PHILOSOPHY OF SIKHISM
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The main reason I wrote this paper was to better my own understanding of the faith that my culture heavily practiced. My goal, after writing this account of Sikhism, is to educate the general public about the many facets of this faith. I firmly believe that this religion, or way of life, needs to be recognized on a broader scale. Even though Sikhism boasts a large number of followers it is often misconstrued or not understood at all. Knowledge about this faith seems to be confined to a select few that have roots in religious studies or the culture itself. I have opted to use the thematic approach of unity as this is the fundamental notion of Sikhism. I believe this approach will the most effective way to help readers absorb and understand Sikh Ideologies.

My first aim is to present the notions of Sikhism and its contemporary relevance. My second aim is to establish that Sikhism is in fact an independent faith and not a sect of Hinduism or Islam and moreover, not a synthesis of the two. Although there are similarities with the two belief systems, I will demonstrate that Sikhism is essentially a separate faith that has evolved independently. Lastly, what I hope to accomplish with this paper is to provide readers with an in-depth understanding of Sikhism as a culture while offering a general, yet thorough illustration of the faith.
Introduction

The Sikh religion is amongst the youngest of faiths, having been founded around five hundred years ago in the state of Punjab. Today it is recognized as the fifth largest religion in the world, with approximately 30 million Sikh followers globally. The origins of Sikhism can be traced back to 1469, the year its founder Guru Nanak was born. Guru Nanak declared a message of love and faith and proclaimed that devotion to God is the basis of the religion. He preached this message as he travelled throughout India and other parts of Asia. Guru Nanak’s entire view was based on the concept of the unity of God as this was the ultimate purpose of man. He asked people to worship the One Supreme Being and Him alone. He emphasized submission to God’s will through prayer while teaching that virtue and love for all is the final means to realization and liberation from suffering. Guru Nanak was conscious of the poverty and societal rifts caused by the inherent hostility religious diversity caused through opposing views. He posited that all religions rooted from the same God which could be taught in different styles. He wanted people to see past the external differences in various ways of life to realize that the fundamentals are almost always shared. His ethical structure breaks the oppressive practices and sovereignties of caste, class, ethnicity, and gender; everybody autonomous and equal, with the same responsibilities toward the Divine and toward one another. His goal was for society to unite as one and for all to embrace the nature and world that God created.
Guru Nanak and the Origin of Sikhism

Guru Nanak was born on April 15th, 1469 into the family of Mehta Kalyan Chand, his father; Tripta Chand, his mother; and Nanki, his older sister (Gurbachan 11). He was born in the village of Talwandi, now known as Nankana Sahib in Pakistan. As an adolescent Nanak worked in the city of Sultanpur as a storekeeper. He married his wife Sulakhni in his early twenties; she gave birth to two boys, Sri Chand (1494-1643) and Lakhmi Das (1497-1555). Guru Nanak passed away on September 7th, 1539. He was aware of his advanced age and appointed a successor Guru to further spread the faith of Sikhism. The story of Guru Nanak’s life plays an important role in the Sikh tradition as his biography is, “strongly imprinted in the collective memory of Sikhs” (N. Singh 1). Although there is a lack of factual documentation on his life, there are three key sources offering testimony on the founder of Sikhism, “the Janamsakhi narratives; the ballads of Bhai Gurdas²; and the Sikh scripture” (N. Singh 1). It is important to discuss the Janamsakhi literature as it has an immense influence over determining what is generally accepted as the authoritative account of Guru Nanak’s life.

Janamsakhis:

Janamsakhi is derived from the word “janam, which means ‘birth’ and sakhi, which means ‘story’” (N. Singh 1). In the Sikh faith, the Janamsakhis are writings which are professed to be the closest narrative biography of Guru Nanak. They entail accounts of his birth, childhood, adolescence, adulthood and lastly his death. Janamsakhi literature is an eminent aspect of Guru Nanak and Sikh heritage as it highlights the importance and uniqueness of Guru Nanak’s life. They also tell stories which depict the divine attributes of Guru Nanak, his compassion to all beings, his emphasis on the importance on divine unity, and his desire for the unity of humanity.

2. Honoured Sikh scholar.
In summary the Janamsakhis provides Sikhism with its first literacy and introduces the heritage to its devotees.

According to the Janamsakhis, in his early in life, Nanak showed signs of knowledge and intelligence beyond his years. He was sent to school to learn various languages such as Hindi, Sanskrit, and Arabic. To each of his teachers he displayed extraordinary wisdom, not only in mastering his education but in the questions that he asked. He proclaimed, “Without comprehending the essence of knowledge, even a literate person would remain ignorant” (Gurbachan 11). From an early age Nanak thought only of the one sole creator of the universe and expressed remarkable insight into the role of the divine power on Earth. He also acknowledged the boundaries and discriminations set upon lower class Indians by society. Several other incidents recorded in the Janamsakhis reveal unusual characteristics which Nanak held. One story takes place when Nanak was only eleven years old:

His father arranged the customary rite of investing him with the janeou\(^1\). When the family priest tried to place the thread over his head, Nanak caught the priest’s hand and declined to wear a symbol which sought to differentiate man on the consideration of caste (Gurbachan 11).

According to the Janamsakhis the birth of Sikhism took place while Nanak was in his early thirties and living in Sultanpur. One day Nanak did not return home from his morning bath. His clothes were found on the banks of the stream and it was feared that he had drowned. Nanak reappeared three days later and he declared, “There is no Hindu, there is no Mussalman”. It is believed that Guru Nanak had direct communion with the Almighty. As the Janamsakhis recount, he was given a cup filled with \textit{amrit}\(^2\) with the order from the lord, “Drink it… I am with you and I do bless and exalt you. Go, remember My Name and teach others to do so… I have

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1. Sacred thread worn by upper class Hindus.
2. Lit. Nectar.
bestowed upon you the gift of my Name. Let this be your duty now” (Singh and Joshi 191). This was the turning point in Nanak’s life and the beginning of his religious mission to spread the word of the Sikh faith. He departed from his family and travelled all over India preaching the oneness of God, reality against evil, wrong-doing, and caste discrimination. He encouraged individuals to live a more pure, simpler, and just life.

Some argue that Sikhism is rooted from Hindu beliefs while others hold that Sikhism is derived from the faith of Islam. Others also acknowledge Sikhism as a sect of one of the two. In his book, *The Indian Way*, John Koller insists that earlier traditions influenced Guru Nanak’s thought. Guru Nanak was born Hindu by birth and used Sanskrit terms in his writings. On the other hand, he was born into a village and time where India was under great Sufi influence. So, although these ideas are hard to dismiss, Sikhism is in fact a religion that grew independently of any influence. The individuality of Sikhism can be highly agreed upon due to the notions of equality and union. He believed that no different Gods or caste of people existed, hence his words ‘There is no Hindu, there is no Muslim’. Guru Nanak preached the words of Hindu and Muslim saints because he believed that they were identical to the Sikh ideology of the Divine nature that surrounded the universe. He also uses the terms of Gods from other religions such as Shiva, Brahman, Allah and Krishna. He does this to eliminate the idea of more than one God because he believed that there was only One, and He could be termed as anything as long as only He was the only One being worshipped.

*Teachings of Guru Nanak:*

Although he was born into Hinduism and raised in an Islamic village, Nanak believed that it made no difference to the message he communicated. He valued every individual as his equal and expressed love for every being and for God’s worldly creations. He addressed the Lord
as universal, and the father and mother of all created beings. Guru Nanak educated his disciples to love and be truthful to everyone no matter what difference they had. Prejudice was pointless, for when it came to God any individual had the equal chance of attaining oneness with the Lord.

Guru Nanak believed that humanity was suffering from samsara, the cycle of birth and death. Nanak believed that there were five vices that needed to be lifted out of the mind and soul of the individual: lust, anger, greed, attachment, and ego. He taught that individuals needed to liberate themselves from these evils through righteous living and meditation through their love of the Lord. Meditation in the name of the lord and all his aspects would progressively liberate one’s soul into a communion with God.

The Janamsakhis portray Guru Nanak as denouncing formal ritual in several instances, such as his refusal to participate in the janeu (thread) ceremony. In another instance, the Janamsakhis recorded that during his travels Nanak visited Haridwar¹, the ancient site of pilgrimage on the River Ganges. When he saw some priests sprinkling water to the rising sun in the East, offering oblations to the spirits of their dead ancestors, Nanak started sprinkling water to the west to water his plants. The priests became irritated and found his actions disrespectful. Nanak continued his procedure and made the point that, if the priests sprinkled water to reach the dead, he could do so to reach his crops (N. Singh 5).

In his final days, Guru Nanak and his family resided in the village of Kartarpur², which was founded by Guru Nanak himself during his travels. He continued his teachings, further illustrated the divine message, and offered discourse on righteous living, and enlightenment from the misery of ignorance. A community of disciples grew in favour of the Guru’s word and a new sense of family was formed. Their display of “seva³, langar⁴ and sangat⁵ created the blueprint for Sikh doctrine and practice” (N. Singh 5).

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1. City and municipality in the Haridwar district of Uttarakhand, India.
2. ‘City of God’. Located in Narowal district of Punjab, Pakistan.
3. Lit. Service.
5. People meeting religiously.
Development of Sikhism

Hindu and Islam religions were practiced in most of the Indian subcontinent during the birth and development of Sikhism. India had been on the route of many invasions and was heavily ruled by Muslim sovereigns. Caste and religion became the backbone of an increasingly hierarchical society. This ruling empire was oppressive and life, except for the upper class, was difficult. Hindus, being the larger half of India’s population, were subjected to hateful attacks and often slavery. Rulers were not only discriminatory with non-Muslims but also between Muslims of different sects such as the Sunnis, Shias, Sufis, and the Ismailis (Gurbachan 11). The teachings of the Gurus created a window of opportunity for men and women to break out of the captivity of oppression and discrimination. The idea of the ten Gurus can be conceptualized as light passing from one body to another because every Guru is one in spirit, metaphysically, although different in body. They each reveal the same message to mankind while demonstrating love and devotion to God.

Guru:

The term Guru comes from the Sanskrit term ‘master’ or ‘teacher’. In Sikhism, “the Guru is the vital link in man’s spiritual progress” (Singh and Joshi 207). In Sikhism Guru is considered to be God and also the founder of Sikhism, Guru Nanak and the remaining nine Gurus. However, Guru Nanak and his successors are not incarnations or the human form of God. Sikhs believe that Guru Nanak was the messenger or voice of God as he had direct communion with him. The subsequent Gurus possess Guru Nanak’s divinity and religious authority. A Guru is characterized as one that “shows the way through example and guide. He is a perfectly realized soul and at the
same time, he is capable of leading the believer to the highest state of spiritual consciousness” (Singh and Joshi 205). In the Sikh faith, the ten Gurus are special figures who perform two functions. They give the Sikh, the Word and knowledge of God aid Sikhs to the path of liberation. Guru Nanak’s nine successors also have unique histories which are essential to the understanding of Sikhism.

**Guru Angad** (March 31st, 1505- March 28th, 1552): Guru Nanak appointed his discipline Lehna as his successor and renamed him Angad (‘my limb’). It is said that Lehna heard the hymns of Guru Nanak and was deeply moved. He travelled to Kartarpur to see Guru Nanak and there he remained, devoting his whole heart to the Guru’s word and to the deeds of service. Guru Nanak believed that Lehna was worthy of the dignity because he abandoned himself to the will of God. Guru Angad shows characteristics of humility and obedience and thus he gained spiritual insight. It is recorded in the Janamsakhi that Guru Nanak placed five copper coins and a coconut before Lehna and bowed down to his feet (Singh and Joshi 199). Guru Angad retired in the village of Khudar¹ and transferred the light of the Divine to the third successor.

**Guru Amar Das** (May 5th, 1479- September 9th, 1574): The story of Guru Amar Das is similar to that of Guru Angad as he too was moved by the words of Guru Nanak. Amar Das heard his nephew’s wife reciting a prayer. Upon learning that the woman was the daughter of Guru Angad, Amar Das travelled to Khudar to see the Guru himself. There he demonstrated a performance of selflessness by “fetching water from the river every morning, serving food, and bringing wood in from the forest” (Singh and Joshi 216). At Guru Angad’s bidding, Amar Das retired to the village of Goinwal² where he married and raised a family but continued to live by the Guru’s example of humility and devotion. Guru Angad recognized Amar Das’ enlightenment

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1. City in Punjab province of Pakistan
2. Village in Amritsar district in the states of Punjab, India
and proclaimed him as the future Guru. When he became the third Guru, Amar Das “set up twenty-two manjis, covering several parts of India” (Singh and Joshi 217). Each manji was placed under the charge of a pious Sikh appointed by Guru Amar Das. The purpose was to spread Guru Nanak’s message, provide spiritual guidance, and keep the congregation in touch with Guru Nanak's message.

Guru Amar Das also gave special attention to the equality of women and is considered one of the first to attempt amelioration of the discrimination of women at the time. According to the text of Singh and Joshi, Guru Amar Das discouraged the customs of purdah\(^1\) and sati\(^2\) (216).

**Guru Ram Das** (September 24\(^{th}\), 1534- September 1\(^{st}\), 1581): Ram Das was introduced to the Sikh faith through accident. On his way home from work, he mistakenly accompanied a group of Sikhs that were travelling to Goindwal. As they travelled, the Sikhs sang the Hymns of Guru Nanak. Ram Das’s heart was filled with happiness and it is said that he forgot about his home and family and remained in Goindwal to take to the Guru’s instructions. Ram Das proved to be a true devotee to the Sikh faith, this delighted Guru Amar Das so much that he married his daughter to him. Before passing, Guru Amar Das assigned Ram Das to become his successor and to continue the teachings of Guru Nanak. In his time as a Guru Rama Das built and resided in the city of Amritsar\(^3\).

**Guru Arjan Dev** (April 15\(^{th}\), 1563- May 30\(^{th}\), 1606): Guru Arjan Dev played a central role in the development of the Sikh faith. He gave Sikhism its first scripture, the *Adi Granth*\(^4\) and was the first martyr of Sikhism. He was the youngest of the three sons that Guru Ram Das had. Before he was named Guru he had established a Sikh sangat in the city of Lahore and after inheriting his father’s role as Guru, Arjan Dev completed the development of the Amritsar water tank. Upon completing the tank, Guru Arjan Dev laid out a temple in the middle of the tank. The

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1. Veil worn by Muslim women to cover their face.
2. Self-immolation practised by widowed women.
4. Early compilation of Sikh Scripture.
temple was completed in 1589. The temple “had four doorways which meant that the Sikh worship was open to all. There were no restrictions on any caste entering the temple. The building was called Harmandir, the Temple of the Lord. Today, the temple is famously known as the Golden Temple and is considered the religious capital of the Sikh community. In 1590 the Guru left Amritsar and founded a new town called Kartarpur, where he constructed another tank.

Guru Arjan compiled the Adi Granth by sending messages to Sikhs all over the country to collect and pass on to him the writings and hymns of his predecessors. He also collected poetry and hymns from other Indian saints, both Muslim and Hindu, that he believed demonstrated the spirit of Sikh teachings. Guru Arjan added his own compilations of poetry with hymns full of divine love and deep human sympathy. His Sukhmani which is literally translated into ‘Peace in your mind’ is considered a masterpiece of devotional poetry. He arranged the Adi Granth in a thorough order. “He arranged the hymns in thirty different ragas, or musical patterns. A precise method was followed in the setting of the compositions. First came shabads by the Gurus in the order of their succession. Then came chhands and vars by the Gurus. The compositions by the Gurus in each raga were followed by those of the Bhaktas” (Singh and Joshi 228). The scripture contained close to 6,000 hymns and today it is preserved and kept by a family of the Guru’s descendants at Kartarpur (Jallundhar).

Guru Arjan was arrested by Hindu officials who were in power at the time. He was arrested for his preaching of the Sikh faith to society. Even though he was subjected to torture, Guru Arjan did not give up on his faith. He was imprisoned and tormented for five days and later died of his injuries.

1. Village located in district of Jalandhar in the state of Punjab, India.
3. Quatrain used in the poetic traditions.
4. Composition of Guru Nanak. Can be read or sung.
**Guru Har Gobind** (July 5th, 1595- March 19th, 1644): Guru Har Gobind was the son of Guru Arjan. Unlike the preceding Gurus, who wore “rosary and other saintly emblems of spiritual inheritance, Guru Har Gobind wore warrior equipment for the ceremony of succession” (Singh and Joshi 230). He adopted the style of a solider and carried with him two swords which would become an imperative symbol of unity in the Sikh faith. His father’s death made him realize that a sterner method was required to meet the growing intolerance of the Mughal Empire. He established a military which emerged to nearly 500 soldiers as men from across India offered their services. To fortify the city of Amritsar, Guru Har Gobind built a building in front of the Golden Temple. He named it *Akal Takht*, meaning ‘The Throne of the Timeless One’.

Along with introducing a military force, Guru Har Gobind created a coat of arms for the Sikhs knowns as the *Khanda* which is denoted by the symbol 🖖. It is represented by two swords; signifying the spiritual and secular forces influencing the soul, a double edged sword; symbolizing the ability of truth to cut through the duality of illusion, andLastly, a circlet; representing unity within all of humanity and a sense of being at one with the Divine.

Some argued that Guru Har Gobind’s military establishment was a part of Guru Nanak’s teachings. Har Gobind responded by stating that he took up arms to defend the principles established by the Guru’s before him. He expressed that, just like his predecessors, he believed in fighting for justice against tyranny while keeping Guru Nanak’s teachings in mind. Guru Har Gobind was imprisoned for two years because of his role in creating a military force of Sikhs. After he was released he travelled in the Punjab and east of India where he founded the town of *Sri Hargobinpur* and the town of *Kiratpur* in the Sivaliks. In both cities he not only built Gurdwara, but Mosques, and Hindu temples. He resided in the town of Kartarpur founded by

1. Imperial power of Muslims.
2. State in the northwest of the Republic of India, forming part of the larger Punjab region.
3. city and a municipal council in Gurdaspur district in the Indian state of Punjab
4. Mountain range of the outer Himalayas
his father, Guru Har Gobind. There he faced hate crimes and was placed into many battles of war to defend his faith. He and his soldiers were successful in all of the four battles that they fought.

**Guru Har Rai** (January 26th 1630- October 6th, 1661): Har Rai was the grandson of Guru Har Gobind. He embraced and lived by the idea that “man must live in the world and be a master of oneself” (Singh and Joshi 239). He lived in the town of Kiratpur where he marvellously preached the teachings, poetry, and hymns of his predecessors but did not compose his own.

**Guru Har Krishan** (July 23rd, 1656- March 30th, 1664): Har Krishan was the youngest son of Guru Har Rai. He became his father’s successor at the age of five and was the youngest of all the Gurus. He showed remarkable maturity and wisdom for his age. He conducted the Sikh community as he had a “rare ability in interpreting the Sikh teachings which delighted the hearts of his disciplines” (Singh and Joshi 243). While spreading the Sikh faith in Dheli, Har Krishan became ill with small pox. In his final days he uttered “‘Baba Bakale’ and meant that the next Guru would be found in the village of Bakala” (Singh and Joshi 244).

**Guru Tegh Bahadur** (April 1st, 1621- November 24th, 1675): Following Har Krishan’s death, Sikhs marched towards Bakala. Tegh Bahadur was the youngest son of Guru Har Gobind’s five sons. He guided the Sikh community by spreading the word of Guru Nanak at different congregations across India. Guru Tegh Bahadur travelled to the very far east of India, where no other Guru had previously gone. Here he continued to preach his faith and urged for the people he met to practice Sikhism. In his final days, while Guru Tegh Bahadur was travelling along Punjab spreading the word of God, he was arrested by Mughal officers, put in chains, and ordered to be tortured until he abandoned his religion. He refused to let go of his faith and when

1. Festival that commemorates the establishment of the Khalsa.
2. City in Rupnagar district in the state of Punjab, India. Known as "the holy City of Bliss".
asked to perform a miracle to prove his divinity, “he declined to do saying that it was never right to try to intervene in the will of God” (Singh and Joshi 248). Guru Tegh Bahadur’s execution was then ordered, but before being executed in public he named his son, Gobind Singh, as his successor.

**Guru Gobind Singh** (December 31\(^{st}\), 1666): Gobind Singh showed immense modesty and wisdom at a young age. He made quick progress in his studies, learned Sanskrit, Hindi, Persian, and “learnt by heart the whole of the Adi Granth” (Singh and Joshi 250). Guru Gobind Singh was nine years old when he was given the designation of the tenth Guru. Gobind Singh took great pride in his duty, “he performed daily devotions and held morning and evening congregations, he composed poetry and he practiced the use of arms and went out hunting” (Singh and Joshi 250).

Guru Gobind Singh played a significant role in establishing the Sikh faith. He instilled the inauguration of the Khalsa:

March 30\(^{th}\), 1699 was the day of Baisakhi\(^{1}\) and Sikhs from across India gathered in Anandpur\(^{2}\) to celebrate. It was here where Guru Gobind Singh asked for the heads of five devoted Sikhs. He took each Sikh into a tent, one by one, and would come out with his sword covered in blood as he asked for the next devotee. After a while, Guru Gobind Singh led the five men out of the tent. The men came out “decked in saffron colored cloaks topped over with neatly tied turbans similarly dyed” (Singh and Joshi).

The Guru introduced his companions to the audience as *Panj Piarey*, the five devoted spirits beloved by the Guru. Guru Gobind Singh stated that the five men had “blessed themselves and brought glory to their faith and that they would form the nucleus of the order of the Khalsa, God’s Elect” (Singh and Joshi 254). He concluded the new ceremonial baptism by filling a bowl

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1. Festival that commemorates the establishment of the Khalsa.
2. City in Rupnagar district in the state of Punjab, India. Known as "the holy City of Bliss".
with pure and clean water; he stirred it with a two-edged sword while reciting the sacred verses over it. Sugar crystals were added to the bowl as Guru Gobind Singh stirred. He called it Amrit, the nectar of immortality.

The Guru gave the five Sikhs each five handfuls of it to drink. Upon drinking the amrit, “the five Sikhs were given the surname of Singh, meaning lion, and were sworn to wear the emblems of the Khalsa- the kasha, or long hair and beard; kangha, a comb in the kasha to keep it tidy; kara, a steel bracelet kachh, short breechesm and kirpan, a sword” (Singh and Joshi 255). Guru Gobind stated that the five men were enjoined in brotherhood to help the poor, fight the oppressor, to have faith in the One God, and to consider all human beings as equal irrespective of caste and religion. He followed by asking the Panj Piarey to prepare the Amrit for him, as he did for them, so that he could be initiated into the brotherhood as well (hence the inclusion of Singh in Guru Gobind’s name).

Guru Gobind Singh faced several months of battle against the Mughals in the town of Anandpur. It proved to be hard and depressing times for the Sikh community, but even while faced with starvation they succeeded in each of their battles.

**Guru Granth Sahib or Guru Eternal:**

When a person interprets the Guru Granth Sahib by either reading the shabads or reciting the hymns they can indulge their mind with the essence of God. Thus in the Sikh scripture readers encounter the Divine directly. The scripture entails the manifestation of the God’s spirit through Guru Nanak and his successors. Similar to the collection of philosophical texts from
Vedas, the Guru Granth Sahib can be read, chanted, and sung. Although both texts allow individuals to participate in the energy of the Divine, the Granth Sahib is presented in one volume whereas the Vedas spread over four.

Whenever the holy Granth is being interpreted and or not in its resting state, it must have an attendant waving a fly-whisk (chanwar) over it as a sign of respect to God. The word ‘Granth’ is derived from Sanskrit, meaning par excellence\(^1\). Unlike scriptures from religions such as Christianity, the Guru Granth Sahib is neither history, mythology, nor a collection of rituals. In this respect it is a unique scripture amongst others. Its contents are spiritual poetry, the vision of the cosmic order, and union with God. It remains different from other scriptures by consisting solely of the meditations by God-inspired men who have communicated the Divine in spirit of deep humility and compassion for all of mankind.

Guru Nanak’s verse forms the model for the entire scripture, with his Japuji being the opening hymn. In his extensive repertoire, “Guru Nanak expresses his desire for the Infinite One. From his metaphysical poetry we gain a valuable insight into his personality” (N. Singh 17). In general, the entire text expresses love for the Infinite One in the voice of the Sikh Gurus along with Hindu saints and Muslim mystics. Thus, the Guru Granth Sahib is not authored by Sikh Gurus alone; in fact only six of the ten Gurus have their work included in the Holy Book. The Guru Granth Sahib pays homage to the works of both Hindu and Muslim saints by incorporating their ideas to demonstrate the singularity of God. The compositions in the Guru Granth Sahib provide awareness of God and bring unity to the Sikh community.

**Gurdwara:**

A Gurdwara is a place of public gathering where people can worship God. The word Gurdwara means, “door or threshold (dwara) to the Guru” (N. Singh 80). A “typical Gurdwara is

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1. Lit. By excellence.
open all day, with devotees coming and going as they please” (N. Singh 80). Religious activities inside the temple include viewing of the Guru Granth Sahib and listening to it being read or sung. From the time of Guru Nanak and his successor to the present day, Gurdwaras have become a place of more than just worship but a source of food, shelter, assistance, and fellowship. To minimize the distinction of caste and gender the act of volunteering ones time to provide services for everyone was introduced by Guru Nanak and Guru Amar Das.

Sikh families usually create a room in their house that enshrines the Guru Granth Sahib. The room is resembles an ‘at home Gurdwara’ therefore, Sikhs can worship at any time and day in the comfort of their own home. Whether an individual is inside the Gurdwara or at home in a mini-Gurdwara, there are acts of worship that take place. One of the first acts “consists of matha tekna (bowing) to the Guru Granth, or darshan karana (seeing) it” (N. Singh 81) where the individual goes down on both knees and bows their head down in front of the scripture. Many choose to make offerings of money, milk, sugar, and flour to help sustain the Gurdwara’s ability to operate and feed others. This first act is a sign of humility and submission to the Eternal Guru.

At home or in the Gurdwara, the Guru Granth Sahib is opened daily at dawn and adorned in robes. This opening of the scripture is called, “prakash, ‘making the light manifest’” (N. Singh 81). The Book is opened at random and the reading of the first passage on the left hand side is understood as the message of the day, meant for the entire congregation. This daily ceremony is considered an “enchantment of the Guru being enthroned and ready to receive the public, and radiate its luminosity” (N. Singh 81). In the evening the Guru Granth Sahib is ceremoniously closed. The closing of the scripture is called, “sukhasan, the position (asan) of rest or comfort (sukh) for the night” (N. Singh 82). In some Gurdwaras, such as the Golden Temple\(^1\), these ceremonies are more elaborate. At the Golden Temple for example, “the Guru Granth is taken in

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1. Prominent Sikh Gurdwara located in the city of Amritsar, Punjab, India.
gold and silver palanquin\(^1\) (palki) to a special chamber for its nightly rest” (N. Singh 82). During this ceremonial procedure, devotees and visitors will chant Guru Nanak’s hymn ‘Arati’\(^3\) as the palanquin carries the holy scripture to its destination.

**Sikh Metaphysics, Ethics and Esthetics**

**Metaphysics:**

**Oneness:**

The Sikh religion is based entirely on Guru Nanak’s monistic revelation, ‘*Ik Onkar*- One Being Is’. The Guru Granth Sahib opens with this premise and its 1,430 pages of poetry repeat the extent and unity of the Divine. Guru Nanak’s monotheistic teachings hold that there is one God who is eternal, infinite and formless. Belief in one God is the first principle of Sikhism. God is the creator of all men and all things and is the source of grace and love.

Ik Onkar is denoted by the symbol ੴ. Nikky-Guninder Singh illustrates that three modes of knowledge have been used to signify the Divine symbol- numerical, alphabetical and geometrical (N. Singh 59). Significantly, the prime number ‘1’ is recognized by individuals of all languages, cultures and religions. It is “followed by the alpha of the Gurmukhi\(^2\) script, which is the sign for *One* (being) and completed by the sign for *Kar* (Is), a geometrical arc reaching away into space. This doctrine of oneness is frequently expressed by Guru Nanak’s successors throughout the Guru Granth Sahib:

God is the sole Provider without a second. (*Guru Granth Sahib Vol. 1.* 80)

No other is there to mentions. Mother mine:

The Lord is one and sole-
One and sole, brother! (*Guru Granth Sahib Vol. 2.* 746)

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1. A covered seat carried on poles held parallel to the ground on the shoulders of two or four people.
2. Most common script used for writing the Punjabi language in India.
By the First Learn: Sole and immaculate is the Supreme Being Immortal, unincarnated, above castes and attachments. (Guru Granth Sahib Vol. 3. 1732)

As noted, numerous verses in the Guru Granth Sahib describe the oneness and unity of the Divine. Furthermore, Guru Nanak sates that the One God cannot be imaged or shaped in any exclusive form:

He is the Sole Supreme Being; of eternal manifestation Creator, Immanent Reality! Without Fear; Without Rancour; Timeless Form, Unincarnated. (Guru Granth Sahib Vol. 1. 1)

Neither is He installed in temples Nor fashioned by skill: He. The Immaculate is self-existent. (Guru Granth Sahib Vol. 1. 3)

Qualities of God:

The Sikh Scripture speaks of two aspects of God. In his book Real Sikhism, Surinder Kohli defines the two aspects as Para Brahman and Apara Brahman (56). They can also be respectively known as Nirugna, meaning devoid of attributes and Saguna, meaning endowed with attributes.

God is without form, quality; attribute (nirguna) because God is incomprehensible. He is non-temporal, non-spatial and non-phenomenal, and without relations. God is with attributes (saguna) because He is comprehensible. He is without fear (nirbhau) and enmity (nirvair), Immanent, the Creator, and Lord of the universe and temporal and spatial world. God created reality and the material entities it holds because God is time and reality. According to Kohli, Para Brahman is called the ‘Higher Brahman’ and is described by the method of negation and Apara Brahman is called the ‘Lower Brahman’ described by the method of affirmation. (Real Sikhism 56). These two qualities of God are portrayed in the Guru Granth Sahib:
The creature by no manner of utterance can approach the reality.
Of the Lord, who remains inaccessible, unknowable, immaculate. (*Guru Granth Sahib Vol. 1. 594*)

The Lord who by wielding His might has the whole universe charmed,
Is unattributed and attributed Himself.
His wonders He has Himself created:
To Him alone is His worth known.
None other than the Lord is real
In all beings is He solely pervasive.
His own he and form in all universe is manifest.
Such illumination in holy company is obtained.
By wielding His might creation has He raised-
Innumerable times is Nanak to Him a sacrifice. (*Guru Granth Sahib Vol. 1. 595*)

*Creation:*

Although Sikhism discusses the creation of the world, it “does not have a fixed theory about when the cosmos came to be” (N. Singh 61). Sikhism does not position the creation of the world with teleological proofs. According to the faith, “the entire cosmos is merely the nature of God, the first principle. It is the original force, the sole reality. As such, there can be nothing beside the One God and nothing outside of him” (N. Singh 62). This notion is similar to that held by the Veda’s conception of *Rita*¹. Like Rita, the entire creation of the world is manifested by *hukam*, or God’s will. Hukam is the rhythm, structure and order of the universe. Hukam denotes God as the first cause and therefore, Hukam precedes God and is the principle of all life. Guru Nanak makes no further attempt at deducing how and when the universe was created. According to the Nanak, “No one knows the hour or the day, the season or the month of its origin. One the Creator who made the world knows when He made it” (Singh and Joshi 202). Furthermore, Guru Nanak preaches that it is man’s duty to seek and understand the Divine hukam and to live his life wholly in accord with it.

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1. Principle of natural order which regulates the universe and everything within it.
The World and Reality:

Contrary to such Indian faiths as Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism, the primary objective taught by Sikhism is not to look for a higher level or reality but to aim for ultimate union with the Eternal Lord and in turn liberate oneself from transmigration. The former three faiths perceive the phenomenal world as an illusion from the ultimate reality. Furthermore, because of this thought, some Indian religions, but not all, believe that ‘change’ is not. For example, a seed blossoming into a flower is mere illusion given that the phenomenal world is not real. It is held that the individual should attain a higher level of consciousness and thus depart from the reality they are born into to achieve attainment with God.

In Sikhism, the world is regarded as both transitory and relatively real. It recognizes the visible words as an expression (Hukam) of God. It regards the phenomenal world as the fullness and reality of the Divine. Likewise, change was also real because God allowed life to develop through his Love. Guru Nanak believed that nothing could separate God from the phenomenal world because God is the phenomenal. Therefore, Sikhism disagrees with other Indian religions and holds that God would not create a world that is false.

Man and God:

In the Sikh faith, life is considered a gift from God. Human birth is regarded as the highest possible opportunity on Earth in means of uniting with God. Guru Nanak also held that everyone being was the child of God and thus we are all brothers and sister. This idea is contrary to such religions as Hinduism and Buddhism which regard life as insignificant. They regard human life as a burden that destroys the mind. However, the Guru Granth Sahib portrays humanity as a bequest given by God to all his children:
The Lord is mother, father and cherisher.  
The Lord looks after me; we His children.  
In serenity in gamboling engaging us,  
Never in this slothful;  
Never our faults considering, to His bosom attaching us,  
The Divine father, donor of joy all our uttered wishes fulfils.  
Capital of enlightenment, wealth of the Name has  
He granted me.  
And made me worthy of this mechandize. (Guru Granth Sahib Vol. 1. 2239)

According to the Sikh faith, the ultimate goal in life is to “find salvation through union with God” (Koller 328). Guru Nanak held that humanity was suffering because people were too concerned with attaching themselves with pleasures of the world (i.e. wealth, sex and material goods). Society had become more concerned with self-indulgence and reputation which prevented them from finding true happiness. According to Koller, the theory behind this ignorance is with what is called the man or soul (338). Koller continues by stating that “the soul is consciousness, self-image, sense, and will, as these function together creating a sense of individual existence capable of thinking and acting in the world” (338). It is the soul that determines what is right from wrong, what is true from false.

Guru Nanak believed that the soul held the Light of the Divine, but because of ignorance due to the five evils (lust, anger, attachment, greed, and ego) the soul was separated from God. The individual must conquer the five mighty vices in order to liberate oneself and thus cease samsara (transmigration). When man has stopped living by the five vices and absorbs himself in the name of the lord at all times, he will live a virtuous life through humility and thus will attain liberation.

The idea of the soul is somewhat similar to that of the Upanishads and Atman and Brahman. The Upanishads enlightened others to separate the pluralism that surrounds life in
order to experience the ultimate reality, known as *Brahman*. To experience this divine external reality, one needs to discover the paramount substance to external happiness - their soul, *Atman*. Atman is the deepest reality that lies within all beings. Although Sikhism holds that the soul is the key component in uniting with God, it does not believe that there is a higher consciousness that needs to be achieved. One does not have to depart themselves from the phenomenal world to gain liberation.

The word ‘Sikh’ has its origin in the Sanskrit word *shishya*, meaning student or one who learns. A Sikh is one who believes in one God alone and has faith in and follows the teachings of the ten Gurus. Thus, anyone can be termed a Sikh if he or she follows the precepts of the faith. In efforts to realize the Eternal Lord, students have to instil purity to their body, mind and soul, both in personal conduct and in relation to society. The advice given by Guru Nanak is to meditate, pray, carry out virtuous actions and earn an honest living while sharing your earnings. Guru Nanak believed that all of humanity should complete the former acts in order to maintain Unity with God and companionship (‘brotherhood’) amongst humanity.

*The Name:*

Guru Nanak taught that devout love of God and realization of His creation was essential in seeking liberation from attachments of the five vices. In Sikhism, “this love of God is realized through *Nam*” (Singh and Joshi 204). The word Nam is literally translated as ‘name’. Nam lies at the heart of Guru Nanak’s teachings. It is the discipline of concentrating on the Divine and absorbing oneself in God. Nam is practiced by means of repeatedly reciting the *Word*, or shabad. The Word is God Himself and all his attributes. Nam and shabad can be objected to any terms that refer to the Divine. It is through speech and sound of that the essence of the Divine is
absorbed in one’s mind. In the Sikh faith it is held that Nam be uttered at all times of the day in every action and thought. In the opening of the Guru Granth Sahib, Guru Nanak writes:

The Lord Supreme is all deities-
He is Shiva, Vishnu, Brahma,
And the goddess Parvati, Lakshami and Saraswati.
Were I to realize His true greatness,
How may I utter it?
By what power may I express it?
My Master thus has enlightened me.
He alone is the Provider of all-
Never may I put him out of my mind! (Guru Granth Sahib Vol. 1. 4)

Practicing shabad and reciting Nam allows “one to become aware of God’s presence and gets into harmony with His Will” (Singh and Joshi 204). In the Guru Granth Sahib there are different words used to refer to God such as: Onkar (One Being), Satguru (True teacher), Waheguru (Wonderful teacher), Satnam (True Name) and Rama, Krisha, and Allah among others. Guru Nank believed that there were different people who used different ‘words’ to envision the Divine. Thus the use of various Gods from other religions highlights this fact and further depicts the unity of man and God.

Self-centeredness:

Humai, or self-centeredness hampers with the human understanding of God. The Sikh faith holds that God dwells in the body but egoism creates a wall around the individual which separate him from God. Humai is the cause of all suffering and leads to five evils: lust, anger, greed, attachments and pride. Truth is realized by overcoming the sense of humai as this is the way to achieve union with God and end the cycle of death and rebirth. By “knowing the Divine will (hukam) alone one conquers one’s self. One thus realizes the reality and frees oneself from the bondage of ego” (Singh and Joshi 205).
Ethics:

Ethics is most commonly defined as the science of moral righteousness of human acts as a means of obtaining happiness. However, the concept of happiness differs amongst individuals and communities. Therefore, the combination of ethics and religion is disregarded in most Western thinkers. In contrast, Sikhism merges the two given that the religion is inseparable from the notions of the model way of life. The essence of Sikh ethics lies in equality and fairness, societal unity and virtuous living. Everyone must live in the word by promoting welfare, goodwill towards all, and rendering service to others.

The Individual:

It is held that the individual should work on three planes: the physical, the mental, and the spiritual.

To the individual, the body is a temple of God and must remain clean. Likewise, physical harm towards others in accumulation of wealth, theft of their belongings, and sexual hunger should be controlled. Indulging in such acts is said to weaken the body and result in misery. The individual should live by ahimsa or non-injury to living beings. This notion affirms the value and brotherhood of Sikhism. Ahimsa applies to animals and plants as well, for they are also creations of God. In order to reach union with God, the individual should care for his body and the bodies of all beings, plans and animals in the same manner.

Sikhism holds that the mind is capable of thinking evils thoughts and this is can destroy the Word of God. One should not think of committing evil acts and one should refrain from thinking bad thoughts of others. The mind should always think of committing virtuous deeds and think pleasant thoughts because unsavory ones will result in suffering. If the mind is kept under
control it can unite with God. Guru Nanak preached that by killing the five vices, the mind obtains liberation.

As an individual, it is held that everyone in society should perform the same virtuous deeds and acts of humility to become united with God. Buddhists and Sikhs hold the same idea when it comes to individuals. They both believe that the individual should live a life fulfilling good deeds and service for others. However, Buddhism holds that good deeds will lead to a better birth but not Nirvana\(^1\) whereas Sikhism portrays good deeds as the sole measure of one’s spiritual development. Thus, in Sikhism, the individual’s deeds become the index of spiritual.

*Equality:*

In the Sikhism, there are no borders, no images (male or female), no concepts of hierarchy, and no designation of castes. Together, all of mankind should consider God as their father and individuals in society as brothers and sisters. The fundamental idea of Sikhism is to have welfare for all.

Guru Nanak believed that women should receive the upmost respect. His teachings professed that there should be no sex-barrier in any community through dharma and education. Guru Nanak shared that women has the same soul as men and therefore whatever was said about man should be said about women.

*Dharma:*

Dharma is literally translated as the word duty. It connotes law, justice, virtue, and religious merit as it is “the basis of Indian religions because it leads towards a virtuous life” (Kohli, Sikh Ethics 30). Hindu and Muslim faiths hold that individuals are born into a caste system that designates their duties and social lives. In Sikhism, the dharma for all of humanity

\(^1\) Peace of mind that is acquired with moksha (liberation).
is the same. Individuals must earn an honest living through their own labour, share with others and practise the discipline of Nam throughout all their thoughts and actions.

Five Vices:

The idea of the five evils or vices has been continually brought up because it plays a central role in Sikh philosophy. Guru Nanak highlighted that the main reason man and society suffered was because of the five vices. They are the main cause of misery because they prevent the individual from liberating their soul through the union of God. The five vices as seen previously are: “kama (lust), krodha (anger), moha (attachment), and ahamkara (ego)” (Kohli, Real Sikhism 126).

Kama or lust means “‘desire for’ or ‘longing for’” (Kohli, Real Sikhism 148). If an individual lives by lust, they will live with a sinning mind. Lust can be towards money, land, and sex. These pleasures weaken the body because they are only mere illusions. They please the individual for the mere moment and do not eternally please the soul. Anger occurs when an individual cannot have what they want, or has lost the sense of momentary pleasure and desires more. According to Kohli, anger and lust are the cause of suffering and destruction of the body (Real Sikhism 126). Greed infects the mind vigorously and creates false love. The love for pleasurable things such as money and sex give false perceptions of happiness and as a result cause suffering to the soul. Attachment is caused by lust and greed. Attachment causes illusionary pleasures and blinds the soul from achieving true happiness. Ego is the act of selfishness. When individuals seek pleasures for themselves and commit selfish acts they hinder the love and Word of God from liberating the soul.

1. Peace of mind that is acquired with moksha (liberation).
Five Virtues:

Just as there are five vices, there are five virtues that strongly oppose each vice. Guru Nanak taught that by living a virtuous life through the essence of God (Nam), a Sikh would overcome the suffering of rebirth.

On the Lord’s Name meditate,
Thy mind to the Name attune,
On all bestow charity of it.
Thus will impurity of actions of multiple births go,
And the mind of pride be denuded.
Lust and wrath shall then attract not,
And dog-like avarice be rendered powerless.
As this holy path thou shalt traverse,
The world’s acclaim shalt thou receive.
By devotion to the Name are acquired the approved merit of bathing at sixty-eight holy spots,
And all kinds of charities and compassions to living beings:
Truly enlightened is one to who the Lord, this is His grace grants. (Guru Granth Sahib Vol. 1. 275-276)

Lust is “overshadowed and effaced by sanyam meaning self-restraint” (Kohli, Sikh Ethics 38). Self-restraint is the golden principle in living a virtuous life. Self-restraint is recommended because it leads to spiritual growth and a healthy personality. Sikhism believes that too much of everything is reprehensible. For example, too much eating, drinking, sleeping, sex, and money makes one unhealthy. Every action should be balanced and under control.

Anger is surpassed by toleration. According to Guru Nanak, “anger leads to physical violence (Himsa). Therefore, the virtue of toleration should be exercised such that an individual implements mercy, non-violence, and non-injury to all living beings” (Kohli, Sikh Ethics 38). Greed is overcome by contentment. One should be content with what God have given them in life. No one should want or take more than they have worked honourably for. Happiness is the
key to living an enlightened light, thus greed imparts one from happiness because they are craving happiness in something they do not need.

The virtue opposing attachments is vairagya or non-attachment. It holds that one is absent from seeking worldly desires and passions, and is solely devoted to the Name of the lord. Non-attachments cease “one from wanting material objects and thus one rises above worldly desires (money) and passions (sex) and becomes conscious of its duty” ((Kohli, Sikh Ethics 39).

Ego is overcome by modesty. Guru Nanak believed that self-centeredness was the fundamental wrongdoing in a man or woman’s life. Guru Nanak’s teachings illustrated God as the Father and Mother of all beings, thus every human was equal to one another such that they are all brothers and sisters. Egoism leads to the five evils because it hinders one from living an honest life, being content, and one from knowing what they really need in life. Instead of thinking about themselves, individuals should consider their community and society. Therefore, every individual should provide service and good actions towards all members of society.

**Karma:**

Guru Nanak said that man will continue to suffer from samsara according to his actions. This theory is rooted from the idea of karma, or deeds. In the Sikh faith, “the tendencies a being acquires in a particular life as a result of his actions will determine his subsequent birth and conduct” (Singh and Joshi 206). In the Guru Granth Sahib Guru Nanak writes:

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Filth on hands, feet and body may with water be washed off;
Clothes fouled by dirty may with soap be washed.
The mind fouled by sin and evil,
May only with devotion to God be cleansed.
Good and evil are no empty words-
Each action for the after-life is recorded:
Man raises only the crop whose seed he scatters.
Saith Nanak: By the cosmic law does man traverse the path of
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1. Peace of mind that is acquired with moksha (liberation).
transmigration. *(Guru Granth Sahib Vol. 1. 10-11)*

He explains that if man performs good deeds in his lifetime by righteous living and putting faith into God he can achieve liberation from the cycle of birth and death. Sikhs believe in the use of free will and share the idea that there is always time for an individual to improve themself. This idea is different from that of the Vedic faith.

*Seva:*

The Sikh faith lays special emphasis on seva, or service. To undertake voluntary social service is an essential part of the Sikh faith. This is rendered several ways such as to clean the gurdwara premises, cook or serve food and wash dishes in the lungar (kitchen) hall. In relation to their religious group and community, a Sikh must be an active and integral part of society and the faith. He or she is expected to contribute both individually and as part of a group towards the benefit of society.

*Esthetics:*

*Body:*

Although the body is subject to destruction, Sikhism holds that it must not be disregarded. Guru Nanak preached that “he who destroys the complete form given by God is a faithless person” (Kohli, Real Sikhism 39). For example, Nanak taught that long uncut hair enhanced physical beauty and is a source of strength because it holds man’s utmost sanctity. According to their introduction to Indian religions, Harbans Singh and Lali Joshi stated that “Guru Nanak said the body is a palace, the temple, the house of God. Into it He has put His eternal light” (206). In Sikhism, the body is perceived as a perfect gift from God and is used as
an “instrument of spiritual gain and service to mankind” (Singh and Joshi 206). This idea is preserved in the Guru Granth Sahib:

With the gift of human incarnation granted to thee,
Now is thy opportunity to have union with the Lord *(Guru Granth Sahib Vol. 1. 30)*

Every human being has five senses and should not become a slave to them for they hinder the path of liberation. Sikhism takes the five senses of the body and illustrates them as a way of uniting with God. The *eyes* see the world and all its beautiful manifestations. They see good and evil and right and wrong actions. But in order to stay pure and see the True Nature of the Divine, the eyes must disregard the wrong and see no evil. The *ears* “should hear only truth and truthful sayings” (Kohli, Sikh Ethics 33) and should hear no evil. Thus, the ears must listen to the prayers, poetry, and music of the Divine. The *tongue* is an organ of taste and speech. It should not taste liquids (intoxication of drugs) or foods (halal1 meat) other than that of the Lord and “it should utter the name of God and sing His praises” (Kohli, Sikh Ethics, 33). The *nose* should smell the scent of God and stray away the smells of evil. Lastly, *skin* is the sense of touch. According to Guru Nanak it creates lust, greed and harm to others. Thus, one should not touch evil or walk with evil intentions. This will cause suffering to the individual’s mind and harm to others.

Worthless, is the ears listening to others’ slander;
Worthless the hands grabbing others’ property;
Worthless the eyes viewing others’ womens’s beauty;
Worthless the tongue delighting in alien pleasures;
Worthless the feet that to harm others rush;
Worthless the mind by greed of others property attracted;
Worthless the body that engages not in doing good to others;
Worthless the nose sniffing evil odours;
Without realization are all these worthless.
Saith Nanak: Blessed is the living body that the

1. Food seen as permissible according to Islamic law.
The world:

Contrary to other Indian religions, Sikhism holds that the world is real and not fake. God is viewed as the principle of all acts. God is the most perfect and benevolent Being, therefore he willed the most perfect World. In the Sikh faith it is held that God does not create anything less than perfect. God presents every creature in virtue and manifests himself (his love) through ever being’s heart. Hence, a real and meaningful world is essential for the expression of God’s love. Therefore, the world and everything in it should be loved because it is a creation of God. Other Indian religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism believe that the world is a place of misery, suffering and illusions; thus one should withdrawal from the world. Sikhism opposes this notion and holds that God created the most perfect and loving world and it should not be disregarded by means of seeking a higher level of reality.

Sikh Epistemology

Maya:

Maya is centered on the idea that life is not experienced directly through God but rather through some projection of the material world. A person is affected by maya because they are more concerned with greed, sex, and wealth. For this reason the world is illusionary and only appears real because of ignorance. Maya is derived from the Sanskrit word “may” from ‘not’ and ya from ‘that” (Kohli, Real Sikhism 56). Maya establishes a separation between the individual and the Divine. Some Indian religions (Hindu, Jainism) hold this concept as fact and believe that there is an ultimate reality that can be achieved.
Sikhism does hold the idea of Maya but does not accept this deduction of the world. God is viewed as the only reality and all beings live within it. In Sikhism the concept of maya is distinct from any other religions because it holds that natural phenomena are real but the effects they generate are unreal. In the Sikh Scripture, a person affected by maya is described as suffering from the delusion of seeking pleasures that are not permanent but appear to be. For example, an individual may seek wealth and greed to achieve happiness, but such things only momentarily please the heart because the individual always wants more. Thus, a person attached to maya cannot escape the cycle of life, death, and rebirth.

Sikhism denies the former doctrine of maya as having any positive content given that it signifies a sense of duality between the ultimate reality and man. Guru Nanak stated, “What is there positive to which we can give the name maya? What positive activity is maya capable of?” (Kohli, Real Sikhism 60). Further Guru Nanak, “What is maya except a befooling magic trick?” A Sikh can only cease the attachment of maya by continuously working under the guidance of the Guru. It is the only way the mind can be emptied by the evil forces and be purified.

*Mukti or Liberation:*

Unlike the Vedic beliefs, Sikhism rejects all Gods and Goddesses, all incarnations and prophets, therefore the techniques regarding meditation on them are dismissed. In Sikhism, liberation is only attained by uniting with God. This union liberates the individual from the cycle of birth and death. To do this, one must control their mind by knowledge of the God. Guru Nanak believed that if the ‘one conquered their mind, one conquered the world’. One can conquer their mind and the world if they practice the Word of God. This can be done by reading and reciting hymns and performing all righteous actions while uttering God’s name. Guru Nanak taught his disciplines to meditate on the Name in all its aspects and thus the believer would

1. *Food seen as permissible according to Islamic law.*
progressively find liberation.

For example, Nanak described the Divine Order as the constant principle governing the entire universe and moral creation. In order to attain liberation, Sikhs must strive to bring his or her life into accord with this principle. When the accord is perfect, liberation is attained. Similarly, it is understood that as long as the mind thinks of pairs of opposites, “it is steeped with in ignorance, illusion and duality” (Kohli, Real Sikhism 101). According to Kohli, as long as it thinks of pleasure and pain, bliss and woe, gold and dust, poison and nectar, honour and dishonour etc., it cannot practise meditation” (Real Sikhism 101). Without ceasing the thought of duality the mind cannot be liberated.

**Sikh Worship, Ceremonies and Festivities**

As noted earlier in this paper, Guru Nanak rejected traditional beliefs and practices that centered on external Gods and desired an outward response. Such practices were vital in other Indian religions, such as Hinduism which considered rituals to be an essential mean to communicate with the Divine. Some rituals in the Vedic times were only for select people (usually higher castes). But Guru Nanak did not believe in sacrificing animals, worshipping fires, or believing in horoscopes for they would not purify the mind. He believed in, “reflection on the singular Divine as the sole religious practice” (Joshi, Sikhism 103). There are several ceremonies and festivities that occur in Sikhism. They have grown to become ways of celebrating life, unity, the history, and legacy of the Sikh faith through the name of God.

**Rituals or Prayers:**

Along with living a virtuous life, prayer, or meditation is a fundamental practice of Sikhism. As discussed before, it is routine for a devotee to recite the five banis (hymns) daily:

1. **Food seen as permissible according to Islamic law.**
Japuji, Jaap, and the ten Swaiyas are to be recited in the morning; while Sodar Rehras is to be done at sunset; and lastly Sohila at bedtime.

*Japuji* is the first prayer in the Guru Granth Sahib and his formation of Guru Nanak’s compositions. It presents the “fundamental philosophical and ethical beliefs of the Sikhs” (N. Singh 83). Reciting or hearing the Japuji enables Sikhs to understand the formless and infinite reality and to have a deeper connection with God. It is to be recited in the morning because that is when the mind is fresh and the “atmosphere is serene” (N. Singh 83).

*Jaap* is the compositions of Guru Gobind Singh (10th). His poetic obeisances towards the Transcendent One are highly valued amongst Sikhs as they describe the divine attributes of God.

*Swayayai*, again, compositions of the tenth Guru are written in verses. They are composed of ten verses that are described as the essence of the religion. This is because, “they reject all forms of external worship, and case Guru Nanak’s message of internal love in an undulating rhythm” (N. Singh 84). This prayer is also recited during the *Amrit Sanchar* ceremony.

*Sodar Rehras* include compositions from Guru Nanak, Guru Ram Das, and Guru Arjan. They recite their prayers to the omnipotent Creator; they express their joy on hearing “the melodious Word within their inner self” (N. Singh 84). Sikhs recite these prayers to pay respect to the Transcendent Reality as they sing praises of Divine Magnificence and seek the protection and blessing of God.

*Sohila* is known as the ‘hymn of praise’. It is a collection of five hymns composed by Guru Nanak, Guru Ram Das, and Guru Arjan. Together they illustrate the union of the individual with the Divine, highlight the singularity of the Divine, and also celebrates life on Earth. The Sohila is the finale to the evening prayers and it is intended to be recited before bed. This is

1. Food seen as permissible according to Islamic law.
symbolic to closing the Guru Granth at the end of day and “it is also recited at cremation ceremonies, linking the end of day to the end of life” (N. Singh 84).

*Kirtan*

This is another Sikh ritual that is expressed through song. It is the “singing of scriptural verses” (N. Singh 85) and is usually accompanied by the musical instruments harmonium and *tabla* (a set of drums). The verses are expressed as the infinite manifestation and love of God and are meant to sink deep into the unconscious to awaken one’s ‘cosmic awareness’.

*Ardas*

*Ardas* is a prayer addressed to the Supreme Being. It is a solemn part of daily life and is also essential part of all ceremonies. In the Gurdwara it is recited by the leading member of the congregation or as a solo at home. The word ardas is “derived from the Persian words *arz* meaning supplication and *dast* meaning hands” (Gurbachan 59). In most cases it is recited in the Gudwara by a priest in front of the Guru Granth Sahib, although it can be recited by anyone at any time. Ardas is recited under many occasions such as the birth of a child, marriage, and death. It consists of four essential parts:

The first is an invocation which opens with the initial portion of Guru Gobind Singh’s *Chandi di Var*. The second segment is historical in perspective and recognizes the continuum of brotherhood that has transcended in time. It recalls, “the heroic sacrifices made by those true to the faith in the cause of righteousness and defence of the dharma; the Panj Piarey or Five Beloved, the four sons of Guru Gobind Singh, the forty martyrs and numerous others who resisted tyranny and injustice, suffering terrible torture and death at the hands of their oppressors, without abandoning their faith” (Gurbachan 59). The third portion invokes the blessing of the

1. Food seen as permissible according to Islamic law.
Eternal Lord on all human beings, the Khalsa, the Gurdwaras, and asks for guidance in life while inviting protection against the five evils. It seeks the benevolence of service, faith, justice, patience, and above all, the word. The final portion is added in accordance to the occasion by mentioning the specific purpose for which the ardas is being offered. The concluding words asks the Supreme Being for His blessing and for the wellbeing for everyone in the world. As the ardas is concluded, the individual or congregation kneels and bows in respect to the Guru Granth Sahib. When this is done, everyone stands up and says, ‘Sri Waherguru ji ka khalsa, Sri Waheguru ji ki Fateh’ which translates into, ‘the Khalsa is of the wondrous Lord, victory also is His’. The prayer is ended by having the reciter say ‘Jo bole so nihal’ meaning, ‘whoever utters this will be fulfilled’ and all respond, ‘Sat Sri Akal’ responding that the true Lord is the eternal.

Bhog

Bhog translates into the word, pleasure. It is the “joyous culmination of every Sikh event” (N. Singh 86). It involves reading the concluding pages of the Guru Granth and concludes into the distribution of prashsad¹. The bhog is held at every Sikh event, such as birth, marriage, anniversary and death.

Ceremonies:

There are many stages in a person’s life to birth, marriage and death, which are prevalent in all humans. Along with these shared stages there are other occasions which have a spiritual or denominational significance that are not shared by all, such as naming a child. For Sikhs, “the basic rituals and ceremonies are always conducted in the presence of the Sri Guru Granth Sahib” (Gurbachan 66). In other words, the Eternal Guru is present and blesses the proceedings.

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¹. Dense sweet made with equal portions of semolina, butter, and sugar.
Naamkaran or Naming: It is customary for a child to be given a name before he or she is forty days old. The procedure involves the opening of the Guru Granth at random and taking initial letter of the first word of the shabad. This determines the initial letter of the child’s name. The actual name is chosen by the parents.

Amrit Sanchar: This ceremony was discussed earlier in the paper. Again, it is the symbolic baptism or initiation into Khalsa. During this ceremonial procedure amrit is prepared by churning pure water and sugar together with a double-edged sword. Initiates (male or female) are asked to pledge themselves to the brotherhood (and sisterhood) of the Khalsa. The initiation of Khalsa denotes that the Sikh has become valorous under the discipline of the Guru. The Sikh has killed the five evils that burn his or her illusion of the world by abandoning their pride through absorption of the name of the Lord. Commencement into the Khalsa requires each individual who wear the five K’s:

kesha, or long hair and beard; kangha, a comb in the hair to keep it tidy; kara, a steel bracelet kachh, trousers and kirpan, a sword.

These external symbols are “perpetual reminders for an inner discipline of the qualities: saintliness, cleanliness, continence, righteousness and courage” (Kohli, Real Sikhism 78). Once Sikhs have become instilled into the Khalsa they are not allowed to remove hair from their body in any way (i.e. shave or cut), must wear a turban to keep their hair tidy and refrain from eating meat and refrain from consuming alcohol, drugs and other intoxicants that can harm the body.

Kundhpaat or Thanksgiving:

This ritual consists of a one to three day prayer organized by anyone to mark an occasion such as a birth, birthday, anniversary, buying a new house, and/or any success in life. During this

1. Dense sweet made with equal portions of semolina, butter, and sugar.
time the family or individuals holding the *kundhpaat* will complete a 24 to 72-hour, nonstop reading of the Guru Granth during which several readers take turns. Any Sikh, male or female may read the Guru Granth Sahib if they know how to.

*Marriage:*

Marriage is regarded as a union of two people and two families. A Sikh wedding must take place in the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib to invoke God’s blessing. The union of a man and women is similar to that of God and devotee. According to Own Cole, awe, love, restraint, and harmony are the steps outlined in the wedding hymns of Guru Ram Das (61). The Hymns are recited throughout the wedding ceremony and apply equally to the union of God as to the marital relationship.

*Death:*

In the case of death it is customary to bathe and dress the body. Generally, the body is usually placed on a plank (in Indian village) or in a casket and carried on the shoulders of relatives and/or friends. In both cases the body is taken to a place of cremation. Ardas is recited before the body is cremated. Family and friends will usually attend the Gurdwara where further prayers and shabads are recited.

*Festivities:*

For Sikhs, commending anniversaries of historical events is embraced as celebrations. Certain days of the months and of the year have an added factor of festivity for Sikhs around the world.

One of the most celebrated days in Sikh history is *Baisakhi*. This celebration commemorates Guru Gobind Singh’s creation of the Khalsa “and is also the first day of the Sikh

1. Dense sweet made with equal portions of semolina, butter, and sugar.
calendar” (N. Singh 91). Different means of celebrations take place across the world on this day, but Sikhs will generally gather together to celebrate the day with traditional Punjabi entertainment such as singers and bhangra\(^1\) dancers. At the Golden Temple for instance, “the entire complex is full of devotees bathing in the waters, listening to exegetes and musicians, preparing and eating langar, making special offerings, or reverentially walking around the promenade” (N. Singh 91). Significant functions also take place on Baisakhi. New members are initiated into the Khalsa community and new Sikh flags are hoisted in replacement of old ones at Gurdwaras. Overall Baisakhi is a joyous day in commending the past, new beginnings, and new undertakings.

Diwali, “short for the celebration of deepwali, literally means a string of lighted lamps” (N. Singh 92) and is denoted as the ‘festival of lights’. The celebration arose from the need of light during the short days of winter. Today, it is celebrated immensely across the globe as Sikhs decorate Gurdwaras and their homes with festival lights and ignite fireworks to light up the sky.

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1. Folk dance in Punjab region and or genre of music.
Bibliography

The following bibliography includes sources that I personally used towards my research. I have also developed this bibliography in hopes to present readers with further Sikh philosophical literature to better their understanding. I believe the following resources are more than suitable for anyone who is looking for additional knowledge in Sikh philosophy.


**Books from UBC:**


