

Vaisākhī Explanation

What is Vaisākhī?

Vaisākhī is the beginning of the year in the traditional calendars of South Asia (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Burma and Bhutan). It is the first day of the first month, Vaisākh, and a major harvest festival. For Sikhs according to Nānakshāhī calendar, it is on the 14th of April, but it is not the beginning of the New Year, Cet-March 14th is.

Does it have any special significance for Sikhs?

Yes. More than three hundred years ago on the Vaisākhī Day in 1699, Gurū Gobind Singh, the Tenth Gurū of the Sikhs established the Khālsā Order of the Sikhs, by initiating his Sikhs through Amrit ceremony and becoming initiated himself too. This event holds paramount significance in the history of the community. Sikhs derive their formal, consolidated identity from this day, including their distinctive physical appearance and the names Singh and Kaur. Thus, Vaisākhī has the special spirit of unity, identity and commitment for the Sikhs.

On Vaisākhī day of 1699, Gurū Gobind Singh asked all his Sikh to get together in Anandpur Sāhib. When everyone got together he came in front of everyone and asked for someone to give their head to him. At first many were confused, but then a brave man got up and went with Gurū Sāhib. Gurū Sāhib came back with a sword with blood on it and asked for another head. In the same way he asked for five heads. He brought all five of them back dressed in dastārs and other symbols that have since become symbols of Sikh identity. He called the five Sikhs the Pañj Piāre - the beloved five.

Then Gurū Sāhib put water in a bāṭā and began to do pāṭh. As he did that he asked to put patāse (sugar candy) in the water. Through the prayer, the patāse and Gurū Sāhib mixing it with a Khandā, he created Amrit. Then he sprinkled this on his Pañj Piāre and they drank it too. After this he called them his Khālsā and asked them to initiate him into the Khālsā by giving him Amrit in return.

How is Vaisākhī celebrated by the Sikhs?

Sikhs all over the world celebrate by organizing religious services, including the full reading of the Sikh scripture, Gurū Granth Sāhib, prayers, singing of hymns and community service. Culturally, there are activities like martial arts exhibitions, parades, sports festivals, and song and dance. Families come together during this important festive occasion and some even exchange gifts.

INITIATION INTO THE KHĀLSĀ

Commitment to abide to ideals prescribed by Gurū Gobind Singh. The Initiate, after bathing and dressing in clean cloths stands in front of the Gurū Granth Sāhib. One of the Pañj Piāre, relates the principle of the Khālsā and asks the recipient if they accept them.

Once assent is given, prayers are offered for preparation of Amrit, water and patāse (sugar-balls) are placed in an iron vessel. Five prayers are recited in this order: Japu, Jāp, Ten Svaiyā, Caupaī and Anand. The water (in process of becoming Amrit) is stirred with the Khandā (double-edged sword). Each abhilākhī (ਅਭਿਲਾਖੀ / candidate) makes a cup of his

hands and drinks five handfuls uttering ~ Vāhigurū Jī Kā Khālsā, Vāhigurū Jī Kī Fatih. The Amrit is poured five times in the eyes and five times in the hair. The candidates recite the Mūl Mantr five times. They are reminded of the vows of the discipline and the commands of Gurū Gobind Singh. Hereafter, they are known as the Khālsā. They are to offer one tenth of their income for religious and charitable purposes and keep the 5Ks, avoid cutting hair, eating any sacrificial meat, adultery, and use of recreational drugs.

After ardās (ਅਰਦਾਸ), hukam (ਹੁਕਮ) is read from the Gurū Granth Sāhib and the candidate is given the name Singh or Kaur. He or she is given the privilege to be the Khālsā and must act responsibly on behalf of the Sikh Nation.

SIKH ARTICLES OF FAITH

- Kes (ਕੇਸ / hair) is a reminder to be saintly. Amrit requires keeping the hair as an article of faith of the Khālsā.
- Kaṅgā (ਕੰਘਾ / comb) is a reminder to be hygienic or clean.
- Kaṛā (ਕੜਾ / bangle) is a reminder to exercise restraint and keep from doing bad deeds. It reminds a Sikh of his/her promise to Vāhigurū and that he/she should not perform any act that is not good in its intent.
- Kachihṛā (ਕਚਿਹਰਾ / underwear) has the moral significance of reminding a Sikh of the need to exercise self-restraint over passions and desires. It also demands ever-readiness to fight for justice.
- Kirpān (ਕਿਰਪਾਨ / sword) is the reminder to exercise courage and self defense. It upholds dignity, self reliance, the capacity and readiness to defend the weak and oppressed. It is a constant reminder to a Sikh to defend the truth and uphold Sikh values.

Though these are explanations, all explanations are incomplete. There is no analytical or utilitarian explanation that does justice. A Sikh accepts the 5 Ks as “gifts” from the Gurū for having a personal relationship. Even those who haven’t given the public commitment through Amrit, accepts these as ideals that all Sikhs aspire to.