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SIKHISM – CORE TEACHINGS AND SPIRITUALITY

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ABSTRACT: Sikhism, founded by Guru Nanak Dev Ji in the late 15th century in Punjab, emphasizes monotheism, equality, and selfless service. Rejecting the caste system, religious intolerance, and social inequality, it promotes the oneness of God and equality among all humans. Guru Nanak's teachings, shaped by his spiritual journeys across India, Sri Lanka, and the Middle East, laid the foundation for Sikhism. The religion blends elements of Hinduism and Islam, maintaining a distinct identity while advocating for social justice, including the eradication of caste distinctions and the empowerment of women. After Guru Nanak, the teachings of nine successive Gurus furthered Sikhism's evolution. Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Guru, declared the Guru Granth Sahib as the eternal Guru. Sikhism's core principles include devotion to God, spiritual discipline, and social justice, with practices like Langar (community kitchen) emphasizing equality and selfless service. The Three Pillars—Naam Japna (remembrance of God), Kirat Karni (honest work), and Vand Chakna (sharing with others)—guide followers towards living a righteous life. Guru Nanak's respect for interfaith harmony, including reverence for Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) and the Quran, promotes unity and peace. Sikhism's spiritual philosophy, rejecting idol worship and ritualism, is grounded in love, equality, and the oneness of God (Waheguru). Gender equality, social justice, and a holistic approach to life, including the care of nature, are key aspects of the faith. The

Khalsa, initiated by Guru Gobind Singh, symbolizes spiritual discipline and moral integrity, guided by the Five Ks: Kesh (unshorn hair), Kangha (comb), Kara (iron bracelet), Kachera (cotton undergarment), and Kirpan (sword).

The Gurdwara serves as a spiritual and community center, where Sikhs gather for prayer and service. Practices such as Seva (selfless service), Kirtan (sacred hymns), and Amrit Sanchar (Khalsa initiation) strengthen Sikh spirituality. Sikhism also offers a framework for mental well-being, addressing challenges like depression through prayer, meditation, and remembrance of God (Simran). Sikhism's commitment to karma, righteous actions, and social harmony guides individuals towards personal peace and a just, compassionate society. Through its focus on equality, service, and the oneness of God, Sikhism presents a comprehensive approach to life's spiritual and social challenges.

KEYWORDS: Sikhism, Guru Nanak, Monotheism, Equality, Selfless service, Guru Granth Sahib, Langar, Khalsa, Spiritual discipline, Social justice, Seva

History and Evolution

Sikhism, one of the major religions of the world, emerged in the late 15th century in the Punjab region of South Asia. The religion was founded by Guru Nanak Dev Ji, whose teachings emphasized monotheism and rejected caste discrimination, religious intolerance, and social inequality. Sikhism is a unique faith based on selfless service to humanity, equality, and spiritual discipline.

Sikhism was founded by Guru Nanak Dev Ji (1469–1539), who was born in the area now known as Nankana Sahib in present-day Pakistan. His early thoughts were influenced by religious conflicts and social issues. One day, Guru Nanak had a divine experience that convinced him that there is one eternal God who views all human beings as equal. He challenged religious doctrines and rituals and emphasized embracing universal truths (Singh & Fenech, 2014).

Through his teachings, Guru Nanak conveyed the message of monotheism, equality, and service to humanity. After him, nine more Gurus led the faith, strengthening Sikhism and giving it a structured form. The word “Sikh” means disciple or follower (Mandair, 2013). In Sikhism, a Sikh is someone who accepts the teachings of the Gurus, follows them, and applies those principles in their life (Chahal, 2006).

Sikhism is one of the modern religions of the world and can be seen as a bridge between Hinduism and Islam. Some scholars consider Sikhism a reformist movement within Hinduism, as it adopts certain principles of Hinduism while rejecting the caste system and other orthodox beliefs found in it. The religion also incorporates some elements of Islam, such as belief in one God and service to humanity. Sikhism encourages its followers to be free from all kinds of prejudice and social divisions.

The beliefs of Sikhism encompass both spiritual and social dimensions:

1. *Belief in One God:* Sikhism is based on the oneness of God, who is referred to as "Waheguru."
2. *Equality:* All human beings, regardless of caste, race, or gender, are considered equal.
3. *Service to Humanity:* Sikhism encourages its followers to engage in selfless service to others.
4. *Worship and Spiritual Discipline:* Worship, prayer, and adherence to the teachings of the Guru Granth Sahib are seen as paths to spiritual growth (Doniger, 1999).

The holy book of Sikhism, the Guru Granth Sahib, serves as a source of spiritual guidance and moral principles for Sikhs. This scripture includes the teachings of all ten Gurus as well as the sayings of spiritual leaders from other religions. The Guru Granth Sahib is regarded in Sikhism as the eternal Guru.

The evolution of Sikhism took place under the leadership of ten Gurus. These Gurus not only promoted religious doctrines but also inspired Sikhs toward social and spiritual reforms. Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Guru, declared the Guru Granth Sahib as the eternal Guru and founded the Khalsa Panth, an organized group of those who embody the principles of Sikhism in practice (Shackle & Mandair, 2013).

Sikhism has always taught social justice, equality, and brotherhood. This religion has made efforts to abolish the caste system and granted women equal rights with men. Langar (the tradition of free meals at Sikh places of worship) is a living example of social equality and selfless service.

Sikhism is considered a non-revealed religion, yet it reflects glimpses of divine teachings. Despite incorporating certain elements from Islam and Hinduism, it has maintained its distinct identity. Sikh teachings represent universal brotherhood and service to humanity. Today, Sikh communities around the world are actively helping to address social issues by practicing their faith.

Sikhism is a unique and modern religion founded on the principles of humanity, equality, and service. It teaches its

followers both spiritual growth and social justice. The teachings of Guru Nanak continue to offer a message of peace, love, and brotherhood to the world.

Guru Nanak Dev Ji – Biography and Contributions

Baba Guru Nanak Dev Ji was born on April 15, 1469 (Qureshi, 1996, p. 35) in Talwandi (present-day Nankana Sahib, Pakistan) (Amjad, 2020, p. 5). His father, Kalu Chand (also known as Kalu), was a patwari (village revenue official), and his mother, Mata Tripta, was a kind-hearted and religious woman. Baba Guru Nanak belonged to a Kshatriya family (Bhala, 1962, p. 38). His early education included Arabic, Persian, and Sanskrit, which he received from a Muslim teacher (Amjad, 2020, p. 10).

From a young age, Baba Guru Nanak exhibited extraordinary intelligence and deep spiritual inclinations. He had a profound interest in religious and social issues and often questioned established norms. He married Sulakhni, a woman from a Kshatriya family, and they had two sons, Sri Chand and Lakshmi Das. Through the efforts of his brother-in-law, Jai Ram, he was appointed as the custodian of the royal granary at the court of Nawab Daulat Khan Lodhi in Sultanpur. However, he eventually left the job.

Baba Guru Nanak spent 25 years of his life traveling through various regions, a period known as the Udisi. His four major journeys are as follows (McLeod, n.d., pp. 40–44):

1. *First Journey:* To Eastern India, Bengal, and Assam, where he visited Hindu religious sites.
2. *Second Journey:* To Southern India and Sri Lanka, where he preached his message.
3. *Third Journey:* To Northern India, Kashmir, and Tibet, where he engaged in dialogue with followers of Buddhism.
4. *Fourth Journey:* To Mecca, Medina, Iran, and Iraq, where he held discussions with Islamic scholars.

After traveling through these countries and spreading his message in his unique way, he returned to Punjab in 1521. This was his fourth and final journey (Rana, 2009, p. 65).

Several miracles are attributed to the personality of Baba Guru Nanak, including:

1. *The shade of the black cobra:* While resting under a tree in his youth, a black cobra provided shade over his face.
2. *Water of Life:* The incident of filling a dry pond with water, which is now known in Amritsar as the "Water of Life."
3. *Panja Sahib:* The event of stopping a massive rock while traveling towards Kabul and Kandahar; the imprint of his hand is still visible there today.
4. *Disappearance of the body after death:* After his passing, his physical body was found to have vanished, and only flowers remained, which were respectfully claimed by both Hindus and Muslims in accordance with their respective traditions.

Baba Guru Nanak took practical steps to eliminate social inequality:

1. *The Langar system:* A community kitchen where all individuals eat together without discrimination.
2. *Gender equality:* He declared women to be equal to men.
3. *Honest livelihood:* He emphasized earning a living through ethical means.

At the end of his life, Baba Guru Nanak appointed his devotee Lehna (who later became Guru Angad) as his successor. He passed away on September 22, 1539, in Kartarpur (Shackle & Mandair, 2005, p. xv).

After him, nine more Gurus of Sikhism carried forward his teachings. The life and teachings of Baba Guru Nanak Dev Ji remain a shining example for humanity. His principles of monotheism, equality, and service to humanity continue to serve as a guide for the world. His message was rooted in peace, love, and brotherhood—values that are relevant in every era.

Teachings of Guru Nanak Dev Ji

Guru Nanak Dev Ji, the founder of Sikhism, was a great spiritual leader and social reformer whose teachings impacted the lives of millions. He promoted the values of human equality, social justice, and spiritual growth. His teachings transcend religious boundaries and remain applicable in all times:

1. *Oneness of God*

Guru Nanak emphasized the worship of a formless, omnipresent God, whom he called Waheguru. His philosophy was that God is beyond all religions and can be reached through devotion, righteous living, and good deeds. He taught that the concept of God is not limited to any one religion or belief system (Rose, 2015, p. 97).

2. *Equality of All Human Beings*

Guru Nanak opposed social divisions, the caste system, and gender inequality. He declared that all human beings are equal in the eyes of God. A key aspect of his teachings was the promotion of unity and brotherhood among people of different religions and backgrounds (Cole & Sambhi, 1995, p. 200).

3. *The Three Pillars of Sikhism*

Guru Nanak laid down three essential principles for a purposeful life:

- Naam Japna: Remembering and meditating on God's name—vital for spiritual awakening.
- Kirat Karni: Earning an honest livelihood and working hard.
- Vand Chakna: Sharing one's wealth and resources with those in need (Kapoor, 2005, p. 188).

4. *Opposition to Ritualism*

Guru Nanak condemned religious rituals, idol worship, and pilgrimages that lacked spiritual substance. He emphasized inner devotion, moral conduct, and living a truthful life. He believed that the purpose of worship is to attain closeness to God, not merely to perform external rituals.

5. *Universal Brotherhood*

Guru Nanak's teachings were rooted in harmony, mutual respect, and universal brotherhood. He encouraged dialogue among people of different faiths and worked to eliminate the barriers between them.

Guru Nanak's Hymns and the Guru Granth Sahib

Guru Nanak's teachings were recorded in the form of hymns or shabads, which are included in Sikhism's holy scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib. These hymns were composed in various languages and emphasized humility, devotion, and righteous deeds. Japji Sahib, a daily prayer of the Sikhs, encapsulates Guru Nanak's philosophy.

Social Reforms

Guru Nanak implemented several reforms to eliminate social injustices and lay the foundation of a fair and just society:

1. *Empowerment of Women:* He proclaimed that women are spiritually and socially equal to men.
2. *Elimination of Caste Distinctions:* He introduced the Langar (community kitchen) system, where people from all castes and communities share meals together (Cole & Sambhi, 1995, p. 148).
3. *Honest Livelihood:* He stressed the importance of earning a living through ethical means and hard work.

Message of Unity

Guru Nanak consistently emphasized unity and brotherhood. He believed that Hindus and Muslims could live together in peace and harmony. He worked to create understanding between the two religions and conveyed the message that the oneness of God could unite all humanity.

Preaching Points of Guru Nanak

1. Calling people towards righteousness.
2. Preventing others from engaging in evil.
3. Avoiding selfishness and falsehood.

4. Speaking out against hypocrisy.

Throughout his life, Nanak preached goodness, warned against evil, and raised his voice against hypocrisy, selfishness, materialism, and deceit (Rana, 2009, p. 66).

5. Apart from Naam Simran (remembrance of God), Guru Nanak believed that several other elements help in attaining Divine love. These include company of the holy (Sadh Sangat), earning a livelihood honestly, sharing with others, as well as embodying humility, love, and compassion for all creation (Rana, 2009, p. 68).

6. Instilling the awareness that all human beings are accountable to God.

7. Emphasizing the importance of righteous deeds for salvation.

8. Declaring the Qur'an as a source of Divine guidance.

Guru Nanak's Poetry and Music

Baba Guru Nanak had a natural affinity for poetry and music. He presented his teachings in poetic form and spread his message through music with the help of his close companion, Bhai Mardana. Mardana would play the rabab while Guru Nanak's verses were delivered to the people in the form of devotional songs (Shackle & Mandair, 2005, pp. xiii–xiv).

Guru Nanak's legacy was carried forward by his nine successor Gurus, who strengthened his teachings and shaped Sikhism into an organized religion. Guru Gobind Singh Ji established the Khalsa and declared the Guru Granth Sahib as the eternal scripture of Sikhism. The teachings of Guru Nanak Dev Ji serve not only as a beacon of light for the followers of Sikhism but also for all of humanity. His life and message taught the world lessons of love, equality, and brotherhood. His principles remain relevant even today, offering guidance for the creation of a just and harmonious society.

Role of the Gurus in the Promotion of Sikhism

The ten Sikh Gurus played a crucial role in the development and shaping of Sikhism and its philosophy. Each Guru contributed to strengthening the spiritual, social, and political foundations of the religion. Guru Nanak Dev Ji is the founder of Sikhism. Guru Nanak Dev Ji (1469–1539) was the first Guru and the founder of Sikhism. He began his teachings at a time when religious division, the caste system, and ritualism were prevalent in India. Guru Nanak taught humanity about equality, the worship of one God, and selfless service. His famous principles, known as Naam Japna (remembering God's name), Kirt Karni (earning through honest work), and Vand Chakna (sharing resources), became the fundamental pillars of Sikhism.

Guru Angad Dev Ji: The Second Guru

Guru Angad Dev Ji (1504–1552) was a close companion of Guru Nanak and was appointed as his successor. He took important steps to organize the teachings of Guru Nanak. He developed the Gurmukhi script and recorded the sayings of Guru Nanak, which later became the foundation of the Guru Granth Sahib. He made the Langar (free community kitchen) a part of Sikh worship, which became a symbol of equality. Guru Angad Dev Ji holds the distinction of being appointed as the Guru by Guru Nanak in his final days. As Imad-ul-Hasan Farooqi writes:

“Guru Nanak, during his lifetime, selected a successor, Guru Angad, to guide his followers in the future. Guru Angad's contributions were significant. He not only preserved the traditions initiated by Guru Nanak, such as Kirtan and Langar, but also worked to expand and promote them on a larger scale. He made some changes to the local script and created a new script, naming it Gurmukhi. Additionally, he had Guru Nanak's entire body of teachings, which he had collected during his travels, transcribed into Gurmukhi by his close companion, Bala. Another important task he undertook was the compilation of the life history of Guru Nanak, which also included a summary of Guru Nanak's teachings” (Farooqi, 2009, p. 216).

Guru Amardas Ji: The Third Guru

Guru Amardas Ji (1479–1574) implemented important reforms to further organize Sikhism. He established religious and social principles and organized the followers of Sikhism. He opposed the caste system and granted women equal status. Under his leadership, Sikhism became a strong social movement.

Guru Amardas Ji was the third Guru of the Sikhs, serving from 1552 to 1574. Following the example of Guru Angad, he was chosen as the successor, rather than one of Guru Angad's sons. He introduced reforms to organize the scattered Sikh community across Punjab. He divided the community into 22 districts (called "Manjis," or "spiritual seats"), appointing a seasoned and spiritually advanced Sikh as the head of each district, with a deputy assigned. Guru Amardas Ji maintained excellent relations with Emperor Akbar, which allowed him to initiate various welfare projects, greatly strengthening the Sikh movement and encouraging more Hindus to adopt Sikhism (Farooqi, 2009, p. 216).

Guru Ram Das Ji: The Fourth Guru

Guru Ram Das Ji (1534–1581) founded the city of Amritsar and constructed the sacred Sikh pool, Amrit Sar, which later became part of the Golden Temple (Harmandir Sahib). He further solidified Sikh religious ceremonies, including those for weddings and funerals. Guru Ram Das Ji defined separate Sikh practices for marriage and death rituals, distinct from Hindu traditions. He opposed the Sati ritual and advocated for widow remarriage. He expanded the natural spring, associated with Guru Nanak, into a large pool named Amrit Sar ("The Pool of Nectar"), which later became a holy site. A city was built around the pool, also named Amritsar. This city, located along the main road from Delhi to Kabul, prospered both commercially and religiously. However, it is also true that after Guru Ram Das Ji, the position of Guru became hereditary in his family (Farooqi, n.d., p. 218).

Guru Arjan Dev Ji: The Fifth Guru

Guru Arjan Dev Ji (1563–1606) played a pivotal role in transforming Sikhism into an organized religion. He

compiled the *Adi Granth*, which later became famous as the *Guru Granth Sahib*. He also completed the construction of the Golden Temple in Amritsar, which became the central place of worship for Sikhs. Under his leadership, Sikhism advanced socially and politically. Guru Arjan Dev Ji is credited with the most significant role in establishing Sikhism as a distinct, organized religion. His greatest achievement was compiling the *Guru Granth Sahib*, which had previously been passed down orally. Another of his major accomplishments was the construction of the Harmandir Sahib (Golden Temple) in the Amrit Sar pool, now known as Darbar Sahib. Guru Arjan Dev also introduced the practice of receiving *Dasvandh* (a tithe or donation) from Sikhs, which helped support communal activities such as the *Langar* (free kitchen) and public constructions. With these contributions, three cities—Tarn Taran, Kartar Pur, and Hargobindpur—were established. During his time, the Sikh movement gained political significance, but at the same time, Guru Arjan Dev faced opposition from the Mughal Emperor Jahangir. Jahangir ordered the execution of Guru Arjan Dev and seized all his possessions (Farooqi, n.d., p. 220).

Guru Hargobind Ji: The Sixth Guru

Guru Hargobind Ji (1595–1644) introduced a military system within Sikhism and presented the concept of *Miri-Piri* (the union of spirituality and worldly power). He encouraged Sikhs to take up arms for their own protection and fought several battles against the Mughal rulers. Under his leadership, Sikhism transformed from a spiritual movement into a political force.

Guru Har Rai Ji: The Seventh Guru

Guru Har Rai Ji (1630–1661) was a peaceful and gentle leader. He continued the ideals of Guru Hargobind but tried to avoid conflicts with the Mughal rulers. Under his leadership, Sikhism strengthened its spiritual and social foundations. Guru Har Rai was known for his peaceful nature. The only political action he took was when he helped the prince Dara Shikoh, who was fleeing from Aurangzeb's army. Apart from that, he did not take any significant political actions (Farooqi, n.d., p. 222).

Guru Har Krishan Ji: The Eighth Guru

Guru Har Krishan Ji (1656–1664) was the youngest Guru of Sikhism, who ascended to the position at the age of just five. He passed away while serving the sick during a smallpox epidemic in Delhi. His sacrifice and service to humanity became a symbol of selflessness. Guru Har Krishan was the younger son of Guru Har Rai, while his elder brother, Ram Rai, stayed at the court of Aurangzeb and was estranged from his father. Consequently, Guru Har Krishan was appointed as the Guru at the age of five. On the suggestion of Ram Rai, Aurangzeb summoned Guru Har Krishan to Delhi, where he passed away due to smallpox. Before his passing, he nominated his grandfather's younger brother, Guru Tegh Bahadur, to succeed him as Guru (Farooqi, n.d., p. 222).

Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji: The Ninth Guru

Guru Tegh Bahadur was the ninth of the ten Gurus of Sikhism and led the Sikh community from 1665 to 1675. He was born on April 1, 1621, in Amritsar, Punjab, India, and was the youngest son of Guru Hargobind, the sixth Guru of the Sikhs. He was considered a brave and principled warrior, as well as a spiritual scholar and poet, with 115 Shabads included in the Guru Granth Sahib. Guru Tegh Bahadur was martyred in Delhi in 1675 during the reign of the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb. After his martyrdom, his son, Gobind Rai, succeeded him as the tenth Guru. In 1699, Guru Gobind Singh founded the Khalsa and transformed his followers into a military force to resist religious persecution. Thus, Guru Gobind Singh's leadership shaped Sikh identity into a political and military power (Seiple, 2013, p. 96).

Guru Gobind Singh Ji: The Tenth Guru

Guru Gobind Singh Ji (1666–1708) was the last Guru of Sikhism, who founded the Khalsa Panth. He taught Sikhs to adopt the "Five Ks" (Kesh, Kanga, Kara, Kirpan, Kachera) and gave them the title of Khalsa. He transformed the Sikhs into a strong military force and declared the Guru Granth Sahib as the eternal Guru of the Sikhs. Guru Gobind Singh also spent his final years in disguise in the Deccan, where he

was eventually martyred by Afghan forces. Guru Gobind Singh had decided that there would be no successor to the Sikh Gurus in the future; instead, the Sikh holy book, the Guru Granth Sahib, would always serve as the Guru. Commenting on his era, Imad-ul-Hassan Faruqi writes:

"It can be said that Guru Gobind Singh failed in his mission for which he had dedicated his life—seeking revenge for his father's death at the hands of the Mughal government. Not only did he fail, but he lost everything in the process. However, later history proved that through the formation of the Khalsa, he molded the Sikh community into a new form and infused it with a sense of unity and national spirit. This became evident during the decline of the Mughal Empire, and eventually reached its zenith under Maharaja Ranjit Singh's rule (1793–1838). On the other hand, the evolution of Sikh identity, which had begun during the era of Guru Angad, reached its culmination during Guru Gobind Singh's time, establishing Sikhism as a distinct and unique religious tradition in the world" (Farooqi, n.d., p. 226).

Guru Granth Sahib: The Eternal Holy Book

Guru Granth Sahib is the holy book of Sikhism, which contains the sayings of the Sikh Gurus and other religious figures. This book is written in the Gurmukhi script and serves as a source of spiritual guidance for Sikhs. Guru Gobind Singh Ji granted it the status of the eternal Guru, and since then, no human Guru has been appointed.

Guru Nanak had left behind religious hymns and prayers for his followers, which the Sikhs carefully preserved. The second Guru created the Gurmukhi (Punjabi) script. The fifth Guru compiled all these sayings into a book, which included the hymns and teachings of Kabir and fifteen other spiritual leaders. This is called the Adi Granth or the original Granth. As previously mentioned, the tenth Guru made several new additions to it, resulting in it becoming the sacred book of Sikhism. Before his death, the tenth Guru instructed the Sikhs not to appoint a new Guru but to consider the Granth as their Guru. Since then, this holy book (Granth Sahib) has been the central and spiritual source of the Sikh community.

The entire text of this book is in verse, although there was no strict requirement for all the verses to follow the same meter. Most of it is written in the ancient Hindi script, Gurmukhi, with some parts in other languages. The second part of the Granth is called the Vism Granth, compiled by Guru Gobind Singh, and mostly contains hymns praising Allah, along with some works by Hindi poets. The total number of hymns in the Granth is 3,384, and it is three times larger in size than the Rig Veda. Some verses in the Granth are even in complete contradiction to the teachings of the Quran (Amjad, 2020, p. 184).

Fundamental Beliefs of Sikhism

The principles of Sikhism are based on love, equality, and service. Sikh Gurus not only brought reforms in the religious field but also in the social and political spheres. They raised their voices against the caste system, gender discrimination, and religious intolerance. The teachings of Sikhism played a key role in promoting social justice and equality in India. Under the leadership of Guru Gobind Singh Ji, the formation of the Khalsa Panth transformed the Sikhs into an organized and strong community. The history of Sikhism is filled with the sacrifices and teachings of the Gurus. Each Guru played a role in the development of Sikhism and transformed it into a powerful religious and social movement. Guru Granth Sahib is a treasure trove of Sikhism's principles and teachings, which continues to guide millions of people today. The sacrifices and teachings of the Sikh Gurus are an example for humanity and will always be remembered.

Sikhism is one of the modern religions of the world, based on equality, service to humanity, and the oneness of God. The beliefs and principles of Sikhism are derived from the teachings of Guru Nanak and the subsequent Gurus. These beliefs focus on promoting the welfare of humanity and spiritual peace.

1. *Oneness of God*

The central belief of Sikhism is the oneness of God. Waheguru, the central God in Sikhism, is a singular and formless entity that is present everywhere. Waheguru cannot

be confined to any human form or idol. Guru Nanak defined God through the Mul Mantar as follows:

"ایک اوانکار، ست نام، کرتا پرکھ، نربھاء، نرور، اکل مورت، اجونی، سبھن، گرو پر ساد۔"

"Ik Onkar, Sat Nam, Karta Purakh, Nirbhau, Nirvair, Akal Moorat, Ajuni, Saibhan, Guru Prasad."

Through the Mul Mantar, it is made clear that God is one, the creator of all, and can only be understood through love and faith (Rose, 2015, p. 97).

Prophethood:

Baba Nanak says:

م محمد من توں من کتاباں چار
من خدائے رسول نوں سچائی دربار

*"Muhammad man toon man, kitabaan chaar,
Man Khudaaye Rasool nu sachai darbar."*

This means that for every human being, belief in both the oneness of God and the Prophethood is essential (Rana, 2009, p. 68).

Praise of Prophet Muhammad (صلی اللہ علیہ وآلہ وسلم):

Baba Guru Nanak, on various occasions, praised the honor and dignity of Prophet Muhammad (صلی اللہ علیہ وآلہ وسلم). He writes about the noble status of Prophet Muhammad (صلی اللہ علیہ وآلہ وسلم):

*"Kithe Noor Muhammadi, ditha Nabi Rasool,
Nanak qudrat dekh, mehri khudi gayi sab bhool."*

کیتھے نور محمدی ڈیتھے نبی رسول
نانک قدرت دیکھ محر خودی گئی سب بھول

This means that the light of all the Prophets manifested from the light of Muhammad (صلی اللہ علیہ وآلہ وسلم). When Nanak saw the power of Allah and His wonders, he forgot his own self.

"Uthe pehr bhonda phire, khawan sandray Rasool,
Dozakh ponday kiyon rahe, jaal chit na hoye Rasool."

اٹھے پہر بھوندا پھرے کھاون سنڈرے رسول
دوزخ پوندا کیوں رہے جال چیت نہ ہوئے رسول

This means that those who do not have reverence and love for the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) in their hearts will wander aimlessly in this world and, after death, their abode will be Hell. The salvation of the world is tied to the servitude of the Prophet (ﷺ).

"Hindu kehna na paak hai, dozakh soli,
Kehdo Allah aur Rasool ko aur na bujho koi."

ہند و کہن نا پاک ہے دوزخ سولی
کہدو اللہ اور رسول کو اور نہ بوجھو کوئی

The Hindus speak impure words against the honor of the Prophet (ﷺ) and Allah, and they will certainly be in Hell. Confirm with sincere hearts that Allah and His Prophet (ﷺ) are the truth, and ask no further questions (Bhai Bala, 1990, p. 177).

2. Equality

The principle of equality is very important in Sikhism. Guru Nanak strongly rejected the caste system and declared:

"Na koi Hindu, na koi Muslim" (Shackle & Mandair, 2005, pp. xiii-xiv).

This statement affirms that all humans are equal in the eyes of God. In Sikhism, the concept of Langar (community kitchen) is a practical expression of equality, where people from all castes, religions, and social classes sit together and share a meal.

3. The Three Pillars of Sikhism

Guru Nanak presented three fundamental principles for a meaningful life:

1. *Naam Japna*: Repeating God's name and remembering the Divine in every action (Cole & Sambhi, 1995, pp. 155–156).
2. *Kirat Karni*: Earning a living through honest work.
3. *Vand Chakna*: Sharing wealth and resources with the less fortunate.

These three principles play an essential role in the daily life of Sikhs and promote social justice alongside spiritual awakening.

4. Rejection of Ritualism and Superstition

Sikhism is against ritualism and superstition. Guru Nanak rejected idol worship, rituals, and blind faith, encouraging individuals to seek inner spirituality. According to him, the pursuit of truth and performing good deeds to gain God's favor is far more important (Sikh Rehat Maryada, n.d., Section Four, Chapter X, Article XVI, i; Section Six, Chapter XIII, Article XXIV, d).

5. Faith in Prophets and Scriptures

Sikhism is influenced by several principles of Islam. Baba Guru Nanak acknowledged the truth of God's prophets and the Quran. His sayings also include praises for Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), as he states:

"The light of all prophets emanated from the light of Muhammad (ﷺ)."

Similarly, the Quran is recognized as a divinely revealed scripture (Cole & Sambhi, 1995, p. 157).

6. Worship

In Sikhism, worship is considered crucial for spiritual purification. The following forms of worship are included:

Prayer (Namaz):

- Guru Nanak considered prayer to be an essential part of worship. He said:
"Recite prayer five times a day and remember God, or you will face disgrace."

Guru Nanak presents his thoughts on prayer in the following words:

فریدا بے نماز اکیتا	ایہ نہ بھلی ریت
کبھی چل نہ آیا	پنجے وقت مسیت
اٹھ فریدا وضو ساج	صبح نماز گزار
جو سر سائیں نہ ہنویں	سو سر کپ اتار
جو سر سائیں نہ ہنویں	سو سر کیجئے کاٹیں
کنے ہیٹھ جلائیے	بالن سندڑتے تھائیں

"Farida, the one who does not pray is not following the right path,
He never goes to the mosque for the five daily prayers.
Rise, Farida, and purify yourself,
Perform your morning prayers, and surrender your ego.
If you do not bow to God, then remove your ego,
Take your soul and heart into submission to Him."

Baba Farid Ganj Shakar says, "O prayerless dog! Your way is not acceptable, as you never go to the mosque for the five daily prayers. O Farid, wake up in the morning, perform ablution, and pray. Remove the head of the one who does not bow before God. What use is a head that does not bow before God? It is useless. Throw such a head into the furnace beneath the pot as fuel." Similarly, it is said:

جمع کرنام دی پنج نماز گزار
باجھوں یاد خدائے دلے لہوسیں بہت خوار

"Offer all five prayers in congregation; if you neglect God's remembrance, you will be greatly humiliated" (Shapiro, 2002, pp. 924–925).

Zakat:

Baba Guru Nanak says about Zakat:

لعنت برے نت نہاں جو زکوٰۃ نہ کڈھدے مال
دھکا پوندا غیب دا ہونداسب زوال

"Cursed be those who do not give Zakat from their wealth,
A sudden punishment from the unseen will befall them, and
all their wealth will perish."

Those who do not give Zakat from their wealth are cursed by Allah, and sudden punishment will come from the unseen, causing their wealth to vanish.

Fasting (Roza):

Baba Guru Nanak says about fasting:

"You kept thirty fasts and five prayers, but remember, if
your friend is Satan, all your deeds may be wasted."

It is clearly written in Sikh scriptures that Guru Nanak Ji stayed in Mecca and Medina for two years, and much of his time was spent in fasting.

Additionally, Sikh scriptures confirm that Guru Ji also encouraged others to fast.

Hajj:

Finally, Baba Guru Nanak turned towards Islam and began visiting the shrines. His longing grew so much that the desire to perform Hajj arose in his heart. As mentioned in his Janam Sakhi, he said:

"Let the pilgrims go to Hajj. If it is our fate to perform the Hajj of the Kaaba, we will also reach it. This path is such that if you continue with devotion, love, and service, you will gain the blessings, but if you proceed with mockery, you cannot become a true pilgrim."

Eventually, when this resolve was firmly established, one day Baba Ji said to his companions, "Let's go, we will also perform the Hajj and see the sacred places." Guru Nanak Ji stayed in Mecca and Medina for one year.

Quran Majeed:

The Quran Majeed is the Divine Word. It is the source of Islamic teachings and the constitution of Islamic life. It is the miracle of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) that has not been refuted to this day. Despite challenges, nothing has been created to rival it. Guru Nanak, influenced by its truth and authenticity, writes:

"In the entire world, only the Holy Quran is the approved book; all other books have been abrogated. Now, the attribute of Allah, the Most Merciful, is manifest."

And at another place, regarding the Quran, he writes:

توراة، زبور، انجیل پڑھ سن ڈٹھے وید
رہیا قرآن کتبہ برے کل یگ میں پروان

"I have read the Torah, Psalms, Gospel, and Vedas,
But in the whole world, Allah has chosen the Quran to
guide humanity in this age."

This means that although I studied the Torah, Psalms, Gospel, and Vedas, Allah has chosen the Holy Quran for the guidance of the world. When asked by someone, Baba Ji says:

"Follow the Quran and act according to it" (Rana, 2009, p. 68).

7. Ethics

Ethics hold great importance in Sikhism. Baba Guru Nanak encouraged people to perform good deeds, avoid selfishness, and walk the path of truth. According to him:

"The head that refuses to bow before God is useless" (Singh, 2000, p. 17).

8. Belief in the Afterlife and Resurrection

Baba Guru Nanak's belief in the Day of Judgment is similar to that of Muslims. He believed that one day the sky, the earth, the sun, the moon, and the stars will all fade away, and only the essence of Allah will remain. He accepted the concepts of heaven and hell and stated:

عملاں والے تت دن ہوسن بے پرواہ
سنی چھٹے نان کا حضرت جنائ پناہ

"On that day, those who have good and virtuous deeds will have no worries. Nanak says that those who are protected by the Prophet (صلی اللہ علیہ وآلہ وسلم) will find salvation."

In other words, Nanak believed in intercession (Rana, 2009, p. 69).

9. Denial of Ego

Baba Guru Nanak considered ego (I-ness) the greatest obstacle on the path of spiritual development. According to him:

"A person should eliminate their 'I' and walk according to God's will."

10. Opposition to Asceticism

Sikhism opposes asceticism. Guru Nanak emphasized the importance of married life, righteous companionship, and service to humanity, stating that true success is in remembering God while living in the world.

11. Women's Rights

Sikhism gives women equal status. Guru Nanak stressed gender equality and said that both men and women have equal spiritual rights.

12. The Concept of Langar

Langar is a unique practice in Sikhism, symbolizing equality, service, and social unity. Guru Nanak introduced this concept, where all people, regardless of their background, eat together without any distinction.

13. Love for Nature

Sikhism teaches the preservation of nature and the environment. Guru Nanak instructed humans to live close to nature and respect it.

Sikh beliefs are based on the welfare of humanity, spiritual development, and social justice. The teachings of Baba Guru Nanak and his successors provided this religion with a practical, moral, and spiritual system. These beliefs are not only a guide for Sikhs but also for all of humanity. Sikhism teaches us that through love, equality, and service, we can create a better world.

Symbols and Practices of Sikhism

In Sikhism, symbols and practices not only reflect the spiritual foundations of the religion but also clarify the principles of practical life. These symbols and practices make

Sikhism unique and keep its followers united spiritually, morally, and socially.

1. *Khalsa and the Five Ks*

The Khalsa is an ideal community of Sikh followers, established by Guru Gobind Singh Ji in 1699. The formation of the Khalsa was accompanied by a pledge to ensure its members were spiritually strong, morally upright, and socially just. The members of the Khalsa follow the "Five Ks," which are an essential part of their lives (Singh & Fenech, 2014, pp. 23–24).

Kesh

Kesh, meaning unshorn hair, is the first symbol of Sikhism. It represents the acceptance of God's creation in its original form. This principle shows that Sikhs accept God's will without any alteration.

Kangha

The Kangha is a small wooden comb, symbolizing cleanliness and discipline. It signifies that a Sikh should maintain cleanliness, not only physically but also spiritually.

Kara

Kara is an iron bracelet, symbolizing unity, strength, and immortality. It reminds Sikhs to remain strong and united in their faith and principles.

Kachera

Kachera is a cotton undergarment, symbolizing self-control and purity. It reflects the purity of a Sikh's character and their moral strength.

Kirpan

The Kirpan is a small sword, symbolizing courage, justice, and the defense of the oppressed. The Kirpan signifies that Sikhs will always stand for justice and defend the oppressed against the tyrants.

2. *Langar (Community Kitchen)*

Langar is a prominent tradition in Sikhism, symbolizing service and equality. This community kitchen is

present in gurdwaras worldwide, where people from all castes, religions, and classes sit together to eat (McWilliams, 2014, p. 265).

Langar Principles

- Selfless Service: Cooking, serving, and cleaning in the Langar are done voluntarily, a practice known as "Seva."
- Equality: In the Langar, all individuals sit together on the floor to eat, regardless of their social or economic status.
- No One Should Stay Hungry: The fundamental principle of Langar is that no one should be left hungry, regardless of their religion or nationality.

Importance of Langar

Langar is not just a simple food arrangement; it is a practical demonstration of equality, community, and selfless service to humanity. It is an embodiment of the core teachings of Sikhism.

3. Gurdwara

A gurdwara, the place of worship for Sikhs, is not only a place of prayer but also a center for spiritual, cultural, and social activities. In the gurdwara, Sikhs worship in front of the sacred scripture, Guru Granth Sahib, and receive spiritual guidance.

Gurdwara Features

- Guru Granth Sahib: The most sacred part of the gurdwara is the place where the Guru Granth Sahib is placed.
- Diwan Hall: A large hall for worship where everyone equally participates in prayer.
- Langar Hall: A part of the gurdwara where Langar (community kitchen) is served.
- Nishan Sahib: A tall flagpole outside the gurdwara with the Sikh symbol, which identifies the gurdwara.

Golden Temple of Amritsar

The Golden Temple, located in Amritsar, also known as Harmandir Sahib, is the holiest gurdwara in Sikhism.

- This gurdwara is a symbol of spiritual peace and social unity.
- Thousands of people visit the Golden Temple daily and participate in Langar.
- Kirtan (religious hymns) is sung here day and night, providing spiritual tranquility.

4. Other Symbols and Practices

Sikhism also has other important symbols and practices that represent the unique identity of the religion:

Seva (Selfless Service)

Seva, meaning selfless service, is a central practice in Sikhism. Seva is considered the best way to serve humanity. This service can take many forms, such as working in the gurdwara, helping the needy, or protecting the environment.

Kirtan

Kirtan is the practice of singing sacred hymns, based on the words of the Guru Granth Sahib. Kirtan is a means of spiritual peace and closeness to God.

Amrit Sanchar

Amrit Sanchar is a sacred ceremony in Sikhism through which a Sikh is initiated into the Khalsa. During this ceremony, holy water (Amrit) is prepared and after drinking it, a vow is taken to follow the principles of the Khalsa.

Sikhism's symbols and practices provide spiritual, moral, and social guidance in the lives of Sikhs. The five Ks of the Khalsa, the service of Langar, and worship in the gurdwara, all keep Sikh followers united in a strong community. Through these practices and symbols, Sikhism spreads the message of equality, service, and justice worldwide. These practices are not only religious rituals but also practical examples of serving humanity and social justice, helping to make the world a better place.

Sikh Spirituality and Practical Life

The Guru Granth Sahib is a lengthy religious text consisting of 1,430 pages, compiled and written by Sikh Gurus from 1469 to 1708 (Singh, 1999). Each page contains 19 lines, totaling 26,852 lines. This sacred book was first compiled by the fifth Sikh Guru, Guru Arjan Dev, by bringing together the hymns of the first five Sikh Gurus. Since it is regarded as the final Guru, it holds the highest significance in Sikhism. It is used in all Sikh worship services and important ceremonies like weddings and naming ceremonies. It is never left alone and is typically covered with special multicolored cloth (Penney, 1999).

The Guru Granth Sahib mentions various beliefs that form the foundation of Sikhism, with the central theme of recognizing God as the central focus in every aspect. A key theme in this religious book is that humanity is regarded as the lesser creation, while God is seen as omnipotent and dominant over all things. God's various attributes are described at multiple points, and some of them are as follows:

- Creator: The one who creates everything.
- Omnipotent: The one who is dominant over all things.
- Rahman: The one who is exceedingly merciful.
- Rahim: The one who is exceedingly compassionate.
- Noorani: The one who is the source of light.

These attributes are mentioned throughout the Guru Granth Sahib, illustrating God's greatness and human humility. God is also described as possessing "innumerable" names, some of which are as follows:

- Nirankar: The one who is formless and colorless.
- Akal Purakh: The one who is eternal.
- Sachay Padshah: The one who is the King of Truth.
- Parmatma: The one who resides in every heart.
- Sareer: The one who is present everywhere.

These names appear on various pages of the Guru Granth Sahib, reflecting different aspects and attributes of God.

According to Sikh beliefs, whatever happens in human life occurs according to God's will (hukam). The Guru Granth Sahib emphasizes that the cycle of birth and death (Punarjanm) is real, and that life exists in 8.4 million different forms. Every living being must go through these forms, including insects, elephants, fish, deer, birds, snakes, stones, mountains, etc. Human life is considered the final birth, which is attained only after performing good deeds. It is said that all forms of life are filled with suffering and pain, except human life, which is considered the highest because it provides an opportunity to reunite with God. Only in human life can peace be attained by chanting God's name (Naam). If a person recognizes the true God, they are liberated from the cycle of birth and death and do not take rebirth. Sikh beliefs also emphasize that the thoughts in a person's mind at the time of death determine the nature of their next birth. The details are as follows:

The Cycle of Birth and Death and its Impact

According to Sikh beliefs, the cycle of birth and death is a reality, where a person undergoes multiple births. This cycle depends on the person's actions (karma). If a person performs good deeds, they take a better birth; otherwise, the cycle of birth and death continues. Some important verses from the Guru Granth Sahib regarding this cycle are as follows:

- "Awan jana jammam marna man makh pat gawai"
Those who are distant from the teachings of the Guru remain trapped in the cycle of birth and death.
- "Mere maray thaao na paaye, bartha janam gawai"
Those who do not follow the teachings of the Guru waste their birth.
- "Bhram bhram jooni phir phir aaya"
Those who perform bad deeds are born repeatedly.

These verses are found in various pages of the Guru Granth Sahib, explaining the cycle of birth and death and its effects.

Another important belief in Sikhism is related to karma (actions). Karma refers to a person's worldly deeds; the results of these deeds determine whether a soul can attain freedom (mukti) from the cycle of birth and death. Freedom from this cycle is called "mukti" or liberation. Various factors such as pride (hankaar), lust (kaam), anger (krodh), greed (lobh), and excessive attachment to worldly things (moh) can prevent a soul from attaining mukti. In the Guru Granth Sahib, the human body is described as a garment that is influenced by a person's karma.

Similarly, Hindu philosophy also views life as a continuum and compares the various births to changing clothes (Bhugra, 1992). The prominent Ayurvedic expert Charak also emphasized karma and described the human body as a collection of cells that are divided under the influence of karma, vayu (the life energy), and swabhav (personal nature) (Bhugra, 1992). According to this theory, illness should be understood as part of an interconnected system, where food, environment, and other factors affect the individual, disease, and its response.

The Guru Granth Sahib describes two types of human characteristics:

Man Mukh (Self-Centered People)

These are the people who only think about themselves. It is said that they are always in suffering, wandering like madmen, like a deer searching for the scent of its own musk (Kalra, Bhui, & Bhugra, 2012). They may outwardly engage in worship, much like an unwanted bride who adorns herself, but her husband (God) does not come near her; as a result, she becomes more and more sorrowful. They keep themselves busy with rituals, chanting mantras, or daily rites, but if these are done without the name of God, they are futile. Such people ultimately die in despair, and they are compared to worms that live in dung.

Guru Mukh (People Turning Towards God)

These are the people who always remember God. They experience joy and spiritual fragrance, and they are connected to the name of God. God resides in their hearts, and they attain spiritual treasures. They are called "the pure-hearted bride." The Guru Granth Sahib mentions that Guru Mukh wins the battle of life, while Man Mukh loses. This could suggest that Man Mukh might suffer from emotional breakdowns or depression.

In the Context of Healing and Treatment

The Guru Granth Sahib also provides treatment and guidance regarding mental health issues such as depression on an individual level. It is stated that mental peace and contentment can bring the mind back to its original state, that is, balance (Santan). The Guru Granth Sahib emphasizes the importance of timely diagnosis and treatment of depression. The name of God is described as a medicine (Oshad), and it is said that this name can bring peace to a distressed person and relieve their worries. However, this religious text is not a pharmacopeia, so it does not mention the medicinal role of drugs. In some places, medicines and treatments are even compared to ash. The Guru Granth Sahib describes meditation (Dhyan) as a healing process, provided it is done with the name of God. By listening to meditation and the teachings of spiritual teachers, devotees remain in eternal joy. The Guru Granth Sahib describes several ways of worshiping God (Puja, Bhakti), including:

- Ardas (Prayer)
- Shabad and Kirtan (Sacred Hymns)
- Naam Jap (Recitation of God's Name)
- Oshat (Praise of God)
- Sakhi Sunna (Listening to Guru's Teachings)
- Gurbani (Words of the Guru)
- Updesh (Advice)

The Guru Granth Sahib states that the solution to sorrow and grief is possible when a person seeks refuge in

"Prabhram" (the True God). Here, "refuge" can refer to a sacred place or remembrance of God. For long-term control over depression, the Guru Granth Sahib encourages the remembrance of God's name (Simran), praising Him, and staying in His refuge (Ram Ki Sharan). These practices grant eternal peace and mental balance. The repetition of God's name (Har Jap) and selfless service to others (Seva) grant true happiness. The recitation of God's name can be done twenty-four hours a day (Aath Pehar) or day and night, and it becomes a source of protection from suffering and healing. Therefore, adopting the Guru Mukh lifestyle is recommended.

Causes of Depression and the Role of Karma

Along with emphasizing the importance of karma (actions) in the causes of depression, the Guru Granth Sahib also makes it clear that God can forgive the bad actions of every creature. The only condition for this forgiveness is that the person completely surrenders to God. Such verses can be helpful in the therapy of individuals who are suffering from the feeling of sin due to their bad actions. In the Guru Granth Sahib, responsibility and authority are entirely entrusted to external forces — such as God, karma, and the universe — and to some extent, this attitude prevents people from taking responsibility for their own lives. This seemingly creates the impression that external control is preferable (external locus of control).

According to the Guru Granth Sahib, remembering God (Prabh Simran) and meditation (Dhyan) can relieve both physical and mental illnesses. Those who meditate on God's name with complete focus remain balanced and stable forever. Raja Yoga (Yoga of Meditation) is described as a practice that provides ultimate peace, happiness (Sukh), and contentment (Santokh). Samadhi is considered the ultimate and perfect stage of a prosperous life, akin to a sweet pleasure, where a person quietly merges with God. However, it is also emphasized that meditation only has power when it is done with the name of God. The futility of meditation without God's name is explained through the following examples:

- An imaginary rider sitting on a horse
- A eunuch touching a woman
- Trying to milk an ox
- Chasing a lion while sitting on a cow
- Going shopping without money

Scientific studies on using prayer as a method of treatment or prevention of illness are rare and are often not published in scientific journals. For example, a study conducted on regular reciters of Sikh Muni Sahib in Amritsar found that the incidence of high blood pressure was lower (4.76%) among those who recited Sikh Muni Sahib regularly, compared to those who did not (9.7%) (Singh & Singh, n.d.). Although such a research approach may not be appropriate for religious texts, religion provides hope, meaning, and faith for those in suffering or those who are uncertain about their future.

Dealing with Pain and Suffering in Sikhism (and General South and East Asian Teachings)

Sikh (and generally South and East Asian) teachings offer a specific framework for dealing with pain and suffering. Guru Nanak identified various types of suffering, such as:

- The sorrow of separation from God
- The torment of oppression and death
- The pain of physical illnesses
- The agony of mental and spiritual ailments

Indeed, Singh suggests that the primary role of religious teachings, spiritual emotions, and experiences is to address the ancient and difficult question: "If God is merciful, why is there so much suffering in the world?" (Singh, Hinnells, & Porter, 1999). This spiritual wisdom provides a way for humans to endure and overcome their pain, illness, and despair — and that path is made possible through a connection and closeness to God. The Guru Granth Sahib is not just a religious book for Sikhs but a living spiritual guide, which after the tenth Guru, is regarded as the "living Guru."

Though written centuries ago, this book still holds complete significance today, especially in relation to mental health issues like depression. Not only does it address the causes and symptoms of depression, but it also provides guidance on its treatment. The teachings on treating depression can still be highly relevant and effective in today's world, particularly when considered in a medical context. Mental health professionals, counselors, and therapists who work with Sikh patients, if they understand and reflect on these spiritual and psychological principles from the Guru Granth Sahib, can assist their patients with greater empathy, understanding, and effectiveness.

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