



# Sikhism

## Disclaimer

This resource has been prepared to help staff and students in raising awareness, increasing knowledge and to assist their work at MMU.

The resource has been prepared according to the Faith Communities Navigator' published in 2007 by the Faith Regen Foundation and guidance from

MMU Chaplains. The interpretation of the faith, observances and representation of standards etc. are part of this professional judgement and should not be construed as an authorised or official interpretation. MMU has sought to acknowledge the use of any published material in the text of this resource. Any inadvertent omissions deemed necessary will be corrected upon notification of this error.

## Key beliefs

Sikhism is a monotheistic faith, which was founded in the fifteenth century by Guru Nanak in the region of Punjab, North West India. It is recognised as the youngest of world religions.

Sikhism emerged as a result of the teachings of Guru Nanak whose aim was to encourage all people to faithfully worship one God. The fundamentals of the religion were then further developed by a continuous line of nine gurus (teachers) who succeeded him.

The last guru declared that after him, there would be no other human gurus. The Guru Granth Sahib, The Sikh holy book, would be viewed as the eternal Guru. For Sikhs the Granth Sahib is the focal point of a Sikh temple (Gurdwara) and the ultimate source of religious authority.

The five K's were introduced during the time of Guru Gobind Singh to identify and bond together members of the Khalsa (which refers to the collective body of all initiated or 'baptised' Sikhs); each 'K' has a particular significance.

The five K's are:

- Kesh (uncut hair) - cutting or removing hair is seen as going against God's will;
- Kara (a steel bracelet) - worn on the right wrist and is a symbol of the allegiance to the brotherhood of the Guru;
- Kanga (a wooden comb) - worn in the hair at all times and symbolises orderliness;
- Kachehra (briefs) - symbol of modesty and moral restraint;
- Kirpan (steel dagger) - symbolising readiness to protect the weak and oppressed.

## Places of worship

A Gurdwara is any building for public worship that has a complete copy of the Guru Granth Sahib inside. It is a place for divine knowledge, bliss and tranquillity. The Guru Granth Sahib is the focal point which is placed on a platform under a canopy. Another key feature is Langar, the community kitchen, where free food is prepared and served.

## Food and drink

Sikhism forbids smoking and the consumption of alcohol. Many Sikhs do not eat meat. A devout Sikh will neither eat eggs, nor any animal by-product. Sikhs regard the cow as a sacred animal and the pig is thought to be dirty - hence the prohibition of pork.

## Dress

Sikh men are religiously required to wear turbans to cover their uncut hair. Should she choose, a Sikh woman may also wear a turban. Young Sikh boys will wear their long hair tied in a topknot. The five Ks will be worn on the person: some will be visible, such as the Kara (steel bracelet), while others, such as the Kirpan (sword) and Katcha (shorts) will be worn under the clothes. Men wear a turban over their uncut hair. Some married women, like their Hindu counterparts, may also wear a Bindi - a red powder spot marked on the forehead.

---

## Festivals and days of worship

Sikhs celebrate several religious festivals that combine a cultural and religious significance.

**Vaisakhi** - the central festival which is a dual celebration incorporating both a harvest festival and a commemoration of Guru Gobind Singh's creation of the Khalsa, the pure brotherhood of Sikhs.

**Diwali** - Known as the festival of lights, this commemorates the return of Lord Rama from his exile in the forest. It is, for many traditions, a new-year celebration. It takes place between late October and the middle of November.

**Gurpurbs** - The marking of important anniversaries relating to the birth or death (martyrdom) of a Guru. This includes the full recitation of the Guru Granth Sahib as well as the singing of hymns and Sikh lectures.

**Baisakhi** - The day is celebrated around the 13th April. It is celebration of the founding of the Khalsa Order and Sikh nation. Many Sikhs choose to be initiated on this day. Often, a religious street procession marks the key event.

**Bandi Chhor** - Sikhs commemorate the release of Guru Hargobind (Sixth Guru) from false imprisonment. It coincides with the Indian Festival of Lights (Diwali) between the end of October and mid-November. A Muslim saint laid the foundation stone of the Golden Temple, also on this day.

**Maghi** - This celebration occurs around the middle of January and marks the martyrdom of forty Sikhs at the hands of the Mughal army.

**Hola Mohalla** - On this day Sikhs practice military exercises, stage mock battles, perform martial arts and organise sports competitions. This is to keep the martial skills and spirit alive. Hymn singing and lectures also take place. It occurs the day after the Indian festival Holi around mid-March.

## Bereavement

Sikhs are cremated and have a preference for this to take place as soon after the death as possible. There is no specified mourning period and normal compassionate leave arrangements should suffice.

The diversity calendar can be found at [www.mmu.ac.uk/humanresources/equalities](http://www.mmu.ac.uk/humanresources/equalities)

This fact sheet has been produced using information found in the 'Faith Communities Navigator' published in 2007 by the Faith Regen Foundation and [www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/zoroastrian](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/zoroastrian) with guidance from MMU Chaplains.