

## **GLOSSARY OF SIKH TERMS**

**Also see GREETINGS, NAMES, AND TITLES\* below.**

**Adi Granth:** Literally translated, “the first book,” the early compilation of the **Sikh** scriptures by Guru Arjan, the Fifth Sikh Guru, in 1604.

**Adi Shakti:** The Khanda symbol on a turban pin worn by many Sikh women representing the Primal Feminine Creative Energy of the Universe. Khanda is a double-edged sword surrounded by kirpans on each side, along with a **quoit** (ring), the symbol of eternity. Also see **Khanda**.

**Akal:** Literally translated, timeless, immortal, or non-temporal.

**Akal Purakh:** Literally translated, “a timeless being that never dies.” A Sikh name for God.

**Akal Takhat:** Literally translated, “Eternal Throne,” the pre-eminent of the five seats of Sikh temporal authority, the authority exercised by its Jathedar is not shared by those of the other four Takhats. The actual building is located in the Harimandir Sahib (**Golden Temple**) complex of Amritsar, facing the Harimandir Sahib, and was constructed under the direction of Guru Hargobind.

**Akali Dal:** Literally translated, “eternal army,” the main political party of Sikhs in the Punjab.

**Akhand Path:** A continuous recitation of the **Siri Guru Granth Sahib**, lasting about 48 hours, by a team of readers.

**Amrit:** Literally translated, “nectar.” It is composed of water and sugar and is stirred with a double-edged sword while prayers are spoken. Initiation into **Sikhism** involves drinking Amrit. Can also refer, more generally, to the ambrosia of God’s name.

**Amritdhari:** A Sikh who has taken part in the ceremonial initiation into the Khalsa.

**Amritsar:** Literally translated, “pool of nectar,” the city located in the northern Indian state of Punjab, where the **Harimandir Sahib**

complex is located.

**Anand Karaj:** Literally translated, “blissful event.” The Sikh wedding ceremony, literally translated as “blissful occasion,” the lavan, or four stanzas, are sung to formalize Sikh marriages.

**Anandpur:** The city in India where the Khalsa was created in 1699.

**Ardas:** The Sikh congregational prayer, anonymously written during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Although it is not in the **Siri Guru Granth Sahib**, it occupies a prominent place in Sikh religious functions. It is said with the daily prayers, and often used to initiate or conclude any significant endeavor (i.e. child going away to school, starting a business venture).

**Bhangra:** A Punjabi folk dance.

**Caste:** A ranked, birth-ascribed group, which determines social standing and occupation, based on the tenets of **Hindu** philosophy. For Sikhs, caste has no religious or social significance.

**Chandigarh:** The capital of the modern-day Indian state of Punjab.

**Chunni:** A long, flowing veil worn by some Sikh women with their turbans, symbolizing that every woman is a princess.

**Dasam Granth:** A sacred book of writings attributed by some Sikhs to **Guru Gobind Singh**, the tenth Guru of the Sikhs.

**Dasvandh:** One-tenth of personal income, which a Sikh is religiously obligated to donate to charity.

**Gatka:** The Sikh martial art form.

**Golden Temple:** The Gurdwara of historical, spiritual, and emotional significance to Sikhs, called Harimandir Sahib in Punjabi first conceived by **Guru Amar Das**, although construction did not begin until **Guru Ram Das** became the Guru. Maharaja Ranjit Singh had the structure plated with gold in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. In 1604, the recently compiled Adi Granth was housed here and was attacked by

the Indian army in June 1984.

**Giani:** Someone learned in the Sikh religion. Often leads the congregation in prayers, such as Ardas, or in singing Kirtan.

**Granthi:** A ceremonial reader of the **Siri Guru Granth Sahib**. Duties include arranging daily religious services, reading from the Sikh scripture, maintaining the Gurdwara premises, and teaching and advising community members. A Granthi is not equivalent to a minister.

**Gurbani:** The revealed wisdom of the Sikh Gurus in their own words, found in the **Siri Guru Granth Sahib**; The devotional songs of the Gurus.

**Gurdwara:** Literally translated, “Home of the Guru.” Any building or room dedicated to housing the devotional songs of the Guru for the purpose of spiritual practice; A Sikh place of worship, open to anyone. Provides food and shelter to travelers, and the needy.

**Gurmukhi:** Literally translated, “from the mouth of the Guru.” A written form of Punjabi, used in the Sikh scripture and in contemporary India.

**Gurpurab:** A Sikh holiday to commemorate the birth or death of a Sikh Guru.

**Gursikh:** A Sikh devoted to Waheguru (see **WhaheGuru**).

**Guru:** Literally translated, “teacher.” One of the most important words in **Sikhism**, it has a number of related meanings. It can refer, depending on context of usage, to one of the ten Sikh prophets, the Sikh scripture, the Sikh community (Guru Panth), or God. The Sikhs had ten living Gurus, and the 10<sup>th</sup> Guru transferred the Guruship to the **Siri Guru Granth Sahib**.

**Guru Arjan Dev:** The fifth Guru of the Sikhs and their first martyr. He compiled the **Siri Guru Granth Sahib**. It was on his martyrdom day in June 1984 that the Indian army attacked the Golden Temple.

**Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708)**: The tenth and last living prophet of the Sikhs, he passed the guruship onto the Sikh scripture, the **Siri Guru Granth Sahib**, and the Sikh community (Guru Panth). Guru Gobind Singh Ji founded the order of the Khalsa during Vaisakhi (Baisakhi) 1699.

**Guru Granth Sahib or Siri Guru Granth Sahib**: The Sikh scripture, written in poetry organized in 31 sections, with each section corresponding to a particular melodic scale, or raag. It includes the poetry of six Sikh Gurus, and 36 other saints, including **Muslims** and **Hindus**. It is 1430 pages long and is the embodiment of the spiritual knowledge and authority of all of the Gurus. The words from the **Siri Guru Granth Sahib** are the central focus at all Sikh Gurdwaras. It is used by Sikhs for meditation, guidance, comfort, and inspiration.

**Guru Hargobind**: The 6<sup>th</sup> Guru of the Sikhs. Following the martyrdom of his father, Guru Arjan Dev Ji, he was the first Guru to maintain a standing army and symbolically wear two swords, representing spiritual and temporal power. He was responsible for the construction of the **Akal Takht**.

**Guru Har Krishan**: The 8<sup>th</sup> Guru of the Sikhs, who was only 5 years old when he became Guru in 1661. He died three years later.

**Guru Nanak**: The founder of the Sikh faith. Born in 1469, he began his mission by proclaiming that there is “neither Hindu nor Muslim,” stressing common truths fundamental to diverse faiths. He preached against caste and advocated the equality of women.

**Guru Panth**: Literally translated, “Guru’s path.” The name used by Sikhs to describe the worldwide Sikh community.

**Guru Teg Bahadur**: The 9<sup>th</sup> Guru of the Sikhs who was killed by Mughal rulers in 1675 for defending Hindus facing forcible conversion to Islam. He announced that the Hindus would convert to Islam only after he did.

**Harimandir Sahib**: Literally translated, “Temple of God.” The Punjabi name for the **Golden Temple**.

**Haumai:** The self-centeredness (ego) of a human, which can only be overcome through meditation on God's name (naam).

**Hukam:** Literally translated, "divine will." A decree by an higher authority. Can also refer to a passage from the Siri Guru Granth Sahib, selected randomly daily. The passage is considered the "command of the Guru" for the day.

**Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale:** A charismatic preacher and leader of a group of militants who were killed in the Indian army attack, Operation Blue Star, on the Harimandir Sahib complex in 1984.

**Jathedar:** An appointed leader of Sikh volunteers. Also refers to the appointed leader of one of the five Sikh takhats.

**Jhatka or Chatka:** A Sikh warrior tradition involving the principal that shastars (weapons) are living, like the expression 'living steel'. Those shastars that have been in combat and tasted blood must be refreshed every so often to keep them alive. So, at certain times a goat is beheaded. It must be done in a very specific way, with a single stroke. The goat must be calm and not demonstrating fear or nervousness at the time. The Nihangs who do this are very skilled at calming the goat and making sure it is ready before they take the sword. Once the goat has been beheaded, the severed head is placed on a platter and carried into the Gurdwara where with a steel arrow the blood is taken and touched to the blades of shastars, just a drop or so, which is considered sufficient to keep the shastars alive. See <http://search.aol.com/aol/image?q=shastars+photo>.

**Kacha:** Undershorts. One of the five Ks, the Sikh articles of faith given as gifts of love by Guru Gobind Singh worn by baptized Sikhs as a symbol of devotion and commitment.

**Kanga:** Comb. One of the five Ks, the Sikh articles of faith given as gifts of love by Guru Gobind Singh, worn by baptized Sikhs as a symbol of devotion and commitment.

**Kara:** Steel bracelet. One of the five Ks, the Sikh articles of faith given as gifts of love by Guru Gobind Singh, worn by baptized Sikhs as a symbol of devotion and commitment.

**Kaum:** A term used by many Sikhs to refer to the corporate Sikh nation or Panth.

**Kaur:** Literally translated, “Princess,” the name given to all female Sikhs.

**Kesh:** Uncut hair. One of the five Ks, the Sikh articles of faith given as gifts of love by Guru Gobind Singh, worn by baptized Sikhs as a symbol of devotion and commitment.

**Khalistan:** The proposed name for a sovereign Sikh state in Punjab, that is independent from India.

**Khalsa:** Literally translated, “belonging only to the divine;” The collective body of all initiated Sikhs, who drink the amrit instituted by **Guru Gobind Singh**, and agree to live by the highest ideals of Sikh principles. Committed to one’s own purity of consciousness and actions.

**NOTE:** Khalsa does not apply exclusively to Sikhs. Sikhs must ever be mindful of the human tendency to tribalism. Khalsa includes ALL those who contemplate the Lord; ALL who live by their inner purity and light; ALL who are pure of heart.”

**Khanda:** The double-edged sword symbol, when surrounded by a kirpan on each side along with a **quoit** (ring), a symbol of the Khalsa.

**Kirpan:** Miniature ceremonial sword. One of the five Ks, the Sikh articles of faith, given as gifts of love by Guru Gobind Singh, worn by a baptized Sikh. Represents the Sikh commitment to Truth and Protection of the weak and innocent.

**Kirta:** Traditional long shirt or blouse uniform worn by Sikhs.

**Kirtan:** The devotional singing of sacred hymns, or shabads (songs) from the **Siri Guru Granth Sahib**, usually accompanied by musical instruments.

**Langar:** Free community kitchen. **Langar** is a free-kitchen, open to

all, regardless of religious background, gender or social status as an expression of pluralism, the Sikh belief in the equality of all humanity, and the rejection of the Hindu caste system, which forbade people of different castes from eating together.

**Matha taykna:** Bowing down and touching the floor with one's forehead in front of the **Siri Guru Granth Sahib**. Sikhs do not bow before the book as some type of idol worship. By bowing, Sikhs are submitting themselves to the Living Guru, and the knowledge and true words of God contained therein. Sikhs perform matha taykna as they enter the main hall. Most worshippers opt to place a donation in front of the scripture before bowing, which is used for the management of the Gurdwara.

**Maya:** Literally translated, "delusion." Sikh theology explains that everything in this world is an illusion, i.e., temporary, and that the only true reality is **Waheguru**. A person affected by Maya is described by the **Guru** as suffering from the illusion that all things, which are fleeting, are not worth pursuing. A person attached to **Maya** cannot escape the cycle of death and rebirth, which is the goal of every Sikh. A Sikh strives to avoid rebirth through living a meritorious life of honest work in **service to others**, and in remembrance of God's name.

**Naam:** Name, the Holy Name of God. See **Sat Nam**.

**Naam Simran:** Remembering God's name through **meditation**, this seminal form of worship for Sikhs.

**Nitnem:** The Sikh prayers recited each day.

**Operation Blue Star:** The Indian army attack on the Golden Temple in Amritsar and other Gurdwaras in Punjab, Haryana and Himachel Pradesh in June 1984.

**Panj Piare:** Literally translated, "Five beloved ones." Five Amritdhari Sikhs. Often refers to the first five initiated Sikhs, during the Vaisakhi (Bhaisakhi) celebrations of 1699 that volunteered to give up their lives as a sign of their faith and love for their Guru. Currently, panj piare are necessary to perform baptisms, make important corporate

decisions, and officiate over special occasions.

**Panth:** The Sikh community.

**Patit:** A Sikh who has been initiated into the Khalsa, but fails to observe the Khalsa code of conduct.

**Prakash:** The initial short ceremony performed when the **Siri Guru Granth Sahib** is formally opened each day.

**Punjab:** Literally translated, “five rivers.” The fertile region in South Asia, which today is divided between India and Pakistan, the birthplace of the Sikh religious tradition and the name of a state in both India and Pakistan.

**Raag:** A term used in Indian classical music to refer to a series of five or more notes upon which a melody is based. The poetic works in the **Siri Guru Granth Sahib** are categorized according to the raag in which they are sung.

**Ragi:** A musician who is trained in performing kirtan.

**Rehat Maryada:** A formalized code of conduct for the Khalsa way of life.

**Sangat:** Literally translated, “community,” the Sikh congregation. Believed to be an essential aspect of living a spiritual and God-centered life.

**Sant Sipahi:** Literally translated, “**Saint-Soldiers**.” Guru Hargobind decreed that Sikhs should be both devout followers of the teachings of the Gurus, while being prepared to take up arms for self-defense and defense of the oppressed.

**Sat Sri Akal:** A common Sikh greeting meaning “God is True and Timeless.”

**Seva:** Community service. A central aspect of Sikh theology is selfless service, which is believed to bring one closer to God.



**Shabad:** Literally translated, “Word,” a sacred Sikh hymn.

**Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (S.G.P.C.):**

Established in 1920, this elected governance committee, located in Amritsar, is responsible for the administration of Gurdwaras in India.

**Sikh:** Literally translated, “student, disciple.” According to the Sikh **Rehat Maryada**, a Sikh is someone who follows the one God, the ten Sikh Gurus, the **Siri Guru Granth Sahib**, the importance of the Khalsa initiation, and no other religion; “A Seeker of Truth.”

**Singh:** Literally means lion, the name given to all male Sikhs.

**Sukhasan:** A short ceremony performed when the **Siri Guru Granth Sahib** is formally closed everyday.

**Takhat:** Literally translated, “throne,” one of five centers of Sikh secular authority.

**Turban:** A cotton cloth covering of the head. Worn as a sign of submission and devotion to God.

**Vaisakhi (Baisakhi):** A spring harvest festival in the Punjab, usually held around April 13 holds special significance for Sikhs, as it serves as a time to commemorate the founding of the Khalsa in 1699. Considered the beginning of the Sikh New Year, it is a time of religious observances and festive celebration.

**Waheguru (see **WhaheGuru**):** Literally translated, “the wonderful Lord”; the most popular Sikh name for God; Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa! Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh! Traditional Sikh expression, which means, “Those who are pure, i.e., meditate on God, belong to God! All life’s victories belong to God!”

#### **\*GREETINGS, NAMES, AND TITLES**

**Bhai Sahiba, or Bhai Sahib:** Bhai means Sister or Brother. Sahiba or Sahib means Madam or Sir. These are also titles of reverence bestowed upon highly respected Sikh women and Sikh men respectively for their dedication, spiritual wisdom, insight and

knowledge.

**Ek Ong Kar:** (13); One Creator of Creation; From One Many; Ex Uno Plures; or **God and me, me and God** are One. In the eyes of the enlightened student of religion, there is only One Creator; the same Creator worshipped by various religions, and known by various names and descriptions, e.g., in **Islam**, it's Allah; in **Christianity** and **Judaism**, it's GOD, the Generator, Organizer, and Destroyer; in **Hinduism**, it's Ram; in **Sikhism**, it's Wahe Guru, or Akal Purkh. These are all the same Infinite Being masquerading as the **diversity of creation** while wearing the mask of what Sikhs, Hindus and others call **Maya**. See [13EkOngKar.com](http://13EkOngKar.com).

**God:** Think about this. You grew and developed your **magnificent brain**, perhaps the most complicated thing in the world without even thinking about it. A supremely intelligent **Life Force** of unknown origin created and sustains this wondrous miracle. This benevolent Force is what Sikhs refer to as **Ek Ong Kar**, the Creator of Creation, the One-In-Charge, what Jews and Christians call God.

**Guru:** **Siri Guru Granth Sahib**, the living and only remaining teacher of the Sikhs manifested in the form of **Word**. (See **Most Common Words In Siri Guru Granth Sahib**.)

**Hari:** Name for God, the creative aspect.

**Karma:** The force generated by a person's actions held in **Hinduism** and **Buddhism** to perpetuate transmigration and in its ethical consequences to determine the nature of the person's next existence. (**Newton's Third Law of Motion**. For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction.) See **More Definitions**.

**Kaur:** Princess. Female Sikhs are given Kaur as part of their given name. A female Sikh's given name, as in many other traditions, usually denotes some aspect of the Creator. Female and male Sikhs can have the same given name, e.g., Hari Kaur, woman, and Hari Singh, man.

**Khalsa:** Body of Pure Ones, "those who contemplate the Lord," from Sukhmani Sahib; who live by their inner purity and light; who are pure

of heart. Sukhmani Sahib is the name given to a set of hymns divided into 24 sections, which appear in the [Sri Guru Granth Sahib](#). Khalsa DOES NOT apply exclusively to Sikhs. The Khalsa includes ALL those who contemplate God; ALL those who live by their inner purity and light; ALL those who are pure of heart. Mankind must be ever mindful of the tendency to [tribalism](#). Also see [Tribal vs. Tribalism](#).

**Mahan Tantric:** "Mahan" is a [Sanskrit](#) word meaning principle, supreme, great, or high. "Tantric" is a Sanskrit word meaning one who weaves together, as in weaving together the physical and the spiritual, as in joining together the human and the divine. See [Tantra Yoga](#). See [TheMahanTantric.com](#).

**Mukhia Jathedar:** Chief (Senior) Leader; the honor bestowed upon women and men who have manifested exceptional qualities of knowledge and service to the community.

**Mukhia Sardarni Sahiba, and Mukhia Singh Sahib (aka MSS):** Chief Noble Lioness, and Chief Noble Lion, are ministerial titles bestowed upon women and men respectively who have manifested exemplary service to the community. Indicates an elder of [Sikh Dharma International](#).

**Naam (Nam or Name):** Word-Sound; the expressed sound current by which God, the I AM; the One Creator of Creation is acknowledged, worshipped, remembered, honored, celebrated and appreciated as the One Thee-Me in EveryBody. (See [Word Physiology](#). See [Be Your Allness](#). See [Acknowledgements](#).)

**Sardarni Sahiba, and Singh Sahib (aka SS):** Noble Lioness and Noble Lion, are [ministerial titles](#) bestowed upon women and men respectively who are ordained Sikh ministers of [Sikh Dharma International](#). See [Inspirational Quotes For Ministers](#).

**Sat Kartar:** The True Doer of all. A term sometimes used to acknowledge the reason [Sikhs](#) do not proselytize, i.e., only those whose destiny is to be a Sikh will be Sikh.

**Sat Nam:** Authentic Truth. Used as a greeting, it means Truth is your One Identity, your [Essential Essence](#). In other words, you are IT, I

am IT, we are IT. (Also see [Sat Nam Means](#).)

**Sat Siri (Siri or Sri) Akal:** Supreme Truth never ends, i.e., our True Identity is undying.

**Shakti Pad:** The status or mindset of any practitioner, who knows far less than they think they know, and which fails to acknowledge same. The worst-case scenario is that one falls into the trap of convincing oneself and others that only they know the best way, and that the old ways need to change, going forward. Beware of the 'tiger's bite'! It is a normal consequence of 'riding the tiger' of **pride**. One must be alert to the signs in order to take appropriate action. One must surrender their ego, realizing that learning never stops. See [Antidote](#).

**Singh:** Lion. Male **Sikhs** are given Singh as part of their given name. A male Sikh's given name, as in many other traditions, usually denotes some aspect of the Infinite. Male and female Sikhs can have the same first given name, e.g., Hari Singh, male, and Hari Kaur, female.

**Siri Sardarni Sahiba, and Siri Singh Sahib (aka SSS):** Supreme Noble Lioness and Supreme Noble Lion, are ministerial titles bestowed upon women and men respectively who are religious authorities within a particular domain of [Sikh Dharma International](#). See [SiriSinghSahib.com](#).

**Tantra Yoga:** "Tantra" means woven together. "Yoga" means union.

**WhaHe Guru:** The Indescribable Experience of Indescribable Wisdom, which is commonly known only as '[God](#)'.

**Whahe Guru Ji Ka Khalsa - Whahe Guru Ji Ki Fateh:** An expression or greeting meaning that those who meditate on the Infinite (Khalsa) belong to the Infinite. And any and all accomplishments belong to the Infinite, i.e., God.

**White Tantra Yoga:** "White" connotes self-mastery, meaning under one's personal control as opposed to "Black", or under remote or other's control. See [WhiteTantraYoga.com](#).

**NOTE:** White Tantra Yoga should not be confused with Black Tantra Yoga or Red Tantra Yoga. These forms of yoga also transform energy, but in a different way and for a different purpose. White Tantra Yoga directs the energy to self-mastery. Black Tantra Yoga directs the energy to manipulate other human beings, and Red Tantra Yoga directs the energy solely for sexual purposes.

See [Glossary of Sikh Terms](#). See [A Comprehensive Sikh History Quiz](#). See [Sikh Minister's Vows](#). See [Find The Meaning of Sikh Names](#). See [Core Issues For Sikhs](#). See [Why Are White Tantra Yoga Classes So 'White'?](#)