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Sikhism: Holidays, Traditions & Rites of Passage

In Sikhism, one shouldn't follow a tradition for the sake of following it, as it robs the ritual of due devotion. Explore some holidays, traditions, and rites of passage for Sikhism, which include Maghi, Akhand Path, and prayers like Kirtan Sohila. *Updated: 01/21/2022*

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Sikh Rituals Background

If you know some of the basic information and history of the Sikh religion, you know it's strongly against practicing rituals blindly for the sake of tradition or expectation. It might surprise you then to learn that the Sikhs have a number of commemorative holidays and traditional practices of holy readings. While this might seem like a contradiction of the words of the first Sikh, **Guru Nanak**, his admonition against rituals applies to those done for tradition alone, which robs the rituals of the sense of devotion or purpose they had when originally created. Let's take a look at a number of these holidays, rites of passage in the life of a Sikh, and the ritual prayers, hymns, and holy readings associated with significant events.

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Sikh Holidays & Festivals

Religious holidays that mark events in the lives of the Gurus are called **Gurpurbs**. Much like religious holidays in Christianity or national holidays, some are more significant and involve larger celebrations than others. Interestingly, some holidays have a set date based on the solar calendar, much as we celebrate American Independence Day on July 4th each year, whereas other holidays vary their dates each year based on the lunar calendar, similar to how dates for Easter are determined. Here are three holidays important to the Sikh.

Vaisakhi

Marking the anniversary of the founding of the **Khalsa** order, a group of highly devout warrior-saints founded by Guru Gobind Singh, on Vaisakhi, Sikhs visit temples and hold fairs and parades every April 13th.

Bandi Chhor Divas

This holiday celebrates the day Guru Hargobind was released from imprisonment and welcomed home to Amritsar by thousands of lights illuminating the Golden Temple in 1619. Today, the holiday still involves illuminating temples, especially the Golden Temple, which is the most well-lit, and giving candies and sweets to all in attendance every year toward the end of October or beginning of November, depending on the lunar calendar.

Maghi

On January 14th, the Sikh commemorate the Forty Immortals who gave their lives in battle against the Mughal army. Their deaths gain greater significance because they had previously abandoned Guru Gobind Singh but later redeemed themselves with bravery. The Guru declared that they had achieved liberation from death and rebirth to live on as immortals, and blessed them.

Akhand Path Tradition

Every major change in a person's life is accompanied by a tradition of **Akhand Path**, the continuous reading of the Sri Guru Granth Sahib cover to cover without stopping. It takes around two full days to complete. Usually, family members take turns reading so participants can rest. The reading must be done at a normal pace with clear speech and correctly relating the exact words on the page. Common events where such a reading occurs are typical rites of passage events , such as birth, baptism, reaching adulthood, marriage, moving to a new home, and death. **Rites of passage** are significant moments in a person's life signifying a transition from one state of being to another, often noted by a religious ceremony or traditional activity.

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