

Sikhism at a glance

There are 20 million Sikhs in the world, most of whom live in the Punjab province of India. The 2001 census recorded 336,000 **Sikhs in the UK**.

Sikhism was **founded** in the 16th century in the Punjab district of what is now India and Pakistan. It was founded by **Guru Nanak** and is based on his teachings, and those of the 9 Sikh gurus who followed him.

The most important thing in Sikhism is the internal religious state of the individual.

- Sikhism is a **monotheistic religion**
- Sikhism stresses the importance of doing good actions rather than merely carrying out rituals
- Sikhs believe that the way to lead a good life is to:
 - keep God in heart and mind at all times
 - live honestly and work hard
 - treat everyone equally
 - be generous to the less fortunate
 - serve others
- The Sikh place of worship is called a **Gurdwara**
- The Sikh scripture is the Guru Granth Sahib, a book that Sikhs consider a living Guru

The **tenth Sikh Guru** decreed that after his death the spiritual guide of the Sikhs would be the teachings contained in that book, so the Guru Granth Sahib now has the status of a Guru, and Sikhs show it the respect they would give to a human Guru.

The community of men and women who have been initiated into the Sikh faith is the **Khalsa**. The Khalsa celebrated its 300th anniversary in 1999.

Guru Gobind Singh decreed that where Sikhs could not find answers in the Guru Granth Sahib, they should decide issues as a community, based on the principles of their scripture.

God

- There is only one God
- God is without form, or gender
- Everyone has direct access to God
- Everyone is equal before God
- A good life is lived as part of a community, by living honestly and caring for others
- Empty religious rituals and superstitions have no value

Living in God and community

Sikhs focus their lives around their relationship with God, and being a part of the Sikh community. The Sikh ideal combines action and belief. To live a good life a person should do good deeds as well as meditating on God.

God and the cycle of life

Sikhs believe that human beings spend their time in a cycle of birth, life, and rebirth. They share this belief with followers of other Indian religious traditions such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism.

The quality of each particular life depends on the law of Karma. Karma sets the quality of a life according to how well or badly a person behaved in their previous life. The only way out of this cycle, which all faiths regard as painful, is to achieve a total knowledge of and union with God.

Getting close to God

When a Sikh wants to see God, they look both at the created world and into their own heart and soul.

Their aim is to see the divine order that God has given to everything, and through it to understand the nature of God.

Most human beings can't see the true reality of God because they are blinded by their own self-centred pride (Sikhs call it *haumain*) and concern for physical things.

God inside us

Sikhs believe that God is inside every person, no matter how wicked they appear, and so everyone is capable of change.

Just as fragrance is in the flower, and reflection is in the mirror, in just the same way, God is within you.

The three duties

The three duties that a Sikh must carry out can be summed up in three words; Pray, Work, Give.

- Nam japna:
 - Keeping God in mind at all times.
- Kirt Karna:
 - Earning an honest living. Since God is truth, a Sikh seeks to live honestly. This doesn't just mean avoiding crime; Sikhs avoid gambling, begging, or working in the alcohol or tobacco industries.
- Vand Chhakna:
 - (Literally, sharing one's earnings with others) Giving to charity and caring for others.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/sikhism/ataglance/glance.shtml>