

Note: Pictures are a representation of Guru ji – we do not know for sure what Guru Nanak Dev ji looked like

GURU NANAK DEV JI

SSSEC Punjabi, Gurmata and Kirtan classes every Sunday held at Villiers High School, Boyd Avenue, Middlesex, UB1 3BT. For more information and e-copies of this leaflet please contact us:
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FACTFILE

Guru Nanak Dev ji was the founder of the Sikh faith and the first Guru of the Sikhs

Born: 15th April 1469 at Rai Bhoi ki Talwandi (also known as Talwandi, now called Nankana Sahib, in Pakistan)

Mother: Mata Tripta Ji

Father: Mehta Kaliyan Das (Mehta Kalu)

(Older) Sister: Bebe Nanaki

Wife: Mata Sulakhni ji

Children: Siri Chand and Lakhmi Das

Jyoti Jot: 22nd September 1539 (aged 70) at Kartarpur

BANI

Guru Nanak Dev ji expressed his thoughts and teachings using music and poetry, a tradition which was carried on by all the Gurus after him. Guru ji would call to his companion Mardana to play his rabab, and then he would sing the revelation (shabad).

Another tradition carried on by all subsequent Gurus is the use of 'Nanak' in their bani, to represent the fact that they all carried the same message.

Guru Nanak Dev ji contributed 974 Shabads in 19 Ragas and the following banis: Japji Sahib, Sidh Gohst, Sohilaa Sahib, Dakhni Onkar, Asa di Var, Patti and Bara Mah. Japji Sahib, the essence of his philosophy, is the first bani in the Guru Granth Sahib.

TRAVELS

Guru Nanak Dev ji spent over twenty years travelling, spreading his message as widely as possible. He travelled with his childhood friend Bhai Mardana on four main journeys, referred to as the four *Udassis*. After this he also travelled around Punjab for about 2 years.

His first journey took him around central and eastern Asia and lasted seven years. It was during this time that he met Bhai Lalo, Sajjan Thug, and Kauda Rakhsh. He also visited Haridwar and Banaras, preaching against following meaningless rituals.

The second Udassi also took seven years. In this time, Guru ji travelled to important religious places in South India and Sri Lanka. He held discussions with people of many faiths including Jains, Hindus, Krishna Bhagats and Muslims. During this journey, he also collected hymns of Bhagat Namdev and Bhagat Pipa.

The third Udassi took five years, and Guru ji went north as far as Tashkent and east as far as Tibet. He visited places such as Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir and China.

In his fourth journey, lasting three years, Guru ji travelled to the Arab countries. It was during this journey that his famous visit to Mecca took place.

There are many Gurdwaras marking Guru Nanak Dev ji's journeys, showing how far he spread his message.

PHILOSOPHY

Guru Nanak Dev Ji was a social revolutionary. He had the courage to challenge powerful rulers and the established religious leaders of his time. Guru ji fearlessly put into practice what he preached, even spending time in jail after speaking up against King Babar.

His philosophy can be summed up as:

- Naam Japo – always keep God in mind
- Kirat Karo – work honestly to earn a living
- Vand Chhako – share with others, especially those in need

Guru Nanak Dev ji strove for equality, rejecting the caste system and the practice of sati. He saw everyone as human beings rather than being a specific gender, caste or religion. Guru ji demonstrated this throughout his life by treating everyone equally; one of the biggest examples is the fact that he made one of his followers the next Guru rather than his own sons.

He also emphasized the importance of truthfulness and living by the truth rather than simply speaking of it; 'Truth is high, but higher still is truthful living'.

Guru Nanak Dev ji believed that 'He, who conquers his mind, may conquer the world.' He saw the five vices (lust, anger, greed, attachment and ego) as being the main barriers to achieving oneness with God.

This philosophy was carried forwards by all subsequent Gurus.

SAKHIS

A sakhi is a true story, or historical account, from Sikh history. Sakhis always have a moral, a lesson that we can learn from the actions of the Gurus or Sikhs mentioned. These are some of the most well-known sakhis from the life of Guru Nanak Dev ji:

Janeu

At the age of nine years, Guru Nanak Dev ji was required to take part in the Janeu (sacred thread) ceremony. Without wearing the janeu, a Hindu would be considered as low as the Shudar caste. However even at such a young age Guru ji realised that this was just an empty ritual. He waited till the preparations had been made, then at the last moment, in front of the assembled guests; Nanak refused to wear the janeu. He made them understand that good deeds, not the wearing of the janeu, are important.

Honest living

While travelling, Guru ji stayed at the house of a poor carpenter called Lalo. Hearing this, a rich man in the area, Malik Bhago, got jealous, and decided to invite Guru ji for a feast. However, Guru ji declined the offer, saying he liked Lalo's simple food. When Malik Bhago insisted, Guru ji explained that Bhai Lalo's food had been gained by honest means, and was therefore pure, while Malik Bhago's rich food was not pure, as he was unkind to those who worked for him, and dishonest. This moral is often illustrated using the metaphors of milk coming from Lalo's food and blood coming from the other.

No Hindu, no Muslim

Once when Guru Nanak went to bathe and didn't return, people began fearing that he had drowned in the river. When he returned after three days everyone was overjoyed. When he spoke, the first thing he said was, 'There is no Hindu and no Muslim.' This shocked and confused many people, so Guru ji went on to explain that we are all children of one God, we are all human beings, and that God does not judge us by our beliefs but by our actions. When asked whether Hinduism or Islam was better, he replied, 'Without good deeds, both will repent.'

Hardwar

When Guru ji visited Hardwar, he saw many people at dawn throwing water eastwards, towards the rising sun. They believed this water would reach their ancestors. Here, Guru ji decided to use a novel way to explain his philosophy. Guru ji also climbed into the river and started throwing water – but in the opposite direction, facing west. When asked to explain his actions he replied that he was watering his fields. The people laughed and said, 'Your fields are many hundreds of miles away, how can the water possibly reach them?' Guru ji replied that if the water could reach the sun, which is many millions of miles away, then it would definitely be able to reach his fields, which were much closer. Thus the people realised how meaningless these rituals were.