



Driving Question: See Destination UK

Power Skill: Collaboration

National Curriculum Learning Objectives

- Expression - What is the best way for a Sikh to show commitment to God? Is having a local Gurdwara important to Sikhs?
- Action - Why do Sikhs contribute to the Langar? Do Sikhs think it is important to share? How might the three foundation or pillars of Sikhi: Nam Japna (meditating on God's name), Vand Chakna (helping others through sewa) and Kirat Karna (earning an honest living) guide a Sikh's lifestyle choices?

Key Vocabulary

Sikhism	Guru Nanak	Punjab	God	Guru Granth Sahib
Gurdwara	Khanda	Guru	Langar	Sikh
5 K's	Karma	Rites of passage		

Key Learning

What is Sikhism?

Sikhism is a worldview that was founded by Guru Nanak around 500 years ago in a place called the Punjab. This is an area which spans part of India and Pakistan in South Asia today. Followers, called Sikhs, believe in one God who guides and protects them. They believe everyone is equal before God. Sikhs believe that your actions are important and you should lead a good life. They believe the way to do this is:

- Keep God in your heart and mind at all times
- Live honestly and work hard
- Treat everyone equally
- Be generous to those less fortunate than you
- Serve others

Sikhism facts:

- Deity: God
- Holy book: Guru Granth Sahib
- Place of worship: Gurdwara
- Important symbols: Khanda
- Approximate worldwide followers: 30 million
- Countries where Sikh people live: 80% reside in India but there are significant populations in Canada, UK, US, New Zealand, East Africa, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand.
- Denominations: Khālsā, Nāmdhari, Nirankāri



BBC Bitesize video: What is Sikhism? <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/articles/zkjpkmn>



Who is a Sikh?

Sikhs are the people who practice the religion, Sikhism. They believe in one God who created the world and the people in it to know the difference between right and wrong. The spirituality of Sikhism centres around getting to know and understand God. In order to do this, Sikhs learn to focus on God instead of themselves. This can help them get closer to God and eventually become one with him.

Becoming one with God, a state that Sikhs call mukti, cannot be achieved or earned by people on earth. Instead, it's something that God does to human beings. Sikhs believe that whilst they cannot achieve mukti on their own, God has provided them with the materials, through scripture and the example of saints, that will help them get close to him.

Thinking Point : What is Sikhism? What are the main facts about Sikhism? Who is a Sikh? Where are Sikhs mainly living?

Key Learning

Main Beliefs: Concept of God, Ten Gurus, 3 Duties and Rites of Passage

Concept of God

Sikhs believe that:

- There is only one God.
- God cannot be described as either male or female.
- God is both sargun (everywhere and in everything) and nirgun (above and beyond creation).
- God created the world and created people to know the difference between right and wrong.
- Sikhs do not have images of God and are forbidden to worship any images created of God.
- God is referred to by many names including: Waheguru (Wonderful teacher), Sath Nam (Eternal Reality) and Akal Purakh (Eternal One).

Ten Gurus

In Sikhism, there are ten Gurus (spiritual teachers). Sikhs believe that these Gurus were at one with God. They were the link between God and humans. The Gurus were chosen to deliver God's messages. All Gurus lived their lives as an example to all Sikhs.

The ten Gurus were in human form but the eleventh and final Guru is considered to be the holy book - the Guru Granth Sahib (which contains the messages of all the Gurus).

Guru Nanak: He taught that there was only one God. He argued against social injustice and the caste system. He introduced the system of distributing food to all and communal dining.

Guru Angad: He promoted education and the teaching of reading and writing in Punjabi. He wrote down and compiled Guru Nanak's teachings as well as adding his own, in the Adi Granth (holy book).

Guru Amar Das: He extended the free communal kitchen called the langar, where all were given food and ate together regardless of who they were. Food was served all day and all night. He argued for the idea of women's equality at a time when women did not have many rights in India.

Guru Ram Das: He created the standard Sikh marriage ceremony known as Anand Karaj. He stressed the importance of kirtan (hymn singing) as part of worship.

Guru Arjan: He built the Golden Temple (Harmandir Sahib). This is considered the holiest of Sikh temples in the world. He wrote the prayer for peace called the Sukhmani Sahib Bani.

Guru Hargobind: He introduced the use of Sikh martial arts so that Sikhs could defend themselves. Sikhs celebrate his - and 52 other prisoners - release from prison during Diwali (Bandi Chhor Divas).

Guru Har Rai: He taught and gave lectures on Sikhism and the number of Sikhs grew during his time as the Guru. He refused to change the words of Guru Nanak in the Adi Granth as requested by the Emperor of India at the time.

Guru Harkrishan: He was the youngest Guru (aged 5 when he took over from Guru Har Rai). He helped to heal people with smallpox but caught the disease and died from it at the age of 8.

Guru Tegh Bahadur: He believed in and protected the 'right to freedom of religion' for all - not just Sikhs. He emphasised the importance of honest work and charity.

Guru Gobind Singh: He created the Khalsa, which consisted of Sikhs who had been baptised and dedicated themselves to Sikhism. He instructed that all Sikh males should use the last name Singh (lion) and all females the last name Kaur (princess). He finalised the Adi Granth (which contained the teachings of all the Gurus), and changed its name to the Guru Granth Sahib. He declared that it would be the last and only Guru after him.

3 Sikh Duties

The three duties that a Sikh must carry out: Pray, Work, Give.

- Nam Japna : Keeping God in mind at all times.
- Kirt Karna: Earning an honest living. Avoiding crime, gambling and begging.
- Vand Chhakna: Giving to charity and caring for others

Rites of Passage:

The four rites of passage in a Sikh life are birth, amrit or initiation, marriage and death.

- **Birth:** Following the birth of a baby, a mother takes her child and karah parshad to the Gurdwara where it is prepared and a thanksgiving ceremony performed, during which some amrit (sugar and water) is placed on the baby's lips. The Guru Granth Sahib is opened at random and the first letter of the first hymn will be used as the initial letter of the baby's name.
- **Initiation:** Initiation is extremely significant for Sikhs and usually takes place on physical maturity. For boys, five elder Sikhs lead the ceremony which involves stirring amrit in a bowl with a khanda before having it sprinkled in their eyes and hair. It is at this point that a young male Sikh can adopt the 5Ks - Kesh, Kangha, Kara, Kachera and Kirpan.

Key Learning

- Marriage: It is expected that a Sikh man will marry a Sikh woman. Often marriages are arranged and there is an engagement. Marriages are performed in the Gurdwara and the four marriage vows (Lavan) are read from the Guru Granth Sahib Ji.
- Death: The hymn sung at a funeral is the same as one sung before bedtime. The reason may be that death is little more than a sleep before we awaken to a new world and that sleep is a small death in which we can glimpse the preoccupations of our life. Sikhs can either cremate or bury the body (particularly at sea); the main thing is to treat it respectfully. There is belief in heavens and hells to reward goodness and punish evil.

Thinking Point : What are the main beliefs of Sikhism? Are there any similarities between these beliefs and any other worldviews you know? How have the 10 Gurus shaped the worldview? Can you explore the life of a Guru in depth?

How does a Sikh show commitment to God?

Alongside their strong beliefs, Sikhs have many ways of showing their commitment to God. These include worship in the Gurdwara, celebrating festivals and the 5 K's.

Worship in the Gurdwara

Sikhs worship both in public, at the Gurdwara, and in private, at home. The word Gurdwara means door or gateway to the Guru. At home, Sikhs have pictures of the Gurus that they would pray to and burn incense sticks while doing so. There are many things related to a Gurdwara that end with the word 'sahib' - e.g. Nishan Sahib, Manji Sahib. The word 'sahib' is an Arabic word which means 'master'. It is used to signify respect.

Sri Harmandir Sahib, located in India, is also known as The Golden Temple. This is the most famous and important place of worship in the Sikh religion, its doors open from all sides to people of all faiths.



Gurdwara outside:

- Nishan Sahib: Gurdwara's fly this flag outside to show that it is a special place of worship. The flag contains the Sikh symbol called the Khanda.
- Four doors: There are four doors into the Gurdwara to show that people from the north, south, east and west are welcome.



Gurdwara inside:

- Shoes are removed, hair must be covered and hands should be washed
- Men and women sit on separate sides of the main hall to pray, all facing the Holy Book with their legs crossed
- Langar: There is a free kitchen where food is served without charge during the whole day and evening. Everyone is expected to eat together on the floor (to show that everyone is equal).

Worshipping at home or in the Gurdwara shows a Sikh's commitment to their God as they are fulfilling the Sikh duties and become closer to God.

Festivals

There are many Sikh festivals - known as Gurburbs - throughout the year that celebrate the anniversaries of births or deaths of gurus. These include:

The birthday of Guru Nanak (held in late Autumn)

The birthday of Guru Gobind Singh (celebrated in late December)

During Gurburbs, there are sometimes street processions and the Guru Granth Sahib is read. Gurdwaras are decorated with flowers and Sikhs come to eat and pray together.

Baisakhi, or Vaisakhi, is held on the 13th or 14th of April to celebrate the Sikh new year and the founding of the Khalsa in 1699. For 48 hours prior to the festival, there is a continuous reading of the whole of the Guru Granth Sahib. Team sports are often held to celebrate along with Bhangra dancing and fairs on the day of Baisakhi.

Along with Hindus, Sikhs also celebrate Diwali, the festival of light. This is often a time of giving and receiving gifts, mostly dried fruits and sweets.

The 5 K's

The 5 Ks are 5 physical symbols worn by Sikhs who have been initiated into the Khalsa:

- Kesh (uncut hair) -> Hair (kesh) is a symbol both of holiness and strength. Keeping hair uncut indicates that one is willing to accept God's gift as God intended it.
- Kara (a steel bracelet) -> A symbol of God having no beginning or end.
- Kangha (a wooden comb) -> It symbolises the importance of looking after the body which God has created
- Kachera (cotton shorts) -> It is a symbol of modesty
- Kirpan (steel sword) -> The Kirpan can symbolise: Spirituality, defence of good and weak and can be a metaphor for God.

Thinking Point : How does a Sikh show commitment to their God? Do any practices surprise you? Can you spot any similarities or differences with any other worldviews? Do you think it is difficult for a Sikh to show commitment to their God?