

## Highlights

1. 'Sikh' literally means disciple or student
2. Sikhism is currently the 5th largest religion in the world
3. There are 23 million Sikhs worldwide
4. Sikhism is approximately 500 years old
5. Sikhs believe in ONE GOD
6. Sikhs believe that the human life is a precious blessing and that we should treat ourselves and our bodies with the utmost respect
7. Sikhs believe that everyone is divine; there is no evil in anyone
8. Sikhs believe in equality of all mankind—there is no class, caste, color, sex, or religious distinction
9. Sikh history is traced to 10 human Gurus, or prophet-teachers from 1469 to 1699
10. The Sri Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh holy scripture, is the eternal, spiritual guide, or Guru, of the Sikhs
11. Sikhs encourage living a family life and making an honest living
12. Sikhs promote education and science
13. 99% of the people in the world that wear turbans are Sikhs



## UNITED SIKH ASSOCIATION AT NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

Founded approximately ten years ago the United Sikh Association at New York University (USA at NYU) is an on campus student run religious organization. USA at NYU has a mission to encourage an on-campus community that spreads awareness of the Sikh religion and inspires others to engage in community service. We aim to achieve our goals through religious, cultural and social activities open to the entire NYU community.

With the support of over 40 members, USA at NYU strives to achieve its mission by living closely to the principles of Sikhism, the religion which the organization represents. These principles are those of Seva, or self-less service, Sangat, or community and spiritual support, and Simran, or remembrance of God at all times. These three principles and ideals of Sikhism are incorporated throughout USA at NYU's endeavors.

**Seva. Sangat. Simran.**

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# WHO ARE THE



# SIKHS

**UNITED SIKH ASSOCIATION**  
at New York University

## 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 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 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

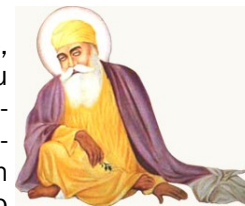


avoid asceticism as a means to reaching God. Spurred by their religious dictates, Sikhs have a long, celebrated heritage of speaking out against injustice and standing up for the defenseless.

The twenty-three million Sikhs worldwide trace the origin of their religion to Punjab, meaning the land of the 5 rivers, located in present-day 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. Sikhs do not condemn other faiths. Just as God transcends the boundaries of race, class, gender, and ethnicity, the Sikh religion dismisses such 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 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 every respect—political, social, and religious—over two and a half centuries before the founding of the United States.



## The Khalsa

In the spring of 1699, *Guru Gobind Singh*—the tenth and final human *Guru*—revealed a new order of the Sikhs, called the *Khalsa* ("meaning belonging only to the Divine"). The *Khalsa* consists of Sikhs who undergo an initiation ceremony, or baptism 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 wearing 5 articles of faith.



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*, a religious sword symbolic of power and the freedom of spirit. It is used only in times of self-defense and adds to self-respect for the human body; a *Kara*, an iron bracelet worn on the dominant hand—a symbolic link to all Sikhs signifying their unbreakable link with God. Also a symbol of controlling one's feelings and a reminder to complete behavior in the event of weakness; A *kanga*, a comb to keep the uncut hair clean and sanitary; and lastly, a *kacchera*, under-shorts which are symbolic of continence and high moral character.

