

# Faith Guide



# Contents

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Introduction	3
Buddhism	6
Christianity	9
Hinduism	12
Islam	15
Judaism	19
Sikhism	22
Non-Religious Beliefs	26
Symbols explained	28
Bibliography	29

# Introduction

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This guide is one of the documents that support the council's single equality scheme. The aim of this guide is to provide staff with an opportunity to gain a better understanding of the religions practised on the Isle of Wight. Having a better understanding of the religious and cultural needs of local people will help us to provide high quality services and effective community leadership.

## **Religious and cultural awareness is important to:**

- promote social cohesion amongst people from different communities;
- promote awareness of people from different cultural and racial backgrounds;
- prevent the social exclusion of certain disadvantaged communities;
- prevent discrimination and promote fair treatment;
- increase access to services.

## **Why is religious and cultural awareness important on the Isle of Wight?**

To meet our priorities of providing high quality services and effective community leadership the council understands that:

- the Isle of Wight is made up of many different communities;
- some communities have greater or different needs than others;
- equality does not mean doing the same for everyone;
- to make progress we must target resources to meet the greatest needs;
- we must consider all communities, even those with fewer needs;
- everyone needs to feel involved.

According to the 2001 Census, we know that 98.7 per cent of the population on the Isle of Wight was born in the UK and we have a low proportion (1.3 per cent) of people from a black or minority ethnic background including Black African, Black Caribbean, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Chinese. However, the 2001 Census has enabled us to have the opportunity to identify the faiths practised on the Island. Describing different religions and traditions is both a challenging and sensitive task. This guide is not exhaustive and it is recognised that members from any religion will vary in the degree to which they observe their faith and that there are significant sub-divisions within each faith.

Overwhelmingly, Christianity is the largest practised religion on the Isle of Wight, the other main religions considered in this summary are: Buddhism; Hindu; Jewish; Muslim; and Sikh. The table below shows the number of people practising each religion (2001 Census) and as the population of the Island increases and diversity grows, the variety of faiths and number

of people practising these faiths is likely to increase. There is a more extensive version of this guide, which provides further information about other minority religions.

<b>Religion</b>	<b>Total for the Isle of Wight</b>	<b>Percentage of total</b>
Christianity	97,851	73.73
Buddhist	233	0.176
Hindu	126	0.095
Jewish	122	0.092
Muslim	361	0.272
Sikh	32	0.024
Other religions	599	0.451
No religion	22,920	17.27
Religion not stated	10,471	7.89
<b>Total</b>	<b>132,715</b>	<b>100</b>

It must be noted that according to the 2001 census 10,471 people stated that they practised no religion; this reflects the national trend in the decline of religious belief. A section at the end of this guide examines non-religious belief.

## **The focus of this guide includes topics such as:**

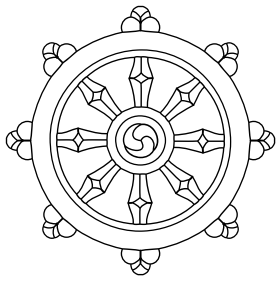
- Prayer and worship
- Religious festivals, holy days and pilgrimage
- Diet/fasting
- Religion-based etiquette/dress
- Naming
- Bereavement

It is important to note that:

- Many faiths are diverse, comprising different sects, denominations or schools of thought, each with different beliefs and practices. This guide aims to give basic and rudimentary information about religious and cultural norms, these may vary between sects, families or from personal conviction and beliefs.
- The descriptions provided under each faith heading are not intended to be an exhaustive account of the practice and beliefs of that faith. They are intended to provide an indication of those aspects of religion and faith.
- Assumptions should not be made about a person's faith simply from things such as names, colour, race or country of origin. Some people do not adopt a faith at all.

- There is no substitute for asking people about their individual needs. The length and detail of information provided under each faith section in this guide should not be seen as an indication of the importance given to the faith, more a reflection of the degree to which the faith might impact on people's lives.

**Copies of this guide can be obtained from the equality and diversity pages on [www.iwight.com](http://www.iwight.com), please contact Rosie Barnard on 823091 or email [rosie.barnard@iow.gov.uk](mailto:rosie.barnard@iow.gov.uk)**



# Buddhism

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Buddhism originated about 2,500 years ago in India. It is a major world religion, the fourth largest of all organised religions. It is mainly found amongst people who originate from South East Asia or the Far East. Buddhists in the UK speak English and a variety of languages reflecting their country of origin or ethnic background.

Buddhism comes from the enlightenment and teachings of a Nepalese prince (Siddhartha Gautama), who came to be known as Buddha, the Awakened One. Siddhartha Gautama was untouched by the outside world until he encountered what he called the four Passing Sights:

- Death
- Age
- Poverty
- Sickness

Buddha wanted to discover how to overcome suffering, which he believed was caused by desire. Dharma is a guiding principle of Buddhism, which advises living life between luxury and austerity. The fundamental beliefs of Buddhists include the Four Noble Truths (or dharma) and belief in the Eightfold Path of Enlightenment; these are described below.

## The Four Noble Truths state that:

- All life is unsatisfactory and involves suffering.
- The cause of suffering is desire and craving.
- Happiness and enlightenment can be gained by the absolute elimination of desire and craving.
- Enlightenment (Nirvana) and the elimination of craving are achieved by following the eightfold noble path.

## The Noble Eightfold Path encourages:

- **Right understanding** - acquired through familiarity with the Buddhist teachings.
- **Right intention** - changed motivation which develops with corrected vision.
- **Right speech** - to cause no injury to oneself or others.
- **Right action** - practising what is beneficial for oneself and others.
- **Right livelihood** - earning a living in ways consistent with the Noble Eightfold Path.
- **Right effort** - constant effort to retain and generate good.
- **Right mindfulness** - rooted in the body and its activity; feelings and states of mind.
- **Right concentration** - is nurtured through the practice of meditation.

## Other key beliefs include:

- **Karma** - Karma is understood as a law of consequences, all deliberate actions have their consequences and whether an action has a useful or negative effect depends upon the intentions.
- **Samsara** - This relates to the wheel of birth and death. Depending on the karma accumulated in one lifetime the rebirth (or re-becoming) will be of different kinds. The principal concern is not to gain a better rebirth but to escape from the wheel of rebirth and death and to attain nirvana.

## Prayer and worship

There are various types of Buddhist buildings (Vihara), each reflecting the different traditions, schools and ethnic groupings of the Buddhists who use them. Styles range from simplistic meditation halls to ornate temples. A Buddhist temple is commonly where teaching, religious observance and meditation takes place. Most Buddhists have a small shrine in their homes. Meditation plays a central role in the practice of Buddhist teachings and is seen as a route to the cultivation of faith, generosity, concentration, mindfulness, energy and wisdom, all of which are foundations to developing spiritual life.

## Religious festivals and holy days

Buddhist religious festivals are based on the lunar calendar. However, festivals and their dates and meaning vary according to Buddhist tradition.

## Diet

Buddhism emphasises the avoidance of intentional killing, however some Buddhists are vegetarian while some are not.

## Dress

Many Buddhists do not wear leather to reflect their adherence to be non-harmful to all life.

## **Points to remember when visiting a Buddhist family home**

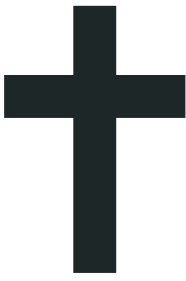
- Do not shake hands unless invited.
- Accept refreshment if it is offered.

## **Points to remember when visiting a Buddhist temple**

- Shoes and headgear should be removed as a sign of respect.

## **Points to remember as an employer**

- There are many Buddhist festivals but not all festivals are celebrated by all Buddhists, however, Vesak (or Buddha Day) is the one key festival celebrated by all Buddhist traditions. This is usually celebrated in May and many Buddhists may wish to abstain from working.
- Meditation is central to the practice of Buddhist teachings and some Buddhist staff may wish to meditate at work, they may require a quiet space to do this.
- Many Buddhists are vegetarian, where catering is provided in meetings or social events, effort should be made to ensure a selection of vegetarian and meat options. Staff should also be able to store vegetarian and meat foods on separate shelves in refrigerators.
- Many Buddhists do not wear leather clothing or shoes. This may be relevant where protective clothing or uniforms are provided.



# Christianity

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Christianity dates back about 2000 years and has approximately one billion followers around the world. It is the largest and longest established religious tradition in the UK, it is ethnically and denominationally diverse. The Bible is the main religious text; it comprises the Old Testament and the New Testament.

## There are some core beliefs, principles and practices common to most denominations, including:

- **One God** - Christians are monotheists, they believe there is one God who caused all creation to happen and who remains involved with the life of this world.
- **The Doctrine of Trinity** – this is the teaching that God is manifested in three ways, as the Creator and Father, as the son (Jesus Christ) and as the Holy Spirit.
- **A belief in a judgement day** – Christians believe that humans have only one life and that they will be judged on how they have lived this life.
- **A belief in life after death** – Christians believe in the continuation of the soul life after death.

Christianity shares a number of beliefs with Judaism and Islam, such as a belief in one God.

## Prayer and worship

Most Christian buildings for worship are referred to as churches. Other names used include chapel or meeting house. Christian places of worship vary in appearance, however some have a range of recognisable features such as a spire or tower or stained glass windows. By contrast some Christian places of worship have the external appearance of a simple square or rectangular hall. In both public and private prayer, the Lord's Prayer is important. It is the prayer which Jesus is recorded in the Gospels as having taught his first disciples. Some Christians fast individually at chosen times in order to renew their faith or as an act of solidarity with the poor.

The names and functions of the designated religious leadership of various Christian churches vary according to their tradition for example; priest, minister or pastor.

## Common practises within Christianity include:

- **Baptism** - the rite of baptism in water accompanied by prayer and conducted in the name of the Holy Trinity marks a person's entry into the Christian church. In many older churches the baptismal font is near the door of the church, to show symbolic entry. The

waters of baptism are understood as a sign of the remission of sins and entry into new life in Jesus.

- **Orders** - From the earliest years of Christianity there have been special groups whose aim was to share a more complete devotion to Jesus and to the pattern of his life and work. Some groups are known as 'orders', and those within them, generally called monks (men) or nuns (women), have taken what are known as 'solemn vows' of poverty, chastity and obedience.
- **Holy communion** - For the majority of Christians, Holy communion is the most characteristic and central act of Christian worship. Holy communion means sharing and refers to the sharing of bread and wine and of the life of the church.

## Religious festivals and holy days

Sunday is traditionally the day of worship and a day of rest. There are many traditions within the Christian faith and this may mean that different religious holidays and festivals are celebrated by different Christian traditions. Some of the dates are based on the lunar calendar and will therefore change each year.

## Diet

Christians do not have any universally agreed dietary regulations, however some Christians avoid pork and alcohol and others may avoid eating meat on Fridays or abstain from certain foods during Lent.

## Dress code

Christian people will dress modestly within a place of worship.

## Naming

Christian names are normally used. Babies are normally christened or baptised a few weeks or months after birth.

## Death/bereavement

Most Christians will call for a Minister and church members to pray for them before dying. The belief is that after death the spirit leaves the body to join with Christ and God in heaven. There is a belief in life after death for those who have lived a good Christian life and have repented their sins.

## Points to remember when visiting a church

- In some Christian places of worship there are seats for worshippers but in Orthodox churches most of the congregation stand during the service.
- Some Christian churches forbid the use of cosmetics, others require that female members dress modestly. A small number of churches require women to avoid wearing trousers.

## Points to remember as an employer

- Sunday is the day of worship and the day of rest within the Christian faith. Christians may therefore wish to avoid working on Sundays.
- There are a number of holy days of obligation, therefore Christians may wish to attend a church service and may request a late start or early finish.

Some Christians fast at chosen times, this may be when they are at work. It is good practice for employers to consider the following in order to support staff who are fasting:

- Allowing staff to take a break when a fast ends.
- Allowing changes in work patterns to enable staff to finish work when the fast ends.
- avoid meetings, where possible, for the time when the fast is due to break.

Christians do not have any universally agreed dietary laws, however some Christians avoid pork and alcohol some also avoid eating meat on Fridays. Where catering is provided in meetings or social events, effort should be made to ensure a selection of vegetarian and meat options. Staff should also be able to store vegetarian and meat foods on separate shelves in refrigerators.

There is no obligation to perform pilgrimage however some staff may wish to visit holy sites and seek extended leave for this purpose.



# Hinduism

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Hinduism is at least 5,000 years old and has a following of over 500 million. The majority of its followers live in India; it is also the majority faith in Nepal and Mauritius.

The term Hindu is related to the Sanskrit word Sindhu, which is the name of the river known in English as the river Indus. The Hindu way of life is referred to as Dharma, and Hindu traditions are often described as more of a way of life than a religion based around common beliefs. There is great diversity within the religion and its followers. Hindus in the UK, in addition to English, speak one or more other languages, the most common are Hindi, Urdu, Bengali, Gujarati or Punjabi. The ancient language of Sanskrit is used in worship and in the sacred texts.

Hindus worship Brahma (The Creator) who is believed to be the supreme deity. Brahma is expressed in the images of hundreds of individual Gods, each of which express a different quality associated with Brahma. Images of Hindu gods and goddesses show them to have more than one pair of arms, which signifies that they have supernatural ability. Hindu tradition allows the use of a variety of symbols, names, terms and images.

## The central ideas of Hinduism focus around the following beliefs:

- **Dharma** – social duty or religion. This relates to the purpose of one's life and that the intrinsic value of a soul is to serve God.
- **Karma** – decent behaviour. Karma relates to the concept that with every action there is an equal or opposite reaction, these can be good or bad depending on the nature and intentions of the action.
- **The Atman (spirit soul)** – Hindus believe that there is a spirit in all life form and embodies each cycle of birth and death until it reaches its goal (Moksha).
- **Samsara** – reincarnation according to the law of Karma, one's present actions determine the type and circumstance of one's future bodily form.
- **Moksha** – achieving release from the cycle of reincarnation.

## Prayer and worship

The Mandir is the Hindu place of worship. It is regarded as the residence of the idols of the Hindu gods and goddesses (Murtis) and it is often the focus for the celebration of Hindu festivals. Mandirs in the UK are generally converted public or religious buildings, there are a few purpose built buildings. Most Hindus have a shrine or small area in their homes for worship. There is no particular day of the week stipulated for prayer and Hindus are not required to come to the temple to pray. A Hindu priest is often referred to as pandit, swami

or maharaj; their role is to conduct religious ceremonies and to care for the holy shrines.

## **Religious festivals and holy days**

Hinduism honours hundreds of deities therefore many festivals are celebrated. Celebration of these festivals will depend upon the gods honoured by the family. Hindu festivals follow the movements of the sun and moon therefore dates change slightly each year.

## **Diet**

The majority of Hindus are vegetarian; all life is viewed as sacred although vegetarianism is not compulsory. Meat eating Hindus are unlikely to eat beef because the cow is revered. There are particular Hindu festivals when it is common to fast.

## **Dress/appearance**

Some Hindu women wear a 'bindi', a red spot on the forehead denoting membership of a Hindu faith. Most married women wear a necklace 'mangal sutra' which is placed around their neck at the time of marriage, some women wear this all the time. Hindu women may wear either a sari or a shalwar khameez. The shalwar khameez is the traditional dress in Pakistan and women from India or Bangladesh are more likely to wear a sari.

## **Names**

Traditionally, Hindu names have three parts and are made up of a personal, a complimentary or middle and family name. Not all married women change their name.

## **Bereavement**

Hindus are cremated and relatives traditionally observe a 13-day mourning period.

## Points to remember when visiting a Hindu family home

- You may be expected to leave your shoes at the door as many Hindus consider leather as spiritually impure, also shoes are removed as a mark of respect for the gods.
- There may be a religious shrine in the house.
- Shake hands if invited by your host.
- Accept refreshment if offered.
- Sometimes it may not be appropriate for a male employee to speak to a woman without a male family member present.
- Although not compulsory, women will usually cover their heads.

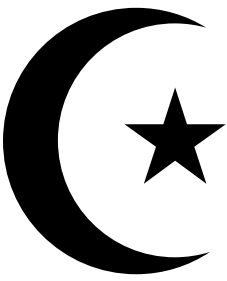
## Points to remember as an employer

- There are a number of festivals that are celebrated and may involve taking time off work.
- Pilgrimage is not compulsory, however for some followers it does form an important part of Hindu religious observance. Staff may request extended leave for this purpose.
- Most Hindus are vegetarian, however if they do eat meat they tend to refrain from eating beef. Some Hindus may also refrain from eating onions and garlic. Where catering is provided in canteens, meetings or social events, effort should be made to ensure a selection of vegetarian and meat options. Staff should also be able to store vegetarian and meat foods on separate shelves in refrigerators.

There are particular Hindu festivals when it is common to fast, this may be when they are at work. It is good practice for employers to consider the following in order to support staff who are fasting:

- Allowing staff to take a break when a fast ends.
- Allowing changes in work patterns to enable staff to finish work when the fast ends.
- Avoiding meetings, where possible, for the time when the fast is due to break.

Under Hindu tradition, close relatives of the deceased observe a 13 day mourning period, during which they may wish to remain at home, Hindus may request leave from work for this purpose.



# Islam

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Islam is over 1,400 years old and the followers of Islam believe that there is one God (in Arabic referred to as Allah). Islam is a major world religion and Muslims (follower of Islam) are found all over the world, they speak many different languages and have different cultural backgrounds. There are around one billion Muslims in the world and can be divided into two distinctive groups, Sunni Muslims (90 per cent of the total Muslim population) and Shi'ah Muslims.

Islam shares common historical roots with Judaism and Christianity. Muslims believe that God has sent many messengers or prophets; these include Abraham, Moses and Jesus, all of whom are regarded highly in the Islamic holy book the Qu'ran. According to Muslim belief the prophet Muhammad received a series of revelations from God (Allah) through the recitations of Angel Gabriel.

The ethnic background of the UK Muslim population is quite diverse therefore a number of different languages are spoken. In addition to English, Arabic, Bengali, Farsi, Gujurati, Malay, Punjabi, Turkish and Urdu are among the most common. Among Muslims, a reading knowledge of Arabic is important, as it is the language of the Qur'an.

## There are five basic duties (or pillars) of Islam:

- **Declaration of faith** – belief that there is no God except Allah.
- **Prayer (Salah)** – ritual prayer carried out five times a day facing the direction of Mecca.
- **Fasting (Sawm)** – duty to fast during the month of Ramadan. Food or drink is not permitted during daylight hours.
- **Almsgiving (Zakah)** – Muslims are expected to give 2.5 per cent of their income or savings to charity.
- **Pilgrimage (Hajj)** - all Muslims are expected to make the pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia once in their lifetime.

## Prayer/worship

The mosque is the Islamic place of congregational worship. Purpose built mosques feature a large dome and a tall minaret. The dome represents the universe and in Islamic countries the call to prayer is made from the minaret. No images, paintings or decorations which represent living beings are found inside a mosque. There are no seats but the floor is carpeted. Not all mosques in the UK are purpose built, many are in converted houses. Before a Muslim can perform prayers, they must carry out an ablution (ritual washing) which involves washing the hands, mouth, nose, face, feet and arms up to the elbows. The

Imam is the leader of the prayers, and may also act as a spokesperson for the community.

## Religious festivals and holy days

The dates of religious festivals are not fixed as the Muslim calendar follows the lunar calendar. Friday (Jumu'ah) is the holy day of the week for Muslims.

## Diet

Muslims are guided by their faith about food that is permissible (halal) and food that is not (haram). All vegetarian food and dairy produce is permitted. Game, poultry and the meat from non-carnivorous animals are permitted, when it is slaughtered in accordance with religious laws. Pork and the meat of carnivorous animals (land or water based) are forbidden. This may include animal fats and food containing gelatine. It is unacceptable to eat food cooked with pork products or to use utensils used to cook pork. Alcohol is forbidden.

## Dress/appearance

Principles of modesty and cleanliness are important for both men and women, however the dress of Muslims vary from culture to culture. Men must be covered from the navel to knees and women must cover their hair, (a head scarf is often used) and their body from neck to ankle. Tight clothing must be avoided. The Shalwar khameez is a traditional garment from Pakistan; it comprises a pair of baggy trousers (shalwar) and a long loose tunic (khameez). A long matching scarf (dupatta) is worn with this.

## Naming

Muslim names are chosen according to their meaning; traditionally a hereditary surname does not exist. A title may be used instead, often indicating gender. However, Muslim families are increasingly using a family surname.

## Bereavement

Muslims are required to bury their deceased as soon as possible; preferably the burial takes place within 24 hours of death.

## Points to remember when visiting a Muslim family home

- In some cases, staff may be required to remove their shoes.
- In some families, it may be thought unsuitable for women to have any contact with men they do not know. It is advisable to keep in mind that this may be the case and discuss with the individual what would suit them.
- When a Muslim woman is introduced to a man unknown to her, shaking hands may be found offensive.
- It may also be inappropriate for a female officer to meet with or visit alone with a married Muslim man.
- Some individuals may not maintain eye contact. This does not indicate either disrespect or contempt.
- Many Muslims do not shake hands with members of the opposite sex and may decline the opportunity to shake hands, this should not be viewed in a negative manner, since it is based on religious principle and not intended to offend.
- Some Muslims believe that only those who have performed ritual ablution (wudu) may handle the Qur'an. Ensure you have your host's permission.

## Points to remember when visiting a Mosque

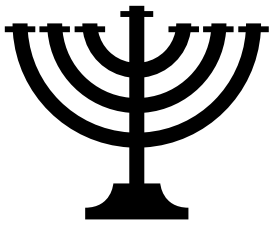
- Inside a mosque, women must cover their heads and wear modest dress which conceals their arms and legs.
- Shoes are removed out of respect before entering the prayer hall.
- Quiet and respectful behaviour is required.
- No alcoholic drink is permitted either inside the mosque or to be consumed before entering. Alcohol is prohibited under Islam.
- Dogs are not admitted inside a mosque as they are considered unclean. This does not mean that Muslims dislike dogs or would not keep them as pets, however care is taken over the nature of the owners contact with them.

## Points to remember as an employer:

It is an obligatory aspect of the faith that Muslims should perform five prayers a day. Muslim staff may require a room for observing their prayers whilst at work. This must be equipped with materials on which to pray and lukewarm water for wudu (cleaning).

- When organising a conference, a prayer room should be available for prayers and catering must reflect the fact that Muslims may not eat pork products or consume alcohol. Where catering is provided in canteens, meetings or social events, effort should be made to ensure a selection of vegetarian and meat options. Staff should also be able to store vegetarian and meat foods on separate shelves in refrigerators.
- Ramadan is a holy period of time, many Muslim staff choose to take their annual leave during this month. There are particular festivals when it is common to fast this may be when they are at work. It is good practice for employers to consider the following in order to support staff who are fasting:
  - Allowing staff to take a break when a fast ends.
  - Allowing changes in work patterns to enable staff to finish work when the fast ends.
  - Avoiding meetings, where possible, for the time when the fast is due to break.

Muslims are required to bury their deceased as soon as possible, preferably within 24 hours. Muslim staff may therefore seek leave to attend a funeral at short notice.



# Judaism

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The Jewish faith originated in the Middle East over 3,500 years ago. Jews are found throughout the world with large communities in the UK. There is no one founder of the faith, however the 3 patriarchs were Abraham, his son Isaac and Isaac's son Jacob. The first religious leader was Moses, who received the laws of Sinai. Jerusalem is the holiest city in the world for Jewish people. Judaism is a monotheistic faith in that it centres on one God. There are different ways of classifying Jews, some based on geography and some by different religious practice or schools of thought. The two main sects of Judaism are the Ashkenazim (who tend to be from Germany, Eastern Europe and Russia) and Sephardim (who originate largely from Spain, Portugal, North Africa and Asian Countries). Jews can be divided into Orthodox Jews and Progressive Jews.

## Prayer and worship

The Jewish holy book is known as the Torah (the book of Moses). This comprises the first five books of the Old Testament, which are believed to have been imparted to Moses on Mount Sinai. The Torah contains commandments, which deal with all aspects of life e.g. ethics, spirituality, diet, the Sabbath and festivals. The Torah is written on a scroll and is wound round a wooden or metal rod. A pointer (yad) is used while reading the Torah to ensure that the parchment is not touched.

The synagogue is the name for a Jewish place of worship. A rabbi's role within the Jewish community is to teach and preach, to take on pastoral duties and to advise on Jewish law. Prayers should be said 3 times a day and Jewish people are likely to attend the synagogue on a Friday evening or Saturday morning during the Sabbath; a religious day referred to in the Ten Commandments, which is observed weekly and lasts 25 hours beginning on Friday just before sunset and ending just after sunset on Saturday. It is considered a day of rest, worship, study and leisure. Religious education is particularly valued for boys because of the requirements for their Bar Mitzvah, which marks their entry into adulthood at age 13. A similar service for girls is called Bat Mitzvah, however the ceremony will differ according to the sect of Judaism.

## Religious festivals and holy days

The Jewish calendar is a combination of both lunar and solar and therefore festivals will vary from year to year.

## Language

Services in Orthodox synagogues (and in some progressive temples) are conducted in Hebrew. Hebrew is the main language spoken in Israel today. Yiddish and Ladino are languages traditionally associated with Judaism but are now rarely used. Hebrew reads from right to left and in the Torah text, vowels are omitted.

## Diet

Jews are guided by their faith with regards to which foods are permissible (kosher) and foods which are not (treif). There are regulations which stipulate when groups of foods may be eaten. Meat from herbivorous animals with a cloven hoof is permitted as is farmyard fowl and fish with both fins and scales. Shellfish is not. The slaughterhouse process must be compassionate and in accordance with Jewish law. Meat and dairy products may not be eaten together. A minimum break of 3 hours is customary between food types. Practising Jews may fast during some festivals, these fasts end at nightfall.

## Dress/appearance

Orthodox Jewish men often have beards and wear hats or skull caps; this is known as a Kipah. Orthodox Jewish women are required to cover their natural hair and may wear a headscarf, beret or wig; they do not wear trousers or sleeveless garments in accordance with religious principles relating to modesty. A tallit is a prayer shawl worn by men whilst praying. The tefillin are worn strapped to the forehead and to the arm, while praying in the morning. They contain extracts from the Torah.

## Bereavement

Jewish tradition requires that the deceased are buried as soon as possible after death, if possible within 24 hours.

## Points to remember as an employer

- The Sabbath is central to Jewish life; it begins about an hour before dusk on a Friday evening and ends at nightfall on Saturday. Observant Jewish staff may wish to leave early on Friday evening in winter to ensure that they do not breach the holy obligation to abstain from working or travelling during the Sabbath.
- Observant Jewish staff may also wish to refrain from work on key religious festivals.
- There is no obligation within the Jewish faith to perform pilgrimage, however some staff may wish to visit holy sites and request extended leave for this purpose.
- Jews are heavily guided by their faith as to what food is permissible.

Where catering is provided in canteens, meetings or social events, effort should be made to ensure a selection of vegetarian and meat options. Staff should also be able to store vegetarian and meat foods on separate shelves in refrigerators.

There are particular festivals when it is common to fast this may be when staff are at work. It is good practice for employers to consider the following in order to support staff who are fasting:

- Allowing staff to take a break when a fast ends.
- Allowing changes in work patterns to enable staff to finish work when the fast ends.
- Avoiding meetings, where possible, for the time when the fast is due to break.

Jewish tradition requires that deceased are buried as soon as possible after death and preferably within 24 hours. Jewish staff who have been bereaved may seek leave to attend a funeral at short notice. Following death, the immediate family members must stay at home and mourn for 7 days.



# Sikhism

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Sikhism originated in the Punjab, India in the 15th century and is therefore a relatively young faith. Sikh means learner or disciple. Sikhism was founded by Guru Nanak Dev; he was the first of ten Gurus who developed the teachings of Sikhism. There are approximately 20 million Sikhs worldwide and it is the majority faith in the Punjab. Sikhism has distinctive religious beliefs and institutions together with its own language, literature, tradition and conventions. Most Sikhs in the UK speak Punjabi and English. Punjabi speakers can to some degree communicate with Urdu and Hindi speakers as the three languages have some common vocabulary and grammar.

Sikhs believe that Guru Nanak Dev was born in an enlightened state and when he was about thirty years old, he received the call to preach God's Word. Over the next 22 years he undertook four great journeys called Udisis. He preached a message of universal love, peace and brotherhood and emphasised worship of the one God. Sikhs believe that God has revealed himself continually before and after the ten Gurus and continues to do so through the scriptures. The Guru Granth Sahib is the most revered of the Sikh scriptures. Sikhs believe in one God, who is believed to be nirankar (formless) and akal (eternal) and present in all creation. The purpose of a human life is understood as being to seek its creator and merge with God, thus breaking the cycle of birth and death. The highest form of life on this earth is the human one. The Karam (actions and their consequences) of this life partly determine whether a person will achieve union with God. Failure to do so leads to the cycle of rebirth. Liberation from rebirth is known as mukti.

## There are a number of ethical principles which are central to Sikh belief and practice, including:

- **God** – Sikhs are monotheistic (belief in one God).
- **Nam Japna** – this involves meditating on God.
- **Kirt Karna** – earning a living by honest and approved means.
- **Vand Chakna** – sharing with the needy.
- **Sewa** – this is service to the community or helping to meet a particular need for the benefit of others.
- **Equality** – the concept of equality was of central importance to Guru Nanak Dev. He taught that all people are born with the opportunity to attain mukti (liberation from rebirth) regardless of caste, gender, wealth or education.

## **Prayer and worship**

The Sikh place of congregational worship is called the gurdwara, meaning 'doorway to the Guru'. A gurdwara is usually recognised from the outside by the Nishan Sahib (saffron coloured flag). This has an emblem depicted in black on it, consisting of a two-edged sword surrounded by a circle outside of which are two further swords. Sikhism does not recognise a priesthood, all Sikhs are of equal status in religious terms. A Sikh is called upon to rise early and after a bath or shower to meditate on one God.

## **Religious festivals and holy days**

Most dates for Sikh festivals are calculated according to the lunar calendar. There is no day of rest; however, in the UK most services are held on a Saturday or Sunday.

## **Dress/appearance**

Practising Sikh males wear a turban, which traditionally keeps uncut hair tidy and fixed back. Some females also wear a turban and tend to keep their hair long.

## **Diet**

Sikhs are urged to avoid alcohol, tobacco and other intoxicants. Meat is only permitted if it is jhatka, where the animal is killed with only one stroke and instantaneously. Those Sikhs who do eat meat must not eat halal meat. Many Sikhs are vegetarian.

## **Naming**

All baptised Sikhs are expected to include Singh or Kaur in their name, Singh means lion and is adopted by males, Kaur means princess and is adopted by all females. It must be noted that the name Singh does not necessarily mean that a person is a Sikh, since the name was common in India before the rise of Sikhism.

## **Bereavement**

Sikhs normally cremate their deceased. Some Sikhs will read the Guru Granth Sahib over a period of days in memory of the departed soul.

## **Points to remember when visiting a Sikh family home**

- Rooms may be decorated with images of Gurus or other religious symbols.
- Accept refreshment if it is offered.
- One room in the house may be allocated for the Sri Guru Granth Sahib. If invited into this room, cover your head and remove your shoes.
- Prayer times are likely to be at dawn, sunset and late evenings. Avoid these times for visiting or organising meetings.
- Women may want to have family members with them when inviting staff to the house.

## **Points to remember when visiting a Sikh place of worship (Gurdwara)**

- Shoes should be removed and head covered.
- Hands and feet are washed.
- Men and women may be segregated within the hall and attendees will sit on the floor in the main hall, although prayers are made standing.
- You may be asked to eat in the canteen with everyone else, but do not offer to pay, instead offer a donation towards the Gurdwara, which is supported by charity.

## Points to remember as an employer:

- Within Sikhism there is no day of rest, however in the UK, Sunday or sometimes Saturday is the day on which most services are held in the Gurdwaras (place of worship). Sikhs may therefore wish to refrain from working on Sundays or Saturdays, or take time off to enable them to attend a service.
- There are a number of festivals when Sikhs would wish to refrain from working.
- Dietary restrictions are a matter of conscience and religious belief for each Sikh, however no Sikh is permitted to eat Halal/Kosher meat (meat slaughtered in accordance with Islamic/Jewish faith) or beef. Some Sikhs are vegetarian.
- Where catering is provided in canteens, meetings or social events, effort should be made to ensure a selection of vegetarian and meat options. Staff should also be able to store vegetarian and meat foods on separate shelves in refrigerators. Alcohol and tobacco are not permitted.
- Sikhs are not required to go on pilgrimage, however many Sikhs regard certain holy sites as places for pilgrimage, some staff may request extended leave for this purpose.
- Sikhs are cremated and there is a preference for this to take place as soon after death as possible. Some staff may request extended leave if they attend a funeral in another country.

# Non religious beliefs

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## Numbers

Those with no religion (17.27 per cent) were the second largest 'belief group' identified in the 2001 census on the Isle of Wight. In addition, 7.8 per cent chose not to state their religion.

It should not be assumed that people who describe themselves as agnostics, atheists or people of no religion, have no belief or that they wish to be ignored in terms of their social and cultural needs. They often use such terms to express that they do not believe in a form of organised religion. Many amongst these have lost faith in organised religious structures, or are suspicious of organised religions. Non-religious people describe and define themselves in various ways. These variations do reflect some differences in meaning and emphasis, though in practice there is considerable overlap and on many issues their views may not vary greatly.

Non-believers do, of course, have many beliefs, though not religious ones. For example, they typically hold that morality is social in origin, based on treating others as they would wish to be treated. They may describe themselves in various ways, the most common today being those listed on the next page. These non-religious beliefs have a long history, though denial of religion began to be publicly acceptable only during the 19th and 20th centuries. During this period a range of organisations began to serve and represent the interests of the nonreligious. The Human Rights legislation and the new legislation around Incitement to Religious Hatred gives equal protection to religious and non-religious beliefs.

## Beliefs and Definitions

**Agnostic** – in normal usage means “don't know” or open-minded about religious belief, but it can mean something much firmer: that nothing is known, or can possibly be known, about god or supernatural phenomena, and that it is wrong to claim otherwise.

**Atheist** – includes those who reject a belief in the existence of god or gods and those who simply choose to live without god or gods. Along with this will usually go disbelief in the soul, an afterlife, and all other religious beliefs.

**Freethinkers** – reject authority and tradition in matters of religious belief, preferring to think for themselves.

**Humanist** – is used today to mean those who seek to live good lives without religious or superstitious beliefs. Humanists believe that moral values are founded on human nature and experience, and base their moral principles on reason (which leads them to reject the

idea of any supernatural agency or afterlife), shared human values and respect for others. They believe that people should work together to improve the quality of life for all and make it more equitable. Alone of the terms listed, Humanism offers a fully fledged 'life-stance' or world-view rather than an attitude towards or about religion.

**Non-religious** – as well as those who are uninterested in religion or who reject it, this category may include the vague or unaffiliated, those who are only nominally or culturally affiliated to a religious tradition, and the superstitious.

**Rationalist** – in this context, means someone who rejects religion on the grounds that it is unreasonable and lacks good evidence.

**Sceptic** – in this context, means someone who doubts the truth of religious beliefs, probably on rationalist grounds.

**Secularists** – believe that laws and public institutions (for example, the education system) should be separate from religious beliefs. Most atheists, agnostics and humanists are secularists too, but some religious believers also take a secularist position which calls for freedom of belief, including the right to change belief and not to believe. Secularists seek to ensure that persons and organisations are neither privileged nor disadvantaged by virtue of their religion or lack of it. They believe secular laws – those that apply to all citizens – should be the product of a democratic process, and should not be determined, or unduly influenced, by religious leaders or religious texts.

# Symbols explained

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**Buddhism** – The Dharmachakra is a Buddhist emblem of Hindu origin. It resembles a wagon wheel with eight spokes, each representing one of the eight tenets of Buddhist belief. The circle symbolizes the completeness of the Dharma, the spokes represent the eightfold path leading to enlightenment.



**Christianity** – The most well known cross is the Latin cross, which to Christians, represents the cross of Christ's crucifixion. When shown with the image of Christ, it is called a crucifix.



**Hinduism** – The word Om (aum) derives from the Sanskrit. The Om is the primordial sound by which the earth was created, a similar concept to the Greek Logos. It symbolizes unfolding or expansion- when pronounced, it begins in the lungs, and ends on the lips. The ordinary waking, or material state; The state of deep sleep; The dream state; Absolute conscience, or the awakened state.



**Islam** – This emblem, commonly recognized as the symbol of the Islamic faith, has actually acquired its association to the faith by association, rather than intent. The star and crescent symbol is very ancient. The symbol was eventually adopted by the Ottoman Dynasty, who are mainly responsible for its association with Islam. There is no mention of this symbol in the Koran.



**Judaism** – The menorah is one of the oldest symbols of the Jewish faith. The seven branched candelabra probably originated as a version of the Babylonian world tree, the seven arms represent the seven days of creation and the seven visible planets.



**Sikh**  
The Khanda is the emblem of the Sikh faith, symbolizing the four pillars of Sikh belief. It consists of four symbolic weapons:

- In the center, the double edged sword, or khanda, from which the symbol derives its name. The Khanda represents knowledge of divinity and the creative power of God.
- Surrounding the khanda is a circular quill, called a Chakkar (chakka), a medieval weapon which symbolizes the unity of God.
- On either side, crossed daggers, or kirpans, called Piri and Miri (after the personal weapons of Guru Hargobind), symbolizing spiritual and temporal power, respectively.

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This document has been written using information from the following publications:

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