



*Interfaith
Scotland*

A Guide to Faith Communities in Scotland

Friendship • Cooperation • Dialogue • Respect • Understanding

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Introduction



This booklet has been prepared by Interfaith Scotland to provide basic information on some of the faith communities who live and worship in Scotland.

The multi-religious nature of Scottish society is now widely accepted and promoted by various individuals, groups, organisations and institutions. The need to be respectful of, and understand, this diversity is also acknowledged by the Scottish Government and is recognised to be fundamental to the harmony of society whether in a global, national or local context.

It is important that individuals and organisations, particularly those professionally associated with public life in Scotland have some knowledge of the different faith traditions operating in Scotland, and it is hoped that they, and the general public, will find this booklet helpful.

The booklet has been designed to include general information on the basic beliefs, customs and practices, places of worship, main festivals, food and diet and community concerns of *Buddhists, Christians,*

Hindus, Muslims, Jews, Sikhs, Jains, Baha'is, Brahma Kumaris and Pagans. This is not a complete picture of the religious communities in Scotland as there is diversity within the religions mentioned and there are also religions not included in this basic booklet.

Interfaith Initiatives in Scotland

Since the historic *World Parliament of Religions* held in Chicago at the end of the 19th Century there has been growing awareness that we inhabit a world of many faiths. This awareness has gradually resulted in the growth of interfaith initiatives and bi-lateral religious dialogue groups throughout the United Kingdom. In Scotland such groups have been operating since the 1970s.

Scotland is also home to the *St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art*. Opened in Glasgow in 1993, this unique museum aims to promote mutual understanding and respect between people of different faiths and of none.



It is clear that world events abroad influence relationships at home and so the ethos of interfaith, which includes developing understanding, respect and dialogue between religions is critical in the creation of a peaceful and inclusive Scotland.

Interfaith Scotland

Interfaith Scotland, formerly the Scottish Inter Faith Council, was officially launched in 1999 by Patricia Ferguson, the then Deputy Presiding Officer of the new Scottish Parliament. As well as promoting better understanding between faith communities *Interfaith Scotland* can function as a vehicle of communication between the Scottish Government and the various communities living in Scotland. Collectively it represents a major cross section of the faith communities in Scotland and its representative members are committed to the process of developing interfaith structures at both local and national levels. *Interfaith Scotland* encourages and supports initiatives aimed at increasing mutual understanding and respect between the members of all religious communities.

Interfaith Scotland is dedicated in its work to break down and diffuse barriers of discrimination and prejudice and promote tolerance and acceptance within society.

The **2011 Census** gives the following statistics for religious faiths in Scotland. People in Scotland were asked ‘What religion, religious denomination, or body do you belong to?’ It should be noted that this was a voluntary question, so may not include all people with a religious faith.

Faith Community	Members
Buddhist	12,795
Christian	2,850,199
Hindu	16,379
Jewish	5,887
Muslim	76,737
Sikh	9,055
Other	15,248

Buddhism

Introduction

Buddhism is based on the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, known as the Buddha, who lived in Northern India about 2500 years ago. Buddha is revered, not as a God, but as an example of how we should aspire to live our lives.



Basic Beliefs

Prince Siddhartha Gautama had a privileged life insulating him from suffering. One day, he went outside the royal enclosure where he saw, for the first time, an old man, a sick man, and a dead person. This greatly disturbed him, as he learned that this was the inevitable fate of human beings. Siddhartha left his protected royal life and followed a life of extreme asceticism, but after six years he felt that rather than asceticism, there should be a 'Middle Way' of moderation. One day, seated beneath the Bodhi tree, Siddhartha became deeply absorbed in meditation, and was led from the pain of suffering and rebirth towards the path of Enlightenment. He became known as the *Buddha* or 'awakened one'.

Buddhists believe that the essence of Buddha is within each of us and we can all attain our Buddhahood through sincere practice of the *Eight-Fold Path*, which includes virtuous conduct such as compassion and generosity, meditation and the cultivation of wisdom. Many Buddhists believe in spiritual rebirth but this is understood as a causal connection between lives rather than the transmigration or reincarnation of an unchanging individual soul. For most Western Buddhists faith in the efficacy of following the Eight-Fold Path is more central than assent to specific verbal formulations of religious belief.

Customs and Practices

Although it is particularly strong in northern areas of the Indian sub-continent and in some parts of South East Asia, Buddhism is a world-wide religion. Many Eastern Buddhist traditions started becoming established in the West during the 20th Century. This was the case in Scotland where we now have perhaps as many as ten schools from several traditions represented. These include the *Theravadan tradition* (originally mainly from India, Sri Lanka, Burma and Thailand), the *Tibetan tradition*, (which has a wide influence through northern India, and China to Mongolia), and the *Zen Buddhist tradition* (which originated in China and spread to Korea, Japan and Malaysia).

In addition, a specifically Western development of Buddhism is represented in Scotland by the ***Triratna Buddhist Community*** (formerly the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order).

Places of Worship

The term “worship” is not really appropriate to Buddhism, where there is no belief in a separate creator god. Buddhist temples, centres or meeting places are where Buddhists gather to meditate, study, chant or pray together. There is a strong emphasis in the western development of Buddhism on the centrality of meditation practice.

There are a number of Buddhist centres in Scotland. Samye Ling Monastery and Tibetan Centre is located in Eskdalemuir, Dumfriesshire, and has a retreat centre on Holy Isle next to Arran. The Zen Buddhist tradition has a Soto Zen School which has a priory in Edinburgh and meditation groups in several cities. Theravadan Buddhists have centres in Glasgow and Edinburgh. The Triratna Buddhist community has centres in Glasgow and Edinburgh, a retreat centre near Callander and meditation groups in several other cities. There are also a number of smaller institutions and retreat centres. Some groups make use of hired premises or meet together in private homes.

Main Festivals

Buddhists have many celebrations throughout the year. These generally commemorate particular events of the Buddha’s life and include his birth (*Wesak*), his enlightenment, the day of his first teaching (*Dharma Day*) and his death (*Parinirvana*). The dates of these events are generally expressed through the lunar calendar and there is some variation between the different traditions. Some Buddhists may also fast on *New Moon* and *Full Moon* days.

Food and Diet

Although their high valuation of life and their rejection of violence means that some Buddhists are vegetarian, this is not always the case.

Concerns of the Community

One of the steps on the Eight-Fold Path is the practice of “right livelihood” and this has promoted a tendency in western Buddhists to seek employment within what are referred to as the “caring professions”. They also support initiatives within the community such as *Angulimala*, the Buddhist Prison chaplaincy service, and hospital chaplaincy. A significant proportion of Buddhists are actively engaged in movements promoting justice and peace.

Christianity

Introduction

Christianity was founded in what is today modern day Israel and Palestine around 2000 years ago. It is based on the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, known as Christ. This means “the anointed one”, and Christians believe Jesus to be the Son of God. Christians see themselves as following in the way of Jesus who revealed the forgiving love of God for all people and God’s concern for human beings.

Basic Beliefs

At the centre of Christian belief is Jesus who is regarded as the revelation of God. For many Christians this revelation is such that he is understood to be the very incarnation of God. In Jesus, Christians come to know something of the nature of God who is seen as loving and forgiving. Christians believe that the life, death and resurrection of Jesus has transformed human nature so that it need no longer follow its sinful inclinations but rather lead a life of love and service. Their experience of God in Jesus has led them to see God as a community of three persons, *Father, Son and Holy Spirit*, called the *Trinity*. Christians believe that the world was created by God and will be brought to its fulfilment at the end of time. In the mean time they believe in the presence and support of God’s Spirit, present among all.



The Christian holy book is called the *Bible*. The first part of the Bible, known by Christians as the *Old Testament*, is largely identical with the Jewish or Hebrew Bible. The second is the *New Testament*, which contains the Gospels (records of Jesus’ life and his teachings), the *Acts of the Apostles*, the writings of *St Paul* and some other works.

Customs and Practice

Individuals are admitted into the Christian Church through baptism which can take place in childhood or adulthood. The central ritual of much Christian worship is *Holy Communion*, also called the *Mass* or the *Eucharist*,

which is a sharing of bread and wine in memory of Jesus' last supper with his disciples. This action unites Christians in a symbolic or sacramental way with the death and resurrection of Jesus and with one another. It can also act as a recommitment to follow in the path set out by Jesus' life and example. Private prayer and meditation, and reading the Bible and/or other devotional texts, are important to Christians in their daily life.

Places of Worship

Public worship usually takes place on a Sunday when congregations gather in churches to worship and/or celebrate Holy Communion. In the Catholic and Episcopalian traditions, Mass/Communion takes place weekly and even daily while in some Protestant denominations it takes place less frequently. For instance, most Church of Scotland (Presbyterian) congregations celebrate Communion about four to six times a year.

Main Festivals

Important dates in the Christian Calendar include *Christmas*, the celebration of Jesus' birth (25 December), and the central Christian feast of *Easter* that commemorates the death (on Good Friday) and resurrection (on Easter Sunday) of Jesus. The exact dates for Easter vary from year to year but usually fall between the last week of March

and the middle of April. The forty days before Easter are known as *Lent* and it is common for many Christians to make some form of self-sacrifice during this time, such as fasting or going without something for this period. It is also a time for increased prayer and helping others. *Pentecost*, which celebrates the coming of God's Spirit, and is thought of as the birth of the church, is also an important festival.

Food and Diet

In Christianity, all is seen as a gift of God. This means that no food is seen as unclean but everything is to be enjoyed in moderation and gratitude. Fasting on particular days and at particular times of the year is also common.

Concerns of the Community

Christians believe the world was created by God and will be brought to its fulfilment at the end of time. In the meantime they believe in the presence and support of God's spirit among all. They are concerned about working for the values of God's kingdom on earth as set out especially in Jesus' sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of Matthew. Among them are justice, love, mercy and peace-making, and many Christians find common cause working together with others for the good of communities at local, national and international levels.

Hinduism

Introduction

The Hindu tradition has no founder and is best understood as a group of closely connected religious traditions rather than a single religion. It represents a complete way of life. Hindus believe in one God and worship that one God under many manifestations or images. They believe that all prayers addressed to any form or manifestation will ultimately reach the one God. Hinduism does not prescribe any particular dogmas; rather it asks individuals to worship God according to their own belief. It therefore allows a great deal of freedom in matters of faith and worship.

Basic Beliefs

Hindus consider that religion is a sanctified and disciplined path one should follow to reach a higher level of consciousness or goal, i.e. to become a better person. This can only be done by following the path of *Dharma*. Dharma is at the heart of Hinduism which is often called the *Sanatana Dharma*. Dharma means the ancient law which underlies the order of the universe and is reflected in a moral and ethical life. Hindus believe in the *law of karma* - a simple law of cause and effect. "As you sow, so shall you reap". They also believe in the divine nature of the soul, which is indestructible and immortal. It

transmigrates from body to body depending on the merits and sins of one's actions (*karma*) accumulated in a lifetime. In the end, one's *karma* (action) determines one's future rebirth.

Hindus further believe in the descent (*avatar*) of Divinity to protect the righteous and destroy the unrighteous. There have been several examples of this in Hinduism including *Rama*, *Krishna* and *Buddha*. They serve as an example and inspiration for pious Hindus. In one sense Hindus accept the prophets of all religions as manifestations or avatars of God and recognise the presence of God in all living beings.

Customs and Practices

Prayer and the reading of the Holy Scriptures, which give Hindus an example of how they should live, are important practices. Worship or veneration of the divine image takes place around a shrine morning or evening in devout Hindu homes. There are two kinds of scripture in Hinduism: the holiest texts, called the *Vedas*, and the great epics of the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*. *The Bhagavad Gita*, which is part of the *Mahabharata*, is a very popular text in the West. Hindus follow the lunar calendar and particular days are set aside during the week and month to honour particular manifestations of God.



Places of Worship

Hindus frequently view systematic organisation with some mistrust, believing it to be often showy and wasteful. Likewise, worship and general religious activity are commonly centred around the home. However Hindu temples or *Mandirs*, which have a priest, educated in the scriptures, do have public worship twice daily and Sunday has become a day for communal worship and activity.

Only trained priests are able to perform religious ceremonies on special occasions. However anyone may perform *puja*, which is a prayer ritual performed by Hindus to honour and worship one or more deities, or to spiritually celebrate an event.

Main Festivals

There are many religious festivals which are celebrated in different ways by different communities. The most commonly celebrated festivals are *Diwali* (or *Deepavali*), the *Festival of Lights*, and *Navrathri*, nine nights during which goddesses such as *Durga*, the Great Mother, are worshipped. This takes place over 9 days and nights twice a year.

Food and Diet

The influence of charity is apparent in the importance attached to hospitality. Every pious Hindu is expected to keep some food aside for an unexpected guest and no-one should ever be turned away hungry. The reverence for life surfaces again in the concept of *ahimsa* (non-injury), one of the highest principles which encourages many Hindus to be vegetarian.

Concerns of the Community

Hindus should show love and respect for all beings as a way of recognising the divinity within all creatures. Charity is very important. It is generally practiced in a discreet, individual manner, and is seen as a means of extending the natural love for the family into the wider community. Hindus also have a concern for the future of their young people and offering support to all members of their community, particularly vulnerable groups such as the elderly.

Introduction

Muslims do not regard Islam as a new religion, but the same truth that the One God revealed through all His prophets to every people since Adam. For a fifth of the world's population, Islam is both a religion and a complete way of life, and its values include peace, mercy and forgiveness. Muslims call God 'Allah' which is the Arabic word for God.

Basic Beliefs

Muslims believe in One Unique, Incomparable God; in the Angels created by Him; in the prophets through whom his revelations and scriptures were brought to mankind; in the Day of Judgement and individual accountability for actions; in God's complete authority over human destiny and in life after death. Muslims believe in a chain of prophets starting with Adam and including Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, peace be upon them all. Muslims believe that Islam is God's final message. It is a reconfirmation of the eternal message and a summing-up of all earlier revelations.

Muhammad (pbuh) was born in Makkah (Mecca) in the year 570AD. Muhammad detested the decadence of his society and would meditate in the Cave of Hira near Makkah. At the age of 40, Muhammad received his first call from God through the

Archangel Gabriel, marking the beginning of the revelation of the holy book the Qur'an. He spent 23 years thereafter spreading the message of Islam.

Customs and Practices

Islam has five pillars that represent the foundation stones of Islamic worship and training for a life of good action:

The declaration of faith: To bear witness that there is none worthy of worship except Allah, and that Muhammad (pbuh) is His messenger to all human beings until the Day of Judgement. The prophethood of Muhammad obliges Muslims to follow his exemplary life as a model.

Prayers: Muslims perform five prayers a day as a duty towards Allah. Each prayer only takes a few minutes to perform and is a direct link between the worshipper and God. They are seen to purify the heart and prevent temptation towards wrongdoing and evil.

Zakah: This word is translated as 'to purify'. Wealth is purified by paying Zakah, a specified percentage of one's wealth to needy people. In addition, Muslims are encouraged to give as much as they can in voluntary work.

Fasting: During the month of Ramadan, Muslims abstain from



food, drink, and sexual intercourse from dawn to sunset, in addition to abstaining from all immoral behaviour. Fasting helps develop a sound social conscience, patience, unselfishness and willpower.

Hajj (Pilgrimage to Makkah): It is to be performed at least once in a lifetime, by those who are physically and financially able to do so. The Ka'bah, which is in the city of Makkah, is the first house of worship appointed for mankind and was built by Abraham and his son Ishmael (peace be upon them).

Places of Worship

Prayer can take place anywhere that is clean. Mosques will be used for communal prayers including the congregational prayer on Friday. They can also be used for community gatherings, social events such as marriage and burial, and for religious education.

Main Festivals

There are two main festivals in Islam and during these festivals

Muslims visit the Mosque, give charity, exchange presents and celebrate with family and friends. The festival of Eid-ul-Fitr coincides with the end of the month of Ramadan. Eid ul Adha coincides with the time of performing the pilgrimage in Makkah. At this time Muslims offer sacrifices of animals to commemorate the sacrifice of Abraham's son. The meat from the sacrifice is distributed to family, friends and the needy.

Food and Diet

Muslims differentiate between food which is allowed (Halal), and food which is forbidden (Haram). Pork, or any other part of the pig, carnivorous animals or blood are Haram. Meat must also be slaughtered according to religious rites by a Muslim butcher. The consumption of intoxicants is forbidden.

Concerns of the Community

The Muslim community is concerned about the increase in Islamophobia, which can result in physical and verbal attacks on individuals and buildings associated with Islam. International issues involving certain Muslim groups, as well as sensationalist news stories of Muslims are conflated to impact Scottish Muslim communities. Scottish Muslims have sought to address such unrepresentative portrayals of their faith and community through greater interfaith dialogue, activity and outreach projects.

Judaism

Introduction

Judaism is a truly ancient religion that has been practised for more than four thousand years. It is based on the belief in the one true and universal God.



Basic Beliefs

Jewish people believe in one universal God who has no physical form and is omnipotent and omniscient, and who revealed the unchanging *Torah* (Divine Law) to Moses. In addition, the Jewish Bible (*TaNACH*) contains the books of Prophets and other Holy Writings including the books of Psalms and Proverbs. Traditional Judaism believes that God will reward the righteous and punish the wicked at the end of time; that there will be a resurrection of all the dead; and that the *Messiah* has still to come. Judaism is not just a set of beliefs but a way of life. There are 613

commandments, of which the *Ten Commandments* are best known, which lay down how to live by Jewish values, which were summarised by the first-century Rabbi Hillel as “Do not do to others what is hateful to you – that is the whole law; the rest is commentary.”

Customs and Practices

Jewish people pray facing towards Jerusalem, and need a quorum of 10 (a *minyan*) for communal prayer, but can pray alone in any clean place. There are three daily prayers, with longer services on Saturday and festival mornings.

Places of Worship

Jewish people worship in a *Synagogue*, which is often a centre for the many aspects of communal life. On the wall facing Jerusalem is an ‘ark’, or closed, usually curtained, cupboard where the *Torah* scrolls are kept. The *Bimah* is a raised platform, either in front of the ark or in the centre of the synagogue, from which prayers are also led, and from which, during some services, the *Torah* scrolls are read. These are hand-written on parchment and are treated with great reverence. In orthodox and most other Synagogues, men are required to cover their heads. In orthodox Synagogues men and women sit separately and married women are also expected to cover their hair.

Main Festivals

Shabbat (the Jewish Sabbath) begins before nightfall on Friday and lasts until it is completely dark on Saturday night. It is observed as a day of rest when observant Jews will not write, travel, work, or cook.

There are also a number of festivals throughout the calendar when similar laws apply. The Jewish New Year, *Rosh HaShanah*, normally occurs in September, and is marked by two days of reflection and prayer. Ten days later comes *Yom Kippur*, the *Day of Atonement*. This is the most solemn day of the Jewish calendar and is spent in prayer and a 25 hour fast. The following week is *Sukkot* (*Tabernacles*), when observant Jews will eat in huts with temporary roofs, followed by *Simchat Torah* (celebration of *Torah*).

In the spring there is *Pesach*, or *Passover* which commemorates the delivery from slavery in Egypt. Most Jewish people mark the first night of *Pesach* with a festive meal, the *Seder*, and during the week eat *matzah* (unleavened bread) and avoid all fermented grain products. Seven weeks later is *Shavuot*, which commemorates the giving of the *Torah*. *Chanukah*, in December, and *Purim*, in March, celebrate later deliverances from extermination. There are also a number of fast days throughout the year.

Food and Diet

Food that complies with Jewish dietary law is known as 'Kosher'. Only some animals, birds, and fish are kosher. Pork, rabbit, shellfish, and birds of prey are not kosher. Meat and dairy products should not be taken at the same meal and food must also be prepared correctly, so observant Jews will only eat food that is certified as being made under supervision. Many products carry a kosher logo, and there are lists of approved products, for example at the website <http://www.klbdkosher.org/>. As different Jewish people have different levels of observance of the dietary laws, when catering is entirely vegetarian, observant Jews will still require the food to be kosher.

Concerns of the Community

The Jewish Community wishes to see a religiously tolerant society in which the practices of minority faiths can continue. Current concerns include the place of religion in schools, attacks on religious methods of slaughter and circumcision, new policies resulting in delays to burial, as well as raising awareness amongst all public services, including health, welfare, the police, and education, of the specific needs of Jewish service users. A continuing and on-going concern of all Jewish people are the various manifestations of anti-semitism, whether motivated by religious or political extremism.

Sikhism

Introduction

The Sikh faith is a distinct religion revealed through the teachings of the 10 successive Gurus, the first of whom was Guru Nanak Dev ji. He was born in 1469 CE in the Punjab, India. In 1708 the tenth and the last human Guru, Guru Gobind Singh ji, vested spiritual authority in the Sacred Sikh Scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib ji. The spiritual and temporal authority was vested in the Khalsa Panth, the community of baptised Sikhs.

Basic Beliefs

Sikhs strictly believe that there is One God, who is *Nirgun* (transcendent), *Sargun* (imminent) and beyond human comprehension. God can however be realized and experienced through prayer, contemplation, service and keertan (the singing of God's praises). The object of a Sikh's life is to move closer to God with the ultimate aim of fusing within Him. A Sikh is to become God-centred, develop God consciousness and ultimately receive God's grace. Life presents the opportunity to do so through truthful living and selfless service in the context of a family life. A Sikh's way of life is guided by the following principles: *Naam Simran* which is remembering and praying to God at all times; *Kirat Karna* - earning a living by honest means; *Wand Shakna* - sharing with the poor and needy; *Sewa* - selfless service to God and humanity; *Equality* - to

treat all human beings as equal. A Sikh practices purity of thought, purity of action, and respect and love for God's Creation. He or she has been given the human form to practice *dharam* (spirituality).

Customs and Practices

The Sikh faith recognises the complete equality between men and women and does not make any distinctions between people according to race, class, caste, age or gender. The tenth Guru, *Guru Gobind Singh Ji*, introduced the concept of equality by instructing Sikhs who had been baptised to share *Amrit* (holy water) adopt the same religious surname of *Singh* (lion) for men and *Kaur* (Princess) for women and wear five articles of faith, commonly known as the Five K's. These are: *Kesh* (uncut hair), *Kangha* (a small wooden comb), *Kara* (an iron/steel bangle), *Kirpan* (a short sword) and *Kachera* (special shorts). The community of baptised Sikhs are known as Khalsa Panth. However not all Sikhs are baptised and thus not all will wear the 5 K's.

Although not mentioned in the five articles of faith, the *dastaar* (turban) is worn to maintain the sanctity of *Kesh* (hair) and is treated with utmost respect by those Sikhs who wear it.

The Guru instructed Sikhs to say prayers in the early morning, at sunset and before retiring to bed, to

abstain from alcohol, tobacco and drugs, and to contribute a minimum one-tenth of their wealth, mind and body for religious purposes or to the needy.

Places of Worship

The Sikh place of congregational worship is called a *Gurdwara*, meaning “Doorway to the Guru” or “House of God”. The *Gurdwara* usually consists of two halls: a prayer hall and a *langar* hall where the congregation sits together and shares a free community meal. Everyone is welcome at the *Gurdwara* providing they abide by the code of discipline. On entering the *Gurdwara* and before going into the prayer hall, heads must be covered with a large scarf or handkerchief both for men and women, shoes removed and hands washed. Sikhs give utmost respect to the Holy Sikh Scriptures, which is the embodiment of all the Gurus and contains the Word of God.

Main Festivals

A Sikh festival or holy day is called a *Gurpurb*: Remembrance Day. This usually refers to the birth or the death of the Gurus. *Vaisakhi* (13/14 April) celebrates the day in 1699 when *Guru Gobind Singh Ji* founded the order of the *Khalsa*, the community of baptised Sikhs. *Bandhi Chorr Diwas (Diwali)* (Oct/Nov) commemorates *Guru Hargobind Ji's* return from imprisonment to the *Harmandir Sahib (Golden Temple)*.



Food and Diet

Tobacco, alcohol and drugs for the sake of intoxication are forbidden. Taking life is forbidden because one needs to exercise compassion in one's daily life. Many baptised Sikhs keep to a vegetarian diet and will not eat eggs. Some Sikhs are non-vegetarians. They are prohibited from eating pork or beef, or any animal flesh that is halal or kosher, as they only eat meat that has been slaughtered according to their own rites (*jhatka*). Meat cannot be taken within the grounds of the *Gurdwara*.

Concerns of the Community

The Sikh Articles of Faith cannot be removed and many Sikhs have faced restrictions in wearing them in schools, at universities and at work despite policies being put into place by various governmental sectors. Welfare state's policies should be reviewed and modified to encourage family ethos and stability.

The Baha'i Faith

Introduction

The Baha'i Faith began in Persia on 23rd May 1844, when a young man known as the Bab (Gate) proclaimed that he was a Messenger from God and also the herald of 'the Promised One', a messenger greater than himself. He and his followers were severely persecuted by the Persian authorities and the Bab was executed in 1850.

Baha'u'llah (the Glory of God) had recognised the divine mission of the Bab and as a result was imprisoned and then exiled with his family to Baghdad, where in 1863 he claimed to be the one whose coming the Bab had foretold. He announced that he had come to help bring about a new age of global civilisation to be characterised by unity and peace. He was then exiled again, first to Istanbul, then to Edirne and finally to the prison fortress of Akka in Palestine. He died at a place called Bahji near Akka in 1892. Baha'u'llah's shrine in Bahji is today the holiest shrine of the Baha'i world. The Bab's remains were laid to rest across the bay from Akka in a shrine on Mt Carmel in Haifa. These shrines, along with other institutions, together form both the spiritual and administrative centre for the Baha'i global community.



Basic Beliefs

The Baha'i Faith is an independent world religion which proclaims the oneness of God, religion and humankind. Baha'is believe that God reveals His purpose progressively through the founders of the major world religions.

Key Baha'i beliefs are, belief in one God; the unity of mankind; independent investigation of truth; the common foundation of all religions; the essential harmony of science and religion; equality of opportunity for men and women; elimination of prejudice of all kinds; universal compulsory education; the need for a universal auxiliary language; abolition of extremes of wealth and poverty; the protection of religious and cultural diversity, and the establishment of universal peace by a world government which will have international courts of justice.

Customs and Practices

Baha'i custom and practice is founded on authenticated scripture written by Baha'u'llah. The focus of Baha'i community life is the Nineteen Day Feast when local Baha'is meet to worship, discuss the affairs of their faith and have fellowship together. Obligations on individual Baha'is include daily prayer and observing a yearly nineteen-day fast abstaining from food and drink from sunrise to sunset. The affairs of the Baha'i Faith are administered by 'Spiritual Assemblies' which consist of nine people elected annually by the Baha'i community. These assemblies operate at local and national level. The international administrative body is elected once every five years by members of the National Spiritual Assemblies. It is known as the Universal House of Justice and has its seat on Mount Carmel in Haifa, Israel.

Places of Worship

World-wide, on every continent, the Baha'i Faith has a House of Worship where Bahai's and people of every faith can come and worship God. Depending on the size of their community, Bahai's may worship at their local centre or meet to worship in individual homes.

Festivals

Festivals and holy days are based on the birthdays of important figures of the Baha'i Faith or significant events in the history of the faith. The birthday of Baha'u'llah, for example, is an important holy day and is celebrated on the 12th November.

Food and Diet

Baha'is do not have food laws as such but are advised to eat moderately and keep to a balanced, healthy diet. They do not drink alcohol and drug-taking is not allowed unless prescribed by a competent doctor.

Concerns of the Community

Baha'is are concerned about anything that leads to conflict or disunity in the community or in the world. To this end, they are encouraged to support activities which further one or all of the principles of their faith. Baha'is are encouraged to protect the interests of their community and country but are also expected to take on the role and responsibility of world citizens.

*"The earth is but one country
and mankind its citizens"*

Baha'u'llah

Paganism

Introduction

Paganism has its roots in the indigenous, pre-Christian religions of Europe, evolved and adapted to the circumstances of modern life. Its re-emergence in Scotland parallels that observed in other Western countries, where it has been growing rapidly since the 1950's. The social infrastructure of Paganism reflects the value the community places on unity in diversity, consisting of a polycentric network of inter-related traditions and local groups served by a number of larger organisations. In Scotland, the Pagan Federation acts as an educational and representative body liaising with government and other relevant bodies on behalf of the Pagan community.

Basic Beliefs

Pagans understand *Deity* to be manifest within nature and recognise Divinity as taking many forms, finding expression in *Goddesses* as well as *Gods*. Goddess-worship is one of the primary characteristics of Paganism. Pagans believe that nature is sacred and that the natural cycles of birth, growth and death observed in the world around us carry profoundly spiritual meanings. Human beings are seen as part of nature, woven into the

great web of life along with other animals, trees, stones, plants and everything else that is of this earth. Most Pagans believe in some form of reincarnation, viewing death as a transition within a continuing process of existence. In Paganism, spiritual truths find expression in *mythopoeic* and symbolic forms rather than through doctrine, and reflect a synergy of *polytheistic*, *pantheistic* and *animistic* understandings of the divine.

Customs and Practices

Pagan ethics emphasise the responsible exercise of personal freedom in trying to live in harmony with others, and with nature. Pagans frequently use the phrase 'If it harms none, do what you will' to describe this approach to life. Pagan worship seeks to honour the divine powers and to bring the participants in harmony with them, to celebrate the turning of the seasons, and to mark the transitions of human life with appropriate rites of passage. Rituals usually begin with the creation of sacred space by the marking out of a symbolic circle and the blessing of those within. They may involve meditation, chanting, music, prayer, dance, poetry and the enactment of symbolic drama together with the sharing of food and drink.



Places of Worship

Paganism has no buildings dedicated as places of public worship. Instead, Pagans hold their ceremonies in woods, on hilltops, along the seashore, at standing stones, in parks, gardens and private homes.

Festivals

Nearly all Scottish Pagans celebrate a cycle of eight seasonal festivals known as the Wheel of the Year. These are *Samhain* (31st Oct), *Midwinter or Yule* (21st Dec), *Imbolc* (2nd Feb), *Spring Equinox* (21st Mar), *Beltane* (30th Apr—1st May), *Midsummer* (21st Jun), *Lughnasadh* (1st Aug) and *Autumn Equinox* (21st Sept).

Food and Diet

For ethical reasons, most Pagans have a strong preference for foods derived from organic farming and free-range livestock rearing, while many are vegetarian or vegan.

Concerns of the Community

Pagans regard nature as sacred and are deeply concerned by the damage inflicted by modern, industrialised societies on the natural world. Many regard environmental activism as a religious duty. Pagans honour Deity in female as well as male forms and strongly uphold equality of the sexes. Women play a very prominent role in Pagan religion. Pagans take it for granted that different people will experience the divine in different ways, and are thus very tolerant of other life-affirming religious beliefs. *Proselytising* is regarded as offensive and ill-mannered.

Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University

Introduction

The Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University (BKWSU) (UK) teaches Raja Yoga as a way of experiencing peace of mind and a positive approach to life.



The University provides opportunities for people from all religious and cultural backgrounds to explore their own spirituality and learn skills of reflection and meditation derived from Raja Yoga, which will help develop inner calm, clear thinking and personal well-being.

Across the UK, the BKWSU works with national and local organisations and community groups in such areas as inter-religious dialogue, youth programmes, prison outreach, social work and women's and men's groups.

BKWSU (UK) was established as a UK charity in 1975 and charges no fees for any of its activities, being funded by voluntary contributions.

The University is part of a worldwide network of over 8,500 centres in more than 100 countries, the first of which was founded in India in the 1930s.

The current Spiritual Head of the Brahma Kumaris is a founding student now aged in her late 90's: Dadi Janki.

In 2013 the BKWSU (UK), re-published, 'Living our Values: an inside-out approach to change your world for the better'. The book explores the twelve values essential for the creation of a greener, fairer and more peaceful world. It offers practical tools for personal change and transformation and provides a comprehensive range of workshops and activities for collective change whether in the family, education system, community or at work.



Jainism

Introduction

Jainism is an ancient religion originating in India. Jainism does not have a single founder. The scriptures affirm that the religion is eternal and has been revealed again and again by countless prophets in every cyclic period in the world.



Basic Beliefs

Jainism is founded on the five mahavratas (great vows), the greatest of which is non-violence (ahimsa). The other principles are truthfulness, not stealing, non-attachment to possessions and sexual restraint/chastity.

Jains believe that the universe is without a beginning or an end, being everlasting and eternal. Everything that happens in the universe is according to the fixed pattern of eternal laws. There is no higher or lower class of people but every soul has immense power which can be released as energy.

The Jain religion recognises the fundamental natural phenomenon of mutual dependence which forms the basis of the modern day science of ecology. Life is viewed as a gift of

togetherness, accommodation and assistance in a universe teeming with interdependent constituents.

Jains wish that they, and all beings, will live in friendship with one another, that there will be no alienation or enmity in their hearts for anyone or anything and that they will be filled with forgiveness for all living beings. The mission of Jainism is to work for the welfare of one and all, to rise from the pitfall of ignorance and inaction and reach infinite bliss and perfect knowledge.

Places of worship

Jains worship in temples and many Jains also have a worship place in the home. Particular days are set aside during the week and month for prayers.

Main festivals

Many festivals are celebrated including Rakshabandhan, Paryushan, Daslakshani, Dashera, Deepawali and Mahavir jayanti.

Food and Diet

As believers in ahimsa (non-violence), Jains are vegetarian. They also abstain from onions and garlic and do not eat after sunset.

Concerns of the community

Jains show love and respect to all living creatures. Charity is extremely important, as is respecting and caring for the elderly.

Meeting People of Different Faiths

Introduction

Today in Scotland there are growing opportunities to meet people from different religions and to build friendships across cultures. Below are some general guidelines to consider when meeting people of different faiths.

Visiting Places of Worship

Usually people are delighted to show others their place of worship. It is a sharing of what they hold very dear. They will, however, hope that the visitor will be respectful and observe certain basic rules of conduct.

Whether visiting alone, or in a group, it is important to follow the guidelines for clothing and behaviour so as not to cause offence. For example, it is important **not to talk loudly**, thus disturbing any who may be at prayer. If anyone has special needs, it is good to let the place/centre that is being visited know about this in advance so that they can prepare to help. For example, although the normal custom of the place of worship in question may be to sit on the floor or to stand for worship, chairs can often be provided for elderly, infirm or disabled visitors. Ask before taking any **photographs** as this is not always allowed.

Most religious communities would expect visitors to **dress modestly** when visiting their centre or place of worship. This may be extended in some communities to having ones

head covered and as you may be sitting on the floor short dresses and skirts are unsuitable. Some religious communities require **shoes to be removed** before entering their place of worship and visitors may be asked to **wash their hands** before entering the place of worship.

Most religious communities would find it **offensive if tobacco, alcohol or drugs** were brought to their centres or places of worship.

Hosting Multi-faith Services and events

Increasingly religious and civic bodies are hosting multi-faith public services for celebration, commemoration or worship. The following suggestions may be helpful for organisers of events involving a number of religious traditions.

It is always a good idea to double **check the date** for an event so that it does not clash with one of the key festivals or special days of a group that is likely to be involved. It is critical that a venue is chosen in which participants feel at ease. If a service is to be held at the premises of a faith community it may be a good idea to hold the service in a social area rather than a sacred area for example as these are usually not so imbued with religious and symbolic significance and might therefore be more appropriate for multi-faith events.

Eating Together

Many religious traditions have certain **dietary requirements** as a result of their beliefs. Generally speaking the easiest way to cater for a multi-faith event is to make it **absolutely vegetarian**. It is helpful to label food where contents are not immediately apparent. Within Judaism the *Kosher* rules are widely observed but with differing interpretations. A local Synagogue can be asked for advice on where to obtain *kosher* food and again this should be clearly marked at an event. It is preferable **not to offer alcohol** at a multi-faith event.

Useful Publications

Interfaith Scotland has a number of publications which can be accessed from our office or downloaded from our website:

Our Sacred Earth offers a comprehensive guide for faith communities in becoming more eco-friendly.

A Celebration of New Life provides reflective readings on the theme of birth and new life from seven faith traditions.

Values in Harmony outlines the core ethical and moral values held in common across 11 faith and belief communities.

Guidelines for Inclusive Civic and Community Events is a publication offering advice on how to hold inclusive civic and multi-faith events.

Belief in Dialogue: A Good Practice Guide has been produced by the Scottish Government and provides guidance on building good relations among and between religious and belief communities and individuals. It also provides practical examples for developing interaction and dialogue.

Religion and Belief Matter and ***A Multi-Faith Resource for Healthcare Staff*** are two useful publications for healthcare staff to help meet the religious and belief needs of patients.

Reflections of Life is an NHS resource that offers words of comfort and encouragement with prayers, poems and prose from 13 belief communities.

Contact Information for Faith Communities in Scotland

Contact information for the faith communities in Scotland referred to in this booklet can be found on the Interfaith Scotland website: **www.interfaithscotland.org**

Interfaith Organisations in Scotland

There are a number of interfaith organisations in Scotland, both national and local.

Interfaith Scotland

Interfaith Scotland is Scotland's national interfaith organisation. As a national organisation their role is to:

- provide a forum for religions to dialogue with one another
- support wider interfaith dialogue within Scottish Society
- promote education about interfaith dialogue
- encourage civic engagement by religions in Scotland and support religion and belief equality in Scotland

In order to carry out this work Interfaith Scotland facilitates events for local interfaith groups, faith communities, young people, religious leaders, members of Interfaith Scotland and the general public. Interfaith Scotland also hosts public presentations, interfaith seminars, religion and belief equality training, school workshops and produces useful resources of an interfaith nature.

As a membership organisation they represent a great diversity of faith traditions all of whom are committed to interfaith dialogue at the local and national level.

Local Interfaith Groups

Throughout Scotland there are interfaith groups operating at the local level. The first local interfaith group came into existence in the 1970's with a further three groups developing in the 1980's and 1990's.

Today the number of local interfaith groups has increased almost 10 fold with local groups found as far north as Shetland and as far south as Dumfries and Galloway. Some of the groups are facilitated by a dedicated team of staff, such as Edinburgh Inter-Faith Association and Interfaith Glasgow, others are supported by Equality Officers from the local authorities and still others are ably managed by volunteers who give their time and resources to manage local interfaith engagement.



Scottish Interfaith Week

Since 2004 Scotland has celebrated Scottish Interfaith Week. During this week thousands of people across Scotland put an extra focus on promoting the multi-faith nature of Scottish Society. In faith communities, schools, places of worship, civic buildings and in homes people from all walks of life build bonds of friendship and learn about the diverse traditions that contribute to Scotland's rich religious heritage.

Scottish Government Support for Interfaith Dialogue and Engagement

The Scottish Government has a proud history of support of Interfaith engagement and funds some of the interfaith work taking place in Scotland.

Further information

For further information and contact information for local interfaith groups in Scotland please visit the website of Interfaith Scotland at www.interfaithscotland.org

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