

How is Sikh faith lived out in daily life and why is this significant?

Lauren: Hello and welcome to the Bitesize GCSE Religious Studies podcast. This series is all about Sikhism and I am your host, Lauren Layfield. I'm a TV and radio presenter, and in this series we explore the beliefs and practices you may come across in your exam.

In this episode, we're looking at how Sikhism, also known as Sikhi, is expressed in daily life. But I can't do it alone, so throughout this series I'm joined by my wonderful co-host Jaz Singh. Hi Jaz!

Jaz: Hey Lauren! I'm a radio presenter too and have also appeared on TV, and I've been raised in the Sikh faith. Now I grew up attending the Sikh temple, the gurdwara, and taking part in community practices like the langar. Now I'm going to tell you more about those, and I'll be bringing other Sikh beliefs and practices to life too.

Lauren: That's great. That's going to be very helpful. Thanks, Jaz. But before we start, grab a pen, some paper, or your notes app, because we will be highlighting key ideas that you might want to jot down.

Jaz: And at the end of the episode, I'll be testing your knowledge with a quick quiz so stay til the end for that. Right then, let's get started!

Lauren: Jaz, tell me about some of the ways Sikhs practise their faith in daily life.

Jaz: Sure. Worship is a really important part of Sikhism and it can take place anywhere, at any time. Shall we start with worship at home?

Lauren: Yes please!

Jaz: Okay. At home many Sikhs say daily prayers known as 'Nitnem'. Some families may have a quiet, clean space set aside for prayer. They may meditate on God's name, Waheguru. This practice is called 'Naam Japna', and can involve reciting, chanting, or singing the name Waheguru.

Now it helps Sikhs reflect on the oneness of God and the belief that Waheguru is present everywhere. 'Naam Japna' is one of the three foundations of Sikhism, so it's considered very important.

Lauren: And we will look at the other two foundations of Sikhism a little bit later in the episode, so stay listening for that. Do Sikhs read from any holy books when their worshipping in the home?

Jaz: Yes Lauren. The Guru Granth Sahib Ji is the most holy scripture in Sikhism, but most Sikh homes won't have a copy. Many Sikhs will have a Gutka though, which contains hymns from scriptures. Some may recite prayers from their Gutka each day.

Lauren: And is there a special area of the home that you worship in Jaz?

Jaz: There is actually. In my house, we have a small area dedicated to worship where we have pictures of Guru Nanak Dev Ji and Shri Guru Gobind Singh Ji. And it's also where our amrit is kept - now that is our holy water.

(Sikh hymns)

Lauren: What other forms of worship are there in Sikhism?

Jaz: Worship can take many forms and could also include things like singing hymns - a practice known as 'kirtan'. It can also be reflecting on Sikh teachings, and learning about the Ten Gurus - the ten foundational teachers of Sikhism.

Lauren: So Sikh worship comes in lots of forms and it can be done anywhere. Why is that significant?

Jaz: Well Sikhs believe that God is 'sargun' or immanent, meaning present in the universe. So wherever we worship, Waheguru is there. It doesn't matter where we worship as long as God is at the forefront of our mind.

Lauren: OK Jaz, let's move on to the gurdwara. Can you tell us about that?

Jaz: Sure. Gurdwara means 'door to the Guru', and it's a Sikh place of worship. Now a gurdwara is any place where the Guru Granth Sahib Ji is kept and respected - that's the Sikh holy scripture.

Lauren: And could you describe a gurdwara to me Jaz?

Jaz: Of course. Typically you'll see a Nishan Sahib outside the gurdwara - that's an orange flag with a blue Khanda on it, which is one of the symbols of Sikhism. It's made up of a double-edged sword, a circular ring, and two curved swords. Now there is also always a light on inside the gurdwara to reflect our belief that Waheguru, God, is always present.

Lauren: That feels really symbolic. Can you tell us more about the Guru Granth Sahib Ji - you said a gurdwara is a place where that holy scripture is kept?

Jaz: Yes that's right Lauren. Sikhs believe any building that holds the Guru Granth Sahib Ji is a gurdwara. The scripture is really sacred. Now we see it as the eternal, living Guru. It is kept on a raised platform under a canopy as a sign of significant respect.

Lauren: And when Sikhs go to the gurdwara, is there anything that they're expected to do?

Jaz: Yes there are a few rules which are all about showing respect to the Guru Granth Sahib Ji. For example;

- Sikhs cover their heads inside the gurdwara
- They remove their shoes before entering

- Those who go to worship sit on the floor so that the Guru Granth Sahib Ji is always higher than them
- Sikhs avoid turning their backs on the Guru Granth Sahib Ji
- And finally at night, the Guru Granth Sahib Ji scripture is put in a different room and put to bed.

Lauren: Now these are just some examples about how Sikhs express their respect to the Guru Granth Sahib Ji in daily life, but for more information search for Bitesize GCSE Sikhism.

(Sikh hymns)

Lauren: Jaz, how do Sikhs worship in the gurdwara?

Jaz: As we've said, worship can happen anywhere as long as you are focused on Waheguru, so there is no expectation to attend the gurdwara at all. But if you do, it's a place for the community to gather together. We call the Sikh community the 'sangats'.

Lauren: What happens during a gurdwara service?

Jaz: Well as soon as you walk into a gurdwara, your head must be covered and shoes must be taken off before attending the main section. We then go into the 'darbar sahib' which is the main hall within the gurdwara. The most important thing in the darbar hall is the Guru Granth Sahib Ji.

You sit down on the floor, facing the Guru Granth Sahib Ji and in many gurdwaras men and women may sit separately as a way to encourage focus. All services will start and end with the Ardas prayer - it's a prayer where we ask Waheguru to guide us in life.

(Ardas prayer)

Lauren: And what kinds of things do Sikhs say during worship?

Jaz: It's a good question. Those worshipping will often chant 'Waheguru' over and over, and we may sing hymns, called 'kirtan'. These hymns are verses from the Guru

Granth Sahib Ji and they help us to feel connected to Waheguru. It reminds us of God's oneness and other important qualities.

Lauren: And who leads these services?

Jaz: Well there is no formal priesthood in Sikhism, and all Sikhs are considered equal. There are no religious leaders that are seen as more important than those worshipping. So a Sikh person of any gender, who is knowledgeable about the Guru Granth Sahib Ji, can lead a service.

Lauren: And what about food - does that come into gurdwara services at all?

Jaz: Yes it does! Karah Parshad is 'blessed food'. It's a simple sweet which is given to everyone at the end of services.

Lauren: And why is that significant?

Jaz: Well it mainly symbolises the Sikh teachings of equality and sharing in the community. It connects to another of the three foundations of Sikhism - Vand Chakna.

Lauren: OK, tell me more about Vand Chakna?

Jaz: It means 'Share and Consume together'. So the community, or 'sangat' is really important in Sikhism. Every Sikh should contribute however they can to the community - to share their wealth and to help each other. For me, the most incredible thing about a gurdwara is that anyone is welcome no matter their religion, background, ethnicity or status.

Lauren: That sounds really special. So you've told us about two of the three foundations of Sikhism - 'Naam Japna' which was meditating on God's name, and 'Vand Chakna' which is about the community sharing together. So what is the third foundation?

Jaz: That is Kirat Karni. Sikhs believe that God wants us all to live an honourable life, earning an honest living and doing work that helps our community. And by that I don't mean just the Sikh community but anyone, be they sikh or non-Sikh - whoever needs that help.

Lauren: So Kirat Karni is about doing, rather than just thinking?

Jaz: That's a really good description Lauren. In fact, there's a quote from the Sikh holy scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib Ji. It's from ang 465 and it says "Wisdom cannot be found through mere words. To explain it is as hard as iron." Sikhs believe words alone are not enough. It's important to remember God through living honestly. Those three foundations Naam Japna, Vand Chakna, and Kirat Karni, work together to guide daily life for Sikhs.

Lauren: Jaz, you've helped us to understand how Sikhism can be expressed in daily life. Can you tell us about the five Ks now?

Jaz: Of course. Now within Sikhism, people may express their commitment to faith in different ways. Amritdhari Sikhs are individuals who have taken part in an initiation ceremony and have become part of The Khalsa community. This group of Sikhs are no more or less important than any other Sikh, but as part of The Khalsa they have rules to follow - the five Ks.

Lauren: OK so what are the five Ks?

Jaz: For Amritdhari Sikhs, the five Ks serve as a daily reminder of their faith. Sikhs who are not part of The Khalsa may follow some, or all, of the 5 Ks too. They are;

- Kesh - meaning 'uncut hair'. Sikhs believe hair is a gift from God and should not be cut. It is often kept covered, for example with a turban, as a sign of respect.
- Kanga - Sikhs carry a wooden comb with them to help keep themselves tidy.
- Kara - that's wearing a steel bracelet. Its circular shape is a reminder of the eternal nature of God.
- Kaccha - Sikhs wear plain, cotton underwear to remind them to show self-control and chastity, meaning no sexual activity before marriage.

- Kirpan - carrying a small ceremonial sheathed blade. It symbolises the duty to protect others since everyone is equal, and that Sikhs should always fight for justice.

The Five Ks act as constant reminders of Sikh faith and identity.

Lauren: Do you know what, that is all really interesting. Thanks so much Jaz! Jaz, I think I'm ready for you to put me to the test.

Jaz: Great, let's do a quick quiz then. Grab a pen, some paper, or your notes app to jot down your answers.

Lauren: And pause this episode if you need some more time to think. Ok let's do it, I'm ready!

Jaz: First question. What does 'Naam Japna' involve? Hint, it's one of three key foundations of Sikhism.

Lauren: OK. 'Naam Japna' is meditating on God's name. So that could be singing, chanting, or reciting God's name, Waheguru.

Jaz: Yes, that's it! Next question. What do we call the Sikh place of worship?

Lauren: That is the gurdwara.

Jaz: Perfect! Worship can take place anywhere though, including in the home. And final question. What is the name for the kind of honest work Sikhs are encouraged to do? It involves earning an honest living and doing work that helps our community. A clue for you - it's one of the three key Sikh foundations.

Lauren: That is Kirat Karni and it's the third foundation of Sikhism.

Jaz: Spot on, well done!

Lauren: Thanks for listening to this episode of the Bitesize GCSE Religious Studies podcast.

Jaz: In the next one we'll be exploring why festivals are significant in Sikhism.

Lauren: And remember you can listen to all episodes in this series over on BBC Sounds. Just search for GCSE Bitesize.

Jaz: See you next time!