

What is Sikhism?
Series 1


ਦੇਗ ਤੇਗ ਫਤਿਹ

ੴ ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ


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An Introduction

By

**Sikh Awareness Society of USA
Tampa--Florida**

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What is Sikhism?

An introduction

Sikhism (Sikh Dharma) is a major religion of India and fifth largest faith in the world. Its followers are called “Sikhs”. Presently it has about twenty three million adherents in the entire world, out of which about fifteen million live in “Punjab”, a region in the north-west of India that has long served to connect South Asia with Middle East and Central Asia and was a sovereign country ruled by the Sikhs, till its annexation by the British in 1849 AD.

Map of the Punjab under Sikh rule and the British India-1846



About six million Sikhs live outside the Indian Punjab (in India) and at least two million live in the rest of the world. Of these about half a million Sikhs are located in the United Kingdom, another half million are in North America out of which around three hundred fifty thousand are residing in Canada and about one hundred fifty thousand in the United States of America. They are present in substantial numbers in Singapore, Malaysia, Australia, New Zealand, Germany, Norway and other Asian, African and European countries. To say it in another way, they are found all over the world.

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Wherever they have gone, they have built their own religious places of worship, 'the Gurdwaras', which in addition to being place of worship, also serve as centers of the Sikh culture. Sikh Gurdwaras built in Sikh style all over the world stand uniquely different from the Hindu Mandirs, Muslim Mosques, Christian Churches, Jewish Synagogues and Buddhist Monasteries. Gurdwara literally means Guru's door, but religiously in Sikhism it means Guru's house / Guru's abode / The house of the divine. It is the Sikh center of spiritual, social, educational and political activities. Usually there are four parts of the complex: The main hall for worship purposes, Langar (The community kitchen), Serai (inn i.e; residential area) and the school. All major Gurdwaras have all these facilities, but in small Gurdwaras one or more of these facilities may not be available. Every Gurdwara, besides religious worship, is expected to provide food and lodging to visitors / travelers, free of cost. The Sikh national flag called *Nishan Sahib*, one of the sings of Sikh sovereignty is hoisted in front of every Gurdwara ever since the Sikhs lost the Sikh State in 1849 CE. It is made up of a triangular piece of deep yellow (Basanti) colour cloth with insignia of Sikhism (Deg Teg Fateh) imprinted on it and hoisted on a wooden or metal pole having *Khanda* (double edged sword) surmounted on the top. It is always taller than the Gurdwara building and the visitor can spot it from a distance and can assure himself that he will get free boarding and lodging here.

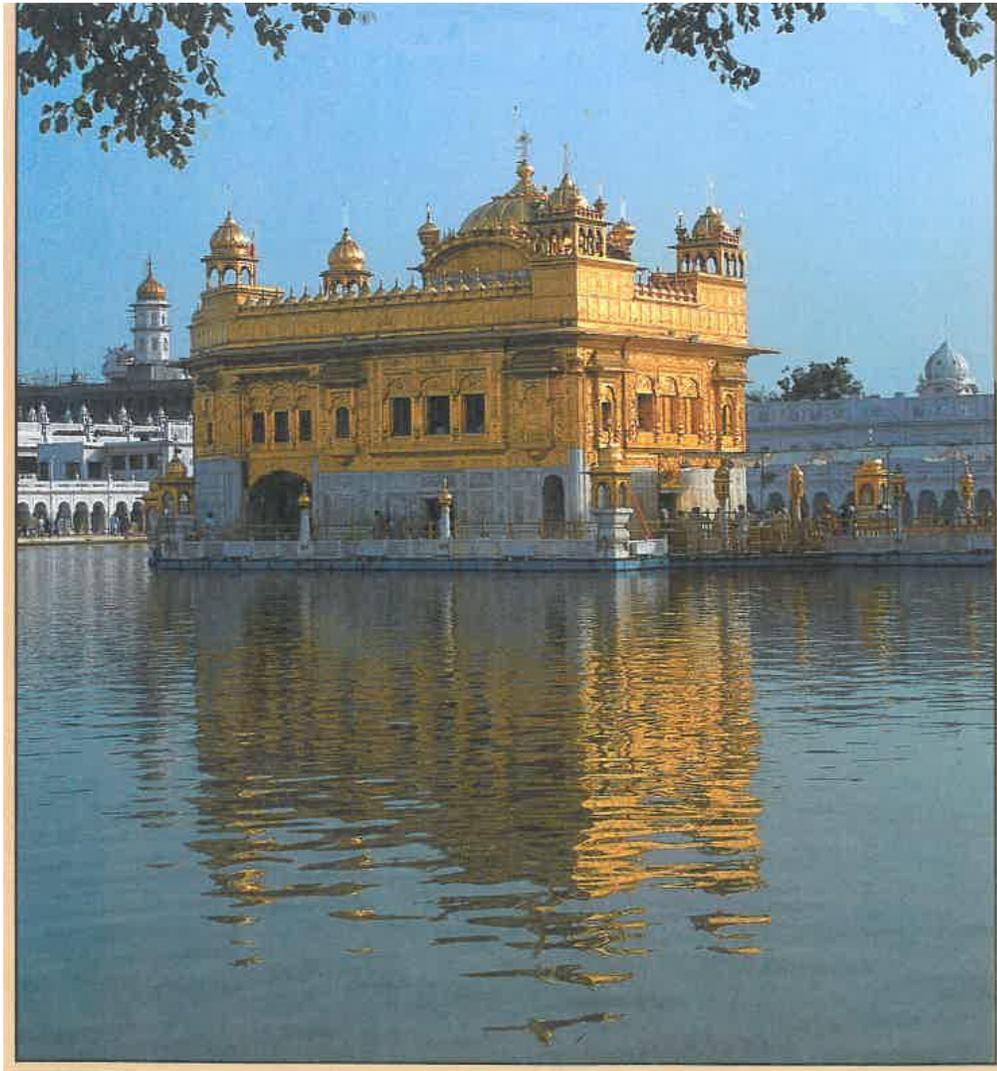


Shoes are not allowed inside the Gurdwara, because the Sikhs consider shoes ceremoniously unclean. The visitor has to go bare foot inside the Gurdwara .Every Gurdwara has a Jora Ghar (shoe house) outside the main complex for depositing the shoes. The Sikh worship is congregational therefore the main structure in the Gurdwara is a big hall, where the holy Sikh Scripture, Guru Granth Sahib wrapped in fine coverlets (Rumalas) is seated over a small raised platform in a Palki (Planquin) with a small tent called Chandoa / Chanani,

hanging from the ceiling upon it. Except when being read, it is kept covered. The Granthi (Sikh priest) waves Chaur (fan made yak hair) over Guru Granth Sahib. Chanani and chaur are symbols of royalty and their presence is not functional but Guru is Sachcha Paadshah (True king).

In a Gurdwara there are no images, altar or pulpit, the object of Sikh reverence is the scripture (Guru Granth Sahib) itself. Outside the inner premises there is provision of clean water for washing hands and feet. In Punjab and India the visitors / devotees go inside the Gurdwara bare feet after washing their hands and at the entrance. The devotees enter the main hall and bow before Guru Granth Sahib, make obeisance (offering) and offer prayer, walk around it and if they wish, find a space in the hall, sit cross legged on the floor in a position facing Guru Granth Sahib to listen the Ragis (religious musicians) proclaim verses from its sacred pages. Generally, a Gurdwara remains open to every visitor through out the day, so that worshippers can offer prayers at any time convenient to them. However in Punjab and India two services are held daily in every Gurdwara, one in the morning and one in the evening. Every day early in the morning, before sun rise, Guru Granth Sahib is brought in the Gurdwara hall from its resting place. All present stand up with bowed heads and folded hands, as mark of respect. In the Gurdwara hall Guru Granth Sahib is placed on Manji Sahib with nice bedding on a raised platform. Guru Granth Sahib is covered with fine rumalas. Then Ardas (Sikh national prayer) is offered. After this Hukam (The order i.e; command) from Guru Granth Sahib is read. It is followed by Asa dee vaar. For the rest of the day the Ragis perform kirtan or a Sikh scholar may perform Katha i.e religious discourse. In a Gurdwara, only hymns from Guru Granth Sahib, Dasam Granth or verses written by Bhai Gurdas and Bhai Nand Lal can be sung. In the evening after recitation of Rehras and Anand Sahib, Guru Granth Sahib is closed (unless continuous un-interrupted recitation of Guru Granth Sahib—Akhand Path is going on), Ardas is offered, Karah Parshad is distributed and then Guru Granth Sahib is ceremoniously wrapped in Rumalas and taken to its special place for the night.

Sikhs do not have a special day of worship. They can do on any day and all days of the week. Outside Punjab and outside India, most Sikhs visit the Gurdwara on the rest day of the particular country they live, for example in Muslim countries it takes place on Fridays, while in other countries such as Britain, Canada, and United States of America, the main service is held on Sunday. Any one, Sikh or non-Sikh may visit Gurdwara, attend congregation and dine in Guru ka langar (the community kitchen) but proper protocol has to be maintained. Carrying of tobacco, alcohol or any other intoxicant is strictly prohibited inside a Gurdwara. A head covering is mandatory inside a Gurdwara. This is a mark of respect to the Guru Granth Sahib.



Gurdwara Darbar Sahib Amritsar also known as Hari Mandir in Punjab and India and Golden Temple in the western world, is the world seat of Sikhism as the Kabba in Mecca for Muslims, Vatican in Rome for Christians and Varanasi in India for Hindus. Akaal Takhat in Amritsar is the Supreme Seat of Temporal Authority in Sikhism and Amritsar itself is the Theo-political capital of the Sikhs and Sikhism. The Sikh doctrine, “Deg Teg Fateh” is found imprinted in Emblematic form on the Sikh National Flag called *Nishan Sahib*, letter heads of Sharomani SGPC and Sharomani Akali Dal.

Emblem (Logo) of Sikhism



“Deg Teg Fateh”

Sikhism took its birth at the fag end of the fifteenth century in Punjab in the Indian subcontinent, among two already well established religions of Hinduism and Islam. Punjab at that time was under Islamic rule, with Hinduism as dominant religion. Religion in both communities (Hinduism and Islam) was limited only to ritualistic practices, rather than inner illumination. The religious leaders of both communities, Mullahs and Brahmins, themselves did not by and large practice what they preached. There was great cultural decadence in all facets of the society. The Hindu had divided the society into four castes (groups) and the lowest in the hierarchy were called *Shudras* or untouchables who were treated worst than animals. The plight of women was no better. The Hindu addressed the non-Hindus as *Malechhas* (unclean). The Muslims called non-Muslims as ‘*Kafirs*’ (non-believers) and observed that the Muslim society was to be enlarged and strengthened progressively through the policy of “enforcement of Islamic laws through sword”—“*as shara tahat us-saif*”. The Islamic rulers also were very unjust and oppressive in their governance and had demoralized the entire Hindu society.

Guru Nanak founded Sikhism, as revealed to him by ‘The Supreme Eternal Reality’—(God) in 1496 CE, at Sultanpur Lodhi in Punjab, in the Indian subcontinent, to fill the vacuum of cultural decadence and religious confusion. He declared oneness of God and universal brotherhood of man. He said, “*Na koe Hindu na Musalmaan*—There is neither any Hindu nor any *Musalmaan*. He (God) is our common father, we are all His children and he takes care of us all—“*ਏਕੁ ਪਿਤਾ ਏਕਸ ਕੇ ਹੰਮ ਬਾਰਿਕ ਤੂੰ ਮੇਰਾ ਗੁਰਗਾਈ॥-Ek pita ekas ke ham barik toon mera gurhaee*” (GGS, 611). Being children of the same father we are all brothers and sisters.

Sikhism believes in equality of all human beings and forbids discrimination on the basis of caste, creed, class, religion and gender and guarantees equal rights/opportunities to all. It strongly denounces the divisive Hindu caste system (*Varan Ashram Dharma*), which limits one's right to worship, learning (education) and choose a profession. It grants everyone the right to become a warrior / soldier and a priest. Guru Gobind Singh in *Bachitar Natak* (Dasam Granth) says, -“*Maanas kee jaat sabay ekay pehchanbo*”-“Treat all mankind alike”. Hinduism is divisive in character and divides the society on the basis of caste, which forms the bed rock of the Brahmanical religion also known as *Varn Ashram Dharma*. Sikhism believes in universal brotherhood of mankind.

In order to establish equality in the society Guru Nanak stepped beyond the frontier in defiance of the 3000 years old divisive caste rules of

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Hinduism. He laid down the fundamentals of Sikhism and founded its basic institutions. The fundamentals of Sikhism are: *Naam Japo* (Remember God in words, mind and actions), *Kirt Karo* (Work hard honestly to earn your living), *Wand ke Chhako* (Share your earnings with the needy). He also founded the basic institutions of Sikhism based on equality, social justice and tolerance. The basic institutions of Sikhism are: *Sangat*, *Pangat* and *Langar*.

Sangat (Holy congregation): is the first and foremost basic institution of Sikhism founded by Guru Nanak in order to abolish caste, establish equality and propagate love and affection among people. *Sangat* literally means association / company. Religiously in Sikhism, the gathering of the Sikhs for the remembrance of God / Practice of *Naam Bani*) is called *Sangat*.

Pangat: The second basic institution of Sikhism established by Guru Nanak is *Pangat*, which literally means row, religiously in Sikhism it means sitting together in a row as equals. It was also meant to abolish caste, remove un-touch-ability, establish equality, inculcate love and teach humility before each other. After meditation he asked people to sit in a row on the ground and eat together, irrespective of their social background or economic status.

Langar (Communal meal): The third basic institution established by Guru Nanak to remove caste, establish equality, teach sharing with the needy and inculcate love among people is *langar*, the sacred food, cooked in community kitchen (*Langar khana*) and served free of cost in the *Langar Hall* attached to the Sikh place of worship (*Gurdwara*). All who visit *Gurdwara* sit down together in a row (*Pangat*) and partake of the simple food offered with loving care as equals, regardless of distinction of caste, creed, colour, country or status in life in life. Only vegetarian food is served in *Guru ka langar* so that it could cater to the people of all faiths.

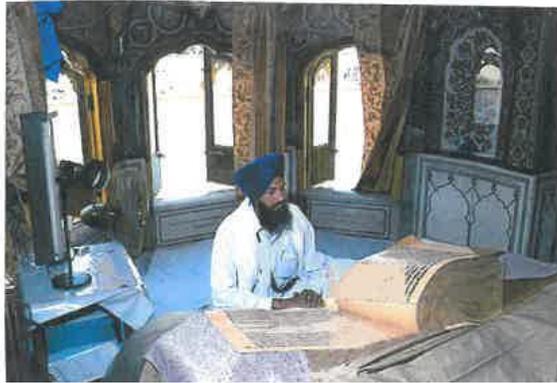
Guru Nanak preached in the vernacular (language) of the people of the Punjab (Punjabi) and composed sacred religious hymns in it, in preference to Sanskrit, which till then was the traditional medium for religious poetry or philosophy. The vernacular of the Punjab region, now called Punjabi till then was only a dialect and did not have its own script for its real pronunciation and expressions. Guru Nanak developed the script for local vernacular, which was named 'Gurmukhi' by his successor, Guru Angad Dev. Thus Guru Nanak gave to the Sikhs a script for their spoken language which was different from Hindus (Sanskrit--Vedas) and Muslims (Arabic-Quran). Thus he broke the monopoly of Brahmin over learning, who boasted about his knowledge of Sanskrit.

Guru Nanak denounced polytheism, henotheism, idolatry, superstition, renunciation, asceticism, celibacy, hypocrisy and ritualism to appease the deities. In his utterances he severely criticized the religious leaders of all the then prevalent faiths in India for their short comings. Of Islam's specialists in jurisprudence, he said, the Qazi sits to administer justice. He turns his beads and mutters the name of God (Khuda). He takes

bribe and denies justice. If questioned, he reads out something” (GGS, p.951). For Mullahs, the religious leaders of Islam, he said, “For an ignorant hungry (destitute) *mullah* mosque is a means to satisfy his hunger i.e, worldly needs (GGS, p.1245), to which the pious poor would come bringing donations. About the Brahmins he said, “Those who wield throat cutting knife wear sacred thread (Janeu)” (GGS, p.471). Then he says, “Leave aside the Qazis and Brahmins the marriage rituals are performed by ‘Satan’ (GGS, p.722). He was highly critical of Jogis and Siddhas who led an escapist life of renunciation, asceticism and celibacy. He praised the householder’s life, who served the society. He preached, “Do not touch his feet who calls himself a Guru or Pir and goes for begging. O Nanak only he knows the right path who earns his livelihood through hard labour and shares it with others (GGS, p.1245). He also up-braided the rulers of his time and said, “The kings are tigers and the courtiers are dogs, they go and harass the sitting and the sleeping ones--” (GGS, p.1288).

People subdued under rigors of caste system, the oppressive alien rule and religious bigotry, could not be expected to take over the social responsibilities and adjust to the liberation offered by the new society over-night. The infant Sikh society had to be nurtured for some time to prevent its relapse into the parent societies. So he introduced the system of succession to carry his mission forward. The message of Nanak was transmitted through his nine successors. The Sikh Gurus were:

1. Guru Nanak, born in 1469 and died in 1539.
2. Guru Angad, born in 1504 (Guru 1539 - 52).
3. Guru Amar Dass born in 1479 (Guru 1552 -74).
4. Guru Ram Dass, born in 1534 (Guru 1574 - 81).
5. Guru Arjan Dev, born in 1563 (Guru 1581 - 1606).
6. Guru Hargobind, born in 1595 (Guru 1606 - 44).
7. Guru Har Rai, born in 1630 (Guru 1644 - 61).
8. Guru Har Krishan, born in 1656 (Guru 1661 - 64).
9. Guru Teg Bahadur, born in 1621 (Guru 1664 - 75).
10. Guru Gobind Singh, born in 1666 (Guru 1675 - 1708).



The holy scripture of Sikhism, “Aad Granth” (now Guru Granth Sahib), the world seat of Sikhism (Gurdwara Darbar Sahib/ Golden Temple) in Amritsar were created by the fifth Guru Arjan Dev in 1604 AD, thereby establishing separate religious identity of Sikhism. He declared the independent position of Sikhism by writing in Aad Granth (now Guru Granth Sahib), in Rag Bhairon, on page 1136---I do not keep the Hindu fast (Vart) or observe the Muslim Ramadan. I serve only the One Supreme Being who alone is my refuge. I serve the One Master who ministers justice to both Hindus and Muslims. I neither worship like the Hindu or like the Muslim go to Mecca. I serve Him alone and no other. I do not pray to idols nor say the Muslim prayer. Taking the formless One in my mind I make obeisance there to the Supreme Being, for we are neither Hindu nor Mussalman.

Of all world religions, Sikhism alone can, with fullest justification, claim to possess the gospels of its founders in their original purity. Truths revealed to Prophets and seers have been often mixed, in course of time with spurious and imperfect additions through the ignorance, prejudices or ill-conceived zeal of their followers and lost their purity. The sagacity and the foresight of the Sikh Gurus envisaged the possibility of such a situation in respect of their own scriptures and they took steps to ensure against this eventuality. Guru Arjan compiled the holy Granth embodying the Sikh teachings under his personal supervision and created for all times the imperishable and yet visible embodiment of the Gurus as also of their wisdom. He started the compilation in 1601 and completed it in 1604. He thus placed all mankind under a permanent debt of gratitude by bequeathing to it the highest moral and spiritual Truths in the purest form as were revealed to the Gurus. These were clothed in various dialects and languages of the people of the land of their birth and were thus made accessible to every person without any distinction of caste, creed, colour or race. It was recensed by Guru Gobind Singh in 1706 when he entered the Gurbani of 9th

Guru, Guru Teg Bahadur, at Talwandi Sabo, now called Damdama Sahib. It was installed as Guru Eternal on October 5, 1708 by Guru Gobind Singh and since then it is called 'Guru Granth Sahib'.

The Sikhs believe Guru Granth Sahib as 'living' embodiment of ten Gurus and it is the only focus of Sikh faith. Guru Granth Sahib is treated with same respect as the human Gurus received. In addition to the hymns of the Sikh Gurus it contains the writings and hymns of saints and preachers with different religious backgrounds, whose philosophy conformed to the spirit of Sikhism. It is a literary classic and a spiritual treasure. It throws light on the path leading to the highest goal of spirituality. It contains eternal truth, proclaims God, and shows the way of His realization. It lays down moral and ethical rules for the development of soul and religious commandments for the progress of morality and attainment of salvation. In it philosophy is propounded through the songs of love and devotion. The message of love, truth, contentment, humility, fatherhood of God, brotherhood of man, restraint of passions, mercy on living beings, purity of mind and body and clothing, search for the self and Higher Soul, equality of man and equality of man and woman, service to others, liberalism in the matter of food and clothing, and references to the political, economic and social life of people of Hindustan during the fifteenth century and sixteenth century constitute the main contents of Guru Granth Sahib. It is a guide to Sikh way of life. References to *Veda* (Hindu scriptures) and *Katebas* (Semitic scriptures) are also found in it. Guru Granth Sahib rejects all types of *Karam Kandas* (ritualism) and formalism for spiritual attainment and propagates a life of inner illumination. It lays stress on selfless action performed in the best interest of the society. It condemns asceticism, which has the effect of negativism. It lays stress on the dynamic attitude towards life. It supports normal family life (Grahisti jivan) and social commitment. It recommends leading of a pure life whilst fighting temptations and imperfection of the world. It is the only scripture where each and every conceivable aspect of human life has been addressed, discussed and analysed. Mythological references are only illustrative and do not indicate any Guru's belief in mythological personages or their actions. In its present lithographed diction, Guru Granth Sahib contains about 5894 Hymns and verses mainly in Punjabi, Hindi, Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian, Sindhi, Lehndi, Dhaki, Bengali and Marathi in Gurmukhi script on 1430 pages, composed and arranged in well known 31 Ragas i.e; tunes / musical settings (Gurmat Sangeet), except for the initial 13 and last 78 pages. It is the treasure of Indian languages and musical Ragas. Guru Granth Sahib is the only scripture in the world, which mentions with respect Ram, Gobind, Hari, Allah, Karim

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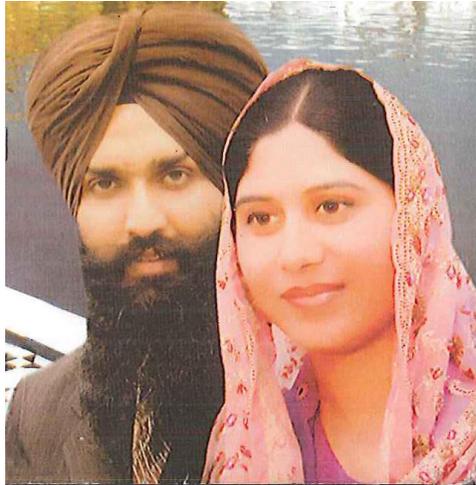
etc; (names for God) used by different religions and which includes writings of holy people born in other religions (Hinduism, Islam) in addition to the Sikh Gurus. It is the only source of Sikh philosophy that has been written by the Gurus themselves and whose authenticity has never been questioned. It is the only scripture, which has travelled through the generations without the change of a single letter. It is final and unalterable scripture. Guru Granth Sahib is treated to be the presence of the Guru himself in the Sangat. It is the presiding deity in every Gurdwara (Sikh place of worship) and every visitor there bows before it in reverence before assuming his / her seat. When moved it is carried on the head accompanied by five initiated Sikhs.

Till the creation of Granth, preaching of Sikhism had been carried out by Sikh Gurus through the word of mouth and it had no separate religious existence distinct from Hinduism and Islam. Because of its principles, Sikhism was acceptable to both Hindus and Muslims. The erosion of their faiths surprised the religious leaders of both Hinduism (Brahmins/Pandits) and those of Islam (The Qazis/Mullas). Therefore, they regarded it as threat to their respective faiths. The Muslim administration, in addition, perceived it as threat to its political power. The tensions that followed between the Sikhs, Hindus and the Muslim government resulted in the execution of Guru Arjan Dev at Lahore and the consequent move of the Sikh center from Amritsar to Kiratpur in the Shivalik foot hills in the 1635 CE. Guru Arjan Dev was succeeded by five more Gurus.

Sikhism developed, matured and became established to work its way in the world at the end of two centuries under the guidance of its ten Gurus. It was formally consecrated by its tenth Guru Gobind Singh on the Vaisakhi day 1699 AD at Anandpur Sahib in the Shivalik foot-hills in the Punjab, through his Sikh initiation ceremony-`*Amritpaan* (Sikh baptism). On this day Guru Gobind Singh gave finishing touch to Sikhism. He laid down distinct Sikh religious code of conduct (Sikh *Rehatmaryada*) and gave the Sikhs a distinct corporate identity.



He called the initiated Sikhs 'Khalsa' (Arabic word literally meaning Sovereign), who now represent and spearhead the tasks of Sikh religion and are recognizable throughout the world as bearded and turbaned Sikhs, supporting the articles of their faith called five k's—Kesh (Unshorn hair), Kangha, Kachh, Kara and Kirpaan. Religiously turban is a must for a Sikh to keep the unshorn hair on the head covered



Before his departure from this mortal world in 1708 AD, Guru Gobind Singh abolished the personal human Guruship and transferred the authority from individual leaders to the scriptures and the community itself. He vested the Eternal Guruship into the holy Sikh scripture, "*Granth Sahib*" and granted it the status of Eternal Guru of the Sikhs, which since then is known as "*Guru Granth Sahib*" (GGS) and is the symbolic head of Sikhism. He vested the temporal leadership into the community itself under the patronage of Guru Granth Sahib and named it "*Guru Khalsa Panth*". Thus from the moment of its initiation by Guru Nanak to its ritual consecration by Guru Gobind Singh, a period of barely 200 years, Sikhism not only acquired its distinctive church and institutions, songs and scriptures, signs and symbols, but also, an unmistakable form or stance.

Presently Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism and Sikhism are the major religions of the world, with Sikhism being in the fifth place followed by Judaism in the sixth with a following of about fourteen million. However, Sikhism is the youngest among all of them.

Sikhism is the latest religion for the present space age and answers the problems of modern man. It satisfies the scientific and juristic minds of today, being without any myth and superstitions in

which man had been made to indulge by some previous faiths and systems. It is a religion of comprehensive moral and ethical values to elevate the man spiritually, morally and socially. Its aim is to convert the self-centered mind to God tuned by Name of God in the mind and the control of mind from the narrow egoistic tendencies to higher conscious to be activated for all the socio-political affairs during one's life and finally unite the individual soul with the Supreme Soul. There is no scope for miracles and mysteries in Sikhism.

Sikhism is a practical way of life to overpower the evils of the day and to lead a truthful life. Sikhism instructs the Sikhs how during life one should conduct oneself and how one should exert influence on the society for a moral and altruistic change. The meditation in the name of God (the one and only one), the Creator of the entire creation as to be included in one's mind and the total submission to His will and commandments while doing pious deeds is the way of life in Sikhism. It teaches love between man and God and love between man and man, to earn one's livelihood with one's hard labour and honest means and share with the needy, selfless service to the needy, equality and dignity of every human being.

Sikhism is a revealed religion based on a definitive revelation like Semitic religions of the West and therefore, it can be clearly distinguished from the earlier Indian religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, etc, which have an anonymous mysticism as their source of validity. It is not simply a set of views or doctrines, but a way of life according to a definite model, 'The Guru', for which the Sikh Gurus gave lessons for over a period of two hundred years and themselves, led the life of that model. Those who perfected it came to be known as Sikhs (literally meaning, the learned). "ਸਿਖੀ ਸਿਖਿਆ ਗੁਰ ਵੀਚਾਰ-Sikhi* Sikhia Gur Veechar" i.e "Sikhism is the teaching of the Guru (Gurmat) (GGS, M1, p.465)".

Sikhism is a religion of knowledge both spiritual as well as temporal wisdom and not a blind faith, "Aklee Sahib saveeay aklee payeeay maan—with thoughtful logic should one worship God, with same logic should one seek honour" (GGS, p. 1245). It strongly denounces ritualism (*Karm kand*). It lays stress on the practice of religious life of inner illumination and not on formalism or ritualism. It is independent and distinct from all prevailing religions in this world. It is not an offshoot of one faith or syncretic blend of different and often conflicting faiths. Sikhism is basically a religion of action and human freedom. It is a religion with comprehensive ethical system based on moral laws, which no science has ever challenged. It elevates mankind spiritually, morally and socially with its deep ethical system. It

teaches the highest and purest principles that serve to bind man with man.

The philosophy of Sikhism is different from the philosophy of all the previously existing religions of the world. It envisages that a true Sikh loves all humanity, earns his livelihood by all fair means, shares his earnings with the deprived and strives for the realization of God by abiding His Will and seeking Grace. Sikhism believes in the doctrines of *Karma*, transmigration, reincarnation, salvation-(Mukti), *Surag* (Heaven), *Narak* (Hell), *Hukam / Raza* (Will of God) and Grace, but according to its own way. Because of theistic kinship with other religious systems the Sikh Gurus did not quarrel with the religious terms used by earlier religions rather they deliberately used them and redefined them in the light of their own philosophy and Sikh mystical experience.

Sikhism believes in law of *Karma* but according to its own ideology. Good actions have good results and bad actions have bad effects. A person has to suffer for his / her unsatisfactory behaviour. Guru Nanak says, "Do not blame others for your sufferings, it is a result of your actions. You have harvested whatever you sowed, why should you embroil others?" (GGS, p.433). The soul is the farmer. It has been given a field in the form of body. When the seed of action is sown, the consequences must follow. Whatever the seed of actions is sown in the body, the harvest is reaped accordingly, "As you sow so shall you reap" (GGS M5, p. 134). Gurbani says, "Having sown *Acasia Arabica*, the farmer searches for juicy grapes. He weaves wool but wants to wear silk" (GGS, p. 1379). Gurbani further says, "Man's every action will be taken into account—i.e, "Man will be accountable for the words he speaks, the food he eats, the path along he walks. He will be accountable for what he hears and see. His every breath will be accounted for" (GGS, p.15). Gurbani also says, "Do the deeds by which thy face shines" (GGS, p. 397). It also says, "One should do actions by which he may not feel ashamed in the presence of the Lord (GGS, p. 1381).

Sikhism does not believe in the Hindu theory of 'Law of *Karma*'. In Sikh religious terms *karam* means action, which could be in the form of a ritual or a positive effort. Sikhism vociferously rejects all ritualistic practices of Hinduism, "*Karam dharm pakhand jo deesy tin jam jaagati lootay. Nirban keertan gawoh kartay ka nimkh simrat jit chhootay*—The ritual poses of piety and hypocrisies, which are seen, them plunders Yama, the tax collector. Sing thou the pure praise of the Creator, contemplating whom, even for an instant, thou shall be saved" (GGS, p. 747). Sikhism only believes in making a positive effort to earn one's living and remember God in order to lead a comfortable and worry free life, "*Udham kareindian jeeo toon kamawandian sukh bhunch dhiaindian toon Prabhu mil Nanak utri chint* (GGS, p. 522).

According to the ideology of Sikhism '*Karma*' is not independent of God. Everything happens under the Will of God. God's Grace becomes a means of release from the '*Law of Karma*'. The chain of '*Karma*' obviously cannot bind God rather His Grace breaks this chain.

Sikhism believes in God's Grace. God's grace according to Guru Granth Sahib is that quality of God's nature, which is the source of man's undeserved blessings particularly those which have to do with his realization of God, "Nanak says, God is realized through the Grace of God--*Nanak nadreen nadir pachhhan*" (GGS, p. 1343). "Nanak says no one is redeemed without the Grace of God" (GGS, p. 661).

Sikhism believes in Divine Will (Cosmic law) to which the Sikh Gurus gave a generic name as '*Hukam*', which literally means command. The holy scripture of Sikhism, Guru Granth Sahib says:

- The whole creation is the product of *Hukam*, which is indescribable (GGS, p.1).
- By Lord's order all are created and by His order they do businesses (GGS, p. 55).

Hukam as Supreme or Infinite Will (Cosmic Law) is mentioned at many places in Guru Granth Sahib. It existed before the creation when there was complete nothingness. Being the "Infinite Self-consciousness of God", *Hukam* is supremely one with Him. It is as infinite as God. In another sense *Hukam* is supreme command. The universe moves, according to it, "Everybody and everything is controlled by His command, which none can escape" (Japji)

Sikhism believes in a life of prayer and service of humanity (*Sewa* and *Simran*). It expounds *Anrang Bhagti*, which is purely devotional and rejects *Behrang Bhagti*, which is ritualistic. It is essentially a religion of devotion whereas the body has to work for the welfare of the family and society, the mind has to remain in tune with the Lord (GGS, p.1376). Its approach to life is realistic therefore it is most modern, practical and rational among all the world religions. Basically it is anti-ritualistic and has no ordained priestly class. It is highly critical of all intermediaries exploiting the masses in the name of religion. It does not foster blind faith. It is a life affirming religion and there is an integral combination between empirical and spiritual life of man. It does not accept any dichotomy in life whether it is 'personal and social', 'spiritual or material', 'faith and reason' or any other such differentiation. It believes in now and here and does not believe in the other worldliness. It has a positive attitude towards world and emphasizes that normal family life (*Grahisti Jiwan*), lived with virtuous

conduct leads to salvation.

The concept of salvation in Sikhism is different from other Indian religious systems in which it means liberation / deliverance from the cycle of birth and death (*Samsara*). Sikhism does not subscribe to this view. It believes in liberation from ego, ignorance and spiritual emancipation now and here i.e; *Jiwan Mukti*, meaning salvation while being alive and not redemption from rebirth and death. The holy book of Sikhism, Guru Granth Sahib says, "O, God, who will see that salvation, which you will grant me after death" (GGS, p.1292). It is concerned with the current life and rejects concept of past or next life and so also the concept of hell and heaven. Gurbani says, "He alone is said to be emancipated in life, who has eliminated ego from within him (GGS, p. 1009). Moreover Hinduism, Sufism (Islam) and Christianity seek personal salvation catering to the needs of individuals. They are unconcerned about the evils of society and barbarities of the rulers of the time. In Sikhism there is nothing like private or personal salvation, just as God is benevolently looking after the entire world, in the same way God man's sphere of and responsibility is equally wide and un-hedged by any self-created barriers. It caters for the spiritual well being of the society as a whole, "He himself is emancipated and emancipates the world, Nanak says to that slave of Lord, one may ever make an obeisance" (GGS, p. 295). This is the fundamental difference between a salvation religion and a universal salvation religion catering for the spiritual well-being of society as a whole.

Followers of all major traditional belief systems except Sikhism seek salvation by practicing asceticism, renunciation, celibacy, worshipping various deities and observing various rituals etc. In order to achieve it the seeker escaped into a monastery, slipped into a forest or retreated into some mountain cave. It was believed that world was a snare and one must run away from it in order to save himself. Sikhism does not want its followers to be escapists. It wants them to be active and responsible participants in everyday life and attain salvation from within the hubbub of the world. Guru Nanak says, "Salvation is not incompatible with laughing, eating, playing and dressing well" (GGS, p. 522). Unlike Yogis, Siddhas and Sadhus (ascetics) who had developed an escapist attitude towards life and had no worthwhile interest in the problems of the society, Sikhism is a religion of workers and householders and preaches dignity of labour, "*Udham karaindian jio toon kamawandian sukh bunch, dhiaindian toon Prabhu mil Nanak Utri chint*"(GGS, p.522). It forbids renunciation and all types of ascetic practices and accepts householder's life as the forum of all spiritual activities and growth. It condemns the escapist life of jogis, siddhas and

sadhus and their way of living on alms (*Biksha-Bhikhia*). It believes in shouldering all social responsibilities by leading householder's life (*Grahisti jivan*), earning one's living through hard work and sharing it with the needy and less fortunate", (GGS, p. 1245). It treats this world as field of action and regards its renunciation like a soldier running away from the battlefield. It preaches a life of truth, right actions and controlled desire, "Truth is highest virtue, but higher still is truthful living" (GGS, p.62). It strongly denounces ritualism. Sikhism believes in obedience to God, "*Hukam rajaein chalna Nanak likhia naal* i.e, Nanak says, "It is ordained that one should follow the Divine Will" (GGS, p. 1). But simultaneously it believes in making positive effort, "*Udham karaindian jeeo toon kamavandian sukh bhunch*" (GGS, p522).

Sikhism believes in peaceful means (*Ahimsa-Ahinsa*) and not violence, but in Sikhism it is not unconditional like Buddhism. It has its own philosophy. It does not believe in Ahimsa that stood as a bar against the religious man or a religious society trying to confront socio-political aggression. A society that has to accept the social responsibility of confronting injustice cannot remain wedded to the hurdle of Ahimsa. According to Sikhism it is righteous to use sword, when all other peaceful means fail. Guru Gobind Singh says, "When all peaceful means fail it righteous to put your hand on the hilt of sword". Among Hindus, Buddhists, Jains and radical saints, *Ahinsa* is deemed to be a cardinal virtue and meat eating is a prohibition, but according to Guru Nanak, only fools argue whether to eat meat or not who can define what is meat and what is not, who knows where the sin lies, being a vegetarian or non-vegetarian (GGS, p.1289). Also: "Living beings feed upon living beings"(GGS.p955). He further says, "Every food grain that we eat has life in it"- ". He further adds, "Water is the primal source of life, which assists growth of all living beings" (GGS, Var Asa, Ml, p.472).

Sikhism like all major religions of the world has some basic theological concepts which are supreme and inviolate. Belief in the existence of God is the basic theological concept of Sikhism. It is a monotheistic faith and strictly forbids polytheism and henotheism, "*Ika bani ik guru ika shabad veechaar*" (GGS, p.646). It proclaims that there is one Supreme Eternal Reality not of any particular religion, but of all mankind, under whatever name He is remembered: God, Rama, Allah, Jehova, *Waheguru* etc, all mean the same, "*-Koi bolay Ram Ram koi Khuda-ay koi sevay gosanyan koi Allahay*" (GGS,p.885). Sikhism does not believe in the Hindu theory of trinity (*Trimurti*) of God: Brahma (The creator) Vishnu (The sustainer), Shiva (The destroyer). In Sikhism, *Ishta* or the choosen ideal is

God Himself and none of His incarnations or substitutes. It proclaims fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man, " -*Ek pita ekas ke ham barik toon mera gurhaae*" (GGS, p.611). It says, God is *nirgun* (Transcendent) as well *sargun* (Immanent), *Nirgun aap sargun bhi uhi*-He is absolute as also Personal Reality" (Ibid, Gauri Sukhmani M5, p287). Dualism of God in heaven and men on earth has no meaning in Sikh thought. It is a faith concerned with the realization of God within us now and here. He (God) resides in every heart and the so called diversity is an illusion: "Why goeth thou to the forest in search of *God*. He liveth in all and is yet distinct. He abideth with thee also. As fragrance dwells in a flower or reflection in a mirror so doth He (God) dwells inside everything, seek Him, therefore, in thyself" - Ibid, Dhanasri, M9, p684). Whoever, through grace, becomes aware of the inner activity of the immanent God as Guru, and responds to that voice in obedience to God's command (*hukam*), attains spiritual liberation while in body. At death the soul (*atma* or *jot*) will live in the divine presence, never to be reincarnated.

Sikhism believes that this universe is God's creation and it operates under His order (*hukam*). Unlike Vedanta (Hinduism), it believes in the reality of God and reality of the world and does not dismiss world out of hand as mere *Maya* or illusion. Guru Nanak says, "God is a reality (exists) and his creation is a reality - Ibid, M1, Japji, pauri 34, p7). It regards the world as house of God and He lives in there. "*Th jag sachchay ki hat Kotharee sachhchay ka vich vaas* (GG,S,p463)".

Sikhism explicitly rejects the authority of the Vedas and their Brahmin interpreters, because these neither reach nor preach the reality of God but only speak of materialism, leading the man to blind deeds and not to emancipation in the fourth stage of grace of god. Sikhism does not believe in its concepts of hell, heaven and reincarnation etc as preached by Vedanta i.e; Hinduism. As per Sikh thought heaven and hell are not places for living hereafter, they are part of spiritual topography of man and do not exist otherwise. They refer to good and evil stages of life respectively and can be lived now and here during our earthly existence. Sikhism does not believe in after life. It believes in now and here. Truthful living in the noble fear of God is heaven. Having no faith in God and living an unethical life is hell.

Sikhism rejects the myth based gods (Devatas), goddesses (Devis) and incarnations (avtaars) of God of Hinduism and the consequent superstitious practices. Unlike Hinduism, Sikhism is rooted in history and not in Mythology, rather it frowns at mythology. It strictly forbids idol (*Moorti*) worship, stone (*Saligram*) worship, grave and tomb worship,

picture worship, worship of sun, moon, earth, trees etc. Sikhism totally rejects all the outward symbolism of Hinduism—its sacred thread (Janeu), frontal mark (Tilak), cutting of body hair etc. Sikhism totally rejects the rites, rituals and customary traditions of Hinduism—The pilgrimage to Hindu holy places, pilgrimage to the sacred rivers and tanks (*Taalab*), the ritual baths in some rivers and tanks, observance of Shradhs (giving the gracious feasts), performing penance and worship enduring bodily pain and self tortures, yogic asanas and futile exercises and many more practices of Hinduism to wipe out sins and achieve salvation. It also strictly forbids ritual fasting (*Varat*). It does not believe in the notion of auspicious and in-auspicious days, magic, miracles, occult powers, superstitions, good and bad omens, *Jantras*, *Mantras*, *Tantras* or any other ritual practices to appease the deities. It does not believe in the Hindu concept of pollution and ritual purification. It also does not believe in vegetarianism, sacredness of cow, sacredness of fire (*Havan*), making burnt offerings and sacrifices. Instead it initiates a moral code distinct from the Hindu ethics among its followers. Mythology, hypocrisy and ritualism have no place in Sikhism.

Sikhism does not agree with the view of Hinduism and Buddhism that human body was impure and must be subjected to ascetic practices, tortuous exercises or to rigorous penances so that its desires were killed and emancipation of the soul attained. On the contrary it regards the human body as "the temple of the God (*Brahm Jot* -Supreme Soul- Ram)" worthy of adoration and reverence. According to Gurbani, Ram (God) resides in human body and the human soul—"atma" and "The Supreme Soul-Ram / "*Parmatma*" are fundamentally same, -"*Atam mein Ram, Ram mein Atam*" (Ibid, Rag Bhairon M1, p.1153). Therefore it is sin against God to torture the body.

Sikhism does not believe that life is sinful in origin or that it was evil and source of suffering inherent in it. On the contrary it believes that having emerged from a 'pure source' was, pure in essence, "*Aap satt kia sab satt, tis prabh tay sagli utpap*" (GGS, p.294). As regards Islam, Sikhism does not believe in doom's day--*Kiamat ka din (yom-e-akhrat)*.

Like all other religions and societies of the world Sikhism too has its own ceremonies related with various phases of life. Sikh ceremonies are not rituals or occasions for display of affluence and ego, but acts of thanksgiving and prayers suited to the occasion. All Sikh ceremonies are simple, but significant and are held in the presence of Guru Granth Sahib. They are devotional in substance and congregational in character. All Sikh religious ceremonies start in the morning and are over by afternoon. Every Sikh ceremony, happy or sad is concluded with recitation of Anand Sahib

Bani, Ardas and distribution of Karah Parshad.

Sikhism preaches a secularism, which respects other people's right to be different. It does not believe in imposing its values on others. It is not a religion of chosen people, but instead it is the religion of entire humanity. It rises above regional barriers, "The Guru wishes the well-being of all the creation".

Democracy an important aspect of modern society is the guiding rule of the Khalsa. Every one present in the congregation (*Sangat / Sarbat Khalsa*) is free to present his / her views and it is for the *sangat* (congregation) to accept or reject them through consensus. Democracy in Sikhism does not mean numerical majority, but consensus.

Sikhism strongly emphasizes humanism. Its philosophy contains all positive qualities required for the welfare of mankind. It has global perspective for that has concern for the whole humanity as opposed to a concern for a particular cultural group. It has never emphasized conversions to Sikhism rather it has preached becoming better human beings by following one's own beliefs. Anybody who likes its ideals is welcome to embrace it. Sikhism does not believe in proselytization through bait or pressure.

Music in Islam is religiously regarded as illegal (*Haram*), but it occupies prime position in Sikhism. The entire holy book of Sikhism, "Guru Granth Sahib except for the initial thirteen and concluding seven pages is structured on the basis of Ragas.

As regards dancing, Sikhism does not prohibit any sensible hobby, entertainment pleasure or enjoyment (GGS, p.465). However, ritualistic dancing or clapping with hands in the presence of Guru Granth Sahib is strictly prohibited (GGS, p. 364).

Woman, who was given the most inferior place in the Hinduism, is elevated to the highest hierarchy of human beings in Sikhism and she symbolizes "the principle of eternal creation". Guru Nanak says, "*So kion manda akhiay jit jamein rajaana*" - "How we can call them evil who give birth to kings (Ibid, p.473)?" It strictly forbids veiling of women, their seclusion from society, slander, burning of widows on the pyre of their dead husbands (*Sati*) and female infanticide.

Marriage in Sikhism is called '*Anand Karaj*', "A blue print for blissful union". It is not regarded as a contract, but a sacrament--an act of socio-spiritual union of two souls, "They are not said to be husband and wife, who sit together. Rather they alone are called husband and wife who have one soul in two bodies" i.e, *Dhan pir ih na aakhian behn ikathay ho-ay. Ek jot doay moortee dhan pir kahee-ay so-ay* (GGS, p.788).

Celibacy in Hinduism is regarded as a means to achieve bliss, but

Sikhism does not subscribe to this view. Guru Nanak says, –“*Bind raakh jau tareey bhai, khusray kion na parm gat paaee*” i.e If one were to be saved by celibacy, then the eunuchs should attain the highest bliss!" (GGS, p.324). "Those who call them celibates do not know the way and so they leave their homes in search of God, “*Jatee sadaway jugat na jaanay chhad bahay ghar baar*” (GGS, p.469).

Sikhism accords prime priority for the maintenance of sexual morality among its followers, the Sikhs. Adultery is a taboo in Sikhism, “*Jaisay sang bisier sion haiy ray taiso he ih par greh*” i.e; "As is the companionship of a venomous serpent, so is the ravishing of another's wife" (GGS, Asa M5, p.403).

The use of alcohol (*Shrab*) and all other intoxicants is strictly prohibited in Sikhism. Gurbani says, "By drinking which, intellect departs, madness enters the brain, man distinguishes not between mine and thine and is buffeted by his Master. By drinking which the Lord is forgotten and the mortal receives punishment at His court. Drink thou not, at all the false wine, as far as it lies in thy power" i.e, “*Jit peetay mat door ho-ay baral pavay vich aa-ay--*” GGS, p.554). The use of tobacco in any form is a taboo in Sikhism.

It is not irreligious to own wealth in Sikhism provided it is acquired through honest and fair means and is used not only to derive personal comfort for oneself or one's family but also to give comfort to society also. "For a religious man, it is not unholy to get wealth, provided he spends it in God's way and gives and lives in comfort" (Ibid, Sarang ki var iv). "*Daulat Guzran* ' - 'Wealth is a necessity of life' (Guru Hargobind-Gurbilas Patshahi chhevin). However, Sikhism is definitely against the exploitive collection of wealth. Guru Nanak says, “*Hak praya Nanaka os sooar os ga-ay, Gur Peer hami taan bharay je murdar na kha-ay*” i.e, “To rob another person of his / her due share is like eating pork for a Muslim and beef for a Hindu (GGS,p141)”. It teaches morality. Guru Nanak says, “–*Je ratt lagay kapray jama ho-ay paleet, jo ratt peeveh mansan tin kio nirmal cheet*” -"Cloth is reckoned impure if stained with blood, how may mind of such persons be deemed pure, who suck blood of men (GGS, p.140)?"

Sikhism preaches spirituality and inculcates love for God, truthful living, universal brotherhood, compassion, peaceful coexistence, loyalty, gratitude for all the favours received, justice, impartiality, honesty, humility, forgiveness, charitableness, self-control, courage, contentment, tolerance and all other moral and domestic virtues known to any holiest man in this world.

What is Sikhism?

Series 1

Sikhism stands for promoting education (*Parrhaee*) among masses. It lays great emphasis on the attainment of knowledge (both, spiritual and temporal) as it dispels the darkness of ignorance. Guru Nanak says, "When sun rises; the moon is not seen, where knowledge appears ignorance is dispelled",- "*ugway soor na jaapay chand. Jeh gian pargaas agian mitant*" (GGS, Suhi Ml, p.791).

Sikhism is a religion of hope and optimism with traditions of ever-rising spirits (*Chardi Kala*-active optimism). Pessimism (*Dhendi-Kala*) has no place in Sikh thought. Sikh discipline is a conscious effort to live in harmony with nature and carry out the altruistic divine will. It aims at authentic religious life and demands deeper penetration of one's own religion in thought, devotion and action. It does not believe in religious conversion (Proselytisation) through bait or force, but any body, who likes its ideals, is welcome to embrace it. The glory of Sikhism is its universality which cannot brook sectarianism or narrow loyalties in any shape or form. It is thus a universal religion having an appeal for all and is most practical in its application. It aims to destroy barriers and to unite all mankind. In Sri Rag the Guru Says "The true Guru is one who unites all (GGS, p.72)".

The essence of Sikh faith then is harmony, universal love, truthful living, universal brotherhood, peaceful co-existence, tolerance, humility, honest labour, complete faith in one Almighty (God) and to resist and fight against social injustice, all kinds of oppression and exploitation. It is the zenith of eastern spirituality and it is the only indigenous revolutionary philosophy of Indian subcontinent, which took birth in 'Punjab'. Thus Sikhism and Sikhs form a unique religion and a unique society, which and who can be clearly distinguished from other religions and political societies of the world.

The global spread of Sikhism has been mainly through migration of the Sikhs from 'Punjab' and not through mass conversions from other faiths. Recently because of its principles, Sikhism has been embraced by many white people and now white Sikhs and even black Sikhs can be found internationally especially in USA.

*Sikhi: Punjabi word meaning Sikhism.

NB:

GGS is an abbreviation for Guru Granth Sahib

SGPC stands for Sharomani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee.

Emblem (Logo) of Sikhism



“Deg Teg Fateh”

The Sikh national Emblem was created by the Shromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) after its constitution in the early twentieth century, when it depicted the Sikh doctrine “*Deg Teg Fateh*” in the Emblematic form. Since then it is seen inscribed on the Sikh national flag/ letter heads and the stamps of various Sikh organizations. The doctrine is first found in written form in Persian, on the seal of Banda Singh Bahadur (1708-1716), stamped on his letters. The seal bore the inscription:

“Deg-O-Teg O Fateh-Nusrat-I -Bedrang Yafat -Az Nanak--Guru Gobind Singh” i.e, “The kettle/ Caldron (*Deg*)- (The Sikh symbol of economy, the means to feed all and sundry on an egalitarian base), sword (*Teg*)-(The Sikh symbol of power, to protect the weak and hapless and smite the oppressor), victory and unending patronage are obtained from Gurus Nanak-- Gobind Singh”. After Banda Singh Bahadur this inscription was adopted by the Sikh Misals and then by Sikh rulers for their coins also. Now the official seal of Akal Takhat bears this inscription.

The circle in the emblem of Sikhism represents the *Deg* (caldron) used to prepare food, *Guru ka Langar* initiated by the founder of the Sikh faith, Guru Nanak to remove caste barriers, teach people equality and humility before each other and to feed all and sundry on an egalitarian base so that no body sleeps empty stomach.

The two swords on the outside represent the *Miri--Piri (Bhagti and Shakti)* doctrine of Sikhism, *revealed by Guru Nanak and put into practice by his sixth successor, Guru Hargobind* indicating the integration of spiritual and temporal powers together and not treating them as two separate and distinct entities.

In the center is the *Khanda*, the double-edged sword, used by the tenth Nanak, Guru Gobind Singh to prepare *Amrit* to initiate the Sikhs. *Khanda* has cutting edge on both sides indicative of two swords fused together representing *Bhagti and Shakti* (spiritual and temporal powers), giving birth to “The Khalsa”, who is a saint-soldier (*Sant-Sipahi*), the saint meaning scholarly in knowledge of Gurbani and soldier meaning martial in spirit.

To summarize, the Sikh national Emblem, reminds the Sikhs that they are warriors, they should take *Pahul (Amrit)*, become ‘Khalsa’ i.e, The ultimate form of the Sikh, keep *Guru Ka Langar* going so that no body sleeps hungry, keep themselves armed, protect the weak and hapless, fight injustice and oppression, wherever it takes place, the victory will be theirs: ‘*Deg-Teg-Fateh*’.