



UNIVERSITY OF
CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge
Interfaith
Programme



Symposium | 16 June 2026

Guru, Imam, Avatar porous portals and esoteric pathways to the divine

Programme

Register in advance to receive information about online attendance.



Featured image: Dawn or dusk? Photograph by Dr Ankur Barua.

Guru, Imam, Avatar | Symposium overview

There will be two sessions, with a 75-minute break for lunch (provided for speakers in Cambridge). Session 2 will finish with 30 minutes of open discussion.

Venue

All venues are inside the Faculty of Divinity, on Sidgwick Site.

Refreshments will be available in the Selwyn Room (ground floor).

Core sessions will be in the Lightfoot Room (first floor).

Weather permitting, the Faculty garden will be available for use during lunchtime.

There is a choice of stairs and lift service between floors and accessible WCs on all levels.

For those joining online, please be aware that if you unmute, what you say will be audible for everyone on site in Cambridge. You will not be visible when a speaker's presentation is shown on screen, but the Zoom gallery will be shown on the main screen at other times.

Schedule

09:40 Welcome Divinity entrance

One of the organisers or a local participant will be available to greet visitors from 09:40–09:55. If you need support outside that time, please ask at reception.

10:00 Session 1 Lightfoot Room

Brief opening comments | Dr Teena Purohit, Associate Professor of Religion, Boston University

Alakh Puruṣ: Naming the Guru in an early modern Hindavi manuscript | Christine Marrewa PhD, Columbia University

The Supreme Guru as the source of authentic knowledge in Sikh lineages and traditions | Satnam Singh, independent researcher and author of *The Road to Empire* (UC Press, 2024)

Contested relics and competing authorities in the Sikh tradition | Gurinder Singh Mann, Director of the Sikh Museum Initiative

Discussant: Dr Teena Purohit

12:45 Break for lunch

14:00

Session 2

Lightfoot Room

Hidden not absent: mystical experiences of the Imam in modern Shi'i practice | Sajjad Rizvi, University of Exeter

The spiritual master at the threshold of silence: South Asian expressions of perplexity | Ankur Barua, Senior Lecturer in Hindu Studies, Faculty of Divinity, University of Cambridge

Secrecy as suspension: The Messiah in political theology | Zaki Rehman, Research Fellow, Gonville and Caius College, University of Cambridge

Discussant: George Warner, Institute for Ismaili Studies

16:00

Closing discussion

17:30

Close

About this event

This Symposium is convened by Dr Ankur Barua (Cambridge) and Dr Teena Purohit (Boston). It is supported by the Spalding Trust, the Cambridge Interfaith Research Forum (small grant scheme), and the College of the Arts and Sciences at Boston University.

Spalding Trust

The Spalding Memorial Educational Trust was founded by Mr and Mrs H N Spalding in the 1920s to promote a better understanding between the great cultures of the world by encouraging the study of the religious principles on which they are based.

For further information, visit www.spaldingtrust.org.uk.

Cambridge Interfaith Research Forum

The Cambridge Interfaith Research Forum was established in 2022, to increase opportunities for Cambridge researchers of all levels to exchange learning and collaborate around the broad topic of religious studies, including inter-religious topics. The Forum is co-convened by Professor Esra Özyürek (Academic Director of the Cambridge Interfaith Programme) and Dr Iona Hine (Cambridge Interfaith Programme Manager).

For further information about the Research Forum, its work, benefits and membership, please visit www.interfaith.cam.ac.uk/research-forum.

College of the Arts and Sciences

Boston University Arts & Sciences is a vibrant, diverse, dynamic community of 8,400+ undergraduates, 2,000+ graduate students, 800+ faculty, 200+ staff, and 100,000+ alumni within 50+ departments, programs, centers, and institutes across the humanities, natural sciences, social sciences, and mathematical and computational sciences.

Further information: www.bu.edu/cas/

Find us



The Faculty of Divinity is located on Sidgwick Site, behind the Faculty of Music, next to the History Building, and near the garden entrance to Selwyn College.

Due to works on the History Building (aka, the Stirling Building), access is limited. For an efficient route, approach via West Road and the walkway next to the Faculty of English.

If the path outside Divinity is blocked, stand and wait. The building site staff will open the path as promptly as is possible—a wait time of more than 2 minutes would be very unusual, providing that they see someone waiting.

[View an interactive map at map.cam.ac.uk.](http://map.cam.ac.uk)

[Up-to-date access routes can be viewed on the Faculty website \(divinity.cam.ac.uk\).](http://divinity.cam.ac.uk)

Attendees arriving in Cambridge in advance of this Symposium may wish to attend Satnam Singh's guest lecture on Monday 15 June, hosted by the Cambridge University Sikh Society at Trinity Hall, Cambridge. Those wishing to attend must register by 10 June. Capacity is limited.



Early Sikh engagements with Islam and classical Sufi thinkers

Intellectual historian & author Satnam Singh shares:

- How Sikh scholars in the 1600s engaged with Islamic and classical Sufi philosophy — via translation, commentary, circulation, and interpretation.
- How Sikhs participated in a wider Persianate cosmopolis of mystical and ethical thought.
- Exchanges Rumi, Imam al-Ghazali, Hafiz, Rabia al-Basri, Hallaj & others had with Sikh scholars such as Bhai Nand Lal Goya and Seva Ram.

Monday 15 June 2026, 17:00 GMT
Trinity Hall, Cambridge

Sign up by 10 June (capacity limited)



This event is organised by the Cambridge University Sikh Society & Dr Anur Sarma with support from the Cambridge Interfaith Research Forum small grant scheme.



www.ukinterfaith.cam.ac.uk/events

