

What Makes Sikhism Unique?

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2 Introduction

Sikhism is truly a spiritual tradition for the modern age. It has many uniquely revealed truths and spiritual tools which have been given to help progress humanity to a higher level of consciousness.

2.1 The World's Only Multi Faith Scripture

The Sikh scripture, the Shri Guru Granth Sahib Ji (SGGSJ), is the world's only multi faith scripture which includes the work from saints of many different religions, spiritual traditions and social status. It is also one of the only scriptures to have been written and authenticated by the authors themselves.

2.2 The World's First Interfaith Institutions

Sikh spiritual institutions such as the Golden Temple were the world's first interfaith centres where people from all walks of life including Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Yogis and Sikhs were freely welcomed in to worship God in their own way. Old and new pictures show people of different faiths and cultures coming together for prayer and meditation.

2.3 Guru Nanak Dev Ji - A Universal Teacher of Humanity

The 1st Sikh Master, Guru Nanak Dev Ji, is the only Guru, Prophet or Messiah to be revered by such a wide variety of religious groups including Buddhists (as Nanak Lama), Muslims (as Hadhrat Baba Nanak), and Hindus, Yogis and Sikhs as Guru Nanak.

2.4 Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji - Protector of the "Freedom of Religion"

The 9th Sikh Master, Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji, is the only Guru, Prophet or Messiah to give his life for the right of "Freedom of Religion" for Hinduism, which was a faith other than his own. The giving of his life was a universal statement that all of humanity should be free to practice whatever faith they wish, without prejudice.

2.5 Emphasis on Spiritual Experience

Sikhs do not merely believe in God. Sikhs experience the oneness of God directly and feel God in everything they do. Sikhism is a purely experiential way of life.

"Along this path to our Husband Lord, we climb the steps of the ladder, and come to merge with Him." (SGGSJ, p.7)

"As metal merges with metal, those who chant the Praises of the Lord are absorbed into the Praiseworthy Lord." (SGGSJ, p.18)

"By personally experiencing the Personality of the Guru, one's own personality is uplifted, and one's light merges into the Light." (SGGSJ, p.27)

"The Lord abides within the mind of the Gurmukh, who merges in the Lord's Union, through the Guru." (SGGSJ, p.21)

2.6 Sikhism is not Dogmatic

The Sikh Scripture is true "Religion of Self" where everyone has a personal relationship with God. It does not place any emphasis on any of the following: Priestly class,

pilgrimage, praying in a particular direction, praying on a particular day, fasting, meaningless rituals, idol worship, superstition, body mutilation, asceticism or celibacy. The 10th Sikh Master, Guru Gobind Singh Ji, called these the 5 freedoms:

1. Dharam Nash - Freedom from all previous religions, customs and practices
2. Karam Nash - Freedom from the effect of all past bad deeds
3. Janam Nash - Freedom from caste or family (ancestor worship)
4. Sharam Nash - Freedom from the stigma or distinction attached to a hereditary profession
5. Bharam Nash - Freedom from all rituals, prejudices and inhibitions

2.7 Unity of God

Sikhism supports the idea of the unity of God i.e. Raam, Allah and Waheguru are the same supreme entity by different names.

"The Muslim God Allah and the Hindu God Paarbrahm are one and the same." (SGGSJ, p.897)

"O Allah, O Raam, I live by Your Name." (SGGSJ, p.1349)

"Kabeer is the child of God, Allah, Raam. All the Gurus and prophets are mine." (SGGSJ, p.1349)

"The humble servants of the Lord are absorbed in the Name of the Lord, Har, Har. The pain of birth and the fear of death are eradicated." (SGGSJ, p.13)

2.8 Unity of Humanity

Sikhism supports the idea of the oneness of humanity which cuts across religion, race, caste, nationality, sexual orientation, culture and gender. There are no chosen people of God or specific religious group which have reservations in 'heaven'.

"There is only one breath; all are made of the same clay; the light within all is the same." (SGGSJ, p.96)

"The clay is one, but it has taken many forms; I recognize the One Lord within them all." (SGGSJ, p.480)

"You are our mother and father; we are Your children." (SGGSJ, p.268)

"He bestowed His Grace on Adam, the father of mankind" (SGGSJ, p.1161)

"They are spiritual heroes, of noble birth, who vibrate upon the Lord God. The Kh'shatriyas, the Brahmins, the low-caste Soodras, the Vaisha workers and the outcast pariahs are all saved, meditating on the Lord. Nanak is the dust of the feet of those who know his God. " (SGGSJ, p.300)

"Recognize the Lord's Light within all, and do not consider social class or status; there are no classes or castes in the world hereafter." (SGGSJ, p.349)

2.9 Complete Gender Equality

Sikhism started the movement of complete Gender Equality 500 years ago. Sikhism had women bishops in the 15th Century! Sikh women have also led Sikh armies and have

held top positions in all aspects of life. In Sikhism, anything a man can do, a woman can do.

The light of God sits equally within both men and women:

"In the earth and in the sky, I do not see any second. Among all the women and the men, His Light is shining. ||3|| In the lamps of the sun and the moon, I see His Light. Dwelling among all is my ever-youthful Beloved. ||4|| In His Mercy, He attuned my consciousness to the Lord." (SGGSJ, p.223)

Both men and women are described as beautiful soul brides of God:

"Her Husband Lord is Beautiful; His Body is forever fresh and new. The True One does not die, and shall not go. He continually enjoys His happy soul-bride; He casts His Gracious Glance of Truth upon her, and she abides in His Will. ||4|| The bride braids her hair with Truth; her clothes are decorated with His Love. Like the essence of sandalwood, He permeates her consciousness, and the Temple of the Tenth Gate is opened. The lamp of the Shabad is lit, and the Name of the Lord is her necklace. ||5|| She is the most beautiful among women; upon her forehead she wears the Jewel of the Lord's Love. Her glory and her wisdom are magnificent; her love for the Infinite Lord is True. Other than her Beloved Lord, she knows no man. She enshrines love for the True Guru." (SGGSJ, p.54)

The cessation of suffering is available to both men and women:

"The Transcendent Lord has given me His support. The house of pain and disease has been demolished. The men and women celebrate. The Lord God, Har, Har, has extended His Mercy." (SGGSJ, p.627)

Both men and women regarded as people of God:

"The women come and sing the songs of joy. Meeting with their Beloved, lasting peace is obtained. ||1|| I am a sacrifice to those, whose minds are filled with the Lord. Meeting with the humble servant of the Lord, peace is obtained, and one intuitively sings the Glorious Praises of the Lord. ||1||Pause|| They are always imbued with Your Joyful Love; O Dear Lord, You Yourself come to dwell in their minds. They obtain eternal glory. The Gurmukhs, those who Love God, are united in the Lord's Union." (SGGSJ, p.798)

A challenge to men to accept women as equals and as being inherently good. This is the direct opposite view held by the other Indian religions with their focus on asceticism and shunning of women:

"From woman, man is born; within woman, man is conceived; to woman he is engaged and married. Woman becomes his friend; through woman, the future generations come. When his woman dies, he seeks another woman; to woman he is bound. So why call her bad? From her, kings are born. From woman, woman is born; without woman, there would be no one at all. O Nanak, only the True Lord is without a woman. That mouth which praises the Lord continually is blessed and beautiful. O Nanak, those faces shall be radiant in the Court of the True Lord." (SGGSJ, p.473)

2.10 The Way of Life of Service

Sikhism is a way of achieving a connection with God by serving humanity from the heart. This extends to everything Sikhs do, including helping with a charity or doing some voluntary work. Sikhs are unique in providing shelter and food to everyone as an integral part of their spiritual tradition at their places of worship, the Gurdwaras. Many Gurdwaras in India feed 100,000 people a day (approx 4 million people per year).

Also Bhai Ghanaya, a famous Sikh saint, is the founder of the world's first 'Red Cross' which administered water and medicine to both friend and foe on the battlefields.

"You shall find peace doing Seva, selfless service without reward" (SGGSJ, p.25)

"Whoever has good destiny inscribed on his forehead, applies himself to Seva, selfless service without reward" (SGGSJ, p.1142)

2.11 Sikhism is not Averse to Wealth Creation

Sikhism does not see wealth or family as a hindrance to spiritual practice. Sikhs are encouraged to live and contribute to society and apply a spiritual consciousness to everything they do. This is in contrast to the asceticism and rejection of worldly life to the other Indian spiritual traditions including Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism.

"Such a servant understands everything. Amidst all, his soul is unattached. Such is the way, O Nanak, of the Lord's servant." (SGGSJ, p.275)

"While laughing, playing, dressing and eating, he is liberated." (SGGSJ, p.522)

"He sleeps, wakes, rises up and sits down without anxiety; he laughs and cries without anxiety. Says Nanak, she who has cheated the world - that Maya is cheated by the humble servant of the Lord." (SGGSJ, p.1217)

"The Gurmukh laughs, and the Gurmukh cries. Whatever the Gurmukh does, is devotional worship. Whoever becomes Gurmukh contemplates the Lord. The Gurmukh, O Nanak, crosses over to the other shore." (SGGSJ, p.1422)

"Why do you tear apart your fine clothes, and take to wearing a rough blanket? O Nanak, even sitting in your own home, you can meet the Lord, if your mind is in the right place." (SGGSJ, p.1383)

"The Lord feeds and sustains all living beings; He blesses them gifts of restful peace and fine clothes." (SGGSJ, p.1356)

2.12 Sikhism has an Honourable History

Sikhs have an amazing and honourable 500 year story of survival, service and love. This is in contrast to many of the major world religions which have forcefully converted people, murdered, raped and looted all in the name of their religion.

2.13 Sikhism goes Hand-in-Hand with Science

Sikhism has never had a problem with modern science and indeed both are considered to be useful tools to enable humans to understand Truth.