

SIKHISM AND THE SIKH KIRPAN FACT SHEET

WHAT IS SIKHISM?

Sikhism is the fifth largest world religion, with over 25 million followers. Sikhs maintain five articles of faith to bind them to the beliefs of the religion, which include advocating for equality and justice, engaging in selfless *seva* (community service), and remembering God at all times.



WHAT ARE THE SIKH ARTICLES OF FAITH?

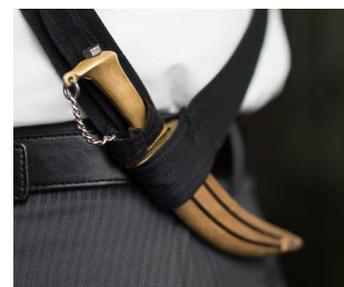
Initiated Sikhs are required to carry/maintain at all times: kesh (unshorn hair covered by a turban), kara (steel bracelet), kanga (small wooden comb), kacchera (undershorts), and a kirpan (a blade). Taken together, the five articles of faith signify an individual's commitment to the Sikh faith and to the highest ideals of love and service to humanity.

WHAT IS A KIRPAN?

- A kirpan is a mandatory Sikh article of faith. It is carried by Amritdhari (initiated) Sikhs at all times. The word “kirpan” comes from two Punjabi words: ‘Kirpa’ means an act of kindness, a favor; and ‘Aan’ means honor and self-respect.
- A kirpan is a blade that resembles a knife. Kirpans are typically sheathed and worn with a gatra (a strap) underneath clothing.
- The kirpan obligates a Sikh to the ideals of generosity, compassion and service to humanity. It acts as a reminder to its bearer of a Sikh's solemn duty to protect the weak and promote justice for all.
- The kirpan also plays an important role in Sikh ritual practice. Kirpans are featured prominently in ceremonies marking major life events, including religious initiation (*amrit sanchar*), marriage (*anand karaj*), and death (*antim sanskar*). In congregational settings, a kirpan is touched to the *parshad* (sweet pudding) to indicate the grace of the Guru and then distributed for consumption.



Kirpan (above and below)



WHAT ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF KIRPAN ACCOMMODATIONS MADE IN THE U.S.?

- In addition to the broad accommodation won by Kawal Tagore in 2012 for all Sikhs accessing federal buildings, the White House, the Hart Senate Building, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the U.S. Department of Justice, and the California State Capitol Building in Sacramento have all provided accommodations to kirpan-carrying Sikhs.
- Many large employers, including AT&T, Boeing, and the International Monetary Fund, have also provided kirpan accommodations to Sikhs.

For more information about Sikh kirpans, please contact the Sikh Coalition at legal@sikhcoalition.org or the Becket Fund at inquiries@becketfund.org. To learn more about kirpans and kirpan accommodations, please visit www.sikhcoalition.org/kirpan-factsheet.

The Sikh Coalition is a community-based organization that works towards the realization of civil and human rights for all people. The Sikh Coalition's Legal Program defends and safeguards religious freedom by providing essential legal services to victims of hate crimes, employment, discrimination, public accommodations discrimination, profiling and other forms of discrimination.

