

EDUQAS GCSE COURSE

World Faith

SIKHISM NOTES – PRACTICES

2023

Main areas of study:-

The Gurdwara : The role of Gurdwaras, their importance for the community, any differences between Bhatra and Ramgarhia. Gurdwaras as a social place. Religious features: Artefacts. Guru Granth Sahib. Langar as an expression of sewa. Practices in a Gurdwara

Worship: Role and importance of prayer in a Gurdwara and worship in the home. Significance of meditating of Guru's name. Importance of the Akand Path

Ceremonies: The meaning and significance of Birth and Naming ceremonies. Significance of Amrit Sanaskar. Significance of Singh and Kaur. Different views of Khalsa and non-Khalsa Sikhs towards the Khalsa and the 5k's

Amritsar: Importance and significance of pilgrimage to Amrtisar. The features and practices of Harmander Sahib (Golden Temple)

Festivals/practices in Britain: The origin and practices of a Gurpurb and mela's and how they are celebrated. Guru Nanak's birthday, commemorations of the martyrdom of Guru Arjan and Guru Tegh Bahader. Vaisakhi – meaning and celebration. Divali, meaning and celebration

Pupils must know these concepts in good detail to use in the areas of study above:-

- amritSanskar
- gurdwara
- gurpurbs
- Mool Mantra/Manter
- mukti
- sangat

- sewa
- Vaisakhi

THE GURDWARA

Design of Gurdwaras:

- can be any building as long as it house the Guru Granth Sahib and facilities for a langar can take place
- In the UK many building were converted into Gurdwaras, now purpose built Gurdwaras have been built i.e Southall and Gravesend
- The most important part of the Gurdwara is the Guru Granth Sahib – it is central in the diwan/darbar hall and is well decorated.

ITEMS IN THE DIWAN/DARBAR HALL:

Chanani = canopy above the GGS

Chauri = flywhisk/fan waved over the GGS

Golak = box to collect donations

Palki = the overall space the GGS is placed in

Manji Sahib = the actual base/wooden **DIAS** the GGS is placed upon,

Rumalla = beautiful cloths given as donations as covers for the GGS

In addition all Gurdwaras will have facilities for:

- Karah prashad to be distributed
- Langar food to be blessed
- Various Khandas and kirpans for blessing/decoration
- Punjabi script instructions for the Sangat (congregation)
- Musical instruments for the Ragis (musicians)
- A pedestal/microphone for addressing the sangat
- Projector /PC's in modern Gurdwaras for key events i.e to translate Punjabi script into English for the younger generations
- Raised seating area/lifts for the disabled
- Flowers/khandas as decoration
- Other offering such as food
- Space/doorway to SACH KHAND (Guru's bedroom)
- Handwashing facilities
- Treasurer to take and give receipts for official donations/gifts/, and book peoples special days/occasions i.e Akand Parts.

The LANGAR HALL will have the usual facilities for cooking food (vegetarian only!), serving food and drink and washing dishes. Nearby or outside there will be shoe facilities and hand washing areas, (head scarves may be provided too) . There may also be classrooms, library, PC rooms, meeting rooms, social rooms, martial arts (Gatka) halls and various storage facilities. A row of people sitting down for Guru Ka Langar (the Guru's langer) are called the PANGAT. There are usually tables and chairs

in most Gurdwaras, although in India many sit in rows on mats. There will be artefacts such as KHANDA's and NISHAN SAHIBS (flags) either inside or outside or both.

PURPOSE OF A GURDWARA

- for main rites of passage – birth, marriage, death
- to be in the presence of the GGS
- sense of belonging/identity
- community/social reasons
- educational purposes (punjabi classes/ GCSE Sikhism)
- spiritual development
- reinforcement of the faith – teach the young
- participation in major festivals including gurburbs
- helping the needy/donations/collections for disasters
- thanking God
- participating in meditation/kirtan/shabads
- seminars, sessions and lectures by leading people/giani's and ragis
- interaction between different generations
- participating in prayers i.e evening = rehraas, or morning prayers = japji.

USE OF THE GURU GRANTH SAHIB

The GGS is used in all religious functions.

- it is centrally placed in the diwan/darbar hall in the Gurdwara
- it is regarded as the final guru
- it is a source of advice and guidance
- it contains all the main verses/shabads for all major rites of passage

BIRTH – Couples will bring in their baby for the naming ceremony, it will be the baby's first visit to the Gurdwara, various prayers will be said, concluding with ardaas (general prayer). The baby will be brought up to the GGS and a rumalla will be given to the child once the Granthi has randomly opened the GGS to pick the first letter for the baby's name, amrit may be sprinkled on the baby (this does not mean the baby has been baptised or become Amritdhari). Karah prashad and langar food is blessed in the presence of the GGS.

MARRIAGE – the whole laavan ceremony is said with the GGS as the central feature. The couple sit in front of it so they are exposed to the awe/importance and role of the GGS. The vows are taken by walking round the GGS 4 times. At each point before and after each vow they bow to the GGS too. Karah Prashad and langar food is blessed in the presence of the 4 GGS.

DEATH – the Sehaj part (slow reading of the whole GGS) which may have been started in the home of the deceased is concluded on the day of cremation. The Kirtan Sohila (nighttime prayer titled the 'Payer of Bliss' is said from the GGS. The final Ardaas is said on conclusion of the GGS and as completion of the Antim Sanaskar (death ceremony). Karah parshad and langar food is blessed in the presence of the GGS.

OTHER SPECIAL OCCASIONS:

Diwali (Bandi Chor Divas) Guru Hargobind's release from prison is celebrated, recited and sung about in the presence of the GGS

Gurpurbs – all Gurpurbs are sung, meditated and remembered from the GGS, verses written by specific Gurus are read aloud and explained in many gurdwaras, many stories are retold by Ragis and Granthis with great vigour and attention (eg the disappearance of Guru Nanak for 3 days, or the call for heads by Guru Gobind)

Vaisakhi – these celebrations begin and end in the Gurdwara – an Akand Part is concluded on the third day. Many stories, prayers, mediation sessions, Ardaas and shabads are sung during the celebrations, even during the Nagar Kirtan (procession)

For all of the above karah prashad and langar food is blessed before the GGS.

GRANTHI'S AND RAGI'S

A **Granthi** is a scholar of the Guru Granth Sahib. Sikhi does not have a clergy or hierarchical structure of command in Gurdwaras. Some Gurdwaras might appoint a Head Granthi merely out of necessity. Most Gurdwaras have a voluntary management committee that run the practicalities of the Gurdwara (health and safety, bookings, seating, kitchen supplies etc). The Granthis have total responsibility for the Guru Granth Sahib. They ensure that Akand parts (continuous reading of the GGS) are completed on time, ensuring that it is read in shifts and all readers have adequate rest. Most Granthi's will also prepare the karah prashad everyday. As well as the actual reading of the GGS Granthi's will bless the langar food everyday.

A Granthi can offer advice and guidance on the Guru Granth Sahib, help with interpretation and understanding Gurbani (the text). Granthi's do not give advice and counselling to people with problems to do with aspects of life such as marriage, money, children, housing, family issues etc. Many Granthis come from India having been especially trained and educated in Gurmukhi and Gurbani and therefore they are not in a position to advise and counsel people with life problems. Many Granthi's (sometimes called Giani's) are also **RAGI's**.

Ragi's are musicians that sing during services such as **Anand Karaj /wedding** - they will sing each lavaan (vow) at the appropriate point (i.e when the couple walk round the GGS). The two main instruments found in the gurdwara are the harmonium and tabla (drums). **Music and singing play an important part in Sikh worship.** The Guru Granth Sahib is almost full of hymns, and other verses that can be put to music, some of which are sung during worship on a regular basis. People are encouraged by the Ragi's to join in with the singing/ and meditation sessions such as simran (repetitive singing on the name of God - "Waheguru")



KHANDA AND NISHAN SAHIB

- In the centre of the Khanda is the two-edged sword which symbolises the Power of God which controls the destiny of the whole universe. One side symbolises Divine Justice. The other side symbolises Freedom. On the outside of the two-edged sword, we can see two swords known as Kirpans (2 swords of Guru Hargobind)
- There must always be a balance between the two, and this balance is emphasised by a circle inside. This circle is called a Chakra. It shows **the Oneness of God** and that he is eternal/everlasting.

NISHAN SAHIB



The Sikh flag is a saffron-coloured triangular-shaped cloth with the symbol of the Khanda in blue. It is usually mounted on a long steel pole (which is also covered with saffron-coloured cloth) headed with a Khanda. The Sikh flag is seen near the entrance to all Gurdwaras. The Nishan Sahib expresses: authority and respect and is a gift from the Gurus to show protection, devotion, UNITY, loyalty. **It is replaced once a year during Vaisakhi at all Gurdwaras**, everyone participates in the cleansing, raising and paying homage to the Nishan Sahib.

LANGAR

Every Gurdwara has a Langar attached to it where food is served to anyone without charge. The term Langar is also used for the communal meal served at the Gurdwaras. The food served in the Langar must be simple, so as to prevent wealthy congregations turning it into a feast that shows off their superiority. Although Sikhs are not required to be vegetarian (except Amritdhari's), only vegetarian food is served in the Gurdwaras. This ensures that any visitor to the Gurdwara, whatever the dietary restrictions of their faith, can eat in the Langar. The meal may include chapati, dal (pulses), vegetables and rice pudding. Fish and eggs are counted as meat and excluded. Langar is open to Sikhs and non-Sikhs alike.

THE MEANING OF LANGAR

- The Sikh Langar or free kitchen was started by the first Sikh Guru.
- It is designed to uphold the principle of equality between all people of the world regardless of religion, caste, colour, creed, age, gender or social status.
- Langar expresses the ethics of **sharing, community, inclusiveness** and **oneness** of all humankind. "...the Light of God is in all hearts."

- Langar ensured the participation of Sikhs in a task of service for mankind = SEWA
- even Sikh children help in serving food to the people (Pangat)
- Langar also teaches the etiquette of eating in a community situation
- People from all classes of society are welcome at the Gurdwara.
- Food is normally served twice a day, on every day of the year.
- Recent reports say some of the largest Sikh community dining halls in Dehli prepare between 50,000 and 70,000 meals per day. (the Golden temple prepare in excess of 100,000 per day.
- All the preparation, the cooking and the washing-up is also done by voluntary helpers, known as **Sewadars**

KARAH PRASHAD AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

- **Karah Parshad** is A semolina pudding made with equal portions of semolina, butter, and sugar.
- It is offered to all visitors to the Diwan hall in a Gurdwara.
- It is regarded as food blessed by the [guru](#) and should not be refused (unless one has an allergy)
- As it has a very high sugar and oil content, visitors may ask the Sewadar for a small portion.
- As a sign of humility and respect, visitors accept the Karah Parshad sitting, with hands raised and cupped.
- The offering and receiving of this food is a vital part of being hospitable – signifies EQUALITY and hence known as ‘THE GREAT EQUALISER’
- It has the same amount of semolina, butter and sugar, to emphasise the equality of men and women.
- When cooked, it is covered with a white cloth and placed near the GGS.. During the Ardaas at the end of worship it is stirred with a small kirpan
- The Sewadar serves it out of the same bowl to everyone in equal portions.
- Karah Parshad is also taken at the initiation ceremony of Amrit Sanskar at the very end where it is shared out equally among all.
- The ingredients for KaraH Parshad are donated by members of the sangat of Ten to commemorate special events in their family
- Following the Ardaas Prayer, (after an Akand or Sehaj Part or in fact any other religious reading of the GGS), the karah prashad is distributed to everyone in the Sangat.
- it is a reminder of the **sweetness of God** and the blessings from the Guru.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN GURDWARAS

All Gurdwara's, in any part of the world, follow very similar patterns for worship, rituals, practices and rules on conduct. The differences that do exist are minor and points that are sometimes open to interpretation and points that a particular community feels strongly about and have made it into their own policy for that Gurdwara. All Gurdwaras are expected to run according to the REHAT MARYADA the Sikh Code of Conduct. The Code is not allowed adhered to by Gurdwaras in the UK largely due to differences in community views. Gurdwaras in India abide by the Code.

CASTE

In order to understand some of the differences within the Sikh communities (and in their Gurdwaras) one has to understand the question of Caste.

- CASTE is the Hindu Caste System (Varna)
- It was a way to keep groups of people in society within their own groupings, ie priests, skilled people, semi skilled, unskilled low ranking workers
- Caste rules were prevalent at the time of the Gurus
- Sikhs **reject** the notion of CASTE outright citing Guru Nanak's teachings

“there is no Hindu, there is no Muslim..”

- All Gurus spoke out against caste saying it is unnecessary, unfair and full of inequality
- Guru Nanak refused the Hindu sacred thread given especially to higher caste boys
- Guru's mixed with ALL castes, and this was frowned upon
- Guru's spoke out against elevated position of Brahmins (priests)
- Gurus emphasised equality by eating together, mixing with everyone and welcoming everyone to Sikhism.
- Caste is very unfair to women
- Caste leaves no room for aspiration giving an acceptance of their station, occupation, economic status in life
- Caste leads to prejudice and discrimination by those in higher castes (Brahmins, Kshatriyas's) against those at the bottom (Sudras and Dalits)

The origins of the Hindu system have been in place for over 3000 years and deeply ingrained in Indian Society even today. However the Sikh faith has fought hard to abolish the system of judging people according to their birth, caste or job in society. Sikhs today believe the system is highly irrelevant in modern society just as the Guru's in their day thought it highly unnecessary and unfair.

The Guru's said (GGS):

- **“worthless is caste ...”**
- **“when you die you do not carry your caste with you”**
- **“it is your deed and not your caste which will determine your fate”**

Basic Sikh events/beliefs on caste

- Guru Gobind banned the system of judging people according to their Caste, the Hindu System of **5 Varna's**, where you can not change your caste, except through birth and re-birth, so you had to accept your caste at birth under the Hindu system
- Guru Gobind banned the system of **JATI** – the occupational Group that you belong to i.e Carpenters, farmers
- Guru Gobind Singh banned the use of **GOT** or **GOTRA**, which is a **sub-group** of the Jati, which many people used as surnames when they migrated to the UK and US.
- Guru Gobind commanded males to use SINGH and females KAUR as their surnames
- Unfortunately many Sikhs have reverted to their *Jati* or *Got* to show their background and status in society, especially when they migrated and sought work in countries like the UK where some employers would not accept every Sikh migrant had the same surname. The Sikhs found it easier to revert to their 'Jati' or 'Got' if they knew it or to use their village name as their surname.

Examples:

Ravinder Singh became Ravinder Singh Birk (Birk is a village in Punjab, India)

Simran Singh became Simran Singh Kohli (Kholi is a name linked to the warrior caste)

MODERN ISSUES OF CASTE/JATI

- Some Sikhs, particularly the older generation, still seek out people's Jati's (old caste connection is there is one) when assessing their backgrounds
- Some Sikhs still use it in consideration of marriage arranging trying to ensure that the couple are of the same Jati
- A few Sikhs use it as a power symbol trying to denote their higher status in society due to their ancestors backgrounds
- Most Sikhs accept the Guru's teaching of equality and abolishment of the caste system
- Most Sikhs strongly believe in Guru Nanaks teachings of tolerance, unity, equality and sharing
- Most Sikhs believe that what is important is the way in which you conduct yourself in life – not your birth roots or past roots
- Most Sikhs will now inter marry across all Jati's as the new generations of Sikhs see the old connection with 'Jatis' and 'Got's' as insignificant, and silly
- Many 2nd/3rd/4th generation Sikhs in the UK completely reject the notion of caste and newer Gurdwara's especially, have no association with caste whatsoever.

HOWEVER

- Some Gurdwara's in the UK, and abroad are caste-based, which is a contradiction to the Gurus' teachings. It is also a contradiction to the Rehat Maryada (the Sikh Code of Conduct , a code that was put together after the Gurus passed away). Sikhs are only meant to acknowledge Amritdhari, Keshdhari, Sehajdhari and Patit (one who has fallen foul of the vows) as the only differences among Sikhs. Unfortunately CASTE groups still to some degree

Jat Sikhs

Jat Sikhs form the largest Sikh communities in the UK. They originate from the Punjab in India, born from landowning / farming communities. Most came to the UK in the 1940/50/60's. They have big communities in London, West Midlands, Birmingham, Wolverhampton. Many of the early Gurdwaras in the UK were formed by Jat Sikhs. Jat Sikhs do not put the word 'JAT' in the name of their Gurdwaras. Early Jat Sikhs worked in factories, airports, some ran businesses or took skilled/semi-skilled jobs such engineers or foremen.

Bhatra Sikhs

These Sikhs mostly originated from the very North of India (which is now in Pakistan). Many converted to Sikhism from the Hindu Brahmin caste in the 17th Century. In the UK they mostly settled in seaport cities having arrived by boat as early as the 1910s. One of the first Gurdwara's was formed by this community in London. They largely live in some of the UK's Largest cities like Glasgow, Edinburgh, Manchester, Cardiff, Swansea, Newcastle, Liverpool. Many early Bhatras were very enterprising, from being pedlars to running their own businesses. Most Bhatras were traditional and did not allow their women to work outside of the home. Many of their Gurdwaras actually state they are for the Bhatra community, but will welcome anyone.

Ramgarhia Sikhs

They originated from Northwestern Punjab in India. They were named after Jassa Singh Ramgarhia (born 1723-1803), they are also known as Tarkhans. Jassa was a leader of a group that protected the Golden Temple – Harmandir Sahib from attacks. Early Ramgarhia Sikhs were very skilled. In the UK they settled in London, Birmingham, Leicester and Reading . During British rule of Africa Sikhs were taken to East Africa, for cheap carpentry labour, over 90% were Ramgarhia Sikhs. Many Ramgarhia Sikhs came to the UK in the 1970s when Idi Amin expelled them from Uganda. Ugandan Ramgarhia Sikhs settled in cities like Swindon and Bristol and took skilled jobs such as

motor engineers and semi skilled work such as taxi/bus drivers. Many of their Gurdwaras state they are for the Ramgarhia community, but will welcome anyone.

DIFFERENCES IN SIKH WORSHIP IN GURDWARA'S

- There is very little difference in practice between these Sikh groups
- All three communities accept the GGS as the eternal Guru
- They all perform religious services and worship in a similar way
- Rites and rituals are carried out according to the Rehat Maryada
- Recently built Gurdwaras such as Southall Gurdwara and Gravesend Gurdwara make NO any caste distinction whatsoever as funds were raised from all the Sikh communities.
- With big celebrations such as Vaisakhi these communities come together and join in with things like the Nagar Kirtan (Vaisakhi procession), for example in Southampton.

SOME MINOR DIFFERENCES IN SOME GURDWARAS

Some Bhatra Gurdwaras throw flower petals when the GGS has been read, or being transported or settled for the night in the Sach Khand.

A number Ramgarhia Gurdwaras refuse to use tables/chairs for the langer preferring to sit on the floor as the Guru's did

All the Gurdwaras have their own way of distributing Karah prashad , ie at the beginning of services, only at the end, or all throughout the services. Some Gurdwaras, such as Bhatra Gurdwaras prefer men to do the bulk of the cooking for a langer and the women to take care of the breads/chapati's only. In many other Gurdwaras the men take responsibility for all the washing of dishes. Some Gurdwaras expect a minimum donation into the golak to ensure all services run.

IMPORTANT NOTE:- With so little differences in practice, it is best to emphasise what most of the Sikh Gurdwaras do and their **similarities**. For example:-

- All have a headcovering/shoe removal/matha tek/golak/romalla
- Reading the GGS / Singing Shabads, doing Kirtan
- Ardas prayer
- Hukum
- Karah prashad
- Langer

Most of the Gurdwaras in the UK offer a host of activities and classes for all age groups and provide a social community function. Practices to do with the caring for the GGS, settling the GGS at night in the Sach khand, undertaking sewa, doing simran, undergoing Amrit Sanaskar (initiation)/or Naam Karan, running classes such as Gathka/community events/social meetings for the elderly and the very young ... are just some of the ways in which all Gurdwaras in the UK will do to a greater or lesser extent depending on the demands of their communities. Some Gurdwara's even have matrimonial services on offer!

WORSHIP

DAILY WORSHIP IN THE HOME

In Sikhism it is possible to pray at home. Although the Gurdwara is central to Sikh worship and the Sikh Community, it is possible to conduct various services in the home by taking a GGS home. In addition many people have smaller parts of the GGS in their home (GUTKA's) such as morning, evening and special prayer books that they can use for personal devotion. Sometimes it is not possible for some Sikhs to attend a Gurdwara and this is a practical solution. For others it is too far away and can only visit a Gurdwara on special occasions.

Advantages of home worship: can pray in your own time, space and when family commitments permit, you can take your time and read slowly, it is a good way to teach the young and explain as you go along, it is comforting for family members who can all feel a sense of closeness and part of the prayer session as its more personal.



It is quite common for Sikhs to have the GGs brought to their homes on special occasions such as the start of a new business or to bless a new home. Many Sikhs will have the GGS brought home to begin a Sehaj parth when someone has passed away with the concluding of the whole reading conducted at the Gurdwara once the cremation has taken place. The significance and activities involved in bring the GGS home:-

- furniture must be moved
- the house must be clean and tidy
- sheets laid on the floor for all to sit
- food brought in to cook the langar
- space for the pangat to sit and eat langar (some people erect marquees in gardens)
- Family members may come and stay for a few days and must be accommodated
- On arrival of the GGS the family stand and make way for the Granthi's
- All shoes must be removed and heads covered
- The GGS is placed in a prominent position in the room
- Flower petals or water may be sprinkled as the GGS is led to its space
- Hymns or simple Nam Japna is recited until the GGS is ready to read
- Opening Mool mantar is said to indicate the start of the readings
- Special messages and blessing are given for the reason that the GGS was brought into the home (the family will be mentioned and blessing from Waheguru will be sought.
- Karah prashad will be made, blessed and served
- Langer will be made, blessed and served

In effect the above is really a DUPLICATION, as far as possible, of the services in a Gurdwara. Granthi's and homeowners must ensure that the GGS is treated with respect and the same events such as blessings and food is carried out in exactly the same way as in a Gurdwara.

The words of the Granth Sahib Ji offer comfort and strength to Sikhs i.e

"he lives in all, he abides with you ... seek him therefore in your heart".

"Know all humans to be of the Divine light ... after you depart this life, God will ask for a reckoning of your deeds Contemplate on the name of God ... all other rituals are fruitless".

Many Amritdhari Sikhs pray at home equally as well as at the Gurdwara because:-

- they can do so at dawn when fully dressed with the 5k's
- they can pray at their own pace after washing/showering
- they can ask for personal blessings and blessing for their family

Some families have a GGS in their home (this is extremely care) , which has to be treated with the same care and respect as the GGS in the Gurdwara (i.e readings every day, decorated everyday, clothed with new romallas regularly, and put in a Sach Khand every evening). This is a huge commitment and one that is not taken lightly. The few families have have a GGS in their home are very mindful of the fact of not leaving it unattended for days on end and maintaining a high level of routine, cleanliness and homage by everyone who visits their home. Consequently this means that for most Sikhs it is far more respectful and convenient to visit a Gurdwara and only have the GGS brought home as and when they need to, this avoids any issues.

WAYS IN WHICH THE GGS IS USED FOR PRIVATE WORSHIP *(some of the above points also apply)*

- in private worship – if the GGS is brought home the same respect accorded in the Gurdwara is given at home too
- All children in the home are taught to show the same respect when the GGS is in their house and fully participate in the readings – if only to sit and listen
- Many of the main prayers (Mool Manter, Japji, various shabads, Ramkali, Sukhmani, Rehraas, Kirtan Sohila are put into smaller handy size books for individuals to use privately. This makes it easier to learn and participate in readings
- Many groups (i.e Sikh university students, Sikh womens groups, children's classes etc) use smaller prayer books (Gutka) to hold special reading sessions in their home or even the Gurdwara facilities – it's a good way of learning Gurbani, sometimes simplified to just 'bani' (words in the GGS)
- Everyone is encouraged (and they do!) learn the main prayers by heart from a young age.

ALL OF THE ABOVE CLEARLY INDICATES HOW GREAT RESPECT IS SHOWN THE GGS BY THE WAY IT IS HANDLED BY EVERYONE AND HOW IT IS USED FOR ALL SERVICES IN THE GURDWARA AND MANY SERVICES IN THE HOME TOO

Why worship at home?

Although the Gurdwara is the central place of worship for Sikhs, especially for the key services such as birth, marriage and death, it is equally possible to worship at home and even conduct all these services from home. In the UK it is more convenient and sensible, given the size of homes and numbers of friends and family to have services at

the Gurdwara. However some families may still have some odd services at home such as an Akand Part. The reasons could be:-

- to bless a new home
- to welcome a new baby
- bless a new venture or business
- to celebrate a special milestone (graduation, passing a test, leaving, or to just generally thank God for everything – in private)

In order to conduct an Akand Part means arranging for the Granth Sahib to be brought into the home. All the usual signs of respect must be adhered (cleaning, washing, dressing up, and a special room given up for the GGS. Furniture is cleared away and sheets laid down and a special mini Palki is taken to the home and constructed. A langar would also be offered as well as Karah Prashad. No meat products should be kept in the home while the GGS is present. Rules on taking shoes off outside the room of the GGS apply, as will the need to have washing facilities for hands, and distribution of karah prashad. After the conclusion of the akand part, hymns may be sung and everyone can join in. Sikhs and non-Sikhs alike can be invited.

A few Sikhs keep a room dedicated to the GGS on a permanent basis with their own copy of the GGS. This requires a lot of discipline and dedication and as such very few people take this big step and install one in their home. Those that do will ensure that morning (japji) and dusk (rehraas) and nighttime (Kirtan sohilla) prayers are said every day and that all the family participate, that the GGS room is aired and cleaned everyday, and karah prashad or a dry nuts prashad is always available. Homage would have to be paid to the GGS everyday, which in modern society can be difficult with employment/days out and holidays. Again indicative of the fact that very few families would keep a GGS in their home on a permanent basis.

Therefore most Sikh families do not keep a GGS in their home. They may have a small Gutka (prayer book of the morning and evening prayers). Many KHALSA/Amritdhari Sikhs will use the Gutka which allows them to worship in private at home and in their own time. Amritdhari Sikhs can wash in the morning in their own time and then do their prayers alone or together as a family. Worship in the home can also be a meditation session i.e simran. Such sessions do not require a full GGS and can be conducted at times to suit the family. If a member of the family is sick or dying prayers can be said in the home and in privacy. Special passages can be read that have been taken out of the GGS using a small Gutka (book of prayers). Likewise other reasons can include those listed above such as graduation or new business blessing. Special passages are easy to access nowadays with the internet (Sikhnet.org) and hence private worship is becoming popular too.

One of the Sikh main principles is NAM JAPNA, which is saying Gods name again, for example the mool mantar – which characterises the qualities of God i.e Akal Purukh, Gurbarsad etc. Nam Japna can take place while sitting at home, cooking, gardening or just relaxing. Again this can be carried out in privacy, using a **mala** (beads), aloud and in ones own time and need. After all Waheguru is everywhere!



SEWA: Sewa is service that contributes to the welfare of the local, national and international community.

Can be split into :-

Tan (physical) – helping in the langar, building/maintenance, cleaning

Man (mental) – committee work, education, raising awareness of issues

Dhan (material) – giving money, goods, giving things to charities/helping needy

GGs says :- *“there can be no worship without performing good deeds”*

**SIKH WAY OF LIFE IS SERVICE TO GOD,
TO THE KHALSA PANTH AND TO HUMANITY !**

Sewa gives the Sikh:-

- sense of awareness of others
- empathy with others
- sense of equality and sharing
- common purpose and cause
- better community relations
- spiritual fulfilment
- practical benefits and sense of achievement
- morally uplifting
- focuses the mind on nam japna
- educational - teaches children from a young age to be selfless
- teaches everyone to not expect reward for everyone you do in life
- sewa means to serve and to worship and revere God all in one
- sewa is a DUTY
- through sewa you are serving God
- *“he who turns to the Guru finds joy in sewa”* Guru Amar Das
- Sewa, such as collecting or contributing to international disaster funds ensures that Sikhs are aware of their responsibilities to humanity

ARDAS PRAYER

The most important prayer said at all services/religious occasions, ceremonies, gurburbs, festivals, and worship in the home.

The Ardas signals the end of services, for many of the rites of passage – such as marriage, death and important Akand Part's it is lengthened to include a speech that informs all those present as to why they are there i.e to remember a loved one, or to ask for a happy life for a newly married couple.

Ardas as a prayer has evolved over time, it includes:-

- a reminder to everyone (especially the young) how some Gurus died to defend the faith
- it is very graphic outlining how the bodies of babies were cut up and made into necklaces and hung around mothers necks by the Mughal rulers at the time of the Guru's
- it tells the sangat to say "waherguru" altogether to show UNITY
- it tells Sikhs to practice peace and tolerance towards all
- it tells Sikhs to protect the poor no matter who they are
- it remind Sikhs of the battle in 1705 when 40 brave warriors died knowing they would as they were outnumbered
- The Khalsa is given a special mention and its significance
- God is thanked for everything and his will is accepted
- The Ardas will finish by reminding everyone of the occasion they are attending (birthday, new house, graduation, new business, happiness, remembrance, marriage, new baby etc)
- It will mention the names of the families and sometimes how much money they have contributed to the Gurdwara
- After the Ardas Karah Prashad will be served
- The Granthi will tell the sangat to eat their langar before leaving.

AKAND PART

Akand Path is the continuous, front to back, reading of the Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji. It usually takes almost three days to read. This reading is an important and extremely meaningful meditative practice for Sikhs. It is the ultimate in Sikh Worship. Akand Parts form part of every festival from Vaisakhi to a simple Gurburb. Akand Paths are also read in honour of major life events like marriages, funerals, and births. They are important community events and conducted either by a team of granthis who take turns reading for long periods of time or can be helped by community members who take turns reading for smaller time slots. The GGS is read day and night. Any sangat can attend. The continuous reading takes the reader and the listener on a beautiful journey that begins with Guru Nanak Dev Ji's Mool Manter and ends with the Raag Mala (a verse that discusses spirituality). Reading from the GGS is considered a pleasure; curiosity to learn is evoked; and lessons are learnt. From beautiful descriptions of the One Waheguru to harder hitting messages on hypocrisy, humai and maya (attachment to wealth), and the mind in general, the Guru is a conversation with your spiritual self.

CEREMONIES

BIRTH RITES – Naam Sanskar

Sikhs DO NOT baptise babies or very young children.

When a child is born a naming ceremony (Naam Sanskar/Nam Karan) takes place in the Gurdwara. The naming ceremony is *not* Baptism into the faith it is a **welcome** to the faith. Traditionally as soon as a child is born and it is convenient it is taken by the parents and all family and friends for its first visit to the Gurdwara. After the usual services of the day (Kirtan, Ardas etc), the GGS is opened randomly and a short shabad (extract) is said, the FIRST LETTER of this shabad is then given to the parents of the baby to name the baby. Some parents will immediately choose a name there and then and it will be announced, but many parents decide in their own time. If the letter was B then a name such as Baljeet or Bahader is given. Almost all Sikh names are suitable for boys or girls, they are **not gender specific**. This **signifies equality**. All Sikhs will add either SINGH or KAUR to the first name as applicable. Many Sikhs do not add a special surname, as stated by Guru Gobind Singh, because of its past association with a persons occupation and old castes of India. However in the UK, US, Canada many Sikhs have added a surname to go along with Western naming systems, this surname is either the area, village or town they originated from or a family term/lineage/clan identifier that they used to be known by. Examples include, Arora, Birk, Bedi, Potiwal, Roath.

The actual **actions** during the Naam Sanskar are:-

- parents sit down with the sangat holding the baby – having already paid homage to the GGS
- couple may offer a rumalla or donation to the Gurdwara too
- at the appropriate point the granthi (or senior Committee member) will ask for the child to be brought forward to the GGS
- the couple are told the letter that has been extracted from the GGS
- the Gurdwara may give a romalla back in return, some Gurdwaras give a small Gutka (prayer book) too
- Some Gurdwaras give a saropa (a long scarf) to the parents.
- the couple bow to the GGS with the baby
- a small amount of Amrit (holy/blessed water specially prepared in a special steel bowl called a bata) is sprinkled into the baby's mouth, sometimes using the end of a kirpan, the mother will be offered the rest (this does not signify entry into the Khalsa/Amritdhari Sikhs) to signify the babys first presence in the Gurdwara
- the parents and baby are offered karah prashad and a small amount will be touched upon the baby's lips
- the couple then return to their seated positions
- the Granthi will then announce the babys name (if the parents have it at the ready), bless the baby and its family and may even say a few words about the hope that the child will grow up a devout Sikh
- the names SINGH and KAUR will be added to the baby's name, the Granthis will explain the significance of the names ie lion, princess, qualities, hope of joining the Khalsa, identity and remembrance of the Guru's and their teachings.
- a simple Ardas prayer is said
- the karah prashad is then served to the rest of the sangat
- ceremony is significant to welcome the child to the Gurwara
- to be blessed in the presence of the GGS
- to make its first visit special and meaningful
- to allow others to see the baby and offer their congratulations

- to signify the parents hope that the baby will grow up with Sikh hopes, ideals and beliefs, and thankfulness and good wishes for the future.
- All then partake langer

NOTE: There are some Sikhs who choose **not** to name their baby using the GGS and prefer to choose their baby's first name themselves. They will still add the names SINGH and KAUR to the name as dictated by Guru Gobind Singh. However they ask for a blessing from the Gurdwara for the baby/family on first visit with their child. All actions stated above, with the exception of the first random letter of the GGS, will still take place for a simple blessing of the baby.



INITIATION CEREMONY (BAPTISM) = AMRIT SANAKAR

A VERY SIGNIFICANT STEP. Amrit Sanskar is the SIKH 'BAPTISM' CEREMONY into the KHALSA PANTH (Sikh brotherhood or Order). **Guru Gobind Singh Ji** designed this ceremony in Anandpur in April 1699 during the harvest festival of Vaisakhi. This ceremony is now the accepted way in which a person can become a member of the Khalsa. Sikhs make a conscious decision as to *when* they want to be initiated – it is usually considered an adult decision, few young children take Amrit. Once the initiation has taken place the individual is then known as an AMRITDHARI SIKH and is considered a full member of the Khalsa. One does not have to be born into a Sikh family to take the AMRIT – anyone who feels they are ready to do so are able to take it. The ceremony usually takes place in April every year on the day of Vaisakhi.

The events:-

- one must be sure they wish to be initiated and take Amrit (blessed water)
- they will be told the various responsibilities and duties required and guided by a Granthi or other Amritdhari
- they will already be expected to have begun the process of keeping the 5k's (especially the hair/KES, KANGA, and KARA).
- On the day the responsibilities of the event are highlighted
- It takes place in the Gurdwara in presence of GGS (can be done elsewhere if GGS present)
- Sometimes it is conducted in a side room near the GGS
- All taking Amrit have to nod their acceptance of the responsibilities
- Prayers are said
- The Amrit (water and sugar crystals called patashas are mixed in a steel bowl called a bata and stirred with a Khanda)
- The **FIVE BELOVED one (panj piare)** altogether have to stir the Amrit water
- The five beloved ones then do the prayers
- Then in turn the five serve the amrit to each of the recipients in turn
- Five compositions from five guru's is recited (i.e japji, chaupai, swayyas)
- The Amrit is given to each recipient in their CUPPED HANDS five times by the Panj Piare – each person receiving the Amrit is expected to sit in the BIR ASAN position – one knee on the floor

- While receiving the Amrit they must recite **Waheguru Ji ka Khalsa, Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh'**. This must be said five times.
- The Amrit is then sprinkled into the eyes and hair FIVE times.
- They then stand up and then take sips from the bata
- Any recipient not in possession of any of the 5 K's are given the items
- The Mool Mantar is then said by all – and the responsibilities taken from the Rehat Maryada are told.
- All then read a shabad together
- Karah parshad is distributed to all the sangat.
- Amrit Sanskar ceremony is over. (proceed to langer)

SYMBOLISM AND SIGNIFICANCE

- Identity
- Sense of belonging
- Commitment and loyalty to the faith
- Reinforcement of beliefs and devotion
- Outward sign to all of pride wearing the 5 K's
- Blessing with the khanda symbolic of strength, power and determination
- Sharing of the Amrit symbolises breaking down barriers of caste etc
- Sharing symbolises equality
- The prayers symbolise the importance of Nam Japna and recitation for the mind/soul
- Amrit indicates membership of the khalsa and its values
- There is the hope of each Amritdhari sharing their knowledge and devotion to God with others
- The 5k's indicate discipline and responsibilities to the faith and to humanity.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE KHALSA

In order to become a member of the Khalsa, a person has to

- give up his or her previous religion/ or other faiths (Dharam Nash)
- give up the practice of ritualistic or superstitious behaviors (Karam Nash)
- give up any caste distinctions (Kul Nash)

Teachings and purpose of the Khalsa

- 1) To have regards for each other with mutual love and affection. LOVE/UNITY
- 2) To pray together, addressing God by the names assigned to Him in any and every language, with equal affection and regard. PRAY
- 3) To break bread with each other, side by side, regardless of status, caste, belief, or even non-belief. EQUALITY
- 4) To spread righteousness and to collectively and systematically oppose repression or injustice. JUSTICE
- 5) To end the hatred for individuals of different faiths. TOLERANCE
- 6) To show self-confidence and encourage people to stand up for their rights, live a humble but not weak life,, and to serve society. SERVICE

The Khalsa Code/responsibilities that are highlighted at the Amrit Sanaskar

- Meditation (Nam Japna and Simran):
- Honest Living (Kirt Karni):
- Sharing With Others (Vand Chakna)
- Wearing of the 5ks (panj kakke)

- Respecting women ('for they give birth to kings and warriors')
- Refrain from drugs and alcohol (as it intoxicates the mind away from nam japna)
- To not eat meat (Amritdhari Sikhs must not eat meat) Others Sikhs may well do so – but halal meat is forbidden as the Gurus did not feel it appropriate to eat meat that has been ritually slaughtered
- Worshipping the Eternal Lord (Akal Purakh):
- Understanding Gurbani (Paricha Shabad Ka)
- Appreciating the Sikh Rehat (Rehat Maryada) – Sikh Code of Conduct
- Working and wishing well for Humanity (Sarbat Ka Bhala):
- Accepting the Will of God (Waheguru ka Hukam)
- Maintaining moral behavior (Sacha Achar):



IDENTITY OF A KHALSA SIKH – THE FIVE K'S

KESH

- ♦ Long unshorn hair. The keeping of hair in its natural state is regarded as living in harmony with the will of God.
- ♦ An outward commitment.
- ♦ Cherished symbol handed down by Guru Gobind Singh Ji.

SIKHS COULD BE CATEGORISED AS:-

- ♦ Sahajdhari (no outward signs, or possibly a few such as the kara)
- ♦ Keshdhari (Long hair kept and males wear the turban)
- ♦ Amritdhari (a Sikh who has taken baptism (Amrit) and wears all of the 5Ks)

KANGA

- ♦ Small comb worn in a Sikh's hair.
- ♦ Represents the importance of discipline and is used to keep the hair clean and untangled.
- ♦ Promotes orderliness and spiritual discipline

KARA

- ♦ Steel bracelet usually worn on the right hand, but not always.
- ♦ A symbolic reminder of the commitment of a Sikh to God.
- ♦ Signifies allegiance to the Khalsa
- ♦ Circle is also a symbol of restraint – a constant reminder to be good/truthful
- ♦ Symbol of unity/equality

KIRPAN

- Symbol of courage, dignity and honour
- By wearing a Kirpan a Sikh makes a commitment to stand up for the Truth and against oppression (self-defence/power and freedom)

- The Kirpan is not a dagger as it is not an article of violence or harm
- US, Canadian and British courts have always upheld Sikhs' right to wear the Kirpan as an article of faith
- Sikhs have won all known Kirpan cases that have gone to court. It is recognised it as an article of faith.
- According to the Sikh code of conduct, the *kirpan* is to be worn using a *Gatra* (a strap that enables a kirpan to be suspended near one's waist or tucked inside one's belt). The implication of this explicit requirement is that the Kirpan cannot be worn as a miniaturised symbol, although some people do. To neglect to wear one or more of the Five Ks represents a serious lapse in the Sikh religion, and more so for KHALSA/Amritdhari Sikhs

KACHERA

- Long boxer-like underwear – breeches.
- Represents the commitment of a Sikh to monogamy and sexual restraint.
- Symbolises high moral character - modesty
- Practical in those times/useful.
- Emphasised the importance of cleanliness

Outward symbols are a sign of:

- Identity (especially for KHALSA Sikhs)
- belonging
- pride
- being recognised
- standing up for the faith
- standing up against injustice (kirpan)
- discipline (Kesh)
- modesty/sexual restraint (kachera)
- cleanliness
- dedication (kesh, kanga,)
- belief in one God (kara)

Attitudes of Sehaj Dhari (slow learner) Sikhs towards the 5k's is of overall respect. Many young Sikhs grow up thinking the 5ks are things connected to the faith which is in the domain of the elders in the Gurdwara and not something they need to worry about. Some may not even know or understand the significance beyond the fact that they are outward symbols that devout Sikhs adhere to. Gurdwara's in the UK now make a concerted effort to run educational events to inform the sangat of the tenets of the faith. Khalsa Sikhs are seen as role models, particularly if they are British born, young and educated for the younger generations to take pride in their identity and realise they are on a journey which may well lead them to become initiated Sikhs too. Almost every Sikh in the UK will at the very least wear the Kara (as it is the easiest symbol to wear – male and female alike), this means they are on the path – albeit a slow path. Some may even grow their hair and wear the turban as well as the kara. Sehaj Sikhs will participate in all festivals and family events in the Gurdwara quite happily.

AMRITSAR

Why do people go on pilgrimages?

- Religious duty/requirement
- Compelled to do so
- Seek penance
- Connect with God
- -See a particular building/feature of the faith
- Connect with the meaning/symbolism the place represents
- To learn more about yourself
- To learn more about your faith

Technically Sikhs do not believe in pilgrimages because.....

- Sikhs do not believe in pilgrimages
- There is no religious duty to undertake a pilgrimage
- The Guru's did not agree with pilgrimages or fasts
- The emphasis in Sikhi is that life is a personal journey
- The 3 principles, equality, sewa are more important than visiting places
- Waheguru is everywhere
- The burden of pilgrimage should not be put on anyone

However if a person wishes to go on a Pilgrimage it is their Personal Choice:-

- Some Sikhs like to visit famous Sikh sites. They do this because of the HISTORICAL connection of a place.
- Some Sikhs they feel that making an effort to visit famous sites helps them 'connect' with the trials and tribulations that the Guru's went through.
- Some Sikhs see it as a way to educate the next generation
- Popular sites are all connected with the Guru's and are in the Punjab, India and the Punjab in Pakistan.
- Pilgrimage does not make you a better person. Becoming Gurmukh does!

A famous Pilgrimage site:- **HARMANDER SAHIBN**

- Harmander Sahib (also called The Golden Temple) is the most sacred place for Sikhs
- The Temple is a homage to Waheguru
- It is in a City called Amritsar, Punjab, India
- The pool in which it sits was dug by the 4th Guru – Guru RAMDAS
- Guru ARJAN DEV JI started the actual building in 1589
- The first stone was laid by a Muslim Saint called Main Mir !
- It was completed in 1601
- The Guru Granth Sahib (then known as the Adi Granth) was installed in it in 1604
- The gold on the building was added later by the last King of the Punjab, Maharaja Ranjit Singh in early 1800s
- The gold is 24 carat (pure) gold and there are semi precious stoned encrusted into the gold.

- The Committee in control of the Golden Temple is The Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandkh Committee (SGPC)
- The building is surrounded by the pool of water called a sorovar
- It has 4 doors to signify everyone is welcome
- The Golden Temple is run by SEVADAR'S – selfless volunteers
- Over 100,000 visitors go to the Golden Temple EVERY WEEK
- It is a popular tourist site - open to anyone
- It is the world largest free kitchen (langar!)
- The whole complex is run by donations that come from Sikhs all over the world.



The experience provides the following benefits:-

To worship / meditate at the most important site of the religion and visit the surrounding museums . It gives devout Sikhs a chance to try and relate to the Guru's and their times. Everyone is able to matha tek,/give a donation and listen to the GGS and join in with Naam Japna. Most of all many Khalsa Sikhs take the opportunity to undertake sewa, enjoy some karah prashad and be part of the biggest langer in the world! Furthermore it is a way to educate the younger generation especially those born in other countries like the UK. Many Sikhs find spiritual fulfilment and see it as a life changing experience.

Many visitors will take a **dip in the sorovar** (water), or just wet their feet as part of the experience. For Sikhs it's a Gurdwara on a massive scale but a humbling experience.

Other sites that many Sikhs will visit include Gurdwara Bandi Chor – where Hargobind was imprisoned with 52 Hindu princes. Also Gurdwara Hemkund which is 150000 ft above sea level and is where 10th Guru meditated.

SUMMARY:- Pilgrimage is not an obligation or an important part of Sikhi. Many other religions like Hinduism have countless places of pilgrimage and an important feature of the Islamic faith is the Hajj to Mecca. The Gurus did not believe it was necessary to go on pilgrimages. But Sikhs have a number of important places such as Harmander Sahib – the Golden Temple in Amritsar which is considered to be the SPIRITUAL CENTRE OF SIKHISM. The building is two storeys and has four doors to show it is open to all regardless of CASTE, RELIGION, AGE, BACKGROUND, RICH, POOR OR OCCUPATION.

IMPORTANCE OF MARTYRDOM IN SIKHISM

Vaisakhi created the idea of unity, identity, justice and creation of a force to be reckoned with namely the Khalsa Panth. Divali gave Sikhs a strong notion of religious freedom and the right of a Sikh or anyone of any faith the freedom to practice their beliefs. Concepts of equality run through these major turning points in the history of Sikhism. Another major concept that actually gave rise to the stance that Guru Gobind took by creating the Khalsa is the notion of MARTYRDOM.

Guru Arjan (5th Guru) was the first martyr, Guru Tegh Bahader (9th Guru) was the second martyr, this was followed by many more including the Guru Gobind Singh Ji's four sons. Sikh history to this day has martyrs by the hundreds called Shaheedi's.

The back story of the two main Guru's that were martyred is as follows:-

(Note: Pupils do not need to know all the detail of these Guru's and their martyrdom- just a basic grasp of what led to their death in the context of how their Gurpurbs would be celebrated)

GURU ARJAN (1563-1606)

- Arjan was the youngest of the three sons of Guru Ram Das,
- Guru Arjan was a born poet, and grew up to be a philosopher, saint and scholar.
- He was only 18 when the Guruship was bestowed upon him.
- Guru Arjan devoted himself completely towards building a **national identity for the Sikhs**
- In 1589 Guru Arjan started the construction of a focal place of Sikh worship called **Harmander Sahib** (Temple of God) in the middle of the Srovar excavated by Guru Ram Das. It is the Sikh centre of prayer and worship, which is commonly known in the west as the Golden Temple.
- The greatest work of Guru Arjan was the compilation of the Sikh Holy Book, the **Adi Granth**, later to be accorded the status of the Guru and hence the Guru Granth. The first copy of the Adi Granth was installed in Harmander Sahib in 1604.
- The building of Harmander Sahib and the installation of the Aad Granth set alarm bells ringing amongst some enemies and local chiefs.
- Even when the Aad Granth was being compiled a complaint was lodged at the court of the Mughal Emperor AKBAR that some of its verses made derogatory references to the Muslim and Hindu prophets.
- However, Akbar, though a Muslim, was a man of secular vision and understanding. He found nothing objectionable in the verses referred to, and was rather impressed by the universal approach of the Granth.
When Akbar died in 1605, his son Jahangir ascended to the throne of Delhi. He was not as liberal in his views as his father and did not tolerate Muslims being attracted to any other religion.
- Jahangir soon found an excuse when his own son Khusro, revolted against him. Guru Arjan was alleged to have blessed prince Khusro as he was passing through Goindwal on his way to Lahore whilst being pursued by the emperor and his soldiers.
- After the capture and death of Khusro, the Guru was summoned to the king's court to explain his conduct. Guru Arjan was also fined 200,000 rupees and ordered to remove hymns from the Adi Granth. Guru Arjan refused.
- On 30th May 1606 the Guru was **subjected to torture** by making him sit on a red hot Tavi (a large iron plate used for cooking flatbreads) whilst burning sand was poured over him. Finally, to add to his suffering, his blistered body was thrown into the cold water of the river Ravi, which carried it away.
- Guru Arjan was the **FIRST MARTYR** of Sikhism

GURU TEGH BAHADUR (1621-1675)

- Tegh Bahadur was the youngest of five sons of the sixth Guru, Guru Hargobind. He was 44 when he took up the Guruship in 1664.
- Like some other Gurus he soon had his rivals claiming the Guruship; one of them even tried to have him killed. To avoid more bickering between his followers and the rivals he purchased a piece of land covering a pleasant hillock about five miles to the northwest of his ancestral town, KIRAT-PUR. There he laid a foundation of a new town to be called ANAND PUR (city of peace).
- There was growing persecution of Sikhs at the time. Many people were asked to pay high taxes for being a Sikh.
- Guru Tegh Bahadur decided to go on a long tour, like the founder Guru Nanak, and preach his message of **peace and tolerance**.
- He preached calmness of mind against anger, humility against pride and love against hatred. He travelled a lot.
- In 1670 whilst in Assam the Guru was informed of the general policy orders of the Emperor Aurangzeb instructing his provincial governors of Kashmir and Panjab to eradicate all Hindu temples and Sikh places of worship, which had become a threat to the spread of Islam.
- Some Kashmir Brahmins (Hindus) came to seek the help of Guru Tegh Bahadur and explained the oppression imposed by the Emperor.
- This news upset the Guru. His son Gobind, who was then nine years old, noticed his father's sadness and the Guru explained that the solution to the persecution lay in the hands of a great person "*Who could that be other than you, father!*" was the immediate reaction of the alert son.
- The Guru knew his son was right and only he, Tegh Bahadur could attempt to reason with the Emperor.
- In 1674 the Guru set out towards Delhi, meeting and preaching to Sikhs on his route.
- By this time the Emperor had ordered the arrest of Guru Tegh Bahadur, which resulted in the Guru being brought to Delhi and put in prison. He was called upon to embrace Islam but the Guru refused to convert
- Further tricks and threats failed. Eventually, he was publicly beheaded in the city square called Chandni Chowk, on 11th November 1675.
- The **martyrdom** of Guru Teg Bahadur marked the **turning point in the history of the Sikhs**. The Sikhs knew they had to strengthen their military power.
- It was left to Guru Gobind Rai (10th Guru) to **shape the Sikhs** into such a strong willed courageous community that they could not only resist but also challenge any offensive and autocratic ruler, who tried to reject their religious freedom and basic human rights.
- Guru Tegh Bahadur was the **SECOND GURU MARTYR**.

FESTIVALS

CELEBRATIONS IN THE UK

Gurpurbs

Gurpurbs are festivals that are associated with the lives of the Gurus. They are regarded as happy occasions which are celebrated most enthusiastically by Sikhs. The history of the Sikhs shows that they sacrificed even their lives in order to celebrate the Gurpurbs.

The most important Gurpurbs are:

- The birthday of **Guru Nanak**, founder of Sikhism (April or November)
- The birthday of **Guru Gobind Singh**, founder of the Khalsa (January)
- The martyrdom of **Guru Arjan** (June)
- The martyrdom of **Guru Tegh Bahadur** (November/December)

Sikhs celebrate Gurpurbs with an *akhand path*. This is a complete and continuous reading of the Guru Granth Sahib, that takes 48 hours and finishes on the day of the gurpurb.

For the main Gurpurbs gurdwaras are decorated with flowers, flags and lights, and Sikhs dress up in new or smart clothes and join together for special services. Hymns are sung from the Guru Granth Sahib, poems are recited in praise of the Gurus and there are lectures on Sikhism, and activities for children. Food is important in all festivals, including Gurdwaras. Sikhs come together to eat Karah Parasad and the langar.

Some words used in calendars include **Parkash** which means birthday of the Guru, **Gurgadi** which means ascension to Guruship and **Jotijot** which means death of the Guru.

BIRTHDAY OF GURU NANAK SAHIB - The Birthday of Guru Nanak Sahib falls on Kartik Purnamashi i.e. full moon day of the month called Kartik. On this day the Birthday is celebrated every year. The Shrine (Gurdwara) representing the home of Baba Kalu (Father) and Mata Tripta (Mother) is called Gurdwara Janam Asthan, situated in Talwandi (now called Nanakana Sahib in Pakistan). The Sikhs from all over the world gather here and celebrate the Gurpurb every year with great devotion and enthusiasm.

BIRTHDAY OF GURU GOBIND SINGH SAHIB - Guru Gobind Singh Sahib, the tenth Nanak was born at Patna Sahib on 22/12/1666 His birthday generally falls in December or January or sometimes twice within a year as it is calculated according to Hindu Bikrami Calendar based on moon-year/lunar. **According to Nanakshahi calendar (which most Sikhs now accept as accurate) the birth-day of Guru Gobind Singh Sahib falls only once in a year i.e. on 5th January (every year).**

Martyrdom Gurpurbs- The remembrance of the martyrdoms (Guru Arjan and Teg Bahader) will have some similar celebrations, but the prayers will be more appropriate to the occasion and the stories of their deaths will be told again and again.

The format for Gurpurbs follows that of most services, but with the addition of extra singing, prayers, some will have special activities laid on for children and food (ie pizza) to appeal to the younger generations. The basic format is an Akand Part, Shabads, Hukum, Karah Prashad, Langer. Large

scale Gurburbs such as Vaisakhi and Diwali would include a Nagar Kirtan – which is a procession with the GGS being transported and recited as Sikhs follow.

VAISAKHI (also spelt Baisakhi)

- All started in Anandpur in 1666 when Guru Gobind Singh I was the Guru.
- The festival of Vaisakhi was going on (harvest festival)
- The Guru sent a message to all Sikhs to come to Anandpur
- Over 20,000 Sikhs assembled in Anandpur, many tents were put up
- Everyone waited for Guru Gobind to emerge to hear him speak
- When the Guru appeared he had a sword in hand held high as he greeted all
- He asked “I need a head of a Sikh who claims faith in me and the Sikh message”
- There was silence and then one man – *Daya Ram*, a shop owner, stepped forward and said “o Lord, the true Guru ... my head is ready for you, please take it”. The Guru took him into the tent and came out with a bloodied sword.
- The Guru then asked for a 2nd head, people were frightened but again a devout Sikh stepped forward – *Dharam Das*, a Jat – farmer. Again the Guru took him into the tent and came out with bloodied sword.
- This happened 3 more times with *Mokam Chand* a clothes washer, *Sahib Chand* a barber, and *Himat Rai* a water carrier.
- The people became anxious when the Guru did not emerge as quickly after taking in the Himat Rai, but they waited patiently
- Then the Guru came out with the five Sikhs behind him all clothes in blue and saffron (orange) coloured clothes and turbans on their heads.
- They looked like the Guru himself and stood proud before the crowd
- The people were confused but pleased, then the Guru spoke saying he had given the Sikhs a test – to test their faith and belief in a Sikh brotherhood or nation.
- He stated that from that day onwards the five would be known as the PANJ PIARE (five beloved ones) and they were to be given the status of KHALSA SIKHS
- This event started the brotherhood of Sikhs known as the **Khalsa Panth**
- KHALSA means pure of heart
- The five were given sweet water (amrit), mixed by the Guru’s wife, blessed by the Guru himself
- The name SINGH (lion) were given as their surname so that they were EQUAL as men (their previous surnames gave away their occupation and status in life)
- Women were to be called KAUR – meaning princess – as women were to be treated equally and with respect too
- The giving of the sweetened water became the INITIATION ceremony known as Amrit or **Amrit Sanskar**.
- The Guru himself also changed his name from GOBIND RAI to GOBIND SINGH
- 10,000’s of Sikhs were initiated/‘baptised’ on the day of Vaisakhi – a tradition still popular today (although one can be initiated into the Khalsa anytime).

The events and Amrit ceremony was a turning point in Sikh history because:-

- it sealed the idea of Sikhism as a religion in its own right with its own method of baptism and belonging
- it showed courage, bravery, power of faith, loyalty, love and determination
- It introduced the powerful concept of KHALSA which is very significant to Sikhs, baptised and un-baptised all over the world today
- It reinforced the idea of all Sikhs should be SAINT-SOLDIERS (Meeri-Peeri).

- The idea of 5 Khalsa Sikhs is reenacted all over the world during Vaisakhi and the NAGAR KIRTAN, which are huge processions that take place on that day in every major town and city all over the world there are Sikhs in APRIL.

{Note: more detail of the AmritSsanskar ceremony given in the initiation ceremony}

NAGAR KIRTAN

This is an important Sikh custom involving processional singing of hymns throughout a community. While practiced at any important time in the Sikh calendar it is mostly practised in the UK during Vaisakhi. The procession is led by the five saffron-robed **Panj Piare** (the five beloved of the Guru), who are all Khalsa Sikhs. The Guru Granth Sahib is placed on a decorated float. The walking sangat may choose to wear bright colours especially saffron, orange or blue. Heads must be covered. However shoes are permitted as the procession will walk a few miles around the city. The panj-piare will not wear shoes!. The road before the procession is cleared by sewadars (volunteers). Bystanders should bow their heads to the scripture. Along the routes food may be provided by the local community. It is common in some larger UK cities for local businesses of various/or no faith to give out free food to anyone in the procession. The procession concludes at the Gurdwara with the usual Ardas, karah prashad and langer.

HOLLA MOHALLA AND MELAS

Hola Mohalla or simply **Hola** is a Sikh festival that takes place usually in March. This, by a tradition was established by Guru Gobind Singh, it is a festival that celebrates and demonstrates Sikh military prowess and marital skills by simulating battles.

The festival lasts THREE days, with many exhibitions, mock fights, sword fighting, Gatka, kirtan recital and Gurbani sessions, music and poetry competitions and even activities such as bareback horseriding, tent pegging, and other such competitive activities/sports. The festival appeals to all age groups.

The usual sewa, parshad and langar all play an important part in this festival too.

Melas do not necessarily have to have a religious connection to be held. Many melas in the UK are non-religious and they are organised with the support of all ethnic communities and faith groups to celebrate, culture, traditions, cuisines, military prowess by Nihangs, music and fun for all the family. Large towns in the UK will hold a mela. Activities at the melas tend to be lots of stalls selling pictures, clothes, jewellery, henna painting, gifts and lots and lots of food, obviously if the mela is organised in the name of a Sikh religious festival the food will be strictly vegetarian and there will be no alcohol. Some melas are held to celebrate a religious festival such as Vaisakhi or Divali. The Gurdwaras will also lay on a number of activities such as childrens bouncy castles to simran sessions and martial arts like Gathka. They may even have an Akand Part too; all in a bid to support and draw the community together.

Melas which are organised by many communities of different faiths will include meat stalls, but rarely alcohol as Melas are considered family events. Bhangra music (Punjabi genre of music from North India) is extremely popular in the UK and many melas are able to attract big international singers such as Gurdas Maan, Malkit Singh, Juggi D, Miss Pooja etc. Melas will start early in the morning till well past midnight. Some of the best melas in the UK are in London and the Midlands.

DIVALI (also spelt Diwali)

Otherwise known as Bandi Chorh Divas by Sikhs today

The Sikh celebration of the return of the sixth Guru, GURU HARGOBIND from detention in the Gwalior Fort coincides with Hindu festival of Diwali. This coincidence has resulted in some similarity of celebration amongst Sikhs and Hindus.

The Sikhs celebrate this day as Bandi Chorh Divas i.e., "the day of release of detainees", because the sixth Guru had agreed to his release on the condition that the other fifty-two detainees, who were in prison with him would also be released. These other fifty-two detainees were the smaller state kings who had done something to annoy the emperor.

Emperor Jahangir had imprisoned the Guru Hargobind because he was afraid of the Guru's growing following and power. The Sikhs on this day, which generally falls in October-November, hold a one-day celebration in the Gurdwaras. In the evening, illuminations are done with Divas (earthen oil lamps) or candles and fireworks. The celebrations are held both in the Gurdwaras and in homes.

The story of Divali for the Sikhs is a story of the **Sikh struggle for freedom**.

Diwali for Hindu's is the festival of lights when, according to Indian lore, Lord Rama returned home after destroying the demon god Ravana, but this story has no significance for Sikhs because the Sikh story is about **struggle for freedom** from the oppressive Mughal regime, the festival of Divali is now the second most important day after the Vaisakhi festival in April.

The Sixth Guru Hargobind, was freed from imprisonment in the famous fort of Gwalior by Emperor Jahangir in October, 1619. The reason for the young Guru's imprisonment was no more than religious politics. The Guru's father, Guru Arjan, had been martyred for the same reason. Jahangir was under pressure from influential Muslim religious leaders like Hajrat Mian Mir, a friend of the Guru, to release him. So the Emperor relented grudgingly and said that only those Rajahs that could hold on to the Guru could be freed with him (as the Guru had refused his release unless the Hindu Rajah's in the cell with him were given their freedom too).

Cunningly, the Guru asked for a special coat to be made with 52 coat tails - same number as the rajahs in prison with him! And so the rajahs were freed and the Guru became known popularly as the Bandi Chorh (Deliverer from prison). He arrived at Amritsar on the Divali day and the Harmandir Sahib (also known as the Golden Temple) was lit with hundreds of lamps i.e. he was received in the same way as the Lord Rama (Hindu story) and the day came to be known as the Bandi Chorh Divas (**the day of freedom**).

Guru Hargobind reached Amritsar on the eve of Diwali. The people illuminated the Golden Temple and the city splendidly to celebrate the return of their Guru to the city. Thereafter, Diwali has been celebrated at Amritsar with great pomp and show, and also with a lot of religious fervour.

During the fair, religious congregations are held at Manji Sahib, Akal Takhat and Baba Atal which continue for three days. A large number of poets and singers also participate. Recitation of *Granth Sahib* is done at Harmandir Sahib (Golden Temple), Akal Takhat and various gurdwaras in the vicinity of Golden Temple.

Early in the morning, pilgrims take a holy dip in the sacred tank, while reciting *Japji Sahib* and thereafter, they go to the Golden Temple for paying their obeisance. They make offerings of various kinds both in cash and kind, such as flowers, candy-drops and parched-rice grains. They receive the *karah parshad*. Circumambulation of the tank (water surrounding the Golden Temple) is

considered sacred by the pilgrims. Most devout Sikhs will take a walk around the whole complex, many will sit and Naam Japna, or even just in silent meditation.

This Divali fair is attended by people in large numbers, they come from far and near in India and from abroad. In the UK Divali celebrations include; recitals, lighting candles called divas, Akand Part, music by ragi's, sewa, prashad, langar. All Gurdwaras in the UK will do an Akand Part for Divali. Many larger Gurdwaras will hold massive firework displays too. Most people go to a Gurdwara to participate in the celebrations. Some Sikhs prefer to spend the day at home at home with family and friends and just light some fireworks in their gardens, have some special Punjabi food such sweets called Jelebi's, and some families give presents to their children on this special day.

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