

**20**  
**Minute**  
**GUIDE**  
**To The**  
**SIKH**  
**FAITH**



# 20 Minute Guide To The SIKH FAITH

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## Other books by the author:

*Who Are The Sikhs? – An Exploration of the Beliefs, Practices & Traditions of the Sikh People* (2023), Archway Publishing, Bloomington, Indiana, USA.

*Angahe Raah* (2019), (Punjabi translation of *An Uncommon Road*). Unistar Books, Chandigarh, India.

*An Uncommon Road: How Canadian Sikhs Struggled Out of the Fringes and into the Mainstream* (2018). Echo Storytelling Agency, Vancouver, Canada.

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*Guru Nanak's Benediction May You Be Displaced!* (2019) In Dr. Gurbinder Singh (Ed.), *Guru Nanak Darshan: Philosophy of Guru Nanak* (pp. 114-119). Sri Guru Singh Sabha, Surrey, B.C.

*Odysseys of a Spiritual Messenger* (2019) In Dr. Gurnam Singh Sanghera, (Ed.), *Guru Nanak: Revealer of Truth* (pp. 89-120). India Cultural Centre of Canada, Richmond, B.C.

*Guru Nanak's Relative and Absolute Truth* (2019) In Dr. Gurnam Singh Sanghera, (Ed.), *Guru Nanak Sahib: Jagat Guru – Founder of New World Order* (pp. 73-84). Akali Singh Sikh Society, Vancouver, B.C.

# 20 Minute Guide to the Sikh Faith

by

**Gian Singh Sandhu**

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To  
To the Divine Creative Force that  
permeates through each of us

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## FOREWORD

**S**ikh religion, despite being relatively new, is the fifth-largest living religion of the world. It is deeply rooted in the spiritual and historical experiences of Guru Nanak (1469-1539). A close examination of Guru Nanak's writing, particularly spiritual hymns, make it abundantly clear that the lack of spirituality, immoral behaviour, and caste-based social order were not acceptable to him. He was determined to convey that there is only "One Divine Being," who loves all and can be realized equally by everyone, notwithstanding gender or social status. His spiritual, poetic utterances, sung in nineteen melodies, established a distinct faith and provided a new social order, afresh with ideological alternatives aimed at spiritual regeneration and social reconstruction of which truthful living, equality, equity, and justice were the fundamental values.

Five hundred years ago, in the midst of a highly patriarchal society, Guru Nanak took a stand for the empowerment of women and gender equality. The uniqueness of Sikh spirituality lies

in the fact that it neither subscribes to otherworldliness nor confines itself to liberation at the individual level. It is a congregational religion that takes care of both worlds, *Deen* (spiritual) and *Duniya* (secular), in equal measure. It is all-inclusive and holistic in its approach towards the world and the concerns of human life. Sikhism is a life affirmative and holistic religion that not only focuses on a family and householder lifestyle but also believes in the welfare of humanity. Its' mission is to eradicate evil and injustice from all walks of life. Epistemologically speaking, it was a radical departure from the Indian religious tradition. It was a quantum leap in Indian spirituality as it broke the barriers of caste and threw open the doors for liberation. It was a social and religious revolution.

The present study, *20 Minute Guide to the Sikh Faith*, has been written with an avowed objective to educate young Sikhs and introduce the faith to non-Sikhs. The author discusses the origin and development of Sikhism very briefly and takes into account the epoch-making events that left an indelible imprint on the psyche and history of the Sikhs. He dwells upon the most significant beliefs and practices, namely the Sikh Scripture,

the institution of Gurdwara, the Sikh code of conduct, Five Ks (five articles of Sikh faith), rites of passage, the Sikh festivals, etc. in a very cogent and lucid style. Besides the table of dates relating to the lives of Sikh Gurus, the author has very wisely given the gist of hymns that are recited to solemnize the Sikh marriage ceremony known as *anand karaj*. Simply put, it serves the purpose of reminding the newly wedded couple of their duties and commitment towards each other and society as well. Though the author is very candid and humble in his claim that “It is by no means a comprehensive or categorical” treatise, yet he has succeeded in his objective to fulfill the reader’s quest to know more about Sikhism. I appreciate it very much and congratulate S. Gian Singh Sandhu for this accomplishment.

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## INTRODUCTION

This guidebook is intended to provide readers with a brief glimpse into Sikh<sup>1</sup> values, beliefs, practices, and traditions. It is by no means comprehensive or categorical. Like any other faith group, Sikhs are not homogeneous ethnically or in terms of how they each interpret their Guru's teachings and choose to apply them to their own lives. However, observant Sikhs share much in common, starting with a firm belief in the spiritual teachings compiled in the *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*,<sup>2</sup> the Sikh Scripture. Thus, much of this book will focus on those teachings while also touching on the practices of Sikhs that have developed since the beginning of the Guru's times and are designed to put those teachings into action.

Guru Nanak is widely considered to be one of the most influential spiritual teachers of all time. He was a radical socio-religious thinker who fearlessly challenged existing social norms. Based on his profound divine experience, and dialogue with different faith-based leaders throughout

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<sup>1</sup> The word "Sikh" is pronounced with the short "i" sound, as in "pick".

<sup>2</sup> Prefix 'Sri' and suffix 'Sahib' are honorific titles added to all Gurus' names.

India and the Middle East, he weaved spiritual thought into a unique philosophy and distinct identity that has left an indelible imprint on this world. *Sikhi*<sup>3</sup> (Sikh religion) is a monotheistic faith, and in that respect, it is similar to other world religions. However, there are critical differences between Sikhi and other religions, which will become evident as you read this book. One of its unique features is the Sikh concept of the saint-soldier (*sant-sapahi*) – a brave individual who balances the quest for personal enlightenment with social activism.

I invite you to join me as we briefly explore Sikh philosophy, institutions, values, and practices – in short, ‘the Sikh way of life.’ Whether you are hoping to learn more about your Sikh heritage, or are simply curious about your next-door neighbour, I hope this book helps you on your quest for knowledge.

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<sup>3</sup> The word “Sikhi” is pronounced “Sikhee”. This is how most Sikhs refer to their faith.

## 1. HISTORY

Our journey begins in 1469 CE in the village of ‘Rai Bhoi Di Talwandi,’ where Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh faith, was born. The village was renamed in his honour and is now known as Nankana and is located in Punjab,<sup>4</sup> Pakistan, about 65 kilometers from Lahore.

The decades surrounding Guru Nanak’s birth were a time of great social and religious upheaval in India and, indeed, the world. Columbus had only recently ‘discovered’ the Americas. Nicolaus Copernicus was working on his seminal theory that the Sun and not the Earth was at the centre of our solar system. And Martin Luther was on the cusp of starting the Protestant Reformation. Closer to home, Guru Nanak was an eyewitness to the Mughal invasions of India and wrote about the atrocities perpetrated on the

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<sup>4</sup> Punjab is pronounced “pan-ja-b.” It literally means the land of five (panj) rivers (ab). After the partition of India in 1947, the Punjab province of British India was split between India and Pakistan.

people of the Indian subcontinent by the invading forces.

All of these events helped form and shape Guru Nanak's vision of creating a community of socially responsible and spiritually aware individuals. He was a visionary, centuries ahead of his time. During a period when women were treated as mere chattels and considered sub-human, he advocated against female infanticide, widow burning (*sati*)<sup>5</sup>, and the veiling of women's faces. He maintained that all religions were equal and sought to unify people of different faiths. Guru Nanak encouraged a radical transformation in how individuals lived their lives, promoting self-awareness and truthful living - which are integral to the Sikh path.

Guru Nanak's life has been documented and passed on to succeeding generations through *Janamsakhis*, which chronicle the development of his thought and revolution against the status quo. One such *Janamsakhi* recounts how, at the age of nine, Guru Nanak refused to wear the *janeu*, a sacred religious thread worn by Hindu males as their initiation into the religious order and to

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<sup>5</sup> The Indian practice of 'sati,' where widows were compelled to immolate themselves on their husbands' funeral pyres.

distinguish themselves from other (lower) castes. He did not want to reinforce social and gender disparity. He proclaimed that people should be known for their qualities and their deeds, rather than symbolic threads, rituals, or blind faith.

Towards the end of the fifteenth century, Guru Nanak had a profound spiritual experience that led to his vision of the true nature of human existence and our relationship with the Divine Creator. He saw the Creator as a benevolent and “wondrous teacher” (*Waheguru*<sup>6</sup>), accessible to all (*sarb-sanjha*), regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, or religious belief. He viewed himself as a student (the literal translation for the word “*Sikh*”) of this wondrous teacher. Guru Nanak challenged the prevalent socio-religious practices and taught that anyone could connect with Waheguru anytime and anywhere, without any rituals or needing an intermediary.

According to Guru Nanak, Waheguru could be experienced by earning an honest living (*kirat karna*); reflective meditation (*naam japna*); and sharing one’s earnings with others, particularly

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<sup>6</sup> Waheguru: pronounced “wha-hey-guru,” is the most commonly used Sikh name for the Divine Creator. It may also be spelled ‘vahiguru’.

the needy (*vand chhakna*). These three principles have become the pillars of the Sikh way of life. They require a real and practical commitment to life and its ethical obligations. If practiced daily, Guru Nanak believed that they would lead to a holistic and fulfilling life, leading one to become a spiritually aware and socially responsible person.

Guru Nanak travelled extensively, on land and by sea, throughout the geographic regions that are currently referred to as India and the Middle East. During these travels (*udasis* or odysseys) he shared his vision of the Divine Creator, and empowered people to rise above the temptations of lust (*kaam*), anger (*krodh*), greed (*lobh*), attachment (*moh*), and ego (*ahankaar*). Those that followed his teachings became known as Sikhs.

Following four *udasis* undertaken over more than twenty years, Guru Nanak settled with his wife and two children in the village of Kartarpur. He eventually felt the need to pass on the torch of his mission and chose a successor (Guru Angad). In all, there were nine successive human gurus following Guru Nanak. Over a period of 200 years, each expounded upon and reinforced Guru Nanak's spiritual teachings and helped develop

institutions to put these teachings into practice. These include the *sangat* (devout congregation), *gurdwara* (Sikh place of worship); *langar* (community kitchen), *pangat* (sitting together and dining without any distinction of social status), and *keertan* (singing of devotional hymns).

The simplicity and beauty of Guru Nanak's message empowered the downtrodden and emboldened them to challenge the status quo. As more people embraced the Sikh way of life, the Sikhs were increasingly viewed as a threat to the existing social structure and became targets of persecution by the state.

Guru Arjan, the fifth Sikh guru, was tortured and martyred for his refusal to bow to the demands of the Mughal Emperor Jahangir. The sixth Guru, Guru Hargobind, was imprisoned for years for also challenging the Emperor. Guru Teg Bahadur, the ninth Guru, was beheaded for standing up for the freedom of Hindus to practice their faith free of interference and intimidation by the Mughal rulers.

As persecution of Sikhs continued, they were forced to fight back and defend themselves under the leadership of the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh. One of Guru Gobind Singh's generals was

a highly regarded female warrior named Mata Bhag Kaur, who led Sikh soldiers in the battle against the Mughals in 1705. Guru Gobind Singh was fatally stabbed by a Mughal mercenary. His *Joti Jot* (immersion in Eternal Light) occurred in 1708 and was preceded by the martyrdom of all four of his children, the older two dying in battle, and the younger two<sup>7</sup> entombed alive by the Mughal rulers for refusing to give up their faith.

Guru Gobind Singh was the last Guru in human form for the Sikhs. Before his passing, he proclaimed the *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* (the Sikh Scripture) as the eternal Guru to whom Sikhs should turn for spiritual guidance. He bestowed the temporal authority for the conduct of Sikh affairs, on the *Khalsa Panth* (the collective body of Sikhs who accept *amrit*, the initiation ceremony for a practicing Sikh). With a shared destiny and vision, and guided by the teachings in the *Guru Granth Sahib*, the Sikh community has remained united in the ensuing centuries following Guru Gobind Singh's passing (*Joti Jot*).

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<sup>7</sup> The older two sons Baba Ajit Singh and Baba Jujhar Singh were 18 and 14 years old respectively, and the younger sons Baba Zorawar Singh and Baba Fateh Singh were just 9 and 7 years old.

Baba<sup>8</sup> Banda Singh Bahadur (1670-1716), who was initiated into the Sikh faith by Guru Gobind Singh, became a devout Sikh and renowned warrior. In September 1708, Banda Singh Bahadur left for Punjab and raised a Sikh army to battle against the existing oppressive regime. In the following two years, he managed to carve out a sovereign Sikh state in Northern India. This was the beginning of the downfall of the Mughal empire. Following Banda Singh Bahadur's torture and execution in Delhi in 1716, the first Sikh State fell apart. The Mughal governors of Punjab followed a relentless policy to exterminate the Sikhs as a religious community. Sikhs were hunted like wild beasts, imprisoned, and executed publicly in the markets of Lahore.

The persecution of Sikhs led to the battle known as the *Wadda Ghalughara* (major holocaust). On February 5, 1762, it is estimated that 30,000 Sikhs were killed in battle in one day. Instead of becoming demoralized, the Sikhs showed true grit, and the disparate independent *misls* (confederacies) eventually amalgamated to

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<sup>8</sup> *Baba* means grandfather, or wise elder, it is an honorific used to refer to someone who is deeply respected for their knowledge and leadership, regardless of their age. The female term is *Bibi*.

create the Sikh *raaj* (Empire) under the leadership of *Maharaja* (head king) Ranjit Singh in 1799.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh's empire extended from the Khyber Pass in the west (northwest frontier province of Pakistan), the river Satluj in the east, Mithankot in the south, and Kashmir in the north. Though he fell far short of adhering to Sikh teachings in his personal life, Ranjit Singh was appropriately regarded as a fair and impartial ruler. In Ranjit Singh's kingdom, all faiths were given equal opportunity, schools were opened for girls, and capital punishment was abolished. He appointed Sikhs, Muslims, Hindus, Christians, and people of other faiths, as well as many women, to authoritative positions in his administration. His army included generals from France, Italy, and America.

Having conquered the rest of India some fifty years earlier, the British saw it opportune to annex what remained of Ranjit Singh's empire in 1849, merely ten years after his death. However, it was an uneasy reign, with many Indians, including Sikhs, openly rejecting the British Raj (rule).

The movement to be free of British rule was ultimately successful. In 1947, the people of India gained independence from the British, but not

before losing millions of lives during Partition. The British agreed to split the country into three, creating the Muslim majority countries of East and West Pakistan, and the Hindu majority country of India.

The Sikhs, who had their own empire before the British occupation and had lost the most lives freeing India, ended up being short-changed during Partition. Relying on promises made by the Indian political leaders (Jawaharlal Nehru<sup>9</sup> and Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi) that their distinct identity would be protected in a newly independent India, the Sikhs opted not to seek an independent country of their own. Sadly, Nehru and Gandhi failed to keep their word. This betrayal of the Sikh community led Sikhs to face many needless challenges in post-colonial India.

Modern Indian history has been marked by border disputes with Pakistan and China, as well as internal sectarian conflict as religious minorities (such as Christians, Sikhs, and Muslims) seek to protect their own identities. For

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<sup>9</sup> "The brave Sikhs of Punjab are entitled to special consideration," vowed Nehru, a year before India was granted independence and he became the nation's first prime minister. "I see nothing wrong in an area and a set-up in the North wherein the Sikhs can also experience the glow of freedom," reported *The Statesman* – July 6, 1946.

the Sikhs, this came to a head in 1984, when the government of India launched a full-fledged military assault (codenamed '*Operation Blue Star*') against the Sikhs who were advocating for greater rights for all states (including Punjab).

Operation Blue Star resulted in the loss of thousands of innocent lives. The Indian government's orchestrated attack on *Darbar Sahib* (Golden Temple), the destruction of the *Akal Takhat Sahib* (seat of Sikh temporal authority) and Sikh archives, and a simultaneous attack on thirty-eight other historical gurdwaras, reverberated around the Sikh diaspora. This direct attack on Sikh places of worship has been the focal point of continuous Sikh disillusionment with post-colonial India.

In the decades following the events of 1984, the Sikhs have continued to be the conscience of India. In 2021-2022 the Sikhs of Punjab were instrumental in organizing and participating in farmer's protests, which were aimed at improving the lives of farmers across India.

Though many Sikhs still favour the creation of a distinct state (often referred to as Khalistan) where Sikhs can live, flourish, and experience the glow of freedom, Sikhs remain a vital part of India.

Moreover, the Sikh diaspora is genuinely global. Today, there are more than 28 million Sikhs in the world, with the most significant numbers outside of India living in Canada, Great Britain, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, and Malaysia.



## 2. SIKH GREETINGS

**S**ikhs greet each other with folded hands. It is said that Guru Nanak greeted those he met with a salutation 'Sat Kartar' (Hail the Creator, the Eternal). However, modern day Sikhs commonly use two alternative greetings. Compared to customary English greetings, which can vary according to time of day or occasion, the Sikh greeting (either one) is the same for all times, all occasions, and all events.



1. **Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh** - This greeting can be translated as "Sovereign and free, we belong to the Creator; We are all part of Waheguru's (God's) creation, and Victory to Waheguru. This greeting was introduced in 1699 by Guru Gobind Singh, during the creation of the Khalsa, a community of initiated Sikhs. It is the most commonly used greeting among *amritdhari* (initiated) Sikhs.
2. **Sat Sri Akal** - This greeting, which you hear most Sikhs saying when they meet and greet, is

the second part of the full slogan or *jaikara* introduced by Guru Gobind Singh to celebrate victory: *Jo Bole So Nihal, Sat Sri Akaal*. The greeting literally means "Call to victory, triumph or exultation." The full slogan means "Whoever utters this phrase (Sat Sri Akal) shall be happy and blessed; Eternal is the Great Timeless Divine."

### **3. THE SIKH GURUS**

**T**he word “guru” refers to a spiritual teacher, and can be defined as the “deliverer from darkness (ignorance) to light (enlightenment).” The term “Sikh” is defined as a student and a seeker of truth. Thus, the Gurus taught Sikhs how to move from darkness to light, from ignorance to enlightenment, from fear to confidence, from hate to love, and from despair to hope.

While Sikhs believe that the guidance of the Guru is essential to one’s spiritual enlightenment, the Sikh religion rejects the notion that the human Guru is a mediator between the disciple and Waheguru. Rather, Guru Nanak emphasized a personal and direct relationship with the Divine. The Guru’s role is to reveal the way to establish that relationship but never to come between the seeker and Waheguru.

The Gurus’ names and their period of Guruship are listed in Table 1 in Appendix “A.”



## 4. SRI GURU GRANTH SAHIB

**S**ri Guru Nanak expressed his teachings through his profoundly moving and exquisitely written *Gurbani* (divine utterances). These spiritual writings form the basis of the Sikh Scripture. In addition to Guru Nanak, five other Sikh Gurus also expressed their spiritual teachings in the form of sabds (spiritual poetry).

Guru Arjan compiled the very first formulation of the Sikh Scripture, known as the *Aad Granth* (the primal Scripture). In addition to his own writings and those of his predecessors, Guru Arjan included the spiritual writings of saints and devotees from other faiths and diverse social backgrounds, whose philosophy was congruent with Guru Nanak's teachings.

The inclusion of the teachings of non-Sikhs in the Sikh Scripture is an extraordinary display of openness that is the hallmark of Sikh faith. It drives home the Sikh view that each religion is equal, and at its core, teaches the same fundamental values. When Sikhs bow to their

Scripture, they are bowing not only to the teachings of the Sikh Gurus, but also the compositions of other spiritually enlightened individuals who professed other faiths.

Guru Gobind Singh completed the final version of the Sikh Scripture, which is in use today. Included in it are the writings of his predecessor, Guru Teg Bahadur. Though a gifted poet himself, Guru Gobind Singh did not include his own writings in the final compilation of the Sikh Scripture. Guru Gobind Singh named the Sikh Scripture the “Guru Granth”. Sikhs add ‘Sri’ before Guru Granth and ‘Sahib’ after, as show of reverence. Before his passing in 1708, Guru Gobind Singh proclaimed the Sri Guru Granth Sahib as the eternal Guru of the Sikhs, to which Sikhs could turn for spiritual guidance. He also declared that the *panj pyare* (any five initiated and practicing Sikhs) could constitute a decision-making body and provide guidance to the Sikh Panth in secular matters, such as leadership in social issues or assisting with interpretation of the Gurus’ teachings.

Sri Guru Granth Sahib is a 1,430-page volume written in *Gurmukhi* (Punjabi script popularized by the Gurus). Virtually all of the compilations are set

to musical modes (*raags*). Similar to French, Punjabi incorporates the use of the masculine and feminine tense. Though all the gurus were male, the Sikh Scripture is written in the feminine voice, reflecting the Gurus' beliefs that each of our souls, regardless of gender, is best expressed as feminine energy.

Guru Nanak's vision was to reveal the true nature of the Divine and foster the creation of an all-inclusive and egalitarian society. The very first spiritual composition (*sabd*) in the Sri Guru Granth Sahib is known as the *mool mantar* (or the cardinal statement). It sets out the mission statement for every Sikh, and captures Guru Nanak's vision of the Ultimate Divine Source, and by extension, of the Self:

*Ek Onkaar* – there is one eternal being that is all-embracing

*Satnam* – whose name is 'the one that exists'

*Karta* – the Creator of the Universe

*Purakh* – the cosmic consciousness which permeates through all of creation

*Nirbhau* – that which has no fear

*Nirvair* – that which has no enmity

*Akal moorat* – that form which is not bound by time

*Ajooni* – that which is unborn

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*Saibhang – that which came into existence on its own*

*Gur parsad – that which can be realized with the grace of the true Guru*

## 5. GURDWARA

The *gurdwara* (the Sikh place of worship, literally meaning the Guru's door or gateway to the Guru) is the hub of the Sikh community, spirituality, and culture. It is a place where Sikhs gather to meditate, congregate, celebrate, and commemorate. A gurdwara is open to all; each gurdwara is built with four doors<sup>10</sup> yet only one entranceway, signifying that people from all four corners of the Earth, and of all faiths, castes, and genders, are welcome and enter as equals.

A gurdwara is easily recognizable from afar, distinguishable by a 'Nishan Sahib' (a long pole with the Sikh flag on it) present outside every gurdwara. The flag is triangular and usually saffron-colored (though some flags may be blue). At the centre is the *khanda* – the symbol of Sikhi. The design of the khanda reflects some of the core concepts that govern Sikh teachings. The name "khanda" is actually derived from the double-edged sword in the center, which is also called a khanda. The central sword is meant to be a metaphor for one's spiritual journey; the sharp edges cleaving truth from falsehood. The



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<sup>10</sup> In some countries having four doors may be constrained due to land or zoning by-laws.

circle around the khanda is called the *chakar*. It represents the Eternal Divine, with no beginning and no end.<sup>11</sup> The two curved outer swords of the *khanda* are the swords of ‘*piri*’ (spiritual power) and ‘*miri*’ (temporal power). They remind a Sikh of her or his duty to strive for balance in life by placing equal value on spiritual aspirations and fulfilling one’s social obligations.

The typical design of a gurdwara comprises a



central dome on the rooftop, with smaller domes at the corners. The design is not prescribed. If the collective economic well-

*Akali Singh Sikh Society, Vancouver, BC* being of devotees at any given place does not permit this costly construction, then appropriate adjustments are made to the buildings of worship. The emphasis is not on the building but on the purpose of its’ usage.

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<sup>11</sup> In the words of Sri Guru Nanak Sahib, *aad sach, jugaad sach, hai bhi sach, Nanak hosi bhi sach* – that which existed in the primal beginning, that which existed through the ages, that which exists here and now, oh Nanak, that which will exist forever.

The most famous gurdwara is Darbar Sahib, also referred to as Harmandir Sahib in Amritsar, India. In the western world, it is commonly known as the “Golden Temple.” It came



by this nickname after Sri Darbar Sahib (Golden Temple), Amritsar Maharaja Ranjit Singh gilded it with nearly a ton of gold. Darbar Sahib was constructed under the supervision of Guru Arjan, the fifth Guru. In explicit acknowledgement of the concept of only ONE spiritual path leading to the Divine, Guru Arjan invited a Muslim Sufi saint (Sain<sup>12</sup> Mian Mir) to lay the foundation stone for Darbar Sahib. The gurdwara lies in the centre of a massive complex, surrounded by a rectangular pool of water. *Akal Takhat Sahib*, the throne of temporal power, lies opposite Darbar Sahib.

Everyone entering a gurdwara is expected to cover their head and remove any footwear. In addition, tobacco, alcohol, or any other intoxicants are strictly forbidden on the gurdwara premises.

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<sup>12</sup> Sain pronounced “Saw-een”

Sikhs do not have any particular day for worship. However, in North America and Europe the main service is typically held on Sundays or whatever day is a common holiday in the country in which they reside.

Sri Guru Granth Sahib is the primary focus of reverence in every gurdwara. It is placed on a *manji sahib* (an elevated platform) in the centre of the congregation hall (darbar). Seated behind the Sikh Scripture is a man or woman who periodically waves a large whisk (*chaur*) as a sign of respect for the Guru. Anyone from the congregation can perform this function. Devotees pay respect by bowing in front of the Scripture. People may donate money to meet the common needs of the institution and the community. Such donations are deposited in a large donation box (*golak*) located at the front where they pay respect to the Scripture. Donations are made on the basis of personal circumstances and are not prescribed.



*Sri Guru Singh Sabha, Surrey, BC*

Facing the sangat is another elevated stage where *raagis* (devotional musicians) sing sabd's from the Sri Guru Granth Sahib and lead the congregation in



*Sri Guru Singh Sabha, Surrey, BC*

devotional singing. Sikhs do not have any ordained clergy. Instead, they have *gianis* or *granthis* - Sikhs who are learned in the Sikh Scripture, philosophy, and history. They act as caretakers of the Scripture and may fulfill this function as a full-time or part-time job. While any amrithdari Sikh (man or woman) can perform the necessary services in the congregation, the gianis/granthis usually do so.

The congregation is seated on a carpeted floor, all as equals before the Guru. Frequently, men and women sit on separate sides, though there is no bar to them sitting together. It is felt that the separation of the sexes is conducive to meditation.

Everyone who enters the darbar hall (also called diwan hall) is given *karah-parshad*, a sweet pudding-like food made out of flour, sugar, water, and butter. The *karah-parshad* is considered a blessing and is taken with open hands. It may be

regarded as disrespectful or rude to decline the *karah-parshad*, and it is offensive to throw it away.

Every gurdwara has a *langar* hall (community kitchen) where food, usually prepared by volunteers, is served to all devotees and visitors alike throughout the day. *Langar* symbolizes equality and encourages the sharing of one's wealth and humility. It has deep roots in Sikh history. For example, the third Sikh Guru, Guru Amardas, declined to meet with the Mughal Emperor Akbar (1555-1605) until he sat on the floor and ate a meal with the commoners. The food in the *langar* is always vegetarian. The dishes are usually Punjabi food, though any ethnic vegetarian dish can be served in the *langar*.



*Langar Hall*

Generally, Sikhs will eat a meal after the end of the religious service, though it may be consumed at any time. Those that have limited financial means are encouraged to come to the Gurdwara and have *langar*, regardless of ethnicity, race, or religion.

## **6. ARTICLES OF SIKH FAITH**

**I**n 1699, Guru Gobind Singh created a distinctly separate Sikh identity, the Khalsa, through an initiation ceremony known as amrit, which literally translates as “the nectar of immortality.” It was an incredible mark of equality and humility when, after initiating the first five Sikhs (panj pyare), the Guru bowed before them and asked them to initiate him into the order. This gesture affirmed the principle of equality in Sikhi and demonstrated that the disciple (Sikh) and the teacher (Guru) are equals in the eyes of the Divine.

Upon initiation, all Sikh women assume the surname Kaur (meaning lioness, Queen, or Sovereign), and men take on the surname Singh (meaning lion, King, or Sovereign). A Sikh woman maintains her separate identity regardless of marriage and does not change her name to Singh. This naming process was a declaration that people of all backgrounds or castes were equal. The suffixes to their names, indicating their caste or status (according to the era’s prevalent social practices) were replaced with the common last names of Kaur and Singh.

The use of last names other than Singh and Kaur is an artifact from the colonial era, where the British required Sikh men and women to take on additional last names as a way of identification. Frequently, these last names were taken from the names of the villages where they lived.

The amrit *sanchar* (ceremony) is still practiced today, and the outward attire of modern-day practicing Sikhs (turban, unshorn hair, and other articles of faith) has been retained since Guru Gobind Singh's time.

The five *kakkars* (articles of faith – also referred to as the 5Ks), are an outward manifestation of Sikh beliefs and a core part of the Sikh identity. They have practical and spiritual significance and are more than symbols; they represent the values that guide a Sikh. These articles of faith are to be worn at all times, equally by men and women. The five kakkars and their significance are:

- **Kes** – unshorn hair, which represents the acceptance of God's will. *Kes* are to be kept covered at all times, with a *keski* or *dastaar* (turban). The



turban<sup>13</sup> signifies humility, gender equality, and spiritual wisdom. Sikh women may wear a *keski* or other head covering, such as a scarf/dupatta.

- **Kangha** – is a wooden comb representing a sense of cleanliness and self-discipline. It is carried in the hair and used to keep the hair neat and tidy. As Sikhs comb their hair, they are also reminded to comb their mind of impurities and to detach themselves from material things.



- **Kara** – is an iron or steel bracelet worn on the dominant hand. The circle represents the continuum of the universe and the oneness of Waheguru. It serves to remind the bearer to follow Waheguru’s command: to lead an honest, ethical, and compassionate life, to shed greed and ego,



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<sup>13</sup> A poem written by Mohnaam Kaur, aged 11 years, describing the significance of the dastar (turban): “I wear you every day; You give me the courage to stand up; You give me the confidence that I need; You give me the integrity to do what is right; You help my spiritual-self survive; You remind me to treat others equally; No matter who they might be; My humility comes from you; You are my identity.”

and to use one's hands for the benefit of humanity.

- **Kachhera** – is a cotton undergarment that serves as a reminder to maintain high moral character and discipline.



- **Kirpan** – a small sword, worn sheathed, restrained in a cloth sash next to the body. The Kirpan is a composite word where 'kirpa' means grace or compassion, and 'aan' means honour. The kirpan signifies the responsibility of a Sikh to stand up against injustice and assist those that are not able to advocate for themselves. It is a reminder to channel one's emotions towards positive ends, to act with compassion, rather than anger. The size of the kirpan worn varies depending on age and preference. It may range from as little as 1-3 inches for young children and 9-12 inches for adults.



## 7. SIKH CODE OF CONDUCT

**S**ikh religion is a practical, lived faith. Sikhs do not worship idols or practice religious rituals. Sikhs are expected to adhere to a simple code of conduct, known as the Sikh *Rehat Maryada*, which provides consistency and commonality of practices. The *Rehat Maryada* defines a Sikh as a person who faithfully believes in “*One Immortal Being, the Ten Gurus, the Sri Guru Granth Sahib, the teachings of the Gurus, and the Amrit initiation bequeathed by the tenth Guru. Furthermore, a Sikh is a person who does not owe allegiance to any other religion.*”<sup>14</sup>

The *Rehat Maryada* sets out the basic requirements for Sikh worship and ceremonies to mark important life events, such as birth, initiation, marriage, and death. It also sets out some fundamental prohibitions, such as the consumption of intoxicants and substance abuse of any kind and refraining from cutting one’s hair.

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<sup>14</sup> Sikh *Rehat Maryada* (Sikh Code of Conduct), Section One – Translation from Punjabi version.

Female infanticide, child marriage, and marriage without the consent of the bride or groom are also strictly prohibited. Though most Sikhs are vegetarian, consumption of meat is not explicitly prohibited. The Sikh code of conduct prohibits eating kutha, which refers to the meat of an animal slaughtered through a ritualistic manner.

The Sikh code of conduct is silent on issues such as birth control, abortion, euthanasia, artificial insemination, or in-vitro fertilization. However, a deliberate miscarriage or an abortion (unless the mother's physical or mental health is in danger), is generally frowned upon, as it is an interference in Divine Creation. The Sikh faith also teaches us to respect the dignity and freedom of each person. We are, therefore, guided by our own conscience and interpretation of Sikhi teachings, and must be accountable for our actions. "We are all judged by our deeds and actions," says Guru Nanak.<sup>15</sup> With that in mind, Sikhs, in general, are pro-choice on the issue of abortion.

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<sup>15</sup>. SGGS p. 7: ਕਰਮੀ ਕਰਮੀ ਹੋਇ ਵੀਚਾਰੁ ॥

The attached Appendices “B,” “C,” “D,” and “E” describe the processes of naming a child, the amrit, marriage, and death ceremonies, respectively.



## 8. COMMEMORATIONS

**S**ikhs do not believe that any particular day is holier than another. However, some historically significant events are publicly commemorated by Sikhs on the dates the events occurred.

- **Gurpurb:** Gurpurbs are days that mark the birth, martyrdom and death (joti jot) anniversaries of the Sikh Gurus. On these days, Sikhs hold celebrations that include a full recitation of the Sri Guru Granth Sahib, followed by the singing of keertan (also spelled keerten) or devotional Hymns, as well as appropriate lectures focusing on the historical significance of the occasion.
- **Sikh New Year:** Sikhs have their own calendar, called the *Nanakshahi* Calendar to mark special occasions. This calendar begins in the year 1469, which corresponds to the year that Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh religion, was born. The Sikh New Year begins with the start of spring, in the month of Chet, which falls on March 14.

- **Hola Mohalla:** Hola Mohalla, or simply Hola, is a Sikh festival that is celebrated in March. The tradition was established by Guru Gobind Singh in the late seventeenth century to display and highlight Sikh martial arts through simulated battles. *Hola* means the onset of an attack or frontal assault, and *Mohalla* implies an organized procession in the form of an army column.

Hola Mohalla is celebrated for three days in Anandpur Sahib, the city where Guru Gobind Singh held the first initiation ceremony for Sikhs. This festival draws millions of Sikhs and non-Sikhs from around the world.

- **Vaisakhi:** Vaisakhi occurs at the beginning of the month of Vaisakh - the second month in the Indian solar calendar (also called the *Bikrami Calendar*) and occurs around April 14 every year. Although Vaisakhi has traditionally been a harvest festival in Punjab and across South Asia for centuries, the day is particularly significant for Sikhs as it marks the initiation day of the Khalsa by Guru Gobind Singh in 1699.

Sikhs across the globe celebrate this seminal event at Gurdwaras as well as public celebrations in the form of a *Nagar Keertan*.

- **Nagar Keertan:** A nagar keertan is not an event, but rather a method of celebration. Nagar literally means a town, and keertan refers to the singing of devotional hymns. During a nagar keertan, the participants sing hymns along public roads in the form of a celebratory march or parade. The procession is led by five amritdhari Sikhs (panj payare), followed by the Sri Guru Granth Sahib installed in a decorated float. The celebrations are open to all members of the public and include public displays of *gatka* (Sikh martial arts) as well as floats depicting historical or social themes. Along the parade route, people set up tents and offer free food and beverages to all attendees.
- **Ghallughara Akal Takhat Sahib (1984):** The first week of June is commemorated as Ghallughara (holocaust) day. During this week in 1984, thousands of innocent Sikh worshipers and families, including young children, were massacred by the Indian Army during its attack on the Darbar Sahib (Golden Temple) complex and thirty-eight other

historical Gurdwaras in Punjab. The assault was code-named “Operation Blue Star” by the Indian Government.

- **Sikh Genocide Week (1984):** The Sikh community commemorates the first week of November as ‘Sikh Genocide Week’ to remember the November 1984 pogrom during which over 14,000<sup>16</sup> Sikhs were killed in a systematic and orchestrated attack following the murder of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by her two Sikh bodyguards. Sikhs were killed in horrific ways, many burnt alive with rubber tires around their necks, and women and girls’ gang-raped in front of their family members before being tortured and killed.
- **Bandi Chhor Divas:** The *Bandi Chhor Divas* (Day of Liberation) is a Sikh celebratory day which coincides with Diwali, the Hindu festival of lights. On this day, Sikhs commemorate the release of the sixth guru, Guru Hargobind, from years of unlawful imprisonment at the Gwalior Fort by the Mughal Emperor Jahangir.

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<sup>16</sup> The official death toll by the Government of India is 3,000. However, independent human rights groups put the toll at almost five times that number.

History has it that when he was finally offered his release, Guru Hargobind refused to leave the prison unless all 52 Hindu princes, who were rulers of the mountainous regions of Punjab and had also been wrongfully imprisoned, were released. Emperor Jahangir agreed, but with a caveat: he would only allow the release of prisoners who could hold onto the corners of the Guru's robe. Guru Hargobind cleverly designed a robe tailored with 52 "corners" or strings, forcing Jahangir to let him depart with all fifty-two rulers trailing behind him, each holding a "corner" of the robe. This day is celebrated by Sikhs every November.



## CONCLUSION

A Sikh is a student who embarks on an internal journey to seek the truth about their own true existence, their relationship with the Creator, the universe, and all life. A Sikh endeavours to see the presence of Divine light in everyone and everything around them. Divine presence can be readily experienced when one meditates and practices the principles of righteous living.

Guru Nanak emphasized a three-pronged approach to life, emphasizing a practical commitment to balance the spiritual quest with one's obligations to family and society at large:

- Earning one's livelihood through honest means (*kirat karna*);
- Embarking on a quest for internal enlightenment through meditation (*naam japna*); and
- Sharing one's earnings with others (or devoting their time to service of others), particularly the less fortunate (*vand chhakna*).

For a Sikh, Waheguru, the formless Divine Creator is omnipresent. Everyone, irrespective of

their religious beliefs, gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, geographic origins, or linguistic background, can readily connect with the Creator without needing an intermediary or resorting to customary rituals.

A Sikh considers prayer and meditation as ways of directly communicating with the Divine, which can be silent, spoken, or sung through *sabds*. This communication can be performed individually in private, or collectively as part of a congregation. The Sikh *ardas* (prayer) marking the commencement or conclusion of an event, concludes with a request to the Divine to bless all of humanity (*sarbat da bhala*), and not just a chosen few.

The five articles of the Sikh faith (5Ks) comprise the physical manifestation of the Sikh identity. They have practical and spiritual significance and therefore are not mere symbols. These five articles represent the values that constitute the foundations of the Sikh faith and are to be worn by all Sikhs at all times. Superstitions or idol worship are antithetical to Sikh values.

Guru Nanak maintained that all religions are equal and sought to unify people of different faiths

rather than divide them. He introduced a new approach to life and encouraged self-awareness and truthful living. Two of the most significant elements of Guru Nanak's vision were his dedication to women's rights and eradicating caste distinctions and religious zealotry. In Sikhi, women are equal to men in their role, status, and power. Racism, sexism, or religious superiority have no place in the Sikh faith.

There is a *sakhi* (story) about Guru Nanak encountering a village during his travels, where the residents were rude and inhospitable. Upon leaving the village, the Guru blessed them by saying, "*vasdey raho*" (may you prosper and stay here forever). In the next village, the residents were kind and welcoming. The Guru's departing words to them were "*ujhar jao*" (may you be displaced). Upon hearing these words, Guru Nanak's travelling companion, Mardana, asked him why he would give such counterintuitive blessings to the residents of each village. Guru Nanak explained that the inhabitants of the first village had such undesirable habits that it was better that they stayed put and did not spread their negative thinking elsewhere. But in the second village, the personal qualities of the residents were such that

the Guru hoped they would disperse and spread their goodwill to others.

The Sikhs have taken Guru Nanak's advice to heart and have spread from Punjab to every continent of the world. Rare is a country that does not have some Sikh residents. And yet, Sikhi is not a proselytizing faith. Instead, the focus for a Sikh is to live a life of inward reflection, which informs outward action. In that way, Sikhs strive to create a just and fair society, where all may worship and live in their own unique ways, all the while flourishing and growing together.

## **APPENDIX “A”**

Table 1  
The Gurus and Guruship Period

<b>Name</b>	<b>Life span</b>	<b>Guruship period (CE)</b>
Guru Nanak Sahib	1469-1539	1469-1539
Guru Angad Sahib	1504-1552	1539-1552
Guru Amardas Sahib	1479-1574	1552-1574
Guru Ramdas Sahib	1534-1581	1574-1581
Guru Arjan Sahib	1563-1606	1581-1606
Guru Hargobind Sahib	1595-1644	1606-1644
Guru Har Rai Sahib	1630-1661	1644-1661
Guru Harkrishan Sahib	1656-1664	1661-1664
Guru Teg Bahadur Sahib	1621-1675	1664-1675
Guru Gobind Singh Sahib	1666-1708	1675-1708
Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji		1708 onwards

The most common prefix, Sri, is a title of respect. Sikhs also use the suffixes Ji and Sahib or Saheb and sometimes the combination of Sahib Ji after a name or title. Using these honorifics for Sikh Gurus is similar to Christians using Lord or Saviour for Jesus and Orthodox Jews feeling so much awe in God that they write this word only as G-d, without ever spelling it out entirely.

## APPENDIX “B”

### Naam Sanskar (Naming Ceremony)

**W**hether the child is born at home or in the hospital, as soon as the mother and child are physically able, or released from the hospital, the family travels to the Gurdwara and performs the *naam sanskaar* or naming ceremony.

Once inside the Gurdwara, the Granthi (Curator and Scripture reader) will recite or sing a verse from the Guru Grath Sahib “*Satgur Sache Diya Bhej*” – Thank you, Waheguru, for blessing the family with a child,<sup>17</sup> and do an *Ardas* (prayer) seeking Guru’s blessings to name the newborn. Then Sri Guru Granth Sahib is opened at random, and the first sabd (hymn) to appear on the top left-hand corner is recited. It is called *hukam* or *vaak* (divine directive). The name of the child is selected by choosing a name that starts with the first letter of the first word of the sabd.

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<sup>17</sup> SGGS p.396: “ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਸਾਚੈ ਦੀਆ ਭੇਜਿ ॥..”

Regardless of what name is selected, all Sikh names must be given a suffix – for a male child, ‘Singh’ meaning lion or king; and for a female child, ‘Kaur’ meaning lioness or queen. The tenth Guru initiated this practice to emphasize equality between genders, and to break caste and social barriers. After the naming ceremony, karah-parshad is distributed.

## APPENDIX “C”

### Amrit Sanskar (Initiation Ceremony)

On Vaisakhi day in 1699, there was a massive gathering of over 80,000 people in Anandpur Sahib, Punjab. Guru Gobind Singh unsheathed his sword and asked if someone was willing to sacrifice themselves. The *sangat* (congregation) went numb. After a brief pin drop silence, five Sikhs successively came forward. The Guru held a unique initiation ceremony, called amrit sanchar or khande di pahul, and declared the five to be the first Panj Pyare (Five Beloved Ones). As these first five initiates were all men, he added the suffix Singh to their names, and referred to them as *Bhai* (brother). These initiates were Bhai Daya Singh, Bhai Dharam Singh, Bhai Himat Singh, Bhai Mohkam Singh, and Bhai Sahib Singh. The Guru then knelt before them and asked to be initiated by the Panj Payare. He also changed his name from Gobind Rai to Gobind Singh. Thus, the Guru created an institution of loyal Sikhs, called the Khalsa (pure, sovereign),

who were bound by a common identity and discipline.

Sikhs aspiring to join the Khalsa still go through the amrit sanchar similar to the one administered by Guru Gobind Singh. This ceremony provides an opportunity for any male or female Sikh of any time period, and in any country or place, to commit publicly to the Sikhi way of life. Those who accept *Amrit* commit to becoming protectors and custodians of all living beings and the universal truths contained within the Sri Guru Granth Sahib . They practice the spiritual way of life that the Sikh Gurus taught and modelled. By taking amrit, a Sikh surrenders their body, mind, and wealth (*tan, man, and dhan*), and dedicates their life to endeavouring to attain spiritual enlightenment, preserving the Sikh traditions and teachings of the Gurus, and uplifting humanity.

The amrit sanchar usually takes place in a Gurdwara. It is presided over by the Panj Pyare (five initiated Sikhs of high moral character and integrity), who represent the first Five Beloved Ones who gave their heads to Guru Gobind Singh. All candidates for initiation gather together in the Gurdwara or any other designated place, where the Sri Guru Granth Sahib is present.

The private ceremony starts with an Ardas. All candidates arrive wearing the five articles of faith (explained in chapter 6). They sit cross-legged and meditate in unison with the Panj Pyare. Each of the Panj Pyare takes a turn to recite one of the five banis, or select spiritual utterances of the Gurus (these are the *Jap*, *Jaap*, *Chaupae*, *Tav Prasad Savaiye*, and *Anand*) that are part of a Khalsa's daily meditation routine. Concurrently, they prepare amrit (nectar drink) by churning *patase* (sugar puffs) and water in an iron bowl, using a *khanda* (double-edged sword). This initiation process takes between 2-4 hours, depending upon the number of people seeking amrit.

The candidates then come forward to receive amrit and participate in a beautiful and powerful ceremony of transformation. Everyone drinks the amrit from the same bowl, accepting the equality of all, irrespective of their background and social status. The amrit sanchar opens the door for the initiated Sikhs to manifest their purity and light in every aspect of their future lives.

The amritdhari (or Khalsa) Sikh uses the name Singh (for males) or Kaur (for females) as either

their middle name or last name. They commit to the following obligations:

- wear or carry all five articles of faith with them at all the times.
- meditate daily on the same five banis (divine utterances) that are recited at the time of preparing amrit.
- refrain from four transgressions: dishonoring or cutting their hair, eating kutha<sup>18</sup> meat, adultery, and using tobacco, alcohol or other intoxicating substances.

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<sup>18</sup> In Sikh Rehat Maryada, the word kutha means meat of an animal slaughtered in the Muslim way, which is considered ritualistic and causing unnecessary suffering to an animal.

## **APPENDIX “D”**

### Anand Sanskar (Marriage Ceremony)

**S**ikh marriage is called anand karj, which roughly translates to a mystical experience, spiritual bliss, or a state of happiness.

Sikhs do not believe in living a monastic life. Marriage is celebrated. As humans, we constantly search for happiness and fulfillment. A critical step towards accomplishing this goal is through marriage, which brings together two souls in a spiritual union. *“Merely sitting together does not make them husband and wife. Instead, henceforth they must become ONE - make all decisions jointly, acting like one soul in two bodies and contemplate on Waheguru,”* says, Guru Amardas.<sup>19</sup>

There are many reasons why people may choose to get married, whether it is for emotional gratification, economic security, legal legitimacy, or social acceptance. Marriage for Sikhs, however, far exceeds these bounds. Marriage is seen as an integral part of the spiritual experience, where the

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<sup>19</sup> SGGS p.788: “Ek Jot Doay Murti” - ਏਕ ਜੋਤਿ ਦੁਇ ਮੁਰਤੀ ॥”

married couple embarks on a journey together towards self-discovery and community service. Guru Arjan, the fifth guru, says that “*the family life is an asset and an enjoinder to a couple’s faith.*”<sup>20</sup>

A Sikh couple wanting to get married comes to the Gurdwara and presents themselves before the Sri Guru Granth Sahib for spiritual guidance. It is this part of the human journey that leads them to self-discovery and guides them to understand who they are and what their purpose is in life.

As previously stated, Sikhs do not have a class of clergy or priests. A Giani, or for that matter any amritdhari Sikh, man or woman, who is familiar with the responsibilities of conducting marriages, can perform the wedding rite. The Sikh Rehat Maryada (Code of Conduct) Section XVIII explains the process of solemnizing a marriage.

The essence of the anand karj ceremony is as follows.

**Gupt ardas:** The connection with the Guru, with each other and the community at large, starts with *gupt ardas*, which is a silent prayer led by the

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<sup>20</sup> SGGs 71: “girastee girasat dharmataa-ਗਿਰਸਤੀ ਗਿਰਸਤਿ ਪਰਮਾਤਾ ॥”

Granthi, while the bride, groom, and their parents stand in the congregation with their hands folded in prayer. The rest of the *sangat* (congregation) remain seated. However, if a family so desires, the whole congregation may stand and join in prayer.

**Vaak:** A *vaak*, also called *hukam* (divine directive for the event), follows the ardas. The Granthi randomly selects a verse from the Sri Guru Granth Sahib by opening the Scripture and reading the stanza which appears on the top left-hand corner of the open page in the Scripture. The *vaak* is read out loud and is regarded as the spiritual guidance to the couple as they embark on the marriage ceremony.

**Palla:** The next step in the ceremony is the handing over of the *palla* – a marriage scarf that both the bride and groom hold when they are completing the marriage vows. . The bride's parent or guardian takes one end of the *palla* from around the groom's shoulders and hands it to the bride, while the groom grasps the other end of the *palla*. This symbolizes the commencement of their union. While this is happening, the *keertan* or *ragi jatha* (devotional musicians) sing the following hymn, "*O Waheguru, all relationships are false and*

*tough to shoulder; hence we have jointly grasped the hem of your robe and implore your blessing.”<sup>21</sup>*

**Lavan:** The central part of the marriage ceremony then begins, where the four wedding vows (*lavan* – *lav* (ਲਾਵ) singular and *lavan* (ਲਾਵਾਂ) plural) are read and sung in succession, as the bride and groom walk around the Scripture.

The *lavan* are prescribed in the Sri Guru Granth Sahib (SGGS, pp.773-774). The words are intended to guide the couple on how to maneuver through their married life together and how to grow and connect with the Divine. As a Giani/Granthi recites the first *lav*, the couple stands with folded hands and listens attentively. At the end of the recitation, the couple bows down, and gets up together to walk in a circle around the Sri Guru Granth Sahib, in a clockwise direction. During this time, the *keertan jatha* sings the same *lav*. Though the order is not prescribed religiously, it has become customary for the groom to walk ahead of the bride.

By walking around the Sri Guru Granth Sahib, the couple asserts their agreement to the marriage and to abide by the words of the Guru.

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<sup>21</sup> SGGS p.963: “ਹਭੇ ਸਾਕ ਕੁਝਾਵੇ ਡਿਠੈ ਤਉ ਪਲੈ ਤੈਠੈ ਲਾਗੀ॥”

Sometimes a bride may wish to walk the circle while aided by her male relatives. This practice is discouraged as it goes against the Sikh values of gender equality and free will.

At the end of the first lav, the couple bows in unison, kneeling and touching their forehead to the floor with respect, meaning, “Yes, I accept this commitment.” The reading of the second lav begins, and the same steps are repeated four times.

The four lavan, or vows, represent the four stages of spiritual growth as well as growth in the relationship. They translate loosely to the following:

- **First Lav** – In the first lav, the couple commits to letting go of the past and embarking on a new journey together. The lav sets out the daily duties of married life. It emphasizes their obligations towards themselves, each other, their families, the community, and humanity at large. Social responsibilities are to be fulfilled with integrity and compassion and are to be informed by the spiritual teachings of the Sri Guru Granth Sahib.

- **Second Lav** – The second lav conveys the strengthening of their emotional bond. As they each fulfill their social duties with integrity, the couple begins to develop respect for each other, and their love for each other deepens. They commit to putting aside their ego and other materialistic attachment and replacing it with a desire for internal peace through the singing of Waheguru’s praises.
- **Third Lav** – The third lav signifies the couple’s detachment from the past and their profound desire to never be apart from each other and to join with Waheguru as one.
- **Fourth Lav** – The final lav describes the state of harmony and union experienced in married life during which human love blends into the love of the divine.

**Anand Sahib:** At the conclusion of the fourth lav, the marriage ceremony is completed. The keertan jatha sing the *Anand Sahib* – song of bliss.

**Final Ardas:** A congregational prayer is held at the conclusion of the marriage ceremony. The entire sangat rises and remains standing while the Giani leads the congregation in prayer. The ardas seeks blessings and guidance for the newly married couple, from the sangat and the Creator, to help them on this new chapter in their lives.

**Final Vaak:** A *vaak* is again taken from the Sri Guru Granth Sahib. This is the Guru's message to the married couple as they embark on their life together. *Karah-prashad* is handed out to everyone. While it is not a religious requirement, some countries including Canada require the couple to sign the marriage register maintained by a Giani or an authorized executive member of the Gurdwara. This is done after the *karah-prashad* has been handed out.

## **APPENDIX “E”**

### Antam Sanskar (Funeral Ceremony)

**S**ikhs accept death as the completion of their journey on earth. How the body is disposed of makes no difference to the dead. Cremation is the preferred method of disposal and is recommended by the Sikh Code of Conduct for hygienic and psychological reasons of having finality. However, when cremation is not a practical option, the remains may be disposed of appropriately by whatever suitable means available according to the extenuating circumstances. Cremation is considered the most natural way of decomposing the body and is economical and environmentally safe, compared to burial. There is no bar for the body to be donated for organ donation, or to scientific research organizations.

The Sikh Code of Conduct outlines certain religious rites that Sikhs must follow when someone passes away. The body is washed and dressed in fresh clothes before cremation. If the

deceased person was amritdhari, they must be donned with all five articles of faith (see explanation in chapter 6). In India, the cremation usually takes place on the same day as the death, unless there are extenuating circumstances to wait for close relatives. A prayer is done at the time of the funeral, and subsequently, a *sehaj path* or *akhand path* (complete reading of the Sikh Scripture) is started, and a final prayer is done on completion of the reading.

In North America, irrespective of where the death occurs, the body is sent to the crematorium, and the cremation is arranged to accommodate the availability of relatives to attend. In the United Kingdom, the Sikhs follow a slightly different custom. On the day of cremation, they bring the body home for a prayer and then take it to the Gurdwara for public viewing, and finally to the crematorium for public viewing and cremation. Due to limited crematorium availability in the Western hemisphere, finding a spot for cremation takes longer. As such, the *sehaj path* or *akhand path* is started on the day of death and completed with a final prayer on the day of cremation.

Some Sikhs take the ashes to Kiratpur Sahib,<sup>22</sup> Punjab, and dispose of them in the river there. This is not a requirement. Sikhs are recommended to dispose of the ashes in running water anywhere. If that is not possible, they can bury them anywhere, including in their backyards (subject to local laws).

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<sup>22</sup> The town was established by Sri Guru Hargobind Sahib in 1627 CE. It is situated on the bank of the Satluj river. Sri Guru Har Rai Sahib and Sri Guru Harkrishan Sahib were born here.

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*Gian Singh Sandhu*

## SELECTED GLOSSARY OF PUNJABI TERMS

<b>Aad Granth</b>	The premier Sikh Scripture
<b>Akal Takhat</b>	A seat of Sikh temporal authority in Amritsar (literally, the Throne of the Timeless One)
<b>Amrit</b>	The nectar of immortality, prepared for initiating the Sikhs
<b>Amritdhari</b>	A person who has been initiated into the Sikh faith and abides by the Sikh code of conduct, including carrying all articles of faith at all times
<b>Amrit Sanchar</b>	Initiation ceremony – also called Khande Di Pahul
<b>Anand</b>	Spiritual bliss
<b>Anand Karj</b>	Sikh marriage rites – spiritual bliss or union
<b>Ardas</b>	Prayer, request, petition, supplication
<b>Baba</b>	Grandfather, or wise elder, it is an honorific used to refer to someone who is deeply respected for their knowledge and leadership, regardless of their age. The female term is <i>Bibi</i>
<b>Bandi</b>	Imprisoned
<b>Bandi Chhor</b>	Liberator
<b>Bandi Chhor Divas</b>	Day of liberation
<b>Bhai</b>	Brother
<b>Chaur</b>	A ceremonial whisk waved over the Sikh Scripture
<b>CE</b>	Common Era
<b>Darbar</b>	Congregation hall
<b>Darbar Hall</b>	Main congregation hall in a Gurdwara
<b>Darbar Sahib</b>	Most revered place of worship for the Sikhs. Also known as the Harimandir Sahib

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<b>Dastar</b>	Turban
<b>Divas</b>	Day, celebration day
<b>Giani / Granthi</b>	Sikh Scripture reader, who is well versed with Sikh philosophy, and history. They must be Amritdhari
<b>Golak</b>	A receptacle in which offerings made to the Guru are kept
<b>Gurdwara</b>	Sikh place of congregation and worship
<b>Gurmukhi</b>	Punjabi script standardized by Guru Angad
<b>Gurpurb</b>	Celebration of Sikh Gurus' anniversaries
<b>Guru</b>	Deliverer or liberator from darkness (ignorance) to light (enlightenment).
<b>Guru Granth Sahib</b>	The Sikh Scripture, the final and Eternal Guru of the Sikhs
<b>Hola Mohalla</b>	A Sikh festival which follows the Holi festival
<b>Hukam/Vaak</b>	A hymn from the scripture opened at random. It is taken as Guru's command
<b>Janamsakhi</b>	A hagiographical account of Guru's life
<b>Janeu</b>	A sacred religious thread worn by Hindu men
<b>Jatha</b>	Hymn singing group, or an assembled group, often for a particular purpose.
<b>Ji</b>	Suffix connoting respect
<b>Kachhahira</b>	Cotton undergarment, one of five articles of the Sikh faith
<b>Kakkars</b>	Sikh articles of faith
<b>Kangha</b>	Wooden comb, one of five articles of the Sikh faith
<b>Kara</b>	Iron bracelet, one of five articles of the Sikh faith
<b>Kaur</b>	Princess/royalty

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<b>Kes</b>	Uncut hair, one of five articles of the Sikh faith that must be covered with a turban
<b>Keertan</b>	The singing of scriptural hymns
<b>Khalsa</b>	An initiated Sikh who abides by the Sikh Rehat Maryada, the Sikh code of conduct
<b>Khalsa Panth</b>	The collective body of initiated adherents of the Sikh faith
<b>Kirpan</b>	Sword, one of the five articles of Sikh faith
<b>Kirt Karna</b>	Earning an honest living
<b>Langar</b>	Community kitchen in a Gurdwara, where everyone sits on the floor and eats together irrespective of their social status.
<b>Lav</b>	Sikh matrimony vow (single)
<b>Lavan</b>	Plural lav
<b>Manji Sahib</b>	An elevated platform
<b>Miri</b>	Temporal power or sovereignty
<b>Misl</b>	A small, independent principality
<b>Mool Mantar</b>	Lit. creedal formula, recorded in the beginning of Guru Granth Sahib
<b>Nagar</b>	Town
<b>Nagar Keertan</b>	Sikh procession singing hymns on public roads. Sometimes referred to as Parade
<b>Naam Japna</b>	Remembrance of Name Divine
<b>Nishan Sahib</b>	Sikh flag
<b>Panj Pyare</b>	Five beloved Amritdhari (initiated) Sikhs
<b>Panth</b>	A term used in Sikh tradition for the Sikhs as a whole

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<b>Parshad</b>	A sweet pudding-like dish made out of flour, sugar, water, and butter – served to all who enter the gurdwara
<b>Patase</b>	Sugar puffs
<b>Piri</b>	Spiritual sovereignty
<b>Raag</b>	Musical measures/modes
<b>Raagi</b>	Sikh hymn singer, musicians
<b>Rehat Maryada</b>	Sikh code of conduct
<b>Saka</b>	A heroic historical event
<b>Sanchar</b>	Ceremony
<b>Sangat</b>	Congregation present in a Gurdwara
<b>Sarb-sanjha</b>	All inclusive, accessible to all
<b>Sati</b>	The Hindu ritual of burning a widow on her husband's funeral pyre
<b>SGGS</b>	Sri Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh Scripture.
<b>SGPC</b>	Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee
<b>Singh</b>	Lion (denoting initiated Sikh male)
<b>Sri</b>	Prefix used as a sign of reverence or respect
<b>Tan, Man, Dhan</b>	Body, mind and wealth
<b>Vaak</b>	A randomly opened hymn from the Sikh Scripture. It is considered as the Divine directive for the event
<b>Vaisakhi</b>	The founding of the Khalsa, and the first day of the month of Vaisakh, celebrated annually by the Sikhs around the world.
<b>Vand Chhakna</b>	Sharing of one's earning with others, particularly the needy
<b>Waheguru</b>	God, Divine or Creator, also spelled as Vahiguru in the western hemisphere

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