Sikhism was founded in the Punjab by Guru Nanak in the 15th Century CE and is a monotheistic religion. Sikhs think religion should be practised by living in the world and coping with life's everyday problems. There are 20 million Sikhs in the world, most of whom live in the Punjab province of India. The 2001 census recorded 336,000 [**Sikhs in the UK.**](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/sikhism/history/britishsikhism.shtml) Sikhism was [**founded**](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/sikhism/history/history_1.shtml) in the 16th century in the Punjab district of what is now India and Pakistan. It was founded by [**Guru Nanak**](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/sikhism/people/nanak.shtml) and is based on his teachings, and those of the 9 Sikh gurus who followed him.

The most important thing in Sikhism is the internal religious state of the individual.

* Sikhism is a [**monotheistic religion**](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/sikhism/beliefs/beliefs.shtml)
* Sikhism stresses the importance of doing good actions rather than merely carrying out rituals
* Sikhs believe that the way to lead a good life is to:
  + keep God in heart and mind at all times
  + live honestly and work hard
  + treat everyone equally
  + be generous to the less fortunate
  + serve others
* The Sikh place of worship is called a [**Gurdwara**](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/sikhism/ritesrituals/gurdwara_1.shtml)
* The Sikh scripture is the Guru Granth Sahib, a book that Sikhs consider a living Guru

The [**tenth Sikh Guru**](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/sikhism/people/gobindsingh.shtml) decreed that after his death the spiritual guide of the Sikhs would be the teachings contained in that book, so the Guru Granth Sahib now has the status of a Guru, and Sikhs show it the respect they would give to a human Guru. The community of men and women who have been initiated into the Sikh faith is the [**Khalsa**](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/sikhism/customs/fiveks.shtml). The Khalsa celebrated its 300th anniversary in 1999. Guru Gobind Singh decreed that where Sikhs could not find answers in the Guru Granth Sahib, they should decide issues as a community, based on the principles of their scripture.

**God**

* There is only one God
* God is without form, or gender
* Everyone has direct access to God
* Everyone is equal before God
* A good life is lived as part of a community, by living honestly and caring for others
* Empty religious rituals and superstitions have no value

**Living in God and community**

Sikhs focus their lives around their relationship with God, and being a part of the Sikh community. The Sikh ideal combines action and belief. To live a good life a person should do good deeds as well as meditating on God.

**God and the cycle of life**

Sikhs believe that human beings spend their time in a cycle of birth, life, and rebirth. They share this belief with followers of other Indian religious traditions such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism.

The quality of each particular life depends on the law of Karma. Karma sets the quality of a life according to how well or badly a person behaved in their previous life. The only way out of this cycle, which all faiths regard as painful, is to achieve a total knowledge of and union with God.

**The God of grace**

Sikh spirituality is centred round this need to understand and experience God, and eventually become one with God. To do this a person must switch the focus of their attention from themselves to God. They get this state, which is called *mukti* (liberation), through the grace of God. That means it's something God does to human beings, and not something that human beings can earn. However, God shows people through holy books, and by the examples of saints, the best ways to get close to him.

Truth is the highest of all virtues, but higher still is truthful living.

Sikhs believe that God can't be understood properly by human beings, but he can be experienced through love, worship, and contemplation. Sikhs look for God both inside themselves and in the world around them. They do this to help themselves achieve liberation and union with God.

**Getting close to God**

When a Sikh wants to see God, they look both at the created world and into their own heart and soul.

Their aim is to see the divine order that God has given to everything, and through it to understand the nature of God. Most human beings can’t see the true reality of God because they are blinded by their own self-centred pride (Sikhs call it *haumain*) and concern for physical things.

**God inside us**

Sikhs believe that God is inside every person, no matter how wicked they appear, and so everyone is capable of change. Just as fragrance is in the flower, and reflection is in the mirror, in just the same way, God is within you.

**God beyond ourselves**

Sikhs believe that God’s message can be found in several ways outside ourselves.

* The message is written in the whole of creation; look at it with open eyes and see the truth of God, for creation is the visible message of God
* Sikhs believe that most of us misunderstand the universe. We think that it exists on its own, when it really exists because God wills it to exist, and is a portrait of God’s own nature
* The message has been shown to us by the Gurus in their lives and in their words
* The message is set down in the teachings of scripture

**Living a good life in this world**

Sikhs don't think it pleases God if people pay no attention to others and simply devote themselves slavishly to religion. Sikhism doesn’t ask people to turn away from ordinary life to get closer to God. In fact it demands that they use ordinary life as a way to get closer to God. A Sikh serves God by serving (*seva*) other people every day. By devoting their lives to service they get rid of their own ego and pride.

Many Sikhs carry out chores in the Gurdwara as their service to the community. These range from working in the kitchen to cleaning the floor. The Langar, or free food kitchen, is a community act of service. Sikhs also regard caring for the poor or sick as an important duty of service.

**The three duties**

The three duties that a Sikh must carry out can be summed up in three words; Pray, Work, Give.

* Nam japna:
  + Keeping God in mind at all times.
* Kirt Karna:
  + Earning an honest living. Since God is truth, a Sikh seeks to live honestly. This doesn't just mean avoiding crime; Sikhs avoid gambling, begging, or working in the alcohol or tobacco industries.
* Vand Chhakna:
  + (Literally, sharing one's earnings with others) Giving to charity and caring for others.

**The five vices**

Sikhs try to avoid the five vices that make people self-centred, and build barriers against God in their lives.

* Lust
* Covetousness and greed
* Attachment to things of this world
* Anger
* Pride

If a person can overcome these vices they are on the road to liberation.

History:

**Militarisation of the Sikhs**

Sikhism was well established by the time of [**Guru Arjan**](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/sikhism/people/arjandev.shtml), the fifth Guru. Guru Arjan completed the establishment of Amritsar as the capital of the Sikh world, and compiled the first authorised book of Sikh scripture, the Adi Granth. However, during Arjan's time Sikhism was seen as a threat by the state and Guru Arjan was eventually executed for his faith in 1606. The sixth Guru, Hargobind, started to militarise the community so that they would be able to resist any oppression. The Sikhs fought a number of battles to preserve their faith. The Sikhs then lived in relative peace with the political rulers until the time of the [**Moghal Emperor, Aurangzeb**](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/history/mughalempire_1.shtml#h5), who used force to make his subjects accept Islam. Aurangzeb had the ninth Guru, [**Tegh Bahadur**](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/sikhism/people/teghbahadur.shtml), arrested and executed in 1675.

**The Khalsa**

The tenth Guru, [**Gobind Singh**](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/sikhism/people/gobindsingh.shtml), recreated the Sikhs as a military group of men and women called the [**Khalsa**](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/sikhism/holydays/vaisakhi.shtml) in 1699, with the intention that the Sikhs should for ever be able to defend their faith. Gobind Singh established the [**Sikh rite of initiation**](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/sikhism/ritesrituals/amrit.shtml) (called khandey di pahul) and the [**5 Ks**](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/sikhism/customs/fiveks.shtml) which give Sikhs their unique appearance. Gobind Singh was the last human Guru. Sikhs now treat their scriptures as their Guru.

**After the Gurus**

In the middle of the century (1750s) the Sikhs rose up again, and over the next 50 years took over more and more territory. In 1799 Ranjit Singh captured Lahore, and in 1801 established the Punjab as an independent state, with himself as Maharaja.

**Defeated by the British**

After Ranjit Singh died in 1839 the Sikh state crumbled, damaged by vicious internal battles for the leadership. In 1845-6 troops of the British Empire defeated the Sikh armies, and took over much Sikh territory. The Sikhs rebelled again in 1849, and were defeated by the British, this time conclusively.

**The Sikhs and the British Raj**

After this final battle, the Sikhs and the British discovered they had much in common and built a good relationship. The tradition began of Sikhs serving with great distinction in the British Army. The Sikhs got on well with the British partly because they came to think of themselves less as subjects of the Raj than as partners of the British. The British helped themselves get a favourable religious spin when they took control of the Sikh religious establishment by putting their own choices in control of the Gurdwaras. Most of Britain's Sikhs have their origins in immigration either from the Punjab in Northwest India in the 1950s and 60s, or from East Africa slightly later. The first recorded Sikh settler in Britain was Maharajah Duleep Singh. The Maharajah was dethroned after six years' rule, and exiled to Britain in 1849 at the age of 14, after the Anglo-Sikh wars. **The main immigration of the Sikhs** The first Sikh migration came in the 1950s. It was mostly of men from the Punjab seeking work in British industry, which had a shortage of unskilled labour. Most of the new arrivals worked in industries like foundries and textiles. These new arrivals mostly settled in London, Birmingham and West Yorkshire. The first batch of Sikh migrants usually removed the outward religious symbols (turban, hair and beard) as racist prejudice in Britain would have kept them out of work.

**Public worship**

Although Sikhs can worship on their own, they see congregational worship as having its own special merits. Sikhs believe that God is visible in the Sikh congregation or *Sangat*, and that God is pleased by the act of serving the Sangat. Congregational Sikh worship takes place in a [**Gurdwara**](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/sikhism/ritesrituals/gurdwara_1.shtml). Sikh public worship can be led by any Sikh, male or female, who is competent to do so.