SIKHISM, founded by Guru Nanak in the 16th century in the Punjab district of what is now India and Pakistan, is based on his teaching and those of the nine Gurus who followed him. Before his birth, India was plagued by communal hatred and ravaged by loot and plunder. The voice of Guru Nanak was a voice of compassion and courage and a plea for peace and unity. Wherever he traveled, Guru Nanak spoke out against what appeared to him as empty religious rituals such as idol worship and pilgrimages as well as the caste system and the sacrifice of widows. His followers became known as the Guru’s disciples, or Sikhs.

The word “guru” is derived from the root words “gu” which means darkness or ignorance and “ru” which means light or knowledge. Each one of the ten Gurus who established Sikhism over the centuries represented an attribute: humility, obedience, equality, service, self-sacrifice, justice, mercy, purity, tranquility and royal courage. The followers of Sikhism are instructed to follow the teachings of the ten Gurus as well as the scriptures, Guru Granth Sahib, which include selected works of philosophers from diverse religious backgrounds.

Guru Nanak is often described in humanistic terms. The Institute of Sikh Studies has stated that “a Sikh is pious in his religiosity, active in social life, aware of justice, and is responsive to any injustice done to anyone. It is this supreme ideal, which the Sikh Gurus in all their humanistic zeal have given to their Sikhs.”

The Sikh religion today has a following of over 20 million people and is ranked as the fifth largest religion.

Like humanists, and unlike those of many other faiths, Sikh’s view non-Sikhs and Sikhs as equals, accepting all as human beings.
Humanism is ethical. It affirms the worth, dignity and autonomy of the individual and the right of every human being to the greatest possible freedom compatible with the rights of others.

Humanism supports democracy and human rights. (It) aims at the fullest possible development of every human being.

Humanism insists that personal liberty must be combined with social responsibility.

Humanism is a lifestance aiming at the maximum possible fulfillment through the cultivation of ethical and creative living and offers an ethical and rational means of addressing the challenges of our times.

See more at: www.americanhumanist.org/paths

But how can I be a Sikh and a Humanist?

Which of the following lifestances apply to both Sikhism and Humanism?

- Promoting a life of peace, equality, and positive actions.
- Rejecting discrimination of all kinds.
- Living according to individual and shared ethical commitments.
- Promoting liberty, justice, tolerance, and non-violence.
- Treating all races and classes equally.
- Stressing the full equality of men and women.
- Rendering service to humanity and compassion toward all.

If you answered, “All of them!” you are absolutely correct.

“Life’s fulfillment emerges from individual participation in the service of humane ideals. We aim for our fullest possible development and animate our lives with a deep sense of purpose, finding wonder and awe in the joys and beauties of human existence, its challenges and tragedies, and even in the inevitability and finality of death. Humanists rely on the rich heritage of human culture and the lifestance of humanism to provide comfort in times of want and encouragement in times of plenty.”

—Humanism and Its Aspirations, Humanist Manifesto III, 2003

Adapted from the Amsterdam Declaration 2002 of the International Humanist and Ethical Union: “Humanism is the outcome of a long tradition of free thought that has inspired many of the world’s great thinkers…”

HUMANISM is ethical. It affirms the worth, dignity and autonomy of the individual and the right of every human being to the greatest possible freedom compatible with the rights of others.

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