

Birth of Guru Nanak Dev

Sikhism was founded by Guru Nanak, and present day Sikhism is still based on his teachings and those of the nine Sikh Gurus who followed him.

Gurpurbs are Sikh festivals which celebrate the lives of these Gurus. Guru Nanak was born in 1469 in what is now Pakistan. At the age of 30 he mysteriously disappeared for 3 days. When he reappeared, he began to preach the Sikh faith and spent the rest of his life teaching, writing and travelling around the world to discuss religion with Muslims and Hindus.

Sikhs celebrate Guru Nanak's Birthday and the other *Gurpurbs* with an *Akhand Path*, a reading of the Sikh holy scriptures, the Guru Granth Sahib, continuously from beginning to end. This is done by a team of Sikh men and women, each reading for 2-3 hours over 48 hours, beginning two days before and ending early on the morning of the birthday.

On the day before the birthday, processions are held in India and in some parts of England. These are led by five people representing the original ***Panj Piare*** (Five Beloved Ones) and followed by singers, musicians and even teams of people demonstrating martial arts.

The Gurdwaras (places where Sikhs go to pray) are decorated with flowers, flags and posters depicting various aspects of Sikhism. They may also be illuminated. Sikhs join together to sing, pray and eat together. On the morning of the anniversary celebrations begin early, at around 4 or 5am, with *keertan* (musical recitation of hymns from the Guru Granth Sahib) and *katha* (lectures on Sikhism). These celebrations go on until around 1 or 2pm.

After this, *Karah Parasaad* will be served. This is a sweet-tasting food which has been blessed. It is made from semolina or wheat flour, sugar and *ghee* (clarified butter) and is served warm. The congregation will then share a *langar* (meal) from the free kitchen. Celebrations may also include fireworks.

Sometimes the festival extends into the evening, with prayers and hymns continuing long into the night. Sikhs who are unable to visit the Gurdwara during the festival will hold a similar ceremony in their own homes.