

Curriculum Visions

Sikh

faith and practice



Teacher's Guide

in PDF format for printing

Lisa Magloff

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Unit 1: What it means to be a Sikh

Because Sikhism began in the Punjab, most Sikhs today are either from the Punjab or have family from the Punjab (Sikhs are a majority of the population in the Punjab). During Partition, when India and Pakistan became separate states, the Punjab was divided into two. Most Sikhs in the Pakistani half fled to India and now the majority of Sikhs live in India. However, there are a fairly large number of Sikhs living in the UK and also a large number of Sikhs in Canada.

Some Sikhs in India have fought for their own homeland in the Punjab, and some children, especially if they are of Indian origin, may have some negative connotations of these radical Sikhs. During the 1980s, political tensions between the Indian government and those Sikhs demanding greater autonomy for Punjab led to riots, fighting and political assassinations in which many Sikhs and non-Sikhs in India were killed (it was two Sikhs who assassinated Indira Gandhi in 1984). Those days and tensions are now past, but you may need to be aware of this history and treat the subject with some sensitivity if you have Sikh and Indian children in the class whose relatives were involved in these events.

Sikhs share many beliefs with Hindus and Buddhists, such as reincarnation and the idea that what we do in this life will affect the next. But Sikhs do not believe in caste, in gods and goddesses, or in the use of statues during





worship. The core Sikh values are equality between all people, living a good life and helping others, if necessary by using force to protect people who cannot protect themselves. It is this last value that has drawn many Sikhs to join the military of India and other countries and has given Sikhs a reputation as brave and honest soldiers.

People who are born into a Sikh family and who follow the Sikh faith are considered Sikhs, but many Sikhs also go through a baptism ceremony when they are young adults. After this ceremony they are considered to have extra responsibilities, both within the Sikh community and to others. You may like to compare this with the Bar Mitzvah (and Bat Mitzvah) ceremony in Judaism. After this ceremony, Jewish children are considered to have some adult responsibilities, for example, they are responsible for knowing and following Jewish Law. You can also compare the Sikh baptism with confirmation in Christianity, when children confirm their belief and become responsible for any sins they commit.

The Reht Maryada is not scripture. It is a code of conduct that was put together by Sikh scholars and leaders and finalised in 1945. It lays down guidelines

on when and how to worship, how to conduct funerals, weddings and other ceremonies, and provides guidelines for living life according to Sikh beliefs. Here is an extract from the Reht Maryada:

Article XVI

A Sikh's living, earning livelihood, thinking and conduct should accord with the Guru's tenets. The Guru's tenets are:

- ▶ Worship should be rendered only to the One Timeless Being and to no god or goddess.
- ▶ Regarding the Guru Granth and the ten Gurus word alone as saviours and holy objects of veneration.
- ▶ Not believing in caste or descent, untouchability, magic, spells, incantation, omens, auspicious times, days and occasions, influence of start, horoscopic dispositions... ancestor worship... ritual funeral acts... fasting on new or Full Moon or other days... veneration of any graves, of monuments erected to honour the memory of a deceased person or of cremation sites, idolatry and such like superstitious observances.
- ▶ Not regarding as hallowed any place other than the Guru's place – such, for instance, as sacred spots or places of pilgrimage of other faiths.
- ▶ Not believing in Muslim seers, Brahmins holiness, soothsayers, clairvoyants, oracles, promise of an offering on the fulfillment of a wish, offering of sweet loaves or rice pudding at graves on fulfillment of wishes, the Vedas, the Shastras, the Gayatri (Hindu scriptural prayer unto the sun), the Gita, the Qur'an, the Bible, etc.. However, the study of the books of other faiths for general self-education is admissible.
- ▶ The Khalsa should maintain its distinctiveness among the professors of different religions of the world, but should not hurt the sentiment of any person professing another religion.
- ▶ A Sikh should pray to God before launching off any task.
- ▶ Learning Gurmukhi (Punjabi in Gurmukhi script) is essential for a Sikh. He/she should pursue other studies also.
- ▶ It is a Sikh's duty to get his/her children educated in Sikhism.
- ▶ A Sikh must not take hemp (cannabis), opium, liquor, tobacco, in short any intoxicant. His only routine intake should be food.
- ▶ Piercing of the nose or ears for wearing ornaments is forbidden for Sikh men and women.

- ▶ The true Sikh of the Guru shall make an honest living by lawful work.
- ▶ A Sikh shall regard a poor person's mouth as the Guru's cash offerings box.
- ▶ It is not proper for a Sikh woman to wear a veil or keep her face hidden by veil or cover.



You may like to compare this with laws or guidelines for behaviour set down in other religions. However, you should stress that the Reht Maryada is different because it is not holy scripture.

Christian

The Ten Commandments

And God spoke all these words:

“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

You shall have no other gods before me.

You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them...

You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy...

Honour your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.

You shall not murder.

You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not steal.

You shall not give false testimony against your neighbour.

You shall not covet your neighbour's house. You shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour.”

Jewish

some Mitzvot

- ▶ Pray to God (Ex. 23:25; Deut. 6:13)
- ▶ Read the Shema prayer in the morning and at night (Deut. 6:7)
- ▶ Recite grace after meals (Deut. 8:10)
- ▶ Do not travel on Shabbat outside the limits of one's place of residence (Ex. 16:29)
- ▶ Do not work on Shabbat (Ex. 20:10)
- ▶ Celebrate the festivals (Ex. 23:14)

- ▶ To rejoice on the festivals (Deut. 16:14)
- ▶ Love all human beings who are of the covenant (Lev. 19:18)
- ▶ Do not stand by idly when a human life is in danger (Lev. 19:16)
- ▶ Do not wrong anyone in speech (Lev. 25:17)
- ▶ Do not tell tales (Lev. 19:16)
- ▶ Do not take revenge (Lev. 19:18)
- ▶ Do not bear a grudge (Lev. 19:18)
- ▶ Do not leave an animal, that has fallen down beneath its burden, unaided (Deut. 22:4)

Buddhist

Eightfold Path

The eight right ways leading to the cessation of sufferings.

- 1) Right view: See the world through eyes of compassion and wisdom.
- 2) Right thought: Do one thing at a time and do it as well as you can.
- 3) Right speech: Speak kindly to others.
- 4) Right action: Always do your best.
- 5) Right livelihood: Choose a job that does not hurt others.
- 6) Right effort: Look to your own behaviour before criticising others.
- 7) Right remembrance: Always be careful in your thought, words and deeds, so you do not hurt others.
- 8) Right concentration: Always try to have clear thoughts.

Hindu

Hindu Dharma describes the 'right' way to live. It is not written down as such, but is a concept that is contained in many Hindu scriptures. It includes the concepts of:

- 1) Honouring family and ancestors, including making offerings in honour of ancestors.
- 2) Religious austerity
- 3) Truth
- 4) Restraint of anger
- 5) Satisfaction with one's wife (ie not engaging in adultery)
- 6) Purity
- 7) Learning
- 8) Absence of envy
- 9) Knowledge of the Self
- 10) Forbearance



Unit 2: The Sikh Gurus

Although Guru Nanak is considered the first founder of Sikhism, Sikhs actually believe that all 10 Sikh Gurus were equally inspired by God.

The word “guru” is a Sanskrit word meaning teacher, honoured person, spiritual leader or saint. However, when the word is capitalised it refers to one of the ten people who founded the religion. The word Guru is also used as shorthand to refer to the Sikh holy scriptures – the Guru Granth Sahib. This is because Sikhs consider the scriptures to be a spiritual leader, in the same way that the 10 living Gurus were spiritual leaders.

The Sikh Gurus are considered to be ordinary people who were under the guidance and influence of God. Each Guru contributed to the development of the religion. The most important Gurus were Guru Nanak, who founded the religion and propounded its basic principles, and Guru Singh, who founded the Khalsa and the Sikh baptism ceremony and was the last living Guru.

Giving detailed histories of the Gurus would take up a tremendous amount of space, but you can get detailed information at www.sikhs.org.

The Sikh Gurus are all considered to have exemplified Sikh ideals in how they lived, and you can compare this to beliefs about the founders of other religions.

Guru Nanak was a very spiritual person who was always interested in worshipping God properly. Abraham, one of the founders of Judaism, was an ordinary person, and he lived in a place where the people believed in many gods. But Abraham had an unshakable faith in one God, and this is why God chose him. Similarly, in the region Mohammed came from, most people believed in many gods, but Mohammed believed in one God, so God chose him for the same reason.

The Buddha was not chosen, but discovered for himself how to achieve enlightenment. Hinduism is different, in that it has no one founder, but Hindus believe that many people throughout time have been inspired by God, through the gods and goddesses, to teach the messages of Hinduism. Christians believe that Jesus was actually a part of God, sent to earth to teach Christian values, and so everything Jesus did or said was holy.

Unit 3: Sikhism in everyday life

More than any other members of a faith community, Sikhs stand out physically. This is because of the articles of clothing that they wear as signs of their faith. Today, many Sikhs in the UK wear tiny versions of the five Ks (except for the shorts), often on a chain around their neck. But members of the Khalsa will usually wear full-size versions. (Except for the sword, because it is no longer appropriate or allowed for people to carry swords in public.)

Sikhs do not see the five Ks as symbols of their faith, but as obligations that help to define them. This is a subtle difference and it may be easier for children to understand the five Ks and turban if you compare them to articles of clothing used in other religions, such as the Jewish kippah, Muslim skullcap, the Hindu holy thread, the robes of Buddhist monks and nuns or the clothing of Christian clergy such as bishops, priests, vicars, monks and nuns.

Here is some additional information about the five Ks.

Kesh

Sikhs believe in never cutting or trimming the hair. The reason for this is that God created the hair as it is, and cutting it interfered with God's perfect creation. Because nails wear down in the normal course of life, it is considered OK to trim them. You may like to point out the photo on p.12 of the student book. If you look closely at the photo of the adult Sikh man, you will see two small straps around the side of his face. These are used to hold his beard out of the way. You can compare this to the beards on the men on the previous page, which are not being held up. Then you can point out that although Sikhs do not cut their hair, they believe in always keeping their hair neat and clean.

Kaccha

The kaccha came about partly because at the time Sikhism was founded, it was not common for people to wear underwear of any kind. Sikhs were expected to always be ready to rush into action to help others, and not having underwear would make it difficult to do this and still maintain some modesty. The kaccha also serve as a reminder of the importance of chastity in Sikhism.

Kirpan (small sword)

It is important to remember that the purpose of wearing a sword is not to attack, but to defend. The Sikh code of behaviour forbids using the kirpan in



anger or for a malicious attack. However, a Sikh may use it in self-defence or to protect a person in need.

You may like to remind children that when Sikhism was founded there were often no police forces and people had to protect themselves. Sikhs believe in always being ready to help those in need (including non-Sikhs) and so wearing a sword was a way of always being prepared for this. When Sikhism began, Sikhs were often attacked for their beliefs, so the sword was also a way for Sikhs to protect themselves. Today of course we have police and law courts and so Sikhs do not wear their swords in public or ever use them for any reason. Instead, most Sikhs wear tiny versions of the sword in public and larger versions for worship.

Many Sikhs also learn the martial art of sword fighting called Gatka. This was created by the Sikh Gurus and uses circular movements to effectively swing a sword. Again, Sikhs do not ever use this for fighting, but it is a way to remember and reinforce Sikh values.

Turban

Wearing a turban is the sixth symbol which all members of the Khalsa must wear (women may wear a turban if they wish, but they are not required to). There are many different ways of tying a turban. The turban can be any colour, including bright colours, although it is often saffron. Many young adults now wear only the under turban for day-to-day wear, as they find it less cumbersome.

The full turban is made of a length of cloth about eight metres long and two metres wide. One end of the cloth is held in the mouth while the cloth is gradually wrapped around the head. Different styles and looks are created by varying the angle at which each turn is made, the width between turns and the folds of the cloth.

When almost the entire cloth is wrapped around the head, the last part is tucked into the front. The end that was clenched in the teeth is released and pulled to the back of the head. The first fold is then pulled through and opened so that the entire head is covered. Finally, the back end is pulled back and tucked in. Detailed instructions and photos of how to tie a turban can be downloaded from www.daviddfriedman.com/Medieval/miscellany_pdf/Other_Articles_V_Turban.pdf.





Unit 4: The Guru Granth Sahib



The Guru Granth Sahib is different from other books of holy scripture in that it was not written only by Sikhs and does not describe the origins of Sikhism. You might like to contrast this with the Christian and Jewish Bibles and the Holy Qur'an, all of which set out the history of the founders of the religion. The Guru is also unique because it contains only poems and hymns and no stories or prose.

The Guru is considered the direct word of God, but Sikhs believe that God inspired many different people to write down the poems in the Guru, including several non-Sikhs. All of the 10 Sikh Gurus contributed to the book. The Guru is also unique in that it is meant to be sung to music and not merely read out loud.

Guru Arjan Dev, the fifth Sikh Guru, compiled the original version of the Guru Granth Sahib. The Guru was added to by the other Sikh Gurus until 1708, when Guru Gobind Singh declared that there would be no more human Gurus and from then on the Guru Granth Sahib would be the only Sikh Guru: "He who would wish to see the Guru, Let him come and see the Granth. He who would wish to speak to him, Let him read and reflect upon what says the Granth. He who would wish to hear his word, He should with all his heart read the Granth."

The majority of the language of the Guru Granth Sahib is the Punjabi dialect prevalent at that time, although some hymns are also found in Persian, medieval Prakrit Hindi and Marathi, Sanskrit and Arabic. All of these hymns are written in the standard Punjabi script known as Gurmukhi. Each page contains about 18 or 19 lines in bold print.

The hymns of the Guru Granth Sahib have been arranged according to various criteria: the melody in which they are meant to be sung, the metre of the poems, author and the clef or key they are meant to be sung in. You may

like to contrast this with the order of the stories in the Old Testament (roughly chronological); the books of the New Testament (books about the teachings and life of Jesus first, then the works of the disciples); and the verses (surahs) of the Qur'an (roughly longest to shortest, except for the first verse).

The Guru is divided into 33 sections. The first section contains an epic poem by Guru Nanak, which is not meant to be sung. The final section is a collection of assorted verses, many composed by musicians. The remaining 31 sections are the ragas, or hymns.

Although anyone is allowed to read or sing from the Guru, the book must be kept in a room of its own and treated in a certain way. For example, no one is allowed to touch the book unless they have bathed first. For these reasons, few Sikhs own copies of the Guru. However, English translations are available online. The language of the Guru is not easily accessible to children and it may be best to listen to the Guru being sung in Punjabi instead. Although children will not understand the words, this will give them a better feel for the experience of Sikh worship. You can download MP3 and other online versions of the Guru being sung on www.sikhnation.com and <http://sikhnet.org>

An excerpt from Page 729

ONE UNIVERSAL CREATOR GOD. BY THE GRACE OF THE TRUE GURU:

Bronze is bright and shiny, but when it is rubbed, its blackness appears. Washing it, its impurity is not removed, even if it is washed a hundred times. They alone are my friends, who travel along with me; and in that place, where the accounts are called for, they appear standing with me. There are houses, mansions and tall buildings, painted on all sides; but they are empty within, and they crumble like useless ruins. The herons in their white feathers dwell in the sacred shrines of pilgrimage. They tear apart and eat the living beings, and so they are not called white. My body is like the simmal tree; seeing me, other people are fooled. Its fruits are useless - just like the qualities of my body. The blind man is carrying such a heavy load, and his journey through the mountains is so long. My eyes can see, but I cannot find the Way. How can I climb up and cross over the mountain? What good does it do to serve, and be good, and be clever? O Nanak, contemplate the Name of the Lord, and you shall be released from bondage.

Unit 5: Sikh baptism

The Sikh baptism is not merely a confirmation of faith. It is also an initiation ceremony into the Khalsa. The Khalsa are all those Sikhs who have undergone the ceremony and agreed to abide by the code of the Khalsa. This means following the guidelines laid down in the Reht Maryada, always wearing the five Ks and the turban, and always being willing and ready to defend Sikhs and any non-Sikhs who cannot defend themselves. Members of the Khalsa are given



the surname of Singh and Kaur and some children may know people named Singh or Kaur. Many Khalsa Sikhs in the UK use the name Singh as a middle name or a second surname, but others use it as their only surname.

You may like to compare this ceremony to baptism or initiation ceremonies used in other religions and cultures. Some of these are discussed in Unit 1 above. One important part of the Sikh baptism is that people must choose for themselves whether and when to undergo it. This is why children do not usually undergo the ceremony; they are not yet considered old enough to choose the life of a Khalsa.



Unit 6: Worship



Sikh worship in the gurdwara is unique in several ways. One of these is that there is often no formal service of a stated length. At large gurdwaras, the hymns and poems in the Guru may be sung all day long and worshippers may come and go as they please, listening to as much as they like. Children may be surprised to learn that some Sikhs will only spend a few minutes listening to the prayers.

In the UK, most gurdwaras do not have enough members for worship to occur all day every day. Instead, there are daily or weekly worship services which include the elements discussed on page 20 of the student book. In the UK, Sunday is a common day for Sikhs to go to the gurdwara and there may be a longer worship service on this day. That is because it is a day that many people in the UK do not go to work. There is no Sikh day of rest or prescribed day of worship.

Sikh worship is also unique in that there is no official clergy. Worshippers may take turns singing or chanting from the Guru (acting as granthi). In large gurdwaras, professional singers may be used. Although most large gurdwaras do have a full time granthi, this is a person who has been hired by the

community to fulfill this role. Any adult who can read the Gurmukhi script and knows the tunes can act as granthi, although they are usually also a member of the Khalsa. Sometimes, there are talks or sermons as a part of worship services. Again, these may be given by anyone. In the UK, talks by visiting Sikh scholars are common.

The idea behind Sikh worship is for worshippers to meditate on God and on the words of God. Making the words beautiful by singing them, and by playing music, helps worshippers to see the beauty of God.

Children may want to list some aspects of worship services in different religions. They may be surprised to find that different religions sometimes share similar practices for similar reasons. You could make a list of which religions have practices such as: covering the head or leaving it uncovered, sitting on the floor or on chairs, making donations, length of service, where the holy scripture is kept and how is it used, is sacred food eaten or shared, is there a sacred lamp or light, are there statues or paintings, etc?

Sikhs do not worship the Guru, but do show great respect towards it. When entering the gurdwara everyone is expected to remove their shoes and cover their head as signs of respect towards the Guru Granth Sahib and God. Many Sikhs bathe before coming to the gurdwara, also as a sign of respect, and are expected to at least wash their hands and feet. When approaching the Guru Granth Sahib Sikhs bow down and touch the floor as another sign of respect. During worship everyone sits on the floor as a sign of equality (chairs are provided only for those who are unable to sit on the floor for physical reasons). Men and women have equal status, but they sit on separate sides of the room to avoid distracting one another. All people are expected to stand facing the Guru Granth Sahib when the Ardas (common prayer) is read out.

Non-Sikhs are very welcome in the gurdwara. They are expected to observe the customs above, such as covering the head, not wearing shoes, sitting on the floor, etc., but are not expected to make a donation or to bow to the Guru.

All visitors and worshippers are expected to eat a meal at the gurdwara. This is separate from sharing the sacred food, the kardh parshad. You may like to compare the role of food in different religions. For example, the sharing of bread and wine in the Christian communion service, the Shabbat meal in Judaism and the blessing and sharing of food offerings in Hindu worship. Keep in mind that Sikh worship involves both sharing a sacred food, and also having a meal together.

Unit 7: The langar

The langar actually has two purposes, and this may be difficult for some children to understand. For Sikhs, eating in the langar is a part of worship. Sikhs are expected to eat in the langar whenever they come to the gurdwara to worship. When Sikhism began, this was a way to build community feeling, and also a way to show new Sikhs the ideals of equality and service to others that are so important to Sikhism. You can see that working voluntarily in the langar is thus also a form of worship.

The idea of the langar was begun by Guru Nanak and was expanded by other Gurus. Whoever wanted to see Guru Nanak first had to eat a meal in the langar. This was his way of making sure that all visitors understood the Sikh ideals of equality and selfless service that are expressed in the langar. A story is told that the Guru even refused to speak to the Emperor until he had eaten a langar meal of simple food, sitting on the floor and surrounded by people of all castes and religions.



It is important to remember that in the days when Sikhism was founded, India had a very strong caste system. People of different castes and religions would not usually sit down to eat together, and people belonging to the untouchable caste were not welcome anywhere. However, in the langar, people of all castes, even untouchables, were welcome and had to eat together. Today this does not seem so radical, but in Guru Nanak's time, it would have been a real test of faith for someone of a high caste to eat with someone of a lower caste.

However, the langar is also a type of charity. Large gurdwaras, especially in India, will feed hundreds or thousands of people a day. For non-Sikhs who eat in the langar, there is no worship or religious element involved. It is simply a meal, and a chance to experience the Sikh ideals of equality. There is never any preaching or prayer during the meal. People come and go as they please and leave whenever they are finished.

Serving in the langar or contributing to it demonstrates the ideal of seva: selfless service in the community. Seva is simply the act of doing something for other people without expecting any kind of reward. One Sikh saying about seva is: "Bread and water belong to the Lord – and the desire to serve is the pleasure of Sikhs".

You can compare this to the idea of charity which is common in all religions. In Judaism, for example, there are different levels of charity. The highest level is when neither donor nor recipient know each other and nothing is expected in return for the charity. Islamic Law requires those who are not poor to pay a donation called zakat every year, which is a certain percentage of your income that is given to a worthy cause of your choice. But Islam also encourages giving to charity in addition to this. The Christian ideal of charity is a cornerstone of the Christian faith.

Sikhs are not necessarily vegetarian, but the food served in the langar is always vegetarian. This is because the langar is open to everyone. People who follow kosher, halal, Hindu, or Buddhist food laws would not be able to eat in the langar if it served meat. The food served in the langar is often Punjabi, but it does not have to be. Here are the main guidelines about the langar, from the Reht Maryada:

- ▶ It should be vegetarian.
- ▶ The food should be simple and clean.
- ▶ The food should be prepared by the worshippers themselves.
- ▶ All participants are required to sit together on the floor in a line (pangat).

Unit 8: Sikh symbols

As we discussed above, the five Ks are not symbols, but rather requirements of faith. However, there are a few symbols that have special meaning for Sikhs. These are discussed in the student book, but you may like to compare these symbols with those used in other religions. For example, the khanda is the symbol of the Sikhs, as the cross is to Christians, the Crescent Moon is to Muslims or the Star of David is to Jews. All of these symbols reflect fundamental concepts of the religion. The cross reflects the importance of Jesus' death and resurrection as the centre of Christian belief. The Crescent Moon illustrates the way that God lights and guides our way, as the Crescent Moon did in the desert. The Star of David stands for many things, including the memory of ancient Israel and God's covenant with the Jews to lead them to a Promised Land.



The Golden Temple

The Golden Temple is a symbol of Sikh belief and the most important place in Sikhism, so it is included here. Here is some more detailed information about the Golden Temple.

The Golden Temple is commonly known as the Harimandir Sahib (Temple of God) or Darbar Sahib (Divine Court). It is a living symbol of the spiritual and historical traditions of the Sikhs. It is a source of inspiration for all Sikhs and is the chief place of Sikh pilgrimage. The temple stands in the middle of a square pool, called the Pool of Nectar. A causeway traverses the pool to reach the temple itself, which rests on a platform in the middle of the pool. The Harimandir Sahib has entrances and doors on all four sides. This stands for the idea that the temple is for everyone, no matter where they come from.

Excavation on the pool began in 1577, and construction of the temple was completed in 1601. The first edition of the Guru Granth Sahib was placed in the temple in 1604. However, the temple has been destroyed or damaged many times. The Golden Temple as it appears today was built in 1765 and the copper sheets overlaid with gold, which give the temple its name, were added only in 1830.



Here is a passage about a day in the life of the Golden Temple, which you may like to have students read in class. It may help them to understand the importance of the temple. You could also use it to compare the concept of pilgrimage in different religions (see also *Muslim faith and practice* Unit 5 for more information on pilgrimages), or to discuss worship services. The facts in the text have been taken from:

<http://allaboutsikhs.com/gurudwaras/gt03.htm>

A day in the life of the Golden Temple

For thousands of Amritsar's inhabitants, the day begins around three o'clock in the morning, as people prepare for a predawn visit to the temple.

Outside the main entrance, worshippers take their shoes off, check them with an attendant and proceed into the huge complex. At a trough of running water, they dip their feet to clean them. As they pass flower stalls, some worshippers stop to buy garlands of yellow, gold or russet marigolds to carry inside as offerings.

As they descend the marble stairs towards the pool, worshippers express thanks for God's grace that has made the visit possible. When they come to the walkway around the pool, they turn left and go around the entire walkway, stopping at shrines on the way.

The first shrine along the marble walkway is a shrine called the Dukh Bhanjani Ber. Built around a jujube tree, it marks the spot where, it is said, a dip in the sacred pool miraculously cured a crippled youth. Some people stop and immerse themselves in the water here.

Past the Dukh Bhanjani Ber shrine is a raised marble platform which is the Shrine of the Sixty-Eight Holy Places. Some believe that immersing themselves in the water near this spot will make their dreams of visiting the 68 holy places of India come true.

Further along the walkway is the shrine of Baba Deep Singh, a legendary Sikh warrior who died at this spot. Ever since, pilgrims have paused here to pray, to sprinkle rose petals or to lay fresh garlands in his honour.

The Guru Granth Sahib spends the night in a smaller temple called the Akal Takht. About half an hour before the Guru Granth Sahib is brought down from the Akal Takht, the palki, a gold and silver palanquin,

is prepared for it. Attendants replace the cushions and pillows on which the Guru Granth Sahib will rest. They lay down fresh sets of silk and brocade coverings and, when everything is ready, they sprinkle scented rose water over everything.

The head priest appears with the Guru Granth Sahib on a cushion on his head and a series of drum beats begins. Worshippers throw rose petals in its path and recite hymns as the Guru passes. Many worshippers share the honour of carrying the Guru for a few feet each.

Inside the temple, the Guru is placed on velvet cushions beneath a velvet canopy brocaded with silver and gold. The head granthi then opens the Guru and reads out loud the first passage he comes to. This is the Lord's message for the day. The Asa di War is then sung and the entire congregation stands up for the Ardas prayer. After the Ardas, verses from the Guru will be sung throughout the day, to accompanying music.

All day long, worshippers come to the temple. Some listen to hymns and music in the main hall on the ground floor, others listen to the words of the akhand path (a reading of the Guru without music) in the quiet of the upper floors. Some visit the Akal Takht, where the swords and other weapons that belonged to Guru Gobind Singh are kept.

Many worshippers join the line in front of the special kitchen where the kardh parshad is prepared. The food is blessed and then eaten. After this they make their way to the langar, to eat and then to help prepare the food that will be served to the thousands of worshippers and visitors who eat there daily.

As the sun sets, worshippers come to sit and listen in rapt attention to the evening recitations and hymns. The day's prayers end with the Ardas at 9.45 p.m.

When the prayers end, the Guru Granth Sahib is carefully closed, wrapped in fresh layers of silk and muslin cloth, and carried to the palki waiting outside. As in the morning, the palki is carried to the building where the Guru will rest for the night.

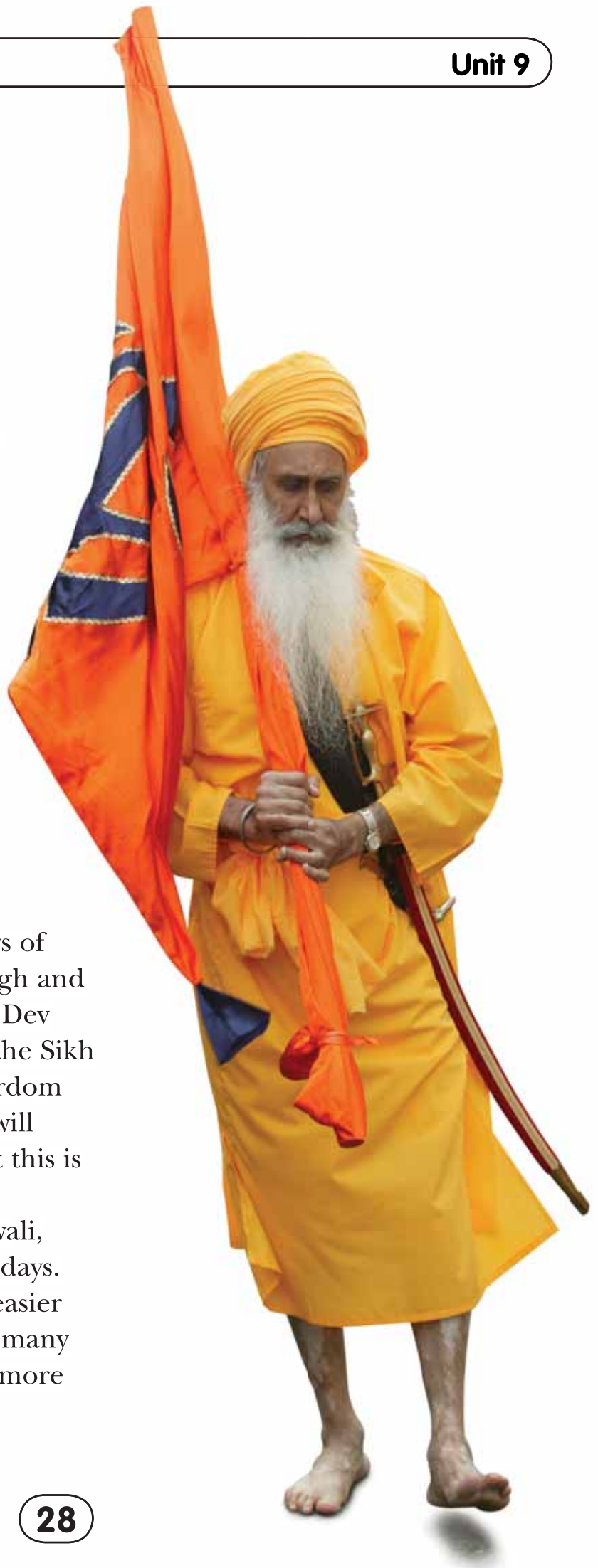
The massive silver and rosewood doors of the temple are shut and a group of volunteers inside the temple starts the ritual cleansing of the shrine with milk and water in preparation for the next day.

Unit 9: Sikh ceremonies and holidays

Sikh dates are calculated on both the solar and lunar calendar, and so holidays move around a bit each year. For example, Guru Nanak was born on October 20th, 1469 in the common calendar, but his birthday is celebrated on the Full Moon in the month of Kartik (October/November).

There are 10 gurupurabs each year. The word gurupurab means festival and gurupurabs are anniversaries associated with the lives of the Sikh Gurus. At each of these festivals, one of the ten Gurus is honoured. The most important of these are the birthdays of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh and the martyrdom days of Guru Arjan Dev and Guru Tegh Bahadur. Many of the Sikh gurupurabs memorialise the martyrdom of Sikh Gurus and others and you will have to decide if a discussion about this is appropriate for your class.

Some Sikh holidays, such as Diwali, are on the same days as Hindu holidays. This was done in order to make it easier for Hindu converts. There are also many local Sikh holidays. Here are a few more Sikh holidays.



Holla Mohalla

Holla Mohalla is a Sikh festival celebrated one day after the Hindu festival of Holi (around March 17). Holla Mohalla was started by the tenth Sikh Guru, Gobind Singh, as a gathering of Sikhs for military exercises and mock battles. This three-day festival is celebrated with processions, mock battles, and music and poetry competitions. There may also be displays of swordsmanship, horse riding and other traditional martial skills, in addition to worship services and religious lectures.

Maghi

On this day, Sikhs worship in the gurdwara to commemorate the martyrdom of the Forty Immortals. The largest gathering happens at Muktsar in India, where an annual fair is held. It occurs on the first day of Maghar Sangrant, around January 14. The holiday commemorates an event when forty followers of Guru Gobind Singh, who had previously deserted him, fought bravely against overwhelming Mughal army forces and were killed. After their deaths, Guru Gobind Singh personally blessed them as having achieved mukti (liberation) and cremated them at Muktsar.

Maghi occurs just after the Hindu festival of Lohri, when bonfires are lit in Hindu homes to greet the birth of sons in the families, and alms are distributed. Maghi is celebrated with an akhand path and worship services in gurdwaras around the world. However, in Muktsar there is a big fair during which pilgrims take a dip in a sacred pool and visit several shrines connected with the historic battle. A procession of pilgrims from the main shrine to the gurdwara Tibbi Sahib, which is sacred to Guru Gobind Singh, marks the conclusion of the three-day celebration.

