

Sikhism

WHO IS GOD?

There are many names for God, because there is only one God, and He is the same God for all people of all religions. One of the most common names for God in Sikhism is Waheguru. Sikhism is a monotheistic religion, which means there is only one God. The beginning of the Guru Granth Sahib Ji, the Sikh scriptures, says (in English) "One Universal Creator God. The Name is Truth. Creative Being Personified. No Fear. No Hatred. Image of the Undying, Beyond Birth, Self-existent." God is in control of all in the universe and holds the life of each person. God can not take human form (as in the Christian account of Christ as God and man).

WHERE DID WE COME FROM?

God created all, but Sikhs also believe that the soul goes through cycles of births and deaths before it takes human form. Human birth is the only path to merging with God. But God is the creator, and is in control of the universe and those in it. God is said to be creative being personified in the Sikh scriptures.

WHY ARE WE HERE?

We are on earth to merge with God. The soul goes through cycles of births and deaths (samsara), and human existence is the opportunity to end it. One can merge with God through following the teachings of the Guru, meditating on God's Holy Name and performance of acts of service and charity. There are four stages in the evolution of humans. These stages are:

1. Manmukh (self-centeredness). Those in this stage are totally oblivious to God.
2. Sikh, or one who has set out on the path of learning and meets the definition of Sikh in the Reht Maryada (believes in: one immortal being, the ten gurus, the Guru Granth Sahib Ji, the utterances and teachings of the ten Gurus, the baptism of Guru Gobind Singh; doesn't owe allegiance to any other religion)
3. Khalsa, or total dedication to Sikhism. Those who are Khalsa have shed their ego and honor Guru Gobind Singh (the tenth guru and founder of the Khalsa) through their life and actions.
4. Gurmukh. Those in Gurmukh have obtained mukhti, or salvation, and their life is centered on God completely.

HOW DO WE KNOW?

The Sikh scriptures are called the Guru Granth Sahib Ji, which means the book of light. It includes hymns and poems written by the gurus and other Sikhs, and it also contains works by Hindus and Muslims. It is written in a Punjabi script called Gurmukhi, but includes pieces in Punjabi, Persian, Prakrit Hindi and Marathi, Sanskrit and Arabic. Its layout is very organized. Hymns are arranged first

by the Raga (melody) they are to be sung in. Then they are arranged by their nature, or by the meter of the poems. Then they are arranged by author, and finally, they are arranged by the clef or key deemed appropriate to them. The Guru Granth Sahib Ji has exactly 1430 pages, with each page containing eighteen or nineteen lines. This format was developed by Guru Arjun Dev, the fifth guru.

WHAT DO WE HAVE TO DO?

Sikhs must control five human impulses. These impulses are:

1. Ahankar (pride)
2. Krodh (anger)
3. Kam (lust)
4. Lobh (greed)
5. Moh (worldly attachment)

Sikhs pledge to always wear the five articles of faith (five K's). The articles are reminders of how to control the five impulses. The five articles are:

1. Kesh (wearing long hair) Since all Sikhs pledge to not cut their hair, Kesh reminds Sikhs of their equality, and removes reason for pride (Ahankar). In addition, all Sikh men are required to wear a turban or Dastar (its optional for women).
2. Kangha (comb) The comb symbolizes control (often of greed, or Lobh). Sikhs are expected to keep their hair clean and to comb it regularly.
3. Kara (steel bracelet) The Kara reminds the wearer of restraint in their actions and remembrance of God at all times.
4. Kachha (drawers) Drawers symbolize self control and chastity. When sexual desires are properly directed, there is intimacy between a husband and wife. The Kachha is a symbol to overcome lust, or Kam.
5. Kirpan (ceremonial sword/sword of mercy) The Kirpan is a symbol of dignity and the Sikh struggle against injustice. It is purely symbolic and is not used as a weapon.

Sikhs also must follow the Sikh Reht Maryada, or the official Sikh code of conduct. These are the major precepts (the full version is available at www.sikhs.org/rehit.htm):

- * Worship of God only. Sikhs are not allowed to worship idols, gods, goddesses or any human being.
- * Only the Guru Granth Sahib Ji is considered holy, although other scriptures can be studied for knowledge.
- * The Sikh does not believe in castes or untouchability, because they believe all are equal. They do not believe in magic, amulets, omens or astrology. Nor do they accept appeasement rituals, ceremonial cutting of the hair, fasts, frontal masks, the sacred thread (a prominent Hindu ritual), graves or traditional death rites.
- * The Khalsa will remain distinct through their wearing of the five K's, but must respect other religions and cultures.
- * The Khalsa must pray to God before starting any work (this is over and above traditional prayers).
- * Sikhs can learn as many languages as they choose, but must know Punjabi, and must teach their children to read Punjabi.
- * Male Khalsa must add Singh (lion) to their name, and female Khalsa must add Kaur (princess).

They can not remove hair from any part of their body.

- * Drugs, smoking and alcohol (intoxicants) are not allowed.

- * Earrings and nose rings are not allowed. The Khalsa must not associate with those who kill their daughters. Sikh women do not wear veils.

- * Sikhs must live by honest labor, and must be generous to those less fortunate. Generosity to the poor is considered generosity to the Guru.

- * Gambling and stealing are prohibited.

- * Other than the kachha (drawers) and dastar (turban), the only limitations on dress are modesty and simplicity.

- * Khalsa greet each other by saying Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa, Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh, which means The Khalsa Belong to God, Victory Belongs to God.

There are also three components to jurmat, or the truthful life. They are:

1. Naam Jap, the remembrance of the creator.
2. Kivat Karni, hard work, earning one's living.
3. Vand Chhakna, sharing time, wealth and energy. Seva, or selfless service, is highly regarded.

WHAT'S GOING ON TODAY?

Today there are almost 23 million Sikhs in the world. The vast majority of them (22 million) live in Asia. The Indian region of Punjab is still home to most of the Sikhs, although there is a growing Sikh population in North America. Sikhs gather for worship in gurdwaras, or sacred shrines (temples). The main Sikh temple is Sri Harimandir Sahib, the Golden Temple, in the city of Amritsar, Punjab. The temporal seat of Sikh power, Sri Akal Takht (Eternal Throne), is located adjacent to Sri Harimandir Sahib. It is currently under reconstruction after it was destroyed by the Indian army in 1984.

HOW DO WE RECOGNIZE IT?

Sikhism is recognized by a symbol called the khanda. It has a doubled edged sword in the center, to symbolize truth, strength, freedom and justice. On either side of the center sword sit the swords of Miri and Piri, which symbolize political and spiritual sovereignty. A chakkar, or circular shield, encircles the central sword. It symbolizes eternity.

The 411 on the founding of Sikhism

Who: Sikhism was founded by Guru Nanak Dev (1469-1539), first of the ten gurus. In Sikhism, a guru is the descent of divine guidance to mankind provided through ten Enlightened Masters. After the death of the tenth guru, Guru Gobind Singh, in 1708, the Sikh scriptures, Granth Sahib Ji, took on the status of living guru for the Sikhs (Guru Granth Sahib Ji). The divine spirit is thought to have gone from one guru to the next, and now resides in the Guru Granth Sahib Ji.

What: Sikhism is a strictly monotheistic religion. The goal of Sikhism is to end the cycle of transmigration (samsara) by merging with God. One merges with God by following the teachings of the Guru, meditating on God's Holy Name and performance of acts of service and charity. A Sikh is a disciple, one who follows the teachings of the ten gurus, and who believes in the Guru Granth Sahib Ji

(Book of Light, a compilation of the hymns of the gurus).

When: Sikhism began in the late 15th century, during the life of Guru Nanak Dev, who lived from 1469 until 1539. The spirit of God moved from Guru Nanak through his nine successors, and now rests in the Guru Granth Sahib Ji.

Where: Guru Nanak Dev lived in the Punjab region of India. Much of Sikh history centers around this region. During the early 1800s, Ranjit Singh ruled over Punjab and Kashmir in what is known as the Sikh state. The vast majority of Sikhs still live in the Punjab region, though there is a Sikh presence in North America because of immigration.

WHAT IF I WANT TO KNOW MORE?

If you want to learn more, check out these sites:

- * www.sikhs.org
- * www.elite.net/~gurpal
- * www.srigurugranthsahib.org/sikhism.htm
- * www.sikhnet.org

Sikh Spirit is a magazine about Sikhs and Sikhism (also available online at www.sikhspirit.com)

Sources:

www.panthkhalsa.org
www.elite.net/~gurpal
www.sikhspirit.com
www.sikhs.org

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