

About Sikhism

Sikhism comes from Northern India and is the world's fifth-largest organized religion. There are more than 25 million Sikhs throughout the world and approximately half a million in the United States. Sikhism was founded 500 years ago when a man named Nanak walked the South Asian subcontinent teaching that all paths lead to One God, all people are equal, and each of us can experience freedom through loving and serving others.

The word "Sikh" means "Seeker of Truth." As a faith rooted in love, Sikhism stands for the equality of women and men and denounces any discrimination pertaining to gender, race, caste, creed, or color. There are three core tenets of the Sikh religion: meditation upon and devotion to the Creator, truthful living, and service to humanity.

Sikhs are meant to uphold the values of honesty, compassion, generosity, humility, integrity, service, and spirituality on a daily basis. Sikh prayer ends with a wish for the welfare for all mankind. A Sikh place of worship welcomes people of all faiths and backgrounds. Many Sikhs wear five articles of faith to express their commitment to these values, including long hair that men and some women wrap in a turban.

Sikhs have lived in America for more than 150 years, helped build the Transcontinental Railroad, served valiantly in every major world war, stood at the forefront of civil rights struggles, and were first responders on 9/11.

Gurdwaras, or Sikh Houses of Worship, are found in many American cities. All are welcome, and in the spirit of community, a meal is shared by all attending the congregation. You can find your local gurdwara at wearesikhs.org/Gurdwara-finder

Basic Understanding of Sikhism

- Sikhism is the world's fifth largest religion in the world and the third largest monotheistic religion in the world .
- Sikhs believes in one omnipresent, formless God. Sikhs commonly call God, Waheguru (Wa-HEY-guru).
- Sikhs regard men and women as equal in all spheres of life
- Sikhs believe in equality amongst all human beings regardless of race or caste.
- The freedom to choose and practice religion freely is at the foundation of Sikhism. We believe that there are many paths to God and many avenues to seek truth.
- Sikhs are expected to perform community service, and share with those less fortunate.
- Observant Sikhs five articles of faith - Kesh (uncut hair), Kirpan (a ceremonial sword), Kara (an iron bracelet), Kanga (comb), and Kachha (breeches).

- 99 percent of turban wearing Americans are Sikh. The turban expresses a Sikh's commitment to protect and stand up for the values of equality for all people and justice for all people.

You can learn more about Sikhs at: wearesikhs.org

Welcome to the Gurdwara

Guru Nanak, the first Sikh Guru and the founder of the Sikh religion, established the first Gurdwara (Sikh House of Worship) in the early 1500's in India. The Gurdwaras were founded as places where the *sangat* (Sikh religious congregation) could come together to worship as a community by reciting and reflecting upon the hymns contained in the *Guru Granth Sahib* (the Sikh scripture). People from all walks of life are welcome to attend or observe religious services in Gurdwaras. The Sikh religious service is centered on *keertan*, which is the singing of Sikh hymns, and ends with the sharing of a community meal.

Here are a few practical points to make you feel more comfortable during your visit:

1. Shoes are removed before entering the main prayer hall. Near the entrance to all Gurdwaras, there is an area to place your shoes.
2. Men and women cover their heads in the prayer hall. There are scarves available at the entrance, or you may bring your own.
3. Upon entering the prayer hall, members will bow down in front of the *Guru Granth Sahib*, or Sikh scriptures, as a symbol of respect. You can choose to do this, or take a seat, as you feel comfortable. You will observe most members of the congregation making a token offering. However, this is not mandatory.
4. In the prayer hall, the congregation is seated on the floor; therefore, women may find it more convenient to wear slacks
5. During the service, men and women tend to sit on opposite sides of the aisle. This is by convention only, and you may sit wherever you choose.
6. After the service, there is always a meal known as *langar*, or community kitchen. This meal is vegetarian so as to be acceptable to everyone. It is usually based on Indian cuisine.