Ressort: Reisen

Sikh History and doctrine

Sikhism from Sikh

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Foto ReD Photographic Agency - Sikhism, religion and philosophy founded in the Punjab region of the Indian subcontinent in the late 15th century. Its members are known as Sikhs. The Sikhs call their faith Gurmat (Punjabi: “the Way of the Guru“).

All 10 human Gurus, Sikhs believe, were inhabited by a single spirit. Upon the death of the 10th, Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708), the spirit of the eternal Guru transferred itself to the sacred scripture of Sikhism, Guru Granth Sahib (“The Granth as the Guru“), also known as the Adi Granth (“First Volume“), which thereafter was regarded as the sole Guru. In the early 21st century there were nearly 25 million Sikhs worldwide, the great majority of them living in the Indian state of Punjab.

The following discussion of the lives of the 10 Gurus relies on the traditional Sikh account, most elements of which are derived from hagiographic legend and lore and cannot be verified historically. This point should be borne in mind throughout, especially in the sections on the early Gurus.

History and doctrine

Sikh in Punjabi means “learner,“ and those who joined the Sikh community, or Panth (“Path“), were people who sought spiritual guidance. Sikhs claim that their tradition has always been separate from Hinduism.

Nevertheless, many Western scholars argue that in its earliest stage Sikhism was a movement within the Hindu tradition; Nanak, they point out, was raised a Hindu and eventually belonged to the Sant tradition of northern India, a movement associated with the great poet and mystic Kabir (1440-1518). The Sants, most of whom were poor, dispossessed, and illiterate, composed hymns of great beauty expressing their experience of the divine, which they saw in all things. Their tradition drew heavily on the Vaishnava bhakti (the devotional movement within the Hindu tradition that worships the god Vishnu), though there were important differences between the two. Like the followers of bhakti, the Sants believed that devotion to God is essential to liberation from the cycle of rebirth in which all human beings are trapped; unlike the followers of bhakti, however, the Sants maintained that God is nirgun (“without form“) and not sagun (“with form“). For the Sants, God can be neither incarnated nor represented in concrete terms.

Certain lesser influences also operated on the Sant movement. Chief among them was the Nath tradition, which comprised a cluster of sects, all claiming descent from the semilegendary teacher Gorakhnath and all promoting Hatha Yoga as the means of spiritual liberation. Although the Sants rejected the physical aspects of Hatha Yoga in favour of meditation techniques, they accepted the Naths“™ concept of spiritual ascent to ultimate bliss. Some scholars have argued that the Sants were influenced by Islam through their contact with the Mughal rulers of India from the early 16th century, but there is in fact little indication of this, though Sufism (Islamic mysticism) may have had a marginal effect.

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