

Glossary: Sikhi worldview traditions

This glossary is also available on our website. We also have accompanying in-depth and core subject knowledge essays, available both on our website and for download.

[In-depth subject knowledge essay](#)

[Core subject knowledge essay](#)

[Glossary](#)

5 K's

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: 5 Ks, Panj Kakke, Panj Kakka

DEFINITION: Sikhs who are members of the Khalsa, Amritdhari Sikhs, that have promised to wear the 5 K's or Panj Kakke to show their identity:

Kesh: uncut hair, which refers to a person's freedom from worldly fashion. This shows respect for the body.

Kangha: a wooden comb, which shows social responsibilities, such as cleanliness, as important.

Kirpan: a small, sheathed sword. Kirpan literally translates as 'sword of mercy'. It is worn diagonally on the torso. This reminds a person of their responsibilities to the community, and to protect the vulnerable, working against injustice.

Kachera: these are loose, cotton undershorts which symbolise modesty and purity.

Kara: a steel bangle, representing the infinity and eternal presence of God, without beginning or end.

5 Khands

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Five Khands, Panj Khand

DEFINITION: These are also known as the 5 stages of liberation, or five stages of spiritual progress towards mukti. They include righteous action, knowledge, spiritual endeavour, grace and truth.

Adi Granth

Guru Nanak collected texts of mystics, added his own hymns and later, Gurus added further writings. They were then collected in one volume – a granth. This text was compiled by Guru Arjan and became the Adi Granth.

This was then added to by the ninth Guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur. This then went on to be finalised as the Guru Granth Sahib.

Akhand Paath

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Akhand Path

DEFINITION: A continuous reading of the Guru Granth Sahib, which takes place over 48 hours. A reading could be to celebrate a wedding, or to mark a death, or for a particular festival. The readings are done by several different people.

Amrit

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Amrita

DEFINITION: A sacred drink, made of water and sugar, which is drunk in a ceremony called the Amrit Sanskar when Sikhs become part of the Khalsa.

Amrit Sanskar

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Amrit Sanchar

The ceremony in which Sikhs become part of the Khalsa and become Amritdhari Sikhs.

During the ceremony, Amrit is stirred with a khanda in a steel bowl. The five Khalsa Sikhs leading the ceremony recite a prayer while the Amrit is made. Amrit is sprinkled on the head and eyes of the person taking part, and a prayer called the Mool Mantar is recited. The initiates drink some of the Amrit.

Once you have taken part in this ceremony, you are part of the Khalsa and known as an Amritdhari Sikh. Once a member of the Khalsa, initiates are given Singh for men (meaning 'Lion') and Kaur for women (meaning 'princess') to be part of their name.

Amritdhari

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Khalsa Sikh

DEFINITION: A Sikh who has gone through the Amrit ceremony and taken the Khalsa vows.

Ardas

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Ardaas

DEFINITION: A formal prayer said at the end of most Sikh worship. There are three parts; a tribute and thanks to God, a remembering of the ten Sikh Gurus and a request for the well-being and peace for all people.

Bandi Chhor Divas

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Bandi Chor Divas

DEFINITION: It is a celebration of good overcoming evil, and also freedom. This mela (festival) remembers when Guru Hargobind, who was unfairly imprisoned along with 52 princes, was released. Bandi Chhor Divas is celebrated at the same time as Hindus celebrate Diwali, over 5 days in October or November. Although some still refer to the Sikh celebrations as Diwali, Bandi Chhor Divas coincides with Diwali but is distinct in meaning.

It is common for an Akhand Path to be held at this time. Many Sikhs also go to visit the Harminder Sahib (Golden Temple) in Amritsar.

Chauri

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Chour, Chavar

DEFINITION: A fan, traditionally made of yak hair, which is waved over the Guru Granth Sahib by the Granthi as a sign of its authority.

Dasvandh

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Daswandh

DEFINITION: The Sikh practice of donating 10% of your earnings to charity. This is one of the vows made within the Khalsa ceremony. It is also a form of Sewa.

Divan Hall

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Darbar Sahib

DEFINITION: The main prayer hall in a Gurdwara. Darbar Sahib is also used to describe the Harminder Sahib in Amritsar.

Granthi

DEFINITION: This person both reads or recites from the Guru Granth Sahib, officiates at ceremonies and also looks after the Guru Granth Sahib. They can also lead services, although others are also able to do this. They lead ceremonies, such as those to choose the name of a child, using the Guru Granth Sahib.

Gurdwara

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Gurudwara

DEFINITION: The Sikh place of worship, which is sometimes called a temple. Gurdwara means, 'the doorway to the Guru'. The Gurdwara is where Sikhs gather to worship God, to hear readings from the Guru Granth Sahib, to sing hymns and to prepare and distribute free vegetarian food for all who come. The Gurdwara's kitchen is called the Langar. The Gurdwara is also a centre for the community, providing, for example, language classes or advice and support.

Gurmukh

DEFINITION: This means being 'God centred'. It is also used to refer to a person who lives according to the teachings of the Gurus.

Gurmukhi

DEFINITION: The script that the Guru Granth Sahib is written in. This word literally translates as 'from the mouth of the Guru'. Guru Angad, the second Guru, refined the written script of his day to make the hymns of the Gurus accessible to everyone. The script was called 'Gurmukhi' from this time on.

Gurpurbs

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Gurpurb

DEFINITION: Celebrations of the lives of the Gurus, for example, Guru Nanak's birthday.

Guru

DEFINITION: This word is most often used to mean 'teacher'. The word comes from the Sanskrit 'one who removes darkness'. The Gurus are considered, by Sikhs, to be spiritually perfect and morally correct. In Sikhi, there are ten human born Gurus:

Guru Nanak (1469-1539)

Guru Angad (1539-1552)

Guru Amar Das (1479-1574)

Guru Ram Das (1534-1581)

Guru Arjan (1563-1606)

Guru Hargobind (1595-1644)

Guru Har Rai (1630-1661)

Guru Harkrishan (1656-1664)

Guru Tegh Bahadur (1621-1675)

Guru Gobind Singh (born Guru Gobind Rai) (1666-1708)

The final Guru is the holy text of the Guru Granth Sahib which embodies the authority of the previous Gurus.

Guru Gobind Singh

DEFINITION: He was the tenth Guru, the last Guru in human form. He lived from 1666-1708 and established the Khalsa.

Guru Nanak

DEFINITION: The first of the Sikh Gurus who founded Sikhi. He lived between 1469 and 1539. Guru Nanak was born into a Hindu family but at 13, declined the sacred thread ceremony, emphasizing a universal path beyond ritual. He taught about equality, acceptance, respect and honesty and established the Langar. He also began collecting the writings that eventually became The Guru Granth Sahib.

Harminder Sahib

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Golden Temple

DEFINITION: The most well-known Gurdwara for Sikhs in Amritsar, Punjab, India. Harminder means 'temple of God'. It is a site visited by many Sikhs as it helps them to remember the oneness of God and humanity.

Hukam

DEFINITION: The will of God, or divine will.

It is also used to refer to a hymn that is read after the Ardas prayer.

Ik Onkar

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Ek Onkar, Ik Oankar

DEFINITION: A symbol, representing that there is only one God. There is also a line in the Mool Mantar meaning there is only one God.

Janamsakhis

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Janam Sakhis

DEFINITION: Writings which are said to be the birth stories of Guru Nanak.

Japji

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Japji Sahib

DEFINITION: This is found at the start of the Guru Granth Sahib. It includes the Mool Mantar, an opening verse, a series of 38 Pauris or hymns, and a closing verse. Some Sikhs say the Japji encompasses the whole essence of Sikhi, which is then expanded on in the rest of the Guru Granth Sahib.

Kachera

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Kacchera, kaccha

DEFINITION: Loose, cotton undershorts that symbolise modesty and purity. It is one of the 5 K's, or Panj Kakke.

Kangha

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Kanga

A wooden comb, which shows social responsibilities, such as cleanliness, are important.

It is one of the 5 K's, or Panj Kakke.

Kara

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Kada

DEFINITION: A steel bangle, representing the infinite and eternal presence of God, without beginning or end. It is one of the 5 K's, or Panj Kakke.

Karah Prashad

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Karah Parshad

DEFINITION: A sweet dish made of flour, ghee, sugar and water. It is shared at the end of services in the gurdwara as a blessing from God, and as a sign of equality.

Karta Purkh

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Kartaa Purakh

DEFINITION: A statement about God from the Mool Mantar and a Sikh belief. God is the creator of the universe and sustains it. .

Kaur

DEFINITION: This means princess, and it is the surname given to women in the Amrit ceremony when they join the Khalsa.

Kesh

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Kes

DEFINITION: Uncut hair, symbolising freedom from worldly fashion. This shows respect for the body. It is one of the 5 K's, or Panj Kakke.

Khalsa

A community of Sikh people who live by the values and disciplines of Sikhi and have reached a point in life where they want to make a complete commitment to their faith. Khalsa means pure. The Khalsa was established by Guru Gobind Singh in 1699.

This group of people have undergone a ceremony of initiation, Amrit Sanskar, promising to commit to specific duties and vows, such as wearing the 5 K's and giving a tenth of their income to charity. Other responsibilities include not smoking or drinking and being prepared to sacrifice everything for the Sikh faith. It should be noted that many committed members of the Sikh community never become members of the Khalsa, or do not do it until much later in their life.

Khanda

A Sikh symbol made up of three weapons:

A chakkar or chakra, which stand for God's infinity, without beginning and without end.

A Khanda, meaning double-edged sword, which stands for God's power of justice and mercy, or creation and destruction.

Two kirpans, meaning swords of mercy, which stand for miri-piri (worldly and spiritual power).

Kirat Karna

DEFINITION: To earn an honest living and work hard. One of the three foundations of Sikhi.

Kirpan

DEFINITION: A small, sheathed sword. Kirpan literally translates as 'sword of mercy'. It is worn diagonally on the torso. This reminds a person of their responsibilities to the community and the importance of protecting the vulnerable and working against injustice. It is one of the 5 K's, or Panj Kakke.

Kirtan

DEFINITION: A song of praise to God. These come from the Guru Granth Sahib and are both songs and poems. These are sung during Sikh worship.

Langar

DEFINITION: The community kitchen and dining area in the Gurdwara, where a free vegetarian meal is served to all visitors. The Langar is designed to show how equality between all people can be put into action; everyone shares the same meal in the same place, regardless of differences. People sit in rows, often on the floor, to eat. Serving, cooking or washing dishes at the Langar is seen as an act of Sewa.

Manmukh

DEFINITION: To be self-centered.

Mool Mantar

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Mul Mantar, Mool Mantra

DEFINITION: The first nine words of the Guru Granth Sahib, which is used as a prayer. Many Sikhs recite it frequently, perhaps several times a day. It is a Sikh declaration of belief, and it describes the nature of God.

This can be translated in many different ways: as 'One Being Energising Reality, Name, Creator, Without fear, Without hate, Form of Infinity, Beyond birth and death, Self-existent, or Grace.'

Mukti

DEFINITION: Liberation from the cycle of birth, death and rebirth. Mukti is the ultimate goal of Sikhs as it means they become one with Waheguru (God).

Naam Japna

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Naam Jaap, Naam Japo

DEFINITION: Part of worship for Sikhs which involves reciting and meditating on the name of God and thanking him for the gift of life. This is one of the three foundations of Sikhi.

Nam Simran

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Naam Simran

DEFINITION: Regular prayer and meditation, and meditating on and reciting the name, of God.

Nishan sahib

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Nishan Sahib

DEFINITION: A triangular orange flag displayed outside a Gurdwara. The flag features the Sikh symbol of the Khanda. The flag is replaced each year at Vaisakhi. The flagpole is also taken down and washed in milk and yoghurt and then water.

Palki

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Palkhi

DEFINITION: The dome, which forms part of the structure above the takht where the Guru Granth Sahib sits.

Pangat

DEFINITION: The rows that people sit in to eat food in the Langar. This shows equality.

Panj Pyare

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Panj Pyare, Panj Piare

DEFINITION: These are five representatives of the Khalsa, and they take a leading role in Sikh religious ceremonies. It is also the name given to the five Sikh men who offered to give their lives for the Sikh faith on the 14th of April 1699. The Panj Pyare became the first members of the Sikh Khalsa; those who have made promises to believe in one God and to follow the teachings of the Gurus.

Panth

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Paanth

DEFINITION: The literal translation of this is 'path'. Panth describes the whole Sikh community. The panth was started by Guru Nanak, the first of the ten Gurus, and developed further by the nine Gurus who followed him.

Rahit Maryada

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Rehit Maryada, Reht Maryada

DEFINITION: The code of conduct for Sikhs who have become part of the Khalsa, Amritdhari Sikhs.

Rumalla

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Rumala

DEFINITION: A silk cloth which covers the Guru Granth Sahib when it is not being read.

Sach Khand

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Sachkhand

DEFINITION: This has two meanings.

It is used to describe the room where the Guru Granth Sahib is placed over night. The Guru Granth Sahib is placed on an ornate bed, as it is treated as a living Guru.

It also means an individual's union with God.

Samsara

DEFINITION: The cycle of birth, death and rebirth (reincarnation).

Sangat

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Sanghat

DEFINITION: The community of Sikhs who meet to worship in the Gurdwara.

Sewa

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Seva

Selfless service. Sewa can be performed in a variety of ways, for example, helping at the Gurdwara or in the local community, or donating money to charities. There are three types of Sewa:

Physical (tan): such as helping at the Langar.

Mental (man): such as teaching someone to understand the Guru Granth Sahib.

Material (dhan): such as donating 10% of your earnings to charities.

Sikh

DEFINITION: The word Sikh comes from Punjabi, 'Sikhana' (to learn). A Sikh is one who learns.

Sikhi

DEFINITION: The preferred alternative to the term Sikhism by most Sikhs. Using Sikhi as a term for the beliefs and lives of Sikh people suggests a continuous state of learning.

Sikhism

DEFINITION: The beliefs and lives of Sikh people. The word Sikhism was coined by the British Raj, and it was not a term used by Sikhs themselves. Many Sikhs prefer the term Sikhi to describe their beliefs and lives.

Singh

DEFINITION: This means lion. It is the surname given to men in the Amrit ceremony when they join the Khalsa.

Takht

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Takhat, Takat

DEFINITION: A structure with a raised seat on which the Guru Granth Sahib sits under a canopy.

The Guru Granth Sahib

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Guru Granth Sahib

DEFINITION: The last human Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, decreed that the scripture of the Sikhs, the Guru Granth Sahib, would be the final Guru. The sacred text, the Guru Granth Sahib, is therefore regarded as a living Guru, and so is treated with the greatest respect and honour.

The Guru Granth Sahib contains the actual words, hymns, poems and prayers spoken by the founders of Sikhi, as well as the writings of the holiest people from Hindu and Muslim traditions who lived at the time the scriptures were being written down. It was called the Adi Granth and was then added to, eventually becoming the Guru Granth Sahib. It has 1430 pages, and page numbers are used to reference where parts of the text can be found.

Turban

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Dastar, Dastaar

DEFINITION: A traditional head covering worn by some Sikh men and women. It is made of an eight-metre piece of cotton and is worn in a variety of colours. It helps to keep the Kesh, uncut hair, tidy and is also a visible sign of identity.

Vaisakhi

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Baisakhi

DEFINITION: This mela, festival, takes place on 13th or 14th of April and celebrates the birth of the Khalsa, the Sikh community, by Guru Gobind Singh. It often by people taking Amrit, as it is the most popular time of year for people to join the Khalsa.

In many towns and cities with large communities of Sikhs, there is a procession with the Guru Granth Sahib transported for everyone to see, led by the Panj Pyare. The road is swept clean before the Guru Granth Sahib passes as a symbol of respect. Members from the local Sikh community form a procession behind the Guru Granth Sahib, and the more infirm travel in coaches. A new Nishan Sahib is raised on the flagpole at the Gurdwara.

Vand Chhakna

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Vand Chakna, Wand Chakna

DEFINITION: To share generously of both your earnings and your food and to give to charity. Sewa is a form of Vand Chhakna. This is one of the three foundations of Sikhi.

Waheguru

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Wahe Guru, Vaheguru, Vahiguru

DEFINITION: A term used to refer to God, which means, 'Wonderful Lord'. Many Sikh hymns and greetings include the name 'Waheguru', and this contains the idea of light and goodness overcoming darkness and evil.