

## INTRODUCTION TO SIKHISM

By Stephen Bigger <sup>1</sup>

Grant me this boon, O God, from thy Greatness  
May I never refrain from righteous acts;  
May I fight without fear All foes in life's battle,  
With confident courage claiming the victory!  
May Thy Glory be grained in my mind,  
And my highest ambition be singing Thy praises;  
When this mortal life reaches its limits,  
May I die fighting with limitless courage!

**Sikh national anthem**, *written by Guru Gobind Singh*

### The Mool Mantar

*or basic belief, written by Guru Nanak*

<i>Ik Onkar</i>	There is only one God
<i>Sat Nam</i>	Truth is His name
<i>Karta Purkh</i>	The Creator
<i>Nir Bhau</i>	Without fear
<i>Nir Vair</i>	Without hate
<i>Akaal Moorat</i>	Immortal
<i>Ajooni</i>	Beyond births and deaths
<i>Saibhang</i>	Self-Illuminated, the Enlightener
<i>Gur Parsaad</i>	Realised by the Kindness of the True Guru [God]

### Sikhs Communities Today.

There are around 13 million Sikhs in the world today. Originating in the Punjab which was divided through partition in 1947, many have dispersed across northern India, to Europe, East Africa, Malaysia, Singapore, Canada and the U.S.A.. In India Sikhs have made a great impact as farmers, members of the armed forces and police, as well as in sport, transport, industry and education. On the latter, Punjab state has four universities, with education free and compulsory to the age of 14. The impact of their beliefs also cannot be minimized - they stand **against** the caste system, child marriage, and the consumption of alcohol and tobacco; and **for** the remarriage of widows, and hospitality.

The Sikh community in Britain began shortly after the partition of India in 1948. Their homeland in India, the Punjab, was an area of conflict, and in the partition was divided in two between Pakistan and India. Many Sikh families found themselves divided with a national boundary between them. Today some of the Sikh holy places are in Pakistan, and others in India.

The Sikhs are a varied people, with longstanding links to the Police and Army in India, to the professions and merchandise, and to farming. The earliest Sikhs in Britain made a living for themselves as doorstep salesmen. The community grew steadily during the 1950s, often with the husbands coming to create a new life before calling the family over. There was a sudden boom in emigration from the Punjab to Britain in the early 1960s, as new immigration laws threatened to tighten up procedures considerably. In the 1960s, Sikh communities grew in established locations. Since there is a strong family unit, families bought houses for its members, often close by other Sikh homes. A substantial sociological study of Sikh

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settlement in Gravesend, Kent was made by A W Helweg, *Sikhs in Britain* (1988). Britain at this time did not find the Sikh presence comfortable. The bitter resentment of many Sikhs focused upon the issue of motor cycle crash helmets, which were then made compulsory by law. The Sikh argument was that the compulsory wearing of crash helmets would force them to abandon their turbans if they wished to ride a motor cycle. They saw this as another example of their perspective not being respected. It was finally resolved by observing that head coverings do not have to be turbans. A later conflict also focused on the judicial hierarchy, after Lord Denning, one of the Law Lords stated that Sikhism was not a religion at all.

During the 1960s and 1970s, a number of Sikhs abandoned the outward form of their faith (the long hair, turbans particularly) simply in order to get a job and create a life in Britain. Towards the end of the 1970s, there was a greater tendency for Sikhs to remain with their faith, proud of its richness. The tendency now was for Sikhs to move out of their local enclaves in the inner city and spread into the wider community. Today, Sikhs are found in all communities, professions and in all walks of life. They may or may not have decided to observe religious formalities

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### **Dress.**

It is because many Sikh men wear turbans that Sikhs have stood out as an ethnic group. Normally, only men who are formally initiated, through the Amrit ceremony (see below) into the Sikh religion, are entitled to wear the turban. No Sikh is banned from the community, or from the Sikh temple, because they are not entitled to wear a turban. Turbans can be seen in a variety of colours, but these are normally not significant. In some cases however, a blue or black turban is used as a kind of badge of a particular group. The turban is a long piece of narrow linen, wound around the head; this covers a piece of cloth worn over the hair underneath the turban. The turban will be put on at the beginning of the day and be worn throughout the day. The turban is an important aspect of Sikh culture, but it is not in itself a religious symbol. There are five special religious symbols, each beginning with the letter K in Punjabi, and therefore called the "Five Ks". These are:

1. Kesh - long hair
2. Kara - bangle
3. Kirpan - dagger
4. Kaccha - shorts
5. Kangha - a wooden comb.

The initiated Sikh promises to wear these sacred symbols, so they are worn by men and women alike. They originated in a period when the Sikhs were fighting for their lives against an enemy determined to eradicate them as a race and as a faith. The principle was that Sikhs should not stand aside and allow fellow Sikhs to be mutilated and killed, but should be ready, and prepared, to defend their comrades. The long hair of the *Sant* ("Saint") inspired them to justice and restraint; the protective arm bracelet, circular in form, suggested eternal loyalty; the comb for the hair suggested cleanliness; the dagger was a sign of foresight and preparation; and the shorts showed they were ready for action. From time to time these military values have had to be rekindled, such as in the period of the massacre of the Sikhs in India during the 1980s in which at least 800 were killed. However, the symbols are also metaphorical; in the struggle of life, spiritual values are needed if evil is to be defeated.

It must be stressed that wearing the five Ks is a sacred obligation for Sikhs. It is a serious matter, for example in a school setting, to forbid initiated Sikhs to wear or carry any of the items. This has been in the past a source of conflict; a wise school will seek a compromise which is comfortable to both parties.

## The Gurdwara.

The Gurdwara, sometimes called Sikh Temple, is extremely welcoming to outsiders. The main formalities are to remove shoes before entering and for both sexes to cover their heads.

The word Gurdwara or Gurudwara means the "door or house of the Guru". In the days of the human gurus, the Gurdwara would be the place where Sikhs could come to seek advice and guidance from their leader. Since the death of the 10th Guru, Guru Gobind Singh (1708), the Gurdwara has instead housed the Holy Book containing writings of Sikh Gurus and earlier spiritual leaders. The Gurdwara is still however set up as though a human Guru is in residence - that is the book is treated as the human gurus may have been in their day. The sacred book is called the **Guru Granth Sahib**. It is placed at the front of the prayer hall on a throne covered with a canopy. Its presence is dignified by the waving of the **Chauri**, made of Yak hair or similar material. Close by will be a kitchen and dining room, the latter called the **Langar**. The Langar or free kitchen is available to anyone inside or outside of the community. It symbolises the need to share and stresses that no-one should be too proud to share their food with other people. In many cities the free kitchen for down and outs is a form of Sikh service to the British community. The Gurdwara will also obtain a bedroom, often on an upper floor. The Guru Granth Sahib is reverentially placed on a four poster bed for the night after evening prayers and brought down again next morning in a similar way.

Outside, the Gurdwara can be recognised by the presence of a yellow flag [**nishan sahib**] on a flagpole. The flag is respected as a symbol of the political and religious freedom of the khalsa (the Sikh brotherhood). The flagpole will be covered with yellow material from top to bottom, bound around. This material is replaced once each year with due ceremony, which includes the washing of the flagpole. The flag contains the Sikh emblem, or **Khanda** consisting of a black circle or discus [*chakkar*] symbolising eternity), a single two edged sword [*khanda*] (symbolising the one God) and two single edged swords facing different directions [*kirpans*] (symbolising spiritual and temporal power).

The Gurdwara is the focal point of the Sikh community in an area. In Britain today, the main services are often on Sunday, for convenience and not for any doctrinal reason. The service will include formal and informal prayers, readings from the Guru Granth Sahib and hymn singing. There may also be a school to teach the children Punjabi, and there will certainly a free kitchen, encouraging Sikhs to share in a meal together. There will also be special services on festival days. Not all of the people who attend the Gurdwara will be initiated Sikhs. The men who are not are likely to have cut their hair, and be wearing a handkerchief instead of a turban on their heads. Little difference could probably be seen in women's dress, since often traditional dress is worn to the Gurdwara, and the hair may be worn long anyway: proportionately less women tend to be initiated than men. The ceremony of initiation is called the "Amrit ceremony". The Amrit is mixed from sugar and water, with appropriate prayers, and is sprinkled on the heads of the new initiates. Text books sometimes call this "baptism", but this seems to be an inappropriate designate for the ceremony. The Amrit ceremony goes back to the 10th Guru, Guru Gobind Singh who, in 1699, welded the Sikh people into a nation and a faith, promising mutual support by asking five beloved ones, disciples who had proved their loyalty to the point of the ultimate sacrifice. At this ceremony, the Sikh solemnly vows to live to the full the life of a Sikh.

### Decorum in the Gurdwara.

Sikhs, on entering the Gurdwara, will come to the front of the prayer hall and do obeisance by prostration to the Guru Granth Sahib. Children are taught this form of respect from a tender age. It is customary also to bring a small gift, often money, for the upkeep of the Gurdwara and for the poor. Non-Sikhs are expected to show respect for the Sacred Book, but Sikhs will not be offended if they do not prostrate

themselves. A respectful greeting (e.g. with hands together) will suffice. The Sikh will, through this obeisance, be directing their prayer and worship through the book to God.

Visitors should be aware that they should not turn their back upon the Sacred Book, nor sit with the soles of their feet pointing towards it - both signs of insult. Sikhs may well be tolerant if this happens accidentally, but would certainly notice it. Both men and women, on entering the Gurdwara, should cover their heads. This also applies to sitting in the free kitchen (Langar).

### **The Golden Temple: Darbar Sahib**

The Golden Temple is the tourist name for the Darbar Sahib or Harmandir. Darbar Sahib means the place where the Lord holds his Court and Harmandir means the House of God. For a long time the Sikhs had no holy places, no cities or shrines which they visited as Christians sometimes go to Jerusalem and Bethlehem, or Muslims make pilgrimage to Mecca. In fact, the Gurus always said "God lives inside us, why search for him in holy places?" In spite of this the fifth Guru, Arjan, decided to build the Harmandir. The foundation stone was laid by a Muslim, Main Mir, and the building was completed in 1604. However, the story goes much farther back than that.

Just over 400 years ago, in a place in the Punjab, not far from Amritsar, in a village called Goindwal, an emperor visited a guru. The emperor was the mighty Akbar the Great, Mogul ruler of most of India. He ruled India well and tried to keep the peace among his many millions of subjects with their various languages and different religions. He was a Muslim, and his queen was a Hindu. Christian Jesuits, and Sikhs frequently visited his court.

Emperor Akbar had heard of Guru Amar Das and on a journey to Lahore decided to pass through Goindwal in order to meet him. When he came to the Guru's home he was surprised to see a large number of men and women, outside, sitting in rows, shaded from the sun by trees or canopies, eating together. In India people of different castes will not always share food. It was strange to see brahmins eating with sudras or people of other religions, such as Muslim or Sikhs. The Emperor was told that eating together was the custom. The Guru taught that all men were brothers. Everyone was equal so everyone should share the same food and eat it in the same place. If the Emperor wished to see the Guru he would first have to sit on the ground with everyone else and share a meal! This he did. When he eventually did see the Guru, the Emperor told him how important he thought the *langar* (free kitchen) was. Travellers and poor people for miles around came to it and none went away hungry. He offered the Guru some local villages which he owned so that the taxes from them could provide food for the kitchen. The Guru refused. The langar must be supported by voluntary work, *sewa*. "Each day's collections are spent the same day, and for tomorrow I trust in God", said Amar Das. The Emperor then asked if he could give the land to the Guru's daughter. According to some Sikhs this offer was also refused, but others say that it was accepted and that the town which grew up on this land became Amritsar, the city of nectar. To provide a water supply and a pool for ritual washing the Guru's son-in-law Jetha dug a large tank. On an artificial island in the centre of this pool the Darbar Sahib or Golden Temple now stands.

The original building was destroyed in a war between the Sikhs and the Moguls but a number of things are known about it. It was about 40 metres (130 ft) by 30 metres (98 ft). Unlike a Hindu mandir (temple) it had four doors, facing in each direction, open to everyone, not one only to the east. Another difference from a Hindu mandir, and most Christian churches, was that to enter it one had to go down a few steps rather than climb some. No matter how lowly a person is he must become even more humble to meet God in the Darbar Sahib, Guru Arjan taught.

## The Scriptures: the Guru Granth Sahib

The tenth guru, Guru Gobind Singh would not appoint another human Guru after his death, but indicated that the scriptures, the *Adi Granth*, would be Guru in his place. He gave the Adi Granth the title Guru Granth Sahib.

The Adi Granth had been compiled in Pabjabi mainly from writings of various Gurus, although there are some passages written by Muslim and Hindu writers. The first collection was made in 1604 by Guru Arjan, and added to by the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh. Every copy should have 1430 pages, and contain 5,894 **shabads** (hymns) arranged into 31 **ragas** (musical measures). The book is shown the greatest respect, kept in an honoured place in the gurdwara, read on all occasions [either by a **granthi** or a volunteer], and carried in occasional procession through the streets.

## The Origins of Sikhism

Sikhism originated in the Punjab in India, an extensive plain through which flow six large rivers. Between this spreads good farmland. The original name of the area was Saptā Sindhva, or "the Land of Seven Seas". The seventh river, the River Sarasvati, dried up. The name *Panj-ab* (i.e. the Punjab) means the Land of Five Waters. The sixth river, the Indus, is not counted because it forms the boundary with the neighbouring land.

In climate, the Punjab is cold in winter and hot in summer. The time for spring and blossom is in February. Between April and June it is scorching hot and then the rains come, ushering in a time of great happiness and joy. The main produce is cane sugar, cotton and wheat, but we now can find rice, millet, maize, indigo and pulses. The Punjab is thus a rural state, covered with farming communities. A central forest used to be full of wildlife, but this has now been wiped out. Where the forest used to be is now desert, an all too common modern creation.

The beginning of civilisation in India was in or around the Punjab - the so-called Harappa culture at Mohenjodaro, a rich prehistoric civilisation. To the influence of Hinduism and Buddhism was added that of Islam, after the Punjab was conquered by Muslims from 647 A.D. onwards. This was in one of the earliest phases of Muslim expansion after the death of Muhammad. There was in addition a Mongol conquest in 1398. Therefore the Punjab is racially very mixed. It was also an area of constant conflict, since it formed a buffer against Afghanistan. We find in this area historically, the influence of Indian languages, philosophies and religious practices, Arabic, Persian and Turkish, and the religions of Islam and Zoroastrianism. There has always been a spirit of nationalism in the Punjab. The farming villages were linked through kinship and ruled by five elders. No central authority ever succeeded in harnessing them, and the spirit of freedom remained. The farmers, or Jats, were workers and warriors and tended to look down upon the Brahmins, the Hindu priests, as beggars; and on the Hindu Kshatriyas, or warriors as mercenaries. Throughout history, the Jat farmers had to defend their farms at any time against a host of enemies.

### The beginning of Sikhism.

"Not the ascetic way,  
But a life of truth and love  
Amid the world's temptations,  
Is the secret of spiritual life.

Put away thy pride.  
The essence of religion is humility,  
Service, sympathy.  
Not the yogi's garb and ashes,  
Not long prayers,  
Not recitations and self-torturings..."

"As fragrance dwells in a flower,  
And reflection in a mirror,  
So does God dwell in every soul;  
Seek him therefore, in thy self."

Guru Nanak (1469-1539)

In this interesting social and political situation, the major faiths were Hinduism and Islam.

" Sikhism was born out of wedlock between Hinduism and Islam after they had known each other for a period of 900 years, but once it had taken birth, it began to develop a personality of its own and in due course grew into a faith which had some semblance to Hinduism and some to Islam and yet had features that bore no resemblance to either" (Khushwant Singh, 1977, p.17).

Sikhism could never be identified with either Hinduism or Islam, and was not in any sense an attempt to combine the two. The stories of the first Sikh Guru, Guru Nanak, show him pointing out the weaknesses and fallacies of Hindus and Muslims alike. He complained that the heart or essence of a faith was too easily obscured by inessential trappings, such as rituals and customs, which might continue for their own sake and not for the sake of the meaning they once symbolised.

### **The Hindu background.**

The Hinduism underlying the teaching of Guru Nanak is not the Hinduism of the Brahmins but rather a personal philosophy of devotion (*Bhakti*) based on the poetry of the Vedas, the philosophy of the Upanishads, and the themes of the Epics (the Ramayana and the Mahabharata). This produced a much more emotional form of the faith, which at the time made a striking contrast with contemporary Buddhists and Jains.

Two important figures in the process of rebuilding Hindu doctrine in the face of Buddhists, Jains and Muslims, were Shankara (CE 800) and Ramanuja (CE 1016-1137). Shankara based his teaching on the Vedas. He advocated Monotheism, without images. God, to him was indefinable and all pervasive:

"O Lord, pardon my three sins. I have, in contemplation, clothed in form Thee who art formless. I have, in praise, described Thee who art ineffable, and in visiting temples I have ignored Thine omnipresence".

God therefore, according to Shankara should be described in non-personal terms. Ramanuja however, who followed and developed Shankara's teaching, thought of God in more personal terms, basing his teaching on the Krishna who appeared in the Bhagavad Gita. Nevertheless to him God is one, indescribable, the only reality. Absolute submission was demanded of worshippers.

In North India, Ramananda encouraged castes to mingle (the caste system was closely linked with the Brahmins) and also welcomed Muslims into his circle. Hymns from a number of Ramananda's disciples appear in the Adi Granth, the Sikh scriptures - Kabir (1440-1518); Dhanna; Pipa; Sain; Ravi Das.

Thus the Hinduism underlying the teaching of Guru Nanak is the doctrine of Bhakti, and not that of the Brahminical priests.

A dialogue between Hindus and Muslims began to emerge from the time of Ramananda. Kabir called himself "the child of Rama and Allah" - i.e. somebody influenced by both Hinduism and Islam. Born a Muslim, he was quite happy to worship also as a Hindu. He was against idols, and recognised the need for modern spiritual mentors (his mentor was Ramananda). He condemned the caste system, but preferred reincarnation to the Muslim of paradise. His hymns of praise were highly regarded. Kabir had many followers, but the doctrine seemed at this stage to be an intellectual exercise. Guru Nanak was remarkable not for the total novelty of his views but because these philosophies became his total way of life. Nanak was concerned with much more than an intellectual exercise.

### **The Influence of Islam.**

Islam had spread through India both through invasion and through more peaceable means. The battle for the heart of India was not won through conquest, but through the scholarly example of the Sufis who focused on the experience of God, seeking to abandon the self through total submission to God. The Sufis embraced other faiths through a process they called "the stringing together of hearts" (*Talif-i-Kulub*). They attracted the low caste Hindus particularly, because they genuinely raised their status. Many Hindus adopted Sufism, regarding the homes of Sufi saints as local shrines, and regarding Sufi masters as Gurus. This form of Sufism very closely resembled popular Hinduism.

In the 15th century, there was great political unrest. There was animosity between Hindus and Muslims, which polarised religion. The Muslim overlords became aggressors, while Hindus retreated into their old ways of idol worship, washing in holy rivers, caste marks and so on. Guru Nanak's teaching deeply criticised this polarisation, and criticised all aspects of both Islam and Hinduism which resulted from this. Two sayings of Nanak sum this up:

"The age is like a knife. Kings are butchers. Religion has taken wings and flown. In the dark night of falsehood I cannot see where the moon of truth is rising". (*Majh Ki Var*)

"Modesty and religion have disappeared as falsehood reigns supreme. The Muslim Mulla and the Hindu Pandit have resigned their duties, the devil reads the marriage vows. Praises of murder are sung, and people smear themselves with blood instead of saffron". (*Tilang*).

### **Guru Nanak.**

Burn up your love of possessions to make your ink,  
Let a pure mind be your paper,  
make love your pen, and your heart the writer.  
Write as God your teacher tells you; write his name and his praises.  
However far you go, God is there. However deep you dive, God is still there.  
He is absolutely great, and is beyond description.  
This is the writing you ought to learn.

Prayer of young Nanak.

Sikhism grew out of an Indian background from the 15th century C.E. Sikhism's founder was Guru Nanak (1469-1539), although the writings of earlier theologians/holy men such as Kabir are also treasured. The worship of one God was important in this strand of Hinduism, a view strengthened by Nanak's early education in Hindu and Muslim schools. For Sikhs, the concept of God is non-personal, and expressed particularly in the language of "truth". This is in line with the Hindu philosophical tradition. There is here an analysis of the question "What is God?": the answer is sought deep in the human soul rather than in any doctrine.

### **The Teaching of Guru Nanak 1469-1539.**

There are a number of stories about Nanak's life, mostly written some considerable time after his death. A clear picture emerges, but legends merge with fact resulting in a work of piety rather than a work of historiography. There are also many of Nanak's writings in the Sikh scriptures, the **Guru Granth Sahib** (once called the *Adi Granth*) so we can piece together Nanak's basic teaching. This is still the basic doctrine of Sikhs today, although their *practice* was formulated by the tenth guru, Guru Gobind Singh. Guru Nanak's influence is such that Sikhs regard Guru Gobind Singh as the tenth Guru Nanak (Guru Nanak X). The religious community that surrounded Nanak's has become the prototype of the Sikh community. The Guru's house is the prototype for the Sikh Temple, the *Gurdwara* (meaning the house or door of the Guru) - although today the human Guru has been replaced by the book, the Guru Granth Sahib.

1. **There is only One Supreme Reality:** Sat Kartar, "True Creator"; Sat Nam, "True Name". This is God, representing the principle of Truth. Nanak rejected belief in *avatars*, incarnations arguing that God could not become subject to decay and death. Nanak was therefore strongly monotheist.

2. **All people are equal**, regardless of caste, race, colour or sex. He encouraged people to worship together and reacted strongly against the view that one person could pollute another. He therefore insisted that all people worshipping as Sikhs should be prepared to eat together (something that rarely happened where caste divisions were strong): his free communal kitchens were (and are) regarded as a vital part of worship. (This same view of caste was an important part of the Hindu Bhakti tradition long before Nanak: in Bhakti terms today caste is a social evil and not a religious obligation). In Sikh worship today, a sweetmeat, *Karah prashad*, is distributed to all worshippers for the same reason.

In a male orientated society, Nanak insisted that women be accorded full respect and dignity. Sikh women are able to participate fully and lead worship in the Gurdwara. Work in the *langar*, communal kitchens, is deliberately shared between men and women.

3. **Any religious path is right if it leads to God.** Both Hinduism and Islam could be vehicles for the worship of God's name - but either faith could equally be a hindrance if the external trappings are seen as ends in themselves. The ultimate aim of religion is the unity and unification of all humanity. The first words Nanak spoke after a mystical experience which served as his call to mission (not his call to faith - this was established long before) were "There is neither Hindu nor Musselman [=Muslim]" - neither path *in itself* is adequate. The desire for God and Truth is the central aim; labels are unimportant. The name Sikh simply means "disciple" [of the Guru]: although there have been Gurus on earth the *Sat Guru*, "True Guru", is God.

4. **Ritual and images are empty** - traditional customary forms of behaviour which tend to divide people and hinder or limit understanding. God should be in the heart; and *sincerity* is of fundamental importance. The mind should always be on God. Truth and true living are essential: "Truth above all, Above truth, truthful conduct".

Ritual without truth is empty; therefore if we are committed to truth, ritual is not necessary.



In Sikhism today, the same applies but Gurdwara worship may seem ritualistic. Generally, the acts are symbolic, and do express some aspect of "truth" that Sikhs would identify. The passing around of the *kara prashad* to eat is a symbolic way of demonstrating the worshipper's belief in equality. The treatment of the book, the Guru Granth Sahib, as a human Guru is a reminder of the human origin of the revelation of truth, and of the deep respect the worshippers owes to the book: it is *as if* Nanak himself were present. In general, however, Sikh worship is informal.

5. **Service** to others, love and almsgiving are vital. Violence, oppression and selfishness are always wrong. We should learn to control the sins of ego, lust, anger, greed, attachment and pride. Yet inside each of us is a kernel of good waiting to be developed. Sikhs today open their free kitchens to down and outs - to anyone who wants or needs a free meal. Following the principle of non-violence, Sikhs tend to be vegetarians.

6. **Priests are unnecessary**, since everyone can find God in the heart. The Sikh path, (*sabaji*) is one of personal devotion and discipline. - not an authoritarian system of dos and don'ts, and not a demand for ascetic deprivations. Prayer and meditation are times of deep personal communication with the One Reality, God. Sikhism is therefore concerned, as is Bhakti Hinduism, with personal devotion to God.

7. **Purity** is in our thoughts, inside us. The external world does not pollute - e.g. through contact with the dead or with untouchables. Only inner sins pollute - greed, pride, lust etc.). The ascetic life, withdrawing from the pollutions of the world, is thus not a useful path; although Nanak aimed at the *discipline* of the ascetic whilst remaining within society, being with and interacting with other people.

8. **Work hard and honestly.** The principle of service should control one's personal attitudes. Do not say one thing and do another. Nanak, despite his missionary work, based his life around his family to show that religion should be an important part of family life.

9. **Everyone needs a guru** - as a guide to salvation and to prevent us from straying from the Truth. Otherwise "truth" would become an entirely individual and self-centred, subjective notion justifying any behaviour at all. God is the Sat Guru, "True Guru. The human guru is not a god and should not be worshipped: rather they are servants of God.

10. **Liberation.** Pain and death are not to be feared. trust in God drives our fear. As in Hinduism, people are subject to a cycle of rebirths: the ultimate aim is to gain liberation, enlightenment or salvation when our individual flame becomes absorbed by the great eternal light.

### **Guru Nanak - The First Sikh Guru**

Nanak was born in Talwandi (the Punjab) in 1469). The Punjab was an area in which Hindus and Muslims naturally mixed. The historical material on Nanak is mostly poetry and hymns, with little biographical material, but there were four biographies called Janam Sakhis (Life-evidences) dating from much later. He is revered as the founder of the Sikh faith and the first teacher ("Guru"), but not worshipped as God.

His father, Kalyan Chand (or "Kalu") kept tax records for a Muslim official, and had a smallholding. His mother was called Tripta, his sister Nanaki and his brother Lahu. Stories tell how, as a baby, he had a marvelous horoscope: "He will worship and acknowledge but One Formless Lord and teach others to do so". By the age of 7 months, he could sit in the lotus position like a yogi.

At school at seven years old, Nanak wrote an acrostic poem about "learning" and was noted by Hindus and Muslims alike for his wisdom. With a Hindu teacher, he learnt Sanskrit and the Hindu scriptures.

Moving to the Muslim school when he was nine, Nanak learnt Arabic and Persian, and soon began to write poetry in Persian.

He was born into the Kshatriya (warrior/ruler) caste, but came to despise the whole caste system. At eleven, a story tells, he was forced into the Hindu "sacred thread" ceremony, in which high caste boys put a thread over their shoulders as a mark of initiation into their caste. Eleven year old Nanak refused, saying

"How can you differentiate between people by these badges.  
It is by their actions that you should categorise them!  
Let compassion be your cotton  
Spin it into the yarn of contentment  
Give it knots of continence and the twist of truth...  
The thread so made will neither snap nor become soiled  
Blest is the man...who wears such a thread around his neck".

As a boy he looked after the herd, and was well known for his devotion to prayer and meditation. One day, during his meditations, he is said to have allowed his animals to stray into a neighbour's field where they damaged the wheat. The neighbour came round to complain, but on examination no damage could be found. The area is now a shrine, the Kiara Sahib or "holy stretch/field". Another shrine is a tree under which Nanak slept: to protect him from the sun, the shadow did not move with the sun but continued to protect him.

At sixteen he fasted so fiercely that he became very ill. All he would say was "I have turned my heart into a temple".

He was given 20 rupees to buy provisions to sell at market, but he met a group of holy men on the way. Spending all of his money on providing food for them, he returned home empty handed to an uncertain reception. His close friend through his various "adventures" was a singer called Mardana who set his poems to music.

He married at 19, a girl called Sulakhni and they had two sons, Sri Chand and Lakhmidas. He was already considered to be a teacher of some importance, and he had a number of disciples.

One morning, when he failed to return, his disciples searched the river and the banks, to no avail. He reappeared after three days, making no comment about where he had been. He would say only:

"There is neither Hindu or Muslim so whose path shall I follow? I shall follow God's path. God is neither Hindu nor Muslim and the path which I follow will be God's path".

Later stories told how he was escorted into the presence of God himself and was given a cup of nectar (amrit). God said:

"This is the cup of the adoration of God's name. Drink it. I am with you. I bless you and raise you up. Whoever remembers you will enjoy my favour. Go, rejoice in my name and teach others to do so. I have bestowed the gift of my name upon you. Let this be your calling".

The first poem that Nanak was said to have composed after this is the "Mul Mantar".

There is One God, Eternal truth is His Name,  
Maker of all things, existing in all things,  
Fears nothing, at enmity with nothing,  
beyond time, not begotton, being of His own being,

By the grace of the Guru (Teacher=God) made known to men.

Nanak was given the title "Guru" from this time on, but he recognised that God was the true Guru.

He travelled widely, according to the traditions, pointing to a sincerity in worship that lay beneath Islam and Hinduism, and which ultimately made ritual and the external trappings of religion totally pointless. He made four major journeys

- eastwards beyond Bengal (1500-1510);
- south to Sri Lanka and back via the west coast (1510-14);
- north to Tibet and beyond (1514-16);
- and west to Mecca, Medina, Baghdad, Tehran and Kabul (1517-22).

One day he went to the River Ganges, where the pilgrims were splashing water westwards towards their ancestors. Nanak splashed eastwards, and when questioned by the incredulous pilgrims, he replied that he was watering his farm 200 miles away. As they taunted him, he replied that the water was as likely to reach his farm as it was to reach their ancestors.

Nanak fought for the respect and the rights of the poor and outcast. In Saidpur he decided to stay not with the rich who had invited him, but with a poor carpenter of low caste called Lalo. The townspeople were deeply offended, no more than the local leader, Malik Bhago. When Nanak refused to come to his feast, he sent men to bring him. On his arrival, he castigated him for eating in a low-caste house, but Nanak replied, "I eat what God sends. There are no castes in God's eyes".

Nanak picked up a piece of Lalo's bread in one hand, and a sweetmeat of Malik's in the other. As he squeezed, blood came out of the sweetmeat, but milk flowed out of the coarse bread. Malik's wealth and power had been based on oppression and on the sufferings of others, but Lalo in his poverty was pure.

Nanak and his friend Mardana travelled throughout the East teaching this message of sincerity and truth, the equality of all people and the worship of the One True God.

For the third period of his life (1520-1539) he lived in Kartarpur, on a piece of land given by a disciple. He began a small community which included dwellings, a place of worship and a hostel for visitors. He became a householder again, and was recognised as guru. Rejecting all ritual and the Hindu deities, he composed his own prayers and poems which were later collected into the Sikh sacred scriptures, called the *Granth* or the Guru Granth Sahib.

He died in 1539, but not before he had appointed a disciple, Lehna, to be the second Sikh guru. He renamed him Angad, saying that he possessed Nanak's spirit and authority: "for my spirit will live on in your body".

In all there were ten gurus, the others being

- Amar Das (1552-74),
- Ram Das (1574-81),
- Arjan (1581-1606),
- Hargobind (1606-44),
- Har Rai (1644-61),
- Har Krishan (1661-4),
- Tegh Bahadur (1664-75) and
- Gobind Singh (1675-1708).

After this, the book of their writings, now called the Guru Granth Sahib, took the place of the human guru.

**The Japji**  
**Poem of Guru Nanak 1469-1539**

**(The Mool Mantar).** God is only one. His name is true. He is the creator, pervading all things. He is without fear. He has no enmity. He never dies. He is beyond births and deaths. He is self illuminated. He is realised by the grace of God, the True Guru.

**(Japu).** Repeat his name.

He was true in the beginning. He was true when the ages began and has always been true. He is also true now. Nanak says that he will certainly be true in times to come.

1. We cannot comprehend God by thoughts, even when we contemplate him hundreds of thousands of times. We cannot achieve peace of mind even if we make a vow of silence, totally absorbed by God's love. Our hunger for worldly goods will never be eliminated either by keeping fasts or by collecting riches. We may have hundreds of thousands of clever thoughts, yet not even one of these wise thoughts will accompany us to the next world. How can we mortals attain truth? How can the veil of falsehood be removed? Nanak says that this can only be achieved by obeying the will of God ingrained within us.

2. God's will cannot be described. By His order everything was created. By God's will life itself was created, and honour was introduced. By His will we are what we are, and we experience what we experience. By His will some receive blessing, but others receive endless transmigration. All are subject to His will and none is beyond its authority. Nanak says that if we were to comprehend his will, we would be purged of our self-centredness.

3. Who has the power to sing and define God's power? Who is able to sing of the grace of God? Who is able to sing of the virtues and excellencies of God? Who is able to sing and describe God with knowledge and scholarship? Who is able to sing about God the creator who then reduces life to dust? Who is able to sing about God who takes away life, and re-creates it? Who is able to sing about God as one who is far away? Who is able to sing about God who sees us face to face? There is no end to the ways he has been described by his worshippers. Millions have described Him in millions of ways. God the giver gives eternally; we the receiver take for granted what we receive. Ever since time began, people have subsisted on His generosity. God directs the path of the universe by His will. God, the disinterested, enjoys it blissfully.

4. God is true and his word is true. People beg in their prayers, and the giver gives his gifts. What should we offer so that we may see Him? What words should we say to obtain His love? Meditate on God in the dewy hours of the morning. Concentrate on the true name and on his greatness. By our good deeds, we achieve our human body, but we achieve salvation through His grace. Nanak says, that we should recognise God as all-pervading.

5. God is immaculate, free from the material world and self-existent. He is neither established nor created. Those who serve God obtain honour. Nanak says " Therefore sing of Him, the excellent treasure of virtue". Sing God's praises and keep love for Him in your hearts. In this way you will obtain joy, and dismiss pain. The words of God, our Guru or teacher, are divine, and lie beneath our knowledge of God. By following God's word, God is realised as the one who pervades everything and everywhere. God the Guru combines in Himself Shiva, Vishnu, Brahma (the creator, maintainer and destroyer) and the goddesses Parvati (energy), Lakshmi (wealth) and Saraswati (learning, wisdom). Yet, even if I knew of God's expanse, I would not have the words to describe Him: He is ineffable, beyond human language. God has made one thing clear to me. There is only one Giver, whom I should not forget.

6. I would bathe on pilgrimage, if I could win his love and grace in this way. But what use is bathing and pilgrimage unless I please God? In this whole visible created universe, without good deeds (karma)

who has got anything? When one listens to God's word, and meditates on Him, His mind becomes filled with gems, jewels and rubies. God has made one thing clear to me. There is only one Giver, whom I should not forget.

7. Were we to live hundreds nay thousands of years, be known on nine continents, have a great name and fame, if we do not earn God's grace we will not win favour. We will be treated like an insignificant worm among worms, and be regarded as a sinner. Nanak says, God bestows virtue on the non-virtuous and gives more virtue to the true. No-one can bestow any excellence on Him.

8. By listening to the in-dwelling word of God, we can achieve wisdom, saintliness, courage and contentment. He understands the real nature of the world, the power that supports it. He knows the islands, the continents, the upper and nether regions, and conquers the fear of death and rebirth. His worshippers are always happy. By listening to the name of God, their sufferings and sins are wiped out. By listening to the in-dwelling name or word of God, a mortal can status of Gods, a sinner begins to praise God, the secrets of the body and of nature are revealed, and the essence of all the scriptures is found. Nanak says God's devotees are always happy, by listening to the name of God, their sufferings and sins are wiped out.

10. By listening to the in-dwelling name or word of God, we obtain truth, contentment and enlightenment, such purification as might be obtained at 68 places of pilgrimage, and scholastic honour. And the mind easily concentrates in meditation. Nanak says, God's devotees are always happy. By harkening in the name of God, their sufferings and sins are wiped out.

11. By listening to the in-dwelling name of God, we can reach the depths of the ocean of virtue and obtain learning, holiness, and loyalty. The spiritually blind find salvation, the unfathomable lord becomes fathomable. Nanak says, God's devotees are always happy. By listening to the name of God, their sufferings and sins are wiped out.

12. The mental state of the one whose mind is obedient to God cannot be described. Anyone trying to do so will regret his inadequacy. There is no pen, paper or scribe to describe it, or to comprehend the mental state of such a worshipper. The name of God is pure. In obeying God, we realise this.

13. By obeying God, wisdom, consciousness and understanding are acquired. It brings the inner knowledge of all spheres of the universe. It takes away the fear of death and transmigration, and achieves salvation.

14. By obeying God, our path is not obstructed. We will depart this world with honour and dignity. We are not mislead, but love truth.

15. One who obeys God reaches the door of salvation, and saves his family. He does not sink, but saves his disciples also. He does not beg.

16. The saintly, approved and honoured by God, look beautiful in God's present. Their focus is constantly fixed on God. But that does not mean that one can form an idea of God's expanse, for the Creator's work is uncountable. The bull, spoken of in ecology, is in effect righteousness which itself stems from mercy. Righteousness, patience and harmony maintain the balance of the universe. The one who understands this is true, and must learn of their reality symbolised by the bull. Beyond this earth, there are many more worlds. What is the power which sustains them? The ever-flowing pen of God keeps a record of all life, all names and all things. Should any mortal be able to write such an account, how massive such a volume would be. How could it describe God's might and harmony? How could it estimate His grace? He created the universe through one word from which a hundred thousand currents of creation began to flow. What power does anyone have to describe God's creation? What power to

praise it in appropriate words? Whatever pleases God is a good thing, thou eternal formless lord pervading all things without fear.

17. There are on earth many who pray to God, many religious practices, many scriptures and leaders of scriptures, many who have withdrawn from the world, many seeking knowledge and wisdom, many generous benefactors, many who defend their nation, many who vow silence, and many entranced in devotion. What power have I to describe their creation? What power have I to praise it? Whatever pleases God is good, thou eternal formless lord pervading all things without fear.

18. Equally many on earth are absolute fools, thieves and frauds, tyrants, cut-throats and murderers, sinners and liars, obscene perverts, slanderers and traitors. What power have I, Nanak, to describe thy creation? What power have I to praise it? Whatever pleases God is good, thou eternal formless lord pervading all things without fear.

19. Further, in the universe, there are many places and their names, spheres, beyond what we know. When we say many, there is no way we can comprehend his infinity, and his name. We can only use words to utter his name, to learn of knowledge, and his virtues, to write and speak of him, to describe our relationship with God. If God cannot be described in words, what he wills that we comprehend. Whatever he has created is a manifestation of his name, his spirit. He is imminent in his creation, pervading all things. There is no place without him. What power have I to describe thy creation? What power have I to praise it? Whatever pleases God is good, thou eternal formless lord pervading all things without fear.

20. If one's bodies or clothes become dirty, we wash them. When the mind is defiled by sin, it is cleansed through meditation. Whether a saint or a sinner we do not become so merely by calling ourselves so. It depends on our deeds. What one says, so does one reap. In accordance to God's will, either one is saved or transmigrates.

21. Pilgrimages, penances, compassion and charity can give us a little honour. If we listen to the indwelling word of God, and obey and cherish God, the mind itself becomes a pilgrimage and cleanses impurity. All virtues come from Thee, O God, I have none. Without virtue, there can be no devotion. Bless me, O Lord and accept my prayer, O God, the true, the beautiful, the true Brahma, in whom all ecstasy resides.

What was the time, the date, the day, the season, and the month, when the universe was created? Neither Hindu nor Muslims scholars reveal this. Nor have any Yogi or other person discovered the date. Only the Creator himself knows when he did create the world. How shall I speak of God? How shall I praise thee? How shall I describe thee? How shall I know thee? Everyone pretends to know of thee, O Lord, each bolder than the other in his claims. God is great, so is his name, what he ordains comes to be. Anyone pretends to know of God's works, that would not befit his spiritual advancement.

22. There are hundreds of thousands of upper and nether regions. People have grown weary of searching for Creation's limits. The Hindu Vedas says, as also do thousands of saints, 18 Puranas, and the Semitic texts, that the source and principle of all creation is only one God. If one could count his creation, he could write an account of it, that his creation is beyond count. Nanak says only that God is great. Only he himself knows how great he is.

23. Worshippers worship God but cannot comprehend his greatness. Just as the rivers and streams fall into the sea, and lose their identity, but know not its extent. If kings and emperors, whose dominions are larger than the oceans, and whose wealth is piled up higher than the mountains, are less than the lowliest creature (worm or ant) which does not forget God in his heart.

24. Countless are the the praises, the praisers, the works and the gifts of God. God's power of seeing and hearing is limitless. Limits of the motive in God's mind are unknown. Limits of his creation cannot be ascertained. It is not possible to know God's beginning or end. The worshipper longs to understand his limits, but these cannot be known. The more we describe, the more is yet to be found. God is great, and highly exalted. Higher still is his name and his Spirit, the highest of the high. Only someone equally exalted as God could come to know the high God. God alone knows how great he is. Nanak says that the merciful God showers gifts by his kind look.

27. God is ever eternal and true, true Lord, Universal Spirit. He is, and shall be, and shall ever remain. He made various things of different colours, descriptions and species. he beholds his work which attests of his greatness. He does what pleases him, he is not subject to someone elses orders. He is the king, emperor, supreme sovereign, all remains within his discipline.

28. Wear the earrings of contentment, make modest besmear your body. Make the knowledge of death your patched coat, a chaste mind your living, and the faith your staff. Make the unity of mankind your first principle, the highest aspiration of you, and the control over the passions of mind as conquest over material world. Hail, all Hail to thee O God, primal being, infinite without beginning, without end, who remains the same through all ages.

29. Make knowledge (of God) your food, compassion your storehouse, and the beat in every heart your conch. God himself is supreme, who controls all. Riches and occult powers lead astray. The rule of union and separation regulates the world. According to man's deeds, he gets his share. Hail, all Hail to thee O God, primal being, infinite without beginning, without end, who remains the same through all ages.

30. It is said in myth that Maya, the mythical goddess, in conjunction with God, gave birth to three famous children. One of them was Brahma, creator of the world. The second is Vishnu, who sustains the world. The third is Shiva, who is the destroyer of the world. But in reality, it is God alone whose orders prevail. He directs them as he wishes. It is wonderful that God sees them, as they cannot see him. Hail, all Hail to thee O God, primal being, infinite without beginning, without end, who remains the same through all ages...

38. Let chastity be your smithy, patience the smith, understanding the anvil, knowledge your tools, discipline the bellows, austerity the fire, devotion the pot, immortality the mould. Thus in the mint of truth, the Name/Word is coined. Those upon who God glances, and find acceptance, succeed in their toil. They, by his grace, achieve salvation.

### **Final Sermon.**

Air is the enlightener (guru), water the fertilizer, and the vast earth the great productive mother. Truth and falsehood are the two nurses in whose lap people perform their role in the world. Good and bad deeds are brought before the God of justice. According to their actions, some are judged nearer to him but others are far from him. Those who have meditated on God's name, the Universal Spirit, their toil is over. They will go with brilliant faces, and many more will be saved along with them.

### **Sikh Morning Prayer.**

There is one God. He is the supreme truth. He, the Creator, is without fear and without hate. He is always with us, is everywhere in the universe. He is not born as we are, nor does he die. By his grace we can worship him. Before time itself there was Truth. When time began to run its course, He was the Truth. Even now he is the Truth; and Truth shall win the victory for ever.

**God our Creator.**

God has his prayer-mat in every region; He has his store-room in every kingdom. To every human being he gives out their share for now and for ever. God, the Maker of the world, looks on his own creation. O Nanak, he has made truth itself, for he himself is true. Hail, we praise you! You are first; you are pure! Without beginning, without end! You are the one and only God and are for ever.

**The word.**

By hearing the word, people achieve wisdom, courage, contentment  
By hearing the word, people learn of the earth and the power that supports it.  
By hearing the word, people conquer their fear of death.  
By hearing the word, people are raised to godliness.  
By hearing the word, one learns of truth and wisdom.  
By hearing the word, the need for pilgrimage disappears.  
O Nanak! The word is so wonderful to the worshippers  
Those that hear it do not fear death.  
Their sorrows and their guilt disappear.

**Guru Angad (born 1504, Guru 1539 - 52)**

Angad was a servant of Nanak called Lehana who Nanak chose as his successor because of his humble discipleship. There are stories of a test in which Guru Nanak's elder son, Shri Chand, refused to fetch a jug which had fallen into the ditch, as the ditch was polluting but Lehana fetched and washed the jug without being asked. Other legendary accounts relate how Angad was not deflected from following Nanak even by gold and silver coins, and jewels which appeared on the path in front of them. Another relates how Nanak told them to eat a corpse on a funeral bier, and when Angad went to do so he found Nanak under the shroud.

Whatever the story of succession, Angad was a humble man noted for meditation and abstinence. He was generous, wise and comforting, with a particular love for children. 62 or 63 hymns of his are found in the Adi Granth, and he is said to have collected hymns of Guru Nanak together for the first time. He encouraged Bala, a disciple of Nanak, to write his master's life story (called a *Janam sakhi*). Angad therefore played a big part in the development of Punjabi literature. The first Punjabi alphabet contained thirty-five letters, found in an acrostic of Nanak. This new Punjabi script was called Gurmukhi, meaning "from the Guru's mouth". Neither the life story nor the compilation still exists. It may, however, have been used by later compilers.

**The third Guru, Guru Amar Das (born 1479, Guru 1552-74)**

Amar Das became a disciple of Angad having been introduced by his nephew's wife, Angad's daughter. He was chosen at the age of seventy-three, to be the new Guru, even though Shri Chand Nanak's son wanted the position for himself. Amar Das organised the fete well, composed a large number of hymns, 907 of which are found in the Adi Granth. The collection of his hymns in Punjabi proved to be very popular, and helped to break the power of the Brahmins in the area. This in turn caused a certain amount of bitterness and persecution. His village of Goindwal grew into a town, and he constructed there a water tank with 84 steps leading down to it. He wanted this to be a place of pilgrimage for Sikhs. He divided the Sikh communities into twenty-two parishes (manjis) with leaders called Sangatias. There were also Masands, agents who collected offerings for the new faith.



He continued Nanak's social and political actions. He acted against **purdah**, the seclusion of women and even appointed women to undertake preaching work. He advocated monogamy, marriages between different castes, and the re-marriage of widows. He forbade **sati** [or **sutti**], the burning of widows on their dead husbands funeral pyre. A number of stories relate meetings between the Emperor Akbar and the third Guru in Goindwal. One is typical. When the Emperor arrived, he was asked to sit with the other visitors and share a meal. The custom of langar was explained to him that people should first eat together to emphasize their equality before they talked together. Akbar was to develop a policy of religious dialogue, and was of considerable help to the Sikhs. The langar has since that time been the means of emphasizing that all people are equal, despite caste differences. The third Guru emphasized and developed a policy and practice first started by Nanak himself.

#### **The fourth Guru. Guru Ram Das (born 1534, Guru 1574-81)**

The name means slave of God (Ram): he was the son-in-law of Amar Das named Jetha. He is best remembered as the founder of the city of Amritsar, where now stands the Golden Temple. Tradition has it that the land on which it was built was a gift from the Emperor Akbar. Amritsar became prosperous very quickly, since it was well placed for trade. It also became a major centre of the festivals of Baisakhi and Diwali. The building of the temple, the Darbar Sahib turned Amritsar into a pilgrimage city. Ram Das continued social reforms and introduced hymns and prayers into wedding and funeral services. By 1581, the Sikh community was small and focused particularly in the Punjab.

#### **The fifth Guru, Guru Arjan (born 1563, Guru 1581-1606)**

The support of Emperor Akbar for the Sikhs continued, but was diverted temporarily by the claims of Prithi Chand, Arjan's brother, to be the true Guru. The period was therefore marked by political machinations. Arjan was the first Guru to have been born a Sikh, and had been carefully prepared for his role. Arjan travelled for five years, winning many converts from the peasant-farmers. The Sikh community (Panth) was taxed at 10%, largely to undertake buildings and reservoirs. Arjan was responsible for the building of the Golden Temple, the Harmandir at Amritsar. This included a large artificial lake. It had a doorway in each side, to show that it was open to all four castes, and that it was open to the North, South, East and West. Its platform was lower than the surrounding area so that worshippers had to step downwards in order to worship, itself a symbol of humility. Since the rival Guru, Prithi Chand compiled a collection of so-called Sikh hymns, including his own compositions, Guru Arjan produced in 1595, the official Sikh collection known as the Adi Granth, which was in 1604 placed in the Golden Temple.

The city of Amritsar was developed by Guru Arjan: his name means "pool of nectar". He also built other cities - Taran Taran, Kartarpur ("city of the creator") and Sri Hargobindpur. Akbar died, and Jehangir became Emperor. The authorities were now against the Sikhs and particularly against Arjan. Arjan was captured and tortured, under the excuse that he was aiding a rebellion by Jehangir's son. He was allowed to wash in the stream, but his body was so weakened that the current carried him away so he drowned.

For Sikhs, Arjan had died a martyr. His death became a turning point. In order to survive, there had to be a call to arms for their own self-defence.

#### **The sixth Guru, Guru Hargobind, (born 1595, Guru 1606-44)**

Hargobind organised the army, on occasions secretly when politics demanded. He also restored the *dharmshalas* (i.e. the Gurdwaras) which were connected with the earlier Gurus.

He produced a flag which later became the flag of Sikhism, the Nishan Sahib.

He began to use the kettle drum, which eventually became installed in each Gurdwara.

### **The seventh Guru, Guru Har Rai (born 1630, Guru 1644-61)**

Har Rai became famous for catching animals instead of hunting them, and growing herbs for medicine. He was sometimes called the tender-hearted, but he suffered the loss of most of his children, and was strenuous in battle when necessary.

### **The eighth Guru, Guru Har Krishan (born 1656, Guru 1661-04)**

The eighth Guru was only five years old when he succeeded, and soon died of smallpox.

### **The ninth Guru, Guru Teghbadur (born 1621, Guru 1664-75)**

The name of the ninth Guru means brave sword, and he did a great deal to support the Sikhs at a very demanding time. He was more concerned, however, with feeding the hungry (he therefore had the nickname Deghbadur, the brave cooking pot). He had opposition to his position at the beginning, but this disappeared as pressure grew from the Mughal authorities, who began to persecute the Sikhs. He died a martyr, defending the principle of religious liberty.

### **The tenth Guru, Gobind Singh (born 1666, Guru 1675-1708)**

The career of the tenth guru was decisive in Sikhism and gave Sikhism the format and structure that it still has today. He realised that the annihilation of the Sikh people was a distinct possibility, and that only communal self-defence would help the faith preserve itself. As the occasion to weld the people into a fighting force he chose the festival of Baisakhi 1699. He wanted people who would show the ultimate loyalty to him and to his cause. The story goes that he asked for volunteers who would be prepared to give up their heads for him. When at last some people responded, he took them into a tent so that it appeared to the people present that they had in fact been executed. He asked for more volunteers. Four followed the first, making five in all. These five are called the panj pyares, or the five beloved ones. Eventually it was revealed that their lives had not been taken, but the blood was that of a goat. The five were given amrit (nectar) made from water and sugar prepared in an iron bowl and stirred with a sword. This was the first Amrit ceremony. These five were the first members of the Khalsa (or the pure ones). They made several vows, including abstinence from alcohol and tobacco. The men would call their name Singh (meaning lion) and the women would take the name Kaur (meaning princess). This was the point from which members of the Sikh Khalsa would wear the five 'Ks' , symbols which still represent faithfulness to the Sikh tradition -

- Kesh, uncut hair
- Kangha, a comb
- Kara, a steel bangle
- Kirpan, a sword or dagger
- Kaccha, short trousers.

New members of the Sikh community today still take part in the Amrit ceremony and make similar vows. It is open to both men and women. The Khalsa wear trained to fight, albeit defensively, to protect fellow Sikhs from persecution and death. This action was largely responsible for saving the Sikh nation.

Towards the end of his life, the tenth Guru realised that he should not appoint a successor. There was a danger that the Sikhs would become no more than a petty kingdom, of which there were many in India. He wished the sacred book the Granth Sahib to take the place of the living Guru, and it is said that he placed five coins and a coconut in front of a copy of it, symbolically making it his successor. Not only would the book become the Guru, but so did the community who interpreted the book. This is the Guru Panth, the members of the Sikh community in the presence of the holy book. The tenth Guru was also a writer, but did not include any of his works in the holy book. They were collected separately. His works were collected early in the eighteenth century in the Dasam Granth, or the book of the tenth Guru.

After the tenth Guru, the sacred book, and the community played the role that the Gurus had played historically. Overall however, Sikhs believe that God is the true Guru and his guidance should be sought by all who serve him.

So, on the decree of Guru Gobind Singh, no successor was appointed and supreme authority on earth rested in the sacred book, the Guru Granth Sahib. Sikhs today undergo an amrit ceremony which marks their entry into the Sikh community. This is equally open to men and women. From this point they vow to keep the five Ks and other demands of Sikhism. If they fail to keep them, a rededication is necessary - at which sincerity would be the central issue. Not all Sikhs join the khalsa in this way. Only those men who do are entitled to wear a turban; others tend to cover their heads in Gurdwara with a handkerchief. The turban is not one of the Ks but has become a central symbol for Sikhism. Women can wear turbans, and a few do - but mostly they cover their heads in other ways.

## Sikh Festivals

There are two major categories of Sikh Festivals - anniversaries of the births or deaths of the gurus (GURPURBS); and fairs when, in the olden days, Sikhs used to gather around their guru (MELAS). *Gurpurbs* include special services in the Gurdwara, which may involve a complete forty-eight hour reading of the Guru Granth Sahib, which is called *akhand path*. In India and the Punjab, there are likely to be in addition street processions.

### Gurpurbs

#### 1. **Guru Nanak's birthday (November)**

Nanak, 1469 to 1539, was brought up as Hindu in a Muslim empire. He advocated true spirituality, unimpeded by ritual and dogma. His birthday celebration involves an *akhand Path*, a full service in the Gurdwara, and in India a carnival procession, with decorations, free food and drinks. The flavour of this celebration also takes place in England.

#### 2. **The martyrdom of Guru Arjan (April/May)**

Guru Arjan built the Golden Temple at Amritsar and published the first collection of Sikh scriptures. He was tortured and executed for plotting against the Mughal Emperor, a charge which have always strongly denied. In India, Sikhs hold a procession in what is the hottest month, and distribute free drinks.

#### 3. **Martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur (December)**

Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth Guru (1621-1675) was beheaded by the Mughals in Delhi, where this festival is especially celebrated, for refusing to convert to Islam. For Sikhs, this stands for the right of all individuals to practice their own faith in a spirit of freedom and toleration.

#### 4. **Birthday of Guru Gobind Singh (January)**

Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Guru (1666-1708) became Guru at the age of nine when Tegh Bahadur was executed. He organised the Sikhs in a time of great persecution, losing all four of his sons in the process. Two, aged five and eight, were buried alive and two died in battle as teenagers. The tenth Guru laid the foundations for the Sikh community today (called the Khalsa) and gave the Sikh worship its modern form, with a sacred book replacing the human gurus. On his birthday there are religious services, games and sports.

#### 5. **Birthday of Guru Har Krishan (June/July)**

The eighth Guru (1656-1664) died of smallpox at the age of eight. A Gurdwara was built on the site, from which holy water is taken to protect worshippers from illness.

#### 6. **The birthday of Guru Ram Das (September/October)**

### **Melas or Fairs.**

#### 1. **Baisakhi (April 13)**

Baisakhi is the most important Mela which counts as the Sikh New Year. It originated as the spring wheat harvest festival. Its main historic reference is to the particular happenings of 13 April 1699 at Anandpur when Guru Gobind Singh united the people into a fighting force to resist persecution. A ceremony involving the sprinkling of *Amrit* to initiate Sikhs into the brotherhood was initiated. The Sikh solemn vows date from this ceremony. From this point also, Sikh men take the name of Singh (lion), and Sikh women take the name Kaur (princess).

A more recent historical reference is to the massacre of villages at Jallianwala Bagh at Baisakhi 1919 when the British General Dyer ordered his troops to fire on the villages, killing 379 people.

Baisakhi celebrations today involve Gurdwara services, a meal, social events, poetry, music and dancing. The Sikh flag (*Nisan Sahib*) is renewed and the flagpole washed (usually in yoghurt). On this occasion, sweet rice is eaten.

#### 2. **Diwali (October/November)**

This is a traditional Indian festival but given a new meaning by Sikhs. The sixth Guru, Guru Hargobind (1595-1644) was imprisoned for conspiracy, but released on Diwali and welcomed home with the traditional *diya* lamps. He refused to leave prison unless fifty-two Hindu princes were also released. He was allowed to take as many Hindu princes as could hold onto his cloak - so he had an extremely long cloak made with attached tassels so that all fifty-two could hold onto them. In the Sikh home, Diwas and lights are lit, and there is a particular illuminated ceremony at the Golden Temple. Sikhs will have special meals, sweets, new clothes, family celebrations, bonfires and fireworks.

#### 3. **Hola Mohalla (February/March)**

This is the Sikh equivalent of the Hindu Spring Festival of Holi. The tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, introduced military exercises at Anandpur as an alternative to Holi. Today, health emphasised through sports, games, athletics, and horse riding. It is a day of some anarchy, including the splashing around of coloured water.

## Other Festivals

### 1. **Basant (January/February)**

This celebrates the beginning of Spring. Yellow clothes are worn and food eaten. Kite flying is a popular occupation. It is a good day to start school, and a good day for sweethearts.

### 2. **Maghi (January)**

A day remembering a brave Sikh woman who persuaded forty deserters from the tenth Guru's army to return in defence of Sikhism.

### 3. **Lohri (January)**

A celebration to mark the end of winter, with bonfires lit. On this day young unmarried girls pray for husbands.

### 4. **Raksha Bandhan (August/September)**

This is a festival of love between brothers and sisters, celebrated by both Hindus and Sikhs. Sisters put ribbons around their brother's arm and give him sweets. The brother vows to protect her and gives her money.

## Ceremonies

Guru Nanak criticised the ceremonies of his own day as having become meaningless: Sikh ceremonies try to learn the lesson of this criticism, ensuring that ceremonies are true acts of worship. Thus ceremonies praise God, express personal devotion, and ask for blessing. They are thus simple, inexpensive and religious in nature, performed before the Guru Granth Sahib, including hymns [*kirtan*], prayers [*ardas*] and the distribution of *karah prasad*.

**Naming.** This is done several weeks after the birth. Relatives are invited to the gurdwara if possible. The parents prepare *karah prasad*, takes a new *rumala* [embroidered Granth covering] and some sweetmeats. The granthi, or a gurdwara official, prepares *amrit* by placing sugar cubes or crystals into water in a steel bowl, and stirring it with his *khanda* [double edged sword] whilst reciting the Mool Mantar and the first five verses of Japji Sahib (see above). A few drops of *amrit* are dripped into the baby's mouth, the mother drinking the rest. There is a special hymn, drawing on the Adi Granth, 496 and 656:

O child  
This blessing is sought by your mother:  
May you never forget  
The Lord of the Universe  
Even for a moment.  
May the True Guru be kind to you  
And may you imbibe a love  
For the society of saints.

God has sent this wondrous gift;

Conceived by grace may his years be long.  
Boundless the joy of his mother's heart  
When the child appeared in her womb.

Refrain: Born our son, born to adore  
Faithful disciple of God.  
His fate inscribed since time began,  
Now given for all to see.

The guru has granted my heart's desire;  
My spirit stilled, at being one with God.  
A father earns his child's respect,  
And thus I speak as the Guru bids.  
No mystery dims these words of mine;  
This child is the gift of the Guru's grace.

After prayer, the Guru Granth Sahib is opened: the first letter of the first hymn which begins on that page becomes the initial letter of the child's name. Boys are surnamed Singh [lion], and girls Kaur [princess]: technically caste or family names are discouraged since Guru Gobind Singh encouraged Sikhs to regard themselves as being in one family - children of Guru Gobind Singh and his wife Mata Sahib Kaur.

Sikhs do not always differentiate clearly between girls' and boys' personal names - so Pritam Singh and Pritam Kaur only become gender specific when Singh or Kaur is added.

Ending the ceremony with *langar*, a shared meal, is optional.

### **The *amrit* ceremony.**

This is the initiation rite whereby a member of the gurdwara (male or female) becomes a full member. It is often called "baptism" and in early days was carried out through immersion in water. The current practice of "baptism by the sword" goes back to the tenth Guru, Gobind Singh when he created the Khalsa brotherhood in 1699. Five Sikhs are selected to perform the amrit ceremony, to recall the "Five Beloved Ones" in the first ceremony in 1699. In front of the Guru Granth Sahib, prayers are said as those seeking amrit face the five. Sugar crystals are placed in water in the steel bowl: the five recite five Sikh compositions - *Japji*, *Jaap Sahib*, the Ten *Savaiyas*, *Chaupai*, and *Anand Sahib* - whilst the leader stirs the *amrit* with a *khanda* - double-edged sword. When the *amrit* is ready, a prayer is said. Each seeking amrit is called up and asked to sit with the right knee on the ground and left knee up [a posture called *bir asan*]. He or she cups the hands, with the right hand over the left, and receives five handfuls of amrit. Candidates say *Wahaguru ji ka Khalsa, Wahaguru ji ki Fateh* and drinks - and each time *amrit* is also sprinkled on their hair and eyes. Any remaining amrit is finished by the candidates. The five recite the Mool Mantar five times, the candidates repeating it after them each time. The final prayer comes from the Adi Granth 525:

Grant me protection, merciful Lord,  
Prostrate here at your door;  
Guard me and keep me,  
Friend of the humble,  
Weary from wandering far.  
You love the devout  
And recover the sinful;  
To you alone I address this prayer:  
Take me and hold me,

Merciful Lord,  
Carry me safely to joy.

After this, the candidates become members of the *Khalsa* or "pure ones": by doing so they enter into the solemn vows of *Khalsa* membership - to wear the five Ks, not to drink alcohol or smoke tobacco, to read and observe the teaching of the Guru Granth Sahib. If they subsequently default on any vow, they will become known as *tankahiyas*, or defaulters: after appropriate penance, they will need to take the *amrit* ceremony again before being readmitted into the Khalsa.