to attain that goal. If it is missed, a person falls back into the cycle of birth and rebirth. Sikhs believe in reincarnation.

**Khalsa.** Guru Gobind Singh, the last human Guru, created the *Khalsa*, a spiritual community of men and women devoted to purity of thought and action. He gave the *Khalsa* a distinctive external form to remind followers of their commitment, and to help them maintain an elevated state of consciousness. Every Sikh baptized as *Khalsa* vows to wear the Five "K's":

- *Kesh*. uncut hair and beard, as given by God, to sustain him or her in higher consciousness; and a turban, the crown of spirituality.
- *Kangha*. a wooden comb to properly groom the hair as a symbol of cleanliness.
- *Katchera*. specially made cotton underwear as a reminder of a commitment to purity.

- *Kara*. a steel circle, worn on the wrist, signifying bondage to Truth and freedom from every other entanglement.
- *Kirpan*. the sword, with which the *Khalsa* is committed to righteously defend the fine line of truth.

*Khalsa* also vow to refrain from sexual relationships outside of marriage, and from meat, tobacco, alcohol, and other intoxicants. Finally, Guru Gobind Singh infused his own being into the *Khalsa*, declaring that the *Khalsa* was now the Guru in all temporal matters.

Bha Nand Lal, a contemporary of Guru Gobind Singh, wrote the following description of the *Khalsa*:

*Khalsa* is one who fights in the front ranks;  
*Khalsa* is one who conquers the five evils  
 (Lust, anger, pride, greed, ego);  
*Khalsa* is one who destroys doubt;  
*Khalsa* is one who gives up ego;  
*Khalsa* is one who does not stray from his spouse;  
*Khalsa* is one who looks upon all as his own;  
*Khalsa* is one who attunes himself with God.

Male Sikhs who have taken the *Amrit* vow take as one of their names “Singh” (lion); and women take the name “Kaur” (princess).

The *Khalsa* was to be a saint, a soldier, and a scholar, with high morals and excellent character. He or she would be strong, learned, and wise. The Guru challenged the *Khalsa* with the five virtues – sacrifice, cleanliness, honesty, charity, and courage – and prescribed the code of discipline or conduct:

- The Sikh will worship only God. They will not set up any idols, gods, goddesses, or statues for worship nor shall they worship any human being.
- The Sikh will believe in no religious book other than the **Siri Guru Granth Sahib**, although they can study other religious books for acquiring knowledge and for comparative study.
- The Sikh will not believe in castes, untouchability, magic, omens, amulets, astrology, appeasement rituals, ceremonial hair cutting, fasts, frontal masks, sacred threads, graves, and traditional death rites.
- The *Khalsa* will remain distinct by wearing the five K’s but shall not injure the feelings of others professing different religions.

- The *Khalsa* will pray to God before starting work, over and above the usual prayers.
- Although a Sikh may learn as many languages as he likes, he must learn Punjabi and teach his children to read it.
- Every male should add “Singh” after his name and every female *Khalsa* should add “Kaur” after her name. They must never remove hair from any part of their bodies.
- The use of drugs, smoking, and alcohol are strictly forbidden.
- *Khalsa* men and women will not make holes in their ears or nose and have no connection whatsoever with those who kill their daughters. Sikh women will not wear a veil.
- A Sikh must live on honest labor and give generously to the poor and the needy, thinking all the time that whatever he gives is given to the Guru.
- A Sikh must never steal or gamble.

**Role of Women.** At first glance, the Sikh religion can be viewed as primarily male-oriented and -dominated. The religious literature is mostly the work of men and many institutions have been almost exclusively staffed by men. In addition, the most visible characteristics – the beard, turban, and attire – are mostly male. In many ways this is an inaccurate description of Sikh tradition. In contrast with Indian society at that time, Sikh tradition was very egalitarian. The **Guru Granth Sahib**, in a hymn by Guru Nanek, says this of women:

Of woman we are born, of woman conceived,  
 To woman engaged, to woman married.  
 Women we befriend, by woman do civilizations continue. When a  
 woman dies, a woman is sought for. It is through woman that order is  
 maintained. Then why call her inferior from whom all great ones are  
 born?  
 Woman is born of woman; None is born but of woman. The One, who is  
 Eternal, alone is unborn. (473)

Married family life, not asceticism or celibacy, is extolled as the ideal for human social fulfillment. Although no late 20<sup>th</sup>-century meaning may be read into these words, the role of women was certainly much more exalted than that experienced by women elsewhere in society. This provided a sense of equality, both social and religious, which was unique in India.

**Marriage.** Marriage is obligatory for a Sikh. Renunciation of the world is rejected by Sikhs because they are expected to live the life of a householder. Marriage is

sacramental; it is not merely a contract between two people. Sikh marriages are not arranged, but parents, family, and friends help their children in finding marriage partners. No one is forced into a marriage, however. Because of the sacramental nature of marriage, it is for life. There is no legal means of dissolving a marriage; it cannot be annulled by a decree of any court. Once married, a husband and wife are “one spirit in two bodies.”

**The Golden Temple.** The Golden Temple, known as *Harmandir Sahib*, at Amritsar in Punjab, is the most revered religious center in Sikhism. The temple was built by the fourth Guru, Guru Arjan. It stands in the center of a rectangular pool of water, called *Amrit Sarovar*, or “tank of nectar.” In 1802, the roof was gilded; from that time, the temple was known as the Golden Temple. The Golden Temple has an entrance on each side, symbolizing that all people are able to enter it, unlike the practice where only the upper caste of the four Indian castes was able to enter into temples. The Golden Temple is also built with a lower elevation than the surrounding buildings, symbolizing the humility of the Sikh faith towards God and humanity. Located inside the temple is the **Guru Granth Sahib**. Pilgrims cleanse themselves in the pool, but this is seen as a symbolic cleansing of the soul rather than an actual bathing of the body.

**The Khanda.** The *Khanda* is the Sikh insignia or symbol. It has four components: a double-edged straight sword, a ring, and a sword on either side of the ring. The name is derived from the central symbol, the *Khanda*, a special type of double-edged sword that confirms Sikhs’ belief in One God and symbolizes the creative power of God that controls the destiny of creation.

The inner circle is called the *Chakra*. This circle, without a beginning or end, symbolizes the perfection of God, who is eternal.

The *Chakra* is surrounded by two curved swords called *Kirpans*. These represent spiritual and temporal authority. The right edge symbolizes freedom and authority governed by moral and spiritual values, called *Piri*. The left edge symbolizes divine justice used to punish wicked oppressors, called *Miri*.