

Websites

Important note: The information on wikipedia is constantly being edited and therefore we have decided to leave the links below for teachers to view and print directly prior to teaching the lesson. Please use these resources accordingly to create student handouts for class time.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judaism>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hinduism>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhism>

Sikhī

Five hundred years ago, Gurū Nānak's divine experience inspired a revolution in South Asia that sought to reform the social and religious conditions of the time. Gurū Nānak, the first Gurū-Prophet, transformed a society in which blind faith, religious rituals, and social inequalities were a norm. In this new society, all people would follow faith intelligently and devoutly, in conjunction with an acceptance of equal rights and statuses. This revolution directly resulted from the formation of Sikhī - a belief system and way of life - as revealed to Gurū Nānak in the early sixteenth century. Over the next 240 years, each of the following nine Gurū-Prophets would contribute to the revolution through the articulation of theology and the establishment of institutions.

The Sikh faith emerged in the context of the Muslim-Hindu confrontation, a conflict representative of the colliding Semitic and Aryan cultures. This clash occurred in the South Asian region of Pañjāb – the land of five rivers. But rather than attempting to combine the two belief systems, Gurū Nānak laid the foundations for a distinctly revealed and monotheistic faith; a religion with its own prophet-hood, scripture, and ethical code.

Basic Beliefs

The Sikh vision seeks to create an open, progressive society while developing an organized resistance to the perversion of mind. As the individual seeks to experience Love in its purest form, all thoughts and actions translate into a continually flowing celebration of life. Sikhs aspire to live in the glory of God and love for humanity through spiritual experiences, but at the same time, they are responsible for contributing to the global community.

In the *Mūl Mantr*, the opening and root verse of the Sikh scriptural canon, Gurū Nānak expresses various qualities of the Almighty. This reflection of the Divine illustrates what a Sikh should strive for - perfection through the development of godly attributes:

ੴ	ik oṅkār	One Universal Integrative Force
ਸਤਿ ਨਾਮੁ	sati nāmu	Identified by Truth
ਕਰਤਾ ਪੁਰਖੁ	kartā purakhu	Pervasive Creator
ਨਿਰਭਉ	nirbhau	Fearless
ਨਿਰਵੈਰੁ	nirvairu	Without Enmity
ਅਕਾਲ ਮੂਰਤਿ	akāl mūrati	Timeless Being
ਅਜੂਨੀ	ajūnī	Unborn
ਸੈਭੰ	saibhañ	Self-Illumined
ਗੁਰ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ	gur prasādi	Attained by the Grace of the Gurū

Three basic tenets of Sikh living are:

- *Nām japnā* – Remembrance
To be in constant remembrance of the All-pervading; introspective living
- *Kirat karm* – Earn
To earn in a just manner with integrity and honesty; truthful living
- *Vanḍ chaknā* – Share
To benefit peers and share with the needy; distributive living

Gurū in the Sikh Tradition

The term ‘gurū’ is derived from two words: gū – darkness, and rū – light. Essentially, a gurū is one who dispels darkness. In the Sikh tradition, the Gurū stands as a line of prophet-genius; an institution which guides the seeker from ignorance to enlightenment. It is the message of the Gurū that plays a stimulating role as the link between a Sikh and Realization.

As the Gurūs were blessed with indistinguishable experiences of the All-Knowing, they enjoyed a common spiritual wisdom or ‘divine light.’ The Gurūs shared their thoughts and messages in musical arrangements, revelatory messages composed to provide humanity a path to godliness. Their compositions were compiled into the Gurū Granth Sāhib, which was granted spiritual authority by Gurū Gobind Singh in 1708. Nine years earlier, the Tenth Nānak had given physical authority of the Sikhs to the *Khālsā Panth*, the order of committed Sikhs. As the *Khālsā Panth* operates in accordance with the Gurū Granth Sāhib, these two institutions jointly serve as Gurū Granth-Panth, the present Gurū of the Sikhs.

It is important to note that the Gurūs clarified that they were human beings, and therefore, not to be worshipped. Of equal importance, Gurūdom was not a role which one inherited through lineage, but instead, a position given by merit: only the perfect were recognized as what

Sikhs refer to as ‘The True Sovereign.’ Since all Gurūs are considered part of one Divine Light, they shared the single identity of Nānak.

Gurū	Order	Gurūdom
Gurū Nānak	Nānak I	1469 – 1539
Gurū Angad	Nānak II	1539 – 1552
Gurū Amardās	Nānak III	1552 – 1574
Gurū Rāmdās	Nānak IV	1574 – 1581
Gurū Arjan	Nānak V	1581 – 1606
Gurū Hargobind	Nānak VI	1606 – 1644
Gurū Harirāi	Nānak VII	1644 – 1661
Gurū Harikrishan	Nānak VIII	1661 – 1664
Gurū Teghbahādur	Nānak IX	1664 – 1675
Gurū Gobind Singh	Nānak X	1675 – 1708
Gurū Granth-Panth		1708 -

Gurū Granth Sāhib

The Gurū Granth Sāhib is the scriptural canon of the Sikhs, a compilation of revelatory writings by enlightened individuals. It includes compositions from six Gurūs, three devotees, fifteen saints of various religious traditions, and several bards from the Gurū’s court. The inclusion of non-Sikh contributors highlights the Sikh faith’s universal nature, a universality that stems from the belief that people from any faith structure can experience Oneness.

The Gurū Granth Sāhib is written in *Gurmukhī*, a script institutionalized by Gurū Angad (Nānak II). Every hymn is written to a musical measure called a *rāg*. Initially known as the Ādi Granth, it was compiled by Gurū Arjan (Nānak V) and placed in Darbār Sāhib, Amritsar in 1604. After Gurū Gobind Singh had the compositions of Gurū Teghbahādur (Nānak IX) added to the Ādi Granth, he raised the canon to the status of Gurūdom, ordaining it as the Gurū Granth Sāhib in 1708.

Gurū Granth Sāhib is an infinite prayer embracing only those parts of universal cultures that have the potentialities to be generous, sublime, and impartial. Its revelation admits no intrusion that might disturb the flow of its spiritual creativity: the message is general in its application to people from all walks of life. It contains a timeless value system, untainted by temporal or secular matters. The Gurū Granth Sāhib is not a code of ethical conduct or social organization, though it proposes a social context for practice of religion and ethical conduct. These ideas remain unchanged in the consideration of self-interest – the beliefs are uncompromising in their principles. Witnesses of the canon observe the uniqueness of scriptural status encompassing the lively excellence of soul, body and society as articulated in the Gurū Granth Sāhib.

The Birth of the Khālsā

On Vaisākhī day in 1699, Gurū Gobind Singh institutionalized the ‘Order of committed Sikhs,’ commonly known as the Khālsā. After inaugurating five devoted Sikhs in the presence of the entire congregation, the Gurū asked them to initiate him in the same manner, thus emphasizing the equality in the relationship between the Gurū and his disciples. This action institutionalized the idea of leader-servant introduced by Gurū Nānak over 200 years earlier.

Since its inception, the initiation ceremony has become mandatory for all Sikhs. Once an individual makes this commitment, that person is responsible for upholding the discipline as expressed in the *Panthic Rahit Mariādā*, Sikh code of conduct. In the decision to become a member of this order, one voluntarily surrenders the self to the Gurū, an action that indicates a continuous effort to live according to the Gurū’s wisdom. Although it is necessary, this decision is not an end in itself; rather, the journey of spirituality only begins in this humble submission.

The *Panth* was an order where people would strive for perfection, an institution established as a result of the contributions made by the nine Gurū-prophets preceding Gurū Gobind Singh. The groundwork set by Gurū Nānak had been cultivated by each Gurū, developing a community whose responsibility progressed, and finally culminating in the creation of the Khālsā Panth. This individual was to be a saint-soldier with high moral and excellent character. Whether man or woman, the Khālsā would be strong, courageous, learned, and wise. They would live their life with great discipline and honesty, and the combination of virtue and courage is the strength of this order. The order was an assurance against the ruthless exploitation of masses by their masters, and a device for overcoming hurdles that lied in the practice of holiness and spiritualism. Gurū Gobind Singh commanded his followers to use the sword only as a last resort, that is, when all peaceful methods have failed – an idea justified by the Gurū’s ordinance to fight for self-defense, protection of the oppressed, and the establishment of a Sikh nation-state. This was the spirit of the Khālsā.

The Sikh Identity

The significance of the ‘articles of faith’ is situated in the relationship between a Sikh and the Gurū. As adherents recognize these articles as gifts from their beloved Gurū, these objects are worn with absolute love and appreciation. The Sikh identity is such that every action stands as a reflection of the people – every Sikh is a representative of the faith. Therefore, the Sikh appearance also encourages its adherents to continually portray the community in a positive light. The five K’s, as they are popularly termed, are:

1. *Kes* – uncut hair
2. *Kañghā* – comb
3. *Karā* – iron bracelet
4. *Kach* – soldier-shorts
5. *Kirpān* – traditional sword

Sikhs also wear a *dastār* – turban as a head covering for their unshorn hair. This unique external identity, an assertion of sovereignty and a major part of the Sikh psyche, resonates with the Sikh values of realizing the nobility and divinity within each individual.

The Sikh code of conduct was not created as a means to achieve the end; in other words, it is not the spiritual authority of the Sikhs. Rather, the discipline was devised to guide Sikhs in their journey – each protocol was deliberately established to assist individuals in their everyday living as members of the faith. The code of conduct also provides a framework for unity through the provision of procedural implementation.

Along with maintaining the five articles of faith, Sikhs are required to refrain from:

1. Trimming, shaving or removing hair from the body
2. Eating *halāl* or sacrificial meat
3. Consuming tobacco, alcohol, or recreational intoxicants of any type
4. Engaging in extramarital affairs