

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 respect—political, social, and religious—over two and a half centuries before the founding of the United States.

## Khalsa

On March 30, 1699, Guru Gobind Singh—the tenth and final human Guru—revealed a new, voluntary 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.

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 are the *Kirpan* (ceremonial sword), *Kara* (metal bracelet), *Kanga* (comb) and *Kaccha* (under-shorts). They all have deep religious meanings for Sikhs, who wear them to honor the teachings, wishes, and memory of their beloved *Gurus*.

Kirpan



Produced by the Sikh Mediawatch and Resource Task Force (*SMART*). For more information on the religion or history of the Sikh people please contact SMART at: [info@sikhmediawatch.org](mailto:info@sikhmediawatch.org) or visit SMART's web site at [www.sikhmediawatch.org](http://www.sikhmediawatch.org).

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The Sikh Mediawatch and Resource Task Force (*SMART*), founded in 1996, is a nonprofit, non-partisan, organization dedicated to the fair and accurate portrayal of Sikh Americans and the Sikh religion in the American media and society. It has a diverse membership across the United States, and also works to combat bigotry and prejudice; protect the rights and religious freedom of Sikh Americans; and provide resources to empower the Sikh American community in understanding and exercising its civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights.

*Distributed by:*

# WHO ARE THE



# SIKHS



There is only one God  
Whose name is Truth  
The Creator  
Without fear  
Without hate  
A timeless being  
Beyond births and deaths  
Self-illuminated  
Revealed only by the Guru's grace

- Mool Mantra  
Japji

# Highlights

- The word *Sikh* means disciple or student.
- *Sikhs* are students and followers of Guru Nanak (b. 1469), the founder of the Sikh religious tradition.
- Guru Granth Sahib is the eternal spiritual guide of the Sikhs.
- Sikhism's central theological belief is that there is one God for all of creation, a loving Creator attainable through meditation upon and remembrance of God's Name.
- Sikhism is a way of life that advocates the practice of holistic life experiences—work, worship, and service.
- Twenty-two million Sikhs worldwide trace the origin of their religion to Punjab.
- Sikhism is the fifth largest religion in the world.
- Sikhism does not recognize racial, class, caste, or other earthly distinctions.
- Sikhism recognizes the complete equality between women and men in all spheres of life: political, social, and religious.
- Guru Gobind Singh—the tenth and final human Sikh Guru—revealed a new, voluntary order of the Sikhs, called the Khalsa (meaning "belonging only to the Divine").

# Background

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. Though sometimes mistaken for members of a sect of Hinduism or Islam, Sikhs belong to a distinct religion with its own unique, divine scriptures, which are collected in



Guru Granth Sahib

the *Guru Granth Sahib*, the eternal spiritual guide of the Sikhs. This

extraordinarily poetic treasure of sacred and practical wisdom contains not only the writings

of the Sikh *Gurus*, but remarkably, those of Muslim and Hindu saints as well. It is also notable in that the holy text was written by the *Gurus* themselves, without the use of any intermediaries.

# Beliefs

Sikhism's central theological belief is that there is one God for all of creation, a loving Creator attainable through meditation upon and remembrance of God's Name. In addition, Sikhs

are enjoined to lead moral lives, earn their living through hard work and honest means, and to share the fruits of their labor through charitable contributions and work. Sikhism is a way of life that advocates the practice of holistic life



Ek Onkaar [There is only One God]

experiences—work, worship, and service—in

order to attain perpetual union with God, while creating a just social order in this world. A Sikh is enjoined to lead a wholesome family lifestyle, and to avoid celibacy or asceticism as a means of reaching God. Spurred by their religion's dictates, Sikhs have a long, celebrated heritage of speaking out against injustice, and standing up for the defenseless.

The twenty-two 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. Now the fifth largest religion in the world, Sikhism is universal in that it is open to all, and that it recognizes and respects all human beings as equals. Just as



Punjab

God transcends the boundaries of race, class, gender, and ethnicity, the Sikh religion

dismisses such earthly distinctions. The Sikh religion is profoundly egalitarian and democratic, as its adherents believe steadfastly that all people have civil rights, including the freedom of religion. Sikh doctrine resonates with the *Gurus'* belief that all people have the right to follow their own path to God, without condemnation or coercion from others.

Nearly five centuries ago, Sikhism's founder, Guru Nanak, denounced the invidious, wretched caste system that still plagues Indian society today. He strove to create a spiritual community in which such marks of social status would be