

Vaisakhi/Baisakhi



Guru Gobind Singh was the last of the Guru's and his birth is remembered on January 5th. Baisakhi is the festival to remember the formation of the Khalsa on April 13th. The festival which celebrates the founding of the Khalsa during the guruship of Guru Gobind Singh, in AD 1699. The day had always been a Sikh festival, but on this day the tenth and last guru stood in front of a crowd in front of his tent and asked those who were prepared to die for their faith to step forward. Five men did and each was taken into the tent only for the guru to reappear a few moment later with the sword bloodstained. After the fifth man had been taken into the tent, the guru appeared with the five men alive and well.

The Panj Pyare, as they are now called, remain an inspiration for Sikhs, and many present themselves for initiation into the Khalsa at this festival. They have to be prepared to live by the prescribed code and to wear the five Ks.

During the festival the nishan sahib (Sikh flag) which flies over the gurdwara is renewed along with the cloth which is wound round the flag pole. Sikhs in the Punjab try to visit Amritsar during the festival, whilst those in this country process to and from the gurdwara.



Guru Gobind Singh and the Khalsa

Guru Gobind Singh summoned his followers to Anandpur. He asked for volunteers who were ready to die for their faith. Eventually one came forward and the crowd heard a sickening thud. Then the Guru asked for another and again a volunteer stepped forward and the same sound happened. This procedure was repeated 5 times until the Guru had 5 volunteers. They emerged dressed in yellow robes and declared to be Panj Pyare the beloved five. These were the first members of the new brotherhood.

The 5 Ks date from the creation of the Khalsa Panth by Guru Gobind Singh in 1699. The Guru introduced them for several reasons:

Adopting these common symbols would identify members of the Khalsa because all members of the Khalsa wear the 5 Ks the members of the community are more strongly bound together. Each K has a particular significance.

The meaning of the 5 K's

The 5 Ks taken together symbolise that the Sikh who wears them has dedicated themselves to a life of devotion and submission to the Guru.

The 5 Ks are 5 physical symbols worn by Sikhs who have been initiated into the Khalsa.

The five Ks are: Kesh (uncut hair), Kara (a steel bracelet), Kanga (a wooden comb), Kaccha - also spelt, Kachh, Kachera (cotton underwear) and Kirpan (steel sword).



- ① Sit down with the children and show them the series of pictures overleaf. You may wish to lay the sheets out either on a table or the floor, and then read the story.
- ② Ask the children the following questions and discuss them:-
What did you enjoy?
Which part did you find difficult?
What is a volunteer?
- ③ What would you volunteer to do? Ask the children to talk about their understanding of offering to do something.
- ④ Many people are identified by wearing the same clothes. Ask the children which people they know who wear a uniform to identify themselves. Can they name them and describe what they wear?
- ⑤ Get the children to draw a picture of someone who helps them.

The Story of Guru Gobind Singh



The Sikh leader was called Guru Gobind Singh. Guru means teacher, and he taught people about God. Guru Gobind Singh decided things had to change, and so, on the spring festival of Baisakhi, he called the Sikhs to join him. There was a huge crowd, over 20,000 people. Guru Gobind Singh stood outside his tent and called out: 'I need a Sikh who is willing to die for God and for the Guru.'



His words were passed through the crowd. Everyone was amazed. Who was devoted enough to give up their life? Twice more the Guru called out to the crowd and asked the question. Then one man came forward.



Guru Gobind Singh took him into his tent. After a while the Guru came out by himself. But in his hand was a sword covered in blood! The crowd gasped. Then the Guru asked again. 'Who is willing to die for God and the Guru?' Surely no one else would come forward.



What about that sword with blood on the blade? But then another man stepped forward and went into the tent with the Guru. Once again the Guru came out of the tent alone, with blood on his sword. Then amazingly, another man stepped forward and went into the tent, and then another. Four brave and devoted men - and each time the Guru stepped out of the tent alone, with his sword in his hand.



Then a fifth man stepped forward and went into the tent with the Guru. How many men must die, the crowd wondered. But this time the Guru came out of the tent, with his sword, and behind him were the five men. They were still alive!



'This was a test,' the Guru explained, 'to see who was brave enough and willing to give up everything to show how much they were devoted to God.' The Guru called the five men the 'Panje Pyare', the beloved ones. They were to become the first members of a group called the Khalsa, which would defend the Sikh faith and care for the poor and helpless, whoever they were and whatever they believed.



Then the Guru made a mixture of sugar and water called 'amrit'. He asked the beloved ones to give him some of the amrit, to show that although he was the Guru, all people were equal in God's eyes.



That day amrit was given to people in the crowd who said that they believed in one God, and that all people were equal. They were given new last names too, to show that they now belonged to one big family. Women were given the name Kaur, which means princess, and men were given the name Singh, which means lion.