



The Sikh faith is a monotheist faith founded by *Gurū Nānak Sāhib* (1469 – 1539) and shaped by nine Gurūs who followed him.

Sikhism promotes the concept of one God, living truthfully and seeing God's light shining within all people and creation. Although Sikhism is considered the complete way of living that leads to liberation whilst alive, it recognizes the universal truths that underlie all human endeavours, religions and belief systems. The universal nature of the Sikh way of life reaches out to people of all faiths, cultural backgrounds, both genders, encouraging us to see beyond our differences and to work together for inner-peace as well as world peace and harmony.



Vaisākhī (14<sup>th</sup> April), the harvest festival in Northern India, marks the completion of the mission of the Ten Gurūs with the Tenth Gurū manifesting the Khālsā, the Sikh nation, in 1699. On this day Gurū Gobind Singh gathered the Sikhs together at the foothills of the city of Anandpur, and made an extraordinary demand for a devotee's head.

A Sikh came forward; the Gurū then took him into the tent and after sometime came out with his sword dripping with blood. He repeated the demand a further four times. He presented the Five Sikhs with a radiating glow around them to the congregation on the open stage wearing robes and named them "*Pañj Pyaaré*" (Five Beloved Ones).

The Gurū tested the crowd and after a prolonged period, the Gurū emerged with all the Five Sikhs neatly dressed in the same attire. He initiated the five in a new and unique ceremony called "*Khandé dī Pāhul*" (initiation of the double-edged Sword), what is known as the "Amrit Ceremony".

The Five Sikhs were spiritually reborn through the giving of the Amrit (Nectar) which embodied the balance qualities of the Khālsā personality; it was prepared in an iron bowl and stirred with double-edged *Khanda* (sword) conveying strength and resilience; it was sweetened by the Gurū wife, Mata Sāhib Kaur, with sugar crystals (*pataasé*) infusing it with kindness and compassion; it also absorbed the powerful chanting of prayers by the Gurū to bring sacredness and sanctity.



The Gurū then asked the Five Sikhs to initiate him to the Khālsā. This is unique in world history, where a Prophet/leader becomes the disciple of his followers as well as the leader.

On Vaisākhī, the creation of the Khālsā was the creation of a democratic people who were given

power to handle the nation's affairs. The Gurū put a seal on the Sikh identity and instructed the Sikhs to wear the Five Ks uniform and live a disciplined and Godly life.

The Gurū then gave all Sikh men the suffix name **Singh**, meaning "lion", a reminder of the need for courage. At the same time, the Gurū gave all Sikh women the suffix name or title **Kaur**, meaning "prince", to emphasize dignity and complete equality.



Each baptised Sikh has to wear a uniform consisting of five articles of faith often called the Five Ks and follow a strict code of conduct:

**Kesh (unshorn hair) covered with keskī (short turban).** Sikhs do not cut or forcibly remove any hair from any parts of the body to maintain natural form. Hair is neatly tied in knot above head and covered by a small turban, washed regularly, kept clean and protected.



**Kangā** is a wooden comb kept together with knot of hair on head. It is used to keep hair neat and tidy. Kangā is a reminder to maintain cleanliness and keep thoughts pure.



**Kirpān** resembles a sword and is worn in a strap that allows it to be suspended near the waist. Wearing it is a commitment to standing up for the Truth and against oppression.



**Karā** is an iron bangle worn to remind one to commit good deeds and that every Sikh is bound to the high principles and the Gurū.



**Kachherā** is cotton underwear with cord string worn much like under shorts reminds a Sikh to restrain from overindulgence. It is a symbol of modesty and chastity.

**There are four acts that are cardinal taboos:**

1. Dishonour the hair (cut, pluck, wax, dye any bodily hair)
2. Eat *Kuthhā* (killed animals, i.e. meat and allied products)
3. Intimate relationship outside marriage
4. Consume Tobacco (intoxicants)

**The foundation for every Sikh's daily life is:**

- (1) Earn an honest and righteous living.
- (2) Share with others and do selfless service.
- (3) Lovingly remember God at all times.

With the distinct identity and consciousness of purity, Gurū Gobind Singh gave all the Sikhs the opportunity to live lives of courage, dignity, grace, sacrifice and equality.

Following the evolution of Sikh into the Khālsā, the line of human Gurū ended with Tenth Gurū in 1708. Today the religion is guided by joint sovereignty of *Gurū Granth Sāhib* (the scriptural embodiment of spiritual revelation and instructions) and *Gurū Panth* (the collectivity of all the Khālsā worldwide) as the physical manifestation of the Gurū.



*Vaisākhī* is a joyous celebration for Sikhs throughout the world bringing happiness and excitement. It is a time of reflection on what the Khālsā represents and stands for and implementing the virtues which each of the names of the Five Beloved Ones of 1699 represent: compassion (*Dayā*), righteousness living (*Dharam*), courage (*Himmat*), steadfastness (*Mohkam*) and mastery (*Sāhib*).

The celebrations include a complete non stop reading of *Gurū Granth Sāhib*, called an *Akhand Paatth*, changing the cloth covering the Sikh Flag (*Nishaan Sāhib*), a procession of singing sacred hymns in praise of God (*Nagar Keertan*) led by the five baptised Sikhs and *Gurū Granth Sāhib*.

Throughout the day, *Keertan* (singing of sacred with musical instruments) is performed and *Langar* (free communal food) is served to all. *Vaisākhī* celebrations also involve exhibitions, talks on faith & history, sports competitions and in many Gurdwaras, *Amrit* Ceremony is conducted on the day because people prefer to be initiated on this auspicious day.

# Why Sikhs Celebrate Vaisākhī

