

dissolved, and all would be recognized as equals by the fact of their humanity. A truly revolutionary social reformer, Guru Nanak also condemned the mistreatment of women in his time, proclaiming them the equals of men in every respect—political, social, and religious—over two and a half centuries before the founding of the United States.

Khalsa

On March 30, 1699, Guru Gobind Singh—the tenth and final human Guru—revealed a new order of the Sikhs, called the *Khalsa* (meaning “belonging only to the Divine”). The *Khalsa* consists of Sikhs who undergo a initiation ceremony and dedicate themselves to living by the high standards



of the Sikh Gurus at all times, as well as maintaining their physical

distinctiveness in society by maintaining five articles of faith. The *Khalsa*, a global human fellowship, upheld the highest Sikh virtues through the harshest and most difficult times in Sikh history.

One of the more conspicuous and noteworthy of the articles of faith is the *Kesh* (uncut hair), which is kept covered by a distinctive turban. The other articles are the *Kirpan* (religious sword), *Kara* (metal bracelet), *Kanga* (comb) and *Kaccha* (under-shorts). They all have deep religious meanings for Sikhs, who wear them to honor the teachings, wishes, and memory of their beloved *Gurus*.



SALDEF
Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund

Produced by the Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund (SALDEF).

About SALDEF: Founded as the Sikh Medlawatch and Resource Task Force (SMART) in 1996, SALDEF is a national civil rights and educational organization serving the Sikh American community through legal assistance, educational outreach, legislative advocacy and media relations. SALDEF is a nonprofit, non-partisan, membership based organization with a diverse membership across the United States.

SALDEF has several professionally-produced resources for members of the Sikh American community and the general public. The following publications are available for distribution: *Helping Sikh Children with Bullying* booklet, *Know Your Rights* pocket guide explaining civil rights, *Who Are the Sikhs* full-color brochure, *Visiting a Gurdwara* booklet for non-Sikhs, and *Law Enforcement Reference Card* addressing awareness and protocol.

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For more information on the religion and history of the Sikhs please contact SALDEF at: 877-91-SIKHS, info@saldef.org or visit SALDEF's web site at www.saldef.org.

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WHO ARE THE



SIKHS



There is only one God
Whose name is Truth

The Creator
Without fear
Without hate

A timeless being

Beyond births and deaths

Self-illuminated

Revealed only by the Guru's grace

- Mool Mantra
Guru Granth Sahib

Background

The word Sikh means disciple or student. Sikhs are students and followers of *Guru Nanak* (b. 1469), the founder of the Sikh religious tradition, and the nine prophet-teachers—called *Gurus*—who succeeded him. Though sometimes mistaken for members of a sect of Hinduism or Islam, Sikhs belong to a distinct religion with its own unique, divine scriptures, which

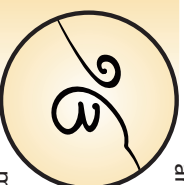


are collected in the *Guru Granth Sahib*, the eternal spiritual guide of the Sikhs. This

extraordinarily poetic treasure of sacred and practical wisdom contains not only the writings of the Sikh *Gurus*, but remarkably, those of Muslim and Hindu saints as well. It is also notable in that the holy text was written by the *Gurus* themselves, without the use of any intermediaries.

Beliefs

Sikhism's central theological belief is that there is one God for all of creation, a loving Creator attainable through meditation upon and remembrance of God's Name. In addition, Sikhs

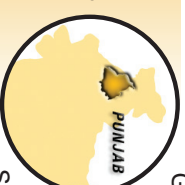


Ek Onkar
[There is only
One God]

are enjoined to lead moral lives, earn their living through hard work and honest means, and to share the fruits of their labor through charitable contributions and work. Sikhism is a way of life that advocates the practice of holistic life

experiences—work, worship, and service—in order to attain perpetual union with God, while creating a just social order in this world. A Sikh is required to lead a wholesome family lifestyle and avoid asceticism as a means to reaching God. Spurred by their religion's dictates, Sikhs have a long, celebrated heritage of speaking out against injustice, and standing up for the defenseless.

The twenty-four million Sikhs worldwide trace the origin of their religion to *Punjab*, meaning the land of the five rivers, located in present-day Pakistan and northern India. Now the fifth largest religion in the world, Sikhism is universal in that it is open to all, and that it recognizes and respects all human beings as equals. Just as



God transcends the boundaries of race, class, gender, and ethnicity, the Sikh religion

dismisses such earthly distinctions. The Sikh religion is profoundly egalitarian and democratic, as its adherents believe steadfastly that all people have civil rights, including the freedom of religion. Sikh doctrine resonates with the *Gurus'* belief that all people have the right to follow their own path to God, without condemnation or coercion from others.

Nearly five centuries ago, Sikhism's founder, Guru Nanak, denounced the invidious, wretched caste system that still plagues Indian society today. He strove to create a spiritual community in which such marks of social status would be

Highlights

1. The word Sikh means disciple or student.
2. Sikhs are students and followers of Guru Nanak (b. 1469), the founder of the Sikh religious tradition.
3. Sikhism's central theological belief is that there is one God for all of creation, a loving Creator attainable through meditation upon and remembrance of God's Name.
4. Sikhism is a way of life that advocates the practice of holistic life experiences—work, worship, and service.
5. Sikhism does not recognize racial, class, caste, or other earthly distinctions.
6. Sikhism recognizes the complete equality between women and men in all spheres of life: political, social, and religious.
7. Guru Gobind Singh—the tenth and final human Sikh Guru—revealed a new, voluntary order of the Sikhs, called the Khalsa (meaning "belonging only to the Divine").
8. Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh holy scripture, is the eternal Guru and spiritual guide of the Sikhs.
9. Twenty-four million Sikhs worldwide trace the origin of their religion to Punjab.
10. Sikhism is the fifth largest religion in the world.
11. There are an estimated 500,000 Sikhs in the US and about the same number in Canada.