

The Cross and The Khalsa



**A five session
study course**

for Christians about

SIKHISM

by Patricia M Hooker

INSERT ADDED JULY 2018

The Cross and Khalsa study course,

written by Pat Hooker, was originally published by Faith to Faith in 2005. Faith to Faith is now part of Global Connections. We believe that the main text of this book remains correct, but please note that any statistics and references to other materials, may no longer be up to date.



Global Connections

Caswell Road, Leamington Spa, CV31 1QD

01926 487755

globalconnections.org.uk

Registered in England and Wales as the Evangelical Mission Association, charity no. 1081966, company no. 3886596

This course book was produced as a pdf in July 2018 by Global Connections for free download, still acknowledging Pat Hooker's continuing right to be identified as the author of this work. She had previously agreed that we might put it on our website and we have endeavoured to contact her to confirm that this has now been finished.

THE CROSS AND THE KHALSA

a five session course for Christians about SIKHISM

This course of five, one and a half to two hour sessions is designed to help Christians who are interested in popular Sikhism, to explore this religion sensitively, to learn what is special, sacred and holy for Sikhs and what animates them in their believing. Significant similarities and differences will be assessed and we will ask: ‘What is the Gospel?’ for the Sikh man or woman. We take as our own position the fundamental Sikh assumption: namely that all religions are authentic avenues for approach to GOD. It is however of the essence of believing that the believer will not compromise his or her faith. These two ideas will be held in tension in the course, as they must be in any creative discussion between people of faith.

It is assumed that all who undertake this course will have read and enjoyed one of the excellent school textbooks or other books on Sikhism. At the time of going to press we particularly recommend:

- Kanwaljit Kaur-Singh - *Sikhism for today* (O.U.P. 1998)
- Sue Penney - *Sikhism* (Heineman Education - Discovering Religions Series)
- Beryl Dhanjal - *What do we know about Sikhism?* (Macdonald Young Books 1996)
- Kanwaljit Kaur-Singh - *Sikhism* (Wayland Ltd 1995 - World Religions Series)
- Piara Singh Sambhi - *Guru Granth Sahib* (Heineman Education 1994)
- Nikky Gurinder Kaur Singh - *The Name of My Beloved: Verses of the Sikh Scriptures* (Sacred Literature Press 1996)
- Grewal JS - *The Sikhs of the Punjab* (CUP 1990)
- McLeod WH - *Sikhism* (London 1997)
- R Gidoomal & M Wardell - *Lions, Princesses and Gurus – Reaching your Sikh neighbour for Christ* (Highland 1996)

Posters, audio-visual aids, artefacts etc can be obtained from your local RE Resources Centre (contact S.A.C.R.E. via your L.E.A.). You could also obtain some publications from the Sikh Missionary Society: 10 Featherstone Road, Southall, Middlesex UB2 5AA.

The Plan of the Sessions

Each session will usually include:

Brief Bible reading
Sikh texts for careful reading
Straight information
Questions for discussion
Visuals
Ideas for closing prayers

The questions for discussion mostly highlight the importance of a basic understanding of Christian doctrine. It should be remembered however, that like most Christians, most Sikhs are quite inarticulate about doctrine. They are much more likely, in conversation, to want to tell relevant stories about the Gurus which are used in teaching the faith.

Acknowledgements:

I want to thank all those who have read and commented on the course:

Bahadur Singh
Dr O Cole
Dr E Nesbitt
The Revd Dr John Parry
The Revd Hakim Singh Rahi

Some of their suggestions have been incorporated but I take full responsibility for what follows.

Bibliography:

ed T G Tappert	<i>Luther - Letters of Spiritual Counsel</i>
W Owen Cole	<i>The Sikhs</i>
W H McLeod	<i>Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion</i>
W H McLeod	<i>Textual Sources for the Study of Sikhism</i>
Gopal Singh	<i>A History of the Sikh People 1469-1988</i>
Kushwant Singh	<i>History of the Sikhs</i>
Cole and Sambhi	<i>Sikhism and Christianity</i>
Cole and Sambhi	<i>The Sikhs</i>
Ranbir Singh	<i>The Sikh way of life</i>
Gopal Singh	<i>The man who never died</i> Macmillan (India)
W O Cole	<i>Teach yourself Sikhism</i> H&S 1995
Joy Barrow	<i>Meeting Sikhs</i> Christians Aware 1998
Hakim Singh Rahi	<i>Sri Guru Granth Sahib discovered</i>

THE CROSS AND THE KHALSA

COURSE OUTLINE

SESSION ONE: BEGINNINGS

- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Bible reading
- 1.3 The life of Guru Nanak
- 1.4 The Sikh understanding of God
- 1.5 The Sikh understanding of Revelation
- 1.6 Closing prayer

SESSION TWO: THE POWER OF SUFFERING

- 2.1 Bible reading
- 2.2 The suffering and martyrdom of Gurus
- 2.3 Sacred sites
- 2.4 The founding of the Khalsa
- 2.5 An overview of Sikh history
- 2.6 Prayer

SESSION THREE: COME INTO HIS COURTS

- 3.1 Bible reading
- 3.2 Sikh Scriptures
- 3.3 Sikh public worship
- 3.4 Reflecting on Sikh scripture
- 3.5 Private devotion
- 3.6 Seva
- 3.7 Prayer

SESSION FOUR: BIG QUESTIONS

- 4.1 Bible reading
- 4.2 Who is a Sikh?
- 4.3 Does the Khalsa require a state?
- 4.5 What is right living?
- 4.6 What is it like for a Sikh in Britain?
- 4.7 Prayer

SESSION FIVE: WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

- 5.1 Bible reading
- 5.2 Issues relating to conversion
- 5.3 Using the Bible
- 5.4 Strategies for the Church: What can we do together?
- 5.5 Guidelines in discussion with Sikhs
- 5.6 Prayer

APPENDIX

Additional Notes for Course Leaders

SESSION 1: BEGINNINGS

Objectives:

- To introduce ourselves in relation to our experience of Sikh people and observation of Sikh practice.
- To place Sikh origins in their historical context.
- To learn something about Guru Nanak and his essential insights.
- To reflect on the Sikh understanding of God as creator and on how God is known.
- To re-examine Christian experience of the Trinity and understanding of Incarnation.

1.1 Introductions:

Group members introduce themselves by telling of any contacts they have had with Sikhs. This is followed by a sharing of any impressions group members may have about Sikhism.

1.2 Bible reading. Read Amos ch5 v 21-24. What is it that Amos is really criticising?

Q Read the two 'boxed' passages. Luther and Guru Nanak were contemporaries. What concern did they share? Can you think of a gospel reference that makes the same point?

I (Martin Luther b.1483 was one of those whose criticism of the church in 16th century Germany led to the beginning of Protestant churches in Europe).

"If we blabbe and let our minds wander in prayer we are tempting God. As when a priest prays: 'Make haste O God to deliver me' but calls out: 'Boy, harness the horse'. He prays: 'Make haste to help me O Lord', but calls out: 'Girl, go and milk the cow'. He prays: 'Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit', but calls out: 'Run boy and may the fever take you'. 'Is he praying?'

* For details of all quoted passages see the bibliography.

II (Guru Nanak b.1469 was an outspoken critic of Muslim and Hindu religiosity. He was the 'founder' of Sikhism).

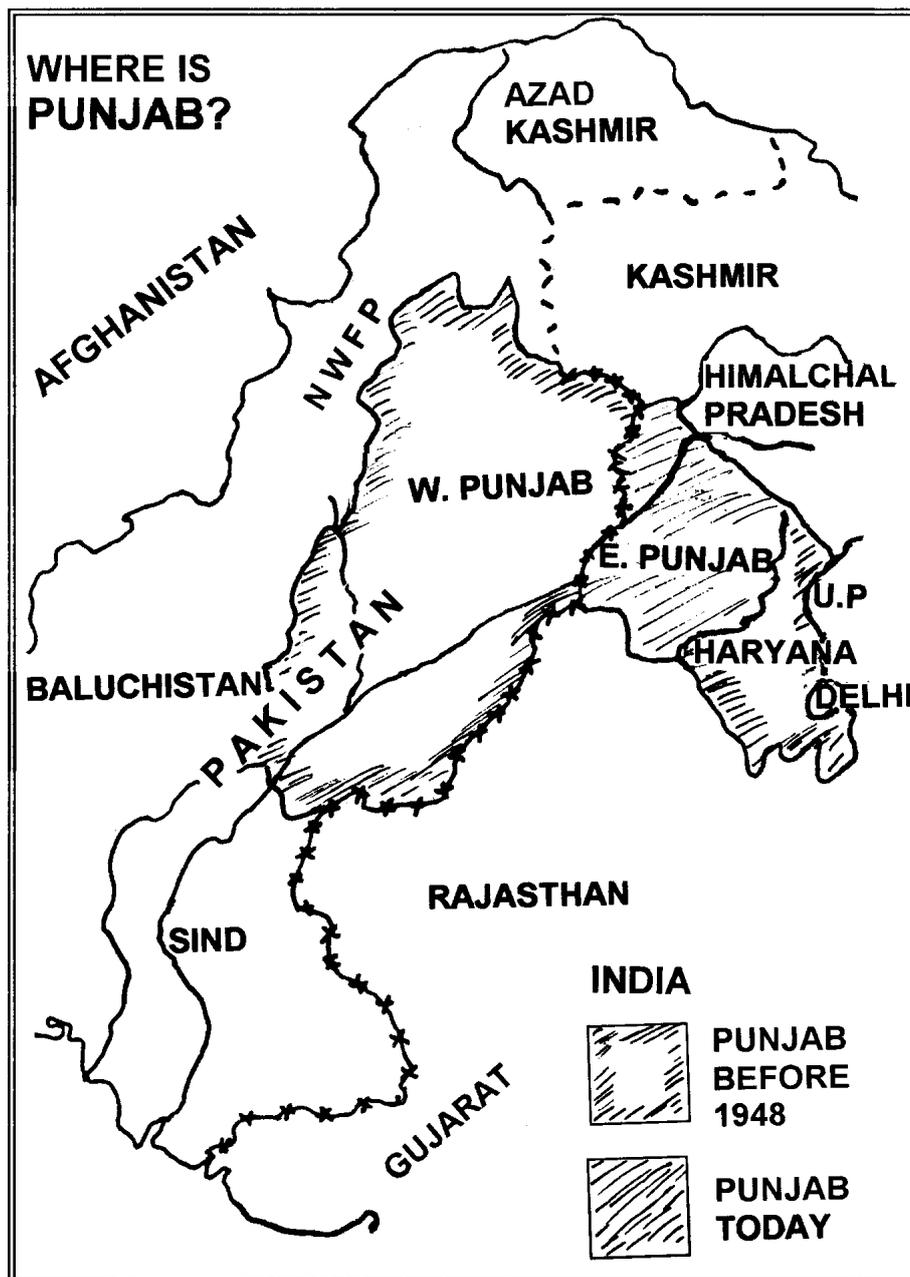
One day early in his career Guru Nanak was being examined by some Muslims. He attended prayers at the mosque with them but stood erect, laughing quietly and not joining in the movements of Muslim prayer. When challenged Nanak explained that he laughed because he knew that the man who had challenged him, had not been thinking about God, but about a new born filly in his courtyard that was in danger of falling into the well. Nanak's critic agreed that this was perfectly true and, recognising Nanak to be a prophet he became his disciple.

1.3 The Life of Guru Nanak 1469 - 1539 C.E

Guru Nanak was born of Hindu parents in Punjab, North India.

Since prehistory the area known as Punjab had been fought over by invaders from the North West. By the 16th century CE (AD) it was racially, culturally and religiously mixed. The Muslim dynasty of the Lodhi was in decline. In 1526 the last of the Lodhis was killed in the battle of Panipat and the Moghul emperor Babar set up his court in Delhi.

In this politically unstable area Hindus and Muslims lived in uneasy tolerance, but much of religious activity was corrupt and superficial.



Read this brief account of Nanak's call:

III One morning when he was about thirty years old Nanak failed to return from his ritual bathing in the river. His clothes were found on the river bank and the townspeople concluded that he had drowned. The river was dragged but no body was discovered. After three days Nanak reappeared but remained silent. It was the next day before he spoke and then he made the enigmatic pronouncement: 'There is neither Hindu nor Muslim so whose path shall I follow? I shall follow God's path. God is neither Hindu nor Muslim and the path which I follow is God's'.
(Puratan Janam Sakhi)

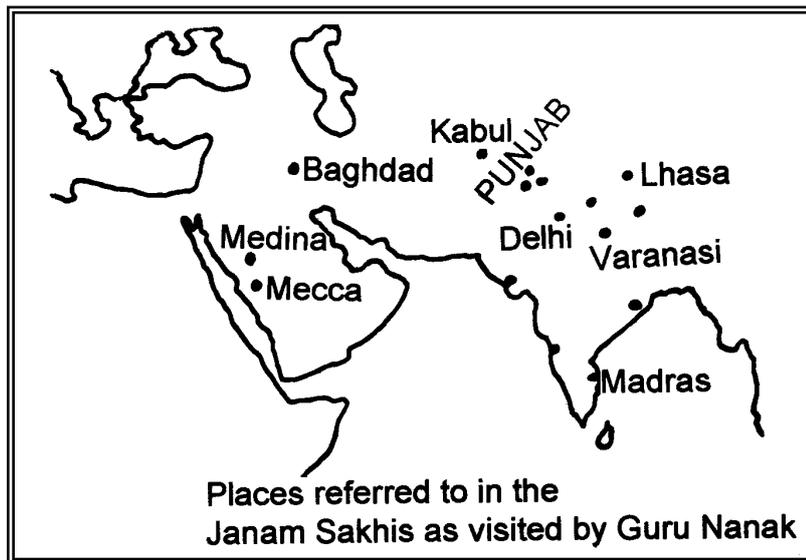
These are Nanak's words describing his experience:

IV I was a minstrel out of work
The Lord gave me employment
The mighty one instructed me:
'Night and day sing my praise'
The Lord summoned the minstrel
To his high court
On me he bestowed the robe of honouring
him and singing his praise.

On me he bestowed nectar in a cup
The nectar of his true and holy name
Those who at the bidding of the Guru
Feast and take their fill
at the Lord's holiness
attain peace and joy.
Your minstrel spreads your glory
By singing your word.
Nanak, through adoring the truth
We attain to the all-highest
(A.G.150)

Q From these two passages what is your impression of Nanak? What sort of person was he?

After his call it is believed that Guru Nanak spent about 24 years as a travelling teacher, visiting the places shown in this map.



V When Guru Nanak arrived in Mecca tired and footsore, it is said, he slept at night with his feet towards the holy Kaaba. This was considered an act of great sacrilege. No Muslim ever does so. An Imam, incensed by such impertinence, kicked him saying: 'You infidel, don't you know that you have turned your feet towards the house of God?' The Guru replied: 'You turn my feet in the direction where the house of God is not!'

This is an account of an incident during his visit to Mecca:

Accounts differ on what happened next. In one account the man acknowledges defeat and dies, in another he becomes Nanak's loyal disciple.

Stories such as this and the ones we read earlier were collected together in the century after Nanak's death in what are known as the Janam Sakhis.

Finally he settled with his many disciples back in Punjab where they developed a distinctive way of life becoming known first as Nanak-panthis (followers of Nanak's path) and then as Sikhs (learners).

Sikhism then, has emerged as a distinct religion from Nanak's disillusionment concerning the practice of Hinduism and Islam in his day. The new religion was obviously going to be deeply influenced by Islam and Hinduism just as Christianity emerging, as a critique of early Judaism, owes so very much of its language and symbolism to Judaism.

1.4 The Sikh Understanding of God

‘There is one supreme being, the eternal reality’	(Sikhism)
‘There is no God but God’	(Islam)
‘Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one’	(Judaism)
‘We believe in one God the Father almighty’	(Christianity)

Sikhs spell out their creed in the ‘Mool Mantra’:

VI There is one and only one God. Truth is his name. He is the Creator. He is without fear. He is without hate. Immortal, he is beyond birth and death. He is self-illuminated. He is realised by the kindness of the true Guru. Think! Before and in time past he was the Truth, now and forever he will be the Truth.

With their strong emphasis on MONOTHEISM some Sikhs, like many Muslims, find Christian insistence on the TRINITY and MONOTHEISM hard to take seriously.

Pause for a moment here and consider quietly what the idea of the Trinity means personally (not what the official teaching of the church may be). For the moment leave aside the bigger question about whether we all worship the one unique ‘GODHEAD’.

Notice in the MOOL MANTRA the emphasis on Truth. Remember Guru Nanak’s views on superficiality and hypocrisy.

Recall any New Testament references to TRUTH.

What one word about God might you put instead of Truth in your creed?

These are passages from the Sikh Scriptures which speak of God as Creator.

VII 'A part from GOD there is no other. The LORD is both the CREATOR and the cause'
(AG626)
'This whole phenomenal world that you see, O man is the visible image of God.
Yes, in it I see the face of God'. (AG622)

VIII 'When God took form in his own creation no concept existed of time or of sequence.
Without taking form, he who is formless continues unmanifest, wholly unknown. Thus it
was he created himself assuming the Name by which he is known.
Hail to the master of time and eternity he who is now and forever shall be.
Boundless is he, without end or beginning his infinite forms beyond hope of computing.
Causing creation to come into being.
Immanent he dwells within. (Bhai Gurdas var18)

In this last passage Bhai Gurdas is trying to express how God-beyond-knowing is in fact known by faith. He goes on:

IX God dwells within us as a reflection in a mirror
Present within, as the moon on water produces a multitude of separate images.
As ghee is present in the milk of a cow,
As scent in a flower or juice in a fruit,
As fire glows red in burning wood,
As water is held in the bosom of the earth. (Bhai Gurdas var9)

Q How would you as a Christian explain to a Sikh how you experience God in creation and God's in-dwelling presence?

Bhai Gurdas b 1551 worked closely with several Gurus. He took down the dictation of the Adi Granth and was himself a poet, mystic and teacher. His writings were very influential in the early 18th century CE.

1.5 The Sikh Understanding of Revelation, of how God is Known

Read passage VIII again. Notice that the word Name has a capital letter. In Punjabi this is Nam which translates approximately as WORD. It is through his WORD that GOD is known, that is through the teaching of the Gurus which is TRUTH. (Look back again to passage VI - the last four lines).

The Ten Gurus

Guru Nanak	c1469-1539	} A century of gradual development and increasing distinctiveness.
Guru Angad	1539-1552	
Guru Amar Das	1552-1574	
Guru Ram Das	1574-1581	
Guru Arjan	1581-1606	} A century of tension between Sikhs and Muslims culminating in the founding of the Khalsa in 1699.
Guru Hargobind	1606-1644	
Guru Har Rai	1644-1661	
Guru Har Krishnan	1661-1664	
Guru Tegh Bahadur	1664-1675	
Guru Govind Singh	1675-1708	

(the dates show the period when each guru was leader of the movement)

The ten Gurus are deeply respected as inspired holy men, a little bit like the prophets in Hebrew tradition. The word 'Guru', like the word 'Malachi', translates as Messenger. Literally a Guru is 'one who removes the darkness of ignorance.' Many of them were mystics and poets and, as we shall see in later sessions, they also emphasised the importance of living the truth.

It is easy, but not helpful, to liken the Gurus to Jesus. It is often insisted that they were very special exceptional men, but they were not God. Some Sikhs insist that God **was** incarnate in the Gurus. That they **were** divine.

Q You may want to think out what you understand by the Incarnation. Share your own feelings. Christians have not always been clear about this.

1.6 Closing Prayer

Do you feel you can put this Sikh prayer alongside the well-known words from Charles Wesley's hymn?

The truth that God gives is the land I inhabit
His truth is the goal that I seek
Truth is my capital, truth is my trade
The produce I store in my heart. (AG1002)

O thou who camest from above
the fire celestial to impart
kindle the flame of sacred love
on the mean altar of my heart. (Charles Wesley)

SESSION 2

THE POWER OF SUFFERING

Objectives:

- To get some sense of the importance of martyrdom in the Sikh tradition.
- To become aware of the tension between spiritual and community emphases (miri-piri).
- To look at Sikh responses to suffering.
- To learn of the historical developments leading to the founding of the Khalsa and the later influences on the Panth.
- To revise Christian teaching on the Atonement and redemptive suffering.

2.1 Bible reading. 2 Corinthians 6 v 4-10

2.2 The suffering and martyrdom of the Gurus

The passage that follows is from ARDAS, which is recited at the end of nearly all public worship. You may have discovered from reading the school textbooks who the people are who are referred to in the first line.

The cherished Five, the Master's four sons, and the forty Liberated; all who were resolute, devout and strict in their self-denial; they who were faithful in their remembrance of the divine Name and generous to others; they who were noble both in battle and in the practice of charity; they who magnanimously pardoned the faults of others: reflect on the merits of these faithful servants, O Khalsa, and call on God saying 'Vaheguru!'

Those loyal members of the Khalsa who gave their heads for their faith; who were hacked limb from limb, scalped, broken on the wheel, or sawn asunder; who sacrificed their lives for the protection of hallowed gurdwaras never forsaking their faith; and who were steadfast in their loyalty to the uncut hair of the true Sikh: reflect on their merits, O Khalsa, and call on God saying: 'Vaheguru!'

Guru Arjan and Guru Tegh Bahadur are both especially respected as martyrs. Persecution, mostly at the hands of the Muslim rulers in the 17th century and 18th century C.E., gave the Sikhs what has been called the 'martyrdom tradition'. Remaining faithful unto death was and is highly honoured. The remarkable record of Sikh soldiers in two world wars bears witness to their notable courage. Stories of the martyrs' deaths are a source of inspiration. Tegh Bahadur is particularly honoured because he risked death in order to help Hindus as well as Sikhs in their longing for religious freedom. It was his insistence on going 'behind' Hinduism - and Islam - to God that infuriated the zealous Emperor Aurangzeb and led him to order the Guru's torture and execution. In his account of this Dr Gopal Singh comments that in Guru Tegh Bahadur's death we see how

'a single man's soul ... can turn the course of history, no matter how staggering the odds ...'
(A history of the Sikh People 1469-1988)

With their strong Sikh emphasis on ‘being faithful unto death’ Sikhs do not easily grasp the significance of the crucifixion of Jesus. Christians may want to take up the opportunity to clarify their ideas about the Atonement. There is no time to explore this now, important though it is.

The Sikh understanding of suffering

Sikhs like Hindus believe in re-incarnation - we will look at this in detail in Session 4. Here we can note that suffering can be accepted stoically if the sufferer reasons that he or she is taking the consequences of evil done in a previous life.

Closely associated with this is the widely held acceptance of suffering as ‘my fate’. ‘It is written’ that I should suffer and there is no point in trying to do anything to avoid it.

This sort of resignation is balanced by strong emphasis on ‘good works’ to ensure freedom from suffering in future lives and if possible freedom from re-birth (see Session 4).

Q How would Christians hope to help a Sikh friend who was sick or was facing serious problems?

MIRI-PIRI

At the time of the martyrdom of Guru Arjan in 1606 what had been an essentially spiritual movement (PIRI) began to develop a feeling for land and power (MIRI).

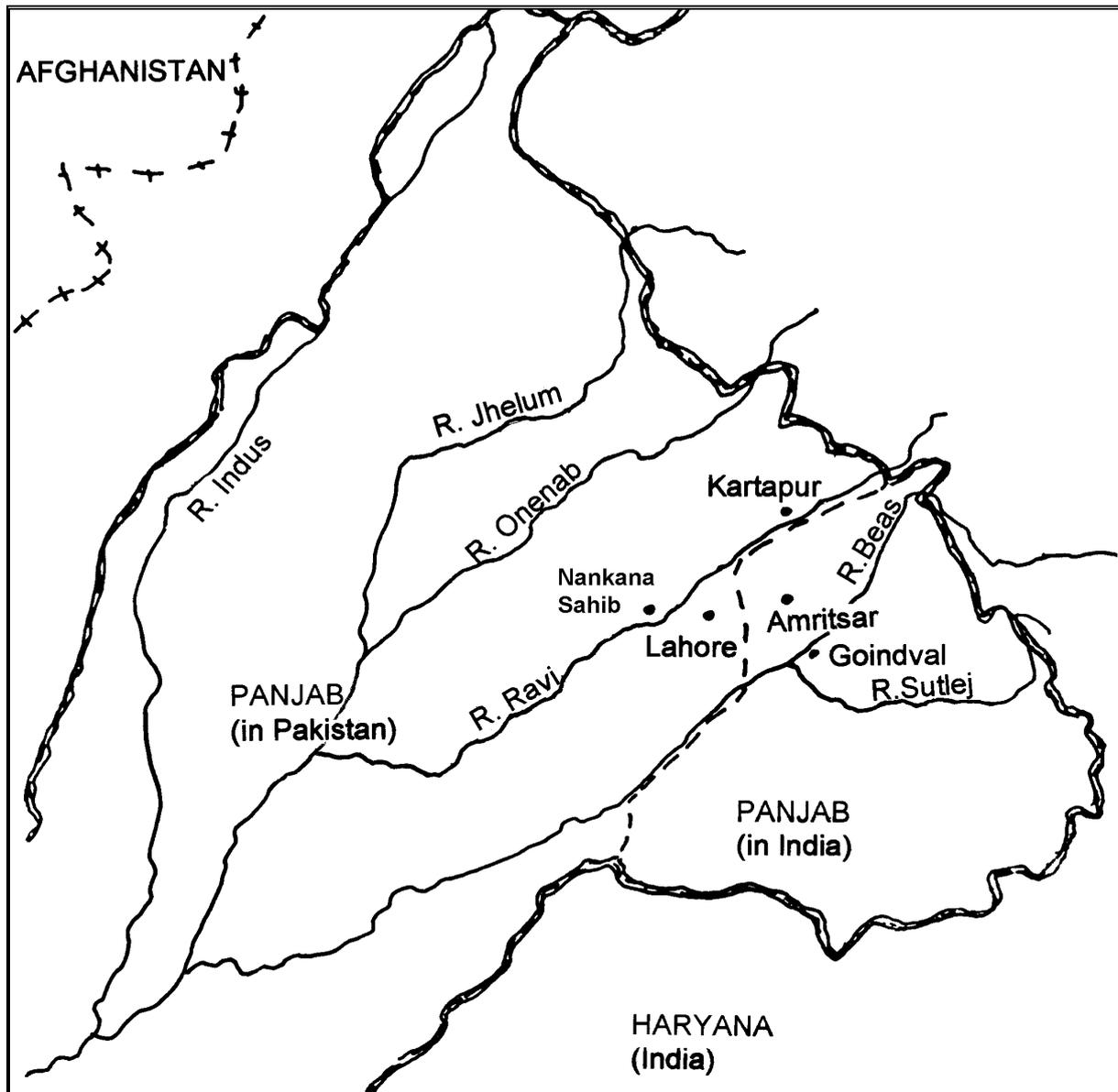
Miri -Piri - The balance between MIGHT and PIETY

<p>After his father’s traumatic death the young Guru Hargobind took his father’s seat with two swords girded round his waist: one to symbolise spiritual power and the other temporal. ‘My rosary shall be my sword belt and on my turban I shall wear the emblem of royalty’. He made it known to his Sikhs that thereafter he would welcome offerings of arms and horses instead of money ... He built a small fortress ‘Lohgarh’ in Amritsar and across from the Harimandir (Golden Temple) he built the Akal Takht (the throne of the Timeless God), where instead of chanting hymns of peace, the congregation heard ballads extolling feats of heroism and, instead of listening to religious discourses, discussed plans of military conquests. (Kushwant Singh History of the Sikhs vol 1 p63)</p>
--

At the time some Sikhs were uneasy about this but Bhai Gurdas calmed their doubts. In the same way there have always been Christians who regret Constantine’s conversion and its effect on the church!

2.3 Sacred Sites

Where there are heroes and martyrs there will be memories. Where there are memories there will be sacred sites and where there are sacred sites there will be pilgrimage. Many places associated with the Gurus are visited by Sikhs for blessing, cleansing of the soul, healing and devotion.



2.4 The founding of the Khalsa

Almost 100 years later the shift, which we have just observed, was formalised when the last Guru, Guru Gobind Singh founded the Khalsa. This was essential it seemed for survival. At the time of the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, the Sikhs were being persecuted and killed for what they believed. The Guru decided that they needed to form a fighting force that could defend the faith.

The word KHALSA is sometimes translated as 'the pure ones' - it can be understood as the company of the openly committed Sikhs. KHALSA is an Arabic word meaning 'lands under the direct suzerainty of the king.' There is a direct relationship between the Khalsa and the Guru; there is no mediator.

You will have read the story of Baisakhi in the school texts. Share the story again.

Q What is the central point of the Baisakhi story?

Not all Sikhs today are members of the Khalsa. Some feel that they cannot keep the rules for living which it expects of them, and some do not feel that membership is important for them. Sikhs who do become members must be old enough to do understand what it involves. Many do not join until they are middle aged.

Sikh power reached a climax under Maharaja Ranjit Singh. This is how Ahluwalia Singh sums up the tension that we have noticed:

Doctrinally Sikhism in its essential concerns is universal, for humanity as a whole, though since the first Sikh reformation arising in the last quarter of the 19th century the essential concerns - political economic, social, cultural of the Sikhs have become predominant. This lopsidedness of the first Sikh reformation was due to the very survival of the Sikh community having become problematic.

'Today, we need another Sikh reformation that would hopefully restore the balance ...'.

Q Where do we find evidence of the power of the church today?

How do we rate the church's use of its power?

Can we still call Britain a Christian country?

Where does our God reign?

Do Christians have territory to preserve in Britain?

What experience do Christians in the group have of the reawakening of Christian spirituality (which seems to coincide with the decline of church influence in Society)?

2.5 An overview of Sikh history

Today Sikhs are widely scattered throughout the world. They have a turbulent history. The main events of the three centuries since the founding of the Khalsa are set out below.

- 1699 Baisakhi - the founding of the Khalsa.
- 1708 Death of Guru Gobind Singh.
- 1761 Battle of Panipat. End of Lodhi power, followed by decades of varying fortunes in fighting against Afahan invaders.
- 1780 Ranjit Singh born.
- 1799 Sikhs take Lahore and establish Sarkar Khalsaji (the Khalsa government). Territorial expansion in face of Afghan and British advances. The government was 'secular' and included influential Muslims and Hindus and many Sikhs.
- 1839 Ranjit Singh died.
- 1849 British annexe the Punjab
- 1857 'Indian mutiny'. Sikhs remain loyal to British.
- 1860 Singh Sabha reform movement begins. Sikhs have to address the question of their identity and this gives rise to internal tensions.
- 1919 Jallianwala bagh Massacre.
- 1926 Sikh Gurdwaras Act
- 1947 Partition of Punjab. Mass movement of Sikh refugees from West to East Punjab.
- 1984 Indian army bombards the Golden Temple, Amritsar.
- 1999 Ter-Centenary of the Khalsa.

As in Christian history so in Sikh history there have been internal differences of opinion and charismatic leaders who have attracted disciples. In Britain today Gurdwaras vary considerably although there is free unrestricted movement between them, as we would expect of an essentially tolerant religion. A detailed investigation of the differences in style would suggest where each group finds itself in the MIRI-PIRI debate.

Q How would you explain the differences in the styles of Christian worship to an interested Sikh?

2.6 Prayer

Q What is there in common and what are the differences between the Sikhs' understanding of the suffering of the Gurus and the Christian understanding of the suffering of Jesus, as expressed in this verse of Wesley's hymn?

And, can it be that I should gain
An interest in my Saviour's blood?
Died he for me, who caused his pain;
for me, who him to death pursued?
Amazing love! - how can it be
That thou, my God, should'st die for me?

SESSION 3

COME INTO HIS COURTS WITH PRAISE

Objectives:

- To learn of the origin of Sikh Scriptures.
- To learn the ground rules for a visit to a gurdwara.
- To read and respond to passages of scripture used in public worship.
- To gain some idea of private Sikh devotion.
- To understand how *seva* is incorporated into worship.

3.1 Bible reading. James 2 v 14-17. Group members briefly share what ‘works’ or ‘service’ they are involved in.

3.2 Sikh Scripture: SRI GURU GRANTH SAHIB

‘Truth is highest, but higher still is true living’
Guidance for true living comes from the Guru’s teaching as it is found in the Sikh Scriptures.

There is a long tradition of verse making in North West India. Much of this has always been religious verse, and had been passed on orally down the generations. These verses or hymns, for they were normally sung or chanted, can be compared with the Psalms, much of the ‘wisdom literature’ in the Bible and the ‘collected works’ of many of the Old Testament prophets.

The Gurus of Sikhism were poets, mystics and prophets. At the end of the 16th century Guru Arjan collected together the hymns of his predecessors, especially Guru Nanak. He included in his collection verse from respected Hindu and Muslim poets who used Sanskrit, Hindi, Urdu or Farsi languages. All the verse was written down in the new Gurumukhi script - which is widely used by Punjabi people today. This first collection is called the Adi Granth.

One hundred years later Guru Gobind Singh added verses by his father, the 9th Guru. This complete collection is known as the GURU GRANTH SAHIB. It is treated by Sikhs as the WORD of GOD and as their LORD. Special rituals attend its use and its care to ensure that it is appropriately honoured.

Q Christians speak of the Bible as the word of God.
Do we respect it? - Show our respect for it? How? To what extent? Why? Why not?

Q Many Sikhs today have difficulty in understanding their scripture. Translations are not used in Public Worship. Remember that for more than 1000 years Christians in Britain didn’t have the bible in their own language. What effect did this have on Christian faith and practice?

Sikhs will often quote from their scriptures and they will assume that the words 'speak for themselves', as they often do. They will not expect to interpret the text. They will often tell stories to illustrate important teaching. It is good to remember this in any attempt at 'dialogue' (discussion of faith between faiths).

Q Frequent and a regular repetition of important 'teaching' hymns from the Guru Granth Sahib has always been an important way of passing on the faith. This is true for Christians as well. What Christian hymns or songs do group members live by?

3.3 Sikh Public Worship

What follows here is important if a visit to a Gurdwara is to be arranged at this point, as is strongly recommended - but it is important anyhow as practical issues force us to examine our attitudes and prejudices.

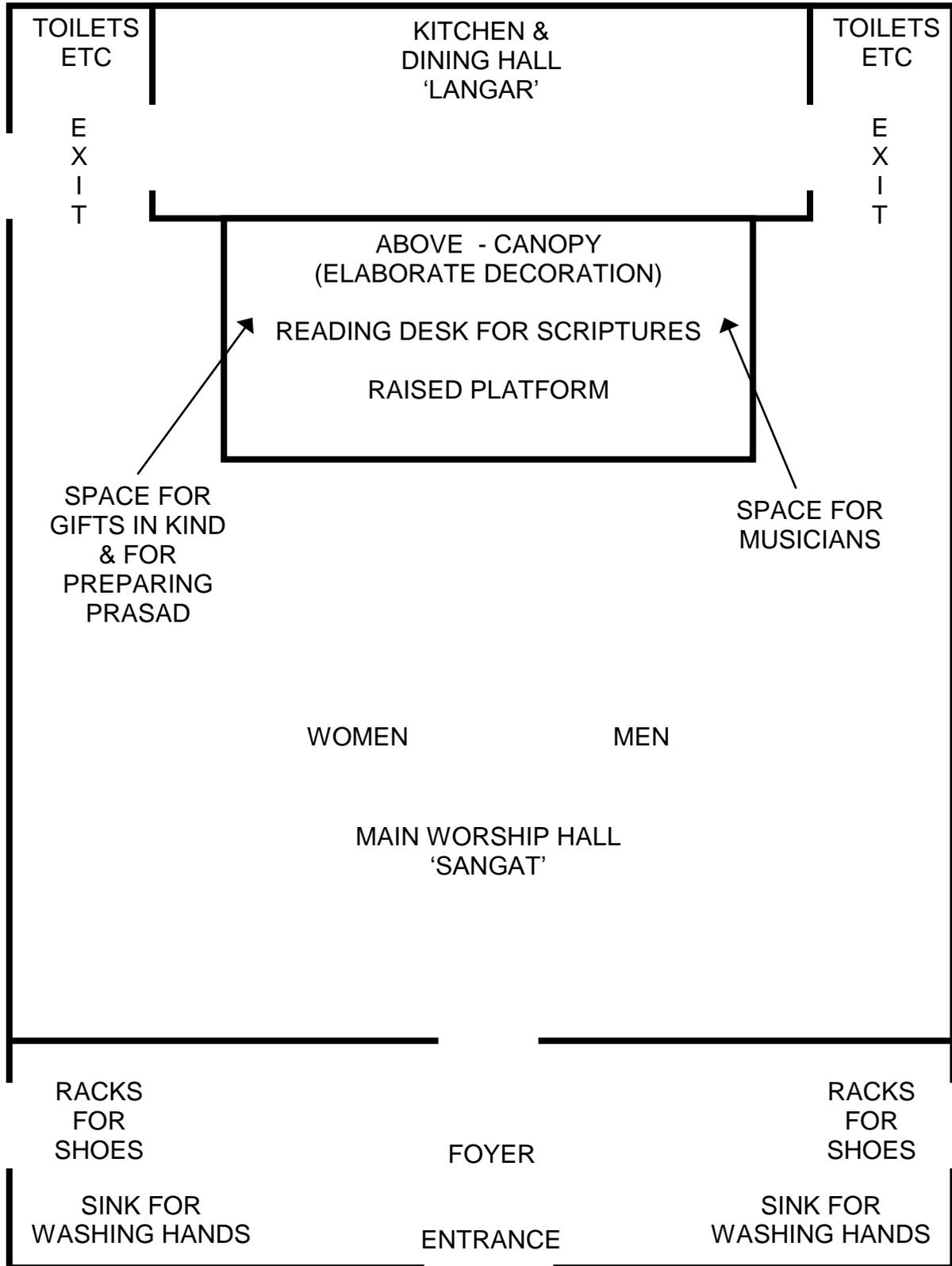
Meeting together for public worship is an essential element in Sikhism. Very many people also go the Gurdwara for private devotions.

It is normal Sikh practice on entering the worship area to go forward to the platform and kneel, touching the floor with the forehead in a prayerful and respectful way before finding a place to sit. In some Gurdwaras all visitors are expected to show 'respect' in some way. Catholics could think of this as oriental-style genuflection. All visitors should think out what they are doing - and why. There are no rules but there are issues of integrity and theology here.

Note also the following ground rules:

- 1 Take something to cover your head.
- 2 You will have to take off your shoes. Avoid complicated lace-up systems.
- 3 You will have to sit on the floor. Ladies avoid short or tight skirts. Do not sit with your feet pointing towards the front of the hall.
- 4 You may be offered PRASAD (a token of welcome and of hospitality), which is a little like semolina. Receive it with both hands and eat it straight away, rubbing the grease into your hands. If you are given fruit, eat it later. Prasad has no further significance and is given to all comers. It is rude to refuse it.
- 5 You will be invited into the Langar (dining room). It is not appropriate to decline the invitation. Keep your head covered and keep your shoes off.
- 6 Relax, you are welcome and there is informality for you to share in.

SIMPLE GROUND PLAN OF A GURDWARA



3.4 Reflecting on Sikh scripture

On the following pages are set out some of the passages from the Guru Granth Sahib that are used daily in private and public worship. The translation is that of W H McLeod in *Textual Sources for the study of Sikhism* (MUP 1984). These might be shared out between group members for quiet reading and reflection followed by sharing reactions.

From Japji (morning prayer).

A Through ritual purity God can never be known though one cleanse oneself a hundred thousand times. Silent reflection will never reveal him though one dwells absorbed in the deepest meditation How is Truth to be attained, how the veil of falsehood torn aside? Nanak thus it is written: Submit to God's order, walk in its way.

* Notice the emphasis on TRUTH and obedience.

B Listening to the word one finds truth, contentment, spiritual insight,
secures all that pilgrimage can achieve,
secures the merit earned by bathing at sacred sites,
one acquires the fame of the learned scholar
one knows the rapture of deep meditation
one plumbs the ultimate depths of virtue
comprehends the wisdom of the Sufi masters
the blind find their eyes have been opened
one fathoms the unfathomable mysteries of our existence.

* Remember that this was written for pre-literate people.

C If hands feet and body are smeared with grime, water will wash them clean.
Clothes may be stained with traces of wine, but soap will restore them again.
If the mind be soiled and defiled by sin it is cleansed with love of the Name.

* Notice how purity is obtained.

D Yogis wear ear-rings - let yours be patience with honest labour for begging bowl and pouch.
Cover yourself with the contemplation as the yogi applies his ashes.
Clothe yourself with the remembrance of death as the yogi dons his blanket.
Let purity, be your yogic discipline and lean for support on the staff of faith.
Accept all as brothers.
Be strong in self-discipline. He conquers the world who conquers self.

* Compare Eph 6 v 10-18

Below is a passage from Sodar (evening worship). It has been translated so as to give some feeling of the original verse. Read it out loud.

E I live by repeating the blest Name of God; if ever I cease I must die:
Hard is the way if one craves the true Name, yet the Name brings all pain to an end.
Refrain. Mother of mine, let me never forget him:
True is my Master, his Name ever true.
Those who would tell of the Name as they know it soon weary and fail in their task:
Let all strive together their effort is vain, for the Name far transcends all their claims.
God does not die, there is no cause for mourning; his mercies unceasingly flow:
He alone is, with no other beside him, existing alone while eternity runs.
Boundless his bounty for he too is infinite, he who makes night follow day:
Base is the wretch who forgets his true Master, vile if he scorns the true Name.

Hear my petition, true Guru and Lord, great and most wondrously wise:
Grant that this worm may receive your protection, the light of your glorious Name.
Refrain. Guru and friend, grant the light of your Name, the guidance which prompts us to
sing your praise.
Blessed are they who, athirst for the Name nourish their faith in your grace:
Blest by your mercy they join with the faithful in virtuous deeds and in praise.
Wretched are they who neglect the true Name, death is the fate they receive:
Never to join in the songs of the faithful, here and hereafter condemned.
Some will be granted a place with the faithful, destined since time first began:
Blessed are they for the joy they obtain there, the joy of the glorious Name.

Here are a few lines from the Sikh initiation ceremony emphasising personal commitment.

F **Benati Chaupai**

Extend to me your guiding hand, grant this my heart's desire,
That at your feet, most gracious Lord, accepted I may dwell.
Let all my foes be overcome, your hand my sure defence. Your hand I crave, my rampart
strong; destroy my foes this day.
May sweet success crown all my hopes, my praise for you endure.
For you alone, Creator Lord, I follow and obey.
May all my people cross life's sea; may all my foes be slain.
Hold forth your hand when death draws near, let every fear depart.
Sustain me by your mighty strength, your sword the sign bear.
Protect me Master, be my shield, with all who hold you dear;
The poor man's friend, the tyrant's foe, creation's only Lord.

This is the closing section of ARDAS, the most often repeated prayer. Notice the emphasis on the shared experience.

G Grant to your Sikhs a true knowledge of their faith, the blessing of uncut hair, guidance in conduct, spiritual perception, patient trust, abiding faith, and the supreme gift of the divine Name. May all bathe in the sacred waters of Amritsar. May your blessing eternally repose on all who sing your praises, on the banners that proclaim your presence, on all places which provide shelter and sustenance to your people. Let us praise the way of truth and call on God, saying, *Vaheguru!*

May Sikhs be humble of heart yet sublime in understanding, their belief and honour committed to your care. O God, eternal Lord and Protector of the Panth, grant to the Khalsa continuing access to Nankana Sahib (see note 1) and to other gurdwaras from which it has been separated. Grant to its members the right to behold these sacred places and to care for them in the service of love. Merciful Lord, pride of the humble, strength of the weak, defence of the helpless, our true Father and our God, we come before you praying that[Refer here in appropriate words to the purpose for which the gathering or congregation has assembled.] Forgive us for any errors committed during the reading of the sacred scripture, and grant to all the fulfilment of their due tasks and responsibilities.

Bring us into the company of those devout souls whose presence inspires remembrance of your Divine Name.

Nanak prays that the Name may be Magnified:
By your grace may all be blest.

Vaheguru ji ka Khalsa! Vaheguru ji ki fateh! (see note 2)
Sat Sri Akal! (see note 3)

Notes:

- 1 Nankanan Sahib, Guru Nanak's birthplace is now in Pakistan.
- 2 Translation: 'The Khalsa of the Wonderful Lord!
The victory of the Wonderful Lord!'
- 3 Translation: 'Truth is ONE.'

3.5 Private Devotion

Not many Sikh families have a copy of the Guru Granth Sahib at home. (If they do it is kept in a special room that is only used for devotions). Instead they will have ‘Gutkas’ or ‘Nitnem’ which contain the essential morning or evening prayer.

‘Just as fragrance is in the flower and reflection in the mirror, in the same way God is within you.
Search for God in your heart’. (Guru Tegh Bahadur).

Nam Simran:

This is the constant remembering of God. The devout will always have the name of God on their lips. They will often use a rosary.

Cole and Sambhi in ‘Sikhism and Christianity’ explain the centrality of NAM SIMRAN as follows:

Without the Name there is no liberation (*mukti*). The liberating Name is obtained by the Guru’s grace. Without the Name, birth into this world is fruitless. Without the Name of God one eats poison, speaks poison, dies without merit, and is condemned to wander. (AG1127)

The contrast with this state is clearly stated in the Sukhmani Sahib by Guru Arjan. It is another important devotional *bani*, which might be translated as the Hymn of Peace:

One who nurtures *Nam* within will find God, ever present there. Gone forever the pain of rebirth, the soul is instantly freed. Noble are the actions, gracious the speech of the one whose spirit is merged in the blessed Name. All suffering, fear and doubts are ended. Such a person is renowned for faith and virtuous deeds, raised to honour and fame. Priceless is the pearl, God’s glorious Name. (AG296)

Running through its two thousand lines is the refrain:

The Name of God is sweet ambrosia (*amrit*), source of all inner peace and joy. The Name of God brings blissful peace to the hearts of the truly devout.

Nam Simran is one of the ways supplied by God’s grace to be the means of becoming God-filled and removing taint of one’s unregenerate nature. This, becoming *gurmukh* as opposed to *manmukh*, is the highest goal of spiritual aspiration. It is not prayer but carefully disciplined meditation, focused firmly upon the Word so that Guru Nanak’s promise can be fulfilled:

One who meditates on the True Name by means of the Guru’s Word is accepted in the court of the True One. (AG355).

3.6 Seva

At the beginning of this session we read the words: 'Truth is highest, but higher still is true living'. To serve, support, minister to others is an essential part of Sikhism.

LANGAR (the common dining facility at every Gurdwara) is one place where SEVA can be given. Often families will take it in turns to provide food for those who eat at the langar. Others will sweep the floors, wash up etc. Other kinds of SEVA include:

The provision of money or food for the langar expenses .
The giving of 'clothes' for the Guru Granth Sahib.
Teaching Punjabi to children in after-school or weekend classes.
Gurmat (Sunday School etc).
Care of the elderly.
Provision and running of libraries for the community.
Advice work.
Fund raising for emergencies.

Q What service to the church and the wider community are group members involved in? Why?

3.7 PRAYER

Teach us good Lord to serve you as we should
to give and not to count the cost
to fight and not to head the wounds
to toil and not to seek for rest
to labour and not to ask for any reward
except the joy of knowing that we do your will.

Amen.

SESSION 4

BIG QUESTIONS

Objectives:

To grasp the importance of defining or knowing ourselves in religious terms.

To learn of the Sikh understanding of 'the human predicament'.

To encounter Sikh teaching on the resolution of the human predicament - a co-operation of God and man.

To sense the tension involved in living within two opposing value systems.

To become aware of Christian assumptions that are challenged by Sikh values.

4.1 Bible reading. Romans 10 v 9. Would you want to add or alter anything here if you were asked: 'Who or what is a Christian?'

4.2 Who is a Sikh?

During the first few centuries of Christianity internal and external events - like disputes over leadership, disputes over Christology, threatened persecution, relations with civil government - made Christians think out and state what they believed and who they were. Initiation, rulers, hierarchy etc emerged. The same process has marked the early centuries of Sikhism and there has always been a felt need to define themselves over and against Hinduism and Islam.

The current definition from the Rehat Maryada is: 'a Sikh is any person who believes in God; in the ten Gurus; in the Guru Granth Sahib, other writings of the ten Gurus, and their teaching; in the Khalsa initiation ceremony instituted by the tenth Guru; and who does not believe in any other system of religious doctrine'.

Q Why do definitions matter in our 'plural' society?
Who is a Christian?

4.3 Does the Khalsa require a State?

To survive after the death of Guru Arjan in 1606, the Sikhs had to arm themselves. Experience of Muslim aggression in the 17th century reinforced this and led to the formation of an explicitly military Khalsa.

It is easy to understand that when in 1799 Ranjit Singh conquered the Muslim army, took Lahore and set up his court there, it was widely believed that the Kingdom of the Khalsa had been established.

but: ‘Within a short time Ranjit Singh convinced the people of Lahore and the Punjab that he did not intend to set up a Sikh kingdom but a Punjabi state in which Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs would be equal before the law and have the same rights and duties. He paid assiduous respect to the institutions of other communities and participated in their religious festivities’.

never the less, later:

‘He was impelled by the weight of tradition that had grown up over the years, that it was the destiny of the Sikhs to rule (*raj Karega Khalsa*) and that perhaps he had been chosen by the gurus to be the instrument of their inscrutable design. With this assurance Ranjit Singh was able to harness the dynamic energies of his people and with a clear conscience launched himself on a career of conquest and annexation.

Kushwant Singh - History of the Sikhs p202, 203, Vol 1

The Khalistan movement in the Punjab in the 1980's was ample evidence that this ambition is not dead.

Q Christendom is now only a hazy memory of what may have been and what might have been - but do Christians in Britain still like to claim territory as their own? What about the use of redundant churches?

4.4 What is our problem as human beings?

Read 2 Cor.12: 9-10, Ephesians 2: 8-9, John 8: 31-32 and read them again at the end of the session.

The Sikh answer to this question includes the following basic ideas:

- **Man is not free.** ‘Because of SELF-RELIANCE man fails to perceive the true nature of liberation. Self-reliance involves worldly attachment and its shadow: doubt’. A.G.466

‘Self-reliance’ is an approximate translation of *Haumai*. It is the cause of estrangement from God. Under its influence man thinks he can do without God. He can’t. He is evading the TRUTH, choosing ignorance.

- **Man longs to be free** - longs for *Mukti* - liberation
Haumai therefore must be overcome.
Man Mukh (worldliness) must give way to
Gur Mukh (becoming God-filled).

‘This can only be done by being achieved or realised, becoming aware of the inner presence of God as Shabad, Guru and Nam and by coming completely under their influence. This in turn is only possible because God (in his grace, blesses) man’s efforts and as Shabad, Guru and Nam makes himself known, enlightens and liberates the believer.

(Cole & Sambhi: The Sikhs, p68).

Shabad, Guru and Nam have distinct meanings but as in the Christian doctrine of the Trinity each word represents the total being of God.

SHABAD is essentially WORD and is taken to mean the Guru Granth Sahib

GURU is here used as GOD and his 10 messengers through whose teaching God is known].

NAM is the realised power, the spirit of God.

PRASAD = GRACE = NADAR

Meditation exposes the devotee to blessing = GRACE

‘Liberation comes only through GRACE’ AG62.

- but it cannot be taken for granted. God’s gift of grace and liberation comes only through right living, and the gift of grace must be shared to become a transforming agent for the whole community.

Q This is the core of Sikh spirituality. Is it strange or strangely familiar?

As the man thus continues to practise the presence of God and sings His praises, a day comes when the veil of Egoism that blurs man's vision of Truth and Reality is completely lifted. And by the grace of the Guru (Divine Master) the soul of man comes in blissful contact with the Supreme Soul already within him. The Divine Light shines forth. There is no more delusion, no more sin. The sense of duality is lost and we work and move in the Lord's Being. There is everlasting Bliss. The spark of fire merges in Fire, the wave merges in the expanse of sea. The drop of water goes back to Ocean, whence it was. We may say the man flows out of one's self into the Supreme Being.

The End - The Magic Touch of the Master!

It is the Grace of the Divine Master that such a devotion fills the heart of the disciple and he becomes One with God. It is not after death in some unknown region but *now* and *here*.

“There comes a moment in the life of man
When he gets into touch with the holiest of holies
There is a miracle! No coming back from thence.
Then, in his heart, the Torch of Wisdom is set aflame,
That state is ‘Sahaj’: Equilibrium - Eternal immutably the same,
His mind and body are wholly Coloured in the Colour-Divine,
Thereafter, he dwelleth e’er and e’er with Thee above all Time!
As a running Rivulet is with the Ocean indissolubly mixt
So also is this - light in Light - Transcendent blended, admixt,
No more the weary wheel of coming and going, for peace is won.
A love-suffused sacrifice am I, O Nanak, to Thee O Being Supreme”
(Guru Arjan: Sukhmani 11-8)

Human life, as distinct from all other life - forms, is seen in Sikhism to be our great opportunity to be liberated from endless re-birth. This is how this ‘liberation’ is described by Ranbir Singh in ‘The Sikh Way of Life’ (1968 p120) note - he translates *Haumai* as ‘Egoism’. He is commenting on and then translating Guru Arjan’s “Sukmani”

Anyone who has knowledge of mystics in the Christian tradition will find this kind of writing familiar.

If there are few in the group who have explored this area at all a start should perhaps be made now. Two ‘tasters’ are provided at the end of the session.

4.5 What is right living?

All devotion is worthless without right living.

(cf James 2 v 14 - end)

Over the years rules concerning correct behaviour have evolved and will continue to evolve.

The 'Sikh Rehat Maryada' or Code of Conduct current at present was published in 1950.

These instructions are for those who, having been initiated to the Amrit ceremony, are full members of the Khalsa:

'You can already read the Gurmukhi script (if not you must learn how to do so) and at least once a day you must read or hear the following works which together constitute the Daily Rule: *Japji*, *Jap* the *Ten Savayyas* in the early morning and *Sodar Rahiras*, and *Sohila* in the evening. You should also read or hear some additional passage from the Guru Granth Sahib at least once a day, and you must always wear the Five Ks. These are uncut hair (*kes*), a sword or dagger (*kirpan*), a pair of shorts (*Kachh*), a comb (*kangha*), and a steel bangle (*kara*).

'There are four sins which are particularly serious and which must be scrupulously avoided: (1) Cutting one's hair. (2) Eating meat. (3) Sexual intercourse with any person other than one's spouse. (4) Using tobacco. Anyone who commits any of these cardinal sins must be re-initiated, unless the act has been unintentional in which case no punishment should be administered.

'Have no dealings with initiated Sikhs who cut their hair, nor with Sikhs who smoke.

'Always be prepared to support the Panth and to provide whatever assistance may be required in a gurdwara. Set aside a tenth part of whatever you earn and dedicate it to the Guru. Let all that you do be done in accordance with the principles of Gurmat.

'Observe at all times the discipline required of those who belong to the Khalsa. If you violate the Rehat in any respect you should present yourself before a congregation of the Khalsa and request a penance.... The following offences warrant a penance:

- 1 Associating with Minas, Masands, Dhir-malias, Ram-raias, and other enemies of the Panth; or with smokers, those who murder baby daughters, or initiated Sikhs who cut their hair.
- 2 Eating from the same dish as a person who has not received the Khalsa initiation or an apostate Sikh (*patit*).
- 3 Dyeing one's beard or hair.
- 4 Giving or receiving a cash dowry in return for a son's or a daughter's hand in marriage.
- 5 Consuming any drug or intoxicant (cannabis, opium, alcohol, cocaine, etc).
- 6 Performing any rite or ceremony which conflicts with Sikh belief, or commissioning anyone else to do so.
- 7 Neglecting to fulfil any part of the Rehat.'

These add up to a demanding rule. Many Sikhs will postpone initiation to late maturity so that they can keep the rules with integrity.

The part of the Rehat that applies to all Sikhs is of course less demanding but it insists on avoiding all rituals associated with Hinduism, on not cutting children's hair and on men wearing turbans (which are optional for women).

There are other rules that are more custom than anything else. A Sikh will sometimes refer to his Amrit ceremony as 'when I became a vegetarian'. Food taboos have enduring influence and are often given religious sanction.

- **BUT right living is not just a matter of keeping laws - it is an attitude to life.**
- A wrong focus in life is likened by Guru Nanak to 'an evil mother-in-law who will not let the young bride unite with her lord (husband) - the mother-in-law represents HAUMAI, the bride is the aspirant and the husband, God.
- Such an ill focussed life is also likened to that of a heron who catches frogs in the mud rather than the swan who reaches down into the ocean to find pearls.

The Jivan-Mukti (the enlightened man or woman) grows like a lotus in the mud. He is 'in the world but not of it'. He is like a goose who spends long hours on the water but keeps his feathers dry.

- Guru Amardas wrote that in order to be liberated Sikhs should:
eat only when really hungry
talk only when absolutely necessary
sleep only when exhausted.
- Self discipline, moderation and tolerance in all things with transparent honesty and sincerity in every walk of life. These are asked of the true believers whose mottoes are:

KIRAT KARNA - earn your own living - work hard
NAM JAPNA - remember the name of God
VAND CHHAKNA - share your good things with others

Q Do Christians ever feel that they would benefit from more imposed 'religious' discipline?
See Galatians 3 v 22 – 25.

4.6 What is it like for a Sikh living in Britain?

Many of the tensions are cultural (we will look at some of these in Session 5), but there is one basic tension arising from the concept of HAUMAI - self-reliance, self pride, independence are all seen as turning away from God.

Strictly, as we have seen, HAUMAI is a rejection of God but effectively in family life it leads to low value being put on individual rights, expectations and development and high value being put on co-operation and the common good, in obedience and the fulfilling of traditional roles.

British culture, drawing on Christian tradition emphasises the **importance** of self-reliance

and trains children in decision-making and independence from an early age. Young Sikhs in British society have to adjust everyday to two totally different sets of values. Christians would do well to be critical of their assumptions.
cf Romans 12 v 3; Eph 4 v 2; Col 3 v 12 etc

Q Is our contemporary obsession with ‘rights’ of God?

4.7 Prayer

What does the Lord require of you but
to do justly
to love mercy
and to walk humbly
with your God

(Micah 6:6-8)

‘ ... also in this He showed me a little thing, the quantity of an hazel nut in the palm of my hand; and it was as round as a ball. I looked at it with eye of my understanding and thought: ‘What may this be?’ And it answered generally thus: It is all that is made.’ I marvelled how it might last, for me thought it might suddenly have fallen to naught for littleness. And I was answered in my understanding: ‘It lasteth, and even shall last because God loves it’. And so the love of God sustains all things.’

Julian of Norwich (1342-1420)

‘ ... The water we see before us, which looks like another starry sky, partly helps us to understand what grace is. For as the image of the heavens mirrors in the water, makes the lake look like the sky itself, so grace, when it comes to the soul and is enthroned in it, does not merely give it the semblance but truly brings to it a likeness of God and his qualities, and transforms it into a very heaven as far as a creature can be transformed without losing its substance.

Louis de Leon (1528-1591)

SESSION 5

WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

Objectives:

- To share together the impact of Sessions 1-4.
- To become aware of the implications of conversion to Christianity.
- To look more carefully at an appropriate way of using the bible in Christian witness.
- To ask ‘what is the Gospel?’ and feel towards an answer.
- To make practical plans for following up the course as a group or individually.

The preceding four sessions have only just touched on some of the important Sikh teaching and practice.

Spend a few minutes sharing your reactions, your responses, your insights arising from what you have learnt.

5.1 Bible reading. John 17 v 20-23

5.2 Issues relating to conversion

While Sikhs respect and honour people of other faiths and do not question the authenticity of other religions, they have no space in their thought - world for moving from one faith to another. The response to a family member expressing a desire for Christian baptism may be (rarely) complete tolerance or lack of interest or (rarely) death threats and total exclusion from family life - or anything between.

The following consideration and biblical teaching will be helpful:

Open confession?

Is a “secret disciple” a contradiction in terms? Read John 3.1-10, 7.50-52, 19.38-42, 12.42-43

- Q** Does the gospel account imply any criticism of Nicodemus, Joseph and other Jews who believed, for being secret disciples?
Did they in any way deny Jesus by hiding their commitment to him?
Did their actions amount to a public confession of Jesus?

Is baptism essential?

The significance of baptism Read Matthew 28.18-20; Mark 16.15-16

The Jews were familiar with the practice of ceremonial washing for purification. They also baptized proselytes, ie non-Jews who wanted to accept the faith of Judaism. At the time of Jesus, therefore, the practice of baptism was known, and it was already connected in people’s minds with the idea of cleansing from sin. What Jesus did was to take a practice that was already

known, and make it a once and for all act of initiation, performed in his name. The Gentiles were not familiar with the practice of baptism, and it would have been entirely new to them. They would not bring to baptism any negative ideas or misunderstandings from their own background.

To Sikhs Christian baptism means nothing more nor less than apostasy from Sikhism. It means that Sikhs have cut themselves off from their family and society; they are renouncing their religion and community, accepting a new religion and joining a different community.

Q Are we to say that every Sikh convert must be baptized? Or are there circumstances in which a Sikh convert might delay baptism - perhaps indefinitely.

We want Jesus and the message of the cross, and not any secondary issues, to be the only stumbling block. Perhaps there are there situations in which baptism creates an unnecessary stumbling block for the rest of the Sikh community, because **it is seen** not only as a sign of public confession of Jesus but as a final repudiation of the Sikh community?

5.3 Using the Bible in our conversations with Sikhs

Stories from the Gospels will often be appropriate in discussion:

John 10 v 1-17	The good shepherd	(sincerity, honesty)
Luke 7 v 36-50	The uncomfortable meal	(humility)
Matt 21 v 28-30	Two sons	(honesty, truth ..)
Luke 14 v 16-24	The great banquet	(reliability, trust)
Luke 18 v 10-14	The Pharisee and the publican	(honesty, self aware)
Matt 7 v 24-27	House building	(depth, sincerity)
Luke 12 v 17-21	The complacent farmer	(values, judgement)

If you feel it would be the right moment, lend a modern translation of St Luke's gospel - or perhaps St John's gospel if the friend is obviously into conceptual thinking. The prologue of St John's gospel would be of particular interest. It might be good also to suggest selecting passages such as:

John	3 v 1-17	Nicodemus
	4 v 4-26	Samaritan woman
	9 v 1-41	The man born blind
	13 v 1-17	Foot washing
	14	Who is Jesus?
John	17	The 'high-priestly' prayer
	18-19	Arrest and crucifixion
	20-21	Resurrection

The following use of the parable of ‘The Prodigal Son’ from Luke 15 is also very suggestive. Remember, however, that many young western Sikhs have very uneasy relations with their parents and they may find the ‘father’ concept unhelpful.

- a The message of Jesus in the form of a story. If we are in the habit of trying to share the gospel by explaining a series of abstract, the theological propositions, such as “All people are sinners; Christ died for our sins”, we might get further if we could learn the art of telling stories. A story is something that can be told, elaborated and dramatized. A series of pictures will be printed on the minds of those who hear it. Their imagination will be stirred, and there will be something that we can discuss together. Long after they have forgotten us and what we have said, they may remember this vivid story.
- b The parable teaches the essence of the good new proclaimed by Jesus. Kenneth Bailey, in his study of the parables of Jesus, believes that the basic message of Jesus can be summed up in the words “the costly demonstration of unexpected love.”

God loves all people.

His love is unexpected, because it’s hard to understand how he can love his creatures who are so sinful.

He demonstrates his love for us - he doesn’t just say that he loves us.

He demonstrates his love in ways that are costly.

The parable of the prodigal son expresses all these points with special force. The father loves his sons - both the rebellious one who wants to leave home and the older one who has such cold and formal relationship with him - and goes on loving them, even when we might expect him to punish them and reject them. He demonstrates his love to both of them in ways that would have been considered surprising, if not shocking. And in demonstrating his love to them, the father suffers in the process.

- c The parable comes out of a culture which is similar to the culture of much of the Sikh world. The strong emphasis in Sikhism on the unity of the family and family loyalties. What Sikh could imagine a younger son asking for his share of the inheritance while his father is still alive? Shouldn’t fathers punish their sons when they dishonour the name of the family? Has the elder brother got to swallow his pride and welcome home his younger brother who has disgraced himself?
- d Sikhs dread ‘loss of face’. When the prodigal thinks of coming home, his face-saving plan is that he will ask his father to accept him back as a servant or slave, so that he can earn his wages and at least have something to pay back to his father. Such a solution, however, is unthinkable to his father, who wants to welcome him home as a son. Jesus who spoke of himself as “the Son” who enjoyed a specially intimate relationship with God as “Father”, brought the good news that all his disciples can approach God as “Father” and have all the privileges and responsibilities of being full members of God’s

family, and not just servants.

One surprising thing about the parable is that it doesn't have an ending. Perhaps this is because Jesus wanted us as readers or listeners to put ourselves into the shoes of the elder brother and ask ourselves, "What would I do if I were in his place? Would I listen to my father's pleading and join in the party to welcome my brother home? Or... would I be so angry with him that I would take the nearest stick and beat him in full view of all the guests? And if God is like the father, and wants me to know and love him as a Father, how am I going to respond to his love?"

5.4 Strategies for the Church: What can we do together?

The questions under the following headings may give the group an opportunity to ask:

"Where do we go from here?"

"Are there any of these things that I ought to be doing to follow up what I have been studying?"

"Are there any of these things that my church should be doing?"

"Are there any things that our churches in this area should be doing together?"

"Are there any practical steps that we can take to continue the discussion opened up through the course and to put into practice what we have learned?"

1 Meeting

How well do we know our Sikh neighbours? How much personal contact do we already have with Sikhs? How can we move on from here?

2 Service

Are there any ways in which we and others can work with the Sikh community - eg through the teaching of English, through voluntary organizations or through local community projects?

3 Political action

What does the Sikh community feel are the important issues for them in the local area - eg housing, schools, permission for gurdwaras?

Are there any national issues of concern to Sikhs in which we need to be involved - eg racism, immigration?

4 Teaching in the church

What are we teaching about the other faiths and our relations with other faith communities?

What *should* we be teaching?

Is there a need for planning a programme, which will include teaching in Sunday School, Youth Fellowships, Wives Groups, House Groups, Sunday sermons, etc?

What books do we know of that could be recommended for people to read?

What material is being produced by different denominational bodies on the subject of other faiths?

5 Relating to their leaders

Is it appropriate for church leaders, ordained and lay, to meet with leaders of the Sikh community from time to time? If so, how should it be done?

6 Schools

How is Religious Education being taught in schools in our area? What is the approach to the teaching of Christianity and other faiths?

Who are the members of our local SACRÉ (Special Advisory Committee on Religious Education)? How do they work? What is the agreed syllabus for our area?

How many pupils in our schools belong to other faith communities?

What, if any, are the particular issues that concern the local Sikh community about British schools?

7 Finding people with special gifts

We need to be aware of the danger of “passing the buck”, of thinking that we are not properly equipped to do any of the things we have been talking about, and should therefore leave it all to the “experts”. But are there people in our churches who have special gifts in this area (e.g. because they have worked with Sikhs overseas and can speak one of their languages), and could therefore help us (but not do it all for us!)

What individuals and groups do we know who are already involved in work with Sikhs?

8 Prayer

How should we be praying about our relations with people of other faiths in general, and Sikhs in particular?

Is the question of “multi-faith worship” an issue in our area? Are we aware of any multi-faith worship events that have been held, and the response to them? Have our feelings about this kind of thing altered as we have followed the course?

9 Sharing the Gospel

We should be able to assume that some of the other activities already discussed will provide opportunities for sharing our faith. But are there any other initiatives that we can or should be taking? For example:

- are Bibles, New Testaments or other portions of Scripture in Punjabi easily available for sale in local shops?
- is there a Correspondence Course that is particularly appropriate for Sikh enquirers that could be advertised?
- how could one get hold of a video (like the *Jesus* film) in Punjabi to lend to elderly Sikh friends or others with limited English who may be interested?

What is the Gospel?

How do you expect a Sikh would respond to John 3 v 16?

Which word would you choose to explain the meaning of the cross to a Sikh? Why?

Salvation or Liberation or Redemption.

Jesus said 'I am the Truth'. How would you use this idea in conversation with a Sikh believer?

In the end 'truth' is an abstract concept. What word is at the centre of Christian believing and in what significant ways does it differ from that concept? If this is the Gospel what are we doing about it?!.....

So, let's go!

5.5 Guidelines in discussion with Sikhs

Some basic dos and don'ts

1 Be prepared to speak about anything

Don't feel that you need always to be speaking about 'religious' subjects! You should be happy to speak about any subjects that are of interest to them or you, or which arise naturally out of the situation.

2 Don't start an argument if you can possibly help it

Whenever we see the warning signals in ourselves, we need to be reminded of Paul's words addressed to Timothy, the young and enthusiastic Christian worker: "Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful." (2 Timothy 2.23-24)

If you do find yourself in an argument, don't be concerned about 'winning' it! Even if you win an argument, you may lose the person. Building a genuine relationship of trust and friendship is more important than defeating someone in an argument.

3 Be open to learn

You should never feel that you know all the answers and have nothing to learn. You should be open to be challenged by what you hear from Sikhs and what you see in their lives.

4 Don't underestimate the power of personal testimony

If you believe that you know God in a personal way, don't be afraid to say so, and to say why you believe that this kind of personal relationship is possible.

5 Be content to explain one small aspect of the Gospel at a time

Don't feel you have failed if you haven't been able to explain "the whole gospel" at one time. There is no single technique for explaining the Gospel to Sikhs. We must resist the temptation to think that one simple technique is bound to produce results.

6 Do not (on the basis of what you have learned in this course) take it upon yourself to inform a Sikh about his own faith! You may well have been at the receiving end of this and you know how it hurts.

Now is the time to plan to meet and talk with practising Sikhs and begin the adventure of faith sharing with them. The Lord be with you!

5.6 Prayer

Almighty God, you gave such grace to St Andrew that he willingly obeyed the calling of your Son, Jesus Christ and followed him without delay, grant to us all, who are called by you, the grace to give up ourselves to the fulfilment of your purposes among the Sikh people whom you give us to love, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

(Book of Common Prayer, adapted).

CROSS AND KHALSA

Additional Notes for Course Leaders

The following comments are responses to important issues raised by people participating in Cross and Khalsa courses. They are offered as a guide to trainers.

1. The meaning of Nam.

On page 13 the Sikh concept of *Nam* is translated as name. There are, however, depths of meaning beyond simply what is understood by the English word name. *Nam* encapsulates the very essence of God because, as it says in the Adi Granth: “God who is Being in himself, became manifest in *Nam*” (AG 463). This quote shows that *Nam* partakes of the nature of expression and revelation. In that sense it is like the Christian concept of Word (Logos), and therefore is sometimes translated as WORD. However this is probably confusing to the reader / course learner, because as p.29 explains there is another Sikh term for *Word* and that is *shabad*, which does literally and theologically mean *Word*.

To conclude, *Nam* is not simply a word or a name, it is “the divine self-expression” (H. McLeod). It is the reality behind all the names for God. Any name can be used – Hindu, Muslim, Sikh – and many are used in the Guru Granth Sahib. These are not important; what is important is the divine essence beyond them all.

2. Prasad

On page 22 it explains that *prasad* has no special significance; in that Sikhs do not believe in sacramental signs. Nor do they use food in the way Hindus do in a temple to dedicate food to a god. Christians do, however, hold different opinions about this and whether it is fitting for a Christian to receive *prasad* in a *gurdwara*.

Paul says in I Corinthians, that food that has been offered to idols does not have any significant power. Many Christians, therefore, believe it is acceptable to receive *prasad*. If, however, a Christian is not so confident or believes that there is spiritual significance in *prasad*, they would best be advised not to go to the *Gurdwara* rather than to go and refuse. They can still learn from their Sikh friends and have conversation and build friendships in their homes.

3. Which God do Sikhs worship?

I would respond to this by explaining that Sikhs long to know the one eternal, creator God. They pray to him. Their understanding of him is limited and they do not know any clear path to reach him. It is not that they worship another god; the problem is that they do not know fully the God they worship.

Faith to Faith is grateful to The Revd Basil Scott for his contribution of the thoughts on this page.

CROSS AND KHALSA



This course was produced prior to 2007 by *Faith to Faith*, but we believe that it is still relevant for 2018!

It was written by Patricia Hooker who spent twelve years with the Church Mission Society in India with her husband Roger, followed by several years amongst the Asian communities of Smethwick in the West Midlands. She has also worked in Tanzania and is now living in the north of England.

Faith to Faith Forum
Global Connections, Caswell Road, LEAMINGTON SPA CV31 1QD
01926 487755, www.globalconnections.org.uk

Mission at the heart of the church, the church at the heart of mission

Faith to Faith, a Christian consultancy and network of individuals, groups and churches, became part of the Global Connections network in August 2007 as a Forum on other faiths in the UK.

This course has been produced by *Faith to Faith* in order to achieve the above aims. Neither *Faith to Faith* nor Global Connections can be held accountable for the final presentation and treatment of this course: this is the responsibility of the individual course leader.

Contact and registered address: Global Connections, Caswell Road, Leamington Spa, CV31 1QD
Registered in England & Wales as the Evangelical Mission Association, charity no. 1081966, company no. 3886596