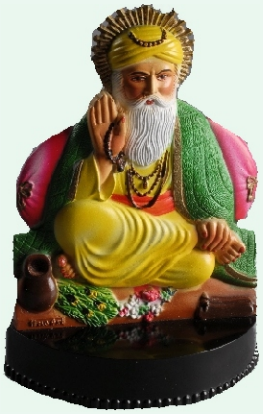
Hands On Learning
with Reading Museum Service

SIKHISM H 234

Guru Nanak Statuette



Guru Nanak was born in Pakistan in 1469 into a Hindu family. He married at 16 and had two sons and then became an accountant in charge of the stores of a Muslim government official. One day in 1499, when he was thirty years old, Nanak went as usual down to the river to bathe and meditate. It was said that he was gone for three days. When he reappeared, it is said he was 'filled with the spirit of God'. His first words after his re-emergence were: 'there is no Hindu, there is no Muslim'. From that date he began his extensive travels, from Sri Lanka to Tibet, to spread his understanding of God. After having spent a lifetime of travelling abroad and setting up missions, an aged Guru Nanak returned home to Punjab. He settled down at Kartharpur with his wife and sons. Pilgrims came from near and far to hear the hymns and preaching of the Master.

Sikhism teaches:

- There is only one God.
- God is without form, or gender.
- Everyone has direct access to God.
- Everyone is equal before God.
- A good life is lived as part of a community, by living honestly and caring for others.
- Empty religious rituals and superstitions have no value.

Sikhs believe that human beings spend their time in a cycle of birth, life, and rebirth. They share this belief with followers of other Indian religious traditions such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. The quality of each particular life depends on the law of Karma. Karma sets the quality of a life according to how well or badly a person behaved in their previous life - you reap what you sow. The only way out of this cycle is to achieve a total knowledge of and union with God. Guru Nanak died on 22 September 1539.



Images of Guru often show him in this position - his legs crossed in meditation and a hand raised in blessing. A similar image can be found on the medallion in this box (right), which is sometimes worn by Sikh girls and women.

Hands On Learning
with Reading Museum Service

SIKHISM H 234

Triptych showing Guru Hargobind being released from prison



Before Guru Nanak died he appointed Guru Angad as his successor. The sequence of Gurus continued until Guru Gobind Singh, who died in 1708.

The sixth guru was Guru Hargobind (1606-1644). Guru Hargobind took over when his father Guru Arjan was executed. His tenure was notable for the militarisation of the community so that they would be able to resist any oppression. The Sikhs fought a number of battles to preserve their faith.

The incident in the centre of the triptych occurred when Guru Hargobind was imprisoned by the Muslim ruler Emperor Jehangir at Gwalior. The Emperor eventually agreed to his release, but Guru Hargobind refused to leave prison without the 52 Hindu princes who were also imprisoned there. The Emperor said that as many princes as could hold on to the guru's clothes could go free. Guru Hargobind asked for a certain type of cloak to be brought. All the 52 princes walked to freedom holding on to the long tassel-like ends of the guru's cloak.

The image on the left shows Guru Nanak. The image on the right shows the tenth and final guru, Gobind Singh (1675-1708). He is shown with a with a bow strung over his shoulder. Guru Gobind Singh was involved in many battles and was renowned as a bowman. For example, in the first battle of Anandpur he engaged in an archery fight with the Muslim General Painde Khan. The whole of the general's body except his ears was encased in armour. Knowing this, the Guru then discharged an arrow at his ear with such an unerring aim that he fell off his horse on the ground and never rose again.

Chauri



Guru Gobind Singh was the last *human* guru, however Guru Gobind Singh decreed that after his death devotion should be given instead to the Guru Granth Sahib. The Granth (book) was originally compiled by fifth Guru and later recompiled by all the gurus that followed him. Up to the time of Guru Gobind Singh's death the holy book was called Pothi Sahib. Gobind Singh named it Granth consisting of two words, 'Gur' and 'Ant' meaning 'Eternal Guru'. He said that 'In future whoever wishes to seek englightenment, guidance and solace, let him read the holy granth. This is your Guru for ever and ever till eternity.'

Continued on page 3.

Hands On Learning
with Reading Museum Service

SIKHISM H 234

The Sikh holy scriptures could not be included in this collection as this would entail devoting a room exclusively to housing it. Few Sikh families possess a copy. This is because it is regarded as more than a book and it should be treated like one of the human gurus. However this box does include a chauri. In a hot, dry region like the Punjab, where Sikhism began, it used to be the custom to wave a chauri over the heads of important people to keep them cool and to keep insects away from them. When the Guru Granth Sahib is read, the chauri is waved over the holy book from time to time to symbolically indicate the honour given to the eleventh guru.

The Five Ks



Guru Teg Bahadur, the ninth Guru of the Sikhs, disagreed with many aspects of Hindu teachings, but was publicly beheaded by the Mughal (Muslim) rulers for trying to protect the Hindu community's right to freedom of worship. The Mughal emperor then challenged the Sikhs, who at the time could not be distinguished from other Indians, to claim their master's body. But in the event no one came forward. The Guru's young son Gobind Singh now became Guru, and, as he grew into manhood, he constantly stressed that Sikhs should always be ready to stand up for their beliefs, however difficult the circumstances. He created a new community of equals, called the Khalsa. These saint-soldiers were to be dedicated to the service of others and the pursuit of justice for people of all faiths.

The signs of membership of the community are, for males:
- Kesh. Uncut hair to denote saintliness. In this collection this is represented by the beard net which Sikh men wear to keep their beard in place.
- Kanga. A small hair comb - a reminder of the importance of cleanliness.
- Kara. A steel bracelet - a reminder of a link to God and Godly ideals.
- Kirpan. A sword for self-defence and protection of the weak. Miniature versions such as this one are usually carried today.
- Kaach. Short trousers , a more appropriate garment for a fit and active life than the cumbersome *dhoti*, generally worn in India.

In a move to end social divisions the first members of the Khalsa dropped their surnames - then linked to caste or occupation - and took the common name Singh, literally 'lion', a reminder of the need for courage.

Hands On Learning
with Reading Museum Service

SIKHISM H 234

Baisakhi Card



The Khalsa was created during the spring festival of Baisakhi (or Vaisakhi) in 1699. Guru Gobind Singh, sword in hand, emerged from a tent and asked that anyone willing to give his life for his faith should come forward. A young Sikh accompanied the Guru into a tent. To everyone's dismay the Guru reappeared alone, his sword covered with blood, and asked for a second volunteer. A second Sikh stepped forward and again the Guru emerged alone, his sword again apparently covered in blood. In the same way a third, fourth and fifth volunteer accompanied the Guru into the tent. The crowd became alarmed. Many believed that the Guru had killed the five Sikhs, but then to everyone's joy, he came out of the tent again, this time followed by all five Sikhs who were clearly alive and well and dressed in turbans and other symbols that have since become symbols of Sikh identity. He called the five Sikhs the Panj Piare - the beloved five. The Guru's wife, Mata Sundri, then came forward and placed some sugar crystals into the holy water or amrit as a reminder that strength must always be balanced by sweetness of temperament.

The card shows the Panj Piare stading behind Guru Gobind Singh. In front of him Mata Sundri is offering amrit. Today the Amrit Ceremony is the initiation rite which a Sikh can go through as soon as they are old enough to understand the full commitment that they are making. During the ceremony, hymns are recited from the Sikh scripture, prayers are said, and the principles of Sikhism are affirmed. Then amrit is prepared that has been stirred with a double-edged sword. The candidates for initiation drink some of the amrit from the same bowl, and have it sprinkled on their eyes and hair.

Turban Length

A turban is not one of the Five Ks, but it is the symbol by which male Sikhs are most easily identified. In general, there is no significance to the different colours worn. Boys too young to wear a turban tie up their hair in a handkerchief known as a rumal.



Hands On Learning
with Reading Museum Service

SIKHISM H 234

Miniature Khanda

A Khanda is a double edged sword. It appears in the centre of the the emblem of the Sikh faith, consisting of four symbolic weapons, which is known collectively as the Khanda (see image, below right).



The other three weapons in this symbol are a circular quoit (chakka) and two crossed daggers (kirpans). The Khanda in the middle is interpreted in a variety of ways. Some suggest it represents knowledge of divinity and the creative power of God, others' God's concern for truth and justice. The Khanda symbol is often found on saffron coloured flags outside Sikh places of worship (gurdwaras) and it is also worn as a necklace, as is the case here.



Costume Doll from Punjab

This item shows the costume worn in the Punjab, birthplace of Guru Nanak.



Wedding Invitation Card

The picture on the front shows the bridegroom mounted on a horse going to the house of the bride.



Two Sets of Prayer Beads

The larger chain is known as a mala and has 108 beads. Sikh malas are usually made from a wool cord tied with knots. 'Waheguru', a name for God, which means 'Wonderful Lord', is said on each bead. Hindus also make use of malas. The smaller set, for wearing around the wrist, is called a simarnaa and has twenty-seven beads. The number of beads on a mala usually adds up to the number nine. That is, 27(2+7), 108(1+0+8) beads.





Hands On Learning
with Reading Museum Service

SIKHISM H 234

Nitnem

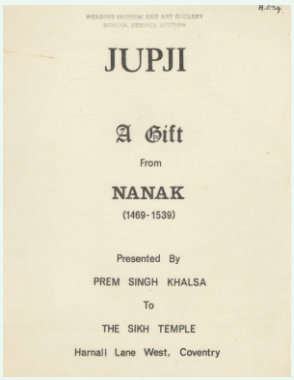


Nitnem is an anthology of different passages that are designated to be read by Sikhs every day. It has five sections:

Jupji Sahib
Jaap Sahib
Tav Prasad Swaiye
Beynti Chaopai
Anand Sahib

It is written in Punjabi. An English translation of the Jupji Sahib can be found in this box.

Jupji Sahib Booklet



This is one of the most important hymns in Sikhism. It is said to have been composed by Guru Nanak in the later years of his life, when he settled down at Kartarpur after his long journeys. People from near and far used to gather around him and listen to him teach. He composed this longer poem for their recitation, guidance and spiritual advancement. It was meant to be recited by the disciples in the early hours of the morning.

It begins with the Mool Mantra - the first nine lines - followed by a beginning Salok (verse), followed by 38 hymns and a final Salok.

The Mool Mantra is considered the basis of Sikhism. Its importance is emphasised by the fact that it is the first composition to appear in the Guru Granth Sahib. It is said to be the first composition uttered by Guru Nanak upon enlightenment at the age of 30. Being the basis of Sikhism it encapsulates the entire theology of Sikhism, and as a result, it is also the most difficult composition to fully understand. The Jupji Sahib and the rest of the Guru Granth Sahib, totalling 1430 pages, are efforts to explain the Mool Mantra.