What is Sikhism?

Sikhism is the fifth largest world religion, and was founded in 1469 by Guru Nanak in South Asia. Its core beliefs were shaped by Guru Nanak and his nine successors during the 16th and 17th centuries. With over 25 million followers worldwide, it is one of the youngest major world religions. There are over 500,000 Sikhs living in the U.S. today.

Origins and Central Beliefs
Sikhism is a monotheistic faith, and teaches that all human beings are considered equal in the eyes of God. This concept of equality spreads across gender, race, religion, ethnicity, etc. Sikhs believe that each individual can realize the divine by practicing 3 things: devotion to God, truthful living and service to humanity. Sikhs are meant to uphold the values of honesty, compassion, generosity, humility, integrity and spirituality on a daily basis.

The present day Guru is both the Guru Granth Sahib and the Guru Khalsa Panth. The Guru Granth Sahib as a religious scripture, written entirely in poetry, is unique in that it includes the hymns of many non-Sikh saints from diverse religious traditions (Hinduism, Islam, Sufism). The Guru Khalsa Panth is the name given to the community of initiated Sikhs, or Sikhs that have made an active commitment to adopt the Sikh lifestyle.

Sikh Uniform
Sikhs who are initiated (and many who are not yet initiated) wear an external uniform to unify and bind them to the beliefs of the religion and to remind them of their commitment to the Gurus at all times. This uniform consists of the five Sikh articles of faith. They are: 1) Kesh (uncut hair), which is kept covered by a distinctive turban, 2) the Kirpan (religious sword), 3) Kara (metal bracelet), 4) Kanga (comb) and 5) Kachera (under-shorts). They all have deep religious meanings for Sikhs who wear them to honor the Sikh Gurus while being ambassadors for their faith.

In America, 99% of the people you see wearing a turban will be Sikh. Wearing a turban declares sovereignty, dedication, self-respect, and courage. All practicing Sikhs wear the turban out of love, as a mark of commitment to the faith, and so they can be easily identified as a Sikh.

Sikhs’ Presence and Contributions in America
Sikhs first immigrated to the United States in the late 1800s, and have contributed to this country’s growth and development ever since. Sikh Americans have had notable achievements as farmers, entrepreneurs, congressmen, scientists, scholars, and actors, among countless other professions. The largest federal court security contractor for the US Marshals Service is a Sikh-American owned company. The inventor of fiber optics is a Sikh-American. America’s largest peach grower is a Sikh-American. And last but not least, one of the first doctors to arrive on the scene to treat victims at ground zero, and indeed a true hero of 9/11, is a Sikh-American.