

Paper 1: Sikhism - beliefs and teachings

The oneness of humanity

Origin of the belief

Hindu society at the time of Guru Nanak

Hindu society was divided into castes, which could not be changed. The higher castes kept apart from lower castes and those outside the caste system (including Dalits, and non-Hindus). Many poor people had to work hard for the rich people, who profited from their hard work. Men were considered more important than women, and women were often uneducated.

The oneness of humanity

All humans are created by God, and contain a spark of God. As a result all humans have equal worth.

There are many teachings in the Guru Granth Sahib that explains why humans are of equal worth and should be treated as such.

"Call everyone exalted; no one seems lowly. The One Lord has fashioned the vessels, and His One Light pervades the three worlds."

This shows that the body was created by God to contain the soul. Therefore, all are equal and should be treated the same.

Sources of belief

"All beings and creatures are His; He belongs to all."

"The God-conscious being looks upon all alike."

"There is no second or third status [in God's Kingdom], all are equal there."

In the lives and teachings of the Gurus

Guru Nanak

He taught about the oneness of humanity and the importance of treating all equally.

He promoted religious tolerance, and said "God is neither Hindu nor Muslim."

He helped the poor, and broke Hindu taboos around touching and eating food given by those in lower castes or outside of the caste system. He set up the langar, so the poor would always be able to eat.

He promoted equality for women, saying "From woman, man is born ... so why call her bad?"

Guru Gobind Singh

He founded the Khalsa, the community of baptised Sikhs, and made it open to all Sikhs, regardless of gender, ethnicity or whether they were born a Sikh. By welcoming all Sikhs into the Khalsa Guru Gobind Singh showed that all were equal.

He also removed the caste surnames of those who joined the Khalsa. A person's surname would show their social group, and therefore could result in discrimination against them. By giving every Sikh the same surname, he showed that they were all equal.

In Sikhism today

In the langar

All Sikhs help to prepare food, or provide the food for it. This reminds them to be humble.

Everyone sits on the floor and eats together. No one is separated because everyone is the same and can eat together. By eating together Sikhs are showing that they believe everyone is equal.

Everyone eats the same vegetarian food. This means those of other faiths can eat there, as they do not need to worry about dietary rules.

All are welcome, even non-Sikhs. This reinforces the Sikh belief that all are equal, not just those who are practicing Sikhs - "All human beings, high or low, and of any caste or colour may sit and eat in the Guru's kitchen."

In the Sikh community

Both men and women can take part in worship, whether that involves being part of the congregation, leading prayers, or playing kirtan (religious music).

Anyone who is knowledgeable can become a granthi. They will read the Guru Granth Sahib at the gurdwara.

Men and women take equal roles in family life, helping to care for the house and children, and earning money.

Caste

A Hindu social group based on ideas of religious purity

Equality

The state of having the same status, rights, and opportunities

Granthi

A person who reads the Guru Granth Sahib and leads ceremonies at the gurdwara

Khalsa

The community of baptised Sikhs

Langar

The free kitchen at each gurdwara

Oneness of humanity

The belief that all humans were created by God and have a divine uniting spark

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The nature of God

Shown in the Guru Granth Sahib

Sikhism is a monotheist religion.

God, or Waheguru, is beyond human description because human words cannot fully describe the greatness of God.

He can be experienced because he reveals himself to humans. Many Sikh names for God show him as someone who communicates with humans.

God does not have 'qualities' but many human qualities are used to describe him.

Sources of belief

"He is the Perfect Transcendent Lord, from the very beginning and throughout the ages."

This teaching shows that God is perfect, beyond and outside the universe, and eternal.

"He Himself is the earth and its support."

This teaching shows that God is present and involved in the universe.

"He is the one, the one Universal Creator."

This teaching shows that there is only one God, and that He is the creator of everything.

God as Creator

Sikhs believe that God created everything. They accept scientific views about how life was created, but believe that all is done through God's will.

Creative being personified

There are many teachings in the Guru Granth Sahib that talk about God as Creator.

"He created the sun and the moon; night and day."

"He established the earth, the sky and the air, the water of the oceans, fire and food. He created the moon, the stars and the sun, night and day and mountains; he blessed the trees with flowers and fruits."

God as separate from the universe

God has no physical form, does not occupy any physical space, and is free and different from his creation.

"He is the Perfect Transcendent Lord, from the very beginning and throughout the ages."

God shown in and through the universe

Every part of the universe reveals God. God is interested in the world and directs it. God is in all things and is present in every human being. Sikhs look at the created world to find God.

"He pervades the continents, solar systems, nether worlds, islands and all worlds."

The Mool Mantar

Importance of the Mool Mantar

It was Guru Nanak's first teaching and summarises Sikh beliefs. It is the first words in the Guru Granth Sahib.

The Mool Mantar

Ik Onkar - One Universal Creator God

There is only One God

Satnam - The Name is Truth

Karta Purakh - Creative Being Personified

Nirhau. Nirvair- No Fear. No Hatred

Akaal Moorat - Image Of The Undying

God will never die

Ajoooni - Beyond Birth

God is not born

Saibhang - Self-Existent

Nothing brought God into being

Gur Prasad - By Guru's Grace

God makes himself known through his word

Influence of the Mool Mantar

Sikhs say the Mool Mantar during daily prayers. It is recited during worship and important ceremonies. The first words, 'Ik Onkar', are used as a symbol of the religion and can be found in gurdwaras and homes.

Eternal

Lasting or existing forever

Guru

A spiritual teacher

Immanent

Present within something

Monotheist

The belief that there is only one God

Transcendent

Existing apart from the universe

Waheguru

A name for God, meaning Wonderful Lord or Teacher

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Nature of human life

Union with God

The three foundations

The purpose of human life is to unite with God in a perfect joyful existence. Humans can do this by making good spiritual progress during a lifetime.

Guru Nanak taught that there are three foundations which will help humans to make progress:

Nam Japna - meditating on the name of God

Kirat Karna - honest work

Sewa - selfless service

The virtues

Developing the virtues will help a Sikh make spiritual progress during their lifetimes.

Truth and truthful living - speaking the truth, being realistic, working honestly, acting fairly and treating all as equals.

Patience - being tolerant of others, forgive their faults or weaknesses and recognise God in others.

Contentment - Sikhs try to live a life that is centred on God and not on desiring things they do not have. This gets rid of worry for the future and fear of the unknown.

Self-control and temperance - Act, speak and think in moderation, making sure that a person is in control.

Wisdom - Sikhs should understand the importance of all the virtues, and put this knowledge into practice every day.

Importance of being God-centred

Gurmukh (God-centred)

Sikhs should aim to have their mind centred on God at all times, to enable them to achieve mukti. Sikhs should try to be free from pride, attachment and ego.

"The Gurmukh acts in harmony with God's Will; the Gurmukh finds perfection."

Manmukh (Man-centred)

Manmukh describe those centred on themselves and their own wishes. They are not happy with life because they always want more. They are far away from God and cannot achieve mukti.

"The foolish self-willed manmukh does not remember the Lord, and shall regret and repent hereafter."

Haumai (Pride / self-reliance)

This quality prevents individuals from understanding their dependence on God and from wanting to seek liberation. It produces confusion and bring suffering because a person tries to change what happens in the present or the future and does not listen to or obey God.

"Egotism [haumai] is opposed to the Name of the Lord."

Beliefs in action

Sewa

All Sikhs should perform selfless service regularly. It is a way of life for Sikhs and cannot be done to achieve any personal gain.

"One who performs selfless service, without thought of reward, shall attain is Lord and Master."

Tan (physical service) - Using the body to help others. For example preparing langar or cleaning the gurdwara

Man (material service) - Using the mind and mental skills to help others. For example reading the Guru Granth Sahib or teaching children in the gurdwara

Dhan (material service) - Using material wealth to help others. For example donating money to charity or providing food for the langar.

The sangat

The community of Sikhs as it meets for learning, prayer or a ceremony. It is important to help a Sikh make progress towards God as it keeps God in the mind and helps them to develop their religious understanding and practice.

"Join the Sat Sangat and find the Lord."

It allows Sikhs to learn about God, perform Nam Japna, hear the Guru's words and gives opportunities for sewa.

Gurmukh

God-centred; being focused on God and spiritual things

Haumai

Pride or self-reliance (ego); relying only on yourself rather than God

Manmukh

Man-centred; being focused on oneself and material things

Sangat

Group of Sikhs who meet in front of the Guru Granth Sahib

Sewa

Selfless service

Virtue

Behaving in the right way

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The afterlife

The aim of human life

The soul

Sikhs believe that all humans contain a spiritual spark, or part of God - "He is contained within all."

Rebirth

The soul moves through the cycle of birth, life and death. After death the soul will be reborn into another life to continue its journey.

Sikhs believe that rebirth happens many times before it is born into a life that is focused on God.

"Those who do not serve the True Guru... They go through the cycle of 8.4 million reincarnations."

Mukti

Once a soul has found God in his completeness it leaves the cycle and achieves mukti. It achieves a perfect existence with God, that is free from suffering and full of joy.

Karma

Actions and words in one life will affect the existence they have in the future and the journey to mukti. "The body is the field of karma in this age, whatever you plant, you shall harvest."

Build up good karma by doing good, behaving well towards others and believing in God. Bad deeds in this life will result in suffering in a future life. It can be removed by meditating on God's name, hearing his word and serving others.

Barriers to Mukti

These are the opposite of the virtues and take people away from God. They prevent people from making the spiritual progress they need to achieve mukti.

Illusion - the belief that brief and impermanent things are important in life.

Self-centredness - Ego prevents people from getting close to God.

The five evils

Anger - comes from a lack of self-control, stops people thinking and acting without balance. Hatred is not acceptable because it is directed at a person created by God

Lust - uncontrolled lust and sexual desire outside marriage can lead people to further wrongdoing.

Greed - results in a desire to possess more than you need for daily life. It is selfish and results from a lack of self-control.

Worldly attachment - places an emphasis on possessions and relationships within the world. It removes the desire for spiritual growth needed to recognise God.

Pride - being proud of things that are given rather than achieved, or things that are not important such as intelligence, talent or material wealth. It leads people away from humility and the belief in the equality of all.

The stages of liberation

Moving through the five stages helps a Sikh achieve mukti. It does not happen within one lifetime, and can take several lifetimes to move through one stage.

Piety - being devoted to God, which allows them to meet with him.

Knowledge - devoting time to God and learning about him to become humble, spiritually aware and open to Him.

Effort - devoted totally to God and developing mind and intelligence as much as possible.

Grace - God takes a part in the development of the individual, allowing spiritual growth and strength - "By the Grace of the Holy; let your mind be imbued with the Lord's love."

Truth - finding God in his completeness. This stage cannot be described, just experienced.

Karma

Consequences of a person's actions

Khand

A stage of human spiritual development

Liberation

Freedom from the cycle of life, death and rebirth

Mukti

Liberation from the cycle of birth, death and rebirth

Rebirth

The return of the soul, born into a new body

Soul

The spiritual spark which sustains life

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Festivals

Vaisakhi

Origin of Vaisakhi

It celebrates the founding of the Khalsa by Guru Gobind Singh.

Celebrated in April, near to Guru Nanak's birthdate.

Celebrations

An Arkand Path is held before the festival.

The Guru Granth Sahib is paraded through the streets, led by the Panj Piare and accompanied by singing and dancing.

Gatka (fighting with sticks or swords) is performed.

A community langar is held at the gurdwara.

Sweets and free food are given to the wider community.

The flag pole outside the gurdwara is washed and a new Nisan Sahib is raised.

Importance to British Sikhs

Sikhs will remember occasions in the past when Sikhs were persecuted and killed, such as the massacre of Sikhs by British soldiers in 1919.

Reminds Sikhs to support those who are persecuted.

Brings Sikhs together to celebrate; Sikhs who live further away from large gurdwaras will travel to take part in the celebrations.

Diwali

Origin of Diwali

Also known as Bandi Chor Divas, or Freedom day, it celebrates Guru Hargobind helping to free Hindu princes who were being held by the Mughal rulers.

It also remembers the martyrdom of Bhai Mani Singh, the guardian of the Golden Temple. He was killed by the emperor after saving the Sikhs from a planned massacre.

Celebrated in November.

Celebrations

An Arkand Path is held before the festival.

The Guru Granth Sahib is paraded through the streets, lead by the Panj Piare and accompanied by singing and dancing.

A community langar is held at the gurdwara.

Sweets and free food are given to the wider community.

Houses and the gurdwara are decorated with lights and there are firework displays.

Importance to British Sikhs

Celebration of freedom, and how Sikhism supports religious freedom, and equality of all.

Shows respect for those who have opposed injustice and oppression.

Remembers the courage shown by those who stand up for the oppressed.

The gurburbs

Origin of the gurburbs

Each Guru, including the Guru Granth Sahib, is celebrated with a gurburb on either their birthday or the day of their death.

The main gurburbs are:

Birthday of Guru Nanak (October)

Birthday of Guru Gobind Singh (December)

Martyrdom of Guru Arjan (May)

Martyrdom of Guru Tegh Badhur (November)

Celebrations in the UK

Take place on the closest Sunday to the anniversary.

Celebrations are quieter and are focused on the gurdwara.

Celebrations in India

Take place on the anniversary of the event.

Colourful processions involving the whole community are held.

Importance to British Sikhs

Provide an opportunity to celebrate the history of Sikhism, and reminds of the important principles of their faith.

Can strengthen faith by bringing Sikhs together to celebrate.

Arkhand path

Continuous reading of the Guru Granth Sahib

Gurburb

Festival of a Guru

Martyr

A person who is killed because of their religious beliefs

Nishan Sahib

Sikh flag flown outside every gurdwara

Panj Piare

5 baptised Sikhs who represent the original

Persecution

Ill-treatment due to religious or political beliefs

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Lifestyle

Ceremonies

Naming ceremony (Naam Karan)

When the baby is about 2 weeks old they are presented to the Guru Granth Sahib by their parents. The Mool Mantra and prayers are said and hymns are sung.

To name the baby the GGS is opened at random. The name given to the baby starts with the first letter of the first letter of the first word on the left-hand page.

Many Sikhs follow Guru Gobind Singh's practice of giving all women the middle name or surname 'Kaur' (princess) and men 'Singh' (Lion).

Initiation ceremony (Amrit Sanskar)

Led by 6 Amritdhari Sikhs: 1 granthi and 5 representing the Panj Piare. Prayers, including the Ardas prayer, are recited and a hymn from the GGS is chosen at random.

The initiate drinks amrit 5 times, saying "The Khalsa belongs to God, victory belongs to God" in Punjabi. Amrit is sprinkled on their eyes and hair and the initiates share the rest of the amrit. Everybody recites the Mool Mantra.

Anybody who does not already have a Sikh name is given one (using the same method as used in a Naam Karan).

Everybody eats a share of karah parshad.

The Sikh path

Sahajdhari path

Not Sikh born and not yet members of the Khalsa.

Don't follow the rules of the Khalsa and only wear the kara.

Take part in worship, festivals and social customs.

Do not have to say the five daily prayers.

May not be ready to fully commit to maintaining the code of conduct.

Often living as a Sikh before they join the Khalsa.

Amritdhari Path

Sikhs who have taken amrit and joined the Khalsa.

Any Sikh (both those who are Sikh born and those who have joined the faith) can take amrit when they are ready to commit to it.

Also known as 'Khalsa Sikhs'

Follow the strict rules of the Khalsa, including wearing the 5 Ks and saying the daily prayers.

Becoming Amritdhari encourages a Sikh to focus on God, which helps them come Gurmukh.

The Khalsa

Founded by Guru Gobind Singh in 1699.

Sikhs were being persecuted and he asked for volunteers who were willing to die for their faith. 5 men who volunteered and who were the founding members are remembered as the Panj Piare (beloved ones).

The rules of the Khalsa

All members have to follow strict rules:

Wear the 5Ks.

Worship one God and accept the teachings of the Guru Granth Sahib and Gurus.

Say or hear the 5 most important Sikh prayers every day.

Do not eat ritually slaughtered meat.

Cohabit with someone they are not married to.

Do not smoke, drink alcohol or gamble.

Women are not allowed to cover their faces.

The 5Ks

Kesh - uncut hair

Kangha - comb

Kara - steel bangle

Kirpan - knife

Kachera - cotton shorts.

Amrit

A mixture of water and sugar used in important Sikh ceremonies

Amritdhari Sikh

A Sikh who has taken amrit and is a member of the Khalsa

Hukam

Opening the GGS at random and reading a verse

Karah parshad

Sweet pudding given at the gurdwara

Khalsa

The community of baptised Sikhs

Sahajdhari Sikh

'Slow adopter'; one who has not joined the Khalsa

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The Gurdwara

Features

Outside the gurdwara

Nishan Sahib - yellow flag with a blue Khanda symbol, flown outside the Gurdwara on a tall flagpole wrapped in yellow cloth.

Inside the gurdwara

Darbar Sahib - Prayer hall where worship takes place in front of the Guru Granth Sahib.

Langar kitchen and hall.

Rest room for the Guru Granth Sahib where it stays overnight.

Inside the prayer hall

Takht - throne for the Guru Granth Sahib, covered in fine cloth and surrounded by flowers.

Palki - domed structure over the takht.

Manji - small bed for the GGS on top of the takht.

Chanai - large cloth canopy over the palki.

Respect for the Guru Granth Sahib

Sikhs sit on the floor for worship, so they are lower than it, and they do not point their feet towards it.

Worshippers bow before it when they enter the gurdwara.

It is covered with a rumalla when it is not being read.

When it is moved it is placed on the granthi's head, and water or petals are sprinkled before it.

Role in the local community

Role within the Sikh community

The gurdwara acts as a community centre and base for local voluntary activities.

Everyone is welcome, including non-Sikhs, and larger gurdwaras are open 24 hours.

Langars provide free food to anybody who wishes to eat there.

The gurdwara arranges for children to learn Punjabi and Gurmukhi.

Meeting rooms can be used by Sikhs and non-Sikhs.

After the terrorist attack at Manchester Arena a local gurdwara helped those affected by giving shelter, free food, and comfort.

During the Covid-19 lockdown langar kitchens across the country provided free food for NHS staff, and those unable to leave their homes

In Leicester a free legal clinic runs once a week at a gurdwara.

The granthi

Granthis are amritdhari Sikhs, can be men or women, but must be of good character and live according to the Sikh Code of Conduct.

They are highly respected for their knowledge, but do not have a higher role than other Sikhs.

They arrange the daily religious services, read from the Guru Granth Sahib, and teach and advice community members.

They also take care of the Guru Granth Sahib.

Pilgrimage to historical gurdwara

The Golden Temple

There is no expectation that Sikhs will complete a pilgrimage, but many visit the Golden Temple (Harimandir Sahib) in Amritsar, northern India.

A golden temple is surrounded by a pool of fresh, clear water, the Amrit Sarover. Pilgrims can bathe in the sacred water.

Around the outside of the pool are many buildings, including libraries, guest houses and the Akal Takht. This is where the spiritual leader of Sikhism works, and is the centre of religious government.

The temple has four entrances to show everyone is welcome, and the steps down into the temple reminds visitors to be humble.

Inside the temple the original Adi Granth is installed on a takht. A continuous reading of the Guru Granth Sahib is performed each day.

There is also the largest langar in the world, feeding 100,000 people every day.

The importance of pilgrimage

Many visit to hear the words of the Gurus spoken aloud - "The spiritual wisdom given by the Guru is the True sacred shrine of pilgrimage."

A visit can also give the time to spiritually reflect, and learn about the history of Sikhism, which can help to deepen their faith and understanding.

The emphasis should be focusing on God, not on rituals.

Adi Granth

The first version of the holy book

Granthi

A person who reads the Guru Granth Sahib and officiates at ceremonies

Khanda

The symbol of Sikhism



Pilgrimage

A journey by a believer to a holy site as an act of worship and devotion

Rehat Maryada

The Sikh Code of Conduct

Rumalla

Decorated cloth used to cover the Guru Granth Sahib

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Worship and prayer

Worship

Worship at the gurdwara

"Worship and adore Him, and you shall be at peace forever."

Services can last up to 5 hours, but worshippers can attend for all or part of the service.

Everybody bows to the GGS on arrival.

Services start and end with the Ardas prayer. Hymns are sung, and prayers are said. A sermon or talk may be given. Readings from the GGS are selected at random.

Verses from the GGS are sung by musicians and the congregation.

"At the Gurdwara... the Kirtan of the Lord's Praises are sung. Meeting with the True Guru, one chants the Lord's praises."

Worship through sewa

Through performing sewa God is worshipped. It shows equality because everyone is involved and everyone who wishes to eat there is fed, even if they are not a Sikh.

It provides security and protection for all, and ensures that no one is in such extreme poverty that they cannot eat.

During the extreme cold weather of March 2018 langars opened their doors to homeless people to ensure they had somewhere to shelter and were able to eat a hot meal.

"The Langar—the Kitchen of the Guru's Shabad has been opened, and its supplies never run short."

Prayer at home

At home

Sikhs should say daily prayers to help them remember God at all times.

"Those who have the treasure of the Lord's name deep within their hearts - the Lord resolves their affairs." GGS 305

Guru Ram Das told Sikhs they should start each day by remembering God (GGS 305). Amritdhari Sikhs should bathe every morning to prepare to concentrate and help them separate meditation from other tasks.

They should then meditate on the name of God (nam japna), by saying or thinking "Waheguru" often.

The Japi, Jap and Swayyas prayers are said at dawn, the Rahiras prayer at dusk and the Sohila when going to bed.

The Ardas Prayer

All services start and end with the Ardas Prayer. It can last up to 15 minutes, but doesn't have to be recited fully each time.

It reminds Sikhs to remember God and the 10 Gurus, and says prayers for the welfare of all.

"There is One Being, all victory belongs to the Wonderful Guru, May the divine Might help us.

"The light of the Ten Gurus shines in the Guru Granth Sahib, Consider its sacred word, envisage its sacred sight, And proclaim Waheguru, the Wonderful Guru!"

The arkhand path

The arkhand path is a continuous ceremonial reading of the whole of the Guru Granth Sahib.

It is read continuously from beginning to end, which takes about 48 hours. It is done by several granthis who take it in turns to read.

It happens before every festival, including gurburbs.

Sikhs can also request an arkand path when a baby is born, before a marriage or on the death of a family member.

Sometimes the Guru Granth Sahib will be taken from the gurdwara to a new business or a new home so an arkhand path can be performed.

Hearing the words of the Guru Granth Sahib during an arkhand path is a great blessing, and not an empty custom to be performed lightly.

Diwan

An act of worship of the Sikh community in a

Granthi

A person who reads the GGS and officiates at ceremonies in the gurdwara

Gutka

A prayer book which contains the daily prayers

Japji

A Sikh prayer

Kirtan

Singing the hymns from the GGS as an act of

Nam japna

Meditating on the name of God