

Sikh - Sacred and Ceremonial Objects

Guru Granth Sahib



The most sacred object in Sikhism is the **Guru Granth Sahib** (also called the **Adi Granth**), the Sikh holy book. The Sikh scripture has 1,430 pages in a single volume. The Guru Granth is the eternal Guru of the Sikhs and may never be replaced by a human being. The scripture is formally referred to as "Siri Guru Granth Sahib", meaning respected scripture of the supreme enlightener. The text is called Gurbani, or the Guru's word and is considered the means of enlightenment and salvation to Sikhs. The original manuscripts of the Granth are hand written in a medieval script used by the Gurus with the words are strung together to form an unbroken line. This ancient connected way of writing is called *laridar* meaning linked. Modern text separates individual words and is called *pad ched*, or cut text. Modern day publishers print the sacred scripture of Guru Granth both ways.

Unlike the New Testament or the Bhagavad-Gita, which are often carried around, dog-eared and placed on a shelf with other books, there are strict rules and procedures for handling the Adi Granth. For this reason, most Sikhs keep a smaller manual at home containing the main passages from the Adi Granth used in daily prayers.

The tenth and last human Guru or spiritual guide, Guru Gobind Singh, designated as his successor the holy book of Sikhism as the enduring and living Guru. Accordingly, the Guru Granth Sahib is treated with the same respect one would show a human Guru.

Anyone who wishes to take responsibility for the care and handling of the Siri Guru Granth Sahib should bathe, wash their hair, and dress in clean clothing. No tobacco or alcohol may be on their person. Before touching or moving the Guru Granth, the attending person must cover their head, remove their shoes, and wash their hands and feet. The attendant should stand facing the Guru Granth with their palms pressed together. The formal prayer of supplication or petition, called Ardas, must be recited before opening the scripture.



The Guru Granth Sahib is kept under a canopy and on a throne, covered in decorative cloths (rumalas) at night, and a chauri (whisk) is waved over it while it is being read. The sacred book is never to touch the ground. When entering the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib, one must be barefoot, have his or her head covered, and prostrate before the book. When moved, the book is wrapped in cloth and carried on someone's head as a sign of its honored status.



Chauri

As mentioned above, a whisk (left) is waved over the Guru Granth Sahib whenever the sacred book is read. This whisk is called a chauri and is usually made of yak tail hair or artificial fiber, set in a wooden or metal holder. The use of the chauri derives from the practice of retainers keeping dignitaries cool with a whisk or fan, which became a symbol of sovereignty and honor.

See a short video <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=41wJNe4-Qlw&feature=related> showing the reading of the Guru Granth Sahib and the waving of the chauri over the sacred book. The continuous reading of the entire sacred text is called an Akhand Path. When it is finished a ceremony or Bhog is performed expressing the joy of the Sangat or congregation.

Five Sacred Sikh Symbols The Five Ks

In 1699 when the tenth Sikh Guru, Gobind Singh established the Khalsa as a military order of "saint-soldiers," to defend the religion, he asked all Sikhs to wear five symbols expressing their allegiance to the new Sikh community. These five symbols are known as the five Ks and are still a fundamental part of the lives of all baptized Sikhs. They are described briefly below:



Kesh is uncut hair on the head and body, symbolizing acceptance of God's will. This gave rise to the distinctive Sikh turban, which arose as a way to keep the long hair clean and tidy.



Kangha is a wooden comb that represents personal care and cleanliness.



Kachh is a pair of white cotton shorts worn as an undergarment. It is practical in battle, and therefore symbolizes moral strength and chastity.



Kara is a steel bracelet symbolizing responsibility and allegiance to God.



Kirpan is a steel dagger, a symbol of resistance against evil and defense of truth.

Nishan Sahib

The Nishan Sahib ("respected emblem") is the Sikh flag. It is triangle-shaped, bright orange or saffron in color, and bears the Khanda, the symbol of Sikhism. The Nishan Sahib is flown outside gurdwaras (temples) and often inside as well. A gurdwara is not authentic without a Nishan Sahib. The flag is also carried in processions and on special occasions, and it is raised and lowered with special rituals. Sikh devotees respectfully place flowers on the parapet at its base and light candles beneath it on the days of celebrations.



The flag is normally replaced annually on Vaisakhi in April, which celebrates the birthday of the Khalsa. The old flag is not thrown away, but divided into pieces which people take as gift from the Guru. These pieces of the Nishan Sahib are used to stitch the chola (long shirt) of infants. An old flag or worn out clothes made out of it is burned and the ashes are placed in flowing water.

Other Sources

1. John Bowker, ed., *World Religions* (DK Publishing, 1997).
2. "Nishan Sahib." Sikh History. 2005 http://www.sikh-history.co.uk/nishan_sahib.htm .
3. Religion Facts <http://www.religionfacts.com/sikhism/places.htm>

Lesson Activity
Completing the Sacred Objects Chart

Left 3 Columns:

1. Think about a religion about which you are familiar. Identify 3 to 5 sacred or ceremonial objects of that religion (Example: for Greek Orthodox Christian it might be an incense burner, or an icon.)
2. On the chart provided put the name of the religion you have selected at the top left. Underneath name the sacred or ceremonial object in the object column.
3. Draw that ceremonial object in the next column.
4. Describe the meaning of the object in the next column.

Right 3 Columns:

1. Using the article provided about Sikhism, select 5 sacred objects.
2. On the chart provided put the name of the object in the Object Column.
3. In the next column draw the ceremonial object of that name.
4. In the next column describe the meaning to that object.

Are there similarities between the sacred objects of the two religions?

Pick out one object from the first religion and one from the second that seem alike in some way. Describe the similarities that they have in meaning.

What do you think this means about similarities between the beliefs of the two religions?

Are there major differences between the sacred objects of the two religions?

Pick out one object from the first religion and one from the second that are very different from one another.

What do you think this means about differences between the beliefs of the two religions?

Comparing Religious Sacred and Ceremonial Object

Selected religion:

Sikhism:

Name	Picture	Meaning	Name	Picture	Meaning
Object 1			Object 1		
Object 2			Object 2		
Object 3			Object 3		
Object 4			Object 4		
Object 5			Object 5		

