



SIKH AMERICANS



SALDEF is a national Sikh American impact organization focused on building leadership and capacity in the Sikh American community. Our mission is to empower Sikh Americans by building dialogue, deepening understanding, promoting civic and political participation, and upholding social justice and religious freedom for all Americans. We are grounded in our values of optimism (chardi kala), humility (nimrata) and service (seva), inspired by the community (sangar) for the benefit of all (sarbat da bhalla). We envision a United States where Sikh Americans are respected and recognized as a vibrant and integral part of the fabric of this nation and are appreciated for our shared values of service, social justice, and an unshakeable belief in freedom and equality for all.

SIKHS AT A GLANCE

- * Sikhism is the world's fifth largest religion with 25 million adherents worldwide
- * Sikhism is a distinct religion, separate from Hinduism and Islam
- * Sikhs believe in one God, equality, freedom of religion, and community service
- * Sikhs cover their uncut hair with a turban - this turban represents a Sikh's commitment to their faith, equality, and justice
- * There are over 500,000 Sikhs in the USA today

BRIEF HISTORY

The approximately 25 million Sikhs worldwide trace their origin of their religion to Punjab, meaning the land of the five rivers, located in present-day Pakistan and northern India. 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. Sikhism is a revealed religion distinct from both Hinduism and Islam. The fifth largest religion in the world, there are over 500,000 Sikhs in the United States.



SIKHISM: A WAY OF LIFE

Sikhism's central belief is that there is one God for all of creation, a loving Creator attainable through meditation upon and remembrance of God. 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 service. Sikhism is a way of life that advocates holistic life experiences --work, worship, and service-- in order to attain perpetual union with God, while creating a just social order in this world. Sikhism is universal in that it is open to all, and it recognizes and respects all human beings as equals.

The Sikh religion is profoundly egalitarian and democratic, as its adherents believe that all people have civil rights, including the freedom of religion. Sikhs have a long, celebrated heritage of speaking out against injustice and standing up for others' human and religious rights.

SIKH THEOLOGY



Over five centuries ago, Sikhism's founder, Guru Nanak, denounced the divisive caste system that still plagues South Asian society. He strove to create an egalitarian community in which social stratification would be dissolved and all would be recognized as equals by the fact of their humanity. A truly revolutionary social reformer, Guru Nanak also condemned the mistreatment of women in his time, proclaiming them the equals of men in every sphere, political, social, and religious.

Guru Nanak's teachings were further disseminated by nine Sikh Gurus, each one chosen by the succeeding Guru. The tenth and final human Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, compiled the writings of the Gurus along with those of Hindu and Muslim spiritual figures whose teachings strongly resonated with Sikh beliefs. This collection of sacred wisdom is known as Guru Granth Sahib, and is the final and eternal spiritual guide for Sikhs. This extraordinary poetic treasure is notable in that the holy text was written and compiled by the Gurus themselves, without the use of intermediaries.



The tenth Guru also revealed a new order of the Sikhs, called the **Khalsa** (meaning “belonging to the Divine”). The Khalsa consists of Sikhs who undergo an initiation ceremony and dedicate themselves to living by the highest standards of the Sikh faith. This includes maintaining their physical distinctiveness in society by observing five articles of faith. One of the more conspicuous and noteworthy of the articles of faith is the Kesh (uncut hair), which is kept covered by a distinctive turban. The other articles of faith are the Kirpan (religious sword), Kara (metal bracelet), Kanga (comb), and Kaccha/Kachera (under-shorts). They all have deep religious meanings for Sikhs, who wear them as their disciplined commitment to their faith and to honor the teachings, wishes, and memory of their beloved Gurus.

GURDWARA

The Gurdwara, or Sikh congregational religious site, is a place of spiritual learning and community gathering. Historically it has served not only religious needs of the community but also been a place for discussions of political topics of the day, and served as a sanctuary for those in need of food or shelter. The service consists of singing of hymns from the Guru Granth Sahib, as well as the exposition of Sikh history, tradition, and theology. Non-Sikhs are always welcome. Gurdwaras all over the world run free community kitchens, called langar, which provide free meals to all regardless of faith, race, or creed. Gurdwaras can be recognized by the Sikh flag called the Nishaan Sahib flying on the premises.

