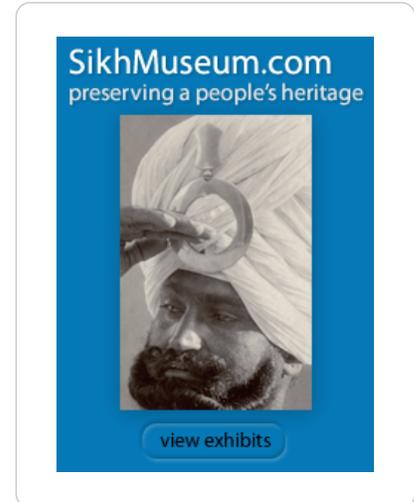


Ceremonies and Festivals

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[Learn about what happens at a Sikh wedding ceremony in words & pictures](#)



ੴ Nam Karan, Naming of a Child

As soon as the mother and child are able to travel, the family visits the Gurdwara. There they recite joyful hymns from the Guru Granth Sahib to celebrate the birth of the new child. Karah Prashad (sacred pudding) is prepared by the family. Amrit (sweet water) is also prepared and given to the infant as well as the mother. The name is chosen by taking the Hukam, the granthi randomly opens Sri Guru Granth Sahib to any page and reads the hymn on that page. The first letter of the first word of the hymn is chosen. The child's name is then chosen beginning with that letter and is announced to the congregation.

ੴ Amrit Sanskar, Baptism

This is the sacred ceremony for the initiation into the Khalsa brotherhood. It should be taken only by those who are fully mature enough to realize the commitment required and the significance. The initiate may be a man or woman of any caste or previous religion. Generally they are encouraged to start behaving, acting and looking like a Sikh before seeking baptism. The baptism is done in a quiet place away from distractions where Sri Guru Granth Sahib has been installed. The initiate is required to wash their hair, cover their head, wear clean clothes and the 5K's before presenting themselves before 6 amritdhari Sikhs (those who are already baptized). Five amritdhari Sikhs will conduct the ceremony while one reads Sri Guru Granth Sahib. The principals of Sikhism are explained to the initiate and this is followed by Ardas and taking of the Hukam (opening of Sri Guru Granth Sahib to a random page and reading of a hymn). Amrit (sweet sugar water) is prepared in a steel bowl and stirred with a kirpan by the five beloved ones while Japuji, Jaap, Ten Sawayyas, Bainti Chaupai and 6 verses from Anand Sahib are recited. This is followed by Ardas and the initiate drinking the amrit five times in cupped hands and exclaiming Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa, Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh (The Pure Belong to God, Victory to God). Amrit is then sprinkled on the hair and eyes of the initiate and any leftover is drunk by all present. This is followed by an explanation of the code of conduct and discipline required for a Khalsa. The Khalsa is required to wear the 5K's and abstain from 1) cutting hair, 2) eating Muslim halal meat, 3) cohabiting with a person other than ones spouse and 4) using intoxicants such as tobacco. Other breaches of the code of conduct are also explained before Ardas is once again repeated. This is followed by taking Hukam and eating of karah prasad (sacred pudding) from a common bowl. If a person does not have a Sikh name, they take a new name at this time.

ੴ Funeral Ceremony

In Sikhism death is considered a natural process and God's will. Any public displays of grief at the funeral such as wailing or crying out loud are discouraged. Cremation is the preferred method of disposal, although if it is not possible any other method such as burial or submergence at sea are acceptable. Worship of the dead with gravestones, etc. is discouraged, because the body is considered to be only the shell, the person's soul is their real essence. The body is usually bathed and clothed by family members and taken to the cremation grounds. There hymns are recited which induce feeling of detachment are recited by the congregation. As the body is being cremated, Kirtan Sohila the nighttime prayer is recited and Ardas is offered. The ashes are disposed of by immersing them in the nearest river. A non continuous reading of the entire Sri Guru Granth Sahib is undertaken and timed to conclude on the tenth day. This may be undertaken at home or in the Gurdwara. The conclusion of this ceremony marks the end of the mourning period.

ੴ Akhand Path

This is the non-stop cover to cover reading of Sri Guru Granth Sahib which is undertaken to celebrate any joyous occasion or in times of hardship, such as birth, marriage, death, moving into a new house, and Gurpurbs. The non stop reading takes approximately 48 hours and is carried out by family members, or professional readers in the presence of the family. The reading must be clear and correct so that it can be understood by all listeners. After the completion of the reading the Bhog ceremony takes place. A Hukam is taken by randomly turning to any page and reading the hymn on that page. Karah parshad (sacred pudding) is also distributed to all present.

This ceremony evolved in the mid 18th century when there were few hand written copies of Sri Guru Granth Sahib. Sikhs were fighting for their lives at this time and hiding in jungles. They would all gather to hear whatever portion of a reading that they could before Sri Guru Granth Sahib would be moved to another location for another audience. Performance of Akhand Path as a blind ritual is highly disrespectful to Sri Guru Granth Sahib and contrary to the teachings of the Gurus.

ੴ Gurpurbs

Important anniversaries associated with the lives of the Gurus are referred to as Gurburbs. These are usually marked at gurdwaras with Akand Path (continuous cover to cover reading of Sri Guru Granth Sahib) concluding on the specific day. There is also kirtan (musical recitation of hymns from Sri Guru Granth Sahib) as well as katha (lectures on Sikhism). Some places also have nagar kirtan, where there is a procession with Sri Guru Granth Sahib led by 5 Sikhs carrying Nishan Sahibs (the Sikh flag). Free sweets and langar are also offered to the general public outside some gurdwaras.

Among the larger Gurburb celebrations are:

- First installation of Sri Guru Granth Sahib in the Golden Temple by Guru Arjan Dev
- Birth of Guru Nanak (traditionally celebrated in November)
- Birth of Guru Gobind Singh
- Martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev
- Martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur
- Martyrdom of The Sahibzadas (the sons of Guru Gobind Singh)

ੴ Vaisakhi

Guru Amar Das first institutionalized this as one of the special days when all Sikhs would gather to receive the Gurus blessings at Goindwal in 1567. In 1699 Guru Gobind Singh gathered thousands at Anandpur Sahib and founded the Khalsa order by baptizing 5 brave Sikhs who were willing to give their life for the Guru. The Five Beloved Ones in turn baptized Guru Gobind Singh into the Khalsa brotherhood. This day celebrated around April 13 is considered the birthday of the Khalsa order. Sikhs visit gurdwaras and fairs and parades are held. Many Sikhs choose to be baptized into the Khalsa brotherhood on this day, as well the wrappings of the Nishan Sahib flag post at most gurdwaras are changed on Vaisakhi.

Note: Vaisakhi is not the Sikh New Year. Vaisakhi occurs in the second month of the Sikh calendar. The Sikh New Year is on Chet 1 according to the Sikh calendar which occurs on March 14th every year. See the Sikh Calendar for more information

ੴ Bandi Chhor Divasi

On Bandi Chhor Divas 1619 the Golden Temple was illuminated with many lights to welcome home and celebrate the release of Guru Hargobind from imprisonment in Gwalior fort. Sikhs have continued this annual celebration with lamps being lit outside gurdwaras and sweets distributed to all. The largest gathering happens at The Golden Temple which is lit up with thousands of lights.

ੴ Maghi

Sikhs visit gurdwaras and listen to kirtan on this day to commemorate the martyrdom of the Forty Immortals. The largest gathering happens at Muktsar where an annual fair is held. It occurs on the first day of Maghar Sangrant, around January 14. Forty followers of Guru Gobind Singh who had previously deserted him, fought bravely against overwhelming Mughal army forces and were martyred here. Guru Gobind Singh personally blessed them as having achieved mukti (liberation) and cremated them at Muktsar.

ੴ Hola Mohalla

An annual festival of thousands held at Anandpur Sahib. It was started by Guru Gobind Singh as a gathering of Sikhs for military exercises and mock battles on the day following the Indian festival of Holi. The mock battles were followed by music and poetry competitions. The Nihang Singh's carry on the martial tradition with mock battles and displays of swordsmanship and horse riding. There are also a number of durbars where Sri Guru Granth Sahib is present and kirtan and religious lectures take place. The festival culminates in a large parade headed by the nishan sahibs of the gurdwaras in the region. Hola Mohalla is held around March 17.

ੴ Sangrand

This is the time when the sun passes from one sign of the zodiac to the next, it is the start of the new month in the Indian calendar. The beginning of the new month is announced in the gurdwaras by the reading of portions of Bara Maha, Song of the 12 Months, by Guru Arjan (pg. 133) or sometimes Bara Maha by Guru Nanak (pg. 1107). This day just marks the beginning of the new month and is not treated as being greater or better than any other day.