



# Religion, Belief and Faith Guide



# Contents

---

Introduction	2
Key Points to Remember	3
Glossary of Terms	4
What is Religion or Belief?	5
Religious Composition	6
Population Composition	7
UK Communities	8
Faith Communities	16
Bahá'í Faith	17
Buddhism	19
Christianity	21
Hinduism	23
Islam	25
Jainism	27
Judaism	29
Sikhism	31
Zoroastrianism	33
Other Religions	35
New Religious Movements	37
Alternative Religions	39
Alternative Schools of Thought	41
References	44
Acceptance	47

# Introduction

*Anglian operates within an increasingly multi-cultural community, where our customers and workforce consist of a diverse range of religions and cultural backgrounds.*

## **Our commitment**

We are committed to providing equal access to services for all; developing our understanding and appreciation of the various minority cultures and faith communities. This handbook demonstrates our commitment to our customers and the importance of understanding their individual beliefs and needs.

We aim to demonstrate an ethical approach to our work which does not compromise or offend the religious beliefs of anyone. To do so, we need to understand the values of our customers and, where we can, demonstrate consensus between their values and ours.

Anglian acknowledges that there are many different communities and this handbook is not intended to cover every one of them. It includes communities with either a significant population, or one which is expected to grow in the near future.

In any group, you will find a wide diversity of backgrounds and beliefs. As it is difficult to cover such diversity in this document, the characteristics described will not apply to everyone from a particular ethnic, religious or cultural group. How an individual identifies themselves is their choice and they do not have to adhere to a certain set of characteristics to be part of a certain group.

We recognise the potential danger for reinforcing stereotypes and prejudices in a document like this. It is vital that when planning and delivering services; we respond to and respect the needs of the individual, asking and listening about individual needs and seeking to satisfy them sensitively and appropriately.



## Key Points to Remember

- Be sure to respect other people's beliefs and principles, treating everyone as individuals. Always refer to people by their name and not by status, faith or BAME group (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic group).
- Some languages can sound quite aggressive and abrupt when the conversation taking place is actually quite friendly! Remember this is usually not rudeness, but simply the manner of speech of that culture or language.
- When communicating with members of faith communities use plain and straightforward language. Cut down the jargon and if possible avoid it completely.
- Not every member of a cultural group is an expert of their group. There are differences in all groups. Always take time to find out.
- If in doubt ask. Do not assume anything, especially about body language or gestures. It is better to give the benefit of the doubt than assume wrongly. It is best to confirm the facts.
- In some communities, women may have less understanding of English. This may be because their traditional role in the family means that they are less exposed to English in everyday life.
- Older people may also have less understanding of English than younger people who have grown up in the UK and been educated here.
- We should not make assumptions about what people want, but recognise and respond to their needs.
- The best way to reduce the risk of misunderstandings is to talk to each other, genuinely explore and try to understand cultural contexts and preferences.

# Glossary of Terms

The following definitions are provided to help you to understand the terms used in this handbook and others you may have heard used in relation to this subject.

- Religion:** 'A specific fundamental set of beliefs and practices generally agreed upon by a number of persons or sects.'
- Belief:** 'Reliance, confidence.' 'The mental act or operation of accepting a fact or proposition as true.'
- Faith:** 'Spiritual apprehension or voluntary acceptance of divine revelation apart from absolute proof.' 'Firm and earnest belief, conviction, complete reliance, trust.'
- Race:** 'Each of the major divisions of humanity having distinct physical characteristics.' 'A group of people sharing the same culture, history, language etc., an ethnic group.'
- Ethnicity:** 'The fact or state of belonging to a social group that has a common national or cultural tradition.' 'Denoting origin by birth or descent rather than present nationality.'
- Culture:** 'The attitudes and behaviour characteristic of a particular social group.' 'The customs, arts, social institutions and achievements of a particular nation, people or other social group.'

*Source: Oxford English Dictionary.*

- Institutional racism:** 'The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people.'

*Source: The Macpherson Report (1999).*

## Black, Asian and Minority

- Ethnic (BAME):** 'Refers to those in Mixed, Asian or Asian British, Black or Black British, Chinese and Other ethnic groups.'

*Source: London Development Agency.*



# What is Religion or Belief?

Religions deal with the many basic questions: how life began, and what happens to us when we die?

From the beginning, religions have attempted to explain these questions and offer people the opportunity to experience that invisible presence or spirit, sometimes as a sense deep within themselves. Each religion has developed its own ideas, beliefs and rituals on these matters. Though any given religion will normally claim to have been inspired by God, it is important to remember that all religions began and developed in particular historical, geographical and cultural situations that have influenced and moulded them.

Religion links together individuals and societies who share the same general beliefs, values, codes of behaviour, practices and traditions. Religion links the present day with the customs, stories, folk beliefs and practices of the past.

Some cultures have no word for religion. To them, it is not a separate compartment in their lives. It is a way of understanding and of living life itself.

Not all beliefs about these basic questions involve religion. For example, atheists or humanists are not religious and deal with the same basic questions by finding ultimate importance in the natural world, and human beings in particular, rather than in God or Gods.

## Aspects of Religion

Religions generally comprise the following aspects:

- Faith/Experience** what people personally feel, their awe and reverence, a sense of belonging and commitment to something greater than the self;
- Creed/Doctrine** the system of beliefs and ideas held by a religion about God, other divinities, creation and salvation;
- Code/Ethics** the way people behave because of their beliefs, including their taboos, and ideas of sin and holiness;
- Rituals** all that is involved in practising the beliefs, e.g. forms of worship and other gatherings of the followers, holy songs, prayer and other practices, ceremonies, festivals, and customs relating to food and manner of dress;
- Community** the social aspect of a religion, e.g. the worshippers at a particular church or temple, the wider denomination or sect, monks, nuns and priests.

# Religious Composition

Data from the 2001 Census showed that just over three-quarters of the UK population reported having a religion. More than seven out of ten people said that their religion was Christian.

After Christianity, Islam was the most common faith with nearly 3 per cent describing their religion as Muslim (1.6 million).

The next largest religious groups were Hindus (559,000), followed by Sikhs (336,000), Jews (267,000), Buddhists (152,000), and people from other religions (179,000).

These figures are summarised as percentages below:

Christian	71.6%
Buddhist	0.3%
Hindu	1.0%
Jewish	0.5%
Muslim	2.7%
Sikh	0.6%
Other religion	1.3%
No religion	15.5%
Not stated	7.3%



# Population Composition

The 2001 Census showed that about 9% of the UK population belong to BAME groups as compared to 5.5% in the 1991 Census. This shows that Britain's BAME population increased by about two thirds between 1991 and 2001. It is expected that this figure has increased since 2001 with the continued rise in migration.

London has the highest proportion of BAME's; just under 50%. The great majority of this increase was from births - over half the total BAME population in 1991 was born in the UK. The great majority of under 16 were born in the UK and increasingly children born into BAME communities have parents who were themselves born in this country.

<b>Breakdown for England &amp; Wales</b>	
Those who say they are white	
White British	87.5%
White Irish	1.2%
White Other	2.6%
Those who say they are Asian	
Indian	2%
Pakistani	1.4%
Bangladeshi	0.5%
Other Asian	0.5%
Those who say they are black	
Caribbean	1.1%
African	0.9%
Other black	0.2%
Those who say they are mixed race	
White/Black Caribbean	0.5%
White Asian	0.4%
Other mixed	0.3%
Other Ethnicities	
Chinese	0.4%
Other ethnic groups	0.5%



## UK Communities

The following table outlines some of the minority communities within the UK, their majority religion, predominant language, and how the community is referred to.

Place of Origin	Majority Religion	First Language(s)	Known As
Bangladesh	Muslim	Bengali	Bangladeshis
Bosnia	Muslim, Christian	Serbo-Croat	Bosnians/Serbs
Ethiopia	Ethiopian Orthodox Church Muslim	Amharic English	Ethiopians
Greece/Cyprus	Greek Orthodox Christians	Modern Greek	Greek/Cypriot
Gujarat	Hindus Muslims	Gujarati	Gujaratis
Hong Kong	Buddhism Confucianism Taoism Roman Catholic	Cantonese Hakka	Chinese
India	Hindus & Sikhs Muslims Christians	Gujarati Hindi Punjabi Bengali Tamil	Gujarati Hindu Indian Muslim Punjabi Sikh
Pakistan	Muslim	Urdu Punjabi Pashto	Pakistanis
Poland	Roman Catholic Jews	Polish	Polish
Punjab State (India)	Sikhs Hindus Muslims	Punjabi	Sikh Punjabi Hindu Punjabi
Punjab (Pakistan)	Muslims	Punjabi Urdu	Muslim Pakistani
Somalia	Muslims	Somali Arabic & English	Somalis
Turkey/Cyprus	Muslim	Turkish Kurdish & Arabic	Turkish / Cypriot Kurdish
Vietnam	Buddhist	Vietnamese	Vietnamese
West Indies	Anglican Roman Catholic Rastafarianism	English (Some European languages also)	Afro Caribbeans



## **Afro-Caribbean Communities**

African-Caribbean migration started in the 1950s and preceded that of people of Asian origin. When there were family ties in the West Indies, men often migrated first. The highest concentration of African-Caribbeans is in London and the West Midlands.

The great majority of the population of the Caribbean islands are the descendants of people brought from Africa. Today these African-descended peoples of the Caribbean formerly referred to as West Indians, prefer to be called Afro-Caribbeans. People accept being identified as West Indian but like to be identified with their country of origin, for example Jamaicans.

The languages of the original Amerind people have long since vanished, and as the slaves were forced to speak the language of their rulers so the original African tribal languages have also passed out of use. Thus the lingua franca in each island is the language of the European power which ruled longest with Spanish, French and English being the most common languages in use.

In the islands with a British background there has grown up a marked difference between the kind of English spoken by the black and the whites and this patois has many dialects and is now a language in its own right.

Christianity is the main religion of the Caribbean. However, although Afro-Caribbean people adopted the religion of the colonial powers, they gradually introduced many features of their own, such as religious parades and festivals that evolved into masquerade and carnival, and uninhibited singing and dancing. Roman Catholicism predominated in territories formerly under the influence of the Spanish or French, and Protestantism prevailed elsewhere.

According to some estimates there are more churches per square mile in Jamaica than anywhere else indicating the importance of religion in the island. In Trinidad the Roman Catholics, Protestants, Hindus and Muslims roughly balance each other in number. There are also many "folk" religions in the Caribbean which add a colourful dimension to religious life. Old African practices such as voodoo and obeah are seen as cults or witchcrafts. Hindu and Islamic faiths are practised mainly by the East Indians of Trinidad.

## **African Communities**

This category covers a diverse continent of over 40 countries. In each country, there are different languages, cultures and religions. It is therefore impossible to summarise such vast diversity. The majority of Africans in the UK come from West Africa with Nigeria as the largest single group. The migration is as a result of colonial links with Britain with consequent pre-independence migration for higher education, which continued post independence. About 40% of African immigrants migrated in the 1980s.

Most Africans migrated to the UK as students or undergraduates; this is especially true of Nigerians and Ghanaians. The majority of the Somali group migrated in the 1980s as political refugees and seamen linking with families. In recent years there has been the advent of political refugees amongst this group.

Africans are one of the fastest growing groups among the ethnic minority population. This group has the highest post 'A' Level qualification of any ethnic group in the UK.

Two main religions represented by African communities are Christianity and Islam. Many of the African Christians belong to the evangelical tradition and have active organisations in the UK.

## Chinese Communities

The Chinese population grew from the 1960s onwards with the migration of ethnic Chinese from Singapore, Malaysia and Hong Kong. The main areas of settlement are in Liverpool, London, Cardiff, Manchester, Leeds, Southampton, Birmingham and Glasgow. Although with expanding commercial interests, Chinese people have established themselves in every town.

The family is important and it is the duty of each member to contribute towards maintaining the stability and well-being of it. The parents' roles and functions are well defined: the father is the breadwinner and the mother is in charge of the domestic chores.

However, both parents act as the disciplinarian and the decision-maker in the family. Also, if the parents run a business of their own, each contributes to establishing and running the business on equal terms. Older relatives are respected and their work is highly regarded. It is usual for them to be living with their son's family, who care for and support them.

Children are required to help and support the family. This is both as a duty and to show respect for their parents. Sons are important to the family as they can continue the line of business and are a sign of prosperity and luck to the family. The parents concerns over their daughters are that they should be married to a respectable and financially independent husband.

Another important concern for parents is that their children should be protected from Western behaviour, or else there is the possibility that the family would lose face within the Chinese community, and particularly among their relatives.

Mandarin is the official language of China but it has many dialects, including Wu, Xiang, Hakka and Cantonese. Although some recent migrants may speak Mandarin, most will be Cantonese speakers.

Chinese people are likely to be influenced by a variety of beliefs primarily, Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Islam and Taoism. Modern Chinese religion combines Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism.

Chinese society involves little emotional display or physical contact. Expressions of loyalty or affection are likely to be practical, e.g. gifts. Gifts are also given when visiting socially. Respect for elders is widely shown, e.g. a daughter would address her mother's friends as aunt or uncle instead of using their names.



## Communities from the Indian Sub-Continent

The modern countries of the Indian Sub-Continent are Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka (Ceylon). They cover a very large area (India alone is about the size of Europe - and whilst there are many similarities of lifestyle, culture, diet and so on, there are also great differences). This means that there are dangers in generalising about any cultural aspect of these societies.

The chief places of origin of Asian immigrants are shown below, namely, Kashmir in Pakistan, Punjab in India and Pakistan, Gujarat in India and Sylhet in Bangladesh. It should be noted that these are predominantly rural and agricultural areas and this aspect very much reflects in the outlook, aspirations and values of these communities.

Pakistan's population is estimated to be around 165 million. The bulk of this population still lives in the rural areas, with an estimated 28.3% in the towns. Pakistanis are predominantly Muslim and their national language is Urdu.

The region known as Punjab was divided between India and Pakistan at Partition, and each country has a state or province of that name. Over half of the Indians and Pakistanis who came to Britain are Punjabis, and though religious adherence is a divisive factor, a similar underlying social structure is shared by Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus.

India is the seventh largest country in the world with over 1 billion people. 80% of the Indian population is Hindu, 13% is Muslim and the other 7% include Sikhs, Christians, Buddhists, Jains, Jews and Parsees. It presents even greater extremes of nature and differences in life styles than Europe.

Fifteen major languages and 544 dialects are spoken throughout the country, and the most commonly used are Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi and Gujarati. English is widely spoken, and is still often the language of government. Since independence the Indian government has been making efforts to promote Hindi as the national language.

The Gujarat region of India, and its people, the Gujaratis, deserve special attention as the majority of the Asian population of East Midlands is originally from Gujarat, although many migrated to East Africa before coming to Britain.

The Gujaratis are divided into two main religious groups - Hindus and Muslims. Gujaratis tend to be enterprising and inclined towards self-employment. Many Gujaratis have the surname Patel, which means landowner, and originally the Patels were farmers.

Unlike India and Pakistan with their mixed populations, the population of Bangladesh is 98% Bengali in origin, and Bengali is the only major language. About 85% of the population is Muslim, but there are also Hindus, Buddhists and Christians. Bangladesh differs little from the Indian state of Bengal, except in religion, with a common language, history, culture and outlook on life. Because of this, most of the general information given about the Indian Sub-Continent applies equally to Bangladesh.

Almost all the migrants from Bangladesh into UK come from Sylhet. Sylhet is a district and the reasons for such localised migration seem to be the vulnerability of the region to flooding as well as historical connection with British shipping.

Most Punjabi women, Muslim, Sikh or Hindu, wear Shalwar Kamees. Shalwar is the baggy trousers with narrowed ankles tied around the waist using a waist lace. Kamees is the long top or shirt. Shalwar Kamees is also the everyday dress for Pakistani men. However, it is more common among men from the Indian sub-continent to wear western clothing than for women. Girls often wear traditional clothes as casual clothing at home and western clothing outside.

Asian women also wear what is known as the Dupatta or Chunni, which is two and a half yards of material draped around the top half of the body in a variety of ways, sometimes covering the head and sometimes not. For Muslim women covering the head is not only a cultural but also a religious requirement. In India and Bangladesh the sari (a piece of cloth about six yards in length worn with a short blouse and petticoat) is the most common form of dress for women, and is worn in many different ways depending on the region.

Jewellery in the Indian Sub-Continent plays a very important part in women's lives. Jewellery is more than a means of adornment. It is an asset, even something sacred, particularly for Hindus, and quite often sentimental as it is passed from generation to generation.

In Asian society greetings tend to be very elaborate compared with European customs. Men always shake hands with one another and may embrace, as do women. Often as a gesture of friendship the hand is retained for some time after a handshake. However, it is not usual for a male to greet women with a handshake, kiss or an embrace, as often occurs in the west, and to do so may cause offence. Indeed, any intimate display of affection between men and women in public is rare.

When Indians greet each other they do it with folded palms raised to the level of the chin, saying "namaste" which stands for good morning, good afternoon, good evening etc. Muslims say "Assalamu alaikum" which means "peace be with you". The reply to this greeting is "wa alaikum assalam" which translated is "peace be with you too".

There is a joint-family system within the Asian community, which institutionalises life for them. A joint-family has married brothers and their families, and also, unmarried brothers and sisters. All live under the guidance of the eldest male member, which means either the father or grandfather.

When the male child reaches adulthood, he does not leave the family and become independent, but maintains his allegiance and consideration to the joint-family.

The father and mother both contribute significantly within the family, although there are clear designated roles and functions for them: the father is the head, breadwinner, strict teacher and main decision-maker; the mother takes care of the domestic duties and looks after the children.



The role of Asian women has developed. They have been allowed to attend further education and have a wage-earning role in the family. Different elements are brought together to establish and reinforce an enduring and secure family system.

Religion plays an important part in Asian people's lives. The rules of religion help to sustain customs and habits of everyday life. Thus, religion has a spiritual and personal significance. It establishes the culture and traditions, within which it sustained and established the laws which it monitors.

**Staff should be aware of the following traditions, which generally apply to all Asian cultures:**

- Avoid eye to eye contact while speaking because it is regarded as a sign of disrespect.
- Try to maintain a formal approach during the conversation or consultation.
- While dealing with a couple, maintain conversation with the male member.
- Only or continue speaking to whoever takes the lead in the discussion.
- Avoid calling the wife a partner.
- Avoid visiting on festival days.
- Do not be condescending as this can be offensive.
- The fact that the resident/client is Asian or Indian should not affect the way you speak to them while speaking or dealing with the customer, do not ask, for example, 'What is your Christian name', because they may not be a Christian. Instead ask for a forename, or an initial or first name.
- Marriages are normally arranged by parents and it is a bond of relationship between two families. They believe this system has many advantages as it is set to be a stable relationship with high expectations. The breakdown of such a marriage may cause serious embarrassment and other consequences to both families.
- Shaking hands, hug or embrace between the sexes is avoided when meeting members of public but very common within the same sex.

### **Turkish/Turkish Cypriot/Kurdish Communities**

The migration of Turkish and Turkish Cypriot people to Britain started after the Second World War, reaching its peak in 1960 and 1961. They mostly settled in London, though there are small settlements in Birmingham and Manchester.

In recent times, many of the Kurdish people who migrated from Turkey are often confused with the Turkish people. There is much diversity within the Kurdish community, with different dialects and countries of origin (Turkey, Iran, Iraq).

South-East Turkey is inhabited by ethnic Kurds, who have their own language and traditional Islamic culture.

The Kurdish community are often grouped together with the Turkish people. In fact, the Kurdish people have a slightly different culture to the Turkish people and have a distinct identity of their own. The refugee status attached to the Kurdish people in Britain means their situation and rights are different from those of the Turkish speakers from Cyprus. Kurdish refugees generally feel their community is discriminated against, as they face hostility when they tell authorities they are political refugees.

### Staff should be aware of the following traditions:

- Don't point your finger directly towards a Turkish person.
- Turkish people say 'yes' by nodding the head forward and down.
- When Turkish people seem to be giving you an arch look, they are only saying 'no.' They may also make the sound 'tsk', which also means 'no'.
- To say 'no', nod your head up and back, lifting your eyebrows at the same time, or just raise your eyebrows.
- Shaking your head from side to side doesn't mean 'no' to a Turkish person; it means 'I don't know'.
- Like Greek people, when Turkish people define themselves as Muslim, they are saying more about what they see as contributing to their main identity than the extent of the religious faith. Although they are Muslims, they are not as conservative as those from other Muslim countries.

### Somali Communities

There are Somali communities in Liverpool, Cardiff, Teesside, Sheffield, Manchester and London. In areas such as Liverpool and London, the Somali community is long-established. Somali men make up most of the community.

Many of the older men were seamen for the British Merchant Navy in World War I, while others arrived on ships crossing waters teeming with U-boats in 1939-45. They stayed in Britain during the full employment years of the 1950s and 1960s, establishing themselves in close-knit communities, often sending money to their families while saving up for the long trip back to Somalia.

Since 1988, the civil war in Somalia has seen Somalis in Britain bringing their families and friends away from the fighting. Many of the refugees are trained doctors, engineers and civil servants.

### The main issues affecting the Somali refugees are:

- Housing: they are more likely to be housed in the worst council estates, which are in bad condition and overcrowded.
- Language difficulties: their inability to communicate properly in English can cause major problems, for example: isolation and poor take-up of statutory services.
- Psychological and emotional strain caused by separation from family members.



- Society's ignorance of their well-being and events in Somalia, no-one to counsel and treat them on the psychological effects of war.
- Trauma on them and their children, caused by experience of war.
- Diseases from refugee camps and war-inflicted wounds.

A few self-help Somali refugee organisations and community groups have been established since 1990, with many run by volunteers and students. This has increased the understanding of refugee problems. However, because of an insufficient office base, Somali refugees have sometimes been unable to gain access to these groups for advice, information and interpreting services.

### **Vietnamese Communities**

The Vietnamese families who came to the UK as refugees are mostly from North Vietnam and are Chinese in origin. Their background is roughly 80% Buddhist, and 20% Catholic, but after 30 years of communist domination a whole generation has missed out on the traditional formation of religious practices and devotion.

The elderly may wish to hold on to their traditional practices and may not speak English; they greet with a slight bow rather than a handshake. The Vietnamese are not given to much touching; hugging and kissing is reserved for the privacy of families.

Vietnamese people eat a lot of fresh fruits and salads. Some do not include dairy products in their meals. They prefer noodles and rice to potatoes. Those who are Catholics may refuse to eat meat on Fridays. The Catholic Vietnamese normally observe Lenten and Good Friday fasts. It is usual to remove the shoes on entering the home.

### **Eastern European Communities**

People from Eastern Europe have come and settled in UK from a whole range of countries and in different periods. Large numbers of Polish, Armenian and Ukrainian came during and after the wars. Since Eastern Europe was very much closed during the last few decades of communist rule there was no immigration as such from this part during the post war general immigration phase.

However, since the dismantling of the communist rule in 1989 and opening of Eastern Europe many people have arrived from various countries including Romania and Russia. The crisis in the Balkan countries during the early 1990's led to refugees coming from the former Yugoslavia and Albania. This has accelerated with the extension of the European Union.

Religiously speaking the majority of people from Eastern Europe are Catholic or Orthodox Christians, with the exception of the communities from Bosnia, Kosovo and Albania who tend to be Muslims.



# Faith Communities

Faith communities consist of groupings of people belonging to the major world religions and of those who follow other forms of religious expression. In the UK, according to Interfaith Network, there are communities of people following nine of the world religious traditions: Bahá'ís, Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Jains, Jews, Muslims, Sikhs and Zoroastrians. The following sections provide a brief overview of these nine faith traditions, covering such information as key beliefs, forms of prayer and worship, diet and social customs.

It is not possible to cover the denominational or sectarian differences within each religious tradition within such brief introductions and therefore a health warning is warranted. The guide offers helpful generalisations provided assumptions are not made in all cases.

Further information and actual contact details for faith communities can be found in the directory *Religions in the UK*. The directory is published by the Multi-Faith Centre at the University of Derby and contains contact details for each of the nine main religions in the UK plus Inter-Faith organisations. For further information refer to [www.multifaithcentre.org](http://www.multifaithcentre.org).



# Bahá'í Faith

## Key Beliefs

The Bahá'í Faith was founded by Husayn Ali, known to Bahá'ís as Bahá'u'lláh (Glory of God), in Persia in 1844. It was declared as a new religion, different to Shia Islam practised in Iran. Key Bahá'í beliefs are found in various collections of the talks which Abdu'l-Bahá gave.

### These include:

- One god.
- Unity of Mankind.
- Independent investigation of truth.
- The common foundation of all religions.
- The essential harmony of science and religion.
- Equality of opportunity for men and women.
- Elimination of prejudice of all kinds.
- Universal compulsory education.
- A universal auxiliary language.
- Abolition of extremities of poverty and wealth through international legislation.
- The establishment of universal peace by a world government which will have international courts and military; and
- The concept of progressive revelation.

According to Bahá'í belief, the basic purpose of human life is to know, understand and worship God. Bahá'ís believe that everyone has a separate rational soul which, though related to the physical existence, persists after death. This world is seen as the place for developing this soul.

Unity is a central theme of Bahá'í faith. Bahá'ís believe that there has only ever been one religion and one God though people have called him by different names. Moses, Krishna, Zoroaster, Jesus and Muhammad are all seen as messengers of God. All these messengers are also believed to have promised the coming of a great messenger who would bring peace to the world. Bahá'ís believe that Bahá'u'lláh was that messenger.

A person joins the Bahá'í faith by first becoming a member of the Bahá'í local assembly. The assembly accepts them if it is satisfied that they have truly accepted the tenets of the Bahá'í faith.



### Nine Pointed Star

The number nine is known as 'the number of Bah'. This first part of the title of the founder of the Bahá'í faith adds up to nine in Abjad notation.

## Key Practices

- **Prayer & Worship:** There are three obligatory daily prayers, of which one must be said. Bahá'ís turn in the direction of Bahji in Israel, which is the burial place of Bahá'u'lláh. Bahá'ís are required to perform ritual washing before the obligatory prayer. If water is not available or if there is some reason why water cannot be applied to the hands and the face, the believer may refrain from performing the ablutions provided the verse "In the name of God, the Most Pure, the Most Pure" is recited five times.

There are no set worship services or any priests and there are only 7 purpose built Houses of Worship across the world. Most Bahá'í meetings take place in homes. These consist of discussion and prayers, known as Firesides.

Access to a prayer room will be sufficient to meet the needs of a Bahá'í wishing to pray during their working hours.

- **Fasting:** The Bahá'í month of Alá, 2nd - 21st March, is the fasting period. Bahá'ís abstain from food and drink from sunrise to sunset during this period.
- **Diet:** There are no specific dietary laws although it is recommended to be vegetarians. Alcohol is strictly prohibited, as are any addictive drugs. Smoking is discouraged.
- **Greetings & Etiquette:** The style of greeting would be whatever is considered normal in a given culture. Some Bahá'ís might shake hands, others might bow, others might hug close friends. Often Bahá'ís will greet each other by saying "Allah-u-Abha".
- **Social Customs:** The Bahá'í religion teaches equality for men and women. The family is seen as very important. Decision making within the family is shared by a process of consensus, called "consultation".
- **Work:** Bahá'ís consider that material benefits and endeavours cannot be ends in themselves. They call for a new work ethic in which work, as well as providing for humanity's basic needs in food, health care and housing, also equips people and institutions to develop a new social order. Human beings need to express their own latent capacities through work designed to meet their needs and those of others. Provided work is consciously undertaken in a spirit of service to humanity, it is seen as a form of prayer or means of worshipping God.

Bahá'ís promote social and economic development. The European Bahá'í Business Forum (EBBF) is a network of people in business in fifty countries which exists to promote ethical values, personal virtues and moral leadership in businesses and organisations of social change.

There are about 6,000 Bahá'í followers in the UK. The Bahá'í community is organised on the basis of Spiritual Assemblies. Each Spiritual Assembly, whether local or national, has nine members and elects officers to carry out its work.



# Buddhism

## Key Beliefs

This is the way of life for the people who follow the teachings of Buddha. He is worshipped not as a god, but as the Founder of a Way of Life. Buddha is believed to have found the middle way between luxuries and asceticism, called the Eightfold Path to enlightenment.

This eightfold path comprises of:

- Right Understanding.
- Right Aspiration.
- Right Speech.
- Right Action.
- Right Livelihood.
- Right Effort.
- Right Mindfulness.
- Right Concentration.



**Wheel of Law and Truth**  
The eight spoked wheel symbolises the eight-fold path propounded by the Buddha.

The object of following the Eightfold Path is to depart from worldly thinking, which is unwholesome (aksala) and to travel the spiritual road to wholesome thinking and action (kusala). When this happens, craving will cease and the person achieves freedom from the force (karma) that causes rebirth (nirvana).

Rebirth happens because craving and desire fuels us to be reborn again and again. There are also three principles known as the three jewels:

- The Buddha - the historical Buddha and the spiritual ideal of enlightenment
- The Dharma - the teachings and practices which lead to human enlightenment
- The Sangha - the spiritual community of the people who are practising the Dharma

Buddhists believe in reincarnation, and that their actions in this life will affect the quality of the next, they therefore accept all responsibilities for their actions.

There is no God to be worshipped, but the act of worship is a way of acknowledging the human ideal.

## Key Practices

- **Prayer & Worship:** Buddhists will worship wherever they can, although they do meet in temples called Viharas, which is often a room in a large house. The room has only a carpet and cushions, and is otherwise bare. Buddhists can worship anywhere, but it is preferable to provide peace and quiet for meditation and chanting. Private family meditations are commonly undertaken on a daily basis.
- **Fasting:** On days of fasting, Buddhists do not eat before 12 noon. Local Buddhists are unlikely to practise fasting on a regular basis. In the west, fasting is practised mostly by monks and nuns.
- **Diet:** Many Buddhists tend to be vegetarians due to the emphasis on avoiding intentional killing of a living being. There are different practices with regard to the eating of meat. For example, whilst many Tibetan Buddhists eat meat, Chinese Zen is strictly vegetarian and in Japanese Zen and Thervada Buddhism, monks and nuns are allowed to eat meat if to the best of their knowledge the animal has not been specifically killed for them. Meat is never served in monasteries. In Chinese forms of Buddhism garlic and onions are also avoided as they are thought to create heat in the body, thus making meditation more difficult.
- **Greetings & Etiquette:** In Buddhist countries the normal form of greeting is to place the hands together in a prayerful manner and bow. Buddhists in Western countries normally adopt the usual styles of greeting found there, like shaking hands. There are no religious requirements for particular forms of everyday dress for lay Buddhists but general etiquette is to dress discretely, modestly and unobtrusively.
- **Social Customs:** Many Buddhists do not like shaking hands.
- **Work:** Buddhists are encouraged to work hard and to be industrious but to earn money through righteous means (right livelihood). This means that no ethical or religious principles should be violated through the work done and the work should benefit both the individual and society.

Right Livelihood is the fifth aspect of the Eightfold Path and has two main elements. The first is a negative aspect, deriving from the principles of non-violence, of not engaging in work involving weapons, meat, intoxicants (e.g. alcohol), poisons (e.g. drugs) or trade in living beings (animals or human beings). The second is a positive aspect, deriving from principles of simplicity, of using technologies that are in harmony with the natural environment and its resources to produce no more than an adequate range of material goods.

The Friends of the Western Buddhist Order work with the Triodos Bank to finance Right Livelihood businesses which provide employment in accordance with Buddhist principles.

Buddhist organisations can be contacted through Viharas, where monks live; centres with residential communities and voluntary groups which normally meet in the homes of members or private/public premises hired or obtained free of charge.



# Christianity

## Key Beliefs

Christianity begins with the person of Jesus Christ who Christians believe to be both divine and human. Christians understand God as one but revealed in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God is thought to have been revealed in Jesus Christ's human life, death and resurrection.

Christians believe that human beings are not alone in the universe but are loved and rescued by the one God revealed in Jesus Christ.

Rescue is needed because although God is thought to have created a world characterised by peace and unity, human beings and the world have gone fundamentally wrong. Without God's intervention, Christians believe human beings are locked into a state of self-centredness called sin. Sin in people's lives can be removed by the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus when he died on the cross on Good Friday. God's spirit, the Holy Spirit, is active in the lives of Christians.

The Christian Scriptures, the Bible, teach that the fruits of the Holy Spirit's work in their lives are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility and self-control.

Christians believe that sin and God's rescue impact on every aspect of human life and the world in which humans live. As a result, Christians work actively, as individuals and through the Christian Church, to demonstrate social concern both by serving those who are disadvantaged and by addressing social structures that cause disadvantage and environmental damage. The Church is the community of Christian believers with a mission to spread the message of Jesus Christ by learning to follow his example.

## Key Practices

- **Prayer & Worship:** Sunday is the usual day for Christian worship. Many Roman Catholics attend Vigil Sunday Mass on Saturday evening. Sabbatarian or Seventh Day Churches believe that the commandment to the Jews to keep the seventh day (Saturday) holy is still binding on Christians after the coming of Jesus. Icons (sacred pictures of Christ, his Mother and the Saints) are extremely important to Orthodox Christians, and many will insist on having some near them. They will sign themselves with the Cross many times in prayer.
- **Fasting:** During Lent, the 40 days of preparation for Easter, many people choose to observe some kind of fasting. In the Roman Catholic Church, Ash Wednesday and Good Friday are days when meat is avoided and only one main meal and two lighter snacks are taken. Some Christians are strict with their diet and do not eat meat on Fridays.



### Cross

Symbolises the belief that the execution of Jesus was the ultimate expression of God's love for humanity.

Fasting is a recognised part of an Orthodox Christian's life. Wednesday and Friday each week, and a long period before Easter and Christmas are fasts, when no meat, fish or milk products or alcohol is taken, though there are many days when the fast is relaxed. However, many are not strict about keeping the fasts, except at particular times. Some Christians also fast at other, individually chosen times.

- **Diet:** There are no universally agreed dietary regulations. Some, but by no means all, will not drink alcohol.
- **Greetings & Etiquette:** Though some sects may issue guidelines, Christians are not enjoined to dress in a particular way. It is traditional for men to remove headgear when entering Church and in some places for women to cover their head with a hat, scarf or veil.
- **Social Customs:** Some Christians may have strong feelings about the significance of marriage, and may, for example, not feel able to live together as a couple before marriage.
- **Work:** Christians believe that God is a worker who works voluntarily, taking pleasure in his work. Similarly, human beings are thought to have been created for pleasurable and satisfying work. However, limits are set on the amount of time that humans should work, one day in seven should provide a rest from work.

### Church Groupings

- **Catholic:** The Catholic Church has its roots in the Western part of the Old Roman Empire. It understands itself as one united universal Church. Catholics are in communion with the Pope in Rome.
- **Orthodox:** These are Churches with their roots in the Eastern part of the Old Roman Empire. They include Greek, Russian, Serbian and Orthodox Churches and are in communion with the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople.
- **Protestant:** Protestant Churches have developed from the sixteenth century Reformation in the West and include: Baptist, Brethren, Congregationalist, Lutheran, Methodist, Moravian, Presbyterian or Reformed, Quakers and Salvationist Churches. Churches of the Anglican tradition see themselves as both Protestant and Catholic.
- **Pentecostal:** The Pentecostal tradition emerged from the broader Protestant tradition and includes the Apostolic Church, Assemblies of God and many Black-Majority Churches.



# Hinduism

## Key Beliefs

Hinduism is the name given to the religion that originated in India. The word Hindu came about as a mispronunciation of the name of an ancient river in India called 'Sindhu'. Hinduism is often misunderstood to be a polytheist religion. (i.e. believing in many almighty Gods and Goddesses).

Hinduism is in fact a 'pluralistic' religion that suggests that God can be thought of and approached in a variety of ways. This teaching is central to Hinduism. It emphasises that, as we are all different, the way we will think of and approach the ultimate reality (God) will necessarily be different.

## Dharma

This is the name given to religious pursuits. It can mean 'righteous living'. Sometimes it is compared to the 'cohesive force that holds society and civilisation together'. The deeper meaning of the word Dharma is to 'Search for the innermost nature of everything - external and internal'.

## Concept of God

Hinduism being a pluralistic religion offers a vast variety of concepts pertaining to God. Broadly these can be divided into three categories: God with form and quality; God without form; and God beyond the form and the formless. Any approach is as good as any other and the choice depends on the individual.

## The Sanctity of life

This principle of non-violence, called Ahimsa, is central in Hindu teachings. It teaches respect for living things extending into the animal and plant kingdoms.

Hinduism claims many founders. They are called 'Rishis', which literally means one who has seen God. Hinduism claims that the message of spirituality is refreshed in all times and in all countries again and again by the 'Rishis'. Hinduism suggests that as spirituality is an empirical subject, the proponents of spirituality cannot be restricted to ancient times. It puts forward the idea that just as prophets of the past experienced God and offered spiritual teachings to mankind, prophets continue to be born in all ages and in all nations. They continue to refresh the message of spirituality. Many Hindu families will show affinity to some such contemporary figure.

There is a vast range of scriptures. Some, like the Vedas, relate the spiritual experiences of the Rishis and are considered to have a higher authority. Some, like the mythological stories, are called the Puranas and are considered to be secondary. The Bhagavad Gita is considered by most Hindus to be the most authoritative scripture in their religion. This text is a spiritual dialogue given by Krishna and explains the philosophy of Hinduism and how it can be made practical and adopted in daily life.



### Om (Aum)

The three phonetic letters (AUM) are said to represent Shiva, Vishnu and Brahma - respectively: the destroyer, the creator and the sustainer.



## Key Practices

- **Prayer & Worship:** The rules of worship or prayers can vary a great deal from family to family. The prayer that all Hindus consider to be central is called the 'Gayatri'. The Gayatri translates as: Let us meditate on the glorious effulgence of that supreme being who has created the universe; may she enlighten our hearts and direct our understanding. Yoga is also a form of worship. It means 'Pathway of communing with God through meditation'.
- **Fasting:** Fasting for Hindus is like a vow to avoid certain foods at certain times. These times could be particular days of the week, of the lunar month, and of the year. Hindus fast (particularly women) to show their devotion to a particular deity and for the well being of themselves and their family.
- **Diet:** Most Hindus are vegetarians and do not eat fish or eggs either. However cakes or biscuits containing eggs are considered acceptable by most of them. Quite a few Hindu families residing in the UK have adopted meat-eating habits. However, they will not consume beef as the cow is considered to be a sacred animal.
- **Greetings & Etiquette:** 'Namaste' is the common Hindu greeting. Hindus traditionally do not shake hands when greeting but do not object to doing so. Hindu men cover themselves from waist to knee. Most wear western dress for work, but some wear traditional dress. It is not acceptable for a Hindu woman or girl to have uncovered legs. Women wear a Sari and Shalwar-Kamees (loose fitting trousers and long top). Some married women wear a Bindi (red spot) on their forehead, or have a red streak in their hair parting as a sign of being married. There are strong and extended family ties.
- **Social Customs:** Families are usually extended (this includes grandparents, aunt, uncles and even neighbours as well as "immediate" family) and the male is often head of the family. Marriages are usually only allowed within castes and divorce is viewed unfavourably. Many Hindus have arranged marriages. Women may be uncomfortable if alone with a male visitor and they may not wish to shake the hand of a man. This should be borne in mind in arranging home visits. Women usually accompany men in social functions.
- **Work:** In Hindu thought, work excels idleness and the acquisition of wealth is a proper pursuit in life. However, it should not be allowed to dominate life and should be acquired through honest and appropriate work. Due to the inherent pluralistic teaching in Hinduism, Hindus find it easy to mix with and work with people from all other faiths. They do not feel threatened or unduly worried. There are no special restrictions in the dress codes either. The range of jobs Hindus will take can be as varied as seen in any modern secular society.

There are a wide range of Hindu organisations in the UK, from religious, community, welfare, youth and educational to political, economic and international. Jatis are community organisations, each representing a particular occupation. Mandirs (Hindu Temples) are usually managed by lay people. A Hindu priest or Pandit is mainly concerned with the religious ceremonies and services.



## Key Beliefs

The literal meaning of the word 'Islam' is Peace and Submission. It implies a peaceful way of life based on Submission to the will of God/Allah. The Islamic faith is followed by many Muslims throughout the world, and contains many schools of thought.

The birthplace of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is Makkah (Mecca) in Saudi Arabia. The Holy Qur'an is the Book which they believe to be the Divine Revelation from Almighty Allah, the final testament and source of guidance for mankind. The Arabic text was preserved during the life of Prophet Muhammad.

Qur'an covers all aspects of life; from history of nations, prophets and ideas to teachings on international relations, worship, economics, politics and personal hygiene.

## Key Practices

● **Prayer & Worship:** There are 5 basic practices known as 5 Pillars:

- **Shahadah:** The declaration of faith. This is made by verbally pronouncing the words: 'I bear witness that there is no god but God (Allah in Arabic) and that Muhammad (Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), was His prophet and messenger'. Belief in the oneness of God is the most important principle of Islam.
- **Namaz/Salah:** The mandatory five daily prayers. Adult Muslims are expected to pray before sunrise, at noon, midway between noon and sunset, at sunset and at night. These prayers are obligatory and therefore can be offered anywhere. They are also offered in congregations in all the mosques at set times. When praying Muslims face Kaabah/Kabah (a cubical building in Makkah built by Prophet Abraham). To ensure the correct direction, Qibla direction finders are available. Friday afternoon prayer is the weekly congregational prayer.
- **Fasting during Ramadan:** (one month of abstaining from food and drink from just before dawn to sunset). Ramadan occurs 11 days earlier each year, and is the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar. Seriously ill, pregnant or breast feeding mothers, menstruating women, people on a journey and elderly people in poor health are exempt from fasting.
- **Zakat:** The giving of alms.
- **Hajj:** Pilgrimage to Mecca once in life if it is affordable.



**Crescent Moon and Star**  
The constantly regenerating moon is a reflection of God's everlasting purpose and control. Just as the moon and stars are guiding lights, so too, is Islam.

- **Diet:** Alcohol, pork and meat of animals not killed in the ritual way are forbidden for Muslims. Animal products such as fat, gelatine and rennet of such animals are also not allowed. Halal (allowed) meat is obtained by slaughtering the animal with the pronouncement of God's name. All vegetarian food is therefore allowed and is the safest and simplest option. Whilst eggs and fish can be eaten, they should not be prepared in an area where pork or other non-Halal meat has been prepared.
- **Greetings & Etiquette:** When two Muslims greet each other they might say "Assalamu Alaikum" (peace be upon you). Modesty discourages physical forms of greeting (kissing, hugging etc), especially between members of the opposite sex. In some Islamic countries, such as Morocco, young men may have close friendships and hold hands in public. You should offer to remove shoes when entering a Muslim home. Muslims are required to follow some modesty rules in their dress, especially, during public meeting and mixing of sexes. Women are required to cover their head, known as Hijab, and wear loose dress. In some traditions women cover their faces too. Many Muslim men grow a beard and some wear a small cap as a religious requirement and some devout ones also keep their heads covered as part of dressing. Since Muslims represent many Eastern and African cultures, a lot of cultural clothing is visible.
- **Social Customs:** In Islam men and women are equal, although their respective roles can be very distinct. There is a strong sense of decorum amongst Muslim women and men should not shake hands with women or vice versa. Some Muslim women may not feel comfortable being alone with a male who is not a family member and communications may be best through a male family member. Men are technically the head of the household although in Islam men and women are equal. Men and women may not gather socially in the same room where there are people from outside of the family present. Islam has rules on dealing in interest (e.g. on money). This means that some Muslims may feel unable to take out conventional loans, or have a mortgage or bank account. This may have an impact on the way that Muslims manage their financial affairs.
- **Work:** Islam encourages Muslims to find honourable employment that is not exploitative, corrupt, or based on cheating and swindling. Earning for the family is still the responsibility of the Muslim man in most Islamic societies, although there is no ruling in Islam to prevent women from going out to honourable work.

A variety of Muslim organisations may be found amongst Muslim communities in UK. They include mosques, welfare and relief organisations, schools, trusts, educational and economic bodies. There are large national networks as well as regional and local organisations.

Mosques are run by management committees or boards of trustees. The religious head in a mosque, known as Imam, is responsible for leading the prayer, teaching and advising. Imams are generally educated in seminaries in Muslim countries and therefore may not be fluent in speaking the English language.



## Key Beliefs

In Jain philosophy, time consists of infinite millennia that come and go in cycles of several million years. In the current cycle, 24 Tirthankaras (builders of the ford, also called Jina) have appeared. Mahavira, a contemporary of the Buddha, was the last Tirthankara or Jina.

A Jain is a follower of a Jina. The principle of Karma, that Jains teach, is that the soul which inhabits the body in its next life is determined primarily by the soul's present actions. The human state is the only one from which moksha (release from the cycle of birth and death) is possible and the teachings of the tirthankaras, therefore, lead humans to spiritual release. In Jainism, there are five ideal levels of human development toward which asceticism, prayer and practice are directed:

- 1 At the first level are the Arhats (worthy ones), also known as Jinas (great teachers) or tirthankaras (the ford-makers);
- 2 At the second level are the Siddhas (liberated souls) who have destroyed all eight types of karmas;
- 3 Next are teachers, Sādhvis (nuns) and Sādhus (monks) who are spiritual leaders;
- 4 Then there are teachers, nuns and monks who instruct other monks and nuns;
- 5 The fifth level is that of ordinary monks.

Over many lifetimes, emancipation from destructive karmic matter can be achieved by Arhats and Siddhas. Most Jains, however, are laypeople whose lifestyles are influenced by the Five Great Vows of Jain Monastics:

- 1 **Ahimsa:** non-violence and no taking of life including compassion for all living creatures;
- 2 **Satya:** truth - the renunciation of secular life;
- 3 **Achaurya or Asteya:** non-stealing;
- 4 **Brahmacharya:** celibacy and chastity;
- 5 **Aparigraha:** non-attachment and non-ownership of material goods – greed and the desire to possess material goods entangles and limits human beings.

The absence of material goods enables humans to be free in this world and to eventually become free from the endless cycle of birth and death.

The Three Jewels offer a graduated pathway towards moksha which both laypeople and mendicants can follow according to their vows. They are:

- 1 Right faith;
- 2 Right knowledge; and
- 3 Right conduct.



## Palm

Symbolises protection and blessing. 24 segments of the wheel represent 24 great teachers of Jain faith. The word 'Ahimsa', meaning non-violence and reverence for life, is at the centre of the wheel.

A further principle of Jainism is Anekantvad or multiple viewpoints. Jains think that each person is limited by their own perspective and cannot therefore pass judgements or act upon a limited point of view.

### Key Practices

- **Prayer & Worship:** Jains may worship (puja), at home, shrines three times a day before dawn, at sunset, and at night. They may also worship at temples (mandirs) or, where there is no temple, will meet in homes and halls.
- **Fasting:** On occasion, some Jains will voluntarily undertake tapas (practices of austerity) such as eating only one meal a day or fasting from sunrise to sunset, either for a day or for a week.
- **Diet:** Dairy products such as milk, curd and ghee (clarified butter) are permitted but meat, eggs, butter, root vegetables, figs, honey and alcohol are prohibited. Garlic and onions will also be unacceptable to observant Jains. Jain ascetics do not eat after sunset or before sunrise and some laity also observe these restrictions.
- **Greetings/Etiquette:** Similar to Hinduism. However, non-violence, the cardinal principle of Jainism effects all aspects of day to day living as Jains avoid any form of physical and mental harm.
- **Work:** Employment is restricted to occupations where there is only a minimal likelihood of harm to human or animal life. Therefore, Jains cannot become butchers, farmers or engage in fishing.

Approximately 30,000 people in the UK follow the Jain religion with most being in and around the London area and in Leicester. Other Jain communities are in Coventry, Luton, Manchester, Northampton and Wellingborough.

There are four Jain places of worship in England, three in London (Croydon, Kenton and Potters Bar) and one in Leicester. Most Jains in the UK consist of Shvetambara (white robed) monks and their followers. There are both national and local Jain organisations in the UK known as mandal (circle), samaj (society) and sangh (group or gathering). Contact is best made with the local group secretary, chair or president.



# Judaism

## Key Beliefs

The Jewish people believe that God made a covenant with Abraham, a promise that he would be their God and they would be his people. The three key elements of Judaism are:

- 1 **God:** God exists; God is one; God is not in bodily form; God is eternal; God knows the deeds of human beings; God punishes the evil and rewards the good; God will send a Messiah; and God will resurrect the dead.
- 2 **Torah:** the Torah (Teaching or Direction) is of divine origin; and the Torah is eternally valid.
- 3 **Israel:** Jews must worship God alone; God has communicated through the prophets; and Moses is the greatest of the prophets.

The Torah contains 613 commandments or mitzvot which are seen as the revelation of God and the basis of the covenantal relationship between God and the people. The tradition is seen as a living one, the interpretation and application of which is collected in the Talmud, which is organised into two parts, the Mishnah and the Gemara. The Mishnah contains prayers and laws and the Gemara comments on, and discusses, the Mishnah.

The legal material in the Talmud is known as Halakhah, whilst the non-legal materials are known as the Aggadah. Community life is centred on the interpretation and practice of the Halakhah.

## Key Practices

- **Prayers & Worship:** Three daily prayers are stipulated; Shaharit (morning service), Minhah (afternoon prayers) and Maariv (evening prayers). Communal prayer can take place anywhere and does not need a rabbi to officiate but, in the Orthodox tradition, can only be said when a group of ten or more Jewish males have been convened. Tephilin (phylacteries) are worn for morning prayers. These are two strap-on leather boxes containing parchment sections of the scriptures. Tallitot (traditional prayer shawls) may also be worn.

The Shabbat begins about half an hour before sunset on the Friday evening and ends at nightfall on the Saturday night. During Shabbat it is forbidden for Jews to engage in any activities which are considered as work. This general rule has been variously interpreted by different Jewish traditions, e.g. Orthodox Jews may not drive their cars on Shabbat, whilst progressive Jews do not deem this as work and therefore do drive.

- **Fasting:** Yom Kippur is a day of fasting. A 24 hour fast is observed by devoting to prayer and worship and seeking forgiveness.



**Menorah**  
Seven-branched candelabrum indicates divine presence. The seven branches represent the sun, the moon, the planets and the seven days of the week. The Star of David, known as the Seal of Solomon is on the base of the branches.

- **Diet:** Food is either kosher (permitted) or trefe (forbidden). Animals with split hooves like sheep, cows and deer, are permitted as are birds (excluding birds of prey). Eggs are kosher if they come from kosher fowl. Eggs with blood spots may not be eaten. Fish with both fins and scales are permitted. Food which contains, or has been cooked in, products from non-permitted animals is unacceptable. For meat to be kosher it must have been humanely slaughtered under the supervision of the Beth Din (religious court). Kosher foods are marked with a seal (hechsher) to show that they are kosher.

Jewish law prohibits the mixing of milk foods with meat foods. Separate sets of kitchen utensils are used for the two types of food and a time lapse is observed between one type of food and the other. Glass (but not Pyrex) can be used for both types of food. Generally vegetarian food and disposable plates, cups and cutlery are acceptable. However, Orthodox Jews will require separate meals prepared in a kosher kitchen. There are special food requirements during the festival of Pesach/Passover.

- **Greetings & Etiquette:** There are no fixed forms of greeting. Orthodox Jews would not expect overly physical displays of affection between those of the opposite sex. A very Orthodox Jew will not touch any woman other than his wife and immediate family. Orthodox Jewish men wear a skull cap all the time. All Jewish men wear one in the synagogue. Orthodox women wear a wig or have their hair covered outside the home. Liberal Jews may not be distinguishable by any dress code, but they may choose to wear a Star of David.
- **Social Customs:** Many Jewish people feel a close bond with Jews from around the world, seeing themselves as part of a global Jewish community. The events of Holocaust have had a profound effect on Jewish identity.
- **Work:** In Judaism, earning a livelihood has religious significance as it makes people independent and a partner with God in the work of creation. Poverty is seen as an unmitigated evil as human beings cannot reach stable religious heights without attending to the needs of the body. Jews think that people should work at anything rather than be dependent on others. No one should impoverish themselves to relieve the poverty of others and the best charity is that which helps the poor dispense with charity. A major religious task in Judaism is to maximise the range of significant choices available to a person regardless of income. Work is not a supreme value in the Jewish tradition, however, because there are inbuilt limits (particularly in the Sabbath) to its practice.

For practising Jews, the importance of the family life means clearly defined gender roles, whereby men have the responsibility of earning for the family and the women look after the home.

The UK's Jewish population is estimated at 300,000 and includes Sephardi and Ashkenazi Jewish communities. The large concentrations are in the London area, Birmingham, Brighton, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester and Southend. Two-thirds are affiliated to a synagogue, with about 80% belonging to Orthodox synagogues and 20% to Reform and Liberal synagogues.



## Key Beliefs

Sikhism originated in the State of Punjab in India some 500 years ago, founded by Guru Nanak. Sikhs believe in one God, and in many cycles or rebirth. They respect equality of all people, regardless of caste, colour, creed or sex.

The one God is known by many names including Ram, Mohan, Gobind, Hari and others. But two names used in worship are Satnam (the recitation of God's name) and Waheguru (Wonderful Lord).

A Sikh Temple is called Gurdwara, a place for speaking about God and for public worship. It is a place for meditation, divine knowledge, bliss and tranquillity. Its focal point is the Holy Granth Sahib (the Sikh Holy Book), wrapped in a costly cloth, and placed on a platform under a canopy. Prayers are read five times each day.

Sikhs believe that an individual should make every effort to overcome anger, greed, pride and passion, and should work hard to earn a decent living. Sikhs recognise three levels of service: physical service, which is being of assistance to those who require help; mental service, which involves enlightening others about God and righteousness; material service, in the form of financial contributions to noble causes. Sikhs are very tolerant of the view of others, seeing all as friends.

## Key Practices

- **Prayers & Worship:** Prayers are usually read five times each day. At Gurdwaras, a special sweet (Karah Parshad) is blessed and shared. It is important that if any is brought in for a patient, he/she should be allowed to eat it regardless of any special diet. As an act of faith, baptised Sikhs wear the five K.s:
  - 1 **Kesh:** The practice of keeping the hair uncut which is the distinctive sign of Sikh identity. Men tie up their long hair and keep it under a turban. Some women may also choose to wear a turban. Different styles and colours do not have any significance except personal choice. Kesh is treated by Sikhs with utmost respect as it is a symbol of identity and commitment.
  - 2 **Kangha:** A small comb, which is worn in the hair at all times. Though it is used to keep the hair organised and clean, it symbolises orderliness.
  - 3 **Kara:** This is a steel bracelet or ring, worn on the right wrist. Kara is seen as a reminder of the universality of God and a symbol of allegiance to the brotherhood and the Guru.
  - 4 **Kaccha:** A special type of underwear garment (male shorts made from cotton) which is knee length. It is both a symbol of readiness to be a combatant to protect the weak and oppressed as well as of modesty and moral restraint.
  - 5 **Kirpan:** A short sword or dagger which symbolises the readiness to defend oneself and protect the weak and oppressed.



### Khanda

The double-edged sword signifies truth, strength, freedom and justice. The circle at the centre represents the eternal and the two swords at the sides represent political and spiritual sovereignty.



- **Fasting:** There are no universal fasting requirements. However, some Sikh women may choose to abstain from salt on the day of the full moon for cultural reasons.
- **Diet:** Many Sikhs tend to be vegetarian, and many will not eat fish or eggs, or any products made with these. Many non-vegetarian Sikhs will not eat beef and some will not eat pork. They do not eat Halal meat. Most Sikhs do not smoke or drink alcohol. Only vegetarian food is served in Gurdwaras.
- **Greetings & Etiquette:** When encountering a group of Sikhs it would be normal to begin by greeting the eldest first. Sikhs greet each other by putting their hands together and bowing, in respect for the divine in the other person. There is no objection to shaking hands. Some Sikhs may hug people of their own gender. Sikh families have strong traditions about modesty. Some women veil their faces in the presence of men who are older than their husbands, but this is a cultural variation and not a Sikh requirement. The home is considered holy and you should offer to remove your shoes.
- **Social Customs:** Sikh women may feel more comfortable if spoken to in the presence of a family member, as modesty is important. Sikh men may be gravely embarrassed if asked to remove their Kachia or turban and baptised Sikhs may refuse to accept work which requires them to remove their turban or cut off their hair. Similarly, girls may not be permitted to wear skirts, and if skirts are part of a uniform they should be allowed to wear Shalwar (loose fitting trousers) underneath.
- **Work:** One of the central principles of Sikh living is kirat karna - earning a living by honest means. No task is considered ignoble but some work is considered unworthy.

Apart from Gurdwaras (temples), there are a whole range of Sikh organisations serving the diverse needs of the community. These include social, cultural, educational, professional and missionary societies, groups and organisations.

The Network of Sikh Organisations is a major umbrella body of the community. There are Councils of Sikh Gurdwaras in a number of towns and cities.



# Zoroastrianism

## Key Beliefs

The founder of Zoroastrianism was the prophet Zarathushtra who lived in Eastern Iran either around 6,000 BCE (Before Common Era) or 1,200 BCE. Zoroaster is the Greek form of Zarathushtra's name. Zarathushtra proclaimed the worship of Ahura Mazda (the Wise Lord or the Lord of Wisdom) who is believed to have created a good world consisting of seven elements of creation: the sky, waters, earth, plants, cattle, humans, and fire.

Zarathushtra saw the world as a theatre of conflict between two opposed mainyus (moral spirits). These are Spenta Mainyu (the Spirit of Goodness) and Angre Mainyu (the Spirit of Evil). They stand for mental attitudes in the psychological domain and opposing moral vectors in all of creation. The world, as created by Ahura Mazda is intrinsically good but contaminated by evil. The ideal form of existence as envisioned by Ahura Mazda is Asha Vahishta (The Highest Truth and Righteousness).

Acting in accordance with Asha is the right thing to do. Each human being possesses Vohu-Mana (the quality of the Good-Mind). Vohu-Mana enables human beings to grasp Asha and to see how any aspect of the world deviates from Asha. This is termed good-thought and from this human beings are inspired to perfect the imperfection (good work). The spirit that inclines human beings to move from right conceptions to right actions is Spenta Armaity (the Spirit of Piety/Devotion or Benevolence/Right-Mindedness). The Zoroastrian trilogy is therefore:

- *humata* - good thoughts;
- *hukhta* - good words; and
- *hvarshata* - good deeds.

Zoroastrians are urged to live life to the full and to enjoy the good creation. Zoroastrians, who believe that Ahura Mazda made the whole of the material world, including plants and animals, have always been very environmentally conscious. Fasting and celibacy are seen as weakening human beings and lessening their power to struggle against evil and as rejecting the divine gift of the good life. Moderation is encouraged. Zoroastrian ethics enjoin an active, industrious, honest and charitable life.

In the social world, the consequence of right actions is Khshathra Vairya (The Ideal Dominion), another divine aspect which means the ideal society or the Kingdom of Heaven. The individual who lives this way of life reaches a state of well-being (of psychic and spiritual integrity) which is called Haurvatat. On dying, such a person enters a state of immortal bliss known as Ameretat. Classical Zoroastrian belief awaited the coming of the Saoshyant (Saviour) to raise the dead for judgement, following which the world would return to its original perfection. This is known as the Frasho-keriti (Making Wonderful) Initiation.



**The Winged Figure**  
Representing divine protection or the divine grace people seek. Known as the symbol of Ahura Mazda, the ring in the left hand of the figure represents cosmic sovereignty and the right hand is raised in a gesture of blessing.

### Key Practices

- **Prayers & Worship:** Zoroastrians will prepare for prayer by washing their hands, face and other uncovered parts of their body. The kushti will be untied and held before a source of light (sun, fire or artificial light). Two prayers, the Ashem Vohu and the Ahunavar, are said. For this, a prayer room will be required. For devotions, Zoroastrians divide the day into five gah (times):
  - 1 **Havan:** from sunrise to noon;
  - 2 **Rapithwan:** from noon to 3.00 pm;
  - 3 **Uziren:** from 3.00 pm to sunset;
  - 4 **Aiwisruthrem:** from sunset to midnight;
  - 5 **Ushahen:** from midnight to sunrise.
- **Diet:** There are no dietary requirements for Zoroastrians although, from personal choice or sometimes from deference to the wider religious population of Iran and India, many abstain from pork and beef and some are vegetarian.
- **Greetings & Etiquette:** Zoroastrians are meant to wear at all times the sudreh and kushti: Sudreh: a white sacred shirt made of muslin or cotton which symbolises purity and good deeds; and Kushti: a sacred cord woven from 72 threads of fine lambs wool (symbolising the 72 chapters of the Yasna or Act of Worship) which is worn over the sudreh.
- **Work:** Zoroastrianism encourages honest and industrious work. Agriculture is particularly praised in Zoroastrianism. Work is equated with righteousness as the Vendidad says, 'Who causes corn to be sown, causes righteousness to be practised'. Work is seen as encouraging right thoughts, progress and independence. Zoroastrians should work for themselves, their families and for others. Work should be sought which helps alleviate the hardships faced by those in poverty.

Although there are small numbers of Zoroastrians elsewhere in Britain and Europe, the headquarters and centre of the Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe (Incorporated) in London is the focus for most Zoroastrian activity in the country and contains the only Zoroastrian place of worship in the UK.



# Other Religions

## African Tribal Religions

About 15% of African peoples practise traditional, indigenous religions, which are based on beliefs as old as those of any race of mankind and are deeply rooted in their society. Although these developed locally in independent tribal groups in different environments far apart, some similar beliefs are found across the continent, for example:

- Everything on earth was created by the one Supreme Being and Creator God.
- Life on earth is basically good, despite human suffering.
- Everything in the world has a soul, even inanimate objects.
- Total death is against nature and, at death, the soul journeys to a land beyond death or looks for somewhere else to inhabit.
- There are also various subordinate spirits which live among the people, and influence their lives.
- The different powers are not all equal but form a hierarchy of forces, best described as like a triangle.
- Ritual occasions include initiation rites, and funerals, celebrated at great length and expense.
- Other rituals involve good magic and medicine to ensure well-being, good life and health, to ward off the influence of witchcraft and to expel evil spirits.
- People make offerings at the shrine of an ancestor, dead chief, spirit or god, to honour them and to ask their help.
- Rituals and ceremonies are conducted by an elder, medium or priest, who may also be a medicine man or doctor and who is required to fast or abstain from certain foods before the rite, wear special clothing and must not be touched.
- Rituals are often accompanied by music, gongs and drums, singing and dancing. Headdresses and carved and painted masks, which follow centuries-old patterns, play a prominent part in worship. They represent the invisible forces present in everyday life, e.g. patron spirits or ancestors, the evil spirit to be driven out, or animals which have great power and protect the wearer.

## Chinese/Vietnamese Religions

Traditionally, there are three major forms of religion practised by people of Chinese/Vietnamese origin in Britain. These are:

- 1 Confucianism
- 2 Taoism
- 3 Buddhism

### 1 Confucianism

In China, Confucianism is known as Juchiaco, the sect of the Jus. The best way to describe it is probably as a code of moral conduct. The two fundamental principles are the worship of ancestors and the belief that present day life will be enhanced by maintaining the morals and cultures of history. Confucian theology suggests that 'fate' controls worldly events and that 'divine will' regulates the order of nature. There are no set services but private or family devotions are often made. As attracting good fortune is very important, some will do so by burning incense, throwing shen-bei (fortune telling blocks), making offerings to the Gods, and practising feng-shui (making sure that human works are in harmony with the hidden and natural environment).

### 2 Taois

In China, Taoism is known as either Taochia or Taochiao. The Taoist School seeks to remove the mysterious from the old traditions, while the Taoist Church aims to preserve the magical practices and mythology. The main moral issues of Taoism are based on five prohibitions:

- The killing of living creatures
- Alcohol
- Hypocrisy
- Stealing
- Loose living

These are based on ten instructions:

- Be obedient to parents (respect of the elders is particularly important to Vietnamese)
- Be obedient to one's master
- Display kindness to every creature
- Bear evil received
- Settle arguments and not harbour hatred
- Help the poor by one's own sacrifice
- Free captured animals
- Plant trees and construct bridges
- Be useful to your fellow men
- Recite the Taoist book and burn incense in its glorification

### 3 Buddhism

Please refer to Buddhism section previous.

Some Chinese people may come from Christian backgrounds, both Protestant and Catholic. There are also Muslim Chinese. Within the Chinese community, customs associated with ancestral worship are likely to form a common link.

However, not all children brought up in this country have followed their parents' beliefs. When greeting each other, many Chinese people will place their hands together in a prayerful attitude and bow. When greeting a Western person they would use local customs. On entering a Chinese home, shoes may be removed.



# New Religious Movements

There are many other kinds of formal and informal faith communities. The late nineteenth and the twentieth centuries saw a great growth in New Religious Movements. Those related to the Christian tradition include:

## **Christian Scientists**

Christian Scientists believe that by acknowledging their God-given identity they find redemption from sin and there by achieve freedom. The movement was formed by Mary Baker Eddy who set out its teachings in the textbook *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*.

They are organized into branch churches each of which maintains a Reading Room. There are no special dietary considerations. Christian Scientists voluntarily refrain from drinking alcohol or smoking, and would usually prefer an environment free from these.

## **Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints**

Often popularly known as the Mormons, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints believes itself to be the divinely-inspired restored Church, needed because of the apostasy of the established Church. Beliefs of the Church include the view that God, Christ and the Holy Ghost are separate personages - though united in purpose.

The Bible is believed to be the revealed Word of God, with continuing revelations appearing in the Book of Mormon and further texts.

The Latter-Day Saints believe they have a living prophet - a man who received revelation from God and who directs the Church here on earth from their headquarters in Utah. Latter-Day Saints are expected to be totally committed to their faith, often giving up 2 years of their life to serve as missionaries. They tithe their income. Family life is upheld. Members do not drink alcohol, tea or coffee or use tobacco or other harmful drugs. The usual fast day is the first Sunday of each month; the fast lasts for two meals or twenty-four hours, during which time nothing is taken in the way of food or drink.

Latter-Day Saints dress modestly. Women usually wear full-length skirts and non-skimpy tops. Well known for its missionary work, it also works with other Churches in social or humanitarian projects. Their regular public worship takes place in chapels.

## Jehovah's Witnesses

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that, in the near future, Jehovah will replace all human government with his own and the earth will become like Eden. Charles Taze Russell founded the Jehovah's Witness movement in Pennsylvania in 1879 and it has since become a worldwide movement.

Jehovah's Witnesses meet together for instruction and study regularly each week. The celebration of the Lord's Evening Meal is commemorated annually on the equivalent of Nisan 14 in the Jewish calendar. Christmas and birthdays are not observed. Jehovah's Witnesses believe it is important to build up children's trust, to maintain moral standards of truth and integrity and to uphold scripture. No blood or meat of animals from which the blood has not been properly drained should be eaten but there are no other particular dietary needs.

Jehovah's Witnesses are organized into congregations meeting in Kingdom Halls. Congregations are linked into circuits and circuits are grouped into districts.

## Seventh-day Adventists

The Seventh-day Adventist Church grew up out of a 19th century religious revival in America, known as the Great Advent Awakening. Amongst Adventist doctrines is the Seventh-day Sabbath, (sunset Friday to sunset Saturday) the non-immortality of the soul, and the imminent Second Coming of Christ.

Adventists avoid secular work on the Sabbath. All Seventh-day Adventists are required to abstain from unclean meat. This includes pork in all its forms as well as shellfish and fish without fins and scales. Generally animals regarded as kosher by the Jews would be acceptable, though there is no insistence on the meat being specially prepared. A large number of Adventists are ovo-lacto-vegetarians, (eggs and dairy products but no meat). A few are vegans.

## Other Religious Movements

Groups related to traditions of the other world religions include:

- Brahma Kumaris.
- Namdhari.
- Sikh Community.
- Ravidassia.
- Sant Nirankaris.
- Sathya Sai Service Organisation.
- Valmikis.

Other newer groups include:

- The Church of Scientology.
- The Family Federation for World Peace.
- Unification (popularly known as the 'Moonies').
- Various forms of 'New Age' spiritualities.



# Alternative Religions

## Paganism

Pagans understand their faith to be an indigenous religious outlook which recognizes many deities and is nature-venerating. Because divinity is honoured as both God and Goddess, pagans are likely to treat gender equality as an assumption. Pagans may believe in personal energy fields such as the Chinese concept of chi and may use positive thinking and visualisation techniques.

Religious ceremonies are celebrated with small groups on an astronomical cycle. Most pagans observe the beginning and midpoint of each season as major holidays (Sabbats) while some also celebrate on Full Moons (Esbats). A symbol of paganism, such as a pentangle, Celtic knotwork, Thor's hammer, the Yin-Yang, or an ankh among others, may be worn. Pagan ethics allow personal freedom within a framework of personal responsibility and are based on the understanding that:

- Everything is interconnected.
- Nothing exists alone.
- Every action has a consequence.

Pagan traditions include: Asatru, Druidry, Men's spirituality groups, Neo-Paganism, Odinism, Paganism, Shamanism, Wicca, and Women's spirituality groups. There are major differences between each of these traditions but most share ecological concerns. Some traditions are organized into local groups such as Wicca Covens or the 20 Pagan Druid Orders but some pagans also practice their faith alone.

## Rastafarianism

The Rastafarian Movement began in the 1930's in the West Indies, and is linked to the roots of resistance to slavery among descendants of the black African slave families. Therefore a strong bond with Africa is central to the movement.

Haile Selassie (Ras Tafari), who became emperor of Ethiopia in 1930, is seen as the new Messiah. He was seen as the person to lead all black people to freedom. Whilst accepting the Old and New Testaments as Scriptures, Rastafarians do not see themselves as Christians, as Christ was reborn in the new Messiah - Ras Tafari.

Haile Selassie is accepted as the living God (Ras Tafari). They basically follow the moral principles of the Ten Commandments, but follow the ancient laws of Ethiopia. It is believed that they will eventually return to Ethiopia (some see this as the whole of Africa), leaving Babylon (the Western World).

There are no churches, official clergy or pre-set services, as Rastafarianism is considered a personal religion. The practice of Rastafarianism can vary widely and a precise definition is difficult to provide. Rastafarians are usually recognisable by their dreadlocks. This is a sign of pride and faith and some Orthodox members may not permit them to be cut. They may also be unwilling to remove their hats. Rastafarians emphasise self-employment particularly in craft or other creative cultural activities. The principles of collective work are also important.



## Alternative Religions *(continued)*

Marijuana (Ganja) is seen as the holy herb, justified by Genesis 1, vs 12, 'And the earth brought forth grass and herbs yielding seed after his kind, and god saw that it was good', and Proverbs 15, vs 17 'Better is a dinner of herb where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith', Psalm 104, vs 14 'He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle and the herb for the service of man'.

Pork and pork products are banned. Some Rastafarians are strict vegetarians and eat no meat at all. Fish must have fins and scales. Alcohol must be drunk in moderation, but is not prohibited. Rastafarians have no set 'fasting' days, although they are required to fast. It is important to consult the individual to assess their fasting habits.

July 23 is the birthday of Haile Selassie, which has the importance of Christmas. November 2 is Haile Selassie's Coronation celebration. During October the Organisation of African Unity celebrates African Culture.

### Japanese/Shinto Religions

Shinto has been Japan's religion for over 2,000 years. It is more concerned with this world and life than with the afterlife, with the good of the community than of the individual, and with performing rituals than with doctrines and believing.

Death and other pollutions are deemed to be defiling. Moral and physical purity is a basic law. People's ethical behaviour in this life does not affect their fate in the next. Shintoists must show devotion and sincerity, but aberrations can be erased by purificatory rituals.

Shintoists live to venerate the natural world and to establish communion, harmony and peace with its spirits and deities through prayer and ritual. Shintoists:

- Owe loyalty to the Emperor as a descendant of the Sun Goddess;
- Participate in traditional seasonal festivals;
- Worship at a shrine with prayers and offerings of food and saké (rice wine)

Japan has about 80,000 shrines mostly located in areas of great natural beauty, such as on wooded hills. Worshippers pass through a torii, a ceremonial gateway consisting of two wooden columns crossed by two beams often painted red, which divides the sacred precincts from the secular world. All holy areas are marked off by plaited straw ropes, symbols of the divine presence. Inside they rinse their mouth and wash hands at a ritual water trough to purify themselves for entering the kami's presence.



# Alternative Schools of Thought

## Agnosticism

Agnosticism is a concept, not a religion. It is a belief related to the existence or non-existence of God. The term 'agnosticism' was coined by Professor T.H. Huxley at a meeting of the Metaphysical Society in 1876. He defined an agnostic as someone who disclaimed both atheism and theism, and who believed that the question of whether a higher power existed was unsolved and insoluble.

An agnostic is a person who feels that God's existence can neither be proved nor disproved, on the basis of current evidence. Agnostics note that theologians and philosophers have tried to prove, for millennia, either that God exists or that God does not exist. None have convincingly succeeded.

An agnostic usually holds the question of the existence of God open, pending the arrival of more evidence. They are willing to change their belief if some solid evidence or logical proof is found in the future. However, some have taken the position that there is no logical way in which the existence or the non-existence of a deity can be proven.

## Atheism

Atheism is confined to one factor: the existence or non-existence of a deity. Atheism can be the positive belief that there is no deity or it can be the absence of a belief that there is a deity. This absence of belief generally comes about either through deliberate choice or from an inherent inability to believe religious teachings. It is not a lack of belief born out of simple ignorance of religious teachings.

Some atheists go beyond a mere absence of belief in gods: they actively believe that particular gods, or all gods, do not exist. Just lacking belief in God or gods is often referred to as the "weak atheist" position; whereas believing that gods do not (or cannot) exist is known as "strong atheism".

An Atheist will have a personal moral code. However, it is generally derived from secular considerations, and not from a "revealed" religious text. Most atheists follow many of the same "moral rules" as theists, but for different reasons. Atheists view morality as something created by humans, according to the way humans feel the world 'ought' to work, rather than seeing it as a set of rules decreed by a supernatural being. Many atheists behave in a "moral" or "compassionate" way simply because they feel a natural tendency to empathize with other humans.

Many atheists live a purposeful life. They decide what they think gives meaning to life, and they pursue those goals. They try to make their lives count, not by wishing for eternal life, but by having an influence on other people who will live on. For example, an atheist may dedicate his/her life to political reform, in the hope of leaving their mark on history. Ideas that atheists may promote include:

- There is more to moral behaviour than simply following rules.
- Be especially sceptical of positive claims.
- If you want your life to have some sort of meaning, it's up to you to find it.
- Search for what is true, even if it makes you uncomfortable.
- Make the most of your life, as it's probably the only one you'll have.
- It's no good relying on some external power to change you; you must change yourself.

- Just because something's popular doesn't mean it's good.
- If you must assume something, assume something easy to test.
- Don't believe things just because you want them to be true.
- All beliefs should be open to question.

## Humanism

Humanist thought found particular expression during the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, and in the scientific, social and political revolutions of the modern age. It is the name given to a type of life stance, an individual's or community's relationship with that which is ultimately important to them and the commitments, theory and practice of working this out in living. The values inherent in this relationship define morality.

Humanism finds ultimate importance in the natural world and human behaviour in particular, and derives its morality accordingly. Humanism is not a set of doctrines but humanists are people who (broadly) hold views that are naturalistic, eschewing religious beliefs, rational, eschewing superstition and dogma, and humane, with a morality based on the avoidance of pain and the enhancement of human values.

### Humanists think that:

- This world and this life are all we have;
- We should try to live full and happy lives ourselves and, as part of this, make it easier for other people to do the same;
- All situations and people deserve to be judged on their merits by standards of reason and humanity;
- Individuality and social co-operation are equally important.

Humanists are committed to science as the rational and successful method of explaining life and the universe, and to the 'open society' – a community in which respect for individual freedoms including those of belief and speech sits alongside a high valuation of co-operation, shared values and endeavours.

People can (and in fact do) lead humanist lives without necessarily ever knowing of the word, let alone of any organisation that seeks to represent them. Few humanists feel any need to join an organisation: there is no ritual, nor any required forms or ceremonies. In their voluntary work, humanists join mainstream organisations without any religious affiliation rather than found their own. However, some humanists join local humanist groups, and those conscious of a commitment to the life stance and determined to promote its values are often members of the British Humanist Association (BHA).

The BHA is the principal organisation representing the interests of humanists. It exists to support and represent people who seek to live good and responsible lives without religious or superstitious beliefs. It is committed to human rights and democracy, and has a history of engagement in work for an open and inclusive society.



# Spirituality at Work

An increasing number of books, consultancies and websites are emerging which deal with some aspect of soul or spirituality within the workplace. These are not necessarily linked to the main world religions and tend to have two main aspects:

- **Values:** The soul or spirit is often defined as being a person's life values. As a result, it is thought that the soul is involved in work when the work that a person does is an expression of their life values. Where work is not an expression of a person's life values, it is thought that the person will be dissatisfied with and unproductive in his/her work. As a result, writers on this theme often claim that being concerned about the souls of employees affects the bottom line in business and should be a concern of employers if they want their workforce to be more productive and more effective. Effective organisations are those which understand and reflect the shared values of their employees and where employees identify with the organisations values. Individuals are encouraged to identify their life values and to seek work that expresses these values.
- **Creativity:** The soul or spirit is defined as being about the search for a union of opposites. This may be in terms joining spirit and matter, the random and the ordered, the conscious and unconscious or, Intellectual Intelligence (IQ) and Emotional Intelligence (EQ) through Spiritual Intelligence (SQ). The approach suggests that when people think of themselves as whole people within a whole workplace system, this perception can enable them to identify and take up a creative and responsible role within the organisation. It is argued that people who look at the whole in this way will be better change managers and will be better able to identify patterns or trends in the organisation and its delivery context which lead to new markets, products, services or strategies. Therefore, this aspect of soul or spirit is seen as being the source of creativity within organisations and individuals and should, so the argument goes, be cultivated for this reason. It may also be argued that for work to be fully efficient it should be structured in terms of whole tasks undertaken within distinct work teams.

# References

## Information

The Bahá'í World:

[www.bahai.org.uk/](http://www.bahai.org.uk/)

Guide to the Religions of the World:

[www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/people/features/world\\_religions/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/people/features/world_religions/)

Islam On-Line:

[www.islamonline.net/english/index.shtml](http://www.islamonline.net/english/index.shtml)

The Interfaith Calendar:

[www.interfaithcalendar.org](http://www.interfaithcalendar.org)

The Multi-Faith Centre:

[www.multifaithcentre.org/](http://www.multifaithcentre.org/)

Zoroastrian Net:

[www.zoroastrian.net/](http://www.zoroastrian.net/)

## Organisations

BAPS Swaminarayan Hindu temple Neasden

[www.mandir.org/](http://www.mandir.org/)

The Buddhist Society:

[www.thebuddhistsociety.org/](http://www.thebuddhistsociety.org/)

The Church of England:

[www.cofe.anglican.org/](http://www.cofe.anglican.org/)

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland:

[www.ctbi.org.uk/](http://www.ctbi.org.uk/)

Church Urban Fund:

[www.cuf.org.uk/](http://www.cuf.org.uk/)

Commission for Racial Equality:

[www.cre.gov.uk/](http://www.cre.gov.uk/)

Council of Christians and Jews:

[www.ccj.org.uk/](http://www.ccj.org.uk/)



---

**Evangelical Alliance UK:**  
[www.eauk.org/index.html](http://www.eauk.org/index.html)

**European Bahá'í Business Forum:**  
[www.ebbf.org/](http://www.ebbf.org/)

**Friends of the Western Buddhist Order:**  
[www.fwbo.org/](http://www.fwbo.org/)

**Inner Cities Religious Council:**  
[www.neighbourhood.gov.uk/page.asp?id=524](http://www.neighbourhood.gov.uk/page.asp?id=524)

**Inter Faith Network for the UK:**  
[www.interfaith.co.uk/](http://www.interfaith.co.uk/)

**Islamic Cultural Centre:**  
[www.ramadan.co.uk/](http://www.ramadan.co.uk/)

**The Islamic Foundation:**  
[www.islamic-foundation.org.uk/](http://www.islamic-foundation.org.uk/)

**Muslim Council of Britain:**  
[www.mcb.org.uk/](http://www.mcb.org.uk/)

**Muslim Directory:**  
[www.muslimdirectory.co.uk/](http://www.muslimdirectory.co.uk/)

**Pecan Limited:**  
[www.pecan.org.uk/](http://www.pecan.org.uk/)

**The Relationships Foundation:**  
[www.relationshipsfoundation.org/](http://www.relationshipsfoundation.org/)

**The Religious Society of Friends:**  
[www.quaker.org.uk/](http://www.quaker.org.uk/)

**Sikhs in England:**  
[www.sikhs.org/](http://www.sikhs.org/)

**The Three Faiths Forum:**  
[www.threefaithsforum.org.uk/](http://www.threefaithsforum.org.uk/)

## References

---

United Reformed Church:

[www.urc.org.uk/](http://www.urc.org.uk/)

Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe:

[www.ztfe.com/](http://www.ztfe.com/)



# Acceptance

---

I acknowledge receipt of this reference guide, and confirm that I have attended the Anglian Religion, Belief and Faith Toolbox Talk.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_





Raising the standard.

Anglian Building Products  
Unit 30  
59 Hurricane Way  
Norwich  
NR6 6JB

0870 4280274  
[www.anglian-building.co.uk](http://www.anglian-building.co.uk)  
[abp@angliangroup.com](mailto:abp@angliangroup.com)