

RELIGIOUS STUDIES · KS2

Vaisakhi — Founding of the Khalsa

A Sikh festival lesson

About this lesson

Vaisakhi (sometimes spelled Baisakhi) is one of the most important Sikh festivals. It happens every April. It marks both the harvest in northern India and a hugely important event in Sikh history — the founding of the Khalsa in 1699. This lesson tells that story and explains how Sikh communities mark Vaisakhi today.

The founding of the Khalsa

In 1699, the tenth Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, called Sikhs together at Vaisakhi. He stood before a huge crowd holding a sword and asked: 'Who is willing to give their life for their faith?' The crowd was silent. Then one man, Daya Ram, stepped forward. The Guru took him into a tent. Soon afterwards, the Guru came out alone with a bloodied sword. Four more men volunteered, one after another — each taken into the tent. The crowd was sure they had been killed. Then the Guru emerged with all five men alive, dressed in special clothes — they had passed his test of devotion. These five became the original Panj Pyare (Five Beloved Ones). The Guru gave them special initiation, and the Khalsa — the community of fully committed Sikhs — was born. From that day, all Sikhs who joined the Khalsa took new names: Singh ('lion') for men, Kaur ('princess') for women — names that show all Sikhs are equal.

celebrate Vaisakhi

April celebrations

- Special services at the gurdwara, including processions
- Reading the Guru Granth Sahib (the Sikh holy book)
- Singing hymns (kirtan) and reciting prayers



- Re-enacting the Panj Pyare ceremony in some communities
- Sharing langar — the free community meal at the gurdwara
- Bhangra and gidda — traditional dancing
- Wearing new clothes, often in bright colours
- Public processions called Nagar Kirtan — singing through the streets
- Saying 'Vaisakhi Diyan Lakh Lakh Vadhaiyaan!' (best wishes for Vaisakhi)
- Many Sikhs choose Vaisakhi to be initiated into the Khalsa themselves

Why Vaisakhi matters

Vaisakhi is about courage, equality and commitment. The story of the Panj Pyare shows what it means to stand up for your beliefs. The founding of the Khalsa established something revolutionary for its time: a community where all members are equal regardless of caste, gender or background. The new names — Singh and Kaur — replaced family names that had marked out social status. This made Sikhism one of the earliest religions to teach radical equality. For modern Sikhs, Vaisakhi is a time to remember those founding values — courage, equality, service to others — and recommit to them.

Reflection

