

What does Sikhi teach about God?

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

In this episode, we're looking at how God is understood in Sikh teachings and practice. And joining me to do so is my brilliant co-host and practising Sikh, Jaz Singh.

Jaz: Hi Lauren, I'm very excited to be here!

Lauren: Oh, we're excited to have you. Now you are a broadcaster, and people may also obviously know you from the reality show *The Traitors*. And you've also been raised in the Sikh faith.

Jaz: That's right. It was the main reason I actually applied for *The Traitors*, to showcase what a British Sikh is all about. And I'm now very grateful to now speak about my faith sometimes on the radio too. Sikhism has definitely taught me a lot Lauren, so my relationship with God and my faith is very important to me.

Lauren: Yes, we can't wait to hear more. Before we get stuck in though, grab a pen, some paper, or you can use your notes app, because throughout the episode, we'll highlight some key ideas you may want to jot down.

Jaz: And stay listening to the end, because there'll be a quick quiz too.

Lauren: So, Jaz, Sikhism, also known as Sikhi, is one of the world's major religions. And it's one that has been founded more recently. Is that right?

Jaz: Yes Lauren. Sikhism as a religion was founded about 500 years ago and today has about 25 million followers around the world. The religion was started by Guru Nanak Dev Ji who we call the first Guru.

Lauren: Yeah, and we'll hear about him more in other episodes in this series. Before that though, there's some key beliefs for Sikhs, aren't there? To start with, can you tell us about God, Jaz?

Jaz: Yes Lauren. We believe there is only one God, who Sikhs worship. We have lots of words to describe God in Sikhism, but a really common name is Waheguru, which means 'wondrous enlightener'.

Lauren: And how do Sikhs describe Waheguru?

Jaz: We believe Waheguru is genderless, so neither male nor female, and can't really be explained or described in words. The term for that is ineffable. Waheguru is eternal, meaning our God doesn't exist in time and space like we do. Sikhism teaches us that the universe and everything in it was created by Waheguru's command, known as 'Hukam.'

Lauren: Jaz, you said that Waheguru can't be explained in words, so can you tell us a little bit more about that?

Jaz: Sure. Sikhs believe that God is 'Nirgun', which means transcendent. And that means God is beyond human understanding and without physical form. But we also believe God is 'sargun' which means immanent. That means, for Sikhs, God is present in the material world.

Lauren: So, God is both Nirgun (beyond understanding or transcendent) and Sargun (present in the world, or immanent). Can you talk about how Sikhs believe God is present in the world?

Jaz: Sikhs believe God's presence is within all living beings, and this is sometimes described as a 'divine spark'. It's kind of like a soul.

Lauren: It's really interesting, thanks for that Jaz. For more information about the nature of God in Sikhism, head over to the Bitesize website where there are loads more resources for you. Just search for 'Bitesize GCSE Sikhism'.

Lauren: So, Jaz, how do Sikhs know these things about God?

Jaz: Good question Lauren! Well, we have something called the Mool Mantra, sometimes called the Mool Mantar. It's a written verse which defines this core Sikh belief in one God. It's the foundational declaration, or opening, of the Guru Granth Sahib Ji - that's a really important holy scripture in Sikhism.

Lauren: And can you give us some more detail about what the Mool Mantra says?

Jaz: Yes of course. The first line says "Ik Onkar". Now Ik Onkar can mean different things to different people. For some it means God is One. Others may interpret it as One Divine Spirit or One force. For me personally, it means that there is only one God. This is a key belief in Sikhism.

Lauren: So, the Guru Granth Sahib Ji is really important, Jaz. Can you tell us more about it?

Jaz: Yeah of course. Although we believe in only one God, we have a number of spiritual guides which we call Gurus. There have been ten Gurus throughout history who taught people about God. Their teachings, and teachings from several other important holy people, have been written in the Guru Granth Sahib Ji, our holy scripture.

Lauren: So, does that belief, 'Ik Onkar', show up in daily life for Sikhs?

Jaz: Definitely. It's represented by a symbol, written in Gurmukhi, which is a script used in Punjab in India. Many Sikhs display the symbol in their homes and in gurdwaras - our place of worship. Now it reminds us that God is one, and you can see an example of the symbol on the Bitesize website. Just search 'Mool Mantra Bitesize'.

Lauren: Is the Mool Mantra used in worship too Jaz?

Jaz: Yes Lauren. Many Sikhs will recite the Japji Sahib prayer, of which the Mool Mantra is the first verse. The Mool Mantra and the symbol help us focus on God when we worship and meditate. And that really allows me to be present in the moment and realign myself with God.

Lauren: And is there anything else within the Mool Mantra that you can tell us about?

Jaz: Well, the other lines tell us more about the nature of God. Shall I read it to you?

Lauren: Yes please!

Jaz: We have:

- Ik Onkar - there is one God
- Sat Naam - Gods name is the truth
- Karta Purkh - God is the creator
- Nir Bhau - God has no fear
- Nir Vair - God has no hatred
- Aakaal Moorat - God is eternal (beyond time)
- Ajooni - God is not born and does not die
- Saibhang - God is not dependent on anything. He is self-emanated, meaning he just exists.
- Gur Parsaad - Only through Guru's grace we exist

Lauren: Jaz, do Sikhs believe it's possible to meet Waheguru?

Jaz: Now that's a really interesting question Lauren. Sikhs believe in the cycle of samsara - that's the cycle of birth, death and rebirth.

Lauren: And Hindus and Buddhists believe in the samsara cycle too, don't they?

Jaz: Yes, they do! Samsara is the belief that we are born, we die, and we are reborn again. Sikhs believe in reincarnation. Now this means when a person dies, their soul is

reborn into another body. As Sikhs we believe this happens in a continuous cycle until we achieve mukti.

Lauren: Okay. Can you explain mukti for us?

Jaz: Of course. Mukti is when we are free from the cycle of samsara, so we won't be reborn again. If we achieve mukti, we have the chance to reach Waheguru - to be united with God.

Lauren: So, Sikhs can be united with God (Waheguru) by exiting the cycle of birth, death and rebirth, which is samsara. Is that right?

Jaz: That's it!

Lauren: Tell us about how the belief then in Waheguru might influence life for Sikhs?

Jaz: Well Sikhs believe in living a life that is God centered, Lauren. We call this 'gurmukh'. That's the opposite to 'manmukh' which means self-centred. So, we live our life with God at the centre, rather than ourselves.

Lauren: So, do gurmukh and manmukh affect how Sikhs live day-to-day, Jaz?

Jaz: In lots of ways, yes! Sikhs may try to focus their mind on Waheguru at all times including during prayer and worship as a way to keep God at the centre of their daily life. Other daily acts include; being generous by giving to charity, helping other people when they can, always acting with love and compassion, and performing selfless acts.

Lauren: And what about you then Jaz, how do you aim for 'gurmukh', so living a life that's God centred?

Jaz: I think it's important to wake up feeling grateful for what you have, and for me, that includes starting the day off with the Mool Mantra prayer. It's a form of meditation, helping me realign myself with God, be present in the moment, reset, and just remind myself to be thankful for everything.

It's given me hope, allowed me to develop a form of resilience and it's actually got me to this point in life, where I would've never expected to be.

Lauren: Thank you so much for sharing, Jaz. And we're going to talk more about some of these themes, like prayer and meditation, in our episode on daily Sikh practices. You can listen to all the episodes in this series over on BBC Sounds.

Just search 'Bitesize GCSE Sikhism'. You mentioned reincarnation before Jaz - can you tell me more about that?

Jaz: Sure. Like Hindus and Buddhists, Sikhs believe in reincarnation. Now that's the idea that each being has a soul, or 'atma'. So, when we die, our soul is reborn, or reincarnated, as another being.

Lauren: Yeah, and you said that each being has a part of Waheguru in their soul. And you called it the divine spark, I think?

Jaz: Well remembered. The soul is part of God, and we believe God is present in everyone. Now the soul is called atma. So, when we die the atma is born into a new body, and this cycle continues until we are freed. Once your atma is free you achieve mukti and then you join Waheguru.

Lauren: And you can find out more about reincarnation and mukti in Sikhism over on the Bitesize website. Just search for 'Bitesize GCSE Sikhism'.

Jaz: Lauren, that was quite a lot of information. Are you ready for a quick quiz to see how much you remember?

Lauren: Yes, let's do it! Grab a pen, paper, or your notes app and jot down your answers.

Jaz: Let's do this. First question. There are many words for God in Sikhism, but which is the commonly used name that we have used in this episode?

Lauren: That would be Waheguru.

Jaz: Correct, well done! Next question. Sikhs believe there is a way they can be united with Waheguru. They have to achieve something though. What is it?

Lauren: They can achieve mukti. That means they've been liberated from the cycle of samsara and are with God.

Jaz: Perfect answer. Now the last question. In the Mool Mantra, there is an opening line which is very important for Sikh belief in the nature of God. Do you remember what that line is?

Lauren: I do. The opening line is "Ik Onkar".

Jaz: That's it! It's really significant for the Sikh belief in the oneness of God.

Lauren: Thank you very much for listening to this episode of the Bitesize GCSE Religious Studies podcast, exploring Sikhism.

Jaz: In the next episode we'll be exploring how the Sikh faith is expressed in daily life.

Lauren: And remember there are loads of podcasts covering other GCSE subjects like English, Science, and History. Just search for GCSE Bitesize on BBC Sounds.

Jaz: See you next time!