

# What are the key beliefs, teachings, and practices of Sikhi?

## Key facts

- There are around 25 million Sikhs in the world today, most of them (19 million) living in India.
- Sikhi began with a man called Nanak, who was born in part of India called the Punjab.
- When Nanak was 30 he received a revelation in which he understood that although there are many different religions there is only one God. God loves all people equally, whatever religion they follow.
- Nanak made four long journeys over a period of 20 years, spreading word of his revelation. He visited and talked with Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims.
- The story of the miracle of milk and blood emphasises one of Guru Nanak's important teachings – that of working hard and honesty.
  - Guru Nanak died in 1539. He was followed by nine Sikh Gurus, who developed the Sikh tradition.
- The last of the human Gurus was Gobind Singh, who established the Khalsa, a brotherhood of Sikhs established to protect their people from persecution.
- Male Sikhs who join the Khalsa take the surname Singh ('lion') and female Khalsa Sikhs take the surname Kaur ('princess')
- Before he died, Gobind Singh said that the collection of Sikh holy scriptures, the Guru Granth Sahib, would be the eleventh and final – eternal – Guru.
- The book is used during Sikh worship services and special ceremonies. Sometimes readers called granthi will read the whole text from start to finish, which takes about 48 hours.
- The Mool Mantra is a text that describes Sikh beliefs about God, including that he is the creator, immortal, without fear or hate, and beyond birth and death.
- The Sikh place of worship is called a gurdwara. An orange flag called Nishan Sahib always flies above a gurdwara.
- The langar is a communal place for cooking and eating; every gurdwara must have a langar, which is open to everyone, whatever their gender, ethnicity or religion.
- Sewa, serving others is a key Sikh belief. There are three forms of sewa: tan (physical service), man (mental service) and dhan (material service, which includes giving to charity).

## Key Vocabulary

**Adi Granth** – A collection of hymns and writings of the early Sikh Gurus; it means 'first book'.

**Amrit** – Sugar that is mixed into water using a sword; it is drunk at the Amrit ceremony.

**Amrit ceremony** – Ceremony to become part of the Sikh Khalsa.

**Caste** – A series of social classes that determine someone's job and status in society.

**Disciples** – Followers of a religion

**The Five Ks** – Five articles of faith worn by the Khalsa: kesh (uncut hair), kangha (a wooden comb), kara (a steel bracelet), kachera (special cotton underwear) and kirpan (a short sword).

**Granthi** – People who read from, and look after, the Guru Granth Sahib; Sikhs do not have religious leaders or priests and anyone can read from the Guru Granth Sahib.

**Gurdwara** – The Sikh place of worship; literally means 'doorway to

the Guru'.

**Guru** – A religious leader or guide who leads a follower from spiritual ignorance into spiritual enlightenment.

**Guru Granth Sahib** – The Sikh holy book; the name means 'from the Guru's mouth'.

**Initiated** – Made a member of a particular group through a special ceremony.

**Khalsa** – The community of Sikhs founded by the tenth Guru, Gobind Singh.

**Khanda** – The symbol of Sikhi, made up of two double-edged swords, one sword in the middle and a circle.

**Langar** – A word meaning 'free kitchen'; a communal eating area found in every Sikh place of worship.

**Martyr** – Someone who is killed for his or her beliefs.

**Panj Pyare** – 'The blessed ones' – the first five men who volunteered to join the Khalsa

## Key people

**Guru Nanak (1469 – 1539)** – The founder and first Guru of Sikhi.

**Guru Angad (1539 – 52)** – A devoted follower of Nanak who succeeded him as Guru.

**Guru Amar Das (1552 – 74)** – The third Guru

**Guru Ram Das (1574 – 81)** – The fourth Guru

**Guru Arjan (1581 – 1606)** – The fifth Guru who created the Golden Temple.

**Guru Hargobind (1606 – 44)** – The sixth Guru, a key military leader

**Guru Har Rai (1644-61)** - The seventh Guru

**Guru Har Krishnan (1661-64)** – The eighth Guru, who died aged eight.

**Guru Tegh Bahadur (1664 – 1675)** – The ninth Guru, executed by the Mughals.

**Guru Gobind Singh (1675 – 1708)** – The tenth and final human Guru, who established the Khalsa.