

Visiting A Gurdwara



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The Sikh place of worship is called *gurdwara*. The literal translation of the term gurdwara is "the Guru's door", but it also means "by means of the Guru's grace." The gurdwara is the temple or house in which is kept the *Guru Granth Sahib* (the Sikh scripture).

The information in this booklet is designed to assist a visitor learn about the history of the gurdwara and the various activities in a gurdwara. It also provides information about the protocol followed in a gurdwara and a glossary of terms and traditions associated with a gurdwara.

We hope you enjoy your visit to the gurdwara!

History

Guru Nanak, the first Sikh *Guru* (divinely inspired prophet-teacher) and the founder of the Sikh religion, established the first gurdwara in the early 1500s. The Sikh Gurus established gurdwaras as places where a *sangat* (congregation) could come together to worship as a community by reciting and reflecting upon hymns in the *Guru Granth Sahib*. Gurdwaras are not only a religious institution for the Sikhs where they can learn about their religion and pray, but is also a political institution where Sikhs can discuss important local and global issues.

Using the gurdwaras as the centers of activity, the Gurus built flourishing cities around them. The gurdwaras have been a focal point of Sikh communities since the time of *Guru Nanak* and continue to be so even today. They are found throughout the world, wherever a sizable Sikh community exists. A *Nishan Sahib*, a saffron colored flag with an emblem of a double-edged sword, two other swords, and a sharp iron ring, almost always indicates the site of a gurdwara.



Every gurdwara provides *langar*, a free communal meal eaten together by everyone visiting a Gurdwara. Started by *Guru Nanak* and institutionalized by the third *Guru*, *Amar Das*, langar exemplifies an important Sikh teaching: all human beings are equal regardless of their socioeconomic status, race or religion. It was mandatory for all to partake in langar before having an audience with the *Guru*, so that

kings and untouchables alike would sit together and eat the same meal.

Appearance

Gurdwaras range from majestic buildings to small rooms in someone's home. Any place that has the Guru Granth Sahib installed and a sangat present may be considered a gurdwara. Gurdwaras are a dear part of a Sikh's life because they provide Sikhs with an opportunity to sit with other Sikh followers and promote spiritual growth.

Personnel

Usually, a gurdwara has one or more caretakers who are proficient in reciting the Sikh scriptures. The caretaker is called a *Granthi* and is usually addressed as *Bhai Sahib* (brother). Any Sikh man or woman can be a Granthi.

Gurdwara Protocol

- WEAR modest attire
- REMOVE SHOES when entering the congregation hall. This is a sign of respect to the sovereignty of the Guru Granth Sahib. All gurdwaras have shoe racks.
- COVER HEAD at all times as a sign of respect to the Guru Granth Sahib
- BOW in front of the Guru Granth Sahib upon joining the congregation. Non-Sikhs are not required to bow, but should enter and quietly join the congregation. (People offer money and, sometimes, other materials towards the operation of the gurdwara; but this is optional.)
- SIT on the Floor
- STAND up during *Ardas* (prayer to God)
- SIT on the floor during langar and keep head COVERED

- NO alcohol, tobacco, or smoking on the gurdwara premises
- Men and women are seated separately in many gurdwaras. However, this is not required religiously.

Please refer to the Terms and Traditions section below for an explanation of Sikh concepts.

Chronological Outline of a Typical Day at the Gurdwara

- ◆ *Prakash* – A short ceremony performed when the Guru Granth Sahib is formally opened each day
- ◆ *Nitnem* – Daily prayers
- ◆ *Keertan* – Hymns and religious sermons
- ◆ Ardas – Prayer to God: everyone stands facing the Guru Granth Sahib
- ◆ *Hukam* – The order of the day read from the Guru Granth Sahib
- ◆ Community announcements and discussion, if any.
- ◆ Langar – Sharing a communal meal from the community kitchen
- ◆ Religious School - Sikh history or *gurmukhi* classes conducted for Sikh children in most gurdwaras
- ◆ *Nitnem* – Evening prayers
- ◆ *Sukh Aasan* – A ceremony to formally close the Guru Granth Sahib that signals the end of the services

Terms and Traditions

Anand Karaj The Sikh wedding ceremony

Ardas A Sikh prayer, addressed directly to God. *Ardas* is said on several occasions, such as after the completion of morning, evening or

night prayers. It is also said at the beginning and/or end of an important event. It is always done while standing.

- Chaur** A flowing wisk that is respectfully waved over the *Guru Granth Sahib* to indicate its sovereignty.
- Diwan Hall** This is the main hall in the *gurdwara* in which the religious services are held, with the *Guru Granth Sahib* (see *Guru Granth Sahib*) placed at the front.
- Giani** Someone learned in the Sikh religion (like a Rabbi).
- Granthi** (loosely) Minister. A *Granthi's* prime duties include arranging daily services, reading, teaching and explaining the Sikh scripture (see *Guru Granth Sahib*). More generally, a *Granthi* is responsible for the care of the *gurdwara* (see *Gurdwara*), the *Guru Granth Sahib*, and also to teach and advise community members.
- Gurbani** The contents of the Sikh scripture, *Guru Granth Sahib* (see *Guru Granth Sahib*) containing the revealed wisdom of the Sikh *Gurus* (see *Guru*), in their own words.
- Gurdwara** A Sikh place of worship.
- Gurmukhi** The script of the *Guru Granth Sahib*, which is also used in modern Punjabi. ੴ ਅੰਤ ਸਹ ਕ ਖ
ਵਾਹਿਗੁਰੂ
- Gurpurb/Gurpurab** Sikh holiday commemorating the birth or death of a Sikh *Guru* (see *Guru*).
- Guru** Divinely inspired spiritual prophet-teacher. Refers to one of the ten founders of the Sikh faith, the Sikh scripture (see *Guru Granth Sahib*), or God.

<i>Guru Granth Sahib</i>	The Sikh scripture, written mostly in the form of hymns and poetry, it includes the writings of six of the Sikh <i>Gurus</i> (see <i>Guru</i>) as well as the devotional writings of 36 other saints, both Muslim and Hindu. It is 1,430 pages long and is the embodiment of the spiritual knowledge and authority of all of the <i>Gurus</i> , and is treated with the utmost reverence by Sikhs.
<i>Hukam/Hukum</i>	A daily reading taken at random from the Sikh scripture considered by Sikhs as the "command of the <i>Guru</i> (see <i>Guru</i>)" for the day. A new <i>Hukam</i> is taken each day.
<i>Katha</i>	A religious sermon on Sikh theology, history, or discourse on hymn(s) from the <i>Guru Granth Sahib</i> , usually conducted by the Granthi.
<i>Karah Parshad</i>	A dish of sacred pudding prepared and served at all religious ceremonies conducted in the presence of the <i>Guru Granth Sahib</i> . It is served after the reading of the <i>hukam</i> . By accepting the <i>karah parshad</i> , Sikhs symbolically accept the <i>hukam</i> as the sweet blessing of their <i>Guru</i> and agree to take it to heart.
<i>Kirtan/Keertan</i>	Singing hymns (see <i>Gurbani</i>) from <i>the Guru Granth Sahib</i> (see <i>Guru Granth Sahib</i>), usually accompanied by instruments. The singing of <i>Keertan</i> is a primary form of worship for Sikhs.
<i>Langar</i>	The devotional meal eaten by the congregation as part of the religious service. <i>Langar</i> is free and open to all, regardless of religious background, class, color or ethnicity. A central part of Sikh practice, its roots lie in the promotion of equality among all humanity, and the rejection of the Hindu caste system, which forbade people of different castes (social and occupational standings) from eating together.
<i>Matha Tekana</i>	Bowing down and touching the floor with one's forehead in front of the <i>Guru Granth Sahib</i>

(see *Guru Granth Sahib*). It is important to note that Sikhs do not bow before the actual book itself, as some type of idol. By bowing, Sikhs are submitting themselves to the scripture: the knowledge and true written words of the *Gurus* and other saints within. Sikhs perform *Matha Tekana* as they enter the *Diwan* Hall. Non-Sikhs are not required to bow, but may enter and quietly join the congregation. Worshippers generally place a donation in front of the scripture, which is used for the management of the *gurdwara*, but this is not mandatory.

Nitnem

Sikh daily prayers. Sikhs are required to pray three times a day, with the longest prayers early in the morning, shorter prayers in the evening, and the shortest prayer just before going to bed.

Palki

A canopy above the Sikh scripture, *Guru Granth Sahib*, to signify the respect of its authority. This practice is derived from the traditional treatment of kings in India.



PALKI

Prakash

A short ceremony performed when the *Guru Granth Sahib* (see *Guru Granth Sahib*) is formally opened each day.

Ragi/Raagi

A musician who is trained in the singing of sacred Sikh hymns (see *Shabad* and *Keertan*).

Sangat

Sikh congregation

Sat Sri Akal

A common Sikh greeting, meaning, "God is True and Timeless".

Shabad

A sacred Sikh hymn.

Tabla & Harmonium Musical instruments, a set of small drums and a piano-like instrument respectively, used to perform *Keertan*.



TABLA

Waheguru/Vaheguru The name for God most commonly used by Sikhs. Meditating on the name of God is paramount to Sikhs, and the name *Waheguru* is considered by Sikhs to be the culmination of all aspects of God.

Waheguru ji ka Khalsa, Waheguru ji ki Fateh

Literally meaning "The Khalsa belongs to Waheguru (God), Victory belongs to Waheguru (God)." This is the traditional Sikh greeting. It is said before the beginning of and at the conclusion of programs at the gurdwara like *katha*, announcements, and *keertan*. *Guru Gobind Singh*, the tenth *Guru* of the Sikhs, gave this greeting to Sikhs on the day he established the Sikh baptism ceremony known as *Amrit*.

Further Reading and References

□ Books

The following books provide insights into the Sikhism and give an overview of Sikh beliefs and traditions.

1. *The Sikhs*. Patwant Singh (Doubleday, 2001)
2. *A Popular Dictionary of Sikhism*. W. Owen Cole and Piara Singh Sambhi (Curzon Press, 1990)
3. *Sikhs of the Punjab*. J.S.Grewal (Cambridge University Press, 1998)
4. *Visiting a Sikh Temple*. Davinder Kaur Babraa (Lutterworth Press, 2000)
5. *Sikh Gurdwara*. Kanwaljit Kaur-Singh (Milwaukee: Gareth Stevens Publishing, 2000)

6. *Buddhists, Hindus and Sikhs in America*. Paul David Numrich, Raymond B. Williams and Gurinder Singh Mann (Oxford University Press, 2001).
7. *The Name of My Beloved: Verses of the Sikh Gurus*. Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh (Harper Collins, 1995).

These books may be ordered from:

- Nahal Global Trading Co.
Tel: 408-972-2476
Fax: 408-224-8496
Web: [http:// www.maboli.com/nahal](http://www.maboli.com/nahal)
- The Sikh Heritage
Tel: (301) 434-0061
- SikhLink
Web: <http://www.sikhlink.net/>
- Amazon.com
Web: <http://www.amazon.com/>

□ Internet Resources

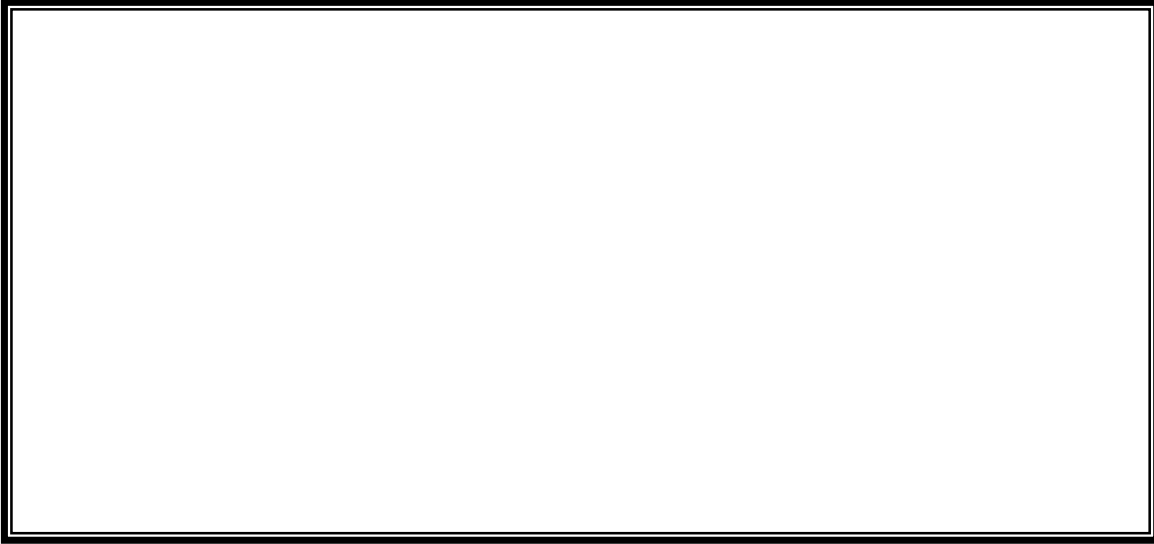
Further information may be obtained from the following sources:

1. Gateway to Sikhism -- <http://www.allaboutsikhs.com>
2. The Sikhism Home Page -- <http://www.sikhs.org>
3. SikhNet -- <http://www.sikhnet.com>
4. Sikh Mediawatch and Resource Task Force (SMART) -- <http://www.sikhmediawatch.org>
5. Sikh History -- <http://www.sikh-history.com>

□ Fun Sikh Web Sites

1. Sikh Link -- <http://www.sikhlink.net>
2. Khalsa Pride -- <http://www.khalsapride.com>

**For more information about the Sikh community in your area,
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About SMART:

Founded in 1996 to promote the fair and accurate portrayal of Sikh Americans and the Sikh religion in American media and society, the Sikh Mediawatch and Resource Task Force (SMART) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan membership based organization. Its mission is to combat bigotry and prejudice, protect the rights and religious freedoms of Sikh Americans, and provide resources that empower the Sikh American community.

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