

The Word of God

Summary: In the early 16th century a community of disciples, called Sikhs, gathered around Guru Nanak who presented strong monotheistic teachings after receiving direct revelations from God. The Sikh community, centered in Punjab, grew under ten generations of successive gurus and has since spread throughout the world.

Sikhism is a strong monotheistic religious tradition. It grew up in the full light of history, in response to the teachings of Guru Nanak, who lived in the late 15th and early 16th centuries in India. Guru Nanak is said to have received revelation directly from God and transmitted it in the hymns that have been cherished and sung by Sikhs for nearly 500 years. These hymns, composed in lyrical verse, pulsate with a mystical, yet practical message. They proclaim the Divine Name of God, the liberating power of devotion to the Name, the kinship of all people, and the equality of men and women.

A vibrant community of disciples called Sikhs gathered around Guru Nanak. Before his death, he designated a successor as *guru*. Thus began a lineage of Gurus that would extend ten generations. Sikhs call their tradition of belief and practice the Sikh Panth, meaning the “community of the disciples of the Guru.” It is a community shaped in tone and spirit by the very first words of the Sikh scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib: *Ek Onkar*, God is One. It is a universal and inclusive affirmation. The one God can only be the God of all humanity, not the Sikhs' alone. Sikhs do not divide the world into believers and non-believers, but rather find beauty and power in all religions, insofar as they all seek to know God. The Guru Granth Sahib, thus includes not only the hymns of the *gurus*, but hymns of some of the Hindu and Muslim poets and saints as well.

The Sikh community has flourished for the past 500 years. While the community’s heartland is in the Punjab in northwest India, Sikhs have now settled throughout the world. Their *gurdwaras*, the places of worship called “the gateways of the Guru,” are centers for community gathering and community service—whether in India or in Kenya, in Southall, England or Fremont, California. Today, the United States is home to 500,000 of the world’s 27 million Sikhs.