

# Who are Sikhs?

The word Sikh means **disciple** or **student**. Sikhs are students and followers of **Guru Nanak** (b. 1469), the founder of the Sikh religious tradition, and the nine prophet-teachers—called Gurus—who succeeded him.



# Beliefs

Sikhism's central belief is that there is **one God** for all of creation, a loving creator attainable through meditation on and **remembrance** of God's name. Sikhs are required to lead **moral** lives, earn their living through hard work and honest means, and to share their earnings through **charitable** contributions and selfless service.

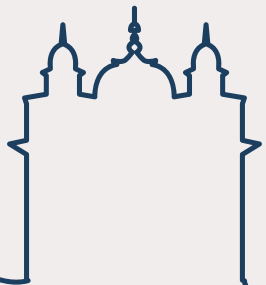
Sikhism is **universal** in that it is open to all, and recognizes and respects all human beings as equals. The Sikh religion is profoundly **egalitarian** and **democratic**, as its adherents believe steadfastly that all people have **civil rights**, including freedom of religion. Sikhs have a long, celebrated heritage of speaking out for **justice**, and **standing up** for the defenseless.

# Roots

The **twenty-five million** Sikhs worldwide trace the origin of their religion to Punjab, meaning the land of the five rivers, located in present-day Pakistan and northern India. Sikhism is the **fifth largest** religion in the world.

Nearly five centuries ago, Sikhism's Gurus rose **above** the caste system through their practices, teaching their followers to do the same.

Sikhism's founder, Guru Nanak, strove to create a **spiritual community** in which such marks of social status would be dissolved, and all would be recognized as equals by the fact of their **humanity**.

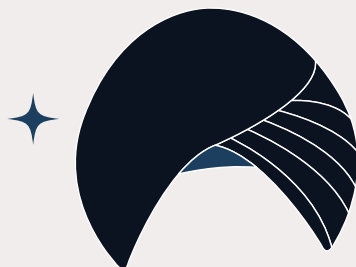


# Khalsa

On March 30, 1699, Guru Gobind Singh—the tenth and final human Guru—revealed a new order of the Sikhs, called the Khalsa (meaning "belonging only to the Divine").

The Khalsa consists of Sikhs who undergo a initiation ceremony and dedicate themselves to living by the high standards of the Sikh Gurus at all times, as well as maintaining their physical distinctiveness in society by maintaining five articles of faith.

The Khalsa, a global human fellowship, upheld the highest Sikh virtues through the harshest and most difficult times in Sikh history.



## Articles of Faith

The five Articles of Faith distinguish Sikhs who have formally committed to the values set forth by Guru Gobind Singh as part of the Khalsa.

### Kesh

Uncut hair, usually covered by a dastaar (turban) represents spirituality and acceptance of God's will



### Kirpan

A small religious sword, a reminder to stand up against injustice and oppression



### Kara

Metal bracelet, worn on the wrist as a reminder to do good deeds and of the eternal nature of God



### Kanga

Wooden Comb, represents the importance of cleanliness



### Kaccha/Kachera

Undershorts, signifies modesty and self discipline



They all have deep religious meanings for Sikhs, who wear them to honor the teachings, wishes, and memory of their beloved Gurus.

## About SALDEF


The Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund (SALDEF) is the nation's oldest Sikh American civil rights organization. Our mission is to safeguard the civil rights of Sikh Americans and ensure equal access, protection, and opportunity in the United States for future generations. To learn more about SALDEF and the Sikh-American community please visit [www.SALDEF.org](http://www.SALDEF.org)




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