

Kirtan (singing hymns), learning to read Gurbani (Word of the Guru), having discussions on religion and philosophy, doing Sewa (selfless service without reward) and entering Sikhi competitions where we would get prizes for doing Kirtan (singing hymns) or presentations on Sikh dharma. This allowed my interest in Sikh dharma to flourish and I grew as a person, more confident and with deeper moral values. My parents also became much more interested in Sikh dharma and began to learn the Sikh philosophy.

At 11 years of age, I started to go to secondary school and always rebelled against the ways of other students who would always mess around in class. My interest in Sikhi had made me self-disciplined and I cared only about doing well in my studies and being successful. I didn't really fit in very well and always felt out of place because I always did my work, had become a lacto-vegetarian and didn't smoke, drink or take drugs. I was generally very closed about my spirituality, I avoided the topic. By 16, I had done very well in my studies but still felt there was something missing. It was after going to 6th form (college) that I really opened up people to my way of life as a Sikh, and began to share it with anyone who was interested. I learnt that Sikh dharma is really nothing to shy away from because it is what defines you as a person. I also learnt that it is a very logical way of life and is about being real to yourself, so there's never any question of shying away from sharing it. Studying philosophy at a deeper level allowed me to see the real beauty of Sikh dharma amongst other ways of life and I continued to do presentations on religion and spirituality on a more regular basis.

I'm now at university and my way of life is more important than ever before. I've started recently learning Kundalini Yoga and the experiences I've had have really made my connection to God much more profound. Some bad habits I had have faded away and I've become much more conscious of my actions. My typical life routine consists of firstly trying to wake up at 4am. Usually I fail, but I try everyday, because this is the time when the environment is still and you can get stillness of your own mind much quicker than any other time. Sometimes I wake up, but cannot get up. It's something I'm working on right now to do, and with

God's Grace I will succeed. The days that I do wake up early, I have a cold shower to waken up the body and then do a Kundalini Yoga set, then read as much of the daily Banis (prayers) as I can, and then I sit and meditate for a while. Afterwards, I use the rest of the time to nap before going to lectures at 9am. I always try and eat something before going to lectures in the morning, as this helps get the brain juices flowing. In the evening, I will come back to my flat and cook for myself. I love to cook! Especially tofu with green chilli, peppers, spring onions and soy sauce, it makes a great evening meal! Also, I will usually spend a few hours a day trying to make websites and content on Sikh dharma, reading about spirituality and Kundalini Yoga, writing poetry, playing piano, going to Sikhi events or helping people who are in need of guidance. I still waste a lot of my time on MSN, browsing random websites and chatting, which make me sleep later than I should at around 12pm, but ideally I try and finish by 8:30pm and get to sleep by 9pm, even if it rarely happens. This I have found allows me to wake up earlier and therefore have a chance to do my early morning practice, which I have found genuinely gives me a day of utter clarity, intuition and well being. Before going to sleep I will meditate from 11 - 31 minutes, say a short prayer to ask God to connect me to the God, and give me the strength to stay on this path to realising the Infinity of my own soul. Then I set my alarm clock, hoping to wake up at 4am!!!

Managing the student life with a daily spiritual practice is difficult to start off with, but as I keep on trying, things are getting easier and falling into place. It does require a few sacrifices, one is a bit of time in the morning and the other is not staying up too late. I don't think that's a too big sacrifice for a life of everlasting bliss, tranquillity and centeredness. 'Keep up and you shall be kept up' is a quote by Yogi Bhajan which always sticks in my mind. It's a priceless blessing to be alive and to be on this path of reality and consciousness, beyond words is my gratitude to God for giving me the strength to keep up. May the pure light within us, guide our way on. Satnaam (Truth is your identity)!!!



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# The Sikh Lifestyle

## A Personal Perspective

**Sikh Dharma**

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## Introduction

A brief insight into the actual lives of three ordinary young Sikhs in the UK shall be given, who at different stages in their spiritual journey.

### A 27 Year Old Sikh Male Working Professional

I'm born and bred in England and I started learning about spirituality and Sikhi when I was at college. I stopped drinking alcohol in my college days and slowly gave up meat and started Jap Ji Sahib meditation and keeping some of the K's in my Uni days. I formally made a commitment to live a Sikh lifestyle when I took Sikh Baptism (Amrit) in April 2006.



I now live and work in London and my morning weekday routine starts off at about 6am with a cold shower followed by 10 minutes of Kundalini Yoga and martial arts exercises. I then get ready and leave the house without having breakfast as I prefer to do my meditations before I eat anything.

Once I get to my local tube station I take out my beautiful Golden Gutka (selected verses from the Shri Guru Granth Sahib Ji and Dasam Granth Sahib Ji scriptures) and start my Nitnem meditation which consists of Jap Ji Sahib, Jaap Sahib, Swaya, Chopai and 5 stanzas of Anand Sahib. I love doing Nitnem on the tube because I think it also helps other people on their spiritual path.

I do a standard 8-10 hours of work and on my way back home I will prepare for my Reharas meditation by doing some Pranayam breathing exercise including 3 stage breathing (breathing in, holding and breathing out for 3 seconds each) or Breath of Fire (fast pulsating breath from the navel point). I might also mix in Conscious Walking which is trying to feel the connection with Mother Earth each time I take a step. Once I feel relaxed, energised and more focused I will start my Rehras Sahib meditation and also do my Kirtan Sohila meditation immediately after.

When I get home, I generally don't watch TV as I find it zaps energy from my being and makes me

lazy. I prefer spending the time doing yoga, martial arts, learning a new skill, doing some business stuff or learning about dharma (spirituality)...there's just sooooo much to do and so little time!

I really love my weekends during which I sometimes attend a group Sadhana (spiritual) session at the Southall Sikh Missionary Society which starts at 5am and consists of Jap Ji Sahib, a Kundalini Yoga set and Kirtan (3 hours in total) or I might pop along to a Sukhmani Sahib meditation hosted by the one and only 'Saturday Southall Sukhmani Sahib Parbandhak Committee' (SSSSPC), which is just a bunch of crazy young cool Gurmukhs in love with the teachings of Guru Nanak Dev Ji, the first Master of the Sikhs.

The Bani (Word of the Guru) and the Bana (physical appearance of a Sikh who keeps the 5Ks) have worked miracles in my life. In fact every day the Guru makes miracles in my life and I feel so lucky and fortunate to have discovered Sikhi...Waheguru...Waheguru....Waheguru (wonderful God).

### A 25 Year Old Sikh Female Working Professional

Thinking back, my first experiences of Sikhi began at around 7 or 8 years of age when I entered a Sikhi competition at the local Gurdwara (Sikh place of worship), and I learnt the 5 Pauris (verses) of Jap Ji Sahib off by heart. This was quite difficult considering I had only recently just started going to Punjabi classes. Following on, my next major dose of Sikhi was when I joined Gurmat school where I learnt about Sikh history and philosophy. I also started learning the Sikh martial art of Gatka at a very basic level. We would go and do Gatka displays every Vaisakhi (Sikh New Year). In 2000, I went to University and founded the Essex Sikh Society, which ran for 3 years. I was then involved with London Metropolitan Sikh Society for a year. To date, I haven't been involved in many Sikhi projects since I started work but have rather been pursuing my musical interests in the Dilruba from Professor Surinder Singh who runs the Raj Academy, and also I often attend Kundalini Yoga sessions. The effects of doing Kirtan (singing God's praises) with the Dilruba, one of the original of the Guru's instruments, have not yet had



much impact on my lifestyle, but this is because its early days yet and I'm just learning the basics. The same goes with Kundalini Yoga, I'm too early on in my practice for me to notice the effects. As well as practicing these two tools, I also have continued my daily prayers and visit Gurdwara on weekends to deepen my connection to God. Work life, for me, has shamefully taken its toll on my spiritual lifestyle, but I recognise it is equally as important.

### An 18 Year Old Sikh Male University Student

I started my life not brought up religiously, and although my parents had given me the physical appearance of a Sikh by not cutting my hair, I used to eat meat and drink alcohol if my Dad gave me some. My first language I learnt to speak Punjabi, because my parents always spoke it. My parents were just like any average Indian parents, who took the family to Gurdwara (Sikh place of worship) every Sunday morning, did loads of weird rituals like giving rice to the moon which I never understood, and they never really knew about Sikh philosophy even though they recited their daily Banis (prayers). Other than that they never forced no religion upon me and would allow me to do almost anything I wanted as a kid.



At 7 years of age, I started going to Punjabi school with my brother and learning to read and write my mother tongue. Our cousin Aunty, was a teacher at the Punjabi school and she used to frequently give me and my brother long scripts to remember and then recite on stage at the local Gurdwara (Sikh place of worship). In the beginning, it was nerve racking and we would make so many mistakes and get embarrassed, but eventually we got used to being on stage in front loads of people and doing speeches in Punjabi, even though we never fully understood what we were saying. At about 9 years of age, we started going to Gurmat class on Saturdays and for the first time, learning what the Sikh way of life was really about. The people I interacted with at Gurmat school became some very prominent people in my life and development as a Sikh. We did so many things together! Go on Sikhi camps, learning Gatka (Sikh martial art), learning