

Sikhism =

SIKHISM

Sikhism is a relatively young South Asian monotheism that stresses community and loyalty. It has more than 20 million adherents, mostly in India.



- **Founder:** Nanak (1469–1539) was the first of ten teachers, or gurus; the tenth guru, Gobind Singh, founded the Khalsa military brotherhood in 1699 and closed the lineage of teachers—investing the scripture, the **Adi Granth**, with the authority of the gurus as a “living text.”
- **Principal deity:** The monotheistic, omnipotent, and omniscient Sikh deity is called **Waheguru**, “the lord” in the sacred Punjabi language.
- **Worldview:** Sikhism teaches the essential unity of all religious sentiment, stressing martial courage and pride in community heritage. Doctrine is based on the teachings of the **Adi Granth**, but emphasis is also placed on the exemplary lives of the ten gurus, as well as martyr-warriors such as **Baba Deep Singh** (d. 1757), who is said to have continued in battle even after his head was severed.
- **Major texts:** Foremost is the **Adi Granth**, or “Sri Guru Granth Sahib.” The **Dasam Granth**, by Gobind Singh, is also revered, as are the **Janam-sakhis**, stories about the life of Nanak.
- **Schools and divisions:** Contemporary Sikh identity is dominated by the ideal of the **Khalsa**; in practice, degrees of observance can vary greatly, even in the same extended family. Khalsa orthodoxy requires display of the **five K’s**: **kacch** (undergarment), **kangha** (wooden comb), **kesh** (uncut hair), **kara** (steel bracelet), and **kirpan** (dagger or sword). A fully initiated Khalsa Sikh is called **Keshdhari** and may refer to uninitiated Sikhs as **Sahajdhari**, or “slow to adopt.”
- **Practice:** Regular community worship is at the **gurdwara**, or temple, where men and women sit separately. Other elements include abstinence from tobacco and display of the five Ks. Doctrine does not endorse devotional acts, but in practice Sikhs often venerate Sikh martyrs and the ten gurus and their relics. They may also go on pilgrimages to **Harmandir Sahib**, or Golden Temple, in Punjab, considered the center of the Sikh world; to **Anandpur Sahib**, the founding place of the Khalsa; or to other historical gurdwaras in South Asia.
- **Membership:** Sikhism welcomes to the **panth** (community) converts who accept the **Rahit Maryada** (code of conduct, formalized in 1950) and obligations of the Khalsa. For practical purposes, however, Sikhs do not proselytize, and the vast majority of the panth is ethnically Punjabi.
- **History:** Sikhism emerged from northern Indian **bhakti** (devotionalism) in the 1400s, but since the 1800s, it has defined itself as distinct from other religions, particularly Hinduism.
- **Contemporary domain:** After the 1947 partition of Pakistan and India split the region of Punjab, most Sikhs now reside in Indian Punjab, with worldwide minority diaspora communities in North America, western Europe, and the Australia/Pacific region.

A COMPARISON OF SIKHISM WITH HINDUISM

(1) *Points of Agreement*

Theoretically, belief in a mystical Supreme Unity.

Practically, great variety of designations for deity.

A certain theistic application of pantheism, even as in some of the Hindu *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad Gita*.

Salvation by faith in the grace of God.

The doctrine of Karma.

Transmigration of souls.

(2) *Points of Disagreement*

Hindu polytheism repudiated, in favor of a monistic pantheism.

Hindu pilgrimages, ritualism, and hermit asceticism repudiated, in favor of pure worship of the Pure One.

Hindu scriptures repudiated, in favor of the Sikh scriptures.

Hindu degradation of women repudiated, in favor of a higher regard for women.

Hindu infanticide repudiated, in favor of a more vigorous populating.

Hindu vegetarianism repudiated, in favor of a more vigorous meat-eating.

COMPARISON OF SIKHISM WITH ISLAM

(1) *Points of Agreement*

Unity of the Supreme Personal Being.

Sovereignty of the Supreme Absolute Ruler.

A certain mercifulness attributed to the inscrutable deity, along with an uncomplaining arbitrariness.

Salvation through submission to God.

Worship through repetition of the name of the deity.

Great importance in repeating prescribed prayers.

Devotion to the founder as God's prophet.

Extreme reverence for sacred scripture.

The first section in the sacred scripture, a kind of Lord's Prayer, composed by the founder at a crisis in his early life when seeking for God, and subsequently prescribed for daily repetition by all his followers.

A series of subsequent leaders after the original founder.

A long, powerful, militaristic church state.

Unity among believers, despite subsequent sects.

A very important central shrine—Mecca and Amritsar.

Vehement denunciation of idolatry.

(2) *Points of Disagreement*

Sikhism's founder not so ruthless or violent as Islam's.

Sikhism's deity not so ruthless or violent as Islam's.

Sikhism's sacred scriptures ascribed to many teachers, at least thirty-seven; not to one, as in Islam.

No fasting prescribed to Sikhs, as to Muslims in month of Ramadan.

No decisive judgment-day in Sikhism, as in Islam. (*Ibid.*, pp. 108-110).

Josh McDowell & Don Stewart

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