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SIKHISM

St Philip's Centre is a charity set up in 2006 rooted in the multi-faith environment of Leicester, Europe's most ethnically diverse city.

The Centre is committed to a wide programme of training, public benefit activities and community engagement. We have a superb track record of promoting positive community relations through education, religion and belief training, charitable activities, community events, dialogue and international exchanges.

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Front cover images: *Main image - The Golden Temple at Amritsar, Punjab, India*

From top down: 1. Guru Nanak Dev Ji, the first Guru (1469 - 1539) 2. Langar 3. Inside a Gurdwara 4. Sri

Guru Granth Sahib Ji (Holy Scripture) 5. Panj Piare (the five beloved)



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What is Sikhism?

An estimated 25 million people worldwide identify or associate themselves with the Sikh faith, making it the fifth largest world-religion. The word 'Sikh' means disciple of the True Perfect Guru. A Sikh is a person whose sole faith consists of belief in One God and who follows the teachings of **Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji**, eternal holy text of Sikhs.

Sikhism, properly known as 'Sikhi', is a monotheistic faith, which was founded by **Guru Nanak Sahib Ji** (1469 – 1539) and shaped by his nine successors in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in South Asia. Sikhism is not a sect of Hinduism or Islam, or synthesis of these two faiths. According to the Sikh belief, there is One God who is all omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient. God is the sole Creator, Sustainer and Destroyer. He is beyond birth and death. He is both merciful and compassionate. He is beyond fear and enmity. He is self-illuminated. All our possessions are a result of His grace. The Sikhs call God **Waheguru**, meaning the most 'Wondrous Lord'.

Gurus

For Sikhs, the '**Guru**' is the exalted master who shows the way to enlightenment and union with God. There were 10 Gurus in the human form from Guru Nanak Sahib Ji to Guru Gobind Singh Sahib Ji who developed the faith and manifested the completed form of the Sikh community. Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji (the Divine Scripture), the scriptural embodiment of over two centuries of spiritual revelation and instructions became the eternal Guru of the Sikhs, ending the human lineage of Gurus.

Sikhs consider the revelation contained within the Sacred Scripture to be the living Word of God, communicated directly through the enlightened Gurus and Saints who had experienced God. Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji teaches through Divine **Baani** (Words of God) that is set to a formal system of Sikh classical music. In the compilation of the Sikh Scripture, the Gurus included the revelations of devotees of God who were born in a diverse socio-economic, caste, and religious backgrounds, however all shared the universal religion of Guru Nanak Sahib Ji and experienced God through which they received revelations.

List of Guru's:

1. Guru Nanak Sahib Ji (1469 – 1539)
 2. Guru Angad Sahib Ji (1504-1552)
 3. Guru Amar Daas Sahib Ji (1479-1574)
 4. Guru Raam Daas Sahib Ji (1534-1581)
 5. Guru Arjan Sahib Ji (1563-1606)
 6. Guru Hargobind Sahib Ji (1595-1644)
 7. Guru Har Rai Sahib Ji (1630-1661)
 8. Guru Har Krishan Sahib Ji (1656-1664)
 9. Guru Tegh Bahadar Sahib Ji (1621-1675)
 10. Guru Gobind Singh Sahib Ji (1666-1708)
- Guru Granth Sahib Ji (1708 - Eternal)

Bandi Chhor Diwas (October/November)

This festival celebrates the return of Guru Hargobind Sahib Ji, the Sixth Guru from detention in the Gwalior Fort with 52 kings. The festival celebrates deliverance from hardship and sacrificing one's own freedom to free others.



Other holy days

Guru Gobind Singh's birthday: January 5

Guru Arjan's martyrdom: June 16

Guru Nanak's birthday: November (date varies)

Guru Tegh Bahadur's martyrdom: November 24



Diet

A Sikh considers one of the first duties is to look after their body and care for it as it is the container of their soul, the temple where God resides. To this end, Sikhs avoid any substance that has been seen to do any damage – temporary or permanent – to their bodies.

For this reason baptised Sikhs refrain from alcohol, tobacco and narcotic or intoxicating drugs, in accordance to the Sikh Code of Conduct (Sikh Rehit Maryada) and Scriptural teachings contained in Guru Granth Sahib Ji.





Gurdwara

The Sikh place of worship is called a **Gurdwara**. In Punjabi, the word Gurdwara means 'gateway to the Guru'. The Gurdwara is more than just a place of worship, it is a place of where one obtains spiritual education, share knowledge of the Guru's wisdom, meditate on God in the congregation as well as act as a focal point for the Sikh community for social needs, services and projects. Worship can be either private or public. **Granthis** are custodians of the Gurdwara and **Gyanis** are interpreters of the scripture.

Gurdwara's are open to visitors, irrespective of their religion or gender, at all times. The common translation of the term as temple is not satisfactory, as Sikhism possesses no sacrificial symbolism. Sikhs have neither idols nor altars in their holy places. They have no sacraments and no priestly order. The essential feature of a Gurdwara is the presiding presence in it of Sikh Sacred Scripture, Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji, living Guru of the Sikhs. Hence the name Gurdwara (guru + dwara = the Guru's Door).

Gurdwara's also have a kitchen and area for eating called a **Langar**. Anyone is welcome to eat there as a sign of equality among all. Sikhs may well belong to particular castes but the Langar symbolises the fact that there is spiritual equality among all, regardless of caste or gender. Both men and women will serve in the Langar. Food served will be vegetarian and alcohol and tobacco are not permitted in a Gurdwara.

Harmandar Sahib (Golden Temple)

Shining in the morning light, the gilded splendour of its panelling and big dome and small minarets, the **Harmandar Sahib (Golden Temple)** is a world palace to the devotees of the Sikh faith. The vision has been received by millions of pilgrims who have come to Amritsar in India for centuries from near and far.

The Golden Temple is holiest shrine in the Sikh religion. **Guru Arjun Dev Ji** requested his great contemporary Muslim saint, Mian Meer to lay the foundation stone of this shrine in January 1589. The building was completed in 1601 and the Holy Scripture of Sikhs, Adi Granth was installed in the Temple in 1604. Guru Arjan Sahib built the Temple so that it reflected openness and humility. Therefore Harmandar Sahib was built on a low level and with four sides to enter and exit instead of one. The Golden Temple is accessible to every person regardless of caste, creed, gender or religion.



Sri Harmandar Sahib (Golden Temple)

Symbol

The Sikh flag carries the insignia known as **Khanda**. It is comprised of:

Khanda - double-edged sword in centre symbolising Immortal God, as well as justice and liberty

Chakar - circle symbolising eternity of God and equality

Miri - sword on left-hand side symbolising political authority

Piri - sword on right-hand side symbolising spiritual power



Leadership

Sikhism does not have a clergy and all human beings are capable of realising God. In 1699, the tenth Sikh Guru manifested the Order of the **Khalsa** to establish a society dedicated in the face of all odds to practicing the essential Sikh values. The physical authority of leading Sikhs was bestowed upon Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji and the Sikh Nation (**Khalsa Panth**).

In earlier days, many decisions affecting the social and political life of the community was taken in Gurdwara's through a consensus of the **Sangat**. These decisions called **gurmattas**, were binding and a member of the community would think twice before violating them. Many important decisions were taken at the **Akaal Takhat** (throne of the immortal) in Amritsar. It is from the Akaal Takhat that **Hukamnamas** (edicts or writs) are announced to provide guidance or clarification on any point of Sikh doctrine or practice.

The **Jathedar** (ordained leader) of the Akaal Takhat is the highest spokesperson of the Sikh Panth and is the spiritual leader without control or influence from any outside sources. Most of the important historical Sikh shrines in Punjab are managed by the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, a body elected from amongst the members of the Punjab Sikh community. Other Gurdwaras worldwide also generally have locally elected and registered managing committees.





Holy Days

Most festivals involve a visit to the Gurdwara for congregational prayer, singing sacred hymns, reflecting on Sikh history through poems and talks, as well as religious discourse, contemplating on the divine wisdom and teachings of Guru Granth Sahib Ji. Festivals are also an opportunity for Sikhs to serve the community through preparing and distributing meals in the free-kitchen (Langar) and other selfless service.

The Sikh festivals are based in accordance to the Sikh Calendar, called the 'Nanakshahi Calendar.' The calendar is aligned to the Gregorian calendar. There are two broad categories of festival; (i) the celebration of the birth, accession of Guruship and martyrdom (these events are collectively known as 'Gurpurbs' (ii) festivals that mark important events in Sikh history.



A Sikh pilgrim bathing in the Sarover (water pool)



Young boy practicing Gatka



Panj Piare (the five beloved of the Guru), followed by the Guru Granth Sahib, the holy Sikh scripture

Holla Mohalla (February/March)

This is a festival celebrating the martial tradition of the Sikh Nation and People.

Vaisakhi or New Year (April 14th)

The New Year, also celebrates the day in 1699 on which Guru Gobind Singh Ji, the Tenth Master, gathered together his followers and invested guruship to the Sikh Nation known as the Khalsa, manifesting and completing the development of the Sikh religion and people.

Vaisakhi is a joyous celebration for Sikhs throughout the world bringing happiness and excitement. The celebrations include a complete non stop reading of Sri Guru Granth

Sahib, which is called an Akhand Paatth, changing the cloth covering the Sikh Flag (Nishan Sahib), a procession of singing sacred hymns in praise of God (Nagar Keertan) led by the five baptised Sikhs and Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji.

Installation of the Gurū Granth Sahib Ji (1st September)

This day celebrates the first installation of the Sacred Divine Scriptures, the Aad Granth Sahib Ji in Harmandar Sahib (also known as the 'Golden Temple') at Amritsar in 1604.

Bandī Chhor Diwas (October/November)

This festival celebrates of the return of Guru Hargobind Sahib Ji, the Sixth Guru from detention in the Gwalior Fort with 52 kings. The festival celebrates deliverance from hardship and sacrificing one's own freedom to free others.

Beliefs

According to Sikh belief, a Sikh must worship only God. Daily prayer and devotion to God and His Creation is required. Every one has equal status before God.

Sikhism promotes the unity of God, universal love, equality and brotherhood of humanity, strict moral conduct and the rejection of the caste system, any distinction made for class, religion, race, or gender, idol worship, superstitious belief and inferiority of women. The Sikh goal is to end the cycle of birth, death and reincarnation, and unite the separated individual soul with the Universal Soul (God). The only way to attain this goal is through living the teachings of Gurus and repeating and meditating the Divine-Name (Naam) revealed through the Guru.

In Sikhism there are 4 cardinal sins (**Bujjar Kurehats**). Sikhs should not:

- Dishonour the hair (i.e. cut, trim, wax, pluck or dye any bodily hair)
- Have an intimate relationship outside marriage
- Use tobacco (or any other intoxicants)
- Eat Kutthaa (killed animal, viz. meat, fish & allied products)

Sikhism identifies 5 vices, which a Sikh must regulate and control. These are Kaam (lust/desires), Krodh (anger), Lobh (greed), Moh (emotional attachment) and Ahankaar (ego).

The **Mool Mantar** is the most important composition contained within the Sri Guru Granth Sahib. It is the basis of Sikhism. Mool Mantar means the "Main Chant" or "Root Verse". Its importance is emphasised by the fact that it is the first composition to appear in the Holy Granth. It is said to be the first composition uttered by Guru Nanak Dev Ji upon enlightenment at about the age of 30. Being the basis of Sikhism it encapsulates the entire theology of Sikhism. The proceeding Japji Sahib (Prayer) and the rest of the Guru Granth Sahib totalling 1430 pages, is a detailed amplification of the Mool Mantar.

5K's

All baptised Sikhs bear the surname **Singh** (meaning lion) and women bear the surname **Kaur** (meaning princess) other Sikhs use these surnames too. Each baptised Sikh has to wear the five articles of faith often called the five K's as part of their body and follow the Sikh code of conduct.

The five Ks are **Kesh** (hair), **Kangha** (a small wooden comb worn in the hair to keep it clean), **Kirpaan** (a sword worn to protect justice and represent the sovereignty), **Kara** (an iron bangle worn to remind one to commit good deeds and that every Sikh is bound to the Guru) and **Kachhera** (a special pair of shorts). Sikhs today are baptised into the Khalsa in a ceremony, which is performed by five **Amritdhari** (baptised) Sikhs that are spiritually elevated, steadfast and fully practice the **Rehat** (Sikh Code of Discipline).

