

and the return of Christ for the Christians.

However, one issue with the above belief is that Baha'u'llah does not necessarily satisfy all the conditions to be an Avatar or a Messiah in the above religions. For example, the New Testament repeatedly cites the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecies in the person of Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:1; 3:14; 8:17; Luke 1:31; Revelation 5:5).

Sikhs do regard Guru Nanak Dev Ji as the Messiah for the current Age of Darkness called Kaliyug. Bhai Gurdas Ji, the first Sikh philosopher says, *"The benefactor Lord listened to the cries of humanity and sent Guru Nanak to this world. He washed His feet, eulogised God and got his Disciples to drink the ambrosia of his feet...Baba Nanak rescued this dark age (kaliyug) and recited 'Sat Naam' mantra for one and all. Guru Nanak came to redeem the Kaliyug"*.

Guru Nanak Dev Ji, the first Sikh Master, is the world's most widely travelled Prophet having undertaken four major Udasis (missions) to different parts of the world, to spread the doctrine of unity of God, unity of humanity and unity of religion. For this reason Guru Nanak Dev Ji is known by many different names by people from different parts of the world including:

- A Sufi Saint called Hazrat Rab Majid Baba Nanak Faqir by Sufi Muslims
- The Manifestation of God called Abdul-Al-Majid Nanak by Muslims of the Ottoman Empire
- As a Buddhist Saint called Guru Gompka Maharaj by Tibetan Buddhists
- As Guru Rimpoche by Lamas of the Karmapa Nyingmapa Sect
- As an Incarnation of Vishnu by Nepalese
- As Guru Nanak Dev Ji by Hindus, Sikhs and Yogis

So, Guru Nanak Dev Ji has never needed to call himself the Guru of the current age. However he is recognised as a Messiah, Avatar and a saint by people from many different religious and cultural backgrounds.

Progressive Revelation

The idea of progressive revelation is that God reveals something new to humanity through a

Messenger or Prophet. However, as can be seen from the similarities between Bahá'ism and Sikh dharma, there is nothing new in Bahá'ism that was not already covered by the Sikh Masters 350 years earlier.

Elimination of Extremes of Poverty and Wealth

Bahá'ism places importance on the removal of the extremes of poverty and wealth. This is a beautiful dream, however it is not a practical belief, as there is no mechanism for wealth redistribution. The World Institute for Development Economics Research at the UN found that 2% of the world's adults own more than half of all household wealth!

Sikhs believe in the principle of 'Sarbhath Da Bhalla' which means 'Good for Everyone', and 'Dasvandh' which is the giving of 10% of a person's time and money to charitable causes. Sikhs have generally created wealth through businesses, investments and entrepreneurship. Business is a tool that Sikhs would encourage developing countries and people around the world to utilise for wealth creation at personal, local and national levels.

Fasting and Rituals

All Baha'is fast, during the month preceding the New Year. This means no food and drink is to be taken between sunrise and sunset.

Sikh dharma does not place any emphasis on fasting or prayer in a particular direction. The SGGSJ says, *"Worship, fasting, ceremonial marks on one's forehead, cleansing baths, generous donations to charities and self-mortification - the Lord Master is not pleased with any of these rituals, no matter how sweetly one may speak. Chanting the Name of God, the mind is soothed and pacified. Everyone searches for Him in different ways, but the search is so difficult, and He cannot be found...The Ambrosial Naam, the Name of the Lord, and the Praises of the Lord are priceless; he alone obtains them, whom the Lord blesses with His Mercy. Joining the Saadh Sangat, the Company of the Holy, Nanak lives in the Love of God; his life-night passes in peace"*.



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Sikh Dharma and Bahá'ism A Comparative Study

Sikh Dharma

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Introduction

Sikh dharma and Bahá'ism are the world's two newest spiritual traditions with many similarities.

The Bahá'í Faith is a religion founded by Bahá'u'lláh in nineteenth century Persia. Bahá'í number around 6 million in more than 200 countries around the world.

Sikh dharma is a way of life founded by Guru Nanak Dev Ji and nine successive Gurus, that began in sixteenth century India. Sikhs number 23 million and can also be found in most countries of the world.

Similarities

Oneness of God

Both Sikhs and Bahá'ís accept that God is a single, unknowable being known by many names including Jehovah, Ram, Allah and Vaheguru.

The Shri Guru Granth Sahib Ji (SGGSJ), the Sikh Holy Scripture says, *"you are constant in each and every heart, and in all things. O Dear Lord, you are the One. Some are givers, and some are beggars. This is all Your Wondrous Play. You Yourself are the Giver, and You Yourself are the Enjoyer. I know no other than You. You are the Supreme Lord God, Limitless and Infinite. What Virtues of Yours can I speak of and describe? Unto those who serve You, unto those who serve You, Dear Lord, servant Nanak is a sacrifice"*.

Unity of Humankind

Both Sikhs and Bahá'ís promote the unity of humankind transcending all divisions of race, nation, gender, caste, social class, sexual orientation and religion while celebrating its diversity. The SGGSJ says, *"The One God is our father; we are the children of the One God. You are our Guru"*. Also Guru Gobind Singh Ji, the tenth Sikh Master has said, *"Recognise the human race as one"*.

Equality Between Men and Women

Both Sikhs and Bahá'ís support gender equality and strive for the complete emancipation of women in all aspects of life.

Unity of Religion

The Bahá'í teachings state that religion has been revealed progressively from the same God through

different prophets/messengers, who at different times through history and in different locations come to provide the teachings of God. In this way Bahá'ís see that religion has the same foundation.

Sikhs also believe that God has sent many messengers throughout time to help humanity. The SGGSJ says, *"There are six schools of philosophy, six teachers, and six sets of teachings. But the Teacher of teachers is the One, who appears in so many forms."*

The Gurus also incorporated mystical revelation from Hindus of high caste and low caste, Sufi Muslims and other saints from different parts of India, to highlight the idea of unity of religion. This makes the Sikh scripture the world's only multi faith scripture.

Priesthood

There are no clergy in the Bahá'í faith, so members learn about their faith through reading and weekly gatherings.

This is the same in the Sikh way of life where every member of the community is effectively a messenger of Guru Nanak Dev Ji, the first Sikh Master. Sikhs are encouraged to join the Saadh Sangat (society of saints) and learn about the Dharma (spirituality) through listening to Sikh scriptures, contemplation on the Word of the Guru (Gurbani), meditation and selfless service, such as assisting in community services like Langar, the free kitchen for all.

Equality Enshrined within Architecture

Bahá'í temples are usually constructed with nine sides symbolising the nine living religions of the world. Bahá'ís have built a beautiful temple in Delhi known as the Lotus temple which attracts four million visitors per year.

The Harimandir Sahib (Temple of God) in Amritsar, India, also known as the Golden Temple, was built with four entrances showing that people from all four corners of the world are welcome. The Harmandir Sahib is also lower than all the surrounding buildings, showing the importance of humility as a key ingredient in spiritual practice.

As in the Bahá'í faith, all Sikh temples are open to one and all irrespective of religion, creed, nationality, gender and race. Sikhs at the Golden temple feed 35,000 (12,000,000 per annum) people from all backgrounds

per day in the free community kitchen (Langar). This is run by volunteers in the spirit of selfless service to humanity.

Harmony of Religion and Science

Both Sikhs and Bahá'ís accept the importance of science and technology for the benefit of humanity. Science will never contradict true revelation, as both are gifts from God. The SGGSJ says, *"Many millions are the fields of creation and the galaxies. Many millions are the etheric skies and the solar systems. Many millions are the divine incarnations. In so many ways, has He unfolded Himself. So many times, has He expanded His expansion. Forever and ever, He is the One, the One Universal Creator"*.

Diet

Bahá'ís do not drink and abstain from drugs. Similarly practicing Sikhs do not smoke, drink or take drugs and are usually vegetarian. This is because the physical body is considered to be the Temple of God and so it is respected.

Differences

Attitudes Towards Conversion

The goal of the Baha'i faith and its leadership is for the world to become a single super-state with Bahá'ism as its religion.

This however contradicts the idea of beauty in diversity. Indeed, Sikhs do believe that the yoke of all spiritual traditions is enshrined within the Shri Guru Granth Sahib Ji, the Sikh Holy Scripture. However, Sikhs unlike Bahá'ís do not actively look for converts and are happy for people to remain within their own cultural and religious traditions.

Sikh dharma does offer many personal development tools and unique insights into the kingdom of God and these insights and tools are open to everyone. If someone has a desire to follow Sikh philosophy and its spiritual lifestyle then they are welcomed with open arms.

The Messiah of the Current Age (Kaliyug)

Bahá'ís believe that Baha'u'llah is the Promised One of all religions including the Kalki Avtaar of the Hindus, the Shah Bahram of the Zoroastrians, the Maitreya Buddha of the Buddhists, the Messiah Ben David of the Jews, the return of Isa for the Muslims