

# Sikh Religion and its values in Mental Health

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Here I want to focus on some fundamentals of Sikhism. A Sikh is any person whose faith consists of belief in One God, the ten Sikh Gurus, the Guru Granth Sahib and other scriptures and teachings of the Sikh Gurus. Additionally, he or she must believe in the necessity and importance of 'Amrit', the Sikh baptism.

According to the Sikh belief, God is all omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient. The sun, moon's, wind, fire, water, vegetation and all other things that exist are His witnesses. A Sikh must worship only the abstract form of God. The worship of images or any other object is strictly forbidden.

God is both the creator and the destroyer. He is beyond birth and death. He is both merciful and compassionate. He is beyond fear and enmity. He is self-illuminated. He is the Master of all the treasures. All our possessions are a result of His grace.

The Sikhs call God Waheguru, meaning the most wonderful Master. The belief of the Sikhs in Waheguru is similar to that of Judaism, Christianity and Islam; that God is the greatest power and He is supreme. He is the King of Kings. He pervades everywhere, He knows the inner thoughts of everyone, He is the giver, He existed before the start of the time, He existed when the time was started, He exists now and He will exist forever.

The Sikh Gurus call Waheguru 'Master' and themselves his servants. In some hymns they call Him Father, Mother, Friend and Brother as well. Like Jesus Christ, Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Guru of the Sikhs, in one of his hymns, called himself 'God's son'.

Sikhism does not believe in asceticism, celibacy or living alone in mountains or in caves or in forests in the search of Truth and God. It also rejects the orders of monasteries. For a Sikh, the true life is the life of a householder. Living in a family environment and by serving the community both Truth and God can be realised. Thus it rejects the order of monks (Buddhism and Jainism) and nuns (Christianity).

The Sikh teachings are based on the principles of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of humankind. Sikhism rejects the concept of chosen people (as in Judaism) and the caste system (as in Hinduism); it also rejects the concept of entering 'Nirvana' without the blessings of God (as in Buddhism and Jainism).

In a Sikh temple, people of all the faiths are welcome. The Sikh holy book, Guru Granth Sahib also has in it the hymns composed by both Hindu and Muslim saints of various denominations.

The first five baptised Sikhs, called the beloved ones, were also from both lower and upper Hindu castes. They were the first Khalsa, the pure ones:

- I Bhai Daya Singh, aged 30, a Khatri from Lahore (Punjab)
- ii Bhai Dharam Singh, aged 33 a Jat from Delhi
- iii Bhai Mohkam Singh, aged 36, a washer-man from Dwarka (Gujarat).
- iv Bhai Sahib Singh, aged 37, a barber from Bidar (Karnatak)
- v Bhai Himmat Singh, aged 39, a water carrier from Puri (Orrisa).

Sikhs also believe in the Law of Karma, that one's good deeds lead to good effects while bad deeds lead to bad effects and that tragedies of this life could be the result of one's action in both this as well as previous lives. However, according to Sikhism, the cycle of Karma can be broken by repentance, meditation and the grace of God.

Sikhs also believe in the concept of Heaven and Hell. However, these are both of this world and the upper realms, so to achieve Heaven one should always be aiming to do good deeds.

My personal journey, which may be of interest to others, started when I was born in a Hill station (Pachmari) in Central India. By tradition, we are a land-owning army family and I had a certain level of confidence. However, it was only after marriage I realised that to give of one's best, faith in one's religion and the understanding of other people is more important.

My experience in the Indian Air Force encouraged me to pursue psychiatry, since general medicine was not very effective in dealing with loss, separation and traumatic events.

Now in my practice of psychiatry, I use some principles from my religion and culture in helping people deal with their loss, conflict and emotional distress. For instance, when dealing with a marital conflict I invite the family members to consider solutions as given in certain stories. One example is that of a king who had to reach the next town before sunset, as otherwise he would lose his kingdom. However, his entourage of elephants and horses was being harried by stray dogs. His choice was either to deal with the stray dogs and waste time or to ignore them, since they were not likely to cause much damage anyway. He chose to ignore the stray dogs and was thus able to save his kingdom. Often after hearing such stories families are able to ignore a lot of the small issues that often feed their conflicts. This often leads to more harmonious relations and conflict resolution.

The issue of loss I often deal with by quoting from the Holy book 'Ram Gaya Ravan Gaya', meaning that life is a cycle, that even the pre-eminent people and prophets have to leave this earth and that loss is inevitable.

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