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Sikhism is a religion that originated in the Punjab region of the Indian subcontinent about the end of the 15th century. It is one of the youngest of the major world religions. The foundation beliefs of Sikhism, articulated in the sacred scripture Guru Granth Sahib, include constant spiritual meditation of God's name being guided by the Guru instead of yielding to capriciousness of mind or psyche, living a house holder's life instead of monasticism, truthful action to dharma (duty), being of selfless service to others, equality of all human beings, and believing in god's grace. In the early 21st century there were nearly 25 million Sikhs worldwide the great majority of them living in the Indian state of Punjab.

Sikhism is based on the spiritual teachings of Guru Nanak, the first guru (1469-1539) and the nine Sikhs Guru that succeeded him. The tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh named the Sikh scripture Guru Granth Sahib as his successor, terminating the line of human gurus and making the scripture the eternal, impersonal spiritual guide for Sikhs. Sikhism rejects claims that any particular tradition has monopoly on absolute truth.

The Sikh scripture open with Ik Onkar (ੴ), its Mul Mantar and fundamental prayer about on Supreme Being (god). Sikhism emphasizes Simran (meditation on the words of the guru Granth Sahib) that can be expressed musically through Kirtan or internally though Nam Japo (repeat god's name) as a means to feel god's presence. It teaches followers to avoid the "Five Thieves" (lust, rage, greed, attachment and conceit). Hand in hand, secular life is considered to be intertwined with the spiritual life. Guru Nanak though that living an "active, creative, and practical life" of "truthfulness, fidelity, self control and purity" is above the metaphysical truth, and that the idea man one who "establishes union with God, knows his will, and carries out that will". Guru Hargobind the sixth Sikh Guru, established the political/temporal (Miri) and spiritual (Piri) realms to be mutually coexistent.

Sikhism evolved in times of religious persecution. Two of the Sikh guru- Guru Arjan (15 April 1563 – 30 May 1606) and Guru Teg Bahadur (1 April 1621- 24 November 1675), after they refused to convert to Islam, were tortured and executed by the Mugal rulers. The persecution of Sikhs triggered the founding of the Khalsa as an order to protect the freedom of conscience and religions, with qualities of a "sant-sipahi" a "Saint Soldiers".

Sikh terminology.

The majority of sikh scriptures were originally written in Gurumukhi alphabet, a script standardized by guru Angad out of Landa scripts used in North India. Adherents of Sikhism are known as sikh, which means students or disciples of the Guru. The anglicized word 'Sikhism' is derived from the Punjabi verb sikhi, with root in Sikhana (to learn) and sikhi connotes the temporal path of learning.

Philosophy and teachings.

The basis of Sikhism lies in the teachings of Guru Nanak and his successors. Many sources call Sikhism a monotheistic religion while others call it a monistic and pantheistic religion, according to Elranor Nesbitt, English renderings of Sikhism as a monotheistic religion “tend misleadingly to reinforce a semitic understanding of monotheism, rather than Guru Nanak’s mystical awareness of the one that is expressed through the many. However, what is not in doubt is the emphasis on “One”.

In Sikhism the concept of “God” is Waheguru considered Nirankar (shapeless), Akal (timeless), and Alakh Niranjana (Invisible), The sikh scripture begins with Ik Onkar, (ੴ) which refer to the “formless one” and understood in the sikh tradition as monotheistic unity of God. Sikhism is classified as an Indian religion along with Buddhism, Hinduism and Jainism given its geographical origin and its sharing some concepts with them.

Sikh philosophy does not approve dichotomy in spiritual development and moral truthful conduct (sach achar), its founder Guru Nanak summarized this perspective with “truth is the highest virtue, but higher still is truthful living”.

Concept of god

God in Sikhism is known as Ik Onkar, the one supreme reality or the all pervading spirit (which is taken to mean god). This spirit has no gender in Sikhism, though translation may present it as masculine. It is also Akaal Purkh (beyond time and space) and Nirankar (without form). In addition Guru Nanak wrote that there are many worlds on which it has created life.

The Mul Mantar the opening line of the Guru Granth Sahib and each subsequent raga, mentions Ik Onkar (translated by Pashaura Singh):

ੴ ;fs Bkw[eosk g[oy[fBoGkT[fBot?o[nekb w{ofs ni{Bh ;?Gz r[o gq;kfd..

Translation: ikk onkar sat nam karata purakh nirabha’u niraviar akal murat ajuni saibhan gur Prasad.

“there is one supreme being the eternal reality, the creator, without fear and devoid of enmity, immortal, never incarnated, self-existent, known by grace through the true Guru.”

Worldly illusion

Maya- defined as a temporary illusion or “unreality”- is one of the core deviations from the pursuit of god and salvation: where worldly attractions which give only illusory temporary satisfaction and pain which distract the process of the devotion of god. However Guru Nanak emphasized maya as not a reference to the unreality of the world, but of its values. In Sikhism the influences of ego, anger, greed, attachment, and lust known as the five thieves are believed to be particularly distracting and hurtful. Sikhs believe the world is currently in a state of kali yuga (age of darkness) because the world is led astray by the love of and attachment to maya. The fate of people vulnerable to the five thieves (Panj Chor) is separation from god and the situation may be remedied only after intensive and relentless devotion.

Timeless truth

According to Guru Nanak the supreme purpose of human is to reconnect with Akal (the timeless one) however, egotism is the biggest barrier in doing this. Using the Guru's teachings remembrance of nam (The divine word or the name of the lord) leads to the end of egotism. Guru Nanak designated the word guru (meaning teacher) to mean the voice of "the spirit": the source of knowledge and the guide to salvation, as Ik Onkar is universally immanent guru id indistinguishable from "Akal" and are one and the same. One connects with guru only with accumulation of selfness search of truth. Ultimately the seeker realizes that it is the consciousness within the body which is seeker/following of the word that is the true guru. The human body is just a means to achieve the reunion with truth. Once truth starts to shine in a person's heart, the essence of current and past holy books of all religions is understood by the person.

Liberation

Guru Nanak's teachings are founded not on a final destination of heaven or hell but on a spiritual union with the Akal which results in salvation or jivanmukta (liberation whilst alive), a concept also found in Hinduism. Guru Gobind Singh makes it clear that human birth is obtained with great fortune, therefore one need to be able to make the most of his life. Sikhs believe in reincarnation and karma concepts found in Hinduism and Buddhism. However in Sikhism both karma and liberation "is modified by the concept of God's grace"(Nadar, mehar, kirpa, karam etc.). Guru Nanak states "The body takes birth because of karma, but salvation is attained through grace". To get closer to god : Sikhs avoid the evils of maya, keep the everlasting truth in mind, practice Shabad Kirtan, meditate on naam and serve humanity. Sikhs believe that being in the company of the Satsang or sangat is one of the key ways to achieve liberation from the cycles of reincarnation.

Power and devotion (Shakti and Bhakti)

Sikhism was influenced by Bhakti movement, but it was not simply an extension of the Bhakti movement. Sikhism, for instance, disagreed with some views of Bhakti saints Kabir and Ravidas.

Guru Nanak, the first Sikh Guru and the founder of Sikhism, was a Bhakti saint. He taught, states Jon Mayled, that the most important form of worship is Bhakti. Guru Arjan, in his *Sukhmani Sahib*, recommended the true religion is one of loving devotion to God. The Sikh scripture Guru Granth Sahib includes suggestions on how a Sikh should perform constant Bhakti. Some scholars call Sikhism a Bhakti sect of Indian traditions, adding that it emphasizes "nirguni Bhakti", that is loving devotion to a divine without qualities or physical form. However, Sikhism also accepts *saguni* concept, that is a divine with qualities and form. While Western scholarship generally places Sikhism as arising primarily within a Hindu Bhakti movement milieu while recognizing some Sufi Islamic influences, Indian Sikh scholars disagree and state that Sikhism transcended the environment it emerged from.

Some Sikh sects outside the Punjab-region of India, such as those found in Maharashtra and Bihar, practice Aarti with lamps during bhakti in a Sikh Gurdwara. But, most Sikh Gurdwaras forbid the ceremonial use of lamps (aarti) during their bhakti practices.

While emphasizing Bhakti, the Sikh Gurus also taught that the spiritual life and secular householder life are intertwined. In Sikh worldview, the everyday world is part of the Infinite Reality, increased spiritual awareness leads to increased and vibrant participation in the everyday world. Guru Nanak, states Sonali Marwaha, described living an "active, creative, and practical life" of "truthfulness, fidelity, self-control and purity" as being higher than the metaphysical truth.

The 6th Sikh Guru, Guru Hargobind, after Guru Arjan martyrdom and faced with oppression by the Islamic Mughal Empire, affirmed the philosophy that the political/temporal (Miri) and spiritual (Piri) realms are mutually coexistent. According to the 9th Sikh Guru, Tegh Bahadur, the ideal Sikh should have both Shakti (power that resides in the temporal), and Bhakti (spiritual meditative qualities). This was developed into the concept of the Saint Soldier by the 10th Sikh Guru, Gobind Singh.

The concept of man as elaborated by Guru Nanak, states Arvind-pal Singh Mandair, refines and negates the "monotheistic concept of self/God", and "monotheism becomes almost redundant in the movement and crossings of love". The goal of man, taught the Sikh Gurus, is to end all dualities of "self and other, I and not-I", attain the "attendant balance of separation-fusion, self-other, action-inaction, attachment-detachment, in the course of daily life".

Conclusion

Observant Sikhs adhere to long standing practices and traditions to strengthen and express their faith. The daily recitations from memory of specific passages from the Guru Granth Sahib, especially the Japji Sahib (literately chart) hymns is recommended immediate after rising and bathing. Family customs induce both reading passages from the scriphie and attending the Gurdwara. Gurdwara are open to all regardless of religion, background, caste, as race. The gurdwara is also the location for the historic sikh practice of "lingar as the community meal. All gurdwara are open to anyone of any faith for a riel meal, always vegetarian. People eat together and the kitchen is maintained and serviced by sikh community volunteers.

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