

The Sikh 5 Ks - Introduction

The 5Ks are the five artefacts of faith worn by all baptised Sikhs. Many non-baptised Sikhs may also wear some or all of these Sikh symbols. The baptised Sikhs both male and female are required to wear the 5Ks at all times. If a Sikh is going to fly, they may wear a pendent of the 5Ks to pass through airport security.

This commitment first came into place in 1699, when *Guru Gobind Singh* announced them at the Vaisakhi gathering. The 5Ks are items of faith which display and show the wearer's devotion to God and are a constant reminder of their love for Him.

Kesh

Sikhs are required to not cut any of their hair and this is known as Kesh. They believe that hair is a gift from God, it would be wrong to cut it. By not cutting their hair, Sikhs are demonstrating that they accept God's gift. Sikh's also believe that they should work with what nature has provided, instead of working against it. This also means that Sikhs should not dye or bleach their hair, as this is both damaging to the hair and working against nature. Sikh's believe that uncut hair shows that they have adopted the simple life, and are concerned more with showing their devotion to God and their faith, than what they look like.



Male Sikhs cover their uncut hair with a turban to help keep their Kesh clean and manageable. By wearing a turban they are also reminded that their thoughts should be focusing on God and to not have an ego.

Kesh does not just apply to the hair on a Sikh's head, but to all body hair. This means that Sikhs should not, for example, shave or pluck their

eyebrows. Sometimes hospitals will tell of cases where a Sikh was very reluctant to have any body hair shaved before an operation!

Kanga

Sikhs are not allowed to cut their hair as they believe it is a gift from God. They therefore use a wooden comb known as a Kanga to maintain it. This is because they should not just accept what God has given them, but look after it too. It is important to look after the body that God has created.



The Kanga serves as a reminder to maintain the body and to keep mind in a clean and healthy state. Sikhs believe we should comb our mind with Gurbani (divine word) just as we comb our hair.

When Sikhs comb their hair they see strands of hair fall out. This is a reminder to them that nothing is permanent and therefore they should focus on their spiritual development and not become attached to material things/objects. Also, when they comb their hair they have to comb out knots. Just as we have knots in our hair, we also have knots in our lives, which we must try to keep free from trouble.

Kara

Sikhs wear a steel bracelet or bangle around their right wrist, which is known as Kara. The Kara is round and therefore has no beginning or end (it is eternal) like God, and it also shows that Sikhs have an unbreakable bond with him. In the UK wedding rings use the same symbolism to relate the love of the married couple. The Kara should only be made of steel and not from precious metals. This is because not everyone may be able to afford gold or silver and therefore by everyone wearing steel it makes them all equal, as they are in God's eyes.



The Kara is a reminder to Sikhs to do good deeds and to refrain from doing wrong. If a Sikh goes to steal something with their right arm, they will see the Kara and know that what they are doing is wrong and are reminded that God is watching them. This will prevent them from committing the crime.

The Kara may have once had a practical purpose of protecting the right arm from the sword, or Kirpan, that Sikhs carried in defence.

Kachera

All Sikhs must wear standard cotton underwear known as a Kachera. The Kachera is a natural, comfortable and dignified item which helps to protect a Sikh's modesty and reminds them to always be faithful. Kachera are normally knee length shorts and are worn by men and women. They do not come in different sizes and are adjusted to fit by drawstrings.



Kachera were very practical for soldiers, who because they were wearing their Kachera, were always ready for battle and could move freely, compared to other clothes at the time. In today's society they are now often worn as an undergarment.

By wearing the Kachera a Sikh is reminded to control their desire for the opposite sex and stay loyal to their wife or husband.

Kirpan

Sikhs are required to carry a small sword at all times known as a Kirpan. Most Sikhs wear it under their clothes. This is used

as a symbol to protect the weak and needy, as well as for self defence. It should only be drawn as a last resort in a righteous cause and never used in anger. It is legal in the UK for Sikhs to carry the Kirpan on them - even at school.



Some Kirpans have a safety protection on them, which means that the blade will not pull away from the scabbard on the first pull. This delay by having to pull again at the blade allows the Sikh to think again about their actions and if it is right to use violence. This prevents them from carrying out an action they may regret. Wearing the Kirpan gives you the power to kill someone, therefore you have to control your anger more than the other person who does not carry such a weapon.

The word Kirpan comes from Kirpa which means an act of kindness, while aan means honour and self-respect. To call it a dagger or a knife is insulting as the concept behind it is to follow the path of high principles and pure actions.