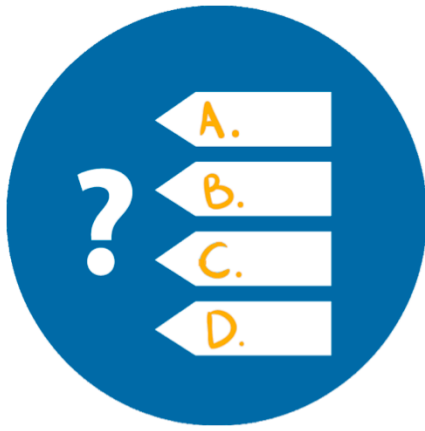


# WHO ARE THE SIKHS?



## QUICK QUIZ



- a) Sikhism is a sect of Islam
- b) Sikhism is a sect of Hinduism
- c) Sikhism is a blend of Hinduism and Islam
- d) Sikhism is an independent religion



The answer is D. Many people assume or believe that A, B, or C are true.

However, Sikhism is actually a **distinct and unique religion. It is different from Hinduism or Islam.** For example, the Abrahamic faiths (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) have a shared history and geography, but are different religions in the same way that Sikhism, Hinduism, and Islam are different.

### Additional Points

- Sikhism has its own scriptures, spiritual guides and house of worship, separate from Hinduism or Islam.

## CAN YOU GUESS?

*Sikhism is the \_\_\_\_ largest religion in the world?*

- 1) Christianity – 2.2 billion
- 2) Islam – 1.4 billion
- 3) Hinduism – 900 million
- 4) Buddhism – 396 million
- 5) **Sikhism – 25 million**
- 6) Judaism – 15 million

**Sikhism is the 5<sup>th</sup> largest religion.**



Sikhs are followers of the Sikh religion called Sikhism, or more traditionally – Sikhi.

These numbers aren't a popularity contest! It may be surprising that Sikhism is in fact the world's fifth largest religion, because when you ask most Americans what the major religions are, Sikhism is often excluded from the list.

For example, despite being the 5<sup>th</sup> largest religion, Sikhism is one of the least understood religions and is often not taught in schools.

### *Significance of the Khanda:*

The Khanda is an emblem associated with the Sikh faith and is seen on the Nishaan Sahib (flag which flies outside a Gurdwara – Sikh house of worship). It is a representation of Sikh values including the oneness of God, separating truth from falsehood. It emphasizes that a Sikh has both spiritual obligations as well as obligations to society.



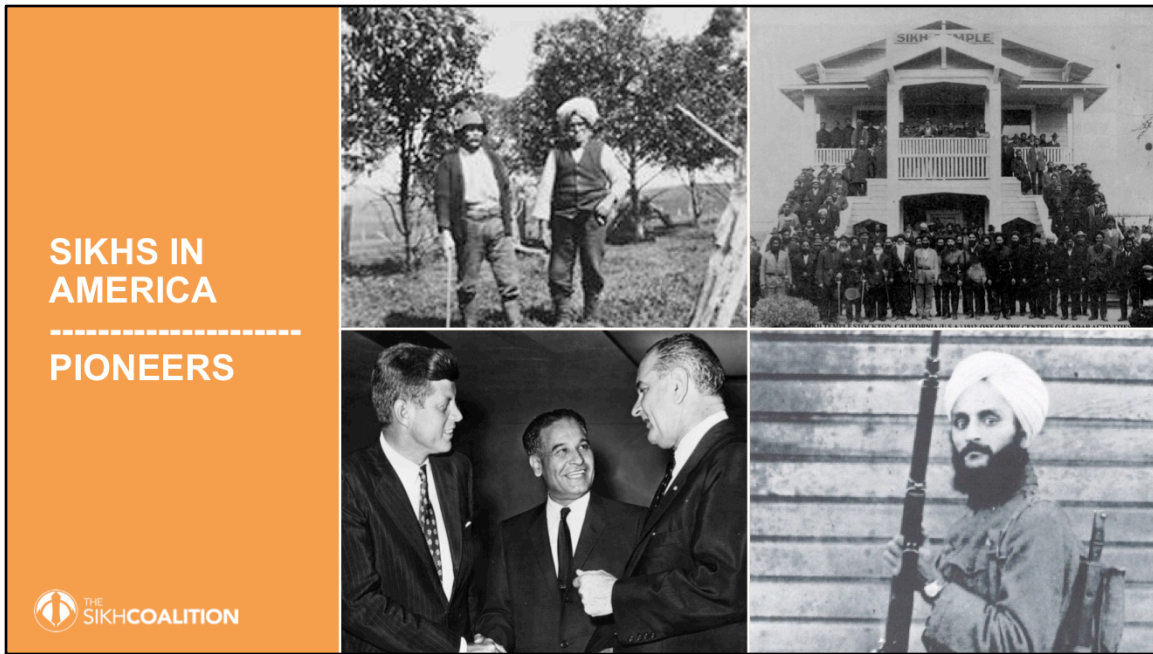
Sikhism is a relatively young religion – just over 500 years old! It originated in South Asia in an area called Punjab in 1469, which, in the present day, is now split between India and Pakistan (due to the Partition of India in 1947). Today, most Sikhs live on the India side of Punjab.

Often times Sikhs are asked if all Sikhs live in Punjab, are Punjabi or speak the language Punjabi.

The answer is most, but not all. Sikhs have migrated all over the world – with large populations here in the US, Canada, England, and Australia, for example. Additionally, not all Sikhs have South Asian ancestry (Sikhs do not proselytize, but some may have chosen to join the faith).

Additionally, it is important to note the difference between religion and culture. Not ALL Sikhs are Punjabi and not all Punjabis are Sikhs, and many aspects of Punjabi culture are not necessarily part of Sikh religious beliefs.






Sikh migration to North America began in the late 1800s. Initially, Sikhs moved to the West Coast and later to New York. We often may assume that Sikhs only recently moved to the US, but Sikhs have a long history of being a part of the American story. As with all communities, there are many interesting examples of immigration, both old and recent.

#### Images:

- **Top Left:** Sikhs were the first and most successful farmers on the West Coast. Since many Sikhs in Punjab were farmers when they immigrated to the U.S., the land and weather conditions were similar to what they experienced in Punjab. So, they became farmers here, as well. The largest peach, raisin, okra, and pistachio farms are owned by Sikh Americans. Sikhs also helped build the railroads that connect the east and west coast. Sikhs also worked as manual laborers, in sawmills, and as farmers.
- **Top Right:** The Stockton Gurdwara (Sikh house of worship) was the first Sikh house of worship founded in the U.S. in 1912. Sikhs, and many other South Asians, came to the gurdwara not only for prayers, but also for lodging, meals and finding job opportunities.
- **Bottom Left:** Dalip Singh Saund, the first ever Asian American congressman - he was of Sikh heritage and elected in 1957.
- **Bottom Right:** Bhagat Singh Thind applied for citizenship when he was an enlisted member of the US Army in 1918. His citizenship was rescinded in 1923 because of his "non-Caucasian" status. After battling for over a decade, Thind was finally given citizenship only because he was a World War I veteran. Bhagat Singh Thind's citizenship paved the way for Indians to fight for an end to legislative discrimination. These legal battles helped many minority communities with immigration to the U.S., such as the Chinese.

# SIKH VALUES





**ONE GOD:** *Loves and sustains all humanity*

**EQUALITY:** *Respect for all genders, religions, races, etc.*

**LIVE & EARN HONESTLY**

**SERVICE TO HUMANITY**

**SOCIAL JUSTICE**

Sikhs believe in the concept of one God, the Creator who loves and sustains the whole of humanity.

Because we believe there is 1 God for everyone, Sikhs believe that everyone is equal in the eyes of God. No one is better or worse than anyone else because they are different. This goes across gender, ethnicity, race, language, etc. Sikhs do not believe in rituals, fasting, superstitions, or the caste system. Everyone should be loved and treated with respect, no matter who you are.

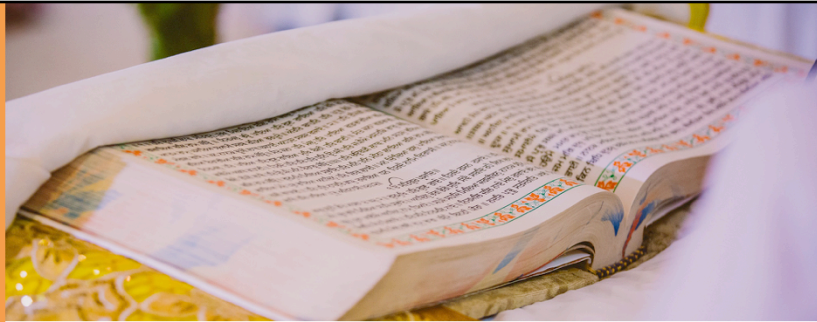
Sikhs believe in the importance of:

1. Living and earning honestly
2. Serving humanity
3. Working towards social justice

### **Additional Points**

**Equality:** The caste system was very prevalent at the time that Sikhism emerged in 1469. The caste system promotes the idea that people are broken into different classes or castes in society based on the family that they were born into. Your caste dictated your profession and the level of respect you would receive from people outside your caste. You could only interact and marry people within your caste. Sikhism rejected this idea because it goes against the beliefs that there is 1 God for everyone and that everyone is considered equal in the eyes of God.

## SIKH BELIEFS



### Guru Granth Sahib

Founded on the teachings of ten Gurus (1469-1708)

The eternal living Guru of the Sikhs is the Guru Granth Sahib (the sacred scripture), which embodies the Gurus' teachings and guides Sikhs.

In Punjabi, the word Sikh (pronounced “Sikh”, not “Seekh”), means a learner. And for a Sikh, their teacher or their spiritual guide is their Guru.

‘Gu’ means darkness, and ‘Ru’ means light. You can also interpret this as ignorance and enlightenment. So, a Guru is someone that literally brings Sikh from the dark to the light or from spiritual ignorance to spiritual enlightenment.

Sikhs had ten Gurus that lived from 1469 – 1708.

For Sikhs, the Gurus were spiritual guides. Their mission was to foster:

- Love for One God, the Creator
- Truthful living
- Social justice
- Service and compassion to humanity
- Freedom from superstitions and rituals

The tenth Guru did not choose a person as the successor but instead, gave the eternal Guru-ship to the Guru Granth and Guru Panth. This refers to the Guru Granth Sahib, which is not only revered by Sikhs as their sacred scripture, but also their living, eternal Guru.

Additional information:

Guru Granth Sahib

- Revered as the living and eternal Guru of the Sikhs
- Compiled by the Gurus themselves during their own lifetimes
- Contains the writings of the Gurus and also of Hindu and Muslim Saints
- 1430 pages written in poetry and musical frameworks called ‘Raags’
- Sikh services consist of reading and singing from the scripture

The Guru Panth, which is the name given to the community of initiated Sikhs (we will



**IDENTITY:**  
TO SERVE, PROTECT  
AND BE HELD  
ACCOUNTABLE



The Sikh identity is like a uniform for Sikhs.

For Sikhs, this uniform or visible identity:

1. creates a sense of belonging and allegiance to the Sikh community
2. serves as a reminder of the values and behavior it is connected to
3. holds them accountable to a code of conduct
4. has a practical purpose
5. enables Sikhs to stand out and be recognized in order to live up to these values



## THE SIKH IDENTITY





**Making a commitment by joining the Khalsa – community of initiated Sikhs**

- Living by a code of conduct
- Having ultimate allegiance to the Sikh way of life
- Maintaining a distinct identity
- Can be done at any time in one's life

We've learned about Guru Granth, now let's learn a little more about 'Guru Panth.' This concept dates back to Vaisakhi 1699, which is one of the most important days of the year for Sikhs.

In 1699 on Vaisakhi day, the Khalsa was created, which is the community of initiated Sikhs. When a Sikh becomes initiated as a part of the Khalsa, it is a personal and formal commitment that you are consciously choosing to follow this path, and not just that you were born Sikh. *There is no particular time in one's life that this ceremony has to be done.*

On this day in 1699, all Sikh women were given the last name Kaur and Sikh men were given Singh to replace their last names as a sign of equality and in defiance of the caste system.

Throughout the history of the Gurus, Sikhs had developed a very distinct outward appearance and it was on Vaisakhi that initiated Sikhs were given this visible identity as a mandatory and formal requirement (which is covered in the next slide.)

When you become a part of the Khalsa, you also maintain a strict code of conduct in your actions and discipline.

### **Extra Information:**

It is important to remember that there are 25 million Sikhs in the world and everyone is on their own personal journey. The Khalsa is an ideal that all Sikhs aspire to. Therefore, some Sikhs may follow the code of conduct and outward identity to a greater or lesser degree even if they haven't undergone initiation. For example, some Sikhs observe this teaching by using Singh and Kaur as their middle names. Some replace their last names with them. Some women will take Singh as their last name if their husband uses that as their family name. This a practice



These are the five articles of faith which are visible markers of the Sikh identity.

Their significance is very personal for each practitioner and everyone can hold their own interpretations. The closest analogy to illustrate the significance of these articles of faith, is perhaps a wedding ring. It is a precious gift worn outwardly and never removed, its value surpasses what it might have cost, it represents a lifelong commitment and connection, and means something deeply personal to each individual who wears it.

These 5 articles of faith are mandatory for all **initiated Sikhs - women and men -** and are to be worn at all times. They are considered as gifts from the Guru, they give initiated Sikhs a distinct outward identity, and they have practical uses. They are also closely linked to internal discipline and values.

Many Sikhs who are not initiated keep some of these articles of faith as well, generally the kara and kes, as a part of their faith journey and their Sikh identity.

1. Kesh is uncut hair. In Sikhism, men and women are not supposed to cut their hair. Kesh represents spirituality and an acceptance of God's will. The Dastaar or turban is used to cover the hair and head. We will speak about that later.
2. Kara is a bracelet, generally made of iron or steel, (show your own at this point), and I wear this because it reminds me to do good deeds.
3. The Kirpans' meaning is difficult to convey with translation. Kirpa means kindness and Aan mean righteousness. It resembles a small sword which comes with great

## DASTAAR THE SIKH TURBAN



- **99%** of the people wearing a turban in the U.S. are Sikhs
- Means that Sikhs can always be recognized and are duty bound to offer help
- Mandatory religious obligation for Sikhs
- Under no circumstances can the turban be forcibly removed



The turban or dastaar is also a mandatory article of faith for Sikhs. The wedding ring analogy is also perhaps a useful way to think about the Dastaar. **The turban is not a hat** – it is not taken off and put on casually, but is tied every day and is very significantly tied to that individual's personal faith and commitment to God.

Kesh. It is a mandatory religious requirement for Sikhs to wear a Dastaar, or turban over their Kesh - uncut hair. Young boys wear a patka (a smaller cloth covering the hair and topknot) before they start wearing a turban.

Did you know that in America, **99% of the time** that you see someone wearing a turban next to you in the grocery store, on the bus, or at your school, they are Sikh?

Sikhs wear the turban because they **WANT** to stand out! Sikhs are identified as Sikh by their turban – it helps them stand out in a crowd and you will know that that person would help you or protect you if you ever needed their help.

**The turban must never be forcibly removed.**

The turban represents values such as: commitment, respect, courage, nobility, justice, wisdom, and responsibility (towards helping others).

The turban is used in other cultures. For example, Indian royalty would sometimes wear one to show

## DASTAAR: SIKH TURBAN STYLES



 THE SIKH COALITION

These are some of the different types of Sikh turbans that you might see. Sometimes you see the more round style, like the man in the red and white striped turban. Or you can have the more pointed turban like the gentleman on the bottom right. The boys in the center at the top are wearing the smaller head covering called a patka. Women can wear turbans, too, like the ladies in this picture.

You can read this article which talks more about the turban:  
<http://www.mashupamericans.com/issues/is-it-hot-under-there/>

When a young boy transitions from wearing a Patka to a Turban, there is a special ceremony called a Dastaar Bandi.



## GURDWARA

THE SIKH COALITION



- Place of prayer, service and learning
- Everyone is welcome
- Services in America typically held on weekends



The Gurdwara is where the Sikh community gathers for prayer, service, and to learn from each other. The central focus of the Gurdwara is the Guru Granth Sahib and services consist of reading and singing from the sacred scripture. The teachings of compassion for all, love, equality and service, can be seen to be put into practice at the Gurdwara. Everyone is welcome to visit a Gurdwara. It doesn't matter what your background is, what your religion might be or what language you speak. You'll see that large amounts of people usually come to the Gurdwara in America on weekends.

The Nishaan Sahib is a saffron-colored flag which flies from every Gurdwara (Sikh place of worship) denoting the presence of the Sikh community and if outside a building, that it is a Gurdwara. A Gurdwara is the home of the Guru Granth Sahib (eternal Guru and sacred scripture of the Sikhs), as well as a place of prayer and selfless service. Every Gurdwara also serves a meal called Langar free of charge, prepared by volunteers. The Nishaan Sahib signifies that these services are offered here. The Nishaan Sahib is also a beacon of refuge and hope - anyone from any community, background or religion knows that if they see a Nishaan Sahib they are welcome in the Gurdwara and will be served with hospitality or given help or shelter in times of need.

## LANGAR



- Langar is a meal served at every Gurdwara throughout the world.
- Prepared and served by volunteers
- Everyone sits together on the floor to share the food in the spirit of equality.

After services, everyone sits on the floor in the spirit of equality and eats a community meal together called Langar.

It is prepared and served by volunteers from the community.

**Fun Fact:** One of the largest Gurdwaras, Darbar Sahib (or commonly known as the Golden Temple), serves about 100,000 meals a day.



As we mentioned, not all but most Sikhs speak Punjabi, which is a language used by over 80 million people in the world. This is what the Punjabi alphabet looks like. As you can see, it looks very different than English. But, just like English, it is written from left to right. Punjabi also has more letters than English does. Punjabi has 35 letters, and English has 26.

The word written here in Punjabi is 'Hello'.

You may find that some of the older generation and newer immigrants of Sikhs are not fluent in English. Sikhs are still a growing population in the United States, and so integration is an ongoing process.

## CHALLENGES SIKHS FACE IN AMERICA



- Hate Crimes
  - Victims of homicide, assaults, vandalism, etc.
- School Harassment
  - Bias-based bullying, name calling, physical attacks, etc.
- Workplace Discrimination
  - Sikhs denied jobs in law enforcement and numerous corporate settings because of turban and beard.



While Sikh Americans have experienced xenophobic violence for more than a century now, the terrorist attacks of 9/11 resulted in a violent backlash that continues to reverberate in modern America. The first fatal hate crime casualty in post-9/11 America was Balbir Singh Sodhi, a Sikh immigrant living in Mesa, Arizona. In 2012, a gunman with neo-Nazi ties killed six Sikhs at a gurdwara in Oak Creek, Wisconsin. Sikhs around the country reported hundreds of hate incidents in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, and these attacks have continued ever since. Anti-Sikh discrimination manifests itself in various ways, from school bullying and workplace discrimination to verbal assaults and violent hate crimes.

Anti-Sikh violence directly targets Sikhs because of their religious identity or because they are viewed as “other.”

While it is easy to present a community that experiences targeted violence as “the victim,” this repeated framing does not accurately portray Sikh outlooks and communities. Sikhism does not have a tradition of “victimhood,” and, in fact, the Punjabi language does not even have an equivalent form of the term. Instead, the Sikh worldview embraces resilience and boundless optimism (*chardi kala*), even in the face of adversity. The Sikh community has struggled to move beyond the victimization narrative, especially in post-9/11 America.

## Everyday Sikhs



Artists



U.S. Army



Basketball Player



Actor & Model



Scientist



Police Officer

17



As Sikhs have been in America for over 100 years, you'll be able to find Sikhs in most States and major cities nationally and in various professions – there may even be Sikhs in your workplace or on your street as your neighbors! Sikhs are very welcoming and hospitable people. We hope this presentation will encourage you to reach out and make friends next time you may recognize a Sikh!

Artists – Singh Twins. Amrit and Rabindra Singh from England.

Actor – Waris Ahluwalia. Spike Lee's Inside Man, Darjeeling Limited, etc.

Basketball Player – Darshpreet Singh, Trinity University, San Antonio, TX.

Military – Corporal Simran Preet Singh Lamba.

Scientist – Dr. Narinder Kapany, invented fiber optics.

## Everyday Sikhs



Politician



Lawyer



Farmer



Pilot



Doctor



Filmmaker

Doctor - Dr. Soram Singh Khalsa.

Lawyer - Harsimran Kaur.

Politician – Mayor Satyendra Singh of Charlottesville with President Obama.

Filmmaker – Rippin Sindher.

Farmer – Sikh farmer from California.

Pilot – Arpinder Kaur.





**THANK YOU!**  
[www.sikhcoalition.org](http://www.sikhcoalition.org)

