

Kesh (hair):

The keeping of uncut hair is given a great deal of importance in Sikhism. But what is so special about hair?

Historical significance: Well the history of hair goes back to the Bible. The Bible talks of a man called Sampson who obtained supernatural powers through his long hair. His hair was later cut and consequently he lost his powers.

It is also a fact that most of the world's prophets and saints including Jesus, the Sikh Gurus and Hindu prophets kept uncut hair.

Meaning: G. A. Gaskell writes, '*Hair of the head is a symbol of faith, intuition of truth, or the highest qualities of the mind.*' - *Dictionary of all Scriptures*

Sikhs believe God to be a perfect creator. It therefore follows that whatever He creates is perfect. The keeping of uncut hair is therefore, recognition of God's perfection and the submission of a Sikh to the Will of God.

Function: Most Sikhs regard hair as a gift from God. But what does this gift actually do for us? Well the functions of hair can be divided into 5 sub categories. These include an ornamental function, physical function, psychological function, Sikh specific function and a spiritual function.

Ornamental function: Nature has decorated a man with a beard and a moustache to differentiate between a male and a female. A good example from the animal kingdom is a lion with its majestic mane.

Physical function: Just like the skin, the hair helps to synthesize vitamin D from sunlight. It also helps to supply the pituitary gland (located in the head) with phosphorous. Phosphorous is an element which is used in meditation by the aforesaid gland. The hair on our body regulates body temperature and our eye lashes, nostril hairs and ear hairs help to keep out dust particles.

Psychological function: This is by far, one of the most important functions of hair. People cut their hair to look good for other people, and although everyone wants to look sexy and cool, a Sikh is encouraged to impress God and not bother so much about the opinions of everyone else. Keeping hair therefore encourages us to become less vain and more God orientated.

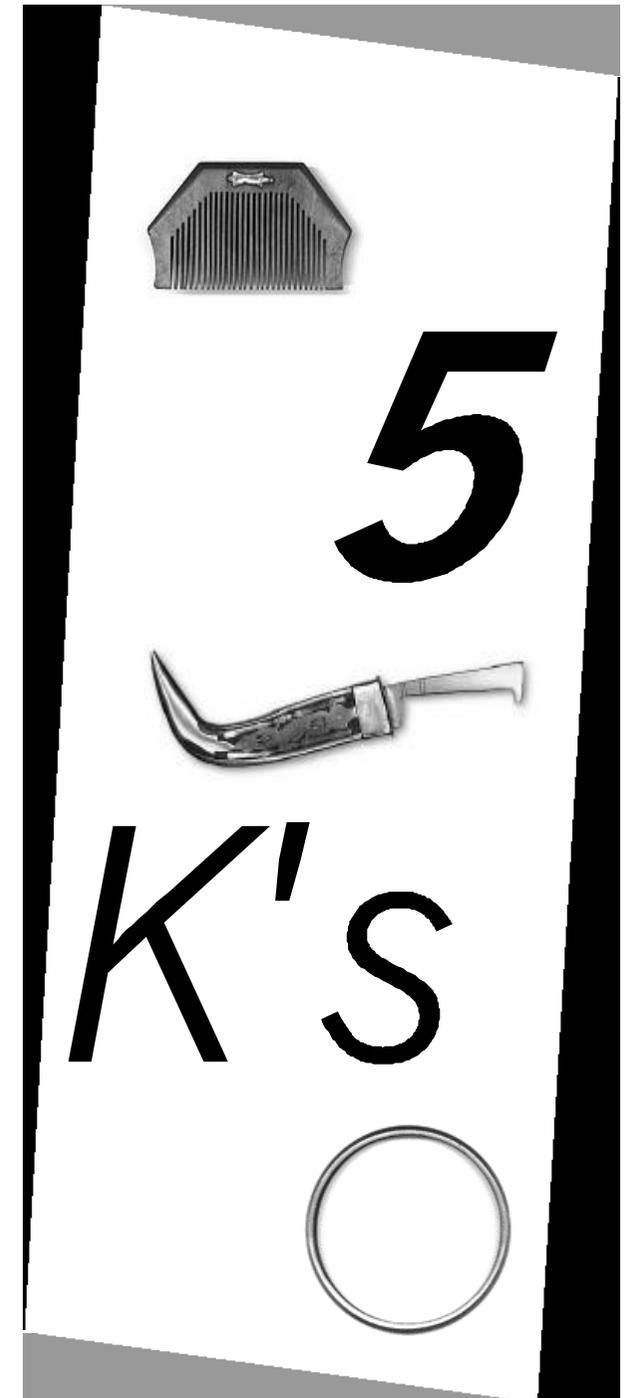
Sikh specific function: Uncut hair is a mark of Sikh identity. The 10th Sikh Guru instructed all his Sikhs to come before him with long hair and weapons. Long hair also represents sacrifice, because there have been many Sikhs like Bhai Taru Singh, who preferred to have their scalp removed instead of their hair cut.

Spiritual function: Hair enhances the ability of a human being to experience God. This can be explained by understanding the workings of electromagnets. An electromagnet consists of an iron rod with a coil of wire wrapped around it. The strength of an electromagnet can be increased by increasing the number of coils. Now in a human being, there are nine visible inlets/outlets (2 nostrils, 2 ear holes, 1 mouth, 2 eyes, 2 below the waistline). And the 10th inlet is located in the head and is invisible. It is called the Dasam Dawar. This is where we experience the reality of God and we can consider this to be the iron rod. Hairs are like coils of wire which amplify spiritual energy at the 10th inlet. A greater quantity of head hair will lead to more coils in the (Joora) knot and therefore a higher concentration of spiritual energy. Of course, it is possible to experience God without any head hair like Buddhists. However anything that helps us to experience God more easily should be welcomed. Hair is essentially a spiritual technology that makes it easier to connect with God.

Conclusion:

Wearing 5K's does not automatically make a good Sikh and in addition to this, wearing the 5 K's without understanding their purpose is silly. The 5 K's are not meaningless symbols, but instead are items which aid us in living a life revolving around God and submission to His Will.

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Introduction:

Sikhism stresses the concept of involution, which is the development of ones inner-self and submission to the will of God. The 10th Guru commanded all Sikhs to maintain 5 articles called the 5 K's. But how do the 5 K's help to achieve the development of ones inner-self? And are they relevant for this modern world? This question is examined by highlighting the historical significance, meaning and functions performed by the 5 K's.

Kara (steel ring):

This is a steel ring usually worn on the right hand by right handed Sikhs and vice versa.

Historical Significance: In the past, a big Kara helped to protect the wrist of a Sikh soldier from being cut by a sword. A big Kara could also be used as a defensive instrument.

Meaning: It is circular in shape showing that God has no beginning and no end. It is also made of steel symbolising strength. In addition to this, both men and women wear a Kara, representing equality. The circle is also associated with unity and a good example of this is the Olympic flag with its five circles representing the unity of mankind and that of the five continents.

Function: A Kara is a continual reminder of the commitment of a Sikh to God. For example if a Sikh was to try and steal something, he/she would see their Kara and not perform the sinful act. It is essentially a handcuff given to Sikhs, by God.

Other religions: Some Christians wear a band on their hand with W.W.J.D. inscribed in it, which is an acronym for 'What Would Jesus Do?'. The concept is very similar to the Kara.

Kachera (Sikh boxer shorts):

This is essentially long underwear worn by Sikh men and women.

Historical significance: The history of long underwear goes back to the Old Testament which states, *'Once they enter the gates of the inner Court, they are to wear linen vestments, They shall wear linen turbans, and linen drawers on their loins'.* – Ezekiel 44 : 18-19

Attention should to be given to the last line of the revelation. More specifically for the Sikh community, long shorts enabled Sikhs to run freely in the battlefield. It was better than the restrictive garments like the *dhoti*, worn by the other communities and therefore provided a military advantage.

Meaning: It represents the commitment of a Sikh to chastity and sexual restraint. A Sikh is not allowed to have a sexual relationship before marriage and wearing a Kachera, is therefore a continual reminder of this commitment.

Function: This minimum requirement of clothing ensures that Sikhs maintain a minimum degree of dignity and grace wherever they are.

Kangha (small comb):

This is a small comb (usually made of wood), which is kept just behind the knot of hair (joora) on the head.

Historical significance: In the past, the Sikh community have had to live in jungles due to a continual threat of extermination. The possession of a comb ensured that every Sikh had the ability to maintain their long hair in a good, clean condition. It is also a good hygiene rule for everyone to have their own comb.

Meaning: It represents the importance of discipline and cleanliness.

Function: Sikhs are instructed to comb their hair twice a day to keep it clean. A comb kept in the hair makes this very convenient. Combing the hair also massages the scalp, which relieves stress.

Kirpan (sword):

This is usually a small sword worn by Sikhs.

Historical significance: Richard Burton says, *'The history of the sword, is the history of humanity ...'*

Indeed the history and heritage of the sword goes back to Hinduism, Christianity and Islam. The Old Testament reads, *'For the Lord accepts the service of the people, He crowns His humble folk with victory ... let the high praises of God be on their lips and two-edged Sword in their hands'.* - Psalms 149, 3-6

In the past, the Sikh community along with many other Indian communities have been ruthlessly persecuted. As a practical solution to this problem, the 10th Sikh Guru said, *'If all other means of exhausting injustice have failed, then it is indeed righteous to use a sword'.*

It is this philosophy which ensured the survival of the Sikh religion and many other religions and cultures. A sword was kept by every Sikh to ensure that every Sikh had the ability to protect themselves and anyone else under oppression.

Meaning: The Sikh Gurus, have used the sword as a metaphor for God, divine knowledge, strength and justice. Guru Arjan Dev Ji wrote, *'Humility is my spiked mace, and to be the dust under everyone's feet, is my Double-Edged sword. None of the wicked can withstand this weapon. The perfect Lord has taught me this.'* - Guru Granth Sahib Ji p.628

Function: The function of the Kirpan is firstly defence. The second function of the Kirpan is to infuse the blessing of God into Parshad, which is a sweet pudding given at the end of a religious function.