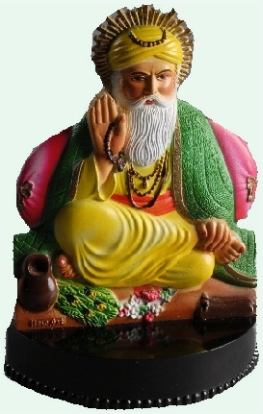
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Guru Nanak Statuette



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.

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Medallion Showing Guru Gobind Singh



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 image on this medallion probably shows Guru Gobind Singh (1675-1708). Guru Gobind Singh is often shown on horseback with a hawk on his hand, or with a bow strung over his shoulder. He was involved in many battles and was renowned as a bowman. Guru Gobind Singh had many titles bestowed upon him, one of which was 'Chittay baaja wala', the keeper of the white falcon.

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.'

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.

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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.

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 words on this card read 'Speak: O the Lord's Khalsa. May glory be to God almighty.' The emblem on the front is often found on Sikh flags and books. It is known as the Khanda. Strictly speaking a khanda is the double edged sword which appears in the centre of the emblem. 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 that it symbolises God's concern for truth and justice.

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.

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Wedding Invitation Card



The picture on the front shows the bridegroom and the bride walking clockwise round the Sikh scriptures, the Guru Granth Sahib. The end of the bride's dupatta is tied to the end of the scarf which hangs from the groom's shoulders. Red is the colour traditionally worn by Hindu and Sikh brides.

Prayer Beads



This 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 at each bead. Hindus also make use of malas.

Nit Nem Booklet



Nit Nem is a collection of different sections of the Guru Granth Sahib (called banis) that are designated to be read by Sikhs every day.

One of the most famous sections is the Mool Mantra. The Mool Mantra is said to be the first composition uttered by Guru Nanak upon enlightenment at the age of 30. Being the basis of Sikhism it encapsulate the entire theology of Sikhism, and as a result, it is also the most difficult composition to fully understand. The Guru Granth Sahib, totalling 1430 pages, is in effect a commentary on the Mool Mantra.

The Mool Mantra reads, in English translation:
'God is One, without opposition. He is the creator, True is His Name, The doer of all that is manifest, He is without fear, He is without enmity, Timeless is His form, Beyond Births and Deaths, Self-Existent, Realised by the grace of the Guru, Meditate on this Name, True before the Ages, True at the start of the Ages, True now, Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji says He shall be true in the future.'