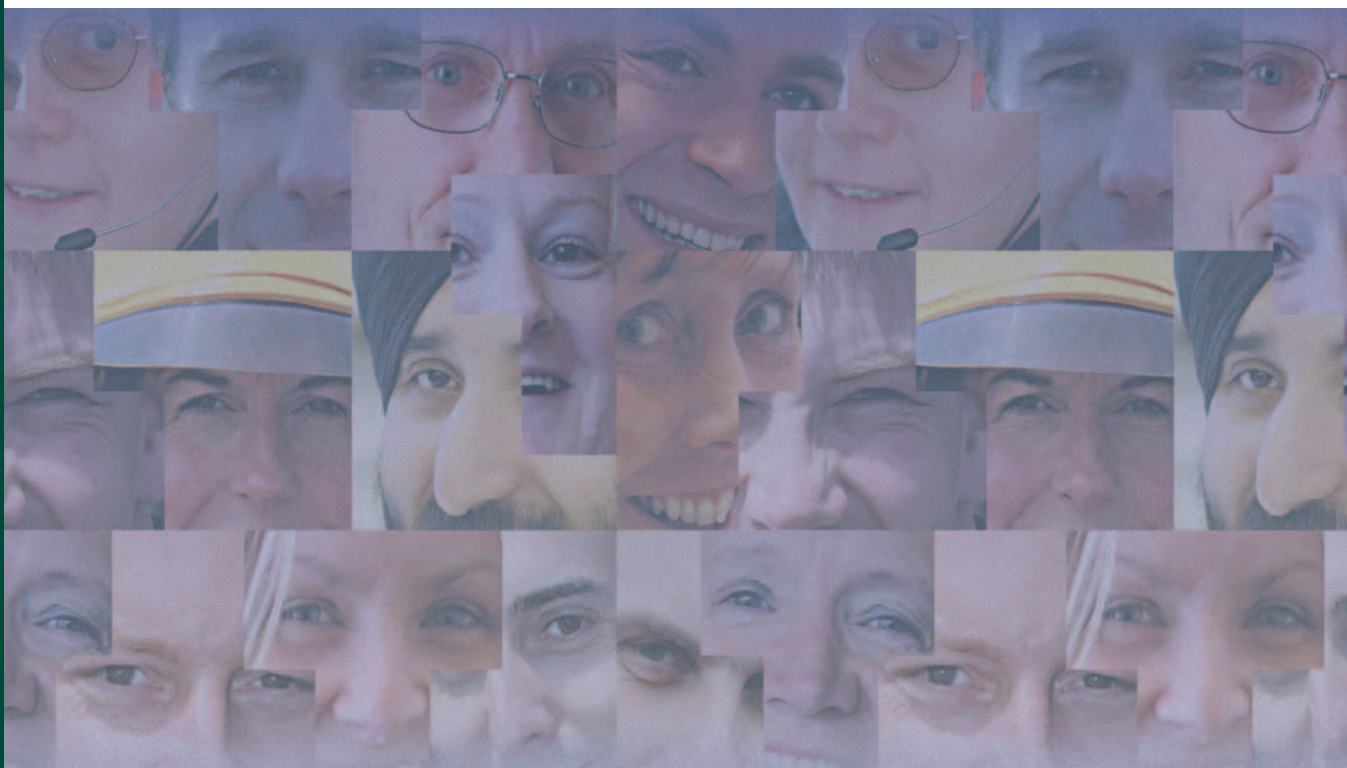




# A GUIDE TO . . .

## CULTURE AND FAITHS IN OXFORDSHIRE



*“Promoting Equality  
and Social Inclusion”*



**OXFORDSHIRE  
COUNTY COUNCIL**  
[www.oxfordshire.gov.uk](http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk)

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# Introduction



In Oxfordshire, we maintain a proud tradition of welcoming people from all over the world to live, work, study or visit. Our communities include a vast range of people from different cultures and of different religions and beliefs.

The aim of this guide is to provide useful information to support our staff in ensuring that we manage our functions in a non-discriminatory manner. This guide offers an insight into the traditions of key faiths and cultures to be found across Oxfordshire. The information within this

guide should not be used to stereotype people, but to challenge our often-unrealistic opinions of minority groups. It is for the reader to use this guide as a starting point to understand, appreciate and respect our neighbours, colleagues, customers and fellow citizens and the roles they play in our community.

As a public authority, the Council is required by law to eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and work to build good relations between different groups. This guide compliments the objectives of the Council's Comprehensive Equality Policy. As a partner and community leader we seek to lead by example.

We aim to provide the most accessible and effective services possible and we must ensure these are delivered in an inclusive way. Our work supports so many different people, with wide ranging needs. Everyone in Oxfordshire should be able to rely on us to provide the highest levels of service and be able to participate in the development of those services.

As an employer, we are responsible for the well-being, conduct and development of our 18,500 employees. The employment decisions we make every day directly affects the outlook of the council, so we need to make the best decisions possible.

I hope this guide helps us to further improve our performance in these areas and increases respect and understanding throughout the County.

*Councillor Dermot Roaf, Deputy Leader of Oxfordshire County Council*



# GENERAL INFORMATION



# Ethnic Origin

The County Council has adopted the ethnic and religious belief categories from the 2001 Census in order to be able to make direct comparisons with Census output data. These are: White, mixed, Asian or Asian British, Black British and Chinese and other. Religious categories are Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Other, No religion and Religion not stated.

Classifying people according to their ethnic origin provides information that is required by many organisations (including Oxfordshire County Council) for various monitoring roles. If you are asked to provide such information and are unsure how an individual or group may wish to be identified, then ask them if possible.

The terms mentioned below can only be regarded as general guidelines, and are always subject to an individual's own preferences.

## ***African***

This is used to describe Black people from Africa, but again, individuals often prefer to identify with their country of origin and will use Nigerian, Somali, etc.

## ***African/Caribbean***

This is often used as a general term to describe Black people from the Caribbean Islands, and as such is not wrong. However, people often prefer to identify with their island of origin, e.g. Jamaican, Barbadian etc.

*Afro-Caribbean* is used less and is gradually being replaced by African/Caribbean. Likewise, the term *West Indian* is a historical term that is not considered appropriate unless it is used as a title e.g. West Indies Cricket Team.

## ***Asian***

This is a general term, and although not unacceptable, is very imprecise. It is far more acceptable to the people concerned, to be identified in terms of their nationality/region/religion, e.g. Indian, Pakistani, Mauritian, or Bengali, or Sikh, Hindu etc.

Although terms such as *South Asian* or *South Eastern Asian* are sometimes used, many people may not be clear as to what is meant. Again, it is better to refer to people by their country of origin, such as Vietnamese, Malaysian, etc. By doing so, you are likely to reduce the risk of causing offence.

# Ethnic Origin

## ***Black***

Under the Commission for Racial Equality guidelines, the term *Black* refers to African or African/Caribbean people.

## ***Black British***

Although this is often seen on official documentation, when racial identity is an issue, people in general (particularly young people) will refer to themselves as Black. Many people in South Wales will now classify themselves as Black Welsh, for example.

## ***British***

This term is about citizenship, and doesn't directly relate to ethnic or racial origin. Nearly everyone born in Britain has British citizenship, regardless of colour or ethnicity. The term should not be used as a synonym for *White*.

## ***Coloured***

This is not usually an acceptable term, and many people find it offensive. Although it was in common usage some years ago, it is now used less often, and has generally been replaced by the term *Black*.

## ***Non-White***

Many people may find this term deeply offensive, as its origins relate to apartheid. The term should be avoided.

## ***Half-Caste***

The use of the term half-caste was widely used until recent times. It is now regarded as offensive by many people due to its origins within the Hindu Caste System, in which being half-caste (and therefore less than whole) could mean social exclusion for the individual concerned. When applied to people of mixed race in this country the term implies a missing or unacceptable half and tends to be used in a derogatory way.



# Self-classification of Ethnic Origin

When dealing with people from any community their own self-classification of ethnic origin is important and should be recorded according to their wishes. Where the self-classification may be perceived by others as derogatory, particularly in written statements, it is recommended that clarification is added in brackets e.g. half-caste (mixed race/parentage), or coloured (Black).

## ***Minority Ethnic Communities/Minority Ethnic***

These terms are widely used and generally accepted in the broadest term to encompass all those groups who see themselves as distinct from the majority in terms of cultural or ethnic identity, and not just *Black* or *visible* minorities.

Ethnics as a term on its own is not acceptable. Neither should a term such as *immigrants* be generally used, unless in a strict technical sense.

## ***Mixed Race***

This term is generally acceptable, but can sometimes have negative connotations. An alternative is *mixed parentage*.

The term *multi-racial* may also be used, for example as in reference to a *multi-racial household*, and the term *mixed cultural heritage* is increasingly used in educational circles.

# PEOPLE & COMMUNITIES



# African People

## *Introduction To The Community*

Covering about 22 percent of the world's total land area and having 54 countries, **Africa** is the world's second largest continent, with an enormous variety and diversity of languages, cultures, people and religions. This section refers to some of the groups who have migrated from Africa to areas of the UK.

**Nigerians** and **Ghanaians** are the two largest groups of people from West Africa. Nigeria has one of the largest populations in Africa, estimated at over 120 million in 2000 and there are more than 250 ethnic groups. Although English is the official language many Nigerians are not fluent in English, and are likely to speak Hausa, Yoruba, and Ibo. They are likely to be either Muslims or Christian. Almost all Ghanaians belong to one of about 100 black African ethnic groups, each with its own cultural heritage. English is still the official language of Ghana and is used in schools, business, and government. English is also the language used to communicate between ethnic groups. Twi, an Akan language with many dialects, is spoken by about two-fifths of the population. Mole-Dagbani, Ewe, Ga-Adangbe and Hausa are also spoken. As a result, most Ghanaians are at least bilingual. Traditional African beliefs are held by many and play an important role in the lives of the people of Ghana, whilst the majority of other Ghanaians are either Muslims or Christian.

**Somalia** is a country in the Horn of Africa that has been occupied by the Somali people for over 1,000 years and more than 95 per cent of the Somali population is composed of a single ethnic group. Somali, the official language, is spoken by almost all Somalis and belongs to the Cushitic family of languages. Nearly all Somalis are Sunni Muslim.

There are approximately 60,000 Somalis in the UK, who tend to be either the established Somali community of sailors and their families or the more recent asylum seekers and refugees (many of whom have arrived in Britain from refugee camps).

## *Language*

Africa is a huge continent with many ex-colonial countries. For many people, English may not be the spoken language of their community.

# African People

## *Beliefs*

Many Africans are of the Christian faith, although the majority of people from northern Nigeria follow the faith of Islam, as do smaller numbers of people from Morocco and Algeria (North Africa), Ethiopia, Sudan, Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. People from East Africa are predominantly of the Christian faith, most Somalis are Muslim.

## *Names*

Religion and colonialism have transformed traditional African naming practices. Many people across Africa have adopted Christian or Muslim personal names. Administrative requirements have led to the introduction of surnames, usually African style, e.g. Nelson Mandela. Some people however, will have both African personal and family names, e.g. Jomo Kenyatta. Because of these influences most African people in Britain will have a personal, or in some cases two personal names, followed by a family name.

Under the West African naming system, women are likely to retain their own names on marriage due to their importance in property ownership, trade, ancestry and inheritance often following the female line. Because of this, husbands and wives may not necessarily have any names in common. Also, many West Africans have at least four personal names, which may include a Christian or Muslim name, a name given after a relative or friend, a birth order name and a day name.

A Somali name will consist of a first name, followed by the father's name, then that of the grandfather. Usually, a Somali is known by the combination of these three names. The naming system is the same for both genders. Traditionally, women retain their own names on marriage although in Britain a Somali woman may take her husband's family (grandfather's name) on marriage.

## *Visiting A Home*

It is difficult to offer any advice on this issue, as the nations and faiths that fall within Africa are so varied. As a general rule, you should be guided by your own common sense and the information listed under faiths elsewhere in this document.

## *Medical Treatment*

Attitudes to medical treatment will largely be dependent on people's country of origin and their faith.



# African People

## *General*

In many traditional African cultures, men and women have equal respect, but believe that both genders have specific roles and responsibilities to fulfil. The man is traditionally the head of the family, whereas the wife is the nucleus of the family and is given great respect.

In Africa, respect and status are gained through age and therefore parents tend to have unquestioned authority over their children. Families who do not take responsibility for their children are not considered good members of their community.

Khat (pronounced Gat) is a plant-based drug, imported fresh in bundles, mainly from Kenya, Ethiopia and the Yemen. It is currently legal unless in resin form and is normally chewed, thus acting as a stimulant. Traditionally it is used for socialising (predominantly among Somali men), although its popularity is spreading. There is concern that Khat is contributing towards mental health problems among the Somali refugees, especially when compounded by social and economic deprivation that some of them are facing in the UK.



# African People/Caribbean People

## *Introduction to the community*

The Caribbean Islands are made up of three main island chains extending in a roughly crescent shape from the Yucatán Peninsula and Florida to the coast of Venezuela. Most of the **African/Caribbean** people in the UK are from the *West Indian Islands* and because of their colonial history have a strong identity with Britain, viewing it as the Mother Country. The islands have been heavily influenced by the British way of life in education, politics and social systems. Approximately 60 per cent of the African/Caribbean people who have migrated to the UK come from Jamaica, with smaller numbers of people from Dominica and Barbados, Trinidad, St Lucia, St Vincent and Guyana (located on the mainland of South America).

African/Caribbean people began arriving in Britain in large numbers in the early 1950's as a result of the post-war economic boom, which had left many jobs vacant. Also at this time, the USA passed the McCarran Walter Act that restricted the numbers of immigrants from 65,000 to 800 per year. On coming to the UK, they settled in and around the large towns and cities that could offer job prospects.

## *Language*

Because of colonisation many African/Caribbean people speak English, although the character and accents will vary much from one island to another, with many younger black people speaking a combination of street language, patois and local dialects.

## *Beliefs*

African/Caribbean people are predominantly **Christian** in their beliefs, with a small number of **Muslims**, **Hindus** and other religions. There are also a substantial number who embrace **Rastafarianism**.

## *Festivals*

Music, dancing and carnivals are central to the social lives of the Caribbean islands. Carnivals are religious in origin, but will normally have grown up around local events on each island. Music has often served as a vehicle of protest about social and economic deprivation.

## *Dress*

Most African/Caribbean people wear western dress, but some groups are influenced by a growing awareness of their African history, which can be reflected in the colour and style of their clothes.



# African People/Caribbean People

## *Diet*

The African/Caribbean diet is varied and includes foods such as plantain, rice, sweet potato, yams and black-eyed beans.

## *Birth*

A matriarchal culture has existed for generations, with women being considered the bedrock of the community in which (through the extended grandmothers, mothers and aunts have always played a key role in the upbringing of children.

## *Naming*

Most African/Caribbeans from the once-named British West Indies will probably follow the British naming pattern. Whilst in most cases the family name is passed from the husband to the children, for some the family name is inherited from the mother. This may reflect the woman's family status, which has tended to be stronger than in Europe.

Greater diversity in personal names may also be found among African/Caribbean families because of the greater use of biblical names such as Moses, Esther etc and a more recent tendency towards creating novel and original names, e.g. Delroy.

## *Marriage*

Marriage is traditionally held in high regard in most African/Caribbean communities and it should only be considered when a personal commitment and a person's economic basis are secure.

In the UK there have tended to be a higher number of formal marriages (possibly due to greater economic security), although as with other communities, there are also a growing number of one-parent households.

As with other cultures, weddings and funerals are treated as opportunities for the community to come together.

Often when speaking to African/Caribbean men (particularly in an atmosphere of conflict), the man may bring his face very close to that of the other person. This is NOT a gesture of threat in every case. Usually it is because the African/Caribbean perception of personal space is much less than that of a European. Likewise, African/Caribbeans are generally more animated in conversation.

## *Medical Treatment*

Attitudes to medical treatment are likely to be influenced by religious beliefs.

# Chinese People

## *Introduction to the Community*

The Chinese have one of the oldest civilisations, with a population that is the largest of any country in the world. It has a population (estimated 2000) of more than 1.26 billion.

75–80 percent of Chinese people in the UK come from **Hong Kong**. Hong Kong's population is predominantly **Cantonese**, coming from the Chinese province of Canton. Other elements in the urban population may include the **Hakka** and people from the Fujian province.

The Chinese have a rich and varied religious tradition and spiritual beliefs and practices. Amongst some Chinese, belief in the traditional religions is strong, to the extent that some may find it difficult to adapt to certain 'crisis' situations like hospitalisation and other disasters, because of feelings of isolation. However, this is changing due to western influence and greater integration.

## *Language*

Chinese people share a written language that is over 2000 years old, and has over 16,000 characters, each standing for an entire word. Traditionally, Chinese is written vertically, but in contemporary Britain it has been changed to read from left to right. Most literate Chinese people (regardless of their spoken dialect) can read the written Chinese language.

There are many dialects in the Chinese language, i.e. Mandarin, Cantonese, Hakka and Fujian. Mandarin is the national dialect and Cantonese is widely used by people from Hong Kong.

## *Beliefs*

While the Chinese government officially encourages atheism, people may exercise religious beliefs within certain boundaries. Buddhists, Taoists, Muslims, and Christians all practise their religions, and temples, mosques, and churches are open to the public.

- ***Buddhism***

Many Chinese see Buddhism as a way of life – ***the process of birth, ageing, illness and death***. It is believed that through prayers, purification, virtuous conduct and acts of compassion a Buddhist can attain a good present life and also reincarnation to a better one. (*For more information, see the separate entry on Buddhism in this guide.*)



# Chinese People

- ***Taoism***

Taoism sees life as compared to a balance of water, fire, earth, metal and wood. Illnesses and bad luck occur when there is an imbalance and the treatment restores the balance.

- ***Confucianism***

This practice places emphasis on law and learning. It is an ethical system that preaches respect for authority and sees law as essential to making life possible.

## ***Festivals***

Yuan Tan (the Chinese New Year) is the most popular festival, as it marks the beginning of the lunar year. It usually occurs between mid-January and mid-February and is usually a three-day celebration.

Other celebrations include Ching Ming (ancestor remembrance), the Dragon Boat festival, and the mid-autumn festival.

## ***Dress***

Many Chinese people wear western clothes, although traditional clothes are still worn by some communities, particularly on special occasions such as weddings and for the New Year celebrations.

## ***Birth***

Traditionally, families hold a celebration a month after the birth, to which families and friends are invited.

## ***Names***

Traditionally, the family name comes first, followed by the personal names that are normally made up of one or two Chinese characters e.g.

Male	<b><i>Lam</i></b> (family name)	<b><i>Wen - Zhi</i></b> (personal name)
Woman	<b><i>Cheung</i></b> (family name)	<b><i>Lan - Ying</i></b> (personal name)

It is becoming common for a married woman to add the husband's family name as a prefix. Thus, Cheung Lan - Ying would become Lam Cheung Lan - Ying.

As people become more westernised some Chinese are also adopting the European way of having their family name last. Others choose to adopt the European way of having a western first name such as Jackie Chan or Bruce Lee.

# Chinese People

## ***Marriage***

Although arranged marriages are not common within the Chinese community, matchmaking is a common practice. Horoscopes are sometimes used to select favourable wedding dates.

Traditionally, a married couple would continue to live within an extended family arrangement of a number of generations and would pool their earnings for the good of the family. However, UK houses are generally smaller and this practice is often not possible, being replaced by what has become known as the 'nuclear family unit'.

## ***Death***

The colour white is synonymous with mourning for the Chinese and therefore is not worn for any celebratory occasions. As with other communities, the family undergo a period of mourning following the death.

Traditionally, family and friends subscribe to the cost of the funeral.

Burial or cremation is acceptable and sometimes the ashes are sent to China to be included in their ancestor's graves.

## ***Visiting A Home***

As with most communities, it is considered polite to address Chinese people by their title and family name e.g. Mr Cheung.

Many Chinese nod politely or bow slightly when greeting another person. A handshake is also acceptable, especially in formal situations or to show respect.

Although the extended family unit may have all but disappeared, elderly people are highly respected, as according to an old Chinese proverb... *"Having an old family member is like having a treasure in the home"*. Due regard should therefore be paid to any elderly people that you come across.

## ***Medical Treatment***

There may be reluctance by some Chinese people to accept western medical help. Homeopathic medicine was largely developed by the Chinese and still plays a major part in their everyday treatment of illness and ailments.



# Eastern European People

## *Introduction to the Community*

Many Eastern European people are here as a result of conflict. They include people from **Poland, Ukraine** and former **Yugoslavian** countries e.g **Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo** and also **Romanies**.

They have migrated to Britain at various times in the past, but numbers increased dramatically following the end of World War II when the families of many Polish soldiers who fought under British command were displaced to refugee camps in Tehran and southern Africa, where they stayed until 1948. There were also Polish and Ukrainian people during this period, who having been deported to German labour camps came to Britain.

The war in former Yugoslavia during the 1990s, between **Muslims, Serbs** and **Croats**, brought a second wave of immigrants to the UK. Many of the Bosnian people in the UK are here on a temporary basis.

Whilst all groups reflect a strong family ethos, **Bosnian** people in particular prefer to live in extended family units that maintain a very strong community spirit.

**Romanies** take this ethos even further by working also as a family unit. This includes children who work as soon as they are able. Men govern Romany society, whilst women dedicate their lives to their children. Romanies are multi-skilled and adapt to changing times, seasons and the economy. Their average life span is 20 years less than the European average and they have one of the highest child mortality rates. This is largely due to poor pre-natal care and the fact that many Romanies live below the poverty level.

## *Languages*

Many of the Eastern European people coming to Britain do not speak English. This is particularly so for older people. This means that Polish and Ukrainians people predominantly rely on their own native tongue, whilst many people from the former Yugoslavia speak **Serbo-Croat**.

Although Bosnian Romanies speak Serbo-Croat, they prefer to communicate in **Romani**, which has many dialects.



# Eastern European People

## ***Beliefs***

Most Polish and Ukrainian people are Catholic or Orthodox Christians. The Orthodox church traditionally celebrates Christmas Day on 7 January each year. Easter is usually celebrated later than in the UK.

The main religions practiced in Bosnia and Herzegovina are Islam along with Catholic and Orthodox forms of Christianity. The Islamic population (including most Romanians) is predominantly Sunni Muslim.

## ***Festivals***

Many Eastern European people are intensely proud of their heritage and form local groups and societies to keep their traditions alive. They tend to be deeply religious and festivals relating to their own faith (predominantly Christian and Muslim) will be an important part of their lives.

## ***Dress***

The wearing of national costume tends to be reserved for special occasions.

## ***Diet***

The traditional Eastern European diet is one that is based upon meat and vegetarians are uncommon.

Many dishes e.g. stews made from differing meats and vegetables, are cooked for long periods. Other foods include pies, pastries and dairy produce, with bread eaten at most meals. Turkish coffee is popular throughout cultures with strong links to the former Ottoman empire, particularly with Bosnians.

## ***Birth***

Some groups follow the practice of extended families caring for the child and mother for an extended period, after the birth.

## ***Naming***

Traditions from their former countries and/or religious beliefs continue, as families hold on to their cultural past.



# Eastern European People

## *Marriage*

Traditional marriages were very much a case of the family helping individuals to find a suitable partner. Before the break up of Yugoslavia, there were often examples of mixed marriages between people from different ethnic groups. These couples were forced to flee their homes and communities as a result of the conflict.

## *Death*

Attitudes to death will mostly depend on their religious beliefs. For relatives of the deceased, who may only have a temporary status in the UK, the decision as to where the body should be buried is sometimes difficult.

## *Visiting A Home*

Because many of the Eastern European people came to the UK under difficult circumstances, they often arrived with few possessions. As a result, they are often very proud of those possessions, as they relate to their cultural background.

## *Medical Treatment*

There are generally no difficulties associated with providing medical treatment.

Although many refugees will have learned English, communication with the elderly and the newly arrived may prove difficult.



# Gypsies & Travellers

## *Introduction to the Community*

Although Traveller suggests a homogenous group of people, there is no single group of Travellers.

Traveller is a collective term for all those ethnic minority, business, professional, and cultural communities who travel for work purposes or who keep travel as an option and key reference point in their lives, even when they are settled.

In their own communities people may assert their specific identities as: **Gypsy** [Welsh, English], **Traveller** [Irish, Scottish] **Showmen** [Fairground] and **Circus**. Gypsies and Irish Travellers are minority ethnic communities protected by the 1976 Race Relations Act.

## *Gypsies*

There is strong evidence to show that Gypsies first migrated into Britain from Northern India in the early 1500's. In Britain at that time they were thought to be Egyptians on a pilgrimage, because of their dark skin and different language. This belief led to the settled population calling them Gypsies.

## *Irish Travellers*

Irish Travellers have a long and complex history. There are known to have been indigenous nomadic smiths, making and mending pots and pans in the Middle Ages in Ireland.

Some scholars believe that the population of Travellers was swelled by communities dispossessed of their homes and land during The Famine in the nineteenth century. There is recorded evidence of Irish Travellers in England in the 1800's, but it was the government's attempts in 1963, to bring in policies to settle families in houses, against the wishes of Travellers, that led to large numbers leaving Ireland.

Although there are differences between communities, Gypsies and Irish Travellers have much in common as nomadic groups, although their historical roots are different.

## *Showmen*

Showmen are a business and cultural community who, by their organisation around a single business interest for generations, and with a history of planned movement, are distinctive from the other Traveller communities.



# Gypsies & Travellers

## *Circus*

Circus families, both British and international, also travel for work purposes around a single business interest and are just as distinctive, by virtue of their lifestyle, professional structure and organisation.

There remains a small group of families travelling and working on the Canal networks in Britain. Their number has been increased by settled families seeking to live and travel on narrow boats. They work permanently or seasonally retaining occupations they had while living in a house.

In the 1980's and 1990's New Travellers emerged. They were mainly young people and young families from settled white mainstream culture who adopted a Traveller lifestyle. Some were educated, who made a positive choice for their own reasons. Others were escaping the negative cycle of homelessness, family conflict or breakdown. Their travel is often limited to the seasonal festival tours, otherwise there is a preference for the more permanent stopping places.

It was in response to the mass gatherings and raves of the New Travellers in the 1980's that the government of the day who saw their activities as subversive and anti-social, introduced legislation to curb their activities, which in turn impacted critically on Gypsies and Travellers. [Public Order Act 1987]

In the 1990's and early years of the new millennium to date, Roma [Gypsies] from Eastern European countries began to arrive as refugees and asylum seekers.

## *Language*

Gypsies use a language known as **Romani**. Scholars believe that the Romani language is derived from Sanskrit [Prakrit]. It is a spoken language although there have been efforts to establish an agreed written international Romani in order to promote and reclaim the language. Hindi and Punjabi speakers will recognise a good deal of shared vocabulary with Romani.

Irish Travellers language, **Gammon**, also known as **Cant**, is believed by some to have been spoken by those from the old religion who were cast out when Christianity came to Ireland. Today an Anglo-Gammon dialect remains, stronger in some groups than others



# Gypsies & Travellers

After the fifteenth century, their not leaving the country, their language, traditions, values, work interests and nomadic lifestyle, led them to be more and more marginalised, stigmatised, and penalised as strangers. By the sixteenth century it was a capital offence to be a Gypsy, a situation not repealed until the mid 1800's.

Today Gypsies are still disadvantaged because legislation fails to provide adequate accommodation, preventing or impeding access to mainstream services and facilities. If Gypsies are excluded or discriminated against at a personal or institutional level then this should be reported to The Commission for Racial Equality.

## *Belief, Custom & Lifestyle*

Gypsies' traditional belief systems have given way for many to organisation of the Gypsy Evangelical Church, and many families travel to attend Gypsy churches and follow mobile missions around the country from Easter time into summer. Many families travel to mainland Europe for religious events including Saintes Marie de la Mer. Irish Travellers are largely and traditionally Roman Catholic.

Gypsies generally adhere to hygiene practices rooted in Hindu laws of cleanliness. Some of the traditions and beliefs in many families have changed, but many others are still intact. Clean water is still poured from closed cans and a range of bowls is still used to separate different washing activities. There is no evidence to support Irish Travellers having roots in concepts of spiritual cleanliness; nevertheless many have also adopted practices akin to Gypsies in an attempt to preserve the health of the family.

Both Gypsies and Irish Travellers engage in increasingly varied work as traditional options disappear. Increasingly, families travel abroad to pursue work.

A small handful of families still live in carved and highly decorated horse drawn wagons called **Vardos**. Some families prize the heavy distinctive stainless steel embossed trailers. Inside, abundant glass and mirrors reflect light and space. Engraved and bevelled glass emulates traditional designs from the wooden carved Vardo.

Today families prefer to purchase modern continental trailers from mainland Europe, indistinguishable externally from mainstream quality caravans on the road. Space is at a premium and families observe finely planned use of space and operation within the trailer.



# Gypsies & Travellers

## *Gypsy and Traveller Populations*

It is not possible to be accurate about the size of the Gypsy and Traveller population in Britain because there has never been a formally conducted census. Gypsies and Travellers are not included as categories in the national census. Every study and report makes its claim for population size, although, each rightly points out that numbers are likely to be greater because of the added difficulty in counting those families who have been long settled in housing. The County Council owns six permanent sites that are overseen by the Council's Traveller Site Manager. There are currently up to nine privately owned sites.

There is a joint-working initiative between Oxfordshire County Council and Thames Valley Police which addresses issues relating to unauthorised encampment.

## *Gypsy and Traveller Representation*

Representation and self-advocacy for Gypsies and Travellers has been fraught with historical conflict, the remnants of which still exist today. There are a number of organisations that are active at a national level, and at a local level an important community link are the Traveller Education Services. The Advisory Service for the Education of Travellers (ASET) is also part of Oxfordshire County Council and has a staff of twenty.

## *Showmen [Fairground]*

The Showmen or Fairground community have a long history from Roman times of providing entertainment at markets, trade and hiring fairs and seasonal festivals across the land - and in Oxfordshire. From the middle ages until as late as the twentieth century, hiring or 'mop' fairs were held where workers were put up for hire.

The use of steam in industrial contexts led in 1868 to the first steam roundabout. The fairs were the first to bring electric light and moving picture shows to a wider public. The dates of the historical Statute and Charter fairs are still adhered to today despite the ever-changing economic and social climate. The modern fairs still bring entertainment to the public on specific dates at different venues throughout Britain.

# Gypsies & Travellers

## *Circus*

A sergeant major in the English cavalry introduced circus to London in 1768. Subsequently it was introduced across Europe. At the beginning of the 19th century many European cities had a permanent circus as well as travelling shows and circus. Today in Britain there are nineteen circuses travelling, mostly seasonally and some for eleven months of the year. There are large circuses with contracted acts as well as small family circuses. There is traditional circus and circus with new skills shows. Circus is both British and international.



# South Asian People

## *Introduction to the Community*

The term South Asia (as used here) includes **India, Bangladesh** and **Pakistan**. It can also include people from East Africa, Sri Lanka, Nepal and the state of Bhutan. India has the second largest population in the world after China, with 1,027 million people (2001 Estimate).

Sikhs and Hindus are predominantly from India and Bangladesh, whilst most Muslims are from either Pakistan or Bangladesh and to a lesser extent India.

Many South Asian people came to England after the Second World War and particularly following the independence of India and Pakistan in 1947, in response to labour shortages in Britain, but also because of a variety of social, economic and political reasons. The construction of the Mirpur Dam in the early 1960's uprooted whole communities, who were given priority to migrate to England.

## *Language*

Although the written language is also Urdu, English is important for commerce and government. many first generation immigrants may not be literate.

**Pakistani** people predominantly speak **Urdu** (although there are many other languages), which is approximately 200 years old. The written language is also Urdu, but many first generation people may not be literate.

**Bangladesh** was formed after a civil war in Pakistan in 1971. Predominantly living in rural areas, about 90% of the population are Muslim, Hindus and Buddhists make up the remainder. There are 70+ Bangladeshi owned restaurants and takeaways in Oxfordshire with an annual turnover of £20M, employing 500 people and serving an average of 20,000 customers a week.

**Sikh** people usually speak **Punjabi**.

## *Beliefs*

The main religions found in South Asia are **Islam, Sikhism, Hinduism** and **Buddhism**, although India in particular is traditionally tolerant of all religions.



# South Asian People

## *Customs*

Traditional images of South Asian communities are of extended families, arranged marriages, a traditional women's role, a particular diet, traditional clothes (particularly for women) and religious devotion.

Physical contact between the sexes (other than for close family members) has traditionally been avoided, especially when in public.

These images or cultural representations are not static however and are subject to constant change, influenced by political, social and economic factors in the UK as well as in their country of origin.

## *Festivals*

There are many festivals, most of which coincide with a religious event relating to their own beliefs. These are referred to in later sections of this document under Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism etc.

## *Dress*

Traditional dress is likely to be determined by the person's country of origin and their own faith. Most UK South Asian men wear western clothes.

Many South Asian women wear the ***Shalwar Kameez*** (a form of trouser suit, particularly favoured by Pakistani and Bangladeshi Muslim women to maintain their modesty, accompanied by a head scarf called a ***hijab***, and ***duputa***, a one-piece garment covering the upper body. Pakistani and Bangladeshi men are likely to wear western clothes accompanied by some form of cap/hat (particularly during times of religious observance), but may wear a loose cotton garment called a ***lungi*** when at home, instead of trousers.

The Shalwar Kameez are also worn by women from India, who might also wear the ***Sari*** (a one-piece garment, wound/folded around the lower body), in conjunction with a blouse and petticoat. The Sari is also likely to be worn by Bangladeshi women.

The Turban is synonymous with Sikhism, but there are other forms of the turban that are worn by people belonging to other groups.



# South Asian People

## *Diet*

Foods vary widely in the region, depending on the culture and region. For example, rice is a staple food in the south, while roti (wheat bread) is a staple food in the north.

Irrespective of their religion, most people are vegetarian, although not exclusively.

## *Birth*

As with other communities, children are viewed as a gift from God. Traditionally South Asian families were larger than UK families to enable them to achieve financial stability, by many people contributing to the household.

## *Naming*

The process of naming can differ for each group, with many traditional practices being influenced by western culture.

## *Marriage*

Many South Asian families use a system of arranged marriages that goes back to a time when a person's average life expectancy was between 30 and 35 years. As a result, it was necessary for couples to marry very young and at a time when their wisdom in choosing a partner may be undeveloped. Accordingly, family heads chose their partners for them... often very successfully.

## *Death*

People's attitude to death differs, depending on their religious beliefs.

## *Visiting A Home*

Although there may be some difficulty with a man visiting a home where there is a lone woman (because of cultural differences), there are unlikely to be any other problems.

## *Medical Treatment*

All medical treatment, such as blood transfusion, surgery or administering of drugs is allowed and life-saving considerations take precedence over any religious duties.



# Refugees and Asylum Seekers

## *Who are refugees?*

Refugees and asylum seekers are people who have fled their home country because they face persecution that their government cannot or does not protect them from.

For those of us brought up in a peaceful democratic country it can be hard to imagine what it is like to be beaten up by the police for the views you hold, or to face a trial where you are not allowed to defend yourself, or to be thrown into prison without trial and tortured. Not all refugees have fled situations like these - some have come from war zones where legal systems have broken down, or where armed gangs attack houses at night. But all have had to leave behind their home and their country. Most have had to leave behind friends and family, sometimes without the chance to say goodbye, and for the few who do not leave behind family, this is usually because they have been killed.

## *Why are they in Britain?*

Naturally when faced by these threats people will try to get to somewhere safe. Most refugees walk across the nearest border and hope for protection from a neighbouring country. A few try to travel further - usually to a country they know something about. So people from ex colonies/countries with a British connection like Zimbabweans or Palestinians, will hope that Britain will help them. People from ex French colonies are more likely to go to France. Some come to Britain because they have been educated in English, or because there is already an established group from their home country in Britain.

Others are helped to escape by 'agents' and do not always have control over where they are going.

## *What is the difference between a refugee and an asylum seeker?*

'Refugee' is a word defined in international law as someone who

- *has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion;*
- *is outside the country they belong to or normally reside in, and*
- *is unable or unwilling to return home for fear of persecution.*

The Home Office decides whether someone fits this description. If so, they are given *indefinite leave to remain* in this country and have most of the rights British citizens have, including the right to work and to receive health care and benefits.



# Refugees and Asylum Seekers

If their case is refused, people have the right to appeal to an independent adjudicator.

'Asylum seeker' is the term used in English to mean someone who has applied for refugee status but who is waiting for a decision from the tribunal. Asylum seekers' rights are restricted.

Sometimes the Home Office or Adjudicator decides that someone does not fit the definition of 'refugee', but it would be unsafe to return them for the time being, often because of war. They are granted 'humanitarian protection' or discretionary leave for a limited time and usually have the same rights as those with indefinite leave to remain except that their family may not join them.

## Some asylum statistics

In 2002

Numbers of recent refugees

- 11.4 million refugees worldwide
- 1.3m in Iran (more than anywhere else in the world)
- 1.2m in Pakistan (ranked 2nd in world)
- 980,000 in Germany (3rd in world)
- 159,240 in UK (15th in world, 4th in Europe, under 1.5% of the world's refugees)

(figures from the United Nations High Commission for Refugees)

Numbers of applications for refugee status

- 103,080 applications for asylum were made to the UK (compare: 100,000 refugees walked across the border from Rwanda to Tanzania in 3 days in 1994)
- this represented 1.9 applications per 1,000 population (8th in Europe)
- Austria had 4.6 applications per 1,000 population (1st in Europe)

In 2003

- There were 9.7 million refugees worldwide
- There were 17 million 'people of concern'
- Pakistan had the highest number of refugees (1.1 million)
- The UK received 49,405 applications for asylum
- Benefits for refugees and asylum seekers made up only 0.5% of the total number of people receiving benefits in the UK

(Figures from UNCHR and the UK Home Office)

# Refugees and Asylum Seekers

In 2004

- 16,865 people applied for asylum in the UK in the first six months of 2004
- 83% of cases decided were refused

The world has not become a safer place, the UK has become less welcoming.

## *How many are there in Oxfordshire and where are they?*

There are no precise numbers because once someone has refugee status they are free to live where they like but there are probably around 2,500 refugees and asylum seekers in Oxfordshire. Most are in Oxford, but they also live in Banbury, Abingdon and Didcot as well as other parts of the county.

## *Backgrounds and cultures*

Although politicians and the media often talk as if refugees and asylum seekers are all the same, in fact they come from very different backgrounds and cultures. The statistics of those claiming asylum change all the time, depending on what is happening in the world.

Recently most have come to the UK from:

- Somalia - where there is a serious breakdown of law and order,
- Iraq - usually Kurds from the north, who were persecuted by Saddam Hussein's government,
- China - due to human rights abuses
- Zimbabwe - Members of opposition parties have been persecuted by President Mugabe's government
- Iran - the strict government does not allow freedom of expression
- Turkey - Kurds in Turkey flee persecution
- Afghanistan - many fled the Taliban regime, and after it fell people fled the warlords who seized power in many parts of the country.

Oxfordshire is also home to refugees from:

- Kosovo - who fled the conflict in the late 1990s
- Rwanda - who fled the genocide in 1994
- Democratic Republic of Congo
- Sudan
- Eastern European Countries following the Second World War. as well as other countries.



# Refugees and Asylum Seekers

## *Language*

Some refugees and asylum seekers have been educated in English and have taken British exams, others learn English when they arrive. Many speak two or more languages.

## *Religion*

A refugee could have any religion or none.

## *Education and work*

On average refugees are more highly skilled and better educated than the UK population. Some have had their education interrupted because of instability in their home countries. They are usually very keen to work, to restart their lives and to be financially independent. However, asylum seekers who arrived here after July 2002 are not allowed to work until their refugee status is granted. Some who arrived before this time do not have permission to work either. Employers wanting advice about employing refugees and asylum seekers can contact Refugee Resource (see support section below).

## *Health care*

All refugees and asylum seekers are eligible for NHS healthcare unless their asylum application has been refused after the final appeal and their benefit has been withdrawn.

Anyone in the country, regardless of status, is eligible for emergency treatment.

## *Campsfield House*

Since 1993 Campsfield House in Kidlington has been an immigration detention centre housing men about whose status the immigration service has queries. Most of these people are asylum seekers. They are not criminals and are likely not to be in Campsfield very long. Many detainees report extreme unhappiness and claim their needs (medical, legal, dietary and psycho-social) are not met. Some of the refugees now settled and working in Oxfordshire have been detained in Campsfield.

## *Bicester*

In April 2004 the High Court upheld the government's application to build a 750 person accommodation centre outside Bicester to house individuals and families while their asylum claim is being decided. This is not a detention centre and asylum seekers will be free to leave the centre during the day. Some are likely to settle in the area after they receive a positive decision.

# Refugees and Asylum Seekers

## *Support for refugees and asylum seekers*

The Social and Health Asylum Seeker Service supports destitute asylum seekers (single adults and families with children) who claimed asylum in Oxfordshire before August 2000, under the “Interim Arrangements” of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. The numbers supported have decreased considerably due to speedier Home Office decision making, and because many families have been granted Indefinite Leave to Remain in the UK under the Indefinite Leave to Remain Integration Project.

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children continue to be the responsibility of the Asylum Seeker Service and Social Care for Children until they reach the age of twenty one.

The Asylum Seeker Service works in partnership with County Council Departments, Educational Institutions, District Councils, the Primary Care Trusts, Thames Valley Police and the voluntary sector, including Asylum Welcome, Refugee Resource, and Action for Children in Conflict.

Asylum Welcome [276A Cowley Road, OX4 1UR Tel: 01865 722082] offers advice and support to asylum seekers and refugees, and is the first place to call for advice about services.

Refugee Resource [Hooper House, 3 Collins Street, Oxford OX4 1XS Tel: 0845 458 0055] offers counselling to refugees and asylum seekers and also coordinates the Access First project which supports jobsearch for refugees and those asylum seekers who have permission to work. It can advise employers about documentation for work.

## *Other immigration statuses*

The Home Office allows employers to recruit staff from overseas

- in employment sectors suffering skills shortages: engineering, healthcare, actuary, teaching, veterinary medicine. The highly skilled migrant entry programme allows highly skilled individuals to migrate to the United Kingdom.

There are also special arrangements for:

- sportspeople and entertainers;
- some people doing work-based training for a specialist qualification



# Refugees and Asylum Seekers

- employers of companies based outside the European Union to work on a contract awarded to their employer by a UK-based organisation
- those recruited to low skilled short-term or casual jobs in the hospitality industry, certain areas of the food manufacturing industries, and seasonal agricultural work.

Citizens of countries within the European Union and the European Economic Area are allowed to move freely between member states and do not need special permission to work. The area has recently expanded with Eastern European countries such as Latvia, Estonia, Poland and Hungary joining. Fears that large numbers of migrants from these countries would enter the UK have not been justified.

The Population of dependant territories or ex-colonies, British protectorates or some Commonwealth citizens may claim British citizenship or nationality and choose to live and work in the UK.

## ***General section:***

***Names*** - as with British names you should always take care with spelling - they are an important part of someone's identity. For example Carole is rarely happy to be called Carol and you should be equally careful to find out whether an individual is Mohammad or Mohamed or another spelling of this common name. If you don't know how to pronounce a name ask, listen carefully and try it out. If you need to remember the name you can, in private, write it in a way that will help you learn the pronunciation. It is never too difficult to learn someone's name.

***If in doubt*** - You cannot be expected to know everything about all the different cultures refugees and asylum seekers come from. If you are uncertain, ask the individual about something you are not sure about.

# FAITHS





# Bahá'í

## *Introduction*

The ***Bahá'í Faith*** is one of the youngest of the world's independent religions.

On May 23, 1844, in Shiraz, Persia, a young man known as the ***Báb*** announced the imminent appearance of the Messenger of God.

The Faith's founder, ***Bahá'u'lláh*** (1817 – 1892) is regarded by Bahá'ís as the most recent in the line of Messengers of God that stretches back beyond recorded time and that includes Muhammad, Christ, Zoroaster, Buddha, Moses and Abraham.

He was a member of one of the great patrician families of Persia, but after the Báb's execution Bahá'u'lláh was subjected to imprisonment, torture, and a series of banishments until his eventual death near Acre.

***Abdu'l-Bahá*** (meaning the servant of Bahá) was the son of Bahá'u'lláh, who appointed him the one authorized interpreter of the Bahá'í teachings and Head of the Faith, after his own passing.

## *Beliefs*

The central theme of Bahá'u'lláh's message is that humanity is one single race and the day has come for its unification in one global society. Bahá'u'lláh said that God has set in motion historical forces that are breaking down traditional barriers of race, class, creed and nation that will in time give birth to a universal civilisation.

Bahá'ís believe that the principal challenge facing the peoples of the earth is to accept the fact of their oneness and to assist the process of unification.

Bahá'u'lláh taught that there is one God whose successive revelations of His will to humanity have been the chief civilising force in history. The agents of this process have been the Divine Messengers who people have seen chiefly as the founders of separate religious systems, but whose common purpose has been to bring the human race to spiritual and moral maturity.

# Bahá'í



Among the principals which the Bahá'í Faith promotes as vital to the achievement of this goal are...

- The abandonment of all forms of prejudice.
- Assurance to women of full equality of opportunity with men.
- Recognition of the unity and relativity of religious truth.
- The elimination of extremes of poverty and wealth.
- The realisation of universal education.
- The responsibility of each person to independently search for the truth.
- The establishment of a global Commonwealth of Nations.
- Recognition that true religion is harmony with reason and the pursuit of scientific knowledge.

It is believed that humanity is now coming of age and it is this that makes possible the unification of the human family and the building of a peaceful, global society.

Today there are some five million Bahá'ís worldwide and there has been a Bahá'í presence in the United Kingdom for more than a century.

## *Festivals*

Holy days and festivals are celebrated as follows...

March 21	- Feast of Naw Rúz (Bahá'í New Year)*
April 21	- First day of Ridván (Declaration of Bahá'u'lláh)*
April 29	- Ninth day of Ridván*
May 2	- Twelfth day of Ridván*
May 23	- Declaration of the Báb* (2 hours after sunset on 22 May)
May 23	- Birth of 'Abdu'l-Bahá
May 29	- Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh*
July 9	- Noon Martyrdom of the Báb*
October 20	- Birth of the Báb*
November 12	- Birth of Bahá'u'lláh*
November 26	- Day of the Covenant
November 28	- Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Bahá





# Bahá'í

A Bahá'í day begins at sunset. The days marked with \* are those on which followers should not work or go to school, although some degree of flexibility can be exercised.

As has been the case in other revealed religions, the Bahá'í Faith sees great value in the practice of fasting, as a discipline for the soul. There is a 19 day period each year when adult Bahá'ís fast from sunrise to sunset each day. This coincides with the Bahá'í month of Alá (March 2 – 21).

Women who are nursing or pregnant, the aged, the sick, the traveller, those engaged in heavy work and children under the age of 15 years are exempt from observing the fast. Fasting is both symbolic and a reminder of abstinence from selfish and carnal desires.

**Ayyamiha** is a festival that runs from 25 February to 1 March and which serves as a spiritual preparation to the fast, which follows.

## **Birth**

Instead of a Christening, Bahá'ís have a naming ceremony.

## **Marriage**

Once parental permission is obtained, a marriage takes place that requires only the simplest of ceremonies.

In the presence of two witnesses designated by the local Bahá'í governing council, the couple recite the following verse... ***“We will all, verily, abide by the will of God”***.

Beyond this simple commitment, Bahá'ís are free to design their own marriage celebration as they wish, depending upon personal taste, cultural traditions and family resources.

## **Death**

All Bahá'ís are buried within one hour's travel distance from their place of death. If the deceased is over the age of 15 years, a ***Prayer for the Dead*** must be recited.

Bahá'ís are free to leave their bodies to medical science, if desired.

# Bahá'í



## *Dress*

There are no special requirements for dress.

## *Diet*

There are no special dietary requirements.

## *Place of Worship*

Bahá'ís meet in Temples for devotional worship every 19 days, but as yet there are none in the UK and so followers meet in each other's homes.

There are no special requirements e.g. removal of footwear or covering of the head, for people who enter a Bahá'í place of worship.

## *Medical Assistance*

No special requirements or restrictions exist.





# Buddhism

## *Introduction*

Buddhism is based on the teachings of **Siddhartha Gautama** (later known as **Buddha**), who was born in the foothills of the Himalayas of Northern India in 563 BCE.

He was the son of a Sakya nobleman and lived a life of luxury, seeing nothing of the outside world until he was a young man. Then he saw **The Four Passing Sights** i.e. death, old age, poverty and sickness. He wanted to find a way to end suffering by finding its cause, how to cure it and to discover the true meaning of life, and for six years he sought different spiritual paths including asceticism (extreme self-denial to the extent of nearly killing himself).

Finally, through meditation and religious trance, he found enlightenment and an end to suffering (**Nirvana**). It is at this point that he became the Buddha and travelled as a missionary for about 45 years with a community of monks and nuns, spreading his teaching.

As Buddhism spread throughout India and Asia it developed into several diverse schools. The most well known are **Theravada** Buddhism, **Vajryana** (or Tibetan) Buddhism, **Zen** Buddhism and **Mahayana** Buddhism.

- **Theravada Buddhism** is prevalent in Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and India.
- **Mahayana Buddhism** spread to Tibet, China, Korea, Japan and Vietnam.
- **Zen Buddhism** is mostly confined to Vietnam, China and Japan.

Buddhism is also well established in most western countries.

Buddhists gather together to meditate and venerate the **Buddha**. Offerings of flowers are made to images and people may kneel before statues and light candles.

Today, there are about 330 million Buddhists worldwide, with the majority living in the Far East and an estimated 130,000 in Britain.

## *Beliefs*

Buddhists do not believe in a divine being or creator. Buddhism can be described as a system of thought and discipline, based upon practical advice. Buddhism maintains that life is cyclical, with rebirth following death.

# Buddhism



Buddhism is based on four ***Noble Truths***:

- Life involves suffering until enlightenment.
- The origins of suffering lie in desire, greed and selfishness.
- The cessation of suffering is possible, resulting in the realisation of ***Nirvana***.
- The way to attainment of Nirvana is by observing eight principles of conduct (***the Eightfold Path***).

The ***Eightfold Path*** involves:

- Seeing the world as it is.
- Becoming unselfish and compassionate.
- Being truthful and gentle in speech.
- Acting with love and compassion.
- Avoiding occupations that harm, and choosing those that benefit others.
- Resisting bad thoughts and encouraging good ones.
- Being attentive and aware, and...
- Training the mind by meditation.

Thus, by learning to think, behave and meditate in a new way, a person can learn to control their desires.

## ***Festivals***

Special days are celebrated, depending on the country of origin.

The festival of ***Vaisakha Puja*** is celebrated in the month of Vesak, on the full moon (usually May) to commemorate the birth, enlightenment and death of Buddha. On this day, captive birds and fish are released as a symbol of Buddha's love and compassion for living things.

In many countries Buddhists hang paper lanterns and flowers in their homes and light candles and burn incense in the temple, in front of





# Buddhism

Buddha's statue. On such a day, food will be taken before noon, but not afterwards.

In addition, some days are set aside for fasting.

## ***Birth***

No particular ceremonies are performed at a child's birth, although monks may be invited into the home to chant texts from Buddhist scriptures. The baby may also be taken to the temple for a naming ceremony.

## ***Marriage***

Traditionally, parents help their children find a suitable partner. The marriage is not a religious occasion.

After the ceremony, the couple may either invite the monks into their home, or go to the temple to be blessed and be given the sermon of the Buddha's teaching on married life. After the blessing, a gift of food is given to the monks.

Divorce and re-marriage is rare among Chinese Buddhists in particular.

## ***Death***

Buddhists see death as natural and inevitable, and this is the main theme of Buddhist funerals.

Buddhist funerals vary a great deal from one country to another and the decision of burial or cremation is likely to be influenced by the country of origin rather than adherence to the faith, and will be a matter of personal preference.

For a dying Buddhist, the state of mind is an important consideration (as with other faiths) and as much quietness as is possible should be maintained. The dying person may welcome having a fellow Buddhist with them to pray.

A delay of three to seven days between death occurring and the burial or cremation taking place is sometimes required on principle, as some Buddhists believe that consciousness remains in the body after death and premature disposal is equivalent to murder.

# Buddhism



## *Dress*

Buddhist monks wear robes of orange/yellow and go barefoot. They shave their heads and traditionally carry begging bowls, in which they receive gifts of food that other Buddhists give to them.

There is no specific code of dress for ordinary Buddhists, who wear clothes relating to their country of origin.

## *Diet*

Buddhists will usually be vegetarian, since their teachings are opposed to all forms of killing. However, diet can also reflect the country of origin and may include meat.

## *Place of Worship*

Buddhist temples (*Vihara*) vary in design from one country to another. They are usually built to symbolize the five elements i.e. wisdom, water, fire, air and earth. All temples would contain a statue of the Buddha.

The temple is where teaching and meditation takes place and often has accommodation for resident monks and nuns.

Buddhists remove their shoes as a sign of respect when entering a temple. Visitors should do the same.

## *Medical Treatment*

There is no objection to receiving blood transfusion or organ transplants. However, Buddhism has developed a system of dealing with pain and ailments through meditation, rather than seeking help from western medical practices.

## *General*

It is best not to shake hands with a Buddhist unless they offer a handshake, as it may not be their custom.

There will normally be a statue of Buddha in the home, which is usually in a central position. The statue may have an incense holder at the front, and flowers and candles by its side.





# Christianity

## *Introduction*

There are over 6 million Christians in the United Kingdom who regularly attend a place of worship. Many more people, whilst not habitual churchgoers, acknowledge a belief in God and consider themselves to be Christians – approximately 30 million in the 2001 census.

Christians believe in One God in Trinity who has revealed himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. While God is transcendent, the relationship with creation is understood to be one of love and reconciliation. Central to Christian belief is the incarnation of the Son, the second person of the Trinity, as Jesus of Nazareth, often referred to as Jesus Christ. Jesus is held to be both fully human and fully God within a single person. As fully human he shared an earthly life and as God he opens the way to everlasting life to all believers through the miracle of his death on the cross and his third day resurrection.

Christianity is independent of race or ethnic origin and spread from its beginnings in Jerusalem to gain followers from the Pacific to the Atlantic. In the fourth century it was officially tolerated by the Roman Empire and soon became the dominant religion of that empire developing Eastern and Western forms. In the fifth century the Christians outside the Roman Empire separated from the Church of the Empire although retaining close links with the eastern forms of worship in modern Syria, Iraq, Iran, India, China and Egypt and Ethiopia. After the decline of the Roman Empire in the eleventh century the Eastern and western traditions separated into the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Church further split in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries into Catholic and Protestant forms.

In England the principle traditions are those of the Roman Catholic, Church of England various free churches such as the Baptist, Methodist, United Reformed, and more recently Orthodox and Pentecostal with many black majority churches in some places.

The beliefs of Christians are based upon biblical tradition and the deliberations of the Universal, Ecumenical Councils of the first eight centuries. The Bible consists of the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament is the same as the Jewish Scriptures and the New Testament consists of four historical accounts of the life of Jesus of Nazareth. The Gospels; a history of the development of the early Church, The Acts of the Apostles; a number of letters written on theological topics to the early Churches, The Epistles and a prophetic book about the final days, The Revelation to John the Divine.

# Christianity



## *Key Beliefs*

Christians believe in one God, whom they call “Father” as Jesus Christ taught them.

Christians recognise **Jesus** as the Son of God who was sent to save mankind from death and sin. Jesus Christ believed and taught that he was Son of God. His teachings can be summarised, briefly as the love of God and love of one’s neighbour. Jesus believed that he had come to fulfil God’s law.

Christians believe in **justification by faith** - that through their belief in Jesus as the Son of God, and in his death and resurrection, they can have a right relationship with God whose forgiveness was made once and for all through the death of Jesus Christ.

Christians believe in the **Trinity** - that is in God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Some confuse this and think that Christians believe in three separate gods, which they don’t. Christians believe in God, who on earth took human form as Jesus Christ and who, through the work of the Holy Spirit, is present today and evident in the lives of believers.

Christians believe fervently that there is a **life after death** on earth.

These days, the word **‘Saint’** is most commonly used to refer to a Christian who has lived a particularly good and holy life on earth, and with whom miracles are claimed to have been associated after their death. Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches confer the formal title of Saint through a process called canonisation.

Members of these Churches also believe that Saints created in this way can intercede with God on behalf of people who are alive today. Most Protestants do not accept this.

In the Bible, however, the word saint is used as a description of anyone who is a committed believer, particularly by St. Paul in the New Testament (e.g. Ephesians 1.1. and 1.15).

## *Worship*

Christian worship involves praising God in music and speech, readings from scripture, prayers of various sorts, a “sermon”, and various holy ceremonies such as the Eucharist.

While worship is often thought of only as services in which Christians come together in a group, individual Christians can worship God on their own, and in any place.





# Christianity

Jesus Christ was a religious Jew who attended the synagogue, and celebrated Jewish festivals, and his disciples were familiar with Jewish ritual and tradition.

The first obvious divergence from Judaism was making **Sunday** the holy day instead of Saturday. By doing this the day of Christian worship is the same as the day that Jesus rose from the dead.

So Christians regard worship as something that they don't only do for God, but that God, through Jesus' example and the presence of the Holy Spirit is also at work in.

A service of particular importance to Christians is the **Eucharist** (also called **Mass**, **Holy Communion**, the **Lord's Supper** or **Divine Liturgy**) when bread and wine, which has been specifically set apart, is shared in commemoration of the life, death, resurrection and second coming of Jesus.

## **Festivals / Special Days**

Various festivals and seasons divide the Church year up. Some like Christmas Day, happen on the same date every year, while others move around within a range of dates.

**Christmas** is a Christian holy day that marks the birth of Jesus, the Son of God. However it is only a Christian festival.

**Epiphany** is an ancient festival that focuses on God's revelation of himself to the world through the incarnation of Christ.

**Shrove Tuesday** is the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday, which is the first day of Lent. It's a day of penitence, to clean the soul, and a day of celebration as the last chance to feast before Lent begins.

**Ash Wednesday** is the beginning of lent for Western Christian churches. It's a day of penitence to clean the soul before the Lent fast.

**Lent** is the period of forty days that comes before Easter in the Christian calendar.

The most solemn week of the Christian year, Holy week is the week leading up to Easter, and is the week during which Christians particularly remember the last week of Jesus' life. Holy week begins on **Palm Sunday**

# Christianity



**Maundy Thursday** is the Thursday before Easter. Christians remember it as the day of the last Supper, when Jesus washed the feet of his disciples and established the ceremony known as the Eucharist.

**Good Friday** recalls the day when Jesus was crucified.

**Easter Day** commemorates the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is the most important Christian festival, and the one celebrated with the greatest joy.

The fortieth day after Easter Sunday commemorates the **Ascension** of Christ into heaven.

**Pentecost** is the festival when Christians celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is celebrated on the Sunday 50 days after Easter.

## **Style**

Different churches, even within the same denomination, will use very different styles of worship. Some will be elaborate, with a choir singing difficult music, others will hand the music over to the congregation, who sing simpler hymns or worship songs.

Some churches leave much of the action to the minister, while others encourage great congregational participation.

## **Initiation**

Most Christian traditions welcome new members through **Baptism** with water. This is often done for babies within Christian families, although some traditions insist upon personal choice by the individual before **Baptism** is given. Many traditions also have ceremonies of adult profession of faith referred to as **Confirmation** or **Calling to Membership**.

## **Naming**

The use of names varies according to cultural practice but often one of the names given to a child will be that of a saint or biblical character. Within some families there is a tradition of particular family names.

## **Marriage**

Marriage is still seen as the focus of family life and the bringing up of children. Ideally marriage is for life but some traditions accept that marriages can break down and are willing, under certain conditions, to allow divorce and remarriage. Some traditions understand marriage as a sacrament and an image of Jesus relationship with the church.





# Christianity

## *Death*

Death is seen as a passage over into eternal life and so although the parting is a time of sorrow it is also upheld by the hope found in such a belief. Some traditions will have set prayers following a death. The Orthodox traditions prefer that a person is buried but most others leave the choice of burial or cremation to the deceased or their family. The timing of the burial is usually governed by societal norms.

## *Diet*

Most Christians do not have specific dietary requirements, although many Orthodox Christians will expect to refrain from certain types of food on particular days. Lent, the forty days before Holy Week and Advent, the four weeks before Christmas, are traditional times of fasting although practice varies. There are a few traditions that do not expect their members to eat with people from outside their tradition.

## *Places of Worship*

Generally the buildings are kept locked outside service times for security, most buildings that attract large numbers of visitors employ staff to ensure accessibility. If planning to visit a place of worship it is always best to enquire first whether the building will be open.

Most churches will expect attendees to dress modestly for the times of worship and some traditions will expect women to cover their heads and upper arms.

## *Medical treatment*

Most Christians will follow the cultural norms concerning medical treatment but some will have reservations about particularly invasive practices such as transplant surgery. It is probably best always to ask rather than to assume a following of societal norms.

Jehovah's Witnesses may differ from mainstream Christianity in significant doctrinal ways, including not accepting blood transfusions.

## *Dress*

There are no specific expectations concerning dress for most Christians. Some will expect a rather conservative fashion sense and, as stated above, some traditions will expect women to cover their heads and upper arms inside a church building. A few traditions will

# Christianity



not expect women to wear trousers for services. Within certain traditions the wearing of a cross by adherents, generally under the clothing, is expected of them for most of the time.

## *General Information*

People from every ethnic minority community may be Christian, so never assume what a person or families religion may be from their country of origin. If knowing this information is relevant for your job asking politely will not cause offence. It is often the case that migrants may have a particularly traditional interpretation of their faith to reinforce their identity away from their country of origin.

When dealing with Christians, as with any other religious group, always be sensitive to your own words and actions. Whatever traditions they are from, Christians have a respect for the name of God and do not expect expressions as 'Jesus Christ' or 'Oh God' to be used.





# Hinduism

## *Introduction*

**Hinduism** does not refer to one religion with a single set of beliefs and practices, but is an umbrella term that embraces the religious and cultural life of the Indian sub-continent. Followers themselves often prefer the term **Sanatan Dharma** (the Eternal Religion), indicating belief in universal and everlasting truths. The tradition has no clearly definable beginning; though scholars date it back more than five thousand years. Hinduism has no single founder and is based upon ancient scriptures known as the **Vedas** and their supplements.

There are 559 000 Hindus in Britain (according to the 2001 census), making Hinduism the fourth largest religion in the UK. Most originate from **India** and **East Africa**. The majority are of Gujarati origin (70%), with others from **Punjab** (15%) and other places such as **Bengal** and **South India** (15%).

There are many sacred books in Hinduism and these are mainly written in the ancient Indian language of **Sanskrit**. Another important section is in **Tamil**. There are also many other, mainly auxiliary, scriptures written in vernacular tongues.

The core scriptures are:

- (1) The **Vedas** (Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharva Vedas), which include:
- (2) The **Upanishads** (philosophical texts)
- (3) The **Brahmanas** (instructions for ritual worship).

The supplements of the Vedas are more widely read and consist of:

- (1) **The Epics** namely the **Mahabharata** and **Ramayana** (the story of Lord Rama)
- (2) **The Bhagavad Gita** ('the Song of God'). It is the most well known Hindu text, outlining all the main teachings, and part of the Mahabharata.
- (3) **The Puranas** (Stories and Myths)
- (4) **The Vedanta Sutra** (Philosophical aphorisms)

## *Beliefs*

### *God*

Practically all Hindu schools of thought differentiate between spirit (brahman) and matter. Spirit is eternal and conscious, whereas matter is temporary and inert. Hindus believe in a Supreme God (with or

# Hinduism



without form) and carry out worship either externally (by worshiping the form of the Lord in the temple) or internally (by meditation through yoga).

Hindus believe that there is one Supreme God but they acknowledge that God is unlimited and therefore can manifest in unlimited forms. The three main functions of God with regard to the world are creation, maintenance and completion, which are held respectively by Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva.

There are many traditions and sects within Hinduism but they all, broadly speaking, can be grouped under three main traditions: Vaishnavism, Shaivism, and Shaktism.

- **Vaishnavas** – worship Lord Vishnu as God, specifically in His forms of Krishna, Rama, and Narayana.
- **Shaivas** – worship Lord Shiva.
- **Shaktas** – worship forms of Shakti, the Goddess in charge of the material energy.

## **Reincarnation and Karma**

Hindus believe in reincarnation, which means the transmigration of the soul (**samsara**). Hindus make a clear distinction between the soul (**atma**), which is eternal and of spiritual nature, and the body, which is the perishable vehicle of the soul. The soul does not die when the body dies. When the body dies, the soul continues in its journey – either to a new body or by achieving spiritual liberation. Liberation means reconnecting with the Supreme Lord; this further implies that perpetual rebirth is not desirable for a Hindu.

As long as we remain in this world, the law of karma (action and reaction) regulates the results of our activities and is a determiner of our next birth. The law of karma is thus a natural justice system, i.e. what we ‘sow’ – we will ‘reap’. Most Hindus are therefore careful not to cause undue harm to others, and vegetarianism is thus seen as an integral part of the path of non-violence (**ahimsa**).

## **Spiritual Practices**

There are five main spiritual practices in Hinduism, namely:

- Worship (**upasana**)
- Observing festivals (**utsava**)
- Virtuous living (**dharma**)
- Going on pilgrimage (**tirthayatra**)
- Performing rites of passage (**samskaras**)





# Hinduism

## *Worship*

Hindu worship takes place in the temples and at the home shrine. There is no special day of the week, though some days may be associated with certain deities and with certain observances such as fasting. Worship of the sacred form (*murti*) of the Lord is considered an integral part of temple worship.

Worship consists of items such:

- (1) **Puja** (ritual worship of the sacred form), with the **Arti** ceremony, which involves the offering of a lamp, incense, flowers, food etc.
- (2) These ceremonies are often accompanied by singing (**bhajan**) or the musical recitation of mantras (**kirtan**).
- (3) **Meditation**, such as by chanting mantras (prayers) on wooden beads.

## *Festivals*

It has been said that in Hinduism there is a festival for each day of the year. This may be an underestimate! Hinduism is not one tradition, it is several; and each tradition has many festival days. The Hindu year is lunar and therefore timings may vary. A few of the most popular are:

- **Diwali** – Also known as the **Festival of Lights**, this commemorates the return of Lord Rama from His exile in the forest. For many traditions it is a new-year celebration.
- **Navaratri** – A nine-day festival in honour of Lord Shiva with singing and dancing, called Ras Garba.
- **Dussehra** – Follows the nine days of Navratri and is a celebration of good conquering evil. In some parts of India the festival is concluded by burning an effigy of King Ravana.
- **Janmastami** – A celebration marking the appearance on earth of Lord Krishna.

## *Birth*

There are many rites-of-passage within Hinduism. Again, these vary according to tradition but can include rituals to mark birth, baby's first hair-cutting, baby's first solid food, formal acceptance of a guru, sacred-thread (brahmin) initiation, marriage and death.

# Hinduism



## *Names*

On the eleventh or twelfth day after birth, parents celebrate the name-giving ceremony, dressing the baby in new clothes. The family astrologer announces the child's horoscope and the child's names are traditionally chosen according to the position of the moon in the birth chart.

Terms like Lal, Bhai, Shree, Shri, Chandra, Kant etc follow first names of Hindu males.

Terms like Ben, Shrimati follow first/surnames of Hindu females.

## *Marriage*

Marriage is one of the most important of the rites of passage (samskaras). It is not only a social institution but also a religious sacrament. Many marriages are arranged, but increasingly, modern Hindus prefer to have complete freedom in their choice of marriage partner.

The bride generally wears red and gold during the marriage ceremony. These ceremonies are usually elaborate, colourful and festive.

Divorce is traditionally disallowed, but is becoming more common.

## *Death*

Hindus can be cremated or buried, after a priest has conducted a ceremony of last rites. The ceremony often consists of recitation of sacred scriptures and congregational chanting of mantras. This is to invoke blessings and auspiciousness for the passage of the soul.

Traditionally, when a Hindu dies the immediate family enter a ritual time of mourning, which usually lasts for eleven days. The ***Shradha*** ceremony is held on the last day and is thereafter observed annually.

## *Dress*

Hinduism does not require any particular type of dress. In Britain Hindus may wear either western or Indian style dress with many young Hindus in particular opting to wear western dress.

Women show preference to wearing ***Saris*** or ***Shalwar Kameez*** according to the region from which they originate. Part of the sari may be used to cover their heads whenever they leave the house as a gesture of modesty.





# Hinduism

Married Hindu women may have a **bindi** (red powder spot) on their forehead, or may also have **sindhur** (red colour in the middle parting of their hair).

Traditional men's wear includes the **Dhoti** (long loincloth or drape) and the **Kurta** (long shirt) – in Britain these are often worn only during special ceremonies or by priests.

## **Diet**

Many Hindus do not eat meat, fish or eggs, or foods containing these ingredients. The more strict may also abstain from other foods such as onions, garlic, mushrooms, tea, coffee, and alcohol. Those who are non-vegetarian almost always abstain from beef. Many Hindus also offer their food at their home shrine. Some Hindus observe a full or partial fast on certain festival days, or certain days of the week or month

## **Place of worship**

Traditionally Hindus will have a shrine for worship at home and will visit the temple (**Mandir**) regularly as well, depending on proximity. Before entering a temple, shoes are removed and sometimes hands are washed. You may be expected to do likewise if visiting.

## **Medical treatment**

There are no objections to necessary surgery, to blood transfusions or to organ transplants and donations, subject to the wishes of the patient, or where he/she is incapable of making the decision, his/her relatives will make it on the individual's behalf.

## **General**

As Hinduism is one of the oldest religions and is found in many forms, the information contained in this booklet is very general and practices may differ from one community to another.

It should be remembered that Hindus do not usually shake hands as a form of greeting. Instead you could raise your hands, place them palm to palm, as if in prayer, bow your head slightly and say "Namaste", or you could just say "hello".

In a Hindu home there is likely to be a room/area set-aside for prayer, which will have a shrine where daily offerings are made to Hindu gods. If you enter this room/area you may be asked to remove your footwear.

# Islam



## *Introduction*

**Islam** is an Arabic word, which means ‘peace’. Islam is about a person’s whole outlook and perspective on life, placing emphasis on forming a personal and loving relationship with God, as well as harmonious relationships with all other people and the environment. In this way it aims to build peace within a person as well as between people and creation at large. This emphasis on peace is demonstrated by the greeting of Muslims who say ‘*Assalamu alaikum*’ (Peace be with you) whenever they meet.

**Muslim** is the word for someone who follows Islam, the main traditions of which are Sunni and Shia. The majority of the approximately 2 million Muslims who live in the UK originate from the Asian sub-continent (particularly Pakistan and Bangladesh). There are also a sizeable number from the Middle East, Africa, Turkey and the former Yugoslavia. However this reflects the immigration pattern and particular history of Britain rather than Muslim figures internationally i.e. there are actually more Indonesian Muslims than Arab Muslims.

**Islam** is not confined to a particular race, nationality or ethnicity. A simple declaration of faith and a commitment to follow the principles of Islam is all that is required to become a Muslim. Islam teaches that God (**Allah** in Arabic) is the Lord of all people, not just Muslims. As such, He is equally just and loving towards all people.

Today Islam and Muslims are often in the headlines, being associated with ‘extremism’ and ‘terrorism’. Many Muslims are upset by the stereotypes with which they are linked and which have no bearing to the way of life which they hold dear and which actually condemns extremism of any kind. Unfortunately, political realities are such that there are tensions in many parts of the world – many of them Muslim majority countries – but these relate more to issues of land and resources such as oil, rather than ideology and religion, as is often portrayed. Despite this, Islam has continued to be the fastest growing religion in the UK among the indigenous population.

## *Beliefs*

Muslims believe that God has offered guidance to people from different nations at different times, across the centuries, through various prophets who taught people about God and the nature of existence. In this way Muslims acknowledge that the essence of most of the religions today contain the same truths, having come from the same source.





# Islam

Muslims believe the Torah and Bible to be divinely inspired books and believe the Prophet Moses and Jesus (Peace be upon them\*) to be very important and respected messengers of God. There is therefore a very strong and respected link and continuity between Islam, Judaism and Christianity.

*\* As a sign of respect Muslims say 'Peace be upon Him', when referring to prophets of God.*

**Muhammad** (Peace be upon Him) is viewed simply as the last of a series of prophets. As with other prophets, although he acted as a spiritual guide, he is not considered divine in any way. He is however believed to have been given the last divine revelation, known as the **Quran** (the Islamic holy book). His life and manners are held up as examples of how it is possible to lead a truly spiritual life connected to the Creator, whilst meeting the demands of an earthly existence, in a just and balanced way.

As with other religious traditions, Islam offers answers to most basic questions of existence i.e.

- Where have we come from?
- What is our purpose in this life?
- What happens after we die?

Muslim beliefs about these important issues centre on the idea that God created souls of all people and every single person has to pass through various stages of life. After the soul has been created it experiences a physical existence from the time it is in the womb, until the time of death. After death the soul continues to live and the state of this existence depends on the type of life that the person has led. Hence the idea of personal choice, and how this choice is used is very important.

## JOURNEY OF SELF

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Soul	B	Earthly	D	Everlasting
Created	I	Life	E	Life
	R		A	
	T		T	
	H		H	

# Islam



Many Muslims believe our earthly existence is only a small part of the ultimate journey of the self. The Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon Him) described this life as a drop of water, compared to a whole ocean. A Muslim tries to lead a life, which continually reminds him/her of this perspective, so that they can enjoy the gift of life without forgetting the bigger picture.

Whilst Islam is a whole way of life, there are five basic tenets (rules), which all Muslims are expected to adhere to in order to foster and maintain their individual relationship with God and be reminded of their duties to other people.

- i. **Declaration and affirmation of faith** in one God and belief in Muhammad (Peace be upon Him) as the final prophet (**Shahadah**).
- ii. **Prayer (Salah)**. Muslims pray five times a day (dawn, noon, late afternoon, just before sunset and late evening). These take only a few minutes and can be offered either individually or in a congregation.

They are offered throughout the day so that an intimate link between the person and God is maintained whatever else is going on. They can be performed in any place as long as it is clean, and a person is also required to be physically very clean, by carrying out a short ritual ablution called **wudu**.

- iii. **Giving money** to the poor and needy (**Zakah**). Muslims are required to give 2.5 percent of their savings every year to charity. In this way the rights of society at large, particularly the poor and needy, are addressed in a practical manner.

Islam's economic system places emphasis on just and unexploitative financial practices. For example, interest has been forbidden – both in receiving and giving it, due to the far reaching effects of debt on individuals and society.

- iv. **Fasting (Sawm)**. Muslims fast in the holy lunar month of **Ramadan**. Muslims all over the world fast at this time, from just before dawn to sunset. In addition to simply not eating and drinking during these times, Muslims endeavour to purify their thoughts and actions, give more to charity and be of service to others. It is a kind of training for the rest of the year in how a person can remain focused on God and in control of their inclinations.





# Islam

People who would find fasting detrimental to their health must not fast as it is not meant to be punitive, but rather a spiritual and uplifting experience.

- v. **Pilgrimage (Hajj)**. If finances allow, a Muslim should make a pilgrimage to **Mecca** in Saudi Arabia, at least once in their lifetime. Here, Muslims from all over the world gather together (approximately 2.5 million each year) to worship in the city where Muhammad (Peace be upon Him) grew up.

Everyone wears the same simple clothes, so that there is no distinction between rich and poor... and there is a great feeling of international brotherhood.

## **Festivals**

There are two main festivals in the 12-month, lunar-based calendar, which are **Eid ul Fitr** – marking the end of fasting during the month of Ramadan and **Eid ul Adha** – which takes place at the end of the Hajj.

Other special occasions include **Lailat ul Qadr** (celebrating the night the Quran was revealed to Muhammad) and **Milad ul Nabi** (celebrating Muhammad's birth).

The **Hajj** takes place every year and consists of a number of acts of worship and remembrance of God that are performed in the company of a vast crowd. Two of the most important devotions are the **tawaaf** (making circuits around the building that all Muslims around the world face when praying, called the **Ka'ba**) and the mass gathering on a plain called **Arafa** to glorify God.

## **Birth**

When a baby is born, the **Azan** (call to prayer) is quietly said in its ear, to welcome the soul to life on earth.

The birth is celebrated by inviting friends and family to a meal called **Aqiqa**, and on the seventh day the baby's head is shaved.

## **Naming**

The names of people will reflect their cultural and ethnic background. There is no particular religious tradition that must be adhered to, except that Muslims are encouraged to choose names that have some kind of positive meaning.

# Islam



## *Marriage*

Marriage is highly regarded in Islam and the nurturing of a strong and loving husband and wife relationship is very much to be encouraged. The Quran describes the husband and wife as being like “garments to one another” thereby offering each other warmth, protection and intimacy.

Under Islamic law, both parties must enter marriage freely. Forced marriages are not allowed and are considered invalid. However, arranged marriages in which families help to introduce couples to each other, are allowed, so long as both the bride and groom are happy. Indeed the coming together of two families as well as the happy couple is encouraged.

It is important to remember that cultural practices vary across the world and Islam does not impose any one tradition, so Muslim weddings will be different, reflecting people’s different backgrounds. The emphasis is simply on a committed and faithful relationship.

The marriage ceremony (***Nikah***) itself is very simple, in which the commitment and consent of both parties is witnessed in public. The groom gives the bride a present (***Meher***). The idea of dowries, in which the bride’s family or the groom’s family are obliged to give gifts or money are forbidden, as these are in effect a ‘bride price’.

Divorce is permitted under Islamic law. A process of reconciliation is outlined in the Quran, in which the couple, family and friends are encouraged to do their utmost to hold the marriage together. However, Islam recognises that divorce is sometimes the better option for the people concerned and in these circumstances stress the importance of letting each other go, with dignity and fairness.

## *Death*

At this sad time, Muslims console one another by repeating a verse from the Quran which says “From God we come and to Him we return” upon meeting the grieving person. In this way they draw comfort from the fact that the soul has returned to God (death being a gateway to the next stage of the journey of life that everyone is believed to be following), and that ultimately people will be reunited.

The deceased is washed with care and respect and the body is wrapped in a white shroud. Burial takes place as soon as possible after death. Simplicity with the coffin and gravestone is encouraged. People gather to say prayers for the deceased’s soul, who is believed to be aware of these final farewells.





# Islam

Muslims place great emphasis on handling the dead person with extreme care and gentleness, believing that awareness is still present. This point should thus be borne in mind in situations that may involve fatalities.

## *Dress*

Islam encourages modesty in dress for both men and women in public places. The purpose of wearing modest clothing is to take away the emphasis of trying to appear physically attractive to the opposite sex, so that interactions between men and women are more about who they are and what they think, rather than what they look like. Within the home however, attractive clothing is encouraged for both husband and wife, as their physical aspects and desires can be freely expressed within the marriage.

As long as they are covered, Muslims are free to wear whatever they like. This is reflected in the very different types of clothes worn by Muslim people around the world. Thus a Muslim living in England will feel equally comfortable in a suit and tie, or *shalwar kameez* (the traditional clothing of the Indian subcontinent, consisting of loose trousers and a long overshirt). A Muslim woman may wear a skirt or *sari*. Although there is no formal dress code in Islam, exactly how the principle of modesty is interpreted varies across different communities.

Many Muslim women feel more comfortable wearing a *hijab* (headscarf), sometimes coupled with a veil (*nicab*) and overcoat (*juba*). As with any other aspect of faith, personal choice is important and traditions may vary.

## *Diet*

Practising Muslims adhere to strict dietary requirements. The terms *Halal* and *Haram* are frequently used in connection with food.

- *Halal* denotes all permissible food and drinks.
- *Haram* means forbidden.

Halal meat comes from correctly slaughtered animals. Examples of Halal food are all kinds of fish, vegetables and fruits. Lambs, cows and chickens are only considered Halal if they have been correctly slaughtered under Islamic Law. Halal foods are never to be mixed with Haram foods, either in preparation, handling or storing.

Examples of Haram food are meat from the pig (and related products), any form of animal fat (lard), carnivorous animals, rodents, reptiles and

# Islam



fish that have no scales (some Muslims do eat shellfish). Alcohol in any form is forbidden to strict Muslims.

Apart from those items that have been forbidden, everything else is considered Halal (permissible). As with dress and other customs, Muslims will vary in the types of food that they eat, depending on which country they come from. For example, it is equally 'Islamic' to eat fish and chips as to eat curry and chipattis, as all of these are Halal.

## *Place Of Worship*

A typical Mosque has a large prayer room that has no chairs or benches, a pulpit for teaching and a lectern for the Quran. Some Mosques may also have a minaret, which is a tower used for calling the faithful to prayer. Outside the main prayer room there will be running water for people to wash before prayer and there may be separate entrances for men and women. Midday on Friday is the busiest time, as all Muslim men must congregate at the Mosques for prayer.

Muslim men tend to cover their heads for prayer and women should cover their head, arms and legs. Within some Mosques there may be a school for educating young scholars and where they can read the Quran and gain a greater understanding of Islam. Women are also encouraged to attend the Mosque for prayers, as the sense of community is important in Islam.

You would be expected to remove your shoes when entering a mosque and may be asked to cover your head.

## *Medical Assistance*

In Islam, all life-saving considerations take precedence over Islamic religious duties.

All medical treatment, such as blood transfusion, surgery or administering of drugs is allowed.

## *General*

Whilst an attempt to summarise some Islamic beliefs and practices has been made here, it is important to remember that everyone is different and people will differ in the extent to which they practice the faith. Some will strictly adhere to the tenets, and others will choose not to practice at all.

As with any human interaction, genuineness and good intentions are what matter.





# Judaism

## *Introduction*

Judaism is a religion dating back over 4000 years to God's call to Abraham. The descendants of Abraham were subsequently enslaved in Egypt and then freed through God's chosen leader – **Moses**. After receiving the Law from God whilst at Mount Sinai, Abraham's descendants settled in the land of Canaan.

Jewish communities can be found all over the world, from large ones such as the USA (about 5 million) to small ones such as New Zealand (about 6,000). The Jewish population of the UK is about 350,000 and the State of Israel about 6 million.

The Jewish holy book is the **Torah** comprising the five books of Moses, i.e. the first five books of the Bible. Also important is the rest of the 'Old Testament' and the Talmud's rabbinic writings, explaining the laws and commandments. Because originally the Torah and Bible were written in the Hebrew language, most Jewish people are taught to read Hebrew.

As an ancient religion, Judaism predates Christianity and Islam, and none of their festivals or divergent beliefs are to be found in Judaism. Therefore, Jews do not celebrate Christmas, Easter, Eid etc.

In the UK Jews are likely to follow...

- ***The Orthodox tradition***  
Jewish people who believe in the divinity and authority of the Torah and Bible i.e. that the laws and teachings must be followed today, exactly as they were passed down by God in the time of Moses.
- ***Progressive, i.e. Reform or Liberal***  
Jewish people who believe that some of the Torah's teachings can be adapted to be more relevant to the needs of living in a modern society.

The **Sabbath** (the Jews most holy day of the week) begins at sunset on Friday and lasts until dusk on Saturday.

Commanded by scripture in the book of Exodus, it also commemorates the seventh day when God rested after creating the world. During this period, Orthodox Jews do not 'work' i.e. travel, use the phone, write, use electrical equipment or cook. The same restrictions apply on festivals.

# Judaism



## **Beliefs**

Jews believe there is one eternal sovereign God for the whole world. Idol worship is prohibited, there are no images, pictures or statues in synagogues.

Jews believe that Moses received the Law (Torah) from God after the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. They also believe in the coming of a messiah, chosen by God when he wishes.

The Jewish affirmation of their belief in God is contained in the prayer/commandment called the **Shema** which is recited twice a day using the words “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One”..

## **Festivals**

Because the Jewish day starts in the evening, it affects the timing of their festivals. Some principal ones are as follows...

- **Rosh Hashana**  
The New Year, which usually occurs on two days between mid September and early October.
- **Yom Kippur**  
The Day of Atonement (one of the most holy days of the year) is a day for prayer and fasting, and occurs 10 days after the New Year.
- **Pesach**  
Pesach or Passover celebrates the exodus of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt and falls sometime between March and April. For eight days, no bread or other food containing a leaven product (or by-product) is eaten.
- **Shavuot**  
Occurring between May and June, it celebrates the giving of the Ten Commandments to Moses.
- **Israel's Independence Day**  
Celebrated in May, it marks the establishment of the Jewish State in 1948.

## **Naming**

Jewish boys are given their Hebrew name at the same time that they are circumcised e.g. eight days after birth. Girls are likewise given a name at the Synagogue.





# Judaism

## *Marriage*

Jewish marriage can only take place when both parties are Jews, and they enter into marriage freely. The children of Jewish woman and a non-Jewish partner are considered by orthodox Jews to be Jewish, but the children of a Jewish man and a non-Jewish partner are not, because the bloodline goes through the woman. The progressive movement is more flexible in the definition of 'Jewish'.

The wedding takes place under a canopy called a *Huppah* where the groom places a ring on the bride's index finger. He then presents her with a contract of what he will do for her. The bride makes no vows on her wedding day. (The rabbi simply supervises the event, ensuring that it fulfils the requirements of Jewish law.)

A number of blessings are then sung and a bride and groom share a cup of wine. The groom stamps on a glass (as a reminder of the fragility of human life and the destruction of the Temple), then everyone shouts "*Mazel Tov*" (good luck). A feast may follow.

Divorce is permitted under Jewish Law, as is the re-marriage of both parties. The religious divorce (get) has to be given by the husband and accepted by the wife.

## *Death*

A dying person should recite the *Shema* prayer.

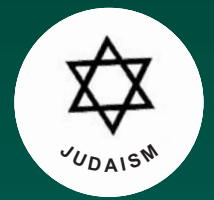
Jewish law requires the dead body to be treated with every reverence and respect. A post mortem is only allowed if absolutely necessary. Otherwise, no disfigurement of the body is allowed.

Parts of a body must be treated with the same reverence accorded to a whole body. If it is possible, they should remain with the body, as Jewish law requires that all body parts are collected and buried. The correct identification of bodies is very important, and has particular relevance for the subsequent position of a widow under Jewish law.

Orthodox Judaism forbids cremation, but progressive Judaism does permit it. Burial takes place as soon as possible after death (preferably within 24 hours, before sunset on the day of death). However, funerals do not take place on the Sabbath or on major festival dates. The coffin will be made of the simplest of materials, and with no embellishment.

The closest blood-relatives (including husband/wife) observe a week of deep mourning in the home, with services conducted there, including prayers for the soul of the deceased, memorial prayers and speeches.

# Judaism



Some Orthodox men and women avoid physical contact between the sexes and therefore comforting by means of touching would not be welcomed.

## *Dress*

Whilst most Jewish people dress in the same way as their non-Jewish neighbours, some Ultra Orthodox Jews retain the traditions of the Jewish communities of eighteenth century eastern Europe i.e. men wear dark clothing, consisting of long coats and a wide brimmed black hat. They will probably also have their hair in side locks and have an uncut beard.

Jewish men are required to have their heads covered when in the Synagogue and this is usually accomplished by wearing the **kippah/kappel** (skull cap). Some Jewish men wear their skull cap at all times.

Some very orthodox married women wear a wig or have their head covered and also keep their arms covered. However, most UK Jews do not follow this practice.

## *Diet*

Judaism sets out as part of its rules for life, strict dietary laws known as the laws of **Kashrut**. Depending on the religious traditions that communities follow, these rules may vary.

Certain animals, birds and fish are either **Kosher** (permitted) or **Treif** (forbidden) as follows...

- **Meat** - animals that have split hooves and chew the cud are permitted i.e. oxen, cows, sheep, goats, but NOT pig meat.
- **Birds** - domesticated birds are permitted i.e. chicken, duck, turkey, goose. Birds of prey are NOT allowed.
- **Fish** - fish that have both fins and scales i.e. cod, plaice, haddock are allowed but NOT eels. Shellfish are NOT allowed i.e. squid, octopus, crab, shrimps.

Jewish law forbids the mixing of meat and dairy foods e.g. cheese-burgers. Neither may milk products be eaten directly after a meat meal and therefore, most observant Jews will wait at least 3 hours before dairy foods or drinks containing milk are consumed.





# Judaism

Because of these rules, great care is taken in the preparation of food, with separate dishes kept for both meat and milk products.

## *Place Of Worship*

As with other faiths, Jewish people can pray anywhere, but Jews tend to come together to pray and study or just to meet as a community, in *synagogues*.

In Orthodox synagogues, men and women sit apart, with the women often sitting in an upstairs gallery, or in an area separated by see-through curtains. In progressive synagogues, men and women sit together.

There is usually a main prayer hall containing the Ark (a cupboard that is the central feature of a synagogue, containing the holy hand written Torah scrolls), which is situated on the eastern wall, facing the holy city of Jerusalem. They are taken out and carried in procession to a central desk – the Bimah, where the portion of text for the Sabbath/Festival is read.

Above the Ark is an 'eternal lamp' known as the *Ner Tamid*, which is permanently lit. There might also be (although not always) a multi-branched candelabrum called a *Menorah* in the synagogue, which is like the one used in the Jerusalem Temple.

Many synagogues have a *Rabbi* (it may be a woman in progressive congregations), who teaches the community about interpretation of the Torah and Talmud. Prayers are held in some Synagogues three times a day and men and women share these prayer times, but may be in separate parts of the same room during the service.

In Orthodox synagogues the service is almost entirely in Hebrew, whilst in progressive synagogues a greater proportion of the service would be in English.

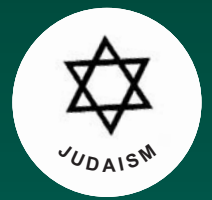
All Jewish men must cover their heads whilst in the synagogue and wear a prayer shawl. Many Orthodox Jewish men will bind *Phylacteries* (small leather containers holding biblical texts) to their left arm and foreheads while at morning prayer.

Non-Jews are welcome to visit a synagogue and may be asked to wear some form of head covering. Both sexes should ensure that they are modestly dressed.

Prayer books are usually printed in both Hebrew and English.



# Judaism



## *Medical Treatment*

On the Sabbath or during festivals, all Jewish laws, such as not travelling etc. may be put aside in order to save life. Any treatment deemed necessary can be carried out without delay.

## *General*

At 13 years of age a Jewish boy becomes a man in the eyes of his community and on the nearest Sabbath to the boy's birthday, he celebrates his *bar-mizvah*.

The bar-mizvah is not the ceremony itself, but the person. The term means "Son of the Commandment". At the celebration held in the synagogue, the boy will read a portion of the Torah aloud, in Hebrew. A party may follow the ceremony.

The bar-mizvah (and for girls, bat-mizvah) was developed from the need that was common amongst all ancient peoples, to mark the point at which a child becomes adolescent and can therefore be admitted to the adult community.

If you are visiting an Orthodox Jewish home, you should remember that any kind of physical contact between people of opposite sexes might be considered to be inappropriate.

To the vast majority of Jews today, Israel is a very important element of Judaism. The land of Israel is regarded as the historic homeland of the Jews, where both Temples stood i.e. the first built by Solomon in about 1000 BC and destroyed by the Babylonians in about 586 BC... and the second built in 520 BC and destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD.





# Rastafarianism

## *Introduction*

Rastafarianism is a way of life (belief system) that is guided by the concept of peace and love. It is a world movement, with a strong core of people who are of African/Caribbean descent and who identify with the ongoing struggle to reclaim their African ancestry.

Its name comes from **Ras** (Prince) **Tafari** (a direct descendant of Kings Solomon and David), who became Emperor Haile Selassie I of Ethiopia.

In the early 1920s, **Marcus Garvey** was an influential black spokesman and founder of the “back-to-Africa” movement. He often spoke of the redemption of his people coming from a future black African king. On one occasion, Garvey proclaimed, “**Look to Africa for the crowning of a Black King, he shall be the Redeemer**”. Only a few years later that prediction was fulfilled in the person of Haile Selassie, who is recognised by Rastas as **Jah** (the living manifestation of God).

The Rasta belief system has gone on to be adopted by wider cultural groups. Such organisations include the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the Ethiopian World Federation, the Universal Rastafarians Improvement Organisation, the Twelve Tribes of Israel and the Rastafarian Universal Zion. As with other ways faiths, not all Rastas are affiliated to a particular group or organisation.

In Britain, there are established Rasta groups within most cities and large towns such as London, Birmingham, Leicester, Luton and Bristol. It is estimated that there are in the region of 100,000 Rastafarians in the UK.

All days of the week are considered to be holy, but some groups appoint special holy days such as the **Sabbath** that is often attributed to a Saturday or Sunday.

The shape of the hands when praying is a symbol for both peace and war, as it represents both the heart and a spear. Worship takes place continually, with followers usually gathering together at least once per week (depending on the practices of the individual Rastafarian community).

## *Beliefs*

Rastafarians believe that Jah resides in each person, and there is a sense of oneness between each other and Jah. The often heard reference to ‘**I and I**’ refers to ‘the self within the self’ and the continual conversation that permeates each individual thought, through the subconscious.

# Rastafarianism



Rastas are guided by the culture and traditions of Africa and the Caribbean, and believe that salvation can come to black people only through repatriation to Africa (the Black Zion), after liberation from the evils of the western world (sometimes referred to as **Babylon**).

Rastafarian beliefs are derived from a very detailed reading of the ***Kebrä Negäst*** (the Ethiopian Bible) and the Christian Bible, (especially the Old Testament and Book of Revelations – the last part of the New Testament).

Music is important to Rastafarians. ***Reggae*** music has often expressed their struggle for liberation and is an important medium through which culturally specific social issues are projected. Music, drumming (the instrument rooted in African traditional music) and dancing, can all form part of the act of worship.

For many Rastafarians, smoking marijuana (***Ganja***) is an important part of worship and a ritual aid for meditation, as mentioned in the Bible – Psalms 104:14. It is seen as natural and a gift from God that is also used in cooking and medicine. There is disparity with the usage of marijuana, with some Rastas abstaining all together.

Fasting is practised by Rastas, but there is no specific requirement for them to do so.

## ***Festivals***

The Rastafarian year is generally based on the Ethiopian calendar.

Important dates are...

- The birthday of Haile Selassie on 23rd July and
- The Ethiopian New Year in early January.

## ***Birth***

Generally, Rastafarian children are blessed by the elders and congregation accompanied by drumming, chanting and prayers.

## ***Marriage***

Rastas recognise and place value on the institution of marriage. However, the community would automatically view a man and a woman who co-habit as husband and wife.





# Rastafarianism

The issue of women's equality (in relation to their involvement in the family decision making process) is a topic that is subject to rapid change. Within the traditional context of Rastafarianism, the role of men and women is similar to that of some parts of Judaism and Islam, with women having some restrictions.

Rastas believe in the celebration of life and therefore abortion and birth control are both opposed.

## *Death*

Rastafarians believe that life is eternal. Moving from one spiritual state of existence to another, through life on earth, to an eventual life in God's spiritual kingdom.

Depending on individual belief, there are special arrangements and/or ceremonies originating in Africa and the Caribbean, following death.

## *Dress*

Rastafarians often keep their hair covered.

Men (brethren) may wear knitted, leather or cloth **Tams**, whilst women (sistren) often cover their hair with a cloth wrap or scarf.

Their hair often remains uncut and uncombed, thus forming **dreads** (a style worn by Haile Selassie as a young man).

The colours red, gold, green and black may be reflected in clothes and accessories.

## *Diet*

The traditional Rastafarian diet is based upon eating I-tal food i.e. food that is unpreserved, unsalted, fresh and seasoned with fresh herbs. However, it is recognised there is diversity in many individuals' diet today.

Many Rastas are vegetarian, but even those who do eat meat are unlikely to eat pork or shellfish.

Strict Rastas avoid stimulants such as alcohol, tea and coffee.

# Rastafarianism



## *Place Of Worship*

Meetings are normally held weekly in a community centre or at someone's home and include worship and the discussion of community matters as well as chants, prayers and singing, to the rhythm of the drums.

Some meetings (known as **Nyabingi**) are a gathering of Rastafarians principally for discussion, but which can also include music.

Women normally cover their heads during a meeting, but particularly so when the congregation is praying.

## *Medical Treatment*

There are no restrictions regarding medical treatment, but Rastafarians have an inherent distrust of institutions (which could affect their attitude to medical treatment), based on their historical association with the State.

## *General*

The influence of Rastafarianism on Jamaican life has been very significant. As a result, it is difficult (at first glance) to always ascertain where Rastafarianism ends and Jamaican culture begins.

Many Rastafarians communicate in a particular lyrical manner, based on the usage of Jamaican patois, often using the first person singular (**I**) as a prefix e.g. a Rasta might refer to "**I** man... **I** don't" etc. It is however, perfectly possible to understand the sentence formulation if the listener actively listens, without prejudging on the basis of traditional English grammar. However, to someone not used to this form of language, communication could prove difficult.

All the above information may vary from individual to individual and may be influenced by locality, or affiliation to a particular group.





# Sikhism

## *Introduction*

Most **Sikhs** living in the United Kingdom are of Indian (**Punjabi**) origin, having come either directly from the Punjab region, or via former British colonies (e.g. those in East Africa, South East Asia etc.) to which members of their family had previously migrated.

Both Punjabi and English languages are widely spoken and used within the community.

Sikhs worship at temples called **Gurdwaras**. The first UK temple was established in Putney, in 1911. There are around 200 Gurdwaras in the UK, serving the largest Sikh community outside India.

The link with the UK has been a long one. Renowned for their bravery and martial tradition, many Sikhs served in the British military and gave their lives for the British Empire in the First and Second World Wars.

## *Beliefs*

The Sikh faith is a distinct religion revealed through the teachings of the ten **Gurus** (Guru means spiritual teacher), the first of whom, **Guru Nanak Dev Ji**, was born in 1469 CE in Lahore, which is now in Pakistan.

The Gurus were the Divine Light who conveyed **Gurbani** (word of God) and were spiritually all one. The tenth Guru vested the spiritual authority in the **Guru Granth Sahib Ji** (the Sikh holy book) and temporal authority in the **Khalsa Panth** (the community of baptised Sikhs).

Sikhs believe that there is one supreme God for all people, not just Sikhs. God is regarded as **Nirgun** (transcendent), **Sargun** (immanent), **Nirankar** (formless) and **Akal** (eternal).

The object of a Sikh's life is to develop God-consciousness and ultimately receive God's grace. Human life presents the opportunity to do this by realising the will and love of God through truthful living and Seva (dedication to service), in the context of a normal family life.

Set prayers are said daily, in the morning, evening and at night, before going to sleep. Prayers can be said individually, together as a family, or collectively at any suitable place, although congregational worship at a Gurdwara is regarded as very important.

Prohibitions for baptised Sikhs include tobacco, alcohol, intoxications, adultery, etc.

# Sikhism



Sikh men and women, particularly those who have taken **Amrit** (been baptised), always wear the following articles of faith that are popularly known as the **Five Ks**.

- **Kesh**  
A Sikh's uncut hair.
- **Kangha**  
A wooden comb that is worn in the hair (underneath the Turban).
- **Kara**  
A steel bracelet, worn from birth on the right wrist.
- **Kirpan**  
A curved sword.
- **Kacherra**  
A pair of under-shorts that are tailored in a special manner.

All of the 5 Ks have a deep spiritual and moral significance, forming part of **Rahit Maryada** (the Sikh code of ethics and discipline).

Although not mentioned among the Five Ks, **Dastaar** (the turban) is worn to maintain the sanctity of the **Kesh** (hair) and is treated with the utmost respect. Whilst obligatory for men, the turban is optional for women who may instead use a **Chunni** (a long Punjabi scarf) to cover their heads. Young boys wear their hair in a handkerchief sized **Rumal** or **Patka**.

The **Khanda** is the symbol of Sikhism and is to be found on the Sikh flag (**Nishan Sahib**). It is made of three elements.

- **The Khanda**  
A double-edged sword that symbolises justice and freedom.
- **The Chakra**  
A circle, symbolising God's continuity.
- **Two Crossed Kirpan Swords**  
That represent spiritual and temporal power.

The Nishan Sahib can be found flying outside all Gurdwaras on a tall flagpole and is triangular in shape and yellow or saffron in colour.





# Sikhism

## *Festivals*

There are many Sikh festivals, but the most important are...

- ***Birth of Guru Nanak***  
The founder of the Sikh religion, born on 14th November in 1469.
- ***Vaisakhi***  
Celebrating the date of 13th April in 1699, when the ***Khalsa*** (the code of conduct) and the ***5 Ks*** were introduced by Guru Gobind Singh.

## *Birth*

As soon as a Sikh baby is born, the beginning of the Guru Granth Sahib (the holy book) is recited as a blessing. This is known as the ***Mool Mantar***.

The child is traditionally given a name beginning with the first letter of a hymn on the page that the Guru Granth Sahib is randomly opened.

## *Naming*

A Sikh is likely to have a personal name (common to both sexes), a middle name ***Singh*** (Lion) for all males and ***Kaur*** (Princess) for females, followed by a family name (surname). In some cases and in keeping with tradition, the family name is not used, in which instance Singh or Kaur may be regarded as the surname. Therefore, the husband will be Mr Singh and his wife, Mrs Kaur.

***Sardar*** and ***Sardarni*** are titles prefixed to the Sikh male and female names respectively. Therefore if these traditional titles are used, Mr and Mrs should not be used at the same time.

## *Marriage*

In Britain arranged marriages are still common and are preferably based on the two people being from a similar background. The practice of offering a Dowry has no place in Sikh traditions, but families would help a couple to set-up home.

A Sikh priest performs the religious marriage ceremony (which is generally held at the Gurdwara). The highlight of the wedding is the four vows, spoken and sung as the groom leads his bride four times in a clockwise direction around the Guru Granth Sahib. Every time that the couple go around the Guru Granth Sahib, they undertake a solemn vow. When all four vows are completed, the couple are considered married.

# Sikhism



Divorce is accepted, although it is against a Sikh's religious beliefs, as marriage is regarded as a sacrament. Divorcees are however allowed to re-marry in the Gurdwara.

## *Death*

When male Sikhs die, they are usually dressed in their best western or traditional clothes (this may or may not include a turban). Women may be dressed in white, in line with tradition.

All Sikhs are cremated (along with the Five Ks) and traditionally, their ashes are taken to a river in Kirtpur in India to be scattered.

During a period of mourning, Sikhs tend to wear pale items of clothing.

According to Sikh etiquette, comforting a member of the opposite sex by physical contact e.g. touching or hugging, should be avoided unless the persons are closely related. Even then for instance, a married couple would not do so (or display any affection) in public.

## *Dress*

Most traditional Sikh men wear a turban, as will some Sikh women. But it should be remembered that although it has become an important symbol of the Sikh faith, not all turban wearers are Sikhs, as people from other faiths may also wear a form of the turban.

Sikh women traditionally wear Shalwar Kameez (loose trousers with a long top) and scarf, a Sari, or western dress.

## *Diet*

Observant Sikhs (especially those who are baptised) are likely to be vegetarians. They will also exclude from their diet eggs, fish and any food containing these, or any animal derivatives as ingredients; or foods cooked in animal fats. Dairy produce is acceptable, so long as it is free from meat products e.g. rennet in cheese.

Sikhs believe that a balance of moderation and temperance should be exercised as a way of life, both for spiritual reasons and for the maintenance of good health. Sikhism does not attach any importance to the practice of fasting, as it believes that it has no religious merit.

## *Place Of Worship*

When visiting a **Gurdwara** and before entering the worship room, you will be expected to cover your head, remove your shoes and wash your hands.





# Sikhism

It would be appreciated if you then went forward to bow to the holy book (the Guru Granth Sahib). Offerings can be made, but are not obligatory.

If invited to eat at the Gurdwara (most of which operate a Langar [kitchen]), you should not offer to pay for the food, as it is free for everyone, but you could make a donation to the Gurdwara prior to departure. If you do eat, your head must remain covered.

Please do not take cigarettes, alcohol or other intoxicants (other than medicines) on to the premises, as this would cause offence.

## ***Medical Treatment***

There is no religious objection to post mortem, organ transplant, blood transfusion, or other form of western medicine, on religious grounds.

If the situation arises where for operational reasons a Sikh's hair needs to be cut, consultation needs to take place with the individual or other Sikhs who may be present.

## ***General***

If you enter a Sikh home you may be asked to remove your shoes and to cover your head. Families will only require this if you enter a room where the Guru Granth Sahib is kept.

A Sikh woman may feel more comfortable being spoken to by a male if family members are present.



# OTHER INFORMATION



# Frequently Asked Questions

Some common questions arise during Cultural Awareness training. These are listed to assist understanding.

## Why do some women have a red dot on their forehead?

- The red dot is called a **Bindi** or **Tilak** and is usually (but not exclusively) an indication that the woman is a married Hindu. Hindu men also wear it on some occasions.

## If I don't know if someone is a Sikh, Hindu or a Muslim, how should I address and/or greet them?

- If you don't know how to address someone... ask politely! They won't be offended and you won't look stupid.
- Unless you know the person, it may be sensible not to offer a handshake unless they do, as this may offend.

## Do Islamic people recognise Jesus as a religious figure?

- Yes... They believe that like Muhammad (pbuh), he was one of 25 prophets sent by God (Allah).

## Where does the name Rastafarian come from?

- Rastafarians take their name from the **King of Ethiopia** – Haile Selassie, who before he was enthroned in 1930, was known as **Ras Tafari**.

## Why do Rastafarians wear their hair in Dreads?

- Both men and women wear dreads as a symbol of spiritual strength.
- Haile Selassie wore them as a young man.

## Why do we welcome people from elsewhere to Oxfordshire?

- Every year thousands of people leave or come into Oxfordshire, from other parts of the UK, from Europe and the rest of the world. The only reason for concern is to ensure that there are enough houses, jobs and places in education if more people come than leave.

# Frequently Asked Questions

- There is a skills shortage in Oxfordshire and an easy way to fill these positions is to employ people from outside Oxfordshire.
- The UK is a rich country that has a long tradition of offering political asylum (often on a temporary basis) to people who cannot live in their country of origin, because of fears for their own safety.

## **What do I do if I need to handle a family's holy book or scripture? (e.g. if found in a fire)**

- Handling Holy Books or Scriptures should be done with sensitivity. If possible, cover the item to prevent further damage and ask the householder what you should do.

## **What if I visit a house and the family has a shrine?**

- Be aware of this possibility and show appropriate respect. If in doubt, ask a member of the family how to treat the shrine.
- This would also apply to some Christians, who may have statues of saints and images of the Christ in their homes.

## **Could I remove a turban to check a Sikh's head for injuries?**

- Yes... there isn't normally a problem with doing so. It is not normally fixed to the hair and so it should just lift off the head. But, don't just discard it afterwards... treat it with respect.

## **Does the wearing of turbans, exclude Sikhs from certain occupations?**

- Yes... At the present time, it does where there are special requirements to wear personal protection equipment, i.e. firefighters. However, this position is currently under review.
- Not all Sikhs wear turbans, or have long hair and beards, and don't face the same restrictions.

## **Would the requirement for a Muslim to pray five times per day mean that they might have to take time out from work?**

- Although the Quran imposes a duty on all Muslims to pray to Allah five times a day, if they are prevented from carrying out their prayer at one particular time they can make it up at another time with agreement from line management.



# Frequently Asked Questions

- Muslims believe that the saving of life takes precedence over religious duties.

## **Why don't Gypsies & Travellers live in houses like everyone else?**

- If born into the travelling life, some would find it as difficult to live in a house as other people would to live in a caravan.

## **Is there legal protection against discrimination at work if I do not believe in god?**

- It is unlawful to discriminate against an individual or their partner on the basis of religion, regardless of the beliefs of the victim. There are also other belief systems such as humanism, that do not centre on religious doctrine but are still protected under the Employment Equality (Religion or Beliefs) Regulations 2003 because they have a distinct set of philosophical values.



# Cross-Cultural Communication

What we say and how we act, can have a direct result in how people respond to us on an individual and collective basis. The following points should therefore be considered when working with, planning a meeting, or when in the company of people from ethnic minorities.

**DO ...** be careful about using jargon or slang when speaking to people from minority ethnic groups. What you say may have a different meaning to your listener.

**DO ...** be careful how you use gestures or body language. Individuals may place different meanings on a gesture you may feel is quite inoffensive.

**DO ...** be sensitive when using terms of endearment e.g. luv, my dear, etc. What is innocent to you may be unacceptable, or even offensive to others.

**DO ...** be aware that in some communities, physical contact between people of different sexes is not common and a handshake is not always the custom when greeting people. This is especially so among women. An act of comforting e.g. putting an arm around someone may cause embarrassment or offence.

**DO ...** be aware that in some communities, a woman may not be comfortable or wish to be in a room with a man who is not related.

**DON'T ...** ask for a Christian name or surname. Ask for their first, personal or family name instead. And don't assume that a response to questions in English means that the person fully understands what you are saying.

**DON'T ...** assume that not keeping eye contact in conversation is a sign of dishonesty or disrespect. In some communities, the opposite applies. And don't assume that just because voices are raised that a person is losing control or becoming aggressive. In some communities, it is common practice for people to speak loudly and to be animated with their bodies and their sense of personal space can be much less than your own.

**DON'T ...** raise your voice if a person does not understand you. Speak more slowly and clearly. Use simple language and be patient.



# Acknowledgements

Oxfordshire County Council would like to acknowledge the comments received from members of each community represented within this guide and particularly the contributions of:

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Oxfordshire County Council

- Corporate Strategies Team, Chief Executive's Office
- Fire & Rescue Service, Community Safety
- Corporate HR, Resources
- Advisory Service for the Education of Travellers, Learning & Culture
- Standing Advisory Committee for Religious Education (SACRE)
- Racial Equality Scheme Reference Group
- Community Safety
- Learning & Culture
- Social & Health Care



“Formate alternative te ketij publikimi ofrohen me kerkese. Kjo perfshin dhe gjuhe te tjera, me shkronja te medhaja, shkronja per te verberit, kasete degjimi, disk kompjuteri ose email.”

Albanian

আপনি যদি অনুরোধ করেন তাহলে এই পুস্তিকাটি বিকল্প ছাঁদে, যেমন, অন্য কোনও ভাষায়, বড় হরফে, ব্রেইলে, অডিও-ক্যাসেটে, কমপিউটারের ডিস্কে বা ইমেলের মাধ্যমে পেতে পারেন।

Bengali

“本刊物備有其他的格式可供索取。這些包括有其他語言版，大字版，盲人用版，錄音帶版，電腦磁碟版或電子郵件版。”

Chinese

प्रार्थना करने पर यह प्रकाशन दूसरे रूपों में प्राप्त किया जा सकता है। जिस में सम्मिलित है, दूसरी भाषाओं में, बड़े छापे में, ब्रेअल, सुनने की टेप पर, कम्प्यूटर की डिस्क पर या ई-मेल द्वारा।

Hindi

“ਇਹ ਪੁਸਤਕ ਬੇਨਤੀ ਕਰਨ ਤੇ ਹੋਰ ਰੂਪਾਂ ਵਿਚ ਵੀ ਉਪਲਬਧ ਹੈ। ਜਿਵੇਂ ਕਿ ਹੋਰ ਭਾਸ਼ਾਵਾਂ ਵਿਚ, ਵੱਡੇ ਛਾਪੇ ਤੇ, ਬ੍ਰੇਲ ਵਿਚ, ਸੁਣਨ ਵਾਲੀ ਟੇਪ ਤੇ, ਕੰਪਿਊਟਰ ਡਿਸਕ ਜਾਂ ਈ ਮੇਲ ਤੇ।”

Punjabi

”اس اشاعت کو متبادل اشکال میں درخواست کرنے پر حاصل کیا جاسکتا ہے۔ اس میں دوسری زبانیں، بڑا پرنٹ، بریل (جسے اندھے چھو کر پڑھ سکیں)، آڈیو کیسٹ، کمپیوٹر ڈسک یا ای میل شامل ہیں۔“

Urdu

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