

WHO ARE THE SIKHS

A Sikh is one who follows the Sikh religion. The word 'Sikh' means disciple or learner. Sikhism is a divinely revealed religion founded by Guru Nanak (1469-1539). A Sikh believes in the teachings of the ten Gurus, *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* (the Sikh holy scripture), and in no other religion. A pious Sikh endeavors to live up to the principles, ideals and the code of conduct as described in *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*.

I. SIKH BELIEFS

Guru Nanak laid down the foundation of Sikhism and over a period of about 239 years, the ten Sikh Gurus developed it into a universal faith. The Sikh beliefs are a product of their practice, preaching, and sacred writings.

One God

Sikhs believe in one God; the sole creator of the universe. God is eternal, omnipotent, omnipresent, fearless, without enmity, is not incarnate, is not born and does not die, is self-illuminated and is without shape or form.

Equality

The Sikhs believe in the equality of all human beings and stress gender equality. The first Guru, Guru Nanak gave equal status to women, stating that woman can not be inferior to men as they give birth to emperors, kings, queens, and scientists. According to Guru Nanak, *“So kiyon mandaa aakhiye, jit jamme raajaan”* (Asa-Di-Var), Sikh women enjoy equal status in religious services and ceremonies. Also, Sikh do not believe in the caste system. Said the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, *“Recognize ye all the human race as one”*.

***Kirat* (Work)**

The Sikh faith teaches that one should earn a living by honest means. One should not take what rightfully belong to others.

Guru Nanak said, *“Taking away other’s rights is as sinful as pork to a Muslim and beef to a Hindu.”*

***Wand Chhakna* (Sharing)**

Sharing your earnings with the poor and needy is a fundamental principle of Sikhism.

***Sewa* (Service)**

Sewa means service to humanity regardless of religious or political affiliation. During a battle between the Sikhs, Hindu kings and Mogul forces, a Sikh named Bhai Kanhaya was on duty to provide water to the wounded. Some Sikhs complained to Guru Gobind Singh that he was serving water to the enemy troops in addition to Sikh troops. He answered to the Guru, "I don't see a friend or a foe, I only see you amongst the wounded." The Guru was pleased and blessed him for his spirit of service to humanity.

Non-Violence

The Sikhs are peace-loving people who stand firm for truth and justice. The tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh said, "*It is right to use force as a last resort when all other peaceful means fail.*"

***Simran* (Meditation)**

Simran is "remembering God" and repeating the holy name "*Satnaam-Waheguru, Satnaam-Waheguru...*" *Simran* helps one to get closer to God and brings peace of mind.

Tolerance of Other Faiths

Sikhism is a secular religion and its followers do not believe in forced conversions. Mian Mir, a Muslim saint, laid down the foundation-stone of Hari Mandar Sahib (Golden Temple), Amritsar.

Wellness of the Entire Human Race

Sikhs, in their daily prayer, wish for the wellbeing of humanity. Said Guru Nanak : “*Nanak naam charhdi kalaa tere bhaane sarbat da bhalaa.*” (O God ! Endow us with ever rising spirit, and provide for the wellness of the entire human race.)

Self-Discipline

Sikhs are expected to be able to control passion (*Kaam*), anger (*Karodh*), greed (*Lobh*), materialistic attachment (*Moh*), and ego (*Hankaar*).

II. HOW TO IDENTIFY A SIKH

Guru Gobind Singh established Khalsa (the army of God) on March 29, 1699 and gave Sikhs their code of uniform as the five K's and turban (for men), and scarf (for women). The following are the five identifiers of a Sikh :

Kesh (Unshorn Hair)

Long, uncut hair is a natural way of living in harmony with the will of God. Sikh men and women do not cut hair.

Kangha (Comb)

A Sikh carries a small comb to keep the hair clean.

Kirpan (Sword)

A Sikh carries a sword to protect oneself and the weak, and to fight justice. It is not to be used for offense.

Kara (Iron Bracelet)

A Sikh wears a bracelet on his/her wrist as a reminder of one's bond with God and as a reminder not to perform prohibited acts.

Kachhahira (Shorts)

These special shorts are necessary for swiftness and agility. They also serve to remind Sikhs of sexual purity.

III. The Ten Gurus

Guru Nanak (1469-1539)

Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, was born in Talwandi, since called Nankana Sahib (now in Pakistan). Guru Nanak had extraordinary foresight. He was always ready to help the poor and feed the hungry. When Nanak was growing up, his father asked him to start a business and gave him 20 Rupees (a sizeable sum at that time). However, the Guru spent the money feeding the hungry. For him, helping those in need was the most profitable business.

Guru Nanak worked as a storekeeper for many years. He used to spend a large part of his wages on feeding the poor and hungry. When he was 30, he travelled all around the South Asian and Middle Eastern region to preach God's message of love for all. He explained that there is one God, who is the sole creator of this universe, is omnipresent, is not incarnate, without enmity, shape or form.

After 20 years of travel, Guru Nanak settled down at Kartarpur and worked as a farmer. He held religious congregation in his home and taught his followers the Sikh way of life.

Guru Nanak was very popular among both Hindus and

Muslims. He was called *Guru* by the Hindus and *Pir* by the Muslims. When he passed away at the age of 70, the Hindus and the Muslims divided his shroud into two. The Hindus cremated their half and the Muslims buried theirs.

Guru Nanak taught that all human beings, black or white, rich or poor, men or women are equal. He said, "There is neither Hindu nor Muslim." He proclaimed that we are all God's people. In God's eyes the labels of Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Jew, Buddhist, or Sikh, are meaningless. It is the behaviour and deeds that are important. Guru Nanak rebelled against nefarious exploitation by Brahmins.

Guru Angad Dev (1539-1552)

Guru Angad Dev was the second Guru. He improved the script called Gurmukhi (from the mouth of the Guru) for writing Panjabi and all of the Gurbani (Gurus writings) was written in Panjabi. Guru Angad himself taught Panjabi to his followers.

Guru Amar Das (1552-1574)

Guru Amar Das, the third Guru, believed in and preached the equality of humanity. During his time, people of lower

classes were having difficulty in getting drinking water. Because of this, he had a deep well dug at Goindwal. He allowed the people of all castes and classes to draw water from this well, thus helping to eliminate caste discrimination. He ordered that anyone who wished to see him must first sit with common people and share the same food from *Langar* (Free Kitchen). When Akbar, the Mogul emperor, came to visit the Guru, he first had to sit with the common people and share the *Langar*.

Guru Amar Das sent many missionaries far and wide to spread the teachings of Guru Nanak.

Guru Ram Das (1574-1581)

Guru Ram Das built the sacred pool of immortality around which he built the present City of Amritsar. This soon grew to become a major religious and trading center. The pool was opened to people of all religions and castes. Taking a bath in the same pool encouraged elimination of caste system.

Guru Arjan Dev (1581-1606)

Guru Arjan Dev, the fifth Guru, wrote more hymns than any other Guru. The most recognized of these compositions is Sukhmani Sahib (the hymns of peace).

He collected the hymns of all previous Gurus and those of some prominent Hindu and Muslim saints, which he compiled into one large volume, now known as the *Adi Granth*.

He built the Hari Mandar (house of God), now known as the Golden Temple in the middle of the pool of immortality at Amritsar.

He was tortured to death by order of the Muslim Emperor Jahangir because of his beliefs and teachings and in this way, the Guru became the first Sikh martyr.

Guru Hargobind (1606-1644)

After the martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev, his eleven-year-old son Hargobind became the next Guru. Guru Hargobind combined spiritual and temporal powers into one authority. Thus, the Sikh community became organized to defend the weak and helpless. The Guru trained his followers in military tactics and encouraged them to use arms only to protect the weak.

This enraged the emperor and the Guru was imprisoned in the Fort of Gwalior. Soon people started to gather near the prison to have an occasional glimpse of the Guru. The Emperor thought it best to release him. However, the

Guru refused to leave the jail until all the other 52 kings that were also imprisoned were released with him. He thus succeeded in getting all these kings freed. For this act, he became known as *Bandi-Chhor* (Liberator).

Guru Har Rai (1644-1661)

The seventh Guru, Guru Har Rai was gentle and kind-hearted. He opened a hospital where medicine and treatment were given free. Even Prince Dara Shikoh, the eldest son of Emperor Shah Jahan, was healed by his medicine.

Guru Har Krishan (1661-1664)

Guru Har Krishan became the eighth Guru at the age of five. He displayed great spiritual leadership and courage. He continued serving and healing the sick during a smallpox epidemic in Delhi at the risk of his own life. Before his death at the age of 8, he nominated Tegh Bahadur as his successor.

Guru Tegh Bahadur (1664-1675)

Guru Tegh Bahadur spent many years in meditation before he was appointed the ninth Guru. He travelled far and wide to preach the message of Sikhism.

The persecution of the people by the Emperor Aurangzeb forced Hindu *pundits* from Kashmir to appeal to Guru Tegh Bahadur to save them from forced conversion to Islam. As a result of this, the Guru was executed (beheaded) for his belief in basic human rights and religious tolerance. He became the second Guru martyr.

Guru Gobind Singh (1675-1708)

Guru Gobind Singh was the last Guru of the Sikhs. He created Khalsa and called it *Akal Purkh ki Fauj* (Army of God). He first baptized five Sikhs who offered to give their life for their faith. Then, he asked them in return to baptize him. After the ceremony, Guru Gobind Rai became Guru Gobind Singh. Many more men and women were initiated. Guru Gobind Singh called them Khalsa and asked them to wear the five symbols as described before, called the five K's.

Guru Gobind Singh had great vision. Creation of Khalsa changed the history and the geography of that region. The fearless Khalsa fought many wars against the mighty Mogul armies and kings from the surrounding hills. The Guru's two older sons died fighting at Chamkaur and the younger two were bricked up alive in a wall at Sirhind because they refused to give up their faith.

The Guru declared that after him only the *Adi Granth*, would be the Guru of the Sikhs. He was, in turn, the last Sikh Guru in human form.

Before passing away in 1708, Guru Gobind Singh appointed Banda Singh Bahadur to lead the Khalsa. Banda Singh Bahadur travelled far and wide and compiled a large army to fight oppression and injustice by Mogul rulers. Banda Singh Bahadur thus established Sikh Rule for the first time in 1710.

IV. *SRI GURU GRANTH SAHIB* (The Holy Scripture)

Sri Guru Granth Sahib (Adi Granth) is the Sikh Holy Scripture. The fifth Guru, Guru Arjan Dev, compiled the sacred writings of the first five Gurus and also those of some Hindu and Muslim saints whose views were in accord with Sikh principles. This large volume is known as *Adi Granth*, is written in Gurmukhi, and contains 1430 pages.

Later on, Guru Gobind Singh added writings of Guru Tegh Bahadur. Guru Gobind Singh declared that there would be no more Gurus in human form after his death. The Sikhs would recognize the *Adi Granth* as their perpetual Guru.

Therefore, it is called *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* and the Sikhs respect it as a living Guru.

Sri Guru Granth Sahib starts with *Mool Mantar*, Guru Nanak's description of God.

Sri Guru Granth Sahib is written in poetic form and contains the philosophy of Sikhism. The basic Sikh principles contained in *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* are love of God and mankind, community service, gender equality, honest living and tolerance of other religions. Honest living is the best form of worship in Sikhism.

The Gurus' teachings forbid Sikhs from worshipping idols and deities, fasting, and performing rituals. The Guru attached great importance to family life.

The Sikhs do not worship any Guru or *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*. Instead they worship and revere the teachings of God revealed through sacred writings. *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* is central to all the Sikh festivals and ceremonies.

Whatever advice or religious instructions Sikhs need, they can find it in this sacred scripture. It is traditionally seated on a *Palki* (decorated seat), which is kept on a *Takhat* (raised platform) at a prominent place in the Gurdwara (Sikh house of worship). It is covered with richly embroidered cloth

called *Romals*. Above it is a colorful *Chaandani* (canopy).

Everyday, *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* is placed ceremoniously and a hymn is read from a randomly opened page. This is called *Hukam*, or the order of the day. The entire process is called *Prakash*. *Ragees* are the professional singers who sing *Kirtan* (hymns in praise of the Lord).

A *Granthi* is appointed to perform all religious ceremonies and other duties. S/he recites *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* and conducts prayers. During the singing of hymns s/he sits behind *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* and periodically waves a *Chaur* over it. A *Chaur* is made from synthetic fiber embedded into a wooden or metallic handle.

After the evening prayer, *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* is ceremoniously closed and taken to its place of rest. This process is called *Sukh-Asan*.

Akhand Path is the continuous uninterrupted recitation of the entire *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* by a relay of readers. It usually takes about 48 hours and is performed on special occasions such as births, marriages, the purchase of new home, or special days or festivals of the Gurus.

Every Sikh is encouraged to recite *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* in its entirety at least once in his/her lifetime.

V. GURDWARA (The Sikh House of Worship)

The word "Gurdwara" literally means Guru's home. It is a place of worship for the Sikhs. Guru Nanak held the very first prayers of Sikhism at his home in Kartarpur. Many Gurdwaras have been built at important Sikh historical places in the memory of the events that occurred there. The most significant Gurdwara is Hari Mandar Sahib better known as Golden Temple, in Amritsar.

Important historical Gurdwaras have been built at Nankana Sahib, the birth-place of Guru Nanak; Anandpur Sahib, where Khalsa was born; Damdama Sahib, where Guru Gobind Singh added Guru Tegh Bahadur's writings to the final version of *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*; Patna Sahib, the birth-place of Guru Gobind Singh; Hazoor Sahib, where Guru Gobind Singh departed for heavenly abode; and Gurdwara Sis Ganj, where Guru Tegh Bahadur sacrificed his life for religious freedom of all people.

A *Nishan Sahib* (Sikh flag) flies at every Sikh Gurdwara. The Gurdwara building usually consists of two separate halls, one for prayer (Congregation Hall) and the other for *Langar*. Some Gurdwaras use one hall for both *Kirtan* and *Langar* for

lack of space. Gurdwaras promote teaching Punjabi, religious education, music and physical activities.

Sri Guru Granth Sahib is the focal point of the prayer hall and is placed in a prominent site. As a mark of respect to the Guru, everyone must take off their shoes, wash their hands and cover their heads before entering the prayer hall. One then walks down towards the Altar and bows in front of *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*. Generally, a voluntary offering of cash is made at this time. Then, one sits on the carpet facing the *Palki* (altar) on which *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* is placed.

Men and women generally sit apart, but this is not a requirement.

Worship takes place in the form of *Kirtan* (singing hymns), *Katha*, the explanation of verses of *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* and related religious texts, and the reciting of different parts of *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*. Usually *Dhadi Jathas* (singers with musical instruments) and *Kaveeshary Jathas* (singers without musical instruments) sing verses related to Sikh religion and history. Gurdwaras usually employ a *Granthi* (a learned Sikh) to recite scriptures and to perform religious ceremonies. If a *Granthi* or a *Ragee* is not available, any Sikh member of the congregation may lead the prayer service.

All religious gatherings conclude by reciting an *Ardas*, the main Sikh prayer, seeking the Guru's blessing; and a random reading of *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, which is also known as *Hukam*. The *Hukam* is regarded as the "order of the day" to be followed by the congregation. Then, *Karah Prashad* (sweet pudding made from flour, Desi Ghee and sugar) is served to the congregation.

This is followed by *Langar*. The congregation sits on the floor and is served a free meal. *Langar* is run by the donations of the congregation. Food is strictly vegetarian and all are welcome to eat regardless of their religion, caste, creed, color or social status.

A Gurdwara is usually managed by an executive committee formed by selection or election of individuals from the congregation. A board of trustees usually oversees the function of the executive committee.

The Gurdwara is open to people of all religions. Visitors are encouraged.

VI. THE GOLDEN TEMPLE

The Golden Temple is considered the most sacred and important of the Sikh Gurdwaras. It was built at the time

of the fifth Guru, Guru Arjan Dev, in the middle of the pool of immortality. A Muslim saint, Mian Mir, laid the foundation-stone of the Golden Temple, in 1588. On the completion of the Gurdwara, Guru Arjan Dev installed the Sikh scripture later named as *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*.

In 1803, Maharaja Ranjit Singh covered the dome of the Gurdwara with a golden leaf, hence its present name the Golden Temple. Sikhs prefer to call it a Gurdwara rather than a temple.

The Golden Temple is not only a place of worship, but also, a center of Sikh solidarity. The sacred pool is said to have great healing power. The temple symbolized history, culture, literature and folklore of Sikhs.

The Golden Temple is itself a part of an extensive complex. Some of the other buildings include *Guru Ka Langar* (a free kitchen), Guru Ram Das Niwas (a free hostel for the visitors), Baba Atal (a nine-storey-tower-building built in memory of Atal Rai, son of the sixth Guru).

The second most important building in the complex is Akal Takhat. Built in 1609 by the sixth Guru, it has been the nerve center of Sikhs ever since. All orders concerning the Sikh community are issued from here. The Akal Takhat has

been destroyed several times over the past few centuries. Most recently, in June 1984, the Indian army demolished the Akal Takhat and many adjoining buildings. Each time, Sikhs have rebuilt the Akal Takhat.

The Golden Temple has four main entrances symbolizing the fact that people from all religions and walks of life are welcome to enter.

VII. BIRTH OF THE KHALSA

In 1699, Sikhs were preparing for a gathering at Anandpur Sahib to see Guru Gobind Rai (as he was then known) and to celebrate Vaisakhi (a holy day often celebrated with a fair). The Guru sent messages all over the region that there would be a special celebration on this occasion. Thus, Sikhs gathered in thousands at Anandpur Sahib.

On the Vaisakhi day, March 29, 1699, the Guru wore a special saffron-colored robe with a blue *sash* as a waistband and held a long sword on his side. He welcomed the Sikhs and praised them for their devotion. He then drew his sword and declared : "I want the head of a Sikh who is prepared to give his or her life for the faith and the Guru."

At that point, the stunned crowd saw a Sikh, named

Daya Ram, bowing before the Guru and offering his head. The Guru took him to a nearby tent. The congregation heard a loud thud and the Guru reappeared on the stage, with his sword dripping of blood.

The Guru repeated his demand 4 more times and 4 more Sikhs offered their heads. The congregation saw each one of them being taken into the tent.

After some time the Guru and the Sikhs reappeared. The five had the same dress as the Guru. The Guru explained that this was a test of their courage, will and readiness to die for their faith and the Guru. The Sikhs has passed the test. He called the five chosen ones *Panj Piaray* (the five beloved ones). Then, he asked for an iron bowl, a *Khanda* (a double-edged sword) and water.

Guru Gobind Rai performed the *Amrit* ceremony (initiation into Khalsa). He poured water into the iron bowl and began stirring it with the *Khanda*. His wife added some *Patassas* (puffed sugar cakes). At the same time, he recited five prayers. Now the *Amrit* was ready.

The Guru gave each of the *Panj Piaray* five palmfuls of *Amrit* to drink and sprinkled *Amrit* five times onto their eyes and hair. Each time the Guru proclaimed, "*Waheguru*

Ji Ka Khalsa ! Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh !" (Khalsa belongs to God, and victory belongs to God). The Guru announced, "They have become Khalsa" (army of God). He explained the Khalsa code of conduct called Rehat. The Panj Piaray took the solemn vows. Thus, the nation of Khalsa was born.

The Guru invited all to join the Khalsa. In response thousands took *Amrit*. The title of *Singh* (lion) was given to men, and *Kaur* (Princess) to women.

These days, the *Amrit* ceremony can be performed at any place or time, as long as it is organized by five initiated Sikhs. Young boys and girls are encouraged to take *Amrit* when they understand and promise to keep the vows. These are :

A. Always wear symbols as uniform of Khalsa. These include :

Kesh, Kangha, Kirpan, Kara and Kachhahira.

B. Recite five sacred prayers daily

C. Give up caste and class distinctions

VIII. SIKH FESTIVALS

Sikh festivals are the occasions for Sikhs to rededicate themselves to the faith. A *Gurpurab*, or Guru's day is a festival connected with some important event in the Guru's

life. The *Gurpurabs* are celebrated to remember events in the Sikh calendar, and to offer personal commitment to Sikh beliefs. On these occasions, Sikhs join in mass prayers and sometimes organize large processions and parades.

The martyrdom anniversaries of the Gurus are not as occasion to express grief, but are festivals to inspire Sikhs, to remind them of their history and struggle for justice, and to teach them the value of sacrifice for a good cause.

People of various other faiths are invited to these celebrations to give them a view of the Sikh faith and way of life.

Vaisakhi (Baisakhi)

Vaisakhi is the New Year festival on the Sikh calendar. On this day, Guru Gobind Singh created the Khalsa. This usually falls on April 13. A *Nishan Sahib*, or the Sikh flag, is replaced on this day every year. A service is held led by the *Panj Piaray* of a congregation. The flag post is taken down and the *Chola* (flag cloth) is removed, the flag post is washed and cleaned, and it is covered with a new cloth. The ceremony is accompanied by *Ardas*. Competitions are held in sports, martial arts, poetry and essay writing on the festival theme.

Guru Nanak's Birthday

On this day, Gurdwaras, and the houses and shops of followers are lit with candles. Special processions are held along important routes led by the *Panj Piaray* and *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* in a decorated *Palki*. All along the routes, the masses sing hymns and Sikh youth display martial arts.

Special celebrations are held at the historical Gurdwara of Nankana Sahib (birth-place of Guru Nanak) and Panja Sahib, both in Pakistan.

Guru Tegh Bahadur's Anniversary

This festival falls in November and carries special importance as Guru Tegh Bahadur sacrificed his life for the religious freedom of all people. To commemorate this day, the Sikhs gather in large numbers in the Gurdwara Sis Ganj in Delhi, where the Guru was beheaded by order of the Mogul Emperor.

IX. SIKH CEREMONIES

In the Sikh religion, there are some special ceremonial events like birth, initiation, marriage, and death in a Sikh family. The idea behind these is to seek the blessing of God and to

renew the spirit of devotion and service. All Sikh ceremonies are held in the presence of *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* including the singing of hymns, a formal prayer (*Ardas*) suitable to the occasion, *Hukam* (a random reading from *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*), distribution of *Prashad* followed by *Langar*.

The Naming Ceremony

After the birth of a child, the mother and the child, when in good health, go to a Gurdwara with their relatives and close friends for the naming ceremony.

The *Granthi* recites Japji Sahib while preparing *Karah Prashad*. Hymns are recited to bless the child. Then, *Ardas* is recited and the *Hukam* is read. The child's name is chosen to begin with the first letter of the *Hukam*. The title of *Singh* (lion) is given to the male and *Kaur* (princess) to the female child. Finally, *Karah Prashad* is distributed to the congregation.

Dastar Bandi

The initial process of tying a turban is called *Dastar Bandi*. The child is seated in front of *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* and an elder member of his family ties the turban on his head.

The *Granthi* explains that he must keep unshorn hair and wear a turban. Prayers are said to invoke the Guru's blessings on the boy.

Initiation Ceremony (Baptism or *Amrit*)

The initiation ceremony in Sikhism is known as *Amrit*. This procedure is necessary for any non-Sikh who wishes to become a Sikh. Those who are born to Sikh parents are also encouraged to take *Amrit*. A candidate for *Amrit* must wear the five K's and a turban (for males) and scarf (for females).

Marriage Ceremony

The Sikh marriage is called *Anand Karaj*. The Sikh wedding is usually held in a Gurdwara or in the bride's home. In this ceremony, the bride sits alongside the bridegroom facing *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*. A short prayer is recited in which the couple and their parents are required to stand. The wedding ceremony begins with the *Ragees* singing the hymn of *Palla*. *Palla* is the bridegroom's scarf. The bride's father places the *Palla* in the bride's hand to hold it firmly. This is symbolic of giving away the daughter.

This is followed by *Laavaan* (the wedding hymn). It

consists of four verses. *Laavaan* are recited by the *Granthi* as the couple sits in front of *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*. Then, the *Ragees* sing the same verse with music while the couple walks gracefully clockwise around *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, the bride following the bridegroom. Similarly the remaining three verses are completed.

Six verses of Anand Sahib (the hymn of joy) are then sung followed by *Ardas* and the distribution of *Karah Prashad*. The bride's family traditionally arranges lunch.

Death Ceremony

Death is an occasion of grief in any society. According to Sikhism, one should bear the loss with courage and accept this as the will of God. Sikhs cremate their dead usually shortly after death. On the day of cremation, the body is washed and dressed in clean clothing. At the crematorium, the *Giani* and the present congregation recite *Sohila*. This is followed by *Ardas* to seek peace for the departed soul. The next day, the ashes are collected and submerged into a river or sea. The final religious ceremony is called *Bhog* (the completion of the journey of life). Usually, a complete reading of *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* is organized and the last

five pages are read at the *Bhog*. Also at this ceremony, the *Ragees* sing *Kirtan*. This is followed by *Ardas* to seek God's forgiveness for any sins committed during this life and for the soul's salvation from the cycle of birth and death.

If it is a father who died, it is customary to offer a turban to the eldest male child of the family. He accepts this as a mark of responsibility to be the head of the family.

X. UNIQUENESS OF THE SIKH FAITH

Sikhism is not a combination of principles selected from Islam or Hinduism. Sikhism is a pious way for achieving peace by doing service to the society. Some of the important principles of Sikhism are meditation on the Name of God, honest living, sharing with others, helping and defending the weak, worshipping only the *Akal Purakh Waheguru* (God), praying for the wellness of humanity, and maintaining good moral behaviour and character. Renunciation and celibacy have no place in Sikhism. Fasting to appease the deities, *Aarti-Pooja* and showering flowers is prohibited. Human worship and idolatry is not permitted. Sikhs do not believe in supernatural beings, or heaven and hell. Superstitions (ominous and auspicious days) have no place

in the Sikh faith. Sikh priests are allowed to marry and have normal family life.

XI. *ARDAS* **(Sikh Daily Prayer)**

In their daily prayer the Sikhs remember God, recite and commemorate the names of the Ten Gurus, the *Panj Piaray* (five beloved ones), *Chaar Sahibzaday* (4 sons of Guru Gobind Singh), *Chaali Muktay* (the forty forgiven), and all men, women and children, who sacrificed their lives, suffered, or contributed towards fighting oppression and injustice, and did not fail their faith. The Sikhs pray for victory of the Khalsa Panth and for God's help everywhere. In the end, Sikhs pray for the wellness of humanity. (*Raj Karega Khalsa*—the Khalsa shall rule, is a part of daily prayer).

XII. THE SIKH HOMELAND

Almost all Sikhs have their roots in Punjab. Punjab literally means the land of five rivers; namely, Jehlum, Chenab, Ravi, Beas, and Sutlej. In 1947, at the time of partition of the Indian Subcontinent, India was divided into two

nations, India and Pakistan. Punjab, being on the border-line of the two new nations, was divided into two parts, one in present day India and the other in Pakistan. It is the Indian half that is referred to as the Sikh Homeland. About 60 percent of the present population of Punjab is Sikh.

Punjab is the most agriculturally prosperous state in India and stands as a symbol of Sikh achievements. Unfortunately, due to various political factors, there has been a decline in this prosperity over the last 50 years.

Sikhs are fond of music and dancing. *Bhangra*, a type of Punjabi music is becoming increasingly popular in Western countries has its origin in Punjab. *Giddha* is the traditional folk dance for women.

XIII. *KHANDA*—THE SIKH NATIONAL SYMBOL

The *Khanda* is a symbol that stands for God's universal and creative power. In its center is a double-edged sword, symbol of primal and almighty power of the Creator. The *Chakra* or the circle is a symbol of continuity. The two swords on the outside are symbols of the spiritual (*Piri*) and political (*Miri*) balance in the universe.

XIV. GURU GOBIND SINGH'S DESCRIPTION OF THE KHALSA

*Khalsa is the one who nourishes the poor
Khalsa is the one who destroys the oppressor
Khalsa is the one who recites Thy name
Khalsa is the one who rises above the evil
Khalsa is the one blessed with God's presence*

Guru Gobind Singh's love for Khalsa is demonstrated
in the following statement :

*Khalsa is the breath of my body
Khalsa is the very soul of my life.
Khalsa is my real pride and glory
Khalsa is my own personal self
Khalsa is my life's sustainer
Khalsa is my body and breath
Khalsa is my creed and Karma
Khalsa is my conscience keeper
Khalsa is my Perfect Satguru
Khalsa is my brave friend
Khalsa gives me intellect and wisdom
Khalsa is my object of meditation*

XV. STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM AND JUSTICE

Sikh history is replete of sacrifices, and acts of bravery and extraordinary courage. Guru Arjan Dev, the fifth Sikh Guru (forced to sit on hot iron board and hot sand poured over his head) gave up his life for his faith.

Guru Tegh Bahadur was beheaded in Chandani Chowk, Delhi for upholding human rights and religious freedom for all faiths. The tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh sacrificed his entire family fighting oppression and injustice.

Bhai Mati Dass's body was sawed into two halves in November 1675, when he refused to accept Islam.

The tyrant Muslim rulers butchered Baba Banda Singh Bahadur most mercilessly. His four-year-old son was put to death in front of him, and his son's heart was taken out and thrust into his mouth. Even this most inhuman and cruel act failed to shake his resolve and determination.

Shaheed Bhai Taru Singh was scalped alive (circa 1745) for not giving up his faith, by Muslim rulers Zakaria Khan who forcibly tried to convert him into Islam. Bhai Subeg Singh and his son Bhai Shahbaz Singh were martyred

together by passing their bodies through adjoining wheels with cutting blades when they refused to accept Islam.

Sikhs played a fundamental roll in getting India liberated from British Rule, and vast majorities of the sacrifices were made by Sikhs.

There are innumerable examples of acts of bravery and sacrifice, which are beyond the scope of this booklet.

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