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Introduction to Sikhism**

Sikhism, the world’s fifth largest religion, is a monotheistic faith developed by Guru Nanak (1469-1539) in the Punjab region of India in the 15th century. The God of Sikhism is a timeless, immortal being called Akal Purakh. Sikhism was in many ways a re-memorization of principle elements of both Hinduism and Islam, which were the predominant religions in the Punjab when Sikhism was founded. The wisdom of Sikhism has been passed consecutively through ten Gurus or spiritual teachers, all equally endowed with guiding wisdom, ending with the tenth Guru, the *Guru Granth Sahib*, which is the holy book of Sikhism. The founder of Sikhism, Guru Nanak, reacted to elements in Hinduism that he found fault with, such as the caste system, ritualism, and polytheism, and he created the Sikh religion in response, as a new way for all people to be equal under one God. Sikhism has experienced a significant diaspora since the late 19th century, but the vast majority of Sikhs still live in India today. However, many Sikhs can be found in the U.S., Canada, Europe, and elsewhere.

The most significant alteration of Sikhism since its formation was the creation of the Khalsa by the tenth guru, Guru Gobind Singh. The Khalsa was a movement within Sikhism in 1699 primarily aimed to revitalize the Sikh people in response to the oppressive Mughal Empire, though other explanations such as external militaristic influences have also been provided. The Khalsa has been viewed in many ways as the militarization of Sikhism, but, along with rejection of the caste system by giving each person a common surname (Kaur for women, Singh for men,) its main implication was the institution of the “5 Ks” that Sikhs who are inducted into the Khalsa are expected to wear every day: Kesh (uncut hair,) Kara (a steel bracelet,) Kanga (a wooden comb,) Kaccha (cotton underwear,) and Kirpan (a steel sword). Though the outwardly militaristic appearance of the Khalsa, along with the role of Sikhs as key fighters in the British army when India was a British colony have tended to give Sikhism a reputation of militarism, most Sikhs today reject any violent descriptors, and are simple, giving people, devoted to God.

Sikhs principles center on the total equality of all people. They emphasize three main duties for all Sikhs: *nam simaran* (prayer/meditation,) *kirt karna* (honest living,) and *vand chakna* (honest living.) Sikhs are known for providing meals at their Gurdwaras (places of worship) and they prioritize living honestly and keeping God in mind at all times. In Milwaukee in August of 2012, six Sikhs were shot and killed by a white supremacist while worshiping at their Gurdwara. Though Sikhs have struggled to popularize their faith, they continue to consistently gain more recognition and maintain a tight sense of community.

Resources:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/sikhism/history/history_1.shtml>

<http://www.sikhs.org/topics.htm>

McLeod, W. H. *Exploring Sikhism: Aspects of Sikh Identity, Culture and Thought*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000.