

Gurunanak



Sikhism originated with Guru Nanak five centuries ago. From an early age he showed a deeply spiritual character. He broke away from his family's traditions and belief systems, refusing to participate in empty rituals. Nanak married and entered business, but remained focused on God and meditation. Eventually Nanak became a wandering minstrel. Guru Nanak travelled far and wide teaching people the message of one God who dwells in every one of His creations and constitutes the eternal Truth. He composed poetry in praise of one God, and set it to music. He rejected idolatry, and the worship of demigods. He spoke out against the caste system and he set up a unique spiritual, social, and political platform based on equality, fraternal love, goodness, and virtue.



When & Where Born

Nanak was born to Kalyan Chand Das Bedi, popularly shortened to Mehta Kalu, and Mata Tripta on 15 April 1469 at Rāi Bhoi Kī Talvaṇḍī (present day Nankana Sahib, Punjab, Pakistan) near Lahore.

Brief Life History of Guru Nanak

His father was the local patwari (accountant) for crop revenue in the village of Talwandi. His parents were both Hindus and belonged to the merchant caste. At the age of around 16 years, Nanak started working under Daulat Khan Lodi, employer of Nanaki's husband. This was a formative time for Nanak, as the Puratan (traditional) Janam Sakhi suggests, and in his numerous allusions to governmental structure in his hymns, most likely gained at this time.

Commentaries on his life give details of his blossoming awareness from a young age. At the age of five, Nanak is said to have voiced interest in divine subjects. At age seven, his father enrolled him at the village school as was the custom. Notable lore recounts that as a child Nanak astonished his teacher by describing the implicit symbolism of the first letter of the alphabet, which is an almost straight stroke in Persian or Arabic, resembling the mathematical version of one, as denoting the unity or oneness of God

On 24 September 1487 Nanak married Mata Sulakkhani, daughter of Mūl Chand and Chando Rāñī, in the town of Batala. The couple had two sons, Sri Chand (8 September 1494 – 13 January 1629) and Lakhmi Chand (12 February 1497 – 9 April 1555). Sri Chand received enlightenment from Guru Nanak's teachings and went on to become the founder of the Udasi sect.

Rai Bular, the local landlord and Nanak's sister Bibi Nanaki were the first people who recognised divine qualities in the boy. They encouraged and supported him to study and travel.



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His sister, Nanaki, lived with her husband in a town called Sultanpur. They found Nanak a job working in a granary. Nanak left his wife and sons with his parents promising to send for them as soon as he could support them. Nanak did well in his new position. He treated everyone generously, and dealt with them fairly. Before long his family joined him, and they moved into a house of their own.

Sikh tradition states that at around 1499, at the age of 30, he had a vision. After he failed to return from his ablutions, his clothes were found on the bank of a local stream called the Kali Bein. The townspeople assumed he had drowned in the river; Three days after disappearing, Nanak reappeared, staying silent. From this point onwards, Nanak is described in accounts as a Guru, and Sikhism was born.

In 1499 Nanak embarked on his Divine Mission and went towards east, west, north and south and visited various centres of Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, Jainis, Sufis, Yogis and Sidhas. He met people of different religions, tribes, cultures and races. He travelled on foot with his Muslim companion named Bhai Mardana, a minstrel. His travels are called Udasis. In his first Udasi (travel), Nanak covered east of India and returned home after spending about 6 years. He started from Sultanpur in 1499 and went to his village Talwandi to meet and inform his parents about his long journey. His parents wanted their young son to provide comfort and protection for them in their old age and so they told him they would prefer it if he did not go. But he told them that the world was burning in the fire of Kalyug and that thousands and thousands were waiting for the Divine message of the Almighty for comfort, love and salvation. The Guru, therefore, told his parents, "There is a call from Heaven, I must go whither He directs me to go." Upon hearing these words, his parents agreed and gave their blessings. So Nanak started his mission and the roots of Sikhism were laid down first towards the east of India.

After 25 years of his spiritual journeys across India and outside, Guru Nanak died on 22 September 1539 in Kartarpur (in present day Pakistan), at the age of 70.

Principles & Practices in Spiritual Life

Guru Nanak was believed to be Messenger of God and continued it in Sikh Guru Tradition. The main basic belief of Sikhism is no revenge, but to spread the message of kindness, and peace. Sikhism is one of the most recently formed religions in the world. The Sikhs, the people who follow the religion, follow the teaching of Guru Granth Sahib (the holy book for the Sikhs)

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Guru Nanak practiced the following and asked his followers the same were to be practiced in three ways:

- *Vand Chakkō*: Sharing with others, helping those with less who are in need
- *Kirat Karō*: Earning/making a living honestly, without exploitation or fraud
- *Naam Japna*: Meditating on God's name to control your 5 evils to eliminate suffering and live a happy life.

Spirituality in his life

Nanak became acquainted with a Muslim minstrel, named Mardana at Sultanpur. They met every morning at a local river, where they meditated before going to work. The entire community expressed astonishment that men of different faiths could worship together.

One morning, Nanak went to meditate and bathe beside the *Kali Bein*, or Black River, with Mardana. Nanak walked into the river and disappeared beneath the water. When he did not show up for work, his employer discovered that he had never come back out from under the water. Everyone assumed that he had drowned except for his sister Nanaki. Three days passed and then, astounding everyone, Nanak emerged from the river alive saying, "*Na koe Hindu, na koe Musalman* - There is no Hindu, there is no Muslim." The amazed town's people agreed that Nanak must be a completely enlightened being and began to call him "Guru."

Nanak immersed himself fully in meditation. He seldom spoke to anyone and quit his job. He gave away all of his personal belongings to the poor. He made living arrangements for his wife and sons, and then left town with his spiritual companion Mardana. They became wandering minstrels. Mardana played a stringed instrument called a rabab and accompanied Nanak, when he sang his poetic compositions. They embarked on a series of Udasi mission tours and traveled together preaching, and teaching, that there is only one God.

Although the exact account of his itinerary is disputed, he is widely acknowledged to have made four major journeys, spanning thousands of kilometres, the first tour being east towards Bengal, Assam and Manipur, the second south towards Sri Lanka, the third north towards Kashmir, Ladakh, Tibet and Arunachal Pradesh and the final tour west towards Baghdad, Mecca and Medina on the Arabian Peninsula

Nanak crossed into Arunachal Pradesh and visited most of the part. First while going to Lhasa (Tibet) he passed through Tawang after crossing from Bhutan and entered Tibet from Samdurang Chu. He returned from Lhasa and went to the famous monastery Samye and entered Pemoshubu Menchukha in Arunachal Pradesh. He meditated for some time at this location. From Menchukha he went back to Tibet, brought the



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residents of Southern Tibet and got them settled in Menchukha. Thereafter through Gelling and Tuting he proceeded to Sadiya and Braham-Kund, before entering the state of Assam again.

Nanak was moved by the plight of the people of world and wanted to tell them about the "real message of God". The people of the world were confused by the conflicting message given by priests, pundits, qazis, mullahs, etc. He was determined to bring his message to the masses; so in 1499, he decided to set out on his sacred mission to spread the holy message of peace and compassion to all of mankind.

Most of his journeys were made on foot with his companion Bhai Mardana. He travelled in all four directions – North, East, West and South. The founder Sikh Guru is believed to have travelled more than 28,000 km in five major tours of the world during the period from 1500 to 1524.

Nanak appointed Bhai Lehna as the successor Guru, renaming him as Guru Angad, meaning "one's very own" or "part of you". Shortly after proclaiming Bhai Lehna as his successor.

The first gurdwara was built in Kartarpur, on the banks of Ravi River in the Punjab region by the first Sikh guru, Guru Nanak Dev Ji in the year 1521. It now lies in the Narowal District of west Punjab (Pakistan). Guru Hargobind, the sixth Sikh guru, introduced the word 'Gurdwara'.

Teachings of Guru Nanak

There is no Hindu. There is no Muslim. There is only one brotherhood of humanity. Nanak's teachings can be found in the Sikh scripture Guru Granth Sahib, as a vast collection of revelatory verses recorded in Gurmukhi.

Firstly a supreme Godhead who although incomprehensible, manifests in all major religions, the Singular "Doer" and formless. It is described as the indestructible (undying) form.

Nanak describes the dangers of egotism (haumai- "I am") and calls upon devotees to engage in worship through the word of God. The word of God cleanses the individual to make such worship possible. This is related to the revelation that God is the Doer and without God there is no other.

Nanak warned against hypocrisy and falsehood saying that these are pervasive in humanity and that religious actions can also be in vain. It may also be said that ascetic practices are disfavoured by Nanak, who suggests remaining inwardly detached whilst living as a householder.



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Religious books / Biography of Guru Nanak

Gurdas, a scribe of the Gurū Granth Sahib, also wrote about Nanak's life in his *vārs*. Although these too were compiled sometime after Nanak's time, they are less detailed than the Janamsākhīs. The Janamsākhīs recount in minute detail the circumstances of the birth of the guru.

Gyan-ratanavali attributed to Bhai Mani Singh who wrote it with the express intention of correcting heretical accounts of Guru Nanak. Bhai Mani Singh was a Sikh of Guru Gobind Singh who was approached by some Sikhs with a request that he should prepare an authentic account of Guru Nanak's life. Bhai Mani Singh writes: Just as swimmers fix reeds in the river so that those who do not know the way may also cross, so I shall take Bhai Gurdas's var as my basis and in accordance with it, and with the accounts that I have heard at the court of the tenth Master, I shall relate to you whatever commentary issues from my humble mind. At the end of the Janam-sakhi there is an epilogue in which it is stated that the completed work was taken to Guru Gobind Singh for his seal of approval. Guru Sahib duly signed it and commended it as a means of acquiring knowledge of Sikh belief.

One popular Janamsākhī was allegedly written by a close companion of the Guru, Bhai Bala. However, the writing style and language employed have left scholars, such as Max Arthur Macauliffe, certain that they were composed after his death. According to the scholars, there are good reasons to doubt the claim that the author was a close companion of Guru Nanak and accompanied him on many of his travels

A book called "*Journey With the Gurus*" authored by Inni Kaur and illustrated by Partdeep Singh released during recent time for children.

Sources

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