

Sikhism

Interfaith Witness

BELIEF BULLETIN

World Religions

NAME: Sikhism (pronounced "seek-ism")

FOUNDER AND KEY FIGURES: Nanak (1469-1539) and nine successive leaders (gurus) through 1708.

ORIGIN: India, with greatest success in the Punjab region

SCRIPTURES: Adi Granth (Guru Granth Sahib)

ADHERENTS: Worldwide—est. 20 million U.S.—est. 250,000

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:

Sikhism is a recent religion (15th century A.D.) and represents a syncretism of Hindu devotional elements and the monotheism of Islam. However, its adherents claim it constitutes a fresh religious start. Nanak believed God commissioned him to spread a new redemptive revelation to humanity—that all people should believe in the true God. His message primarily taught the repetition of God's name, through charity to all, meditation, worship, and ritual purity through ablution were prominent elements. Nanak's followers called themselves Sikhs (disciples). Sikhism does not consider itself an active missionary religion because it accepts other religious traditions as valid.

Sikhs first came to the United States in 1908, when several immigrants from the Punjab region of India entered California. They built their first place of worship in 1912. Migrations since World War II have added to the Sikh population. In 1969, they built the largest Sikh temple in the world in Yuba City, Calif. Sikhs have established several organizational bodies in the United States, including the Sikh Council of North America, the chief instrument for coordinating Sikh work. One prominent branch of Sikhism in the United States is Sikh Dharma. Its head—Yogi Bhajan (b. 1929)—has been the major propagator of Sikh ideas in the United States.

KEY BELIEFS:

GOD: Sikhism holds that God is one. There is no Trinity. He is Creator, sovereign,

all-powerful, all-knowing, eternal. They believe God both transcends and indwells the universe. God is the abstract principle of truth and has never known an incarnation. Neither can He be defined. However, God is personal in that He can be loved and honored. Nanak called God the "true name" (Sat Nam) because he wanted to avoid any term implying God could be limited.

CHRISTIAN RESPONSE: God is the only eternal being in the universe, and He is supreme. God has revealed Himself personally to humanity as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The incarnation of Jesus Christ epitomizes God's love for fallen humanity. Christianity affirms Jesus' unique place as Savior and Lord of humanity (John 1:1-14; 3:16).

PLACE OF HUMANITY: Although humans are the highest order of creation, they are separated from God because of self-centeredness and willful ignorance of God. This separation is the source of all human misery and unhappiness. Consequently, people are bound up in the process known as transmigration of the soul—continual birth, death, and rebirth (reincarnation). Position in the next life is dependent on the law of karma, a notion that one's thoughts, words, and deeds have a direct impact on future reincarnations. Current circumstances were determined by past behavior and current conduct will shape the next life. The goal of Sikhism is to break this cycle.

CHRISTIAN RESPONSE: Human beings were created in the image of a loving

God and are the crowning achievement of His creative acts. God endowed humanity with free choice, but people chose to disobey God and introduce sin into the race. The chief fault of humanity is rebellion against God. As a gift from God, human personality is sacred and unique; every person is of great value. There are no reincarnations, and people have only one life; afterward, all must stand before God's judgment (Gen. 1:26-31; Ps. 8; John 3:16).

SALVATION: The endless cycles of reincarnation are caused by selfish desire and ignorance of God, but they may be ended by renouncing self and becoming devoted to God. Consequently, the ultimate goal in life has a twofold aspect: liberation from continual birth and rebirth and union with God. Salvation is achieved through God's grace, who reveals Himself and allows humans to meditate on His name and nature.

CHRISTIAN RESPONSE: The future destiny of people is not determined by karma, but by acceptance or rejection of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Salvation is defined as being born again, or receiving the new birth (regeneration) through personal faith in Jesus Christ and His sacrifice on the cross. The afterlife is not union of the soul with God, but a resurrection of the body and conscious worship of the Lord forever with other believers (Eph. 2:1-10; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; Rev. 21:1-7).

GRACE: Grace is understood as God's kind recognition or notice of a person. This endowment of grace enables people to follow a path that will free them from karma and reincarnation. Full surrender to God's will is most important for those who want to receive God's grace, because grace comes when

people eliminate self from their minds. The effects of grace include constant meditation on the repetition of God's name and good works to other humans.

CHRISTIAN RESPONSE: Grace refers to God's redemptive love toward sinful humanity. Grace is unmerited on the part of humans. Grace is supremely represented in the person and work of Jesus Christ, who seeks to save sinners and maintains believers in proper relationship with Him (Eph. 2:8-9).

WITNESSING TO SIKHS:

1. Establish positive and cordial relationships with Sikhs. Let them see Christ's love in you. Give your new friends New Testaments so that they may inquire further about your faith. Help them understand what they read.

2. Be aware of aspects of the Sikh religion that are similar to Christianity—for example: monotheism, need for relationship with God, and good works resulting from religious values. Lead them to God's teachings about the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as Savior.

3. Be prepared to share your faith and God's Word concerning the human predicament and God's desire for humanity. The "Here's Hope Roman Road" tract (see Rom. 3:23; 5:8; 6:23; 10:9,13; 12:1-2) is one witnessing tool that has been used effectively by many Christians.

4. Invite Sikhs to attend a Christian worship service, and explain what each part of the service signifies in relation to Christian theology. Clarify such terms as salvation, faith, new birth, and conversion.

5. Underscore the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as humanity's Savior and as God's perfect revelation of Himself.

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4200 North Point Pkwy.
Alpharetta, GA 30202-4174

A Southern Baptist Convention agency supported by the
Cooperative Program and the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering
363-77F/10M/7-95

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