

a faith of Universal Humanism and is a faith for this Scientific Age.

Sikhism places emphasis on individual human dignity and intellect. It has nothing like the Ten Commandments or the Sharia Law. Instead the Guru simply says do not commit an act that you will later regret and do not eat or drink which is unhealthy for your body and mind. Simple as that! Guru Nanak rejected the concepts of virgin birth, resurrection, specific times or directions for prayer. Starving the body for a day time (as fast) and then gorging it at night fall was abhorrent to him. Pilgrimage for spiritual gain and feeding the Brahman to sustain deceased relatives has no value in Sikhism.

In Sikhism, no one place is holier than the other because all places are created by God and God permeates everywhere. The place where you live is just as holy as Hardwar, Banaras, Mecca, Medina, Jerusalem and Salt Lake City. No one time or day is more auspicious than another. Only the time spent in honest productive work and prayers is considered blessed.

Women constitute one half of humanity but no religion accords women the status that Guru Nanak demands for 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. || 2 ||"* Guru Granth Sahib page 473.

Sikhism explicitly states:- *"Truth is higher than everything, but higher still is truthful living"* because that is union with God. (Guru Granth Sahib page 62)

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**(Please feel free to copy, translate
into other languages and distribute
this very brief introduction to Sikhism.)**

WHO ARE THE SIKHS?

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ONE GOD

A Sikh is a believer in and a follower of Guru Nanak's teachings.

Guru Nanak (1469-1539) was born in what is now Pakistan Punjab. There were two dominant religions in India at that time, Hinduism and Islam. He was born in a Hindu family but his lifelong companion, Mardana, was a Muslim as were many of his followers. The Guru wrote hymns and sang to the music of Mardana's Rabab, a folk stringed instrument of that time. He was well versed in both Hindu and Muslim scriptures and in his writings he commented on both. To spread his message of oneness of God, the Creator, and oneness of humanity, he traveled to Muslim places of worship as far west as Mecca in Saudi Arabia and Hindu and Buddhist places of worship to the borders of Tibet in the North, Burma in the East, and Ceylon in the South.

Guru Nanak rejected centuries old ritualistic and discriminatory practices that had crept into the Indian society and ushered in a new movement of universal brotherhood, regardless of one's birth in a particular caste or religion. By doing so, he gravely hurt the feelings of not only his family but also the entire high caste Hindu society and the Muslim administration, the establishments of the day.

Sikhism is unique among the world's religions except for certain principles of ethics and moral norms, which are common to all religions including atheists. Like the three Semitic religions of '**The Torah**', '**The Holy Bible**' and '**The Holy Quran**', the Sikhs believe in their own scripture, Guru Granth Sahib. But the similarity ends right there. There are three fundamental differences:

1. The Sikh religion differs as regards to the authenticity of its Scriptures compared to other major World religions. None of their founders have left a line of their own composition and we only know what they taught through tradition or second-hand information put in writing long after they were gone and obviously influenced by the writers' interpretations.

All 1430 pages of Guru Granth Sahib are poetry, set to Indian musical notes, and every word and verse can be attributed to Guru Nanak, five of his successor Gurus and 29 others, among them fifteen Hindu and Muslim Saints. These were godly men belonging to whole range of social and religious backgrounds, including those dubbed untouchables by the society.

In the Sikh Scripture, Guru Granth Sahib, the core concepts are Guru Nanak's but they are supported, elaborated and reinforced by all these other writers of diverse backgrounds, religions and regions of India. This makes Guru Granth Sahib a truly universal scripture. The following verse from Guru Granth Sahib on the subject of Creation and Oneness of Humanity is by one of those Saints. His name was Bhagat Kabir, whose pedigree is unknown but as an orphan he was brought up by a family of Muslim weavers:

*"First, Allah created the Light; then, by His Creative Power, He made all mortal beings.
From the One Light, the entire universe welled up.
So who is good, and who is bad? ||1||
O people, O Siblings of Destiny,
Do not wander deluded by doubt.
The Creation is in the Creator,
And the Creator is in the Creation,
Totally pervading and permeating all places. ||1||Pause||
The clay is the same,
But the Fashioner has fashioned it in various ways.
There is nothing wrong with the pot of clay –
There is nothing wrong with the Potter. ||2||
The One True Lord abides in all;
By His making, everything is made.
Whoever realizes the Hukam of His Command?
Knows the One Lord.
He alone is said to be the Lord's slave. ||3||
The Lord Allah is Unseen; He cannot be seen.
The Guru has blessed me.
Says Kabir, my anxiety and fear have been taken away;
I see the Immaculate Lord pervading everywhere." ||4||3||*
[Guru Granth Sahib page 1349]

2. Sikhism is a philosophy which has validity for all cultures and religions. Sikh Scriptures speak to a person of every religion or no religion. Anyone who agrees with and practices the teachings of Guru Granth Sahib is a Sikh, regardless of the faith of his/her birth. This means that Sikhs welcome people of all faiths as brothers and sisters. However, if there is a conflict between the teachings of the Guru Granth Sahib and of the other faith, the Sikh will only follow his Guru.

3. The Sikh concept of God is also unique. Most world religions believe in one God, but which one? God of Jews favors only his chosen people who are still waiting for their Messiah; Christian God would save only those who believe in his son Jesus Christ, the Messiah who has already come, and the Muslim God has the last word because Mohammed is the last Messiah and there shall be no more. President Bush has a different God than Osama-bin-Laden.

Guru Nanak's God is the God of the entire humanity. In a Sikh place of worship (called a Gurudwara - Guru's door), people of all races, colors, sexes, religions and nationalities are welcomed as equals without any question about their faith. No effort is made here at proselytization. Another unique feature of Sikhism is the 'Langar', (food prepared in the community kitchen by volunteers and served to all those who enter the Guru's door). Everybody is invited to it without any distinction of caste, creed, color or nationality

Guru Nanak's God is the God of entire creation, *"God is ONE. His name is Truth. He is the creator. He is fearless and not inimical. He is without death and without birth. He is self-existent. Humans can attune to him through Guru's grace. God existed in the beginning; He existed when time started running its course; He exists even now and He shall exist forever and ever"*. Guru Granth Sahib page 1.

Sikhism is a modern, scientific, and practical religious way of life. It abhors asceticism and advocates an active life of a married house-holder in a classless and casteless society. It commands its followers to:

1. Earn their living by doing honest and productive work;

2. Share the fruit of their honest labor with the needy and those unable to help themselves; and
3. Remember the Lord, the Creator, at all times.

When the Pope had Galileo (1564-1642) jailed for advocacy of Copernicus's (1473-1543) theory, that earth revolves around the sun (condemned by the Roman Catholic Church as heretical), Guru Nanak (1469-1539) was postulating views on the origin of the Universe that would make the Big Bang theorists proud. He stated unambiguously that there were countless Earths, Moons and Suns. He called the natural laws that govern their motions in space His 'hukam' (Cosmic Law). Cosmos is the manifest form of God and hukam Cosmic Law) is the invisible form that pervades the cosmos.

Long before Darwin's (1809-1882) theory of origin of species, Guru Nanak had declared that life began in water and evolved through many life forms. Later it spread in the water, over and under the land and in the air. Human beings are the ultimate life form. Death is a loss of consciousness. When a person dies he/she does not go to heaven or hell, because after life heaven and hell exist only in our imagination. It is we who make a heaven or hell of our lives, here on this earth, during our life time. Upon death, the spark, we call soul, merges with the cosmic Consciousness and our physical body turns to dust of which it is made.

Although Guru Nanak was born into a Hindu household he shares not even the concept of God with Hinduism. At a very young age he refused to wear the janeu (Hindu sacred thread worn by high caste males); discarded the caste system (a religiously sanctioned discrimination still entrenched in the 21st century democratic India); preached against idol worship; recognized the dignity and equality of every human being; asserted the equality of men and women; condemned the Hindu practice of Sati (live immolation of a widow on her husband's funeral pyre); instructed the women to discard veils; allowed widow and widower remarriage; rejected the then prevalent concepts of karma, after life salvation, tapasya, heaven and hell (after death), incarnation, transmigration, 84 lakh juni (8,400,000 life forms) yatra to holy places, fasting, multiple gods and goddesses. He preached 'sarbat da bhala' (good of everybody), which is unique only to Sikhism. His was