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An

Introduction to
SIKHISM

Outline

- ◆ Sikhism – The Beliefs, The People and the Articles Of Faith
- ◆ U.K. and International Law Regarding the Sikh Articles of Faith
- ◆ Bias/Hate Crimes Against the Sikhs
- ◆ Proposed Plan Of Change – Education and Awareness

What is Sikhism?

- ◆ Religion founded in India (1469) by Guru Nanak and built upon by the nine prophet - teachers (Gurus) who succeeded him.
- ◆ The word “Sikh” means disciple or student.
- ◆ One of the world’s youngest monotheistic religions.
- ◆ Sikhism is distinct from Hinduism or Islam - with its own unique, divine scripture embodied in the Guru Granth Sahib, The Eternal Guide (*Guru*) of the Sikh Faith.



Guru Granth Sahib

What is Sikhism?

- ♦ Fifth largest religion.
- ♦ Universal religion which is open to all - recognizes & respects all human beings as equals.
 - ♦ Does not recognize race, class, caste, or other earthly distinctions between people.
 - ♦ Recognizes men & women as equal in all aspects of life.
 - ♦ Sikh place of worship is called 'Gurudwaara'

Basic Beliefs

- ◆ There is Only One God.
- ◆ Equality of mankind.
- ◆ Freedom and Liberty for all.
- ◆ Speaking out against injustice and standing up for the defenseless is considered a Sikh's duty.
- ◆ Condemnation of superstitions and blind rituals.
- ◆ Intoxications such as alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs are strictly forbidden.



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Who Are Sikhs?

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Who are Sikhs?

- ◆ All Sikh men are identifiable by their distinctive turbans. 99% of people worldwide that wear turbans are Sikhs.
- ◆ Many Sikh women wear ‘smaller’ turbans to keep their head covered as well.



Who are Sikhs?

- ◆ Sikhs have fought in both World Wars with the Allied troops.
- ◆ The Sikh regiments were instrumental in valiantly defeating the Nazis.
- ◆ Sikhs in one of the world's most famous battles – The Battle of Saraghari, in which 21 Sikhs fought against 12,000 Afghan Tribals.



Sikh Troops in France during WWI

Picture courtesy of www.sikhs.org

Prominent Sikhs In the News

- Dr. Manmohan Singh –
14th Prime Minister of
India.
- ◆ Dr. Narinder Singh
Kapany - ‘Father’ /
Creator of Fiber
Optics.
- Fauja Singh – 92 Year
Old Record Setting
Marathon Runner
(pictured right).



Where do Sikhs Live?



- ♦ India
- ♦ England
- ♦ United States of America
- ♦ Canada
- ♦ Australia
- ♦ Africa
- ♦ Brazil
- ♦ All over the World...

Basic Beliefs

- ♦ ‘Naam Japna’ - Remembrance and meditation on God.
- ♦ ‘Vand Kae Chhakna’ – to share with others before partaking yourself. Encompasses the principles of living as an inspiration to others and supporting the community (i.e. giving to charity).
- ♦ ‘Kirat Karni’ – Earning a honest living through hard work.

Traditional Sikh Greetings

- *Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa, Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh* – The Khalsa (Sikhs) belong to the Almighty, Victory to the Almighty.
- *Sat Sri Akaal* – True and Forever is the Timeless Lord.

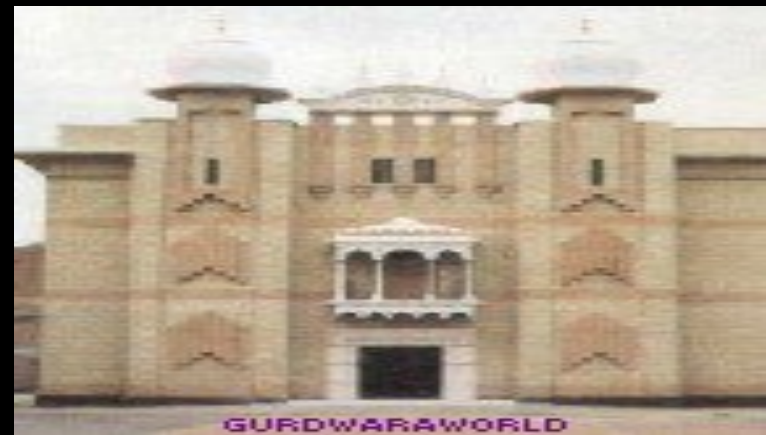


Gurudwara – The Sikh Place Of Worship



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- Guru – The Enlightener.
- Dwara – Door.
- *Gurudwara* – Door of the Enlightener.
- At least 28 *Gurudwaras* in London (bottom picture, Hounslow *Gurudwara*).
- First *Gurudwara* – Harimandir Sahib (top picture) in Amritsar, India.



Inside the Gurudwara

- All who enter the *Gurudwara* must remove their shoes and cover their heads as a sign of respect.
- All entrants must not carry any tobacco/alcohol/narcotics on their person and should be free of intoxication.
- Sikhs will bow before the Guru Granth Sahib, which rests on the central canopied throne and give an offering.





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Sikh Prayer Service - Keertan



- Sikhs engage in spiritual hymn singing known as *Kirtan* (akin to a church choir) as part of the Gurudwara service.
- An integral part of the services held at a *Gurudwara*.
- *Tabla* (drums) and a harmonium are usually used during the service, though other instruments are also utilized.
- Proper conduct mandates one to remain silent and meditative during *Kirtan*.



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Langar – The Gurudwara's Free Kitchen



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- Established by the Gurus, who themselves performed service for their Sikhs.
- Langar – the great equalizer. All are required to sit at one level and partake of food, regardless of race, gender, creed, etc.
- Each Gurudwara will have *Langar* (free kitchen), from which a devotee or visitor can have free food.



Nishan Sahib - The Sikh Flag



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- Flown outside every Sikh *Gurudwara*.
- Represents the sovereignty and sanctity of a Sikh place of worship.
- Carries the Sikh Insignia – the Khanda



Prominent Sikh Insignia



The two most common insignia seen at Sikh *Gurudwaras*, Sikh homes, Sikh events and may be worn by Sikhs on their person.

Ik Onkaar

- *Ik Onkaar* – The One Almighty. The first and central theme of Sikhism, representing the One All-Encompassing God.
- Given the distinction of being the opening words of the Guru Granth Sahib for all Sikhs to meditate upon.



The Sikh Insignia

- Composed of four symbols.
- The *Khanda* (double-edge sword) – represents the creative power of the Almighty. The whole Sikh insignia may also be referred to as a *Khanda*.
- The *Chakkar* (circular quoit) – represents the infinite nature of the Almighty with no beginning or end.
- *Miri* and *Piri* (two outlying swords) – represent the two aspects of a Sikh's life. *Piri* represents the spiritual element and *Miri* represents the temporal element.
- A Sikh is to embody both concepts of *Miri* and *Piri*, but the *Piri* (spiritual) aspect is always to dominate and to guide the actions of the *Miri* (temporal) element.



Nagar Kirtan Parade

- Nagar Kirtan – A parade held to celebrate Sikh religious days in all major cities in the world
- Guru Granth Sahib (Sikh Scripture) is carried during the Nagar Kirtan
- Led by the Panj Pyare (five beloved) who represent the Khalsa (Sikh Nation)



Mandatory Articles of the Sikh Faith



Mandated by religion, all initiated Sikhs must carry the five articles of faith,

“Have, on your person, at all times, the five Ks:

- the *Keshas* (unshorn hair).
- the *Kirpan* (sheathed sword)
- the *Kachhehra* -- drawers like garment may be made from any cloth, but its legs should not reach down to below the shins;
- the *Kanga* (comb).
- the *Karha* (steel bracelet)."

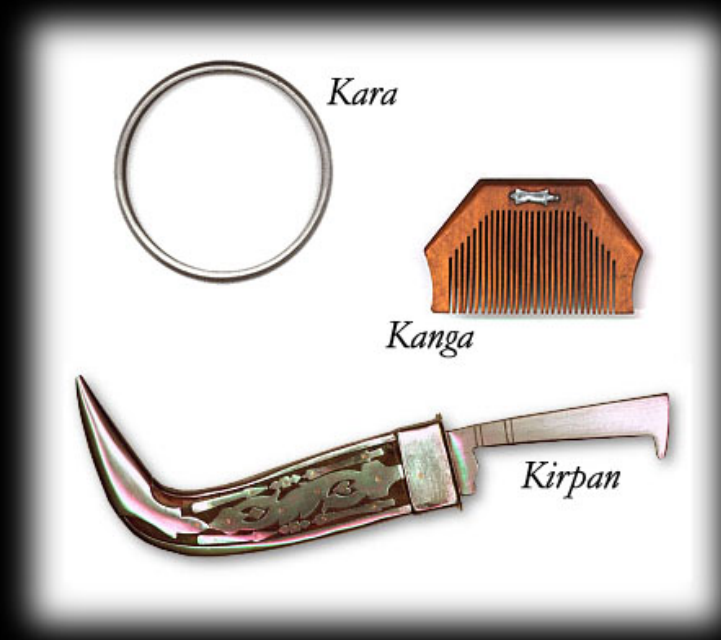
Reference: *The Sikh Rehit Maryada* (Code of Conduct)

Articles of Faith: The 5 Ks



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- ♦ Kara – Steel bracelet usually worn on the right hand. A symbolic reminder of the commitment of a Sikh to God.
- ♦ Kanga – Small comb worn in a Sikh's hair. Represents the importance of discipline and is used to keep the hair clean and untangled.
- ♦ Kirpan – Ceremonial scimitar represents dignity and the Sikh struggle against injustice.



Articles of Faith:

The 5 Ks

- ♦ Kachhehra – Long boxer-like underwear. Represents the commitment of a Sikh to monogamy and sexual restraint.



- ♦ Kesh - Long unshorn hair. The keeping of hair in its natural state is regarded as living in harmony with the will of God. Hair on the head is wrapped under a turban, which represents an individual's dignity and self-respect.

The Kirpan



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- 'KIRPA' + 'AAN'. '*Kirpa*' means an act of kindness, or mercy; and '*aan*' means honor and self-respect.
- To call it a dagger or knife is rather insulting to this article of faith, which functions quite differently from the other two.

Kirpan Facts



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- British, US and Canadian courts have always upheld Sikhs' right to wear the Kirpan as an article of faith
- Sikhs have won all known court cases brought against the wearing of the Kirpan in the United States and Canada; some cases have been dismissed by the courts that have recognized it as an article of faith.
- According to the Sikh code of conduct, the *kirpan* is to be worn using a *Gatra* (a strap that enables a kirpan to be suspended near one's waist or tucked inside one's belt). The implication of this explicit requirement is that the Kirpan cannot be worn as a miniaturized symbol. To neglect to wear one or more of the Five Ks is a serious transgression of the Sikh code of conduct



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Sikh Dress Code



Kara - (Iron/steel Bracelet): Reminder of Righteous Conduct



Kanga - (Comb): Cleanliness



Uncut Hair – (*Kesh*):
Acceptance of a Gift
From God. Hair On Head
Kept Under a Turban
is Sign of
Dignity and Self-Respect.



Sword - (*Kirpan*):
Defence of Truth



Long Underpants –
(*Kacherra*):
Sexual Restraint and
Moral Conduct

Kirpan and Turban – Targets of Litigation

- The Turban and the *Kirpan* have been the target of many frivolous lawsuits.
- Both are articles of the Sikh faith that cannot be compromised as per the tenets of the faith.
- Outcome of litigation in the U.S. has been overwhelmingly in support of the Turban and the *Kirpan*.

British Law and Sikhism

- Specific mention in statutes of Sikh Turban and *Kirpan*.
- Employment Act of 1989 – prevents discrimination against the Sikhs by granting exemptions from hardhat requirements.
- Road Traffic Act 1988, Section 16(2) – grants exemption to a Sikh from wearing a helmet while on a motorcycle.
- Criminal Justice Act 1988, Section 139 – allows a Sikh to carry a Kirpan in public places, including schools, courts, and Houses of Parliament, for religious reasons.
- British law recognizes the wearing of the Sikh articles of faith as right of a Sikh to manifest his religion.



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U.S. Law and Sikhism

- The U.S. Constitution affords general and broad protection for the free exercise of one's religion.
- First Amendment – “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof”.

Turban And Kirpan – U.S. Law



Turban

- Mr. Amrik Singh Rathour v. NYPD - resulted in allowing Sikh police officers to join the police force with a turban as part of the uniform.
- Mr. Sat Hari Singh v MTA – the MTA retracted its ban on the Turban and Sikh plaintiffs are currently pursuing litigation against the MTA.

Kirpan

- Landmark cases - State of New York, Plaintiff, v. Partap Singh, State Of Ohio v. Harjinder Singh – both resulted in the courts upholding the right of a Sikh to wear the Kirpan.
- Sikh organization efforts – have led to the dropping of charges against Sikhs in Kirpan cases – examples include State of Michigan v. Bhagwant Singh, Oregon v. Gural Singh, State of California v. Kamaldeep Singh, New York v. Kashmir Singh).



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Swedish Law and Sikhism

- The Swedish Government has made a positive move by allowing and respecting the Sikh Dastaar and distinct appearance.
- Swedish born, Jaspal Singh, 17 years old, is able to work in the Swedish military defence service with his dastaar and untied flowing beard.

Canadian Law and Sikhism

- Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms – akin to the Bill of Rights of the U.S. and grants broad protection for religious practice.
- *Bhinder v. C.N.R.* – allows exemption to a Sikh from hardhat requirements and prevents workplace discrimination due to the turban.
- *Grant et al. v. Attorney General (Canada)* – allows Sikh police officers to wear a turban while on duty and as part of the uniform.
- *The League for Human Rights of B'Nai Brith Canada v. Syndicat Northcrest*; and *Syndicat Northcrest v. Amselem* – The Canadian Supreme Court ruled courts do not have the duty nor the authority to question the validity of a religious belief.
- *Multani v. Commission Scolaire Marguerite-Bourgeoys* – The Canadian Supreme Court held that Gurbaj Singh, a Sikh student, had a right to wear the Kirpan to school.



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Case of Gurbaj Singh – Sikh Student



- Gurbaj Singh, a Sikh student of Canada was dismissed from school for wearing the Kirpan.
- After many years of litigation, he and Canadian Sikh students, won the right to wear the Kirpan to school.

U.S. Hate Crimes

Post 9/11 – A Sampling



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- Balbir Singh Sodhi fatally shot in Mesa, AZ – first reported fatality of post-9/11 violence in the U.S.
- Rajinder Singh Khalsa – beaten severely by a group of assailants resulting in multiple fractures.
- Sikh family was assaulted by three males outside their home in Queens, New York. The men yelled “Bin Laden go back to your country” and held and punched adult family members in full view of their children .

Bias/Hate Crimes – A Persistent Problem



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- War On Terror, the London bombings and the still-recent 9/11 terror attacks - bias attacks against the Sikhs remain a serious problem.
- Sikh organizations – resolute in educating and raising awareness about Sikhism.
- At a minimum, Sikh organizations must work with government officials to create awareness about Sikhism.



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?? *QUESTIONS* ??



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