

Religions Manual

Development of new Inter-religious tools

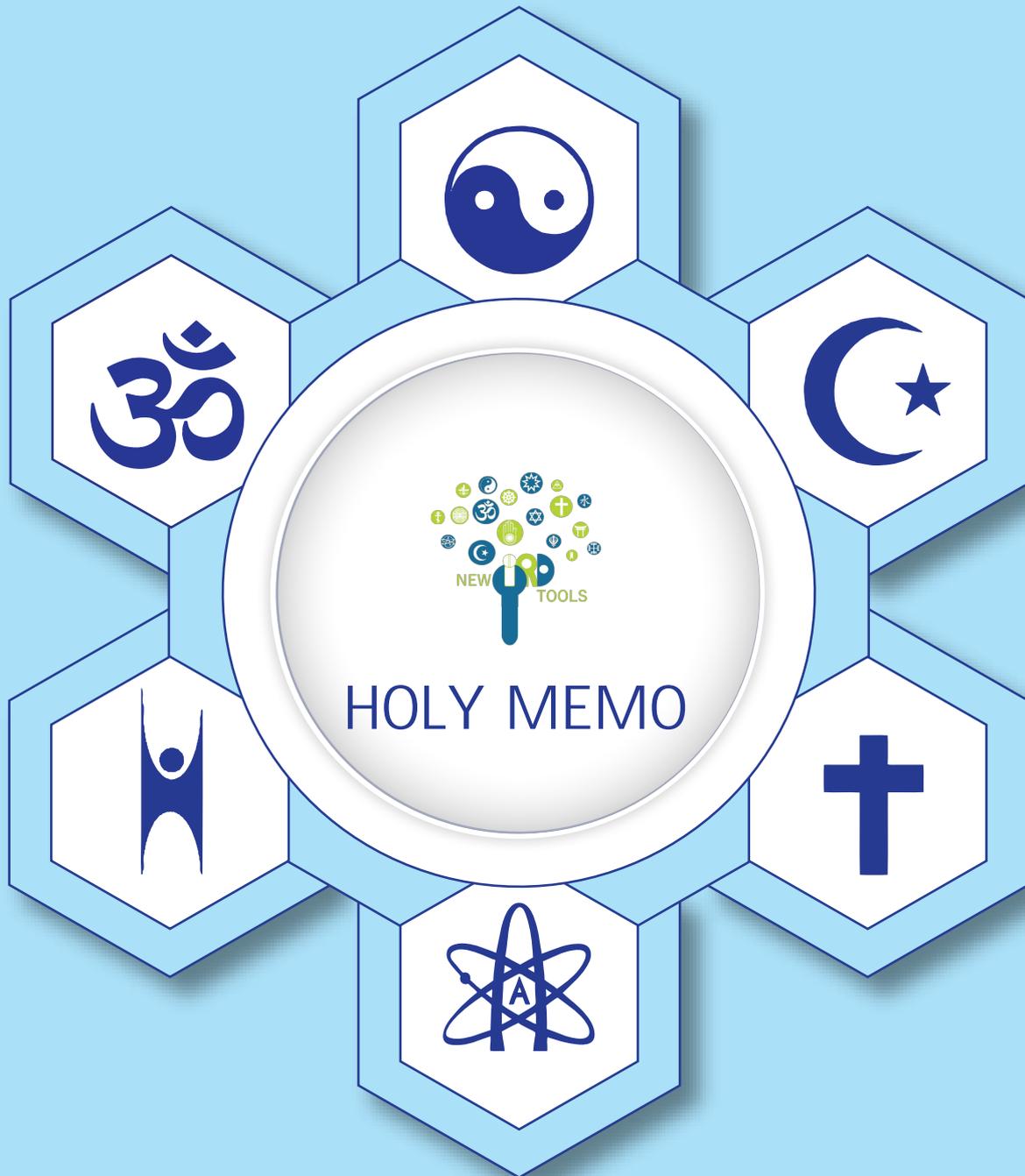


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AYYAVAZHI



Ayyavazhin religion is Founded in the 19th century by Ayya Vaikundar (ca. 1810-ca. 1857) who claimed to be an avatar of Narayan (Vishnu). The movement derives from the Hindu tradition, although some claim it to be a separate religion. The religion shares many ideas with Hinduism but differs in its concepts of good and evil and dharma. It is a monotheistic religion and is based on the life and teachings of Ayya Vaikundar.

It took its rise in South India and is found particularly in Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Tamil is the principal language used in worship and for the movement's scriptures.

It is thought that there may be as many as 8,000,000 adherents and most come from the more poor sections of the population. It had such a great rise in popularity that it became a great concern to Christian missionaries.

The symbol of the Ayyavazhi is a lotus carrying a flame-shaped white Naman.

The key teachings can be found in the book Akilattirattu Ammanai and other as found in the Arul Nool. The teachings are twofold, sociological and mystical. The mystical teachings are devoted to revealing divine knowledge, while social teachings are primarily concerned with eliminating inequality and discrimination in society.

The teachings encourage a positive relationship with God, as opposed to one based on fear.

Ayya Vaikundar is regarded as a teacher, social reformer, healer and miracle worker and followers claim that his numerous prophecies are being fulfilled.

Central to Ayyavazhi's teachings is dharma-one's socioreligious obligation. In particular, Ayya Vaikundar was opposed to caste discrimination (although not the caste system itself), especially the denial of the lower castes' right to temple entry.

The pathis at Swamithope, Vaikundar's birthplace, is often regarded as the movement's headquarters, although the Ayyavazhi do not constitute a single unified organization.

Ayyavazhi condemns the caste system as based on its innate inequalities and is a source of reform in Indian society. As an attempt to challenge caste discrimination, the Ayyavazhi wear turbans – typically forbidden to lower castes – in their places of worship and are permitted to wear full-length dhotis rather than loincloths.

They bear a tilak mark (a white clay marking indicating one's religious identity) on their foreheads in the shape of a jythi (sacred flame).

They encourage commensality among all members, regarding annadhanam (the donation of a common meal) as more meritorious than pilgrimage.

SCRIPTURES

There are two principal scriptures: Akilattirattu Ammani (aka Alikam), originally written by Ayyavazhi's disciple Hari Gopalan Seedar in 1841 and made public in 1933, and Arul Nool, by Arulalarkal. The former consists of the sect's teachings, related by Narayan to his consort Lakshmi, while the latter contains prayers, hymns, instructions for rituals, and account of Ayya Vaikundar's life, and prophecies.

WORSHIP PLACES

The Ayyavazhi have established their own places of worship: there are seven principal holy places known as Pathis ("divine abodes"), at which a number of annual festivals are celebrated. Additionally, there are numerous places of worship known as Nizhal Thangals: these are small pagoda-like structures and are used for worship and study of scripture. Worship consists of the chanting of prayers, not puja, and does not involve the veneration of murtis (images of gods).

FESTIVALS

There are two yearly festivals for Ayyavazhi. The Ayya Vaikunda Avataram is celebrated on the twentieth day of the Tamil month Masi (March – April). This is the only Ayyavazhi festival to be celebrated as per the Solar calendar. The Thiru Edu-Vasippu is a festival of seventeen days celebrated in the Tamil month of Karthigai (November–December).

WORSHIP

Ayyavazhi worship was marked by its simplicity. The absence of idol worship and priestly mediation, and inclusion of alternate type of centres of worship, the Pathis and Nizhal Thangals, were other characteristics of Ayyavazhi worship.

Congregational worship was a distinctive feature of Ayyavazhi worship. Praying together or 'mass prayer' was a form of worship Ayya Vaikundar formulated, in distinction to the practice of priests performing Poojas for individual or collective audiences.

Currently, congregational worship takes place at appointed hours in the worship centres of Ayyavazhi. The devotees worship God, standing close to each other, hands folded over their chests, and a turban (Thalai pahai) on the heads of the males. They recite together the Ucchipatippu and Ukappatippu, the central prayers. Apart from these, the devotees that come to worship in the Pathi perform certain other rituals also.

RITUALS

Rituals of Ayyavazhi are a reform or revolutionary activity, focusing upon social equality, deviating from Hinduism. The rituals are also characterised and bound by religious beliefs that give them an alternative spiritual meaning.

DIET

The practice of vegetarianism is one of the important facts among the followers of Ayyavazhi. Some followers adopted partial vegetarianism. Today, vegetarianism is being strictly practised in one form or another by a section of the followers of Ayyavazhi as one of their religious observances. In particular, most of the Panividaiyalar (one who performs Panividai) of Pathis and Nizhal Thangals strictly follow Vegetarianism.

Arul Nool too teaches one should be vegetarian to a high degree, or otherwise at least partially, especially during the

reading of scriptures and during festivals and when practicing rituals.

OFFERING OF CHURUL

Ayyavazhi does not have the idea of 'giving offerings' but only 'giving Churul' This is also one of the significant practices of Ayyavazhi. The gift offered to Ayya Vaikundar was called 'Churul'.

At present this act of giving Churul has been ritualised and it is also known as nemital. People bring bananas, coconuts and flowers, in a box made of palm leaves, and hand it over to the one performing Panivitai. The panivitaialar receives it and offers it to Ayya and then, after retaining a major portion of it for sharing with others, returns the box with a small portion as Inimam – a gift from Ayya to his children.

MARRIAGE

As in Hinduism, the institution of marriage has a deep significance and meaning in Ayyavazhi. It is viewed as a sacrament and not a contract. The family-life is also taught as the foremost austerity.

During ceremony the couple sitting facing the geographic south witnessing the Thuvaraiyam Pathi in the Indian Ocean. In addition to the priest, all the people who witness the marriage chant the mantras, and praise the couple following the priest, while in Hinduism this was done only by the Priest.

FUNERAL

In Ayyavazhi the body of the dead is buried. The body is buried in a position that faces the geographic north in a Padmasana position. No boxes such as coffins are used. The body is placed inside and covered by sand or Namam (sacred soil).

RELIGIOUS PRACTICE

Dress during worship

One of the significant ritual actions that distinguished the Ayyavazhi male worshipper from others was 'wearing a headgear' during worship. It became a ritual action to be performed before the people entered the Pathi to worship. The male devotees usually removed their upper garment and tied the headgear and entered the Pathi for worship. To this day this practice is followed.

Ayyavazhi do not wear any upper garments during worship. Footwear is prohibited in worship centers. Also in Ayyavazhi, the female worshippers do not go to worship centers during the period of Menses.

Worship Using Mirror Reflection

The Ayyavazhi pray in front of a mirror and shows respect to their god by doing so. Two lamps with oil are also placed in the room. This can also be found in their homes near their consecrated places of worship. The interpretation of this is that God is found inside us and we should not look for him anywhere else.

Circumambulation

The practice of circumambulation is quite commonly seen in Ayyavazhi. In Ayyavazhi the devotees use to take a bath and circumambulate the outer Pathi and then the inner Pathi and then the sanctum sanatorium.

Saffron

Saffron is considered as sacred in Ayyavazhi. All the Panividaiyalar (those who perform Panividai) in Pathis and Nizhal Thangals dress in a saffron dothi and saffron headgear which are collectively known as Kavi Vasthiram. This is also the color of the flag that is to be hoisted in Pathis, as told as Chandiravarnam, and is the color of the Ayyavazhi flags hoisted over their temples.

BAHA'I FAITH



Bahai star

The Bahá'í Faith is one of the youngest of the world's major religions. It was founded in the 19th century by Bahá'u'lláh, who was born in Persia (modern day Iran) and is honoured by Baha'is as the latest in a line of messengers from God that includes Abraham, Krishna, Moses, Buddha, Zoroaster, Christ and Muhammad. This continuity is reflected in Baha'u'llah's teachings, which stress the oneness of the world's religions, and the oneness of humankind. Bahá'ís strive to abolish all prejudices and to gain equality for all, regardless of race or sex. Bahá'ís have no priesthood or liturgy. They come from many different cultural, racial, social and religious backgrounds and support democratically elected institutions at local, national and international levels. They are required to obey the government but may choose to abstain from partisan politics, which can be seen as creating disunity in the community. Baha'is integrate scientific attitudes into their faith and have an holistic approach to life.

Bahá'í teachings are in some ways similar to other monotheistic faiths: God is considered single and all-powerful. However, Bahá'u'lláh taught that religion is orderly and progressively revealed by one God through Manifestations of God who are the founders of major world religions throughout history; Buddha, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad being the most recent in the period before the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. As such, Bahá'ís regard the major religions as fundamentally unified in purpose, though varied in social practices and interpretations. There is a similar emphasis on the unity of all people, openly rejecting notions of racism and nationalism. At the heart of Bahá'í teachings is the goal of a unified world order that ensures the prosperity of all nations, races, creeds, and classes.

ABLUTIONS AND OBLIGATORY PRAYER

Bahá'ís should perform ritual washing before reciting the obligatory prayer. If water is not available or cannot be applied to the hands and the face, the believer may recite 5 times the verse "In the name of God, the Most Pure, the Most Pure". The obligatory prayer is performed facing the holy shrine at Bahji in Israel. There are alternative forms of obligatory prayer. In the West the short form is usually recited, once in 24 hours, between noon and sunset. Those who are ill or over 70 are exempt. Menstruating women are exempt if they recite 95 times "Glorified be God, the Lord of Splendour and Beauty".

BIRTH

Baha'ís believe that the soul comes into being at conception. Methods of contraception that prevent implantation of the fertilised ovum are considered unacceptable. Sterilisation and abortion are forbidden except on compelling medical grounds.

DEATH

The dead body should be washed and wrapped in a shroud of cotton or silk. A special ring is placed on the finger and the corpse is laid in a wooden coffin. Bahá'ís may not be cremated or embalmed and may not be buried more than an hour's journey from the place of death.

The Baha'i faith does not prohibit donation of the body to medical science.

FUNERAL

Baha'i funeral services are normally held within two or three days after the death. Guests may dress according to personal preference and local custom. The family arranges for the officiate to read the prayers. One key requirement for a Baha'i funeral is reading of the Prayer for the Dead.

Baha'i funeral customs do not discourage non-believers from attending or being present when the Prayer for the Dead is read. If you are non-Baha'i attending a Baha'i funeral, please keep in mind that this is a sacred tradition and be appropriately respectful during the reading.

DIET

Bahá'ís do not normally drink alcohol, but may take it within medicine prescribed by doctors. They practise moderation in diet. Some Baha'ís are vegetarian.

FASTING

During the fasting period (March 2-21), Bahá'ís may not eat or drink between sunrise and sunset. Fasting is not obligatory for those under 15 or over 70, for menstruating, pregnant or nursing women, for the sick or for travelers.

FESTIVALS

The Baha'i New Year (Naw-Ruz) is on 21st March. No work is done on this day, and Baha'ís may wish to be at home for this occasion. The period leading up to Naw-Ruz (2-20 March) is a period of reflection and preparation for the coming year, and it is marked by fasting. Another important festival period is Ridvan, from 21st April to 2nd May. This celebrates Baha'u'llah's declaration of his mission. The 1st, 9th and 12th days within this festival are holy days on which work is suspended.

GENDER ISSUES

Bahá'í teaching has always been that women and men are equal. It commands Bahá'ís to educate women and give them the opportunities that they need in order to take advantage of that equality.

GREETING

Some Bahá'ís might shake hands, some might bow, some might hug close friends. Often Bahá'ís will greet each other by saying "Alláh-u-Abhá".

IN BAHÁ'Í HOMES

There may be a plaque with the Arabic inscription "Ya Bahá'u'l-Abhá" ("O Glory of the All Glorious").

INCARNATION

Bahá'ís believe that God cannot become incarnate in a human being.

MARRIAGE

Bahá'u'lláh highly praised marriage, discouraged divorce, and required chastity outside of marriage. Interracial marriage is also highly praised throughout Bahá'í scripture. The Bahá'í marriage ceremony is simple; the only compulsory part of the wedding is the reading of the wedding vows prescribed by Bahá'u'lláh which both the groom and the bride read, in the presence of two witnesses. The vows are "We will all, verily, abide by the Will of God." Baha'ís have free choice in marriage, but parental consent is sought to help create unity between the two families.

Interracial marriage is also highly praised throughout Bahá'í scripture.

DIVORCE

Bahá'ís disapprove strongly of divorce - Bahá'u'lláha and Abdu'l-Bahá made it clear that divorce is abhorred - but it is not banned.

There are no specific grounds for divorce laid down for Bahá'ís.

Bahá'ís wanting a divorce are required to announce their intention to divorce and then live apart for a year before they get it. During the year they should attempt a reconciliation with the help of the local spiritual assembly. This cooling-off period gives the couple a chance to put things right.

FAMILY LIFE

A strong family life is important to Bahá'ís because the family is seen as the fundamental building block of communities and nations. They believe that strong and loving families are essential for society to work properly.

DRESS CODE

The Baha'i Faith has no dress code. But they are exhorted to exercise moderation in all things.

CALENDAR

The Bahá'í calendar is based upon the calendar established by the Báb. The year consists of 19 months, each having 19 days, with four or five intercalary days, to make a full solar year. The Bahá'í New Year corresponds to the traditional Persian New Year, called Naw Rúz, and occurs on the vernal equinox, near 21 March, at the end of the month of fasting. Bahá'í

communities gather at the beginning of each month at a meeting called a Feast for worship, consultation and socializing.

MEDICAL PROCEDURES

Blood transfusions and organ donations are allowed.

Bahá'u'lláh prohibited a mendicant and ascetic lifestyle. Monasticism is forbidden, and Bahá'ís are taught to practice spirituality while engaging in useful work.

RELIGIOUS TEXTS

The most sacred text is the *Kitab-i-Aqbas* which was written by Bahá'u'lláh in 1873. This book of laws contains teachings on personal status, prophecies and outlines Baha'i religious practices. It also establishes Baha'i administrative institutions.

Gleanings from the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, Bahá'u'lláh's Prayers and Meditations, Epistle to the Son of Wolf, the Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys are other holy texts that guide the lives of Bahá'ís.

SACRED PLACES

The two most holiest places in the Baha'i religion are the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh in Acre and the Shrine of Bab in Haifa, Israel.

The Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh marks the location of Bahá'u'lláh's passing. Baha'is all around the world also pray towards the direction of this sacred place.

The Shrine of Bab contains the remains of The Bab. It is considered the second holiest place in the Baha'i faith for this reason, after the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh.

Baha'is pray and meditate at the Shrine of Bab and the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh, including the surrounding gardens.

WORSHIP

Baha'is do their acts of worship in their homes and in certain temples around the world. There are currently seven temples located around the world in North America, Australia, Uganda, Germany, Panama, Samoa, and India. These temples serve as a peaceful place in which Baha'is may reflect and meditate without interruption.

BUDDHISM



Dharmachakra

Buddhism is a Indian Religion or Dharma found by Siddhartha Gautama. Buddhism is also very similar to Hinduism as it was created from it.

Buddhism teaches people how to end their suffering by cutting out greed, hatred and ignorance. Buddhism along with other Indian Religion believes in Karma (i.e) When people do bad things, they will get bad consequences. When people do good things, they will get good consequences.

This cause-and-effect chain is reflected in the endless cycles of life, death and rebirth. Buddhism believes in reincarnation (rebirth). The ultimate goal of a Buddhist is to get enlightenment (Nirvana) and liberate oneself from endless reincarnation and suffering. Some see Buddhism as a religion, others see it is a philosophy, and others think it is a way of finding reality.

Buddhism is a tradition that focuses on personal spiritual development. Buddhists strive for a deep insight into the true nature of life and do not worship gods or deities.

The various Buddhist traditions have their origin in what was then northern India and stem from the enlightenment of Siddhartha Gautama who is said to have been born in 563BCE. Although he was a prince, he left his comfortable home in search of the Truth to bring to an end the misery which he could see all around him. He experienced a profound spiritual realisation: the ability to see things as they really are, the inter-dependence of all things and the inevitable link between the conditions we create and their consequences. Thus he became a Buddha (one who has awakened as though from a dream). He spent the next 45 years travelling through northern India communicating this liberating vision.

Buddhism has been described as a "non-theistic religion" because there is no place for an all-powerful creator God within it. Some Buddhists revere the Buddha as though he was divine, but Gautama himself was a human being who gained enlightenment through his own efforts. All Buddhists believe that there have been many Buddhas in the past, present and future and that all living beings have the potential to become Buddhas. They can do this by aiming to reach enlightenment, by following the Buddhist way of life. Buddhists value compassion, selflessness, personal responsibility, and mindfulness of the present moment. They try to avoid causing harm to any life form.

The 'Three Jewels' of Buddhism are the Buddha, the dharma (his teachings) and the sangha, or community of Buddhists. It is essential for Buddhists to retain close contact with the sangha at all times.

ENLIGHTENMENT AND NIRVANA/NIBBANA

Buddhists believe that there is a cycle of birth, life and death and rebirth. This goes on and on. They believe that unless someone gains Enlightenment, when they die they will be reborn. If a person can gain Enlightenment, they can break out of this cycle.

Breaking out of the cycle is called Nirvana (sometimes called Nibbana). It is the end of everything that is not perfect. It is perfect peace, free of suffering.

Meditation

Buddhists try to reach Nirvana by following the Buddha's teaching and by meditating. Meditation means training the mind

to empty it all of thoughts. when this happens what is important comes clear.

KEY FACTS

- Buddhism is 2,500 years old
- There are currently 376 million followers worldwide
- Buddhism arose as a result of Siddhartha Gautama's quest for Enlightenment in around the 6th Century BC
- There is no belief in a personal God. It is not centred on the relationship between humanity and God
- Buddhists believe that nothing is fixed or permanent - change is always possible
- The two main Buddhist sects are Theravada Buddhism and Mahayana Buddhism, but there are many more
- Buddhists can worship both at home or at a temple
- The path to Enlightenment is through the practice and development of morality, meditation and wisdom.

Four Noble Truths, four principles which contain the essence of the Buddha's teachings:

- The truth of suffering (Dukkha)
- The truth of the origin of suffering (Samudāya)
- The truth of the cessation of suffering (Nirodha)
- The truth of the path to the cessation of suffering (Magga)

WORSHIP

There are as many forms of Buddhist worship.

Buddhists can worship both at home or at a temple. It is not considered essential to go to a temple to worship with others.

At home - Buddhists will often set aside a room or a part of a room as a shrine. There will be a statue of Buddha, candles, and an incense burner.

Temples - Buddhist temples come in many shapes. Perhaps the best known are the pagodas of China and Japan. Another typical Buddhist building is the Stupa, which is a stone structure built over what are thought to be relics of the Buddha, or over copies of the Buddha's teachings.

Buddhist temples are designed to symbolise the five elements:

- Fire
- Air
- Earth, symbolised by the square base
- Water
- Wisdom, symbolised by the pinnacle at the top

All Buddhist temples contain an image or a statue of Buddha.

SACRED BOOKS

The sacred book of Buddhism is called the Tipitaka. It is written in an ancient Indian language called Pali which is very close to the language that the Buddha himself spoke. The Tripitaka is a very large book. The English translation of it takes up nearly forty volumes.

BIRTH

Buddhist ethics proceed on a "case by case" basis, but there are general principles. For example, contraception can include pills to prevent conception but not morning-after pills. If sexual intercourse has taken place, then full responsibility must be taken for the possible consequences, including parenthood. The first precept of Buddhism (abstain from taking life) makes abortion unacceptable unless the mother's life is at stake. There are no set rituals for the birth of a child but the occasion could be marked by a family celebration. Parents might take the baby to a temple to be blessed by monks.

CLOTHING

Buddhists are likely to dress modestly. Buddhist monks or nuns often wear orange robes and have shaved heads. One of the monastic rules is not to become separated from one's robes.

DEATH

Acceptance of death is a key part of Buddhist philosophy. Buddhism teaches that the ideal death is a calm, fully conscious one. A Buddhist will require support from his or her spiritual master. In terminal cases Buddhists may refuse painkillers. They may need support in deciding what level of medication would be appropriate. An atmosphere of calm should be promoted around a dying Buddhist – the presence of distressed relatives may not be conducive to the desired tranquillity.

When a Buddhist dies it is important that a Buddhist minister is informed. Ideally the body should be moved as little as possible before he arrives. Between three and seven days should elapse before the body is disposed of, as some Buddhists believe that consciousness remains in the body for a while after death. This belief in continued consciousness means that Buddhists treat the newly dead as if they were still alive, and would prefer medical staff to do so also, explaining their procedures as they handle the body. Ceremonies for the dead include chanting and meditation.

Both cremation and burial are acceptable as, traditionally, bodies could be disposed of by means of any of the four elements, earth, air, fire or water. As some Buddhists believe that spiritual death may take place some time after organic death, it may not be possible for the organs of a deceased Buddhist to be donated. However, many Buddhists would feel that the compassionate act of donating organs outweighs concerns about disturbing the body.

Some Buddhists believe in literal reincarnation, whereas others believe in a spiritual rebirth that is understood as a causal connection between lives, rather than the reincarnation of an unchanging individual soul. Some would say that the habitual patterns of the mind continue through different births. This is often imaged as a line of candles, each lit from the previous one.

MARRIAGE

The Buddhist view of marriage considers marriage a secular affair and as such, it is not considered a sacrament. Buddhists are expected to follow the civil laws regarding marriage laid out by their respective governments. While the ceremony itself is civil, many Buddhists obtain the blessing from monks at the local temple after the marriage is completed.

DIVORCE

Since marriage is secular, Buddhism has no restrictions on divorce.

DIET

There are no absolute rules for lay Buddhists concerning diet. Many Buddhists are vegetarian or vegan, in accordance with the first Buddhist precept – abstain from taking life. A monk should eat anything that is offered to him, because of the benefit in encouraging the generosity of the giver, but would be gravely at fault for hinting that he would like meat. Monks and nuns, or other Buddhists who are especially concerned with shrines or images should avoid onions and garlic because of the smell.

EUTHANASIA AND SUICIDE

Buddhists are not unanimous in their view of euthanasia, and the teachings of the Buddha don't explicitly deal with it. Most Buddhists (like almost everyone else) are against involuntary euthanasia. Their position on voluntary euthanasia is less clear.

FASTING

In the West, it is mostly only monks and nuns who fast. On fast days a Buddhist may eat before noon, but not afterwards. Full moon days and new moon days are often fast days for Buddhists.

FESTIVALS

A commonly observed festival is Wesak, or Bodhi Day, the Buddha's birthday.

GREETING

In Buddhist countries the normal form of greeting is to place the hands together in a prayerful manner and bow. Buddhists in Western countries normally adopt the usual styles of greeting found there, like shaking hands. When greeting a monk or a nun, it is not appropriate to take their hand or embrace them.

IN A BUDDHIST HOME

Most Buddhist homes will have a shrine, probably with a statue of the Buddha. Some Buddhists might prefer visitors to remove their shoes when entering the home. Many Buddhists would prefer that Dharma books are not laid directly on the floor, or stepped over, or have other objects placed on top of them.

HEALTH AND HYGIENE

Many Buddhists prefer showers to baths. A Buddhist may wish to sleep on the floor.

Traditionally Buddhists treat doctors with respect. However, since much emphasis is put on the importance of having a clear mind, Buddhists may be reluctant to take medications that are mind-altering, and will need side-effects explained to them thoroughly.

Buddhists may prefer the use of home remedies - for example, rice porridge (one part rice to two parts water) may be considered beneficial for convalescence.

Buddhist monks and nuns would prefer to be treated by members of the same sex.

ORGAN DONATION

There are no rules in Buddhism for or against organ donation, but central to Buddhism is a wish to relieve suffering.

There may also be occasions when organ donation may be seen as an act of charity.

In Buddhism the decision for or against organ donation relies very much on an individual's decision. People may decide for or against it, without one choice being seen as right, and the other wrong.

PUJA

The terms 'prayer' and 'worship' are not really appropriate to Buddhism, since there is no God figure. 'Puja', meaning 'the acknowledgement of an ideal' is better, though not all Buddhists will use or be familiar with this term. Some Buddhists use the word 'prayer' to mean a devout personal determination, without the connotation of praying to a deity. A space should be set aside for puja, which may involve chanting. Incense, flowers and candles may be used. Buddhists wash before puja. A Buddhist temple is called a vihara. When entering a Buddhist centre, visitors will be expected to remove their shoes. Some Buddhists consider pointing the sole of the foot at the figure of Buddha disrespectful.

CELIBACY

Apart from certain schools in Japan and Tibet, most who choose to practice Buddhism as ordained monks and nuns, also choose to live in celibacy. Sex is seen as a serious monastic transgression. Within Theravada Buddhism there are four principal transgressions which entail expulsion from the monastic Sangha: sex, theft, murder, and falsely boasting of superhuman perfections. Sexual misconduct for monks and nuns includes masturbation. In the case of monasticism, abstaining completely from sex is seen as a necessity in order to reach enlightenment.

ABORTION

There is no single Buddhist view on abortion.

Buddhists believe that life should not be destroyed, but they regard causing death as morally wrong only if the death is caused deliberately or by negligence.

Traditional Buddhism rejects abortion because it involves the deliberate destroying of a life. Buddhists regard life as starting at conception. Modern Buddhists, however, are more divided about the morality of abortion.

It's personal: Buddhists are expected to take full personal responsibility for everything they do and for the consequences that follow. The decision to abort is therefore a highly personal one, and one that requires careful and compassionate exploration of the ethical issues involved, and a willingness to carry the burden of whatever happens as a result of the decision. The ethical consequences of the decision will also depend on the motive and intention behind the decision, and the level of mindfulness with which it was taken.

AFTERLIFE AND SALVATION

There is no consistent notion of the afterlife or salvation in Buddhism. It varies according to country, era, and individual perspective.

CAO ĐAI



Cao Dai Eye of Providence

Cao Đài is a syncretistic, monotheistic religion officially established in the city of Tây Ninh, southern Vietnam in 1926. The religion combines Buddhism, Christianity, Taoism, Confucianism and Islam. The full name of the religion is Đại Đạo Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ (great religion of the third period of revelation and salvation).

Cao Dai uses ethical precepts from Confucianism, occult practices from Taoism, theories of Karma and Rebirth from Buddhism, and a hierarchical organization (including a Pope) from Christianity.

Cao Đài literally the "Highest Lord" or "Highest Power" is the supreme deity, believed by Caodaists to have created the universe.

The symbol of the faith is the Left Eye of God, representing the yang (masculine, ordaining, positive and expansive) activity of the male creator, which is balanced by the yin (âm) activity of Mother Goddess, the Queen Mother of the West, the feminine, nurturing and restorative mother of humanity.

Adherents engage in practices such as prayer, veneration of ancestors, nonviolence, and vegetarianism with the goal of union with God and freedom from samsāra.

The design, shape and coloring of Caodaist temples is quite standard around the world and includes the incorporation of sacred images, symbols, and colors.

The doctrines of the Cao Đài faith tends not only to reconcile all religious views, but also to adapt itself to all degrees of spiritual evolution. A basic principle of Caodaism is "All Religions are One".

Believers worship God the Father, Holy Mother and the Divine Beings with all their heart. They also venerate the Great Religious Prophets of history and honour the ancestors.

The original center of the CAO DAI faith is at the city of Tay Ninh which is about 70 miles northwest of Saigon.

The most dedicated CaoDaists observe a full-time vegetarian diet, live at a temple, take a vow of chastity, and meditate five hours a day, and some sleep in a sitting position. If a CaoDaist dies with his or her left eye open, then he or she is believed to have reached transcendence. "Very few practice at this level of intensity unless they're trying to achieve sainthood."

STRUCTURE OF THE CHURCH

The organisational structure of the Caodaist church has similarities with that of a state. There are similarities between the hierarchy of the Caodaist clergy and that of the Catholic Church. Besides the Pope, the Caodaist hierarchy has Cardinals, Bishops, Priests, and further ranks.

Caodaism stresses equality among men and women in society. However, in the spiritual domain, ordained women may not attain the two highest positions: the Legislative Cardinal and the Pope.

Ordinary members of the Cao Dai clergy may marry and raise families, as do some of the members of the Eastern Orthodox and some of the Oriental Rites of the Catholic Church. Those above the rank of priest are not allowed to marry and must remain celibate in order to commit their total energies to the religious life. Nuns may occupy all positions up to Cardinal.

CEREMONY

Ceremonial prescriptions such as actions, dress and music were organized in detail by God the Father. These include ceremonies for initiations, marriages and funerals.

Particular attention is paid to death, and it has been revealed to the religion how the soul journeys towards heaven and how, on earth, co-religionists can pray for souls to help them on their way.

Dead body may be either buried or cremated.

For new born there is a ceremony called Tam Thanh (holy shower) in front of the altar of a Caodai temple, where the CaoDai priest prays for divine blessing for the baby and sprinkles the baby with Holy water. For weddings and deaths, there are special ceremonies accordingly.

MARRIAGE

CaoDai suggests one marriage for life, and allow remarriage only when the spouse dies. It does not encourage divorce except for the wellness and best benefits of the parties (including the children). Therefore choosing spouse should be done carefully before marriage and based on virtues, sincerity and spiritual level of a person, believing that materialism will never last.

BELIEFS

Cao Dai holds beliefs common in other faith traditions such as: karma, reincarnation, the unity of God, the existence of the soul, missionary work, and ancestor veneration. Traditional Vietnamese cultural ideas and taboos are also incorporated into the belief structure of Cao Dai.

WORSHIP

Cao Dai perform prayer and reverence to God. Worship involves group prayer in the temple, elaborate rituals and festivals.

There are four daily ceremonies (Cung Tu Thoi): - 12:00 a.m. (Thoi Ty), 6:00 a.m. (Thoi Meo), 12:00 p.m. (Thoi Ngo), 6:00 p.m. (Thoi Dau). Tea is offered in the morning and evening, wine is offered at noon and midnight. On major ceremonial days (Dai Le or Tieu Le), and the 1st and 15th day of each lunar month, there are three offerings (dang tam buu): fruits and flowers, wine and tea. The four services must be observed in Temples (Thanh-That) as well as in homes. For believers a daily minimum of one act of obeisance before the God's altar is required. During the period of worship, the believers must wear distinctive white robes (ao dai trang) with the distinctive black head covering(khan dong den) for men. On ceremonial occasions, all dignitaries and believers must wear special ceremonial dress and head coverings which accord with their various hierarchies.

There is also a special anniversary ceremony once a year for God the Father, the Holy Mother, the five founders of the world's major religions, and the founders of the Cao Dai religion. The rituals differ between places, depending on who they pray to. There are also differences between monthly rituals, and anniversary ones.

DIET

Most CaoDaists observe a vegetarian diet for 10 days a month. The most dedicated CaoDaists observe a full-time vegetarian diet. (Vegetarianism is required of all orders of the priesthood, but not for the laity.)

WOMEN

Caodaism is an institutionalized religion whereby women are only allowed to achieve a certain level of advancement within the institution. The ranking system of the religion proper aligns closely with the Catholic Church. On top is a Pope and then there are Cardinals, Bishops, Priests, Sub-dignitaries, and Followers. Women may only achieve the institutional position of cardinal. Similarly, even though women are allowed to attain high levels within the order, they are frequently disallowed from being leaders.

In worship and in ceremonies, women also have a different walking pattern within the temple. Women walk clockwise around the hall and congregate to the left. Meanwhile, men enter from the right and walk counterclockwise. These symbolic differences of practice within the temple may be representative of the actual spiritual potentials of men and women within the Caodai religion.

HOLY PEPOLE

There are many Holy people from other religions. Some people from history are also venerated. The pantheon of Holy people includes: Buddha, Guan Yin, Jesus, Joan of Arc, Muhammad, Sun Yat-sen, Julius Caesar, Victor Hugo, and many more....

HOLY SCRIPTURES

These are the main scriptures of Cao Dai.

- Kinh Thiên Đạo Và Thế Đạo (Prayers of the Heavenly and the Earthly Way) This is used for Daily life and Prayers for Worship.
- Pháp Chánh Truyền (The Religious Constitution of Caodaiism) This is used for information on the elections of officials, their powers, and ritual dress.
- Tân Luật (The New Canonical Codes) This is used for laws regulating religious, secular, monastic life.
- Thánh Ngôn Hiệp Tuyển (Compilation of Divine Messages)
- Hộ Pháp Phạm Công Tắc The Sermons of His Holiness

Other branches of Cao Dai have additional scriptures.

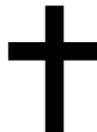
ABORTION

CaoDai does not allow killing life, abortion is considered as a kind of killing a future baby and therefore considered as a crime.

RIGHT TO DIE

CaoDai does not allow suicide therefore would not approve anyone for killing self.

CHRISTIANITY



The Christian faith is founded on the life and teaching of Jesus who lived 2000 years ago in what is modern day Israel /Palestine. Christians believe in One God and worship him as Creator. They believe that God is uniquely revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and strive to lead an ethical life based on His message of love for all people. The Holy Spirit is revered as the agent of God's activity in the world. The Bible is treasured as a guide, inspiration and source of learning.

In the early days of Christianity there was no formal structure or set pattern of belief or worship. Christianity developed out of Judaism and its first scriptures were Jewish. Christian creeds, liturgies, and patterns of leadership evolved over time. Collections of Christian writings were gradually brought together to form the New Testament.

From about the sixth century C.E. the Western and Eastern Churches began to separate. The split was formalised in the eleventh century. Some of the differences between the churches were theological and some were cultural. Eastern and Western Churches still have different calendars and do not celebrate Christmas and Easter at the same time.

There are increasing numbers of Orthodox Christians in the UK, as a result of various upheavals in Eastern Europe. The Greek Orthodox Church is the largest Orthodox Church in the UK; there are also Russian Orthodox, Antiochian (Arab) Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox churches. They represent many different cultures and languages, and include Greeks, Russians, Serbs, Poles, Ukrainians and Romanians.

The Reformation of the 16th century led to the emergence of Protestant Churches and divided the Western Church into Roman Catholic and Protestant. England became a Protestant country with the Anglican Church as the state religion.

There are now numerous Christian groups within the UK. Some are organised as formal churches and are part of a wider organisation; others are independent house churches which may be linked to a national or international network. It is impossible to cover them all in this handbook. Most are Trinitarian (that is they believe that the One God is known in three

persons – God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit), but a considerable number are not. Unitarians, for example, derive their name from their historic insistence on the Divine Unity.

A number of churches in the UK have made a covenant to work together and support each other. These include Anglicans, Baptists, Methodists, Roman Catholics, Salvation Army, Society of Friends, United Reformed Church and others depending on location. As "Churches Together" they provide chaplaincies in colleges, hospitals and prisons, they join together in social work and community projects, and they sometimes share buildings, especially on new estates. Their common ground is considerable but their practices may diverge, particularly in regard to sacraments like Baptism and Holy Communion, which are not practised by the Salvation Army or the Quakers.

In this section we are focussing on the Western Churches, but we recognise that there are many people in the UK from the Eastern Churches, some of whom are refugees and asylum seekers. There are Coptic Christians, Armenians, Ethiopian Orthodox, Syrian Orthodox and others. There are increasing numbers from Africa. Those individuals who come from churches in other parts of the world may have very different cultural experiences of Christianity and may feel very isolated in this country. Their diversity needs to be acknowledged and their traditions explored.

ANOINTING OF THE SICK

Anointing of the sick is important to Roman Catholics and to those members of the Church of England who are known as Anglo-Catholics. It is imperative to call a priest to anoint the dying, but this sacrament can also be offered to the sick, especially before an operation, as a sign of God's healing power and as a source of comfort. However, for many people, anointing has traditionally been associated with impending death and so the matter needs to be handled sensitively. Children also may wish to be anointed if they are ill. Latter-day Saints anoint the sick with oil alongside prayer.

BAPTISM

Most Christians are baptised, some when they are babies, others when they are adults. In non-conformist churches, where adult baptism by total immersion is the norm, babies may be dedicated or blessed. If the newborn baby of Roman Catholic parents is at risk, the baby should be baptised promptly, ideally by a priest. In an emergency, anyone, even someone who is not a Christian, can perform the baptism, providing they have the right intention and baptise the baby "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit". Anglicans, Methodists and some other Christian parents with newborn babies at risk may also request baptism – or, in some cases, the naming – of the infant.

BLOOD TRANSFUSIONS

This is of particular importance to Jehovah's Witnesses, for whom blood represents life itself and so must be treated with respect. They carry an Advance Medical Directive/ Release that directs no blood transfusions be given under any circumstances, while relieving medical practitioners/ hospitals of responsibility for any damages that might be caused by their refusal of blood. When entering the hospital, consent/ release forms should be signed stating this and dealing specifically with the hospital care needed.

Non-blood volume expanders are acceptable, and re-infusion of their own blood is permitted by many Witnesses as long as the blood is not stored and providing that the equipment is arranged in a circuit that is constantly linked to the patient's circulatory system. While a blood transfusion is not acceptable, organ donation and transplantation are not forbidden. Therefore, whether to accept an organ transplant is a personal and medical decision and the same would be true of organ donation. So while refusing blood they willingly accept all non-blood alternative medical and surgical management. Also, Witnesses will receive components with no blood – e.g. corneas. The use of minor blood fractions, such as albumin, immunoglobulins and haemophiliac preparations, are a matter of personal choice. If there is doubt, Jehovah's Witnesses' Hospital Liaison Committees can advise.

CIRCUMCISION

Some of the Eastern Churches (eg. Syrian Orthodox) follow the ancient custom of circumcision of boys.

COMMUNION

Communion (Breaking of Bread, Eucharist, Lord's Supper or Mass), like Baptism, goes back to the very early days of the church, to the meals shared by Jesus and his disciples, especially the Last Supper. Communion unites Christians with the death and resurrection of Jesus, and with each other. It can also act as a recommitment to follow in the path set out by Jesus' life and example. Communion services are regularly held in most Christian churches and communion is often taken to sick people in their homes or in hospital, by lay people as well as by ministers. Catholics would expect to attend Mass every Sunday, on some feast days and sometimes daily. Orthodox Christians receive Communion from the time of their baptism in babyhood, but many Orthodox adults receive communion much less frequently than Roman Catholics or Anglicans. Non-conformists also take communion less often. The Salvation Army and the Quakers do not hold their own communion services but their members might choose to participate in those of other Christian churches. Jehovah's Witnesses commemorate the Lord's evening meal annually on the equivalent of Nisan 14 in the Jewish calendar.

CONFIRMATION

When a child who has been baptised is old enough to make its own promises to God, it may be brought for a service of Confirmation. This includes Roman Catholic, Anglican and Methodist Churches.

DEATH

Christians should be offered the help and support of the appropriate minister or chaplain at the time of death, or when a relative or friend is dying. It is the belief of Christians that the bodies of the dead should be treated with the same respect as if they were alive. There are usually no formal objections to post-mortems, transplants or body donations; it will depend on the individuals concerned. Families may wish to spend some time in prayer beside the bed of someone who has died. Some Christians choose to wear black as a sign of mourning. The sadness of death is seen against the background of hope in the Resurrection.

Latter-day Saints prefer burial to cremation and generally prefer to prepare their own members for burial. For Greek Catholic Christians, the corpse rests in an open coffin for three days. During the last night there is a watch at home by

friends and family before the coffin is closed. Most coffins are taken to a service of Mass in a Church. After the Mass a Bible is put on the foot of the coffin and the congregation is asked to say their last farewells by kissing the Bible and walking clockwise around it. Then it is taken to the cemetery for a burial service. After 40 days there is another family service at the graveside.

DIET

There are no general dietary requirements, but some Christians prefer to eat no meat on Fridays. Some will abstain from food and drink before taking Holy Communion. Jehovah's Witnesses do not eat meat unless the blood has been properly drained away. Methodists traditionally do not drink alcohol, others take it in moderation. Drug-taking is frowned upon except for medical necessity. All Seventh-day Adventists, like Jews, are required to abstain from pork, shellfish and fish without fins or scales. Avoidance of tobacco and alcohol is advocated. Latter-day Saints (Mormons) do not drink alcohol, tea or coffee or use tobacco or other harmful drugs. They may also avoid meat, especially if it has blood in it.

DRESS

Generally speaking this is up to individuals concerned. Latter-day Saints dress modestly. Women usually wear full-length skirts and non-skimpy tops. Full members wear a special garment next to the skin. It should be treated with respect but may be removed for medical treatment and for activities like swimming. It would be part of burial clothing. Women within the Brethren tradition should not cut their hair and they should keep it covered.

EVANGELISM

Christians are called to share the good news of the gospel which Jesus taught, but they interpret this calling in different ways. Some Christians believe that they should strive to convert non-Christians; they may feel a commitment to go from house to house or to preach in public places. Other Christians, including Quakers and Unitarians, celebrate human and religious diversity and believe that people should be free to develop their spirituality in accordance with their conscience.

FAMILY LIFE

The family unit is very important and should provide a warm and loving environment for the nurturing of children within the faith. Latter-day Saints expect families to set aside an evening a week to play and study together. Many Churches put on services for families, especially at Christmas. Mothering Sunday is another traditional time for family services. Jehovah's Witnesses do not observe Christmas or birthdays as these are not based on Biblical tradition. Witnesses are more comfortable with the concept of spontaneous giving. They believe it is important to build up children's trust, to maintain moral standards of truth and integrity and to uphold scripture.

FASTING

During Lent, the 40 days of preparation for Easter, many people choose to observe some kind of fasting. This may mean moderating the diet or total abstinence for a period of time. Fasting is a recognised part of an Orthodox Christian's life. Wednesday and Friday each week, and a long period before Christmas and Easter have traditionally been times when no meat, fish, dairy products or alcohol were taken. In the Roman Catholic Church, Ash Wednesday and Good Friday are days when meat is avoided and only one main meal and two lighter snacks are taken. This does not apply to those under 7 or over 60, or to those who are sick. Latter-day Saints hold regular fast-days, usually on the first Sunday of each month during which neither food nor drink are taken. This is not expected of children, of the sick, or of women who are pregnant or breast-feeding.

FESTIVALS

Sunday has been celebrated since the beginning of Christianity as the day of Jesus' resurrection from the dead. Most Christians meet for worship on this day. Seventh-day Adventists, however, gather together on Saturdays, following the Jewish Sabbath tradition. They also try to honour the day by avoiding unnecessary work. The most important feast days are Christmas (25 Dec), celebrating the birth of Christ; Easter, remembering His death and resurrection; and Whitsun/Pentecost, which celebrates the coming of God's Spirit, and the birth of the church. Most Orthodox Christians in Britain celebrate Christmas Day on 25 December, but some follow the Julian calendar and celebrate it on 7 January. The Orthodox Christians celebrate Easter (Pascha) on a date which is often considerably later than the western Easter. The western dates of Easter and Whitsun vary, as they are linked to old Pagan festivals of spring, and are based on a lunar calendar. There are many ancient symbols and customs associated with Christian festivals, some of which are also shared by people outside the Church. Jehovah's Witnesses do not observe Christmas, or birthdays, as these are not based on Biblical tradition.

LIFESTYLE

This varies from person to person, but there are some common characteristics. All Christians should follow the example of Jesus and his teaching which is highlighted in the Sermon on the Mount. Plymouth Brethren avoid many secular occupations, allowing only those compatible with the teaching of the New Testament. They also avoid leisure activities which bring them into contact with people and things which are deemed harmful. Exclusive Brethren would not watch TV, listen to the radio, read newspapers or fiction, use computers, the internet or mobile phones. Quakers avoid titles, preferring to be referred to or addressed simply by their Christian names.

MARRIAGE

Most Christians prefer to be married in church. Traditionally the bride wears white. Quaker weddings are a version of the usual Sunday meeting, adapted to meet the needs of the couple concerned. Since sharing and simplicity are emphasised wedding lunches will be modest affairs. Mixed faith marriages may be accepted within some churches. The status of same-sex partnerships is a matter of debate within some of the churches. Partnership blessings for same-sex relationships are offered increasingly by Unitarians. Exclusive Brethren are encouraged to marry early (within the faith) and have large families. Latter-day Saints do not permit sex before marriage or outside marriage; marriage should be between one man and one woman, and this union is solemnised in the temple for eternity. Most churches discourage if not forbid divorce, while extending understanding and support for individuals caught up in distressing family situations. Remarriage is acceptable within some Christian traditions. Christian marriages and blessings should reflect stable, loving and responsible

relationships.

MEDICAL TREATMENT

There is generally no problem with most medical treatments. Abortion, simply to avoid the birth of an unwanted child, is unacceptable, except when the mother's life is at risk. There may be other exceptional circumstances, as in a case of rape. Fertility treatments involving the destruction of fertilised embryos are also likely to be rejected. In general, Christians do not view euthanasia as acceptable; nor do they feel that it is desirable to prolong treatment or life unnecessarily. Christian Scientists turn to God in the first instance when they are ill. They may seek the support of a Christian Science Practitioner (professional spiritual healer). They may also accept conventional medical treatment.

PASTORAL CARE AND SOCIAL CONCERN

Pastoral care is a very important aspect of Christian ministry. It is particularly important at times of stress. All Christians have the responsibility to show compassion and offer support to others, but at various moments in their lives Christians may want to see a minister or priest for guidance or confession. In hospitals, prisons, colleges or the armed services there are usually Christian chaplains on hand.

Those in hospital may welcome a visit from a chaplain or their own minister, especially before an operation. They may wish to visit the chapel, to attend a service or listen to it over the hospital radio. Prayer cards and Bibles should be available. In hospital some privacy would be needed when patients are receiving Holy Communion, or having a pastoral visit.

It is important to take seriously the pastoral needs of children. It is equally important to consider the pastoral and spiritual needs of the elderly, particularly if they are cut off from their regular support networks or are unable to continue with established and valued patterns of worship.

All the churches are committed to working within the wider community both in the UK and overseas. Christian Aid and CAFOD work with other partners throughout the world for the relief of poverty. The Salvation Army is the largest provider of Welfare Aid in the UK apart from the government.

PRAYER

The Lord's Prayer, taught by Jesus to his disciples, is treasured by Christians and used both in private and in public worship. Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

RELIGIOUS SYMBOLS

Icons (sacred pictures of Christ, his Mother and the saints) are extremely important to Orthodox Christians. Religious statues, crucifixes and rosaries are important to Roman Catholics and Anglo-Catholics while some non-conformists may actually find them offensive.

WORSHIP

For some Churches, including Roman Catholic and Anglican, there are set forms of prayer and liturgy. Congregational worship is usually conducted by a priest. In non-conformist Churches like the Baptists, the worship is freer and there is more emphasis on the sermon. Ministers or elders lead the worship. Some Churches accept the leadership of women; others reject it as unscriptural. Charismatic congregations are found in most denominations.

The worship of the Roman Catholic Church centres on the Mass. The worship of the Orthodox Churches centres on the Divine Liturgy. By contrast, a Quaker Meeting is silent worship in the presence of the Spirit of God. There is nothing prearranged and no leader. No religious symbols are used and there are no rituals – no baptism, no eucharist, no anointing. Quakers sit together in mindful silence until somebody feels prompted to speak or read from the Bible or other literature. Everyone is welcome to join in Quaker meetings for Worship and anyone may feel the call to speak: man, woman, child, experienced Quaker or first time visitor.

CONFUCIANISM



Chinese character for water

Confucianism, the way of life propagated by Confucius in the 6th–5th century bce and followed by the Chinese people for more than two millennia.

Confucianism is an Eastern religion/philosophy. Although it is more accurately referred to as a philosophy, books on world religions inevitably include it with other religions from Buddhism to Zoroastrianism.

Confucianism is an ancient religion that originated from The Hundred Schools of Thought which was from the teachings of the Chinese philosopher Confucius. It encourages a particular social order, respect for the elderly, the respect and elevation of teachers, and the overall good of the community. This religion came up more as an opposition to the existing rituals and religious practices that were then prevalent in China. Although transformed over time, it is still the substance of learning, the source of values, and the social code of the Chinese.

Confucius was primarily known in China for giving moral advice to the leaders of the country. He wrote deeply, mostly about individual morality and ethics, and the proper use of political power by the rulers of the world. There are an estimated 6.3 million followers of Confucianism worldwide, mostly located in China and Korea. There is some debate whether

Confucianism is a religion or simply a practice to better the mind, body and soul.

Although often grouped with the major historical religions, Confucianism differs from them by not being an organized religion. Nonetheless, it spread to other East Asian countries under the influence of Chinese literate culture and has exerted a profound influence on spiritual and political life.

Most people who adhere to the teachings of Confucius follow Chinese traditional religion, which is a blending of Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, and traditional local practices and beliefs.

THE MAIN BELIEFS

There are six main groups of beliefs in Confucianism, these include:

Yi - Righteousness

Xin - Honesty and Trustworthiness

Chung - Loyalty to the state, etc.

Li - includes ritual, propriety, etiquette, etc.

Hsiao - love within the family, love of parents for their children, and love of children for their parents Jen - benevolence, humanness towards one another (the most important Confucianism virtue)

SACRED BOOKS

There are five books that are considered the sacred books of Confucianism. These are The Book of History, The Book of Poetry, The Book of Changes, The Book of Rites, and the Spring and Autumn Annals. These sacred texts teach the five central virtues of Confucianism- benevolence or humaneness, righteousness, observance of rites, moral wisdom or knowledge, and faith or integrity. It was believed that by understanding and following the virtues given in the books, an individual could achieve moral and cosmic harmony.

The Lun-yü (Analects) are the most revered sacred scripture in the Confucian tradition. It was probably compiled by the second generation of Confucius' disciples. Based primarily on the Master's sayings, preserved in both oral and written transmissions, it captures the Confucian spirit in the same way that the Platonic dialogues embody Socratic teachings.

FAMILY

Confucius laid great emphasis on familial relationships and believed them to form the foundation of any civilised society. These relationships were based on decency and mutual benefit. Confucius laid down the most important relationships and the interactions between members in the relationship. First, the father-son relationship was based on the father's love and care for the child in his youth, and the son's respect and care for his father in old age. Secondly, the younger brothers should be reverent towards their elder brothers and the elder brothers should be patient and gentle with younger brothers and set a good example for them to follow. Lastly, the husband provides security and kindness to his obedient wife who listens and follows his lead.

PRACTICE AND RITUALS

Although Confucianism does not brag to have all the clear cut answers of the universe, the ones who practice have a strong belief in rituals. They believe that participation in ritual serves uniting people, and strengthening the community. However, Confucianism does not hold all the aspects of a religion (such as Christianity or Islam), nor do they hold regular practices and rituals. Instead they symbolize four important times in ones life. These are: birth, reaching maturity, marriage and death. The Practices that go along with these stages are;

BIRTH

The Tai-Shen (spirit of the fetus) protects the expectant mother, and deals harshly with anyone/thing that harasses or harms the woman. She receives a special diet and is given one month to rest after the delivery of the baby. Her parents are responsible for everything that is needed to support the child, on the first, fourth, and twelfth month anniversary of the child's birth.

MARRIAGE

There are six separate things that happen during the marriage rituals, these include:

Proposal: Both sides of the relationship share the hour, day, month, and year of their birth. If any upsetting events happens within the bride-to-be's family within the next three days, it is believed that she has rejected the proposal.

Engagement: After the couple decides the date of the wedding, the bride announces the wedding with invitations and gifts of cookies shaped like the moon.

Dowry: A dowry is a transfer of parental belongings when their daughter is getting married. Gifts equal in value after given to the bride and groom.

Procession: The groom proceeds to the brides home, and brings her back to his place, with much happiness and excitement.

Marriage: The couple recites their vows that will bond them together for a lifetime, toast each other with wine, and then take center stage at a banquet consisting of friends, and the families of both bride and groom.

Morning After: The bride serves breakfast to the grooms parents, and then the parents do the same.

DEATH

After the death of a loved one, the family cry aloud to inform the neighbors of the tragic news. The family begin to mourn by making clothes made of coarse material, and wearing them. The corpse is placed in a coffin, and many family and friends bring money to help with the cost of the funeral. Food and objects important to the deceased are placed into the coffin with him/her. A priest or minister of any religion performs the burial ritual. The guests follow the coffin carrying a large willow tree branch. This is meant to symbolize the soul of the person who has died. Later on, the branch is carried back to the family altar where is used to "install" the spirit of the deceased. A public worship (called a Liturgy) is performed on the seventh, ninth, and forty-ninth days after the burial, along with the first and third year anniversary of the death.

AFTERLIFE

For Confucians, there is no real concept of an afterlife.

SYMBOLS OF CONFUCIANISM

There are four main symbols that represent the beliefs and views of Confucianism. These include: "Confucius", the Chinese character for water, the Chinese character for scholar, and Yin Yang. The symbol for Confucius represents the man who began the religion, as he is one of, if not the most important person to come from this religion. He was very interested in the moral conduct of people in society. The second symbol, the Chinese character for water, is made for water is one of the five elements of Chinese philosophy. Water is viewed as a life source, which most likely comes from its importance in the natural world in sustaining life. The third symbol, the Chinese character for scholar, is made for the importance of knowledge and self-awareness. Confucius believed one could never have too much knowledge, and the idea of an education has become very important in Chinese culture today. The final symbol, Yin Yang, is common in other forms of Chinese religion, and has different meanings. The general meaning is that the circle represents a whole, while the halves and dots depict opposites, interactions, or balance.

HOLY DAYS

Qing Ming: One of the most important days in the Confucianism religion, happens 106 days after the winter solstice. On this day people go to the graves of their ancestors with offerings such as paper clothing and paper money. Food, which is usually offered after the ceremony is offered during the ceremony. This is supposed to connect the spirits of the living and their former ancestors.

Chongmyo Taeje: A ceremony held in honor of the kings and queens of the Yi dynasty (lasting from 1392 to 1910.) Taking place on the first Sunday of May, the past leaders are celebrated with music, food, and dance.

Confucius' Birthday: Born on the 28th of September, is when the ceremony begins. It takes place over the span of a few days and ends on the 10th of October. It begins with a short march to a local temple where an animal is there sacrificed to Confucius. They sing the "Song of Peace" and get a special "wisdom cake" made of rice. It is celebrated the most of all the ceremonies, due to Confucius being the face of the religion. During the event, there are even kung-fu competitions, which are also accompanied by music and dance.

Ching Ming Festival: Also known as the "Tomb Sweeping Day". It is either held on the 4th or 5th of April. On this day, respect is paid to the ancestors by sweeping the graves and laying flowers. Sometimes, the deceased person's favorite food will be left on the grave and small amounts of money is burned. People also bring kites to fly at the festivals.

HOLY PLACES

Confucianism does not have any one specific holy place outside the human experience on earth, and in many ways all space is sacred to Confucianists, however, some places may be considered more divine than others. Some of the holy places of Confucianism include China's Mount Tai in Shandong Province, Confucius' birthplace of Qufu, the different Confucian temples, academies and institutes, and the family home.

WORSHIP

After Confucius's death, people built temples in his honor. There are ceremonies that take place in these temples. Temple rituals can vary from region to region and have changed over time. Contemporary rituals often involve the burning of incense and kneeling and bowing before images of Confucius or other important ancestors and spirits. Offerings, such as cups of tea, are made and donations may also be made to the temple. Those worshipping at the temple will often make wishes for themselves and for others during such rituals.

THE WORSHIP OF ANCESTORS

As respect of elders and ancestors is a chief concern of Confucianism and is practiced by many Chinese in the home, at temples and at the graves of relatives, a common Confucian practice includes ancestral tablets and shrines dedicated to deceased elders. An ancestral tablet is often made of stone and includes names of ancestors carved in lists. Shrines to ancestors often consist of portraits of deceased elders, such as parents or grandparents, and usually includes an incense-stick holder. Those showing their respect will clasp incense in the palm of both hands, kneel before the portrait or tablet and place the burning incense in the holder.

THE GRAVES OF ANCESTORS

It is also a Confucian practice to show respect for one's elders by visiting their graves at least once a year.

The most important time to visit is during Tomb Sweeping Day, a holiday celebrated in early April when the family shows veneration for the departed by cleaning the tombs, clearing weeds and adding fresh soil to the surface of the graves. The deceased's favorite food and wine are placed on the grave as an offering and paper representing money is burned for the dead to use in the afterlife. Family members will also burn incense and kneel before the dead to show their respect.

SEXUALITY

In sexual matters, Confucianism is quite "puritanic." A "good" young girl is not only expected to keep her virginity until she gets married and to get married only once in her life, she is not supposed to make herself attractive, even to her own husband. Confucianism does not consider sexual activity as wrong, but love and tenderness are treated with mistrust, and physical displays of them are considered at least questionable. This rule applies not only to showing affection in public, but also to its display in the privacy of the home.

ORGAN DONATION

The Confucian teaching maintains that one is born with a complete body and should end the same way. Although traditional Confucian principles seem to exclude organ donation entirely, modern Confucian scholars have taken different views. They cite Confucius who said: "The man of Jen is one who, desiring to sustain himself, sustains others." They believe that Jen and righteousness are valued more in Confucianism than preserving the integrity of the dead body and therefore approve of organ donation.

HINDUISM



Hinduism is an Indian religion, or a way of life. Hinduism is widely practiced in South Asia mainly in India and Nepal. Hinduism is the oldest religion in the world, and Hindus refer to it as Sanātana Dharma, "the eternal tradition," or the "eternal way," beyond human history.

The Hindu tradition has no founder and is best understood as a group of closely connected religious traditions, rather than a single religion, representing nevertheless a complete way of life. Hinduism can be traced back to at least 5000 BCE in the civilisations of the Indus Valley, from which the name is derived. It is inextricably bound up with culture and social structure. The teachings are enshrined within many holy books, including the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Srimad Bhagvat Geeta.

For many Hindus the numerous gods and goddesses of Hinduism are seen as aspects of the One divine principle, Brahman. The belief that there are many ways to worship Brahman leads to a tolerance of other religions.

At the heart of Hinduism is Dharma, the ancient law which underlies the order of the universe and is reflected in a moral and ethical life. Karma, the law of action and reaction, teaches humans how to behave, and shapes their destinies. Hindus consider that religion is a sanctified and disciplined path that one should follow to reach a higher goal, i.e. to become a better person.

Hindus believe in reincarnation, through myriad lives, until release is obtained. Reincarnation is bound up with the ancient Hindu principle of compassion for all living things. Release into divine bliss can be reached by human beings through the Way of Action, the Way of Knowledge, the Way of Devotion or the Way of Meditation.

Practices may vary considerably among Hindus, according to where they come from, according to caste, and according to personal preference. Although the caste system is not legally sanctioned in India, it still influences many people, and those from the traditionally higher castes may not wish to be touched by, or eat with, lower caste people.

DEITIES

The Hindu trinity consists of Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Preserver, and Shiva the Destroyer. Their feminine counterparts are Saraswati, the wife of Brahma, Lakshmi, the wife of Vishnu, and Parvati the wife of Shiva. The followers of the last two form two major sects.

BELIFES

Prominent themes in Hindu beliefs include (but are not restricted to) Dharma (ethics/duties), Samsāra (the continuing cycle of birth, life, death and rebirth), Karma (action, intent and consequences), Moksha (liberation from samsara or liberation in this life), and the various Yogas (paths or practices).

Central to Hinduism is the belief in a supreme God Brahman, the universal soul, which is found in everything.

Brahman is worshipped in a variety of forms, including Vishnu, Krishna, Rama, Shiva and several others. Hinduism does not have any founder.

Hindus believe that life is a cycle of birth, death, and rebirth, governed by Karma.

Hindus believe that every action has an effect and there is a cause for everything. This is called the law of Karma.

Hindus believe that the soul passes through a cycle of lives and that the next life is dependent on how the previous life was lived.

CONCEPT OF GOD

Hinduism is a diverse system of thought with beliefs spanning monotheism, polytheism, panentheism, pantheism, pandeism, monism, and atheism among others; and its concept of God is complex and depends upon each individual and the tradition and philosophy followed. It is sometimes referred to as henotheistic (i.e., involving devotion to a single god while accepting the existence of others), but any such term is an overgeneralization.

HOLY BOOKS

The oldest scriptures in Hinduism are the Vedas.

The main Hindu scriptures are:

- the Vedas, a collection of hymns praising the Vedic gods. Veda means 'knowledge'
- the Ramayana, long epic poems about Rama and Sita
- the Mahabharata, which includes the Bhagavad Gita
- the Puranas, a collection of stories about the different incarnations and the lives of saints.

ABORTION

Hindu medical ethics stem from the principle of ahimsa - of non-violence. When considering abortion, the Hindu way is to choose the action that will do least harm to all involved: the mother and father, the foetus and society. Hinduism is therefore generally opposed to abortion except where it is necessary to save the mother's life.

ABLUTIONS AND HYGIENE

Some Hindus prefer washing in free flowing water and they would require water for washing to be available in the same room as the WC.

rites of passage

Birth, The Ceremony of the Sacred Thread, Marriage, Death

BIRTH

The birth of a baby is celebrated, especially the birth of the first boy. Soon after the birth it is customary for a close relative to be invited to put a drop of water and honey on the infant's tongue, celebrating the sweetness of life and the bond with the family. Mothers usually rest for about forty days after the birth and do not prepare food. Sometimes the baby's head is

shaved at the 30th day. Sometimes the baby's name is kept a secret at first.

BABIES RITES

Hindu rituals (sanskars) begin before a child is born. Soon after a couple are married, a prayer called Garbhadana (conception) is recited for fulfillment of one's parental obligations.

During the third month of pregnancy the ceremony of Punsavana (fetus protection) is performed. This is done for the strong physical growth of the foetus.

The Simantonyana is performed during the seventh month. This is the equivalent of a baby shower and means 'satisfying the craving of the pregnant mother'. Prayers are offered for the mother and child with emphasis on healthy mental development of the unborn child.

Once the child enters the world, Jatakarma is performed to welcome the child into the family, by putting some honey in the child's mouth and whispering the name of God in the child's ear. Other rituals include a naming ceremony (Namakarna), the Nishkarmana (the child's first trip out) and the Annaprāsana, (the child's first taste of solid food).

The ear-piercing ceremony (Karnavedha) and first haircut (Mundan) ceremonies are also considered highly significant. These sacraments are performed on both the sexes.

Head shaving is connected to the removal of impurities.

When the child reaches school-going age, the Upanayana (sacred thread) ceremony is performed. The three strands of the sacred thread represent the three vows (to respect the knowledge, the parents and the society) taken before the start of formal education.

SACRED THREAD

The Ceremony of the Sacred Thread is an ancient rite of passage into adolescence reserved for male members of the three upper castes, the Brahmins, Shatriyas, and Vaishyas. Like the Jewish bar mitzvah, it represents a rebirth or initiation into the religious community.

Traditionally, this rite of passage served to introduce the devotee into religious life. In the presence of a guru, or holy teacher, the young man shaves his head and dons a saffron robe. Taking up a simple walking stick, he renounces all material possessions and then receives the sacred thread. The unadorned Thread is symbolic of the interconnectedness of all things. It consists of seven strands, each of which represents a different virtue or quality. They are as follows:

1. Power of speech
2. Memory
3. Intelligence
4. Forgiveness
5. Steadfastness
6. Prosperity
7. Good reputation

The boy promises to embody these qualities, and for the rest of his life he wears the sacred thread as a symbol of his coming-of-age.

The ceremony concludes with a fire sacrifice, the most common form of ritual in Hinduism. In early times, the initiate would follow his teacher into a faraway dwelling to study scriptures and to lead a life of spiritual practice and austerity. Afterwards, he would reenter society, marry, and raise a family. Nowadays, only young men seeking to become priests or ascetics live with a guru.

MARRIAGE

Most Hindu marriages are arranged by the parents, although the children must also be happy with their chosen partner. Hindus almost always marry within the same caste, although in modern times there are increasing exceptions.

Hindu marriage ceremonies can vary a great deal but the central focus is the sacred fire, around which the couple walks (5-7 times) while the priest reads aloud from the scriptures. A wedding can take place at any time of the year but the time of day is likely to be carefully chosen according to its astrological significance for the couple. Most Hindu marriages are arranged through the families. The pre-marriage celebrations last 3-5 days and involve all the relations. The bride usually goes to live with the bridegroom's family. Red and pink are considered to be auspicious colors to wear at a wedding ceremony.

After the marriage ceremony, which is filled with Hindu ritual and devotions to various deities, the marriage is considered to be permanent.

DIVORCE

The concept of divorce is unthinkable to many Hindus, particularly Indian Hindus. Hinduism does not acknowledge divorce as a proper or valid course for a couple to take.

DEATH

After death the body should always be left covered. It is important to consult the family and ask if they wish to perform the last rites. It is traditional that female relatives wash the body of a dead woman; male relatives wash a dead man. Hindus are cremated. Usually the eldest son of the deceased takes a leading part in the ceremonies. Hindus may wish their ashes to be sprinkled in a holy river, such as the Ganges. Many carry Ganges water with them, and believe that it should be the last thing that is put into the mouth when a Hindu dies. White is the color of mourning.

DIET

Hindus do not eat beef because cows are held to be sacred and they may find derogatory comments about cows offensive. Many Hindus are strict vegetarians and do not eat any sort of meat. They may also avoid eggs. Hindus would prefer not to use plates and utensils which have been used for non-vegetarian food. As for other vegetarians, food should be prepared and served separately from meat dishes. Some Hindus will only eat with their right hand, and may expect visitors to do the same.

DRESS

It is not generally acceptable for a girl or woman to have uncovered legs. Saris, or loose top and trousers are normal wear.

The emphasis on modesty means that joining activities such as swimming may be problematic.

Gold jewellery worn next to the skin is believed by some Hindus to ward off diseases and these items will be removed reluctantly. Married women often wear a gold brooch given to them by their husbands, as well as gold bangles. Men of the highest caste (Brahmins) may wear a sacred thread over their right shoulder and around the body; it should only be removed if absolutely necessary.

FASTING

Very few Hindus would insist on fasting whilst in hospital, though they may practise this as part of their faith. Only the more devout Hindus, often women, are likely to fast. Sometimes fasting implies eating only 'pure' foods such as fruits or yoghurt, rather than complete abstinence.

FESTIVALS

Hindus celebrate many holy days:

- Diwali (the festival of lights) is the best known
- Holi
- Navaratri (celebrating fertility and harvest),
- Raksha Bandhan (celebrating the bond between brother and sister)
- Janmashtami (Krishna's birthday)

Notable festivals are Holi (in the spring to mark the death of winter) and Diwali (in the autumn, celebrated with lamps and candles).

GREETINGS

When a younger Hindu greets an elder, the younger may touch the feet of the elder, as a mark of respect. When meeting with a family, or another group of Hindus, it is usual to begin by addressing greetings to the eldest member first.

Public displays of physical intimacy such as kissing and hugging are not the norm amongst Hindus.

IN A HINDU HOME

Most Hindu homes contain a small shrine to one of more gods. These will often feature a statue perhaps an aum symbol, candles and offerings of food or other gifts for the deity. It would be disrespectful to remove or handle things placed at the shrine.

When receiving a visitor it is considered polite to offer some food and drink and it could be seen as offensive for the visitor to refuse such offers.

MODESTY

Hindu women are likely to have a strong preference to be treated, examined and cared for by female professionals and should not be cared for in mixed wards except in emergency situations.

NAMES

Hindus may have several names – a personal name, a special name, and a family name.

ORGAN DONATION

No religious law prohibits Hindus from donating their organs and tissues. Life after death is a strong belief of Hindus and is an ongoing process of rebirth. This could be seen as reflecting positively on the concept of organ donation and transplantation.

PILGRIMAGE

Religious pilgrimage plays an important role in Hinduism. There are many holy sites in India, each dedicated to a certain god, a group of gods, or a famous happening. At these centers of worship, the devotee is energized by history, by the meeting of the spiritual and the earthly.

Within India there are four principal places of pilgrimage resting on the four compass points. Hindus visit these sacred spots in a popular all-country route. The pilgrimage normally lasts ten weeks.

HOLY PLACE:

Himalayan Char Dham - Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri, and Yamunotri. Varanasi/Kashi, Allahabad/Prayag, Haridwar-Rishikesh, Mathura-Vrindavan, Somnath and Ayodhya.

WORSHIP

Puja (worship) takes place in the Mandir (temple).

Mandirs vary in size from small village shrines to large buildings, surrounded by walls.

People can also visit the Mandir at any time to pray and participate in the bhajans (religious songs).

Hinduism is based on the community, rather than the congregation. The home is a place for devotion, but worship also takes place in the temple, or mandir. Visitors to a mandir will be expected to remove their shoes and cover their heads. They should also dress modestly. Seating is on the floor, and it is considered disrespectful to sit with feet pointing towards the sacred area at the front of the temple. Mandirs are only likely to be found in major cities.

Hindus can also worship at home, and many have a special shrine dedicated to certain gods and goddesses.

The giving of offerings is an important part of Hindu worship. It's a common practice to present gifts, such as flowers or oils, to a god or goddess.

HUMANISM



Humanism is an approach to life based on reason and our common humanity, and recognises moral values. It is founded on human nature and experience. The Humanist tradition has developed over thousands of years, in Eastern and Western civilisations, building on many complementary philosophies.

The defining characteristics of a Humanist are:

- no belief in any god, in an afterlife, or in anything supernatural
- the belief that we should all try to live full and happy lives, and help others to do the same
- the belief that all situations and people deserve to be judged on their own merits, by standards of reason and humanity
- the belief that individualism and social cooperation are equally important.

Humanists try to observe the golden rule: "Do not do to others what you would not like done to you." Some Humanists would say they are atheists, while some prefer to describe themselves as agnostics - all live without religious or superstitious beliefs. A large section of the population is not religious, but would not say they were Humanist.

CELEBRATIONS

There are local celebrants, who are happy to arrange ceremonies to celebrate birth, marriage and death, appropriate for the individuals concerned.

DIET, TREATMENT, MODESTY ETC

There are no rules about any of these things for Humanists. They should be regarded as individuals, free to make their preference known.

FORM-FILLING

When filling in forms some people will want to say "none" or "I don't know" when asked what religion they are. Some may say "Humanist".

GREETING

There are no specific guidelines on this. Normally Humanists will adopt the convention of the country in which they live.

IN A HUMANIST HOME

You should show the same basic level of politeness and respect that you would wish shown in your own home. If individual Humanists have any 'house rules' (like not smoking indoors), then they should let visitors know.

HOSPITAL ETIQUETTE

When religious ceremonies are conducted for another patient you could either draw the curtains round the bed of the religious patient or ask if those not participating in the service in the ward would like their own curtains drawn.

HUMANIST VISITORS AND LOCAL CONTACTS

Just as religious patients may enjoy a visit from a chaplain or priest, non-religious patients, especially the terminally ill and their families, might like a visit from a Humanist hospital visitor.

ISLAM



Islam is an Arabic word meaning "submission" or "surrender". The word originally derived from the word "salaam", which means to be at perfect peace. Its full connotation is, therefore, "the perfect peace which comes when one's life is totally submitted to God." Islam, based on the Oneness of God, emphasises divine mercy and forgiveness.

Islam is an Abrahamic monotheistic religion teaching that there is only one God (Allah) and that Muhammad is a messenger of God. It is the world's second-largest religion and the fastest-growing major religion in the world.

Allah (meaning 'the God') is the Originator of all that exists and thus the Creator of the world and of man. Islam is the religion of every prophet of Allah from Adam through to Muhammad among whom are included Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus (peace be upon them). All brought the same message of the unity of God and called for submission to His will. The prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was not the founder of Islam, but rather the last prophet and messenger of Allah. He brought the final revelation, the Qur'an, in the 7th century CE. The Quran is the central religious text of Islam, which Muslims believe to be a revelation from God (Allah).

Muslims repudiate polytheism and idolatry, called Shirk, and reject the Christian doctrine of the Trinity.

Mecca is regarded as the holiest city in the religion of Islam and a pilgrimage to it known as the Hajj is obligatory for all able Muslims.

A mosque is a place where Muslims worship and pray to God.

ABLUTIONS AND HYGIENE

Muslims have to observe certain rules of cleanliness and prefer water for washing in the same room as the WC. They prefer

to wash in free-flowing water and need shower facilities. Ablutions are performed before each prayer-time. After menstruation women are required to take a full bath or shower. Personal cleanliness is very important to Muslims and understood to be part of faith. Muslim adults are required to take a bath at least once a week and generally shave their armpits and pubes.

ABORTION

Abortion is unacceptable, except in extreme circumstances, as when the mother's life is in danger. It should be performed before the sixteenth week of pregnancy.

BIRTH

It is Muslim custom to make the Adhan (pronounced "azan"), the call to prayer, at the moment a child is born, so that these words "there is no deity worthy of worship except Allah" are the first words the child hears. Any Muslim may perform this task, though it is usually done by the father.

In the seventh day, the aqiqah ceremony is performed, in which an animal is sacrificed and its meat is distributed among the poor. The head of the child is also shaved, and an amount of money equaling the weight of the child's hair is donated to the poor. Apart from fulfilling the basic needs of food, shelter, and education, the parents or the elderly members of family also undertake the task of teaching moral qualities, religious knowledge, and religious practices to the children.

Where possible only female maternity staff should be present during child birth. It is important that maternity staff know about these customs and facilitate them. In cases of miscarriage or stillbirth there may be a funeral ceremony. Some Muslims may wish to bury the placenta.

CALENDAR

The Islamic, Muslim, or Hijri calendar is a lunar calendar consisting of 12 months in a year of 354 or 355 days. It is used (often alongside the Gregorian calendar) to date events in many Muslim countries. It is also used by Muslims to determine the proper days of Islamic holidays and rituals, such as the annual period of fasting and the proper time for the pilgrimage to Mecca.

CIRCUMCISION

In Islam, circumcision of boys is required, and it is usually performed at an early age, preferably on the 7th day. Some clarification on whether the hospital will perform the operation is required, as the parents may ask for it to be done before the child leaves hospital. Information should be on hand about what facilities are available.

DEATH

The patient's face should, if possible, be turned towards Makkah, Saudi Arabia (South East) and a relative or another Muslim should be summoned to whisper in Arabic in the ear of the Muslim the article of the faith "there is no deity worthy of worship but Allah". These should be the last words heard by the dying person. If possible Muslims may also recite the Quran audibly near the patient.

The body should be handled with care and it should not be uncovered, except for washing. The body should be washed by people of the same sex and then enshrouded in a threefold white garment called kafan. Placing the body on a bier, it is first taken to a mosque where funeral prayer is offered for the dead person, and then to the graveyard for burial. For Muslims it is required that the body be buried as soon as possible. A post-mortem should be avoided if legally possible and the body should be released quickly to the relatives. It is customary amongst some cultures for the bereaved to express their emotion freely when a relative has died; therefore privacy should be provided. Cremation is prohibited. Islam states that the body belongs to God and all of it should be buried. Therefore no part of it should be cut out or harmed although Muslims differ about donation. Therefore autopsy is prohibited except on sound medical or judicial grounds. Euthanasia is forbidden.

Since Muslim funerals are plain, donations to charities are preferred to flowers. Widows from some cultural backgrounds may stay indoors for 130 days after the funeral.

DIET

Pork and anything containing pork, cooked near pork, or processed using pork extracts is forbidden. This includes lard, gelatine and some cheeses. Animals must be killed in the right way, by a Muslim, and with prayer. Some Muslims consider shellfish, apart from prawns, and fish without scales as prohibited. Muslims do not eat carnivorous animals or anything that feeds on dirt or blood. Acceptable food is called "halal" and forbidden food is "haram". Jewish kosher food would be acceptable to Muslims. Any food and drink containing alcohol is forbidden. Alcohol is, however, permissible as a constituent of medication, if there is no other alternative. All halal food should be prepared, cooked and served separately to other food.

FASTING

During the month of Ramadan a Muslim does not eat or drink (even water) between sunrise and sunset (between the first prayer and the fourth prayer of the day). Fasting is excused for women during menstruation, pregnancy, after recent childbirth, or when breast-feeding; it is excused for all who are very old or young, sick or on a journey. It should be noted that fasting may be interpreted as not accepting anything into the body in any way, including medication by injection.

FESTIVALS

The major festivals are Eid-ul-Fitr, which brings Ramadan to an end, and Eid-ul-Adha, which marks the end of the time of the pilgrimage to Makkah (Haj). These are important times for families to be together.

FIVE PILLARS

The five pillars of Islam are the tenets and practices essential to the faith. These are: the proclamation that God is One and Muhammad is his prophet (Shahadah), offering prayer 5 times a day (Salat), almsgiving (Zakat), fasting during Ramadan (Saum), and undertaking a pilgrimage to Mecca (Haj) at least once in a lifetime, if it is possible. Both Shia and Sunni sects agree on the essential details for the performance of these acts.

GREETINGS

When two Muslims greet each other they might say "Assalamu Alaikum" (peace be upon you). Modesty discourages

physical forms of greeting (kissing, hugging etc.), between members of the opposite sex, unless they are related. For some Muslim communities, shaking hands is acceptable, even between members of the opposite sex. In some Islamic countries, such as Morocco, young men may have close friendships and hold hands in public, but this practice is cultural rather than Islamic.

HOLY BOOK

The Qur'an (Koran) is Islam's holy book, which Muslims believe was revealed by God to the Prophet Muhammad. Qur'anic revelations are regarded by Muslims as the sacred word of God, intended to correct any errors in previous holy books such as the Old and New Testaments. The Quran is divided into 114 chapters (suras) which combined, contain 6,236 verses (āyāt). There are 114 chapters in the Qur'an. Qur'an is written in the old Arabic dialect. The Quran is more concerned with moral guidance than legislation, and is considered the "sourcebook of Islamic principles and values".

HOLY SITES

There are sites, which are mentioned or referred to in the Quran, that are considered holy to Islam.

Mecca and Medina are the two holiest cities in Islam, unanimous among all sects. In the Islamic tradition, the Kaaba in Mecca is considered the holiest site, followed by the Prophet's Mosque in Medina. Additionally, Al-Aqsa Mosque in the Old City of Jerusalem is also quite significant, being the third holiest site in Sunni tradition, and one of the holiest sites in Shi'ite tradition.

HAJJ/PILGRIMAGE

For Muslims, the Hajj is the fifth and final pillar of Islam. It occurs in the month of Dhul Hijjah which is the twelfth month of the Islamic lunar calendar. It is the journey that every sane adult Muslim must undertake at least once in their lives if they can afford it and are physically able. The pilgrimage occurs from the 8th to 12th (or in some cases 13th) of Dhu al-Hijjah, the last month of the Islamic calendar.

IN A MUSLIM HOME

You might see a copy of the Qur'an in pride of place, and you might also see prayer mats ready for use. You should offer to remove shoes when entering a Muslim home.

MARRIAGE

Marriage, which serves as the foundation of a Muslim family, is a civil contract which consists of an offer and acceptance between two qualified parties in the presence of two witnesses. The groom is required to pay a bridal gift (mahr) to the bride, as stipulated in the contract. Most families in the Islamic world are monogamous. Polyandry, a practice wherein a woman takes on two or more husbands is prohibited in Islam. However, Muslim men are allowed to practice polygyny, that is, they can have more than one wife at the same time, up to a total of four. A man does not need approval of his first wife for a second marriage as there is no evidence in the Qur'an or hadith to suggest this.

There is no set form of marriage, as Muslims come from many different cultural backgrounds. Normally speaking Muslims marry partners from within their own faith, but both bride and groom should give their consent. Normally a bride's guardian has to consent too.

Under Islamic law, divorce is allowed, but discouraged.

Pregnancy outside marriage is considered a cardinal sin. Cohabitation and adultery are likewise forbidden.

MEDICINE

Islam has made major contributions to the study of medicine and doctors are highly respected.

Muslims from some cultural backgrounds would not expect to have medical information discussed directly with the patient, preferring to refer the matter to male relatives, including uncles and cousins.

MODESTY

Men and women are required to dress and behave modestly. Some Muslim women prefer to keep their hair (and neck) covered in public at all times. In Islam free mixing of sexes is not encouraged and this is sometimes interpreted quite strictly. If it is necessary to speak to a Muslim woman, it may be necessary for other family members, including children, to be present. Muslims should not be accommodated in mixed wards except in an emergency. Generally Muslims prefer to be examined by medical staff of the same sex. It is always preferable to have female professionals to care for women.

MOSQUE

Visitors to a mosque will be expected to dress modestly, with legs and arms covered. Women should have their heads covered too, and are asked to avoid visiting a mosque when they are menstruating. Shoes are removed before entering a mosque. Women and men sit separately in a mosque. Seating is on the floor, and care ought to be taken not to point the feet towards the 'Qibla' (the wall niche which shows the direction of Makkah – the direction Muslims face when praying).

Music and raising ones voice in the mosque is forbidden.

PLACE OF WORSHIP

A Mosque is a place of worship for followers of Islam. Many mosques have elaborate domes, minarets, and prayer halls, in varying styles of architecture.

PRAYER

Muslims are required to pray five times a day at set times, according to the positions of the sun. They face towards Makkah and prostrate themselves to pray. Women who are menstruating, or who have post-natal bleeding are not required to do this. Muslims physically unable to stand may make their prayer sitting, or lying down. Shoes are removed and heads usually covered before prayer. Muslims are required to pray in a clean area with clean clothes. Urine and excrement in an area or on clothes will have to be cleaned first before obligatory prayer. Adult males are highly encouraged to take part in special prayers on Fridays which includes a sermon.

JAINISM



Jainism Symbol

Jainism is an ancient religion originating in India. It has links with Buddhism and Hinduism but restrictions on foreign travel have limited its spread. Jains believe in an infinite universe with no beginning or end – there is no creator-God. A sage who has achieved enlightenment, is known as a "Jina", a "victorious one" which is the root of the name. Of its twenty-four sages, the latest is Mahavira, born c600BCE. Central to Jainist philosophy is the idea that all things, including objects such as stones, metal and earth, are alive and feeling. Therefore, Jains practise a strict code of ahimsa (non-violence) that permeates every aspect of life. Jainism is an ascetic religion, which emphasises the need to distance oneself from material cares, leading to the principle of aparigraha (non-possession/ renunciation).

Jainism does not have any specific holy book like the Bhagavad Geeta, the Quran or the Bible. They have certain scriptures which are considered as very sacred. These scriptures are called as Agams. Agams are the Jain texts which are based on the discourses of the tirthankaras. Indrabhuti Gautam swami (chief disciple of Lord Mahavira) compiled these scriptures which comprises of 12 parts. These 12 parts are called as 12 Angas (Sanskrit word for parts). The twelfth anga comprises of 14 Purvas.

The Jain community is divided into two major denominations, Digambara and Śvētāmbara. Monks of the Digambara ("sky-clad") tradition do not wear clothes. Female monastics of the Digambara sect wear unstitched plain white sarees and are referred to as Aryikas. Śvētāmbara ("white-clad") monastics on the other hand, wear white seamless clothes.

ABLUTIONS

Jainism has no dogma, so each individual decides how much to adhere to the Jain code. Strict Jains, such as mendicants, often give up washing, in deference to the two main principles of Jainism. The principle of renunciation teaches that the body is unclean, and that spiritual enlightenment can only be attained by austere detachment from material cares (such as hygiene or

personal comfort). The principle of non-violence means that Jains avoid killing all creatures, including tiny bacteria on the body. They might also wish to avoid polluting water with the dirt from their bodies.

CHASTITY AND ABORTION

Intercourse is usually seen as a procreative function only. The principle of ahimsa means that abortion is not acceptable. Family planning as a means to reduce unnecessary suffering may be accepted by some.

CLOTHING

Jainism has adapted to the modern world and attitudes to clothing will vary, but the Jain code of purity and non-possession makes it likely that simple and practical clothes will be preferred. Leather is unlikely to be worn. Jain worshippers, especially Shvetambara monks, often wear a piece of cloth over their mouth to prevent them damaging the creatures that live in the air, and as a symbol of their dedication to purity in all things. Often a soft brush is carried to sweep insects away in their path, to avoid killing them.

COMPASSION

There is a strong element of personal responsibility in Jainism. Although there is such an emphasis on detachment, to allow people around you to suffer or cause others to suffer is considered contrary to the principle of ahimsa. Jains are often very active on the social and political fronts and are concerned and active on animal rights fronts. Family pets are common.

DEATH

Since Jains believe in an infinite universe, they subscribe to the theory of reincarnation, and believe that the state of one's karma will affect what happens to a person in the future. Jains believe that it is possible to escape the endless cycle of life and death through absolute detachment from worldly cares. Much emphasis is placed on self-purification i.e., salvation within oneself, through one's own actions. It is considered rare and precious to attain a human birth. Jains are cremated after their death.

DIET

Jains are usually strict vegetarians, although they may have adapted their diet to the modern world. Some are vegan. Jain monks, and others who wish to observe Jain principles rigorously, may avoid all foods that destroy life, such as root vegetables, or fruit with lots of seeds in it. Eggs, honey and alcohol are often avoided as well. All mendicants and some lay people only eat in daylight, to avoid hurting insects in the dark.

DIVORCE

Within Jainism, divorce is considered an act of violence, an invitation for misery and confusion. Partners in the marriage are strongly encouraged to seek harmony and pacifism with themselves and with each other instead of terminating the marriage. Jains do not exclude divorcees from the faith, but they consider divorce to be theologically incompatible with their beliefs.

EMPLOYMENT

Jains avoid violent professions, such as the meat-trade, or military careers. Even farming is considered destructive, since activities like ploughing the earth destroy minute creatures, and disrupt the earth itself. Manufacturing presents problems, since Jains believe metal and wood have feelings. Jains tend to engage in trade or become tertiary services providers, such as doctors, lawyers and accountants.

FASTING

Fasting is very common in Jain spirituality. Although a Jain may take it upon him or herself to fast at any time, most Jains will fast at special times during the year, at festivals and holy days. The monsoon period (in India) is a time of fasting, and fasting is a feature of Jain festivals. Fasting is more often done by Jain women than men.

It is not sufficient for a Jain simply to not eat when fasting. They must also stop wanting to eat. If they continue to desire food the fast is pointless.

There are several types of fasting:

- Complete fasting: giving up food and water completely for a period
- Partial fasting: eating less than you need to avoid hunger
- Vruti Sankshepa: limiting the number of items of food eaten
- Rasa Parityaga: giving up favourite foods

FASTING TO DEATH

Santhara or Sallenkhana is a procedure in which a Jain stops eating with the intention of preparing for death. This is different from suicide as it is not taken in passionate mood of anger, deceit or other emotions, but is undertaken only when the body is no longer capable of serving its owner as an instrument of spirituality and when inevitability of death is a matter of undisputed certainty.

The intention is to purify the body, and remove all thought of the physical things from the mind. As well as giving up food and water, the ascetic abandons all desires and dislikes so that they can concentrate exclusively on the spiritual as they approach death. (Human rights organisations say santhara is comparable to suicide and euthanasia and must not be allowed to continue.)

FESTIVALS

The holiest Jain festival is Paryushana-parva, the annual festival of confession, which takes place in August or September. The most important socially is Mahavira-jayanti, the celebration of the birthday of the Mahavira, which occurs in March or April. Both are attached to lunar cycles.

HOLY DAYS

Mahavira Jayanti - This festival celebrates the day of Mahavira's birth. Jains will gather in temples to hear readings of the teachings of Mahavira. Images of Mahavira are paraded through the streets with much pomp and ceremony.

Paryushana - This festival consists of eight days of intensive fasting, repentance and pujas. Often monks will be invited to give teachings from the Jain scriptures.

Diwali - This festival is celebrated throughout all of India. In Jainism it has special significance, as on this day in 527 BCE (according to Svetambara tradition) that Mahavira gave his last teachings and attained ultimate liberation. On Diwali parents will often give sweets to their children, and lamps are lit all over India. Some very religious Jains will also fast for the two days of Diwali, following the example of Mahavira.

Kartak Purnima - Following Diwali in October/November is an important festival called Kartak Purnima. This is considered to be an auspicious time for pilgrimage to the sacred sites associated with the Jain religion.

Mauna Agyaras - This is a day-long observance of fasting and silence. Jains also meditate on the five great beings.

MARRIAGE

In order to get married in the Jain religion, partners will need to perform important pre-wedding, wedding, and post-wedding rituals. The pre-wedding rituals consist of setting a date and time for the wedding, performing the Mada Mandap and the Barati and Aarti. The most important wedding ritual is the Phere. This is when the couple walks around the sacred fire four times. Important post-wedding rituals to be completed are the blessing of the marriage, almsgiving, and the reception at the groom's house.

PILGRIMAGE

Pilgrimage plays an important part in Jain life for Digambaras and some Svetambaras, although there are no compulsory pilgrimages. When lay Jains go on a pilgrimage they take on some of the lifestyle and attitudes of a Jain ascetic (a monk or nun).

Jains may visit any number of temples or other locations that are associated with the lives and deeds of the Tirthankaras. One of the most famous and holy sites of pilgrimage for Jains is in Shatrunjaya in Gujarat. It is one of five holy mountains and contains many temples.

WORSHIP

Daily spiritual practices

Jains try to carry out certain spiritual acts every day. These are:

- prayer
- honouring the tirthankaras
- paying respect to monks
- repenting for sins
- self-control through sitting meditation for 48 minutes
- going without something pleasurable

PLACE OF WORSHIP

A Jain temple, Derasar or Basadi is a place of worship for Jains. Jain temples are built with various architectural designs, but there are mainly two type of Jain temples:

Shikar-bandhi Jain temple (one with a dome)

Ghar Jain temple (Jain house temple – one without a dome).

There is always a main deity also known as moolnayak in every Jain temple placed inside a sanctum called "Gambhara" (Garbha Griha). A manastambha ("column of honor") is a pillar that is often constructed in front of Jain temples.

Temple worship

Temple worship is of more importance to lay Jains than to Jain monks and nuns.

Many lay Jains focus their everyday religious life more strongly on devotional activities and temple worship, than on strictly following the Jain vows, probably because it is a great deal easier to go to the temple than to follow the Jain code strictly.

Although monks and nuns are often involved in temple life - particularly as teachers - they do not run temples in the way that the priests of other religions do. Some Jain communities (Sthanakavasis and Terapanthis in particular) are opposed to temple worship.

MONKS AND NUNS

Jain monks and nuns should live the simplest and most austere lives, as this prescription of the qualities of a monk shows. Jain lay people will show their monks and nuns great respect and veneration, inviting them to give teachings and confessing their faults before them. Monks and nuns depend on charity and are permitted to seek their food. Lay Jains regard it as a duty to provide food and other necessities of life for monks and nuns, but monks and nuns will only accept food that has not been specially prepared for them.

Jain monks and nuns live a hard life, with no or few worldly possessions. Although they are separated from their birth family they regard the whole world as their family. They live in small groups of five or six, not in big monastic communities, and spend their day in meditation and study. The senior monk of the group will teach each morning to an audience of monks, nuns and lay people. The monks depend on food that is given to them by local people, but only eat between sunrise and sunset.

WOMEN AND EQUALITY

Jainism is a religion of religious equality, devoted to recognising the rights of all living creatures, so not surprisingly it accepts that women are able to play their part on the road to liberation. But although Jainism is in many ways dedicated to equality, for some Jains a woman's very femaleness creates spiritual inequality.

JUDAISM



Star of David

Judaism is one of the oldest monotheistic religions and was founded over 3500 years ago in the Middle East. It is a total way of life, with a code of conduct which applies to every aspect of life from the cradle to the grave, from sunset to sunset.

The basic laws of Judaism are enshrined in the Torah (the first five books of Moses) and also in the Talmud, which is a vast collection of commentaries, expositions and interpretations. The Ten Commandments are embedded in the Torah.

Jews believe that God appointed the Jews to be his chosen people in order to set an example of holiness and ethical behaviour to the world.

Judaism was founded by Moses, although Jews trace their history back to Abraham.

Jews believe that there is only one God with whom they have a covenant.

Traditionally, Jews recite prayers three times daily, Shacharit, Mincha, and Ma'ariv with a fourth prayer, Mussaf added on Shabbat and holidays.

Most of the prayers in a traditional Jewish service can be recited in solitary prayer, although communal prayer is preferred. Communal prayer requires a quorum of ten adult Jews, called a minyan. In nearly all Orthodox and a few Conservative circles, only male Jews are counted toward a minyan; most Conservative Jews and members of other Jewish denominations count female Jews as well.

Jewish holidays are special days in the Jewish calendar, which celebrate moments in Jewish history, as well as central themes in the relationship between God and the world, such as creation, revelation, and redemption.

HOLY DAYS

Shabbat, High Holy Days: Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, Purim, Hanukkah, Fast Day, Israeli holidays

The most important Jewish holy days are the Sabbath, the three pilgrimage festivals (Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot) and the two High Holy Days (Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur). For observant Jews, it is forbidden to work on any of these days.

ABLUTIONS

Jews are required to wash their hands before eating. In communities where a ritual bath exists, it is used for purification by men and women before the Sabbath, and by women before their wedding and after menstruation.

CIRCUMCISION

The circumcision and naming of Jewish boys (Brit Milah) takes place on the eighth day after birth. The ceremony is performed by a Jewish practitioner (mohel), and usually takes place in the home. It may be deferred if the baby is unwell. The name of a baby girl is announced by her father in the synagogue.

COMING OF AGE

Jewish boys are Bar Mitzvah at the age of 13, when they take their full part with other men in the life of the synagogue. Girls are Bat-Mitzvah at 12 years.

DEATH

Euthanasia is forbidden. A Jewish patient who is dying may wish to hear the Shema (Hear O Israel, the Lord your God is one God...), or the 23rd Psalm ('The Lord is my Shepherd...'). Traditionally someone who is dying should not be left alone, and relatives are likely to sit with the dying person during the last hours or days. The Chevra Kadisha, Jewish Burial Society, should be notified and it will take care of all the arrangements. Autopsy is not generally acceptable. The funeral

should normally take place within 24 hours, though the body cannot be moved on the Sabbath. Cremation is not generally acceptable. Flowers are not usually sent. Simplicity rather than show is stressed at Jewish funerals. Generally mourners do not wear black or buy new clothes for the occasion.

There may be open displays of grief at the funeral. Close relatives are likely to help to shovel the earth onto the coffin and other mourners can follow suit. A mourning period of seven days takes place for family members, during which they will not be expected to work.

Jews do not emphasise a belief in the afterlife, preferring to live well in this life, leaving the rest in God's hands.

DIET

Most Jews will require kosher food, specially prepared under supervision. Jews will not eat pork in any form. Among other forbidden foods are rabbit, shellfish, crustacea and fish without fins and scales. Most Jews will accept a vegetarian diet in hospital or in another home. Observant Jews obey the rule that says meat and milk products may not be eaten together at the same meal. During Passover unleavened bread must be eaten, precluding most cakes and wheat-based foods. Other special foods may be required.

DRESS

Orthodox Jewish men keep their heads covered all the time, and all Jewish men do so in the synagogue. Orthodox women also keep their heads covered and some will wear a wig. Some will not wear trousers or sleeveless tops. Liberal Jews may not be distinguishable by any dress code. Some observant Jews wear a beard and may also have side-locks. During various periods in the religious calendar, some Jews will not shave at all.

FASTING

The main fast of the year occurs in the autumn on Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement). It is a total fast lasting 25 hours, though medical advice will be respected if fasting is considered harmful to health. Religious Jews also observe other fast days. Young children, pregnant and nursing women, diabetics and the sick are not expected to fast.

FESTIVALS

The Jewish calendar is a lunar calendar, and so festival dates vary from year to year when compared with the secular calendar. Among the most important festivals are Rosh Hashanah, which is the New Year, and Sukkot, the Autumn Feast of Tabernacles. Another is Pesach, or Passover, celebrated in the spring and commemorating the Exodus of the Jews from Egypt. In preparation for the Passover, the house is thoroughly spring-cleaned and all traces of leaven are removed. It is important for families to gather together for the major festivals, which like the Sabbath begin at sunset and end an hour after sunset.

GREETING

There are no fixed forms of greeting. Orthodox Jews would not expect overly physical displays of affection between those of the opposite sex. A very Orthodox Jew will not touch any woman other than his wife and immediate family.

IN A JEWISH HOME

A Jewish home can be identified by a mezuzah, a small ornamental case fixed to the right hand doorpost by the front door. It contains the Shema, the central prayer.

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE

According to Orthodox Jews, a Jew is a person whose mother is Jewish. For Progressive "Liberal" Jews, a person is accepted as Jewish if either of their parents is Jewish. Judaism is a family-centred faith and the home is the centre of Jewish life. The weekly Sabbath sustains and strengthens family life.

A wedding is a time for great festivity. A rabbi conducts the marriage ceremony. The couple make their vows under a canopy.

Divorce is acceptable in certain circumstances.

MODESTY

Jews usually dress in a modest manner, and prefer to remain suitably clothed, even in a hospital bed. Mixed-sex wards are not acceptable. There is usually no objection to doctors or nurses of either sex.

PRAYERS

Traditionally, Jews recite prayers three times daily, Shacharit, Mincha, and Ma'ariv with a fourth prayer, Mussaf added on Shabbat and holidays. At the heart of each service is the Amidah or Shemoneh Esrei. Another key prayer in many services is the declaration of faith, the Shema Yisrael (or Shema).

Most of the prayers in a traditional Jewish service can be recited in solitary prayer, although communal prayer is preferred. Communal prayer requires a quorum of ten adult Jews, called a minyan. In nearly all Orthodox and a few Conservative circles, only male Jews are counted toward a minyan; most Conservative Jews and members of other Jewish denominations count female Jews as well.

RITE OF PASSAGE

Brit milah – Welcoming male babies into the covenant through the rite of circumcision on their eighth day of life. The baby boy is also given his Hebrew name in the ceremony. A naming ceremony intended as a parallel ritual for girls, named zaved habat or brit bat, enjoys limited popularity.

Bar mitzvah and Bat mitzvah – This passage from childhood to adulthood takes place when a female Jew is twelve and a male Jew is thirteen years old among Orthodox and some Conservative congregations. In the Reform movement, both girls and boys have their bat/bar mitzvah at age thirteen. This is often commemorated by having the new adults, male only in the Orthodox tradition, lead the congregation in prayer and publicly read a "portion" of the Torah.

Marriage – Marriage is an extremely important lifecycle event. A wedding takes place under a chuppah, or wedding canopy, which symbolizes a happy house. At the end of the ceremony, the groom breaks a glass with his foot, symbolizing the continuous mourning for the destruction of the Temple, and the scattering of the Jewish people.

Death and Mourning – Judaism has a multi-staged mourning practice. The first stage is called the shiva (literally "seven", observed for one week) during which it is traditional to sit at home and be comforted by friends and family, the second is the shloshim (observed for one month) and for those who have lost one of their parents, there is a third stage, avelut yud bet chodesh, which is observed for eleven months.

SABBATH

The Sabbath (seventh day) is the last day of the Jewish week. It begins on Friday at sunset and ends one hour after sunset on Saturday. The beginning of the Sabbath on Friday evening is celebrated by the family with special prayers, rituals and food. The Mother lights the Sabbath candles and recites a blessing. Sabbath observance takes the form of prayer and contemplation, therefore no work is carried out, no money is spent and only travel on foot is permitted. It is important to remember that some Jews interpret the 'day of rest' rule strictly, and some will not even use a phone on the Sabbath.

WORSHIP

Visitors to a synagogue will be expected to dress modestly, with arms and legs covered, and women wearing a skirt or dress, rather than trousers. They may also be expected to cover their heads. In some synagogues, men and women sit separately.

HOLY PLACES

In the Jewish faith, the Temple Mount is the holiest spot on the planet. It is the location where Adam was created, where the binding of Isaac took place and where both the First and Second Temples stood.

The Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron is the second holiest location in the Jewish faith. It is the resting place of all of Israel's beloved biblical patriarchs and matriarchs except for Rachel, who is buried in a separate location.

Rachel's Tomb in Bethlehem is the third holiest site in the Jewish faith.

ABORTION

Judaism does not forbid abortion, but it does not permit abortion on demand. Abortion is only permitted for serious reasons. Judaism expects every case to be considered on its own merits and the decision to be taken after consultation with a rabbi competent to give advice on such matters.

Strict Judaism permits abortion only in cases where continuing the pregnancy would put the mother's life in serious danger.

ORGAN DONATION

In principle, Judaism supports and encourages organ donation in order to save lives (pikuach nefesh).

As all cases are different, Jewish law requires consultation with a competent Rabbinic authority before consent is granted.

If an organ is needed for a specific, immediate transplant then it could be considered a great honour for a Jew to donate organs to save another person's life.

But if the organs were being donated into an organ bank, or for medical research, then this may be looked on less favorably.

CONTRACEPTION

Contraception, including artificial contraception, is permitted in Judaism in appropriate circumstances.

The methods of contraception allowed under Jewish law are those that do not damage the sperm or stop it getting to its intended destination. These are the contraceptive pill and the IUD.

Methods

The female birth control pill is favoured by Jewish couples because male birth control methods are frowned on. This is because they 'waste seed' and because the commandment to have children is primarily directed at men.

Condoms are particularly unacceptable because they block the passage of semen, and because they reduce the pleasure husband and wife get from sex and so interfere with one of the natural purposes of intercourse.

Rabbis disagree about the use of the diaphragm - some forbid it because it blocks the passage of semen, while others state that it is not forbidden because the semen enters the woman's body in a normal manner.

HOLY BOOKS

The Tanakh. It encompasses the Torah, the Nebi'ilm, and the Ketuvim. However, among these, **the Torah is the most sacred, the most important.** It is the heart of Judaism. The other important books are the Mishnah and the Gemara which together form the Talmud, or the Oral Torah.

RASTAFARI



Rastafari - The Lion of Judah

Rastafari, sometimes termed Rastafarianism, is an Abrahamic religion. Classified as both a new religious movement and social movement. Rastafarianism was formulated amongst the dispossessed black population in Jamaica in the early 20th century. A variety of movements grew that sought to emphasise the dignity and pride of black inheritance and promised the possibility of African political and economic independence. Rastafarianism is thus a movement of people who are struggling to reclaim their African ancestry by identifying with African cultures and traditions including elements of the Shango religion of West Africa.

Marcus Garvey was a prominent figure within Rastafarianism who prophesied the crowning of a black king in Africa. Rastafarians believe this prophecy was fulfilled when Haile Selassie was crowned first of all King, and later Emperor, of Ethiopia in 1930. Haile Selassie was known as Ras (Prince) Tafari, hence the name of his followers. He is seen as being the

direct descendant of kings David and Solomon, and is called 'Jah', or the living manifestation of God.

Rastafarianism is a way of life rather than an organised religion, and is guided by the concept of peace and love. Distrusting official hierarchy, the majority of Rastas are not affiliated to a particular group. However, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church is seen as their home.

The Bible is seen as the divine Word. It is interpreted by Rastafarians through collective reading, study and debate, which is known amongst Rastafarians as 'reasoning'. Rastafarians particularly emphasise the Old Testament and the Book of Revelation.

Rastas prefer the term 'principles', rather than 'beliefs', holding that the latter implies doubt. Central principles are that God, Jesus, the Israelites and early Christians were black and that Christians misrepresent Jesus as a blue-eyed European; Rastafarians are true Jews; the Bible is authoritative and was written by and for black people; black people will only be free when they are back in Africa.

It is important to recognise the diversity within the faith, which is open to all members of society, black or white. Therefore the individual must be consulted, especially before medical treatment, as some may follow Old Testament laws more strictly than others.

BIRTH

Most Rastafarians oppose contraception. Abortion is not usually considered acceptable. African traditions connected with the disposal of the placenta and umbilical cord may need to be observed. After giving birth the woman is considered unclean. Whilst in aftercare, Rastafarian Sisters need to have free flowing water close at hand.

CLEANLINESS

During her menstrual period a woman is considered unclean and requires free flowing water. The same applies to men who are being treated for venereal diseases, or have a discharge.

Hair has much significance to Rastafarians. Uncut, matted hair in locks, known as dreadlocks, are common, especially amongst male Rastafarians. Dreadlocks are seen as a symbol of strength, representing breaking away from the 'Babylonian' system of western society. The uncut locks also represent the mane of the lion, the symbol of African strength and emancipation. Therefore, a Rasta's hair should be treated with respect, and all cutting of it should be avoided. Dreadlocks are often cleaned with olive or coconut oil. Frequently, beards are also left uncut.

CLOTHING AND MODESTY

Some Rastafarians will wish to cover their hair, often with a hat (called a tam) bearing the four colours of especial importance to their faith. These colours are black, red, green and gold/ yellow, which stand respectively for: the black race; the blood of slavery; the promised land; and a golden future. Rastafarians often have other items with these colours too. All items bearing these four colours should be treated with respect.

Women are encouraged to dress modestly, and to refrain from wearing trousers or make-up. Sometimes Rastafarians, particularly women, will be unwilling to wear garments that have been worn by non-Rastafarian people. Disposable theatre gowns may therefore be preferred in hospital.

DEATH

'Dead' and 'death' are words considered negative and are rarely used by Rastafarians, who follow the more positive concept of 'ever-living'. 'Passed' or 'passing' are terms often used, reinforcing the Rastafarian belief that life is eternal through the spirit. Some Rastas believe in reincarnation.

There are no religious rituals. No priest is required. If he is available the local head of the 'Twelve Tribes' may be sent for. Rastafarians have no objection to cremation but prefer burial. The 'Nazarite Vow', a principle adhered to by Rastas, enjoins the shunning of dead bodies, which may be prepared for burial by family members, or preferably an undertaker. Attendance at funerals is not emphasised, as Rastafarianism celebrates life, rather than death.

DIET

Rastafarians often have a strong emphasis on living in harmony with the natural world, and accordingly most are vegetarians and some are vegans. Pork and pork products are banned. Fish must have fins and scales. The term used as a model for the ideal diet is 'Ital', meaning a saltless, vegetarian diet. 'Ital' also means natural food. Sometimes this is extended to include all canned or chemical food. Many Rastafarians abstain from alcohol and tobacco, although the use of cannabis is seen as being sanctioned by the Bible. This may need to be taken into consideration by health professionals when administering medicine.

FASTS AND FESTIVALS

Rastafarians are required to fast and may choose to do this on Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath. It is important to consult the individual to assess their fasting habits. July 23 is the birthday of Haile Selassie, which has the importance of Christmas. November 2 is Haile Selassie's Coronation celebration. During October the Organisation of African Unity celebrates African Culture. The year's highlight is 7th January which is the Ethiopian Christmas. It is popularly known as Rasmus. Birthdays are not widely celebrated.

IN A RASTAFARIAN HOME

You might well see a picture of Haile Selassie, along with a copy of the Bible. The lion is also a Rastafarian symbol. There are often items in black, red, green and yellow. There may also be a flag, usually Jamaican or Ethiopian. Visitors may be asked to remove their shoes.

MARRIAGE

Because of their distrust of formal procedures, there is no formal system of marriage within Rastafarianism. Marriage is looked upon as part of the establishment and is not, therefore, encouraged, but commitment to a partner is encouraged and sexual permissiveness is banned. A man and woman who cohabit are automatically viewed as husband and wife. A couple need stay together only for as long as both desire it.

MEDICAL TREATMENT

Generally speaking, Rastas are distrustful towards western medicines and would often prefer alternative treatments such as herbalism, homeopathy and acupuncture.

Rastafarians are completely against any pig product, which includes transgenic hearts, kidneys and heart valves. It is permissible to accept transfusions and blood from family members. However, some will not accept blood transfusion, and some will. It is important to consult individuals. Rastafarians do not carry donor cards and are against any scientific use of the body after death. Prolonging life is considered unacceptable when the person remains in a vegetative state after every attempt has been made to help. Medicines that have damaging side effects should not be used. The use of marijuana to relieve pain would be preferred.

FOOD LAWS

Rastafarians eat strictly I-tal which means natural and clean

Early Rastafarians are unlikely to eat meat, scavengers or shellfish

Rastafarians do not eat pork

Rastafarians regularly eat fish, but will not eat fish more than twelve inches long

Rastafarians eat copious amounts of vegetables, as they are of the earth, and therefore good

Food is prepared without salt, and coconut oil is the most likely form of oil to be utilised

Rastafarians do not drink alcohol

They do not drink milk or coffee, but will drink anything herbal, grown from natural roots, e.g. herbal tea

Rastafarians consume plentiful amounts of fruit and fruit juice

RITES OF PASSAGE

Birth

When a child is born into the Rastafari tradition he or she is blessed by elders in the community, during a Nyabingi session of drumming, chanting and prayer.

Marriage

In Rastafari there is no formal marriage structure. A Rastafari man and woman who live together are regarded as husband and wife (unless, of course, they are related in some other way, such as mother and son).

If marriage does take place it is regarded as a social occasion rather than a religious event.

Death

In Rastafari there is no funeral ceremony to mark the end of life.

Rastafarians believe that reincarnation follows death, and that life is eternal.

WORSHIP

As Rastafarianism is not an organised religion, there does not tend to be a specific place of worship. Some communities will hold weekly meetings in a community centre or in a private house. These meetings include worship, the discussion of community matters and music. Women must cover their heads at these meetings.

SHINTO



Shinto, or kami-no-michi (among other names) is the traditional religion of Japan that focuses on ritual practices to be carried out diligently in order to establish a connection between present-day Japan and its ancient past.

Shinto practices were first recorded and codified in the written historical records of the Kojiki and Nihon Shoki in the 8th century. Still, these earliest Japanese writings do not refer to a unified religion, but rather to a collection of native beliefs and mythology. Shinto today is the religion of public shrines devoted to the worship of a multitude of gods (kami), suited to various purposes such as war memorials and harvest festivals, and applies as well to various sectarian organizations. Practitioners express their diverse beliefs through a standard language and practice, adopting a similar style in dress and ritual, dating from around the time of the Nara and Heian periods (8th–12th century).

As much as nearly 80% of the population in Japan participates in Shinto practices or rituals, but only a small percentage of these identify themselves as "Shintoists" in surveys. This is because Shinto has different meanings in Japan. Most of the Japanese attend Shinto shrines and beseech kami without belonging to an institutional Shinto religion. There are no formal rituals to become a practitioner of "folk Shinto". Thus, "Shinto membership" is often estimated counting only those who do join organised Shinto sects. Shinto has 81,000 shrines and 85,000 priests in the country.

The essence of Shinto is the Japanese devotion to invisible spiritual beings and powers called kami, to shrines, and to various rituals.

Shinto is not a way of explaining the world. What matters are rituals that enable human beings to communicate with kami.

Kami are not God or gods. They are spirits that are concerned with human beings - they appreciate our interest in them and want us to be happy - and if they are treated properly they will intervene in our lives to bring benefits like health, business success, and good exam results.

Shinto is a very local religion, in which devotees are likely to be concerned with their local shrine rather than the religion as a whole. Many Japanese will have a tiny shrine-altar in their homes.

However, it is also an unofficial national religion with shrines that draw visitors from across the country. Because ritual

rather than belief is at the heart of Shinto, Japanese people don't usually think of Shinto specifically as a religion - it's simply an aspect of Japanese life. This has enabled Shinto to coexist happily with Buddhism for centuries.

The name Shinto comes from Chinese characters for Shen ('divine being'), and Tao ('way') and means 'Way of the Spirits'.

Shrine visiting and taking part in festivals play a great part in binding local communities together.

Shrine visiting at New Year is the most popular shared national event in Japan.

Because Shinto is focussed on the land of Japan it is clearly an ethnic religion.

Therefore Shinto is little interested in missionary work, and rarely practised outside its country of origin.

Shinto sees human beings as basically good and has no concept of original sin, or of humanity as 'fallen'.

Everything, including the spiritual, is experienced as part of this world. Shinto has no place for any transcendental other world.

Shinto has no canonical scriptures.

Shinto teaches important ethical principles but has no commandments.

Shinto has no founder.

Shinto has no God.

Shinto does not require adherents to follow it as their only religion.

Shinto is based on belief in, and worship of, kami. The best English translation of kami is 'spirits', but this is an oversimplification of a complex concept - kami can be elements of the landscape or forces of nature. Kami are close to human beings and respond to human prayers. They can influence the course of natural forces, and human events.

Shintō does not have a weekly religious service. People visit shrines at their convenience. Some may go to the shrines on the 1st and 15th of each month and on the occasions of rites or festivals (matsuri), which take place several times a year.

Devotees, however, may pay respect to the shrine every morning.

PURITY

Purity is at the heart of Shinto's understanding of good and evil. Impurity in Shinto refers to anything which separates us from kami, and from musubi, the creative and harmonising power. The things which make us impure are tsumi - pollution or sin. Shinto does not accept that human beings are born bad or impure; in fact Shinto states that humans are born pure, and sharing in the divine soul.

Badness, impurity or sin are things that come later in life, and that can usually be got rid of by simple cleansing or purifying rituals.

THE CAUSES OF IMPURITY

Pollution - tsumi - can be physical, moral or spiritual. 'Tsumi' means much the same as the English word 'sin', but it differs from sin in that it includes things which are beyond the control of individual human beings and are thought of as being caused by evil spirits. In ancient Shinto, tsumi also included disease, disaster and error. Anything connected with death or the dead is considered particularly polluting.

SHINTO FESTIVALS - MATSURI

Shinto festivals generally combine solemn rituals with joyful celebration, and these celebrations can include drunken and loutish behavior. Festivals centre on particular kami, who are treated as the guests of honour at the event. The celebrations are very physical events, and may include processions, dramatic performances, sumo wrestling, and feasting. They are bright, colourful, and loud, aromatic with the smells of food, and involve much activity - these performance elements perhaps parallel in their own way the importance of aesthetic and sensual pleasingness in shrine worship. The processions often feature a mikoshi, a 'divine palanquin', used to carry a kami (or an image of a kami). The mikoshi is often described as a portable altar or portable shrine.

The procession of the mikoshi is effectively a visit by the kami of the shrine to the local community that is devoted to them, and is thought to confer a blessing on that community. Because Shinto originates in the agricultural prehistory of Japan, most of its festivals are tied to the farming seasons.

Oshogatsu (New Year) – This festival is marked on 1 January. It's traditional at New Year to visit a shrine. People go to thank the kami, ask the kami to give them good fortune in the coming year, and make their new year resolutions in the presence of the kami. (Shrine attendance is huge for this festival - the estimate for attendance during New Year 2003 was that 32 shrines and Buddhist temples had more than 500,000 visitors each. Meiji Shrine in Tokyo expected over 3 million visitors over the festival period.)

Seijin Shiki (Adults' Day) - This event takes place on 15 January. On this day those Japanese who have had their 20th birthday in the previous year attend a shrine to give thanks. 20 is the age of legal adulthood in Japan.

Haru Matsuri (Spring festivals) - Rissun (or Setsubun); Rissun is celebrated on 3 February and marks the beginning of spring. It is sometimes called Setsubun, although Setsubun can really refer to the beginning of any season. Rissun is known as the bean-throwing festival. When celebrated at home, a male of the family will scatter roasted beans, saying "demons out, good luck in". At shrines, lucky beans are thrown into the congregation, who will attempt to catch them. Toshigoi-no-Matsuri: This spring festival is a celebration to pray to the gods for a good harvest.

Aki Matsuri (Autumn festivals) - Late summer and autumn feature many aki matsuri, autumn festivals, often thanking the kami for a good harvest. Different shrines countrywide hold their own celebrations on varying dates.

Shichigosan - Shichigosan is celebrated on 15 November, or the nearest Sunday. On this day parents take boys of three and five years old and girls of three and seven to give thanks to the gods for a healthy life so far and pray for a safe and successful future. The festival of Shichigosan is named after the ages of the children taking part - seven (shichi), five (go), three (san).

Rei-sai (Annual Festival) - This is a yearly festival on a day particular relevant to the shrine where it takes place. During this festival the local kami are carried in effigy round the town or village in an ornate litter (like a sedan-chair) called a mikoshi. The procession is often accompanied by musicians and dancers, and the whole occasion is celebratory. More serious

ceremonies also take place within the shrine.

SACRED PLACES

Shinto shrines: A shrine (jinja) is a sacred place where kami live, and which show the power and nature of the kami. It's conventional in Japan to refer to Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples - but Shinto shrines actually are temples, despite not using that name. Every village and town or district in Japan will have its own Shinto shrine, dedicated to the local kami.

Japanese people don't visit shrines on a particular day each week. People go to the shrine at festival times, and at other times when they feel like doing so. Japanese often visit the local shrine when they want the local kami to do them a favour such as good exam results, a good outcome to a surgical operation for a relative, and so on.

WORSHIP

Shinto worship is highly ritualised, and follows strict conventions of protocol, order and control. It can take place in the home or in shrines. In keeping with Shinto values, Shinto ritual should be carried out in a spirit of sincerity, cheerfulness and purity. Shinto ceremonies have strong aesthetic elements - the setting and props, the sounds, the dress of the priests, and the language and speech are all intended to please the kami to whom the worship is offered. Although Shinto worship features public and shared rituals at local shrines, it can also be a private and individual event, in which a person at a shrine (or in their home) prays to particular kami either to obtain something, or to thank the kami for something good that has happened. Many Japanese homes contain a place set aside as a shrine, called a kami-dana (kami shelf), where they may make offerings of flowers or food, and say prayers. There is no special day of the week for worship in Shinto.

TYPICAL RITUAL

The conventional order of events in many Shinto festival rituals is as follows:

1. Purification - this takes place before the main ceremony
2. Adoration - bowing to the altar
3. Opening of the sanctuary
4. Presentation of food offerings (meat cannot be used as an offering)
5. Prayers (the form of prayers dates from the 10th century CE)
6. Music and dance
7. Offerings - these are symbolic and consist of twigs of a sacred tree bearing of white paper
8. Removal of offerings
9. Closing the sanctuary
10. Final adoration
11. Sermon (optional)
12. Ceremonial meal (this is often reduced to ceremonial sake drinking)

RITEs

Harae - purification rites: Purity can be restored through specific Shinto rituals and personal practices that cleanse both body and mind.

Water and salt are commonly used as purifying agents, and a haraigushi can also be used. Purifying rituals are always performed at the start of Shinto religious ceremonies. One of the simplest purifications is the rinsing of face and hands with pure water in the temizu ritual at the start of a shrine visit in order to make the visitor pure enough to approach the kami.

Haraigushi: This is a purification wand, and consists of a stick with streamers of white paper or flax fastened to one end. It is waved by a priest over the person, place or object to be purified.

Misogi: This term covers purification rituals in general, or purification rituals using water to free body and mind from pollution.

Oharae: This is the "ceremony of great purification". It is a special purification ritual that is used to remove sin and pollution from a large group.

The ritual is performed at the end of June and December in the Imperial Household and at other shrines in order to purify the whole population. Oharae can also be performed as a year-end purification ritual for companies, or on certain occasions such as the aftermath of a disaster.

Shubatsu: Shubatsu is a purification ritual in which salt is sprinkled on priests or worshippers, or on the ground to purify it. One notable use of salt in purification is found in Sumo wrestling when the fighters sprinkle salt around the ring to purify it.

RITEs OF PASSAGE

Various Shintō rites of passage - are observed in Japan. The first visit of a newborn baby to the tutelary kami, which occurs 30 to 100 days after birth, is to initiate the baby as a new adherent.

The Shichi-go-san (Seven-Five-Three) - festival on November 15 is the occasion for boys of five years and girls of three and seven years of age to visit the shrine to give thanks for kami's protection and to pray for their healthy growth.

January 15 is Adults' Day - Youth in the village used to join the local young men's association on this day. At present it is the commemoration day for those Japanese who have attained their 20th year.

The Japanese usually have their wedding ceremonies in Shintō style and pronounce their wedding vows to kami. Shintō funeral ceremonies, however, are not popular. The majority of the Japanese are Buddhist and Shintōist at the same time and have their funerals in Buddhist style.

A traditional Japanese house has two family altars: one, Shintō, for their tutelary kami and the goddess Amaterasu Ōmikami, and another, Buddhist, for the family ancestors. Pure Shintō families, however, will have all ceremonies and services in Shintō style.

There are other Shintō matsuri concerning occupations or daily life, such as a ceremony of purifying a building site or for setting up the framework for a new building, a firing or purifying ceremony for the boilers in a new factory, a completion ceremony for a construction works, or a launching ceremony for a new ship.

WEDDINGS

A Shinto wedding is a small-scale affair involving the couple, their family and their close friends. The bride normally wears a white kimono with a white scarf. The colour symbolises purity. The ceremony begins with ritual purification. Next prayers are offered for the couple to have good luck, happiness and the protection of the kami. Then the couple drinks sake - taking three sips each from three cups poured by the miko (shrine maiden) - and the groom reads words of commitment. In many, weddings rings are exchanged. This is followed by a sacred dance performed by the miko. The ceremony ends with an offering of tamagushi (a sacred branch) and a ritual sharing of sake by everyone present.

HATSUMIYAMAIRI – FIRST SHRINE VISIT

This is when a newborn baby is taken to a shrine (usually the local one), to be placed under the protection of the kami. The child then becomes a parishioner of the shrine.

The ritual takes place on the thirty-second day after birth for a boy and the thirty-third day for a girl.

Traditionally the baby was taken to the shrine by its grandmother because the mother was thought to be impure from childbirth, but nowadays the child is often taken by the mother.

FUNERALS

Death is seen as impure and conflicting with the essential purity of Shinto shrines. For the same reason, cemeteries are not built near Shinto shrines. The result of this is that most Japanese have Buddhist or secular funerals, and cremation is common. Shinto funerals, when they occur, are called Sosai, and are largely developed from Buddhist funeral rites. The funerals are usually conducted by lay people not priests (because the contact with death would be too polluting for priests) and do not take place in shrines.

ORGAN DONATION

Organ transplantation is comparatively rare in Japan because the body after death is impure according to Shinto tradition. Shinto traditions also state that interfering with a corpse brings bad luck. Families are concerned that they might injure the relationship between the dead person and the bereaved (known as the itai) by interfering with the corpse. This means that many followers of Shinto oppose the taking of organs from those who have just died, and also would refuse an organ transplanted from someone who has died.

ALCOHOL

There is perhaps no religion that loves alcohol as much as the Japanese Shinto religion, which reveres sake as the most sacred of drinks - the "liquor of the gods." The god of sake is also the god of rice and the harvest, so drinking sake is associated with a bountiful and blessed harvest. It's a standard offering for all deities at Shinto shrines and an important part of agricultural rites, like the jichinsai ground purification ritual, during which sake is liberally poured onto construction sites.

DIET

Shinto does not have strict dietary laws for participants. Most Japanese are not vegetarians and consume fish, fowl, and meat. On some occasions, however, an individual may abstain from consuming specific foods that are believed to offend a given kami. More commonly, special dietary practices involve the serving of certain foods during festivals.

GENDER

Marital infidelity by men has often been overlooked, but women are almost always expected to be faithful. Until the last century, men were allowed to divorce their wives, but the reverse was not the case.

SHINSHOKU (PRIEST)

Shinshoku is priest in the Shintō religion of Japan. Priests may marry and have families. Women may also be admitted to the priesthood, and widows often succeed their husbands. The priests are supported by offerings of the parishioners and worshippers.

CELIBACY

Shinto is opposed to celibacy because the religion represents a celebration of life and procreation. An exception is found with virgins (miko), who assist priests.

SIKHISM



A Sikh believes in one God, and follows the teachings of the ten Gurus as contained in the Guru Granth Sahib (the Sikh Holy Book). The Guru Granth Sahib also contains the verses of bhagats (devotees) teaching similar ideas, including Muslims and Hindus. The Guru Granth Sahib is found in every Gurdwara (door to the Guru) and is treated with veneration as the Word of God. The ultimate Guru (teacher) is God, who is often referred to as Vahiguru (wonderful teacher). Sikhism was founded by Guru Nanak. The first Guru, Guru Nanak Dev, was born in 1469 in the Punjab, in north-west India. The mother tongue of Sikhs is Punjabi.

Sikhs are now living all over the world, thriving in many different cultural contexts. There will be variations in practice but they will share the same basic principles. Guru Nanak taught equality, and emphasised social mobility and universal brotherhood in a situation where Muslims and Hindus were strictly divided. This is reflected in the fact that although Sikhs meet together for worship in the Gurdwara, their community life also centres on the langar (community kitchen), where all

are welcome and all can be fed, irrespective of faith and culture. A central tenet of Sikhism is to serve God by living a truthful and upright life in the service of others.

For Sikhs, they are expected to give out one-tenth of their income to the poor and all three categories of service apply to everyone, and they are not only limited to the followers of Sikhism.

HOLY BOOKS

The main Holy book in Sikhism is the Guru Granth Sahib. This book contains the teachings of all Gurus, and has been identically printed since the first copy, containing the same amount of pages, same words, and same paper size to preserve it. It has over 3000 hymns and instructions to lead a good Sikh life. The book starts with a statement defining the Sikh belief: "There is one God. He is the Truth. He is the creator, and is without fear or hate. He is beyond time, is not born, and does not die to be born again. He is known by his graces."

ABLUTIONS AND HYGIENE

Personal cleanliness is important. Water for washing should be provided in the same room as the WC. Showers are preferable to a bath, though a jug and basin may be used instead. Initiated Sikhs should get up and bathe (shower) before reading their morning prayers.

DEATH

The body is washed and new clothes put on it before cremation. Sons and other male members of the family attend to the father's body and daughters and other females prepare the mother's body. The 5 'K's'* (see below) should not be removed. If the patient's Kachhera have to be removed, they should be replaced with another pair. White is the colour of mourning. Sikh funerals are very simple and no memorials are allowed. Death is not seen as final in the cycle of birth and death, merely as a stage in the transmigration of the soul. Sikhs believe that the soul travels through a number of existences until eventually the soul merges in the All-Soul (God) like a drop of water merges in the ocean. The human body is the last rung on the ladder of reincarnation.

DIET

Initiated Sikhs should not take any intoxicants (alcohol, tobacco, recreational drugs). Most initiated Sikhs are strict vegetarians: no meat, no fish, no eggs. Sikhs in general do not eat beef; some choose to eat other meats, especially chicken. It is very important to check each person's individual requirements.

FAMILY LIFE

Most Sikhs come from South Asia and follow South Asian traditions (see South Asian chapter), with close family ties and respect for the older generation.

FASTING

There are no universal fasting requirements. In fact, the Guru Granth Sahib speaks out against any type of fasting, and also against over indulgence. (Some Sikh women may choose to abstain from salt on the day of the full moon, but this is for cultural rather than for religious reasons.) The Sikhs may observe a fast if they find it useful for health. Observing fasts as a part of religion for spiritual benefit has no value in Sikhism.

FESTIVALS

Sikhs celebrate "gurpurbs" which are dates related to the lives of the ten Sikh Gurus, and dates connected to the Guru Granth Sahib, which after Guru Gobind Singh became the eternal Guru of the Sikhs. On these occasions a full reading of the Guru Granth Sahib takes place, lasting three days.

The two main events in the Sikh calendar are the birthday of the first Guru, Guru Nanak, in November and Vaisakhi, celebrated around April 13, commemorating the creation of the order of the Khalsa (the community of the pure) by Guru Gobind Singh. Vaisakhi is also the Sikh New Year. New members are initiated (take Amrit), there is an Akhand Parth, the Nishan Sahib is replaced by a new flag; there is hymn singing, preaching, various festivities, dancing and competitions.

When Hindus celebrate Diwali (festival of lights), Sikhs commemorate the release of the sixth Guru, Guru Hargobind, from prison along with 52 Hindu princes. He was offered his freedom by the Moghul authorities, but refused to leave unless his 52

fellow political prisoners were also set free.

THE THREE PILLARS OF SIKHISM

Guru Nanak formalised three basic guidelines (pillars) for Sikhs:

1. Naam Japna (focus of God),
2. Kirat Karni (honest living) and
3. Vand Chakna (sharing with others).

With these 3 values, the Guru knew that the person would achieve spiritual elevation and material happiness in this world.

FIVE K'S

The five sacred Sikh symbols prescribed by Guru Gobind Singh are commonly known as Panj Kakars or the 'Five Ks' because they start with letter K representing Kakka in the Punjabi language.

These items have great religious and spiritual significance and are compulsory attire for initiated Sikhs, both men and women. Other Sikhs may wear some of them.

Kesh – hair, no cutting, trimming or shaving of hair anywhere on the body. (Do not throw away hair from combs with rubbish). Uncut hair is a symbol of spirituality, showing acceptance of God's will.

Kangha – comb. This is a symbol of cleanliness and orderliness.

Karah – steel bracelet. This is a reminder of the unity and omnipresence of God, and the need for restraint.

Kachhera – special unisex shorts/ underwear. They symbolise chastity and self-control.

(They were originally worn by people working in the fields to preserve modesty.)

Kirpaan – sword (ornamental, usually very small). It symbolises dignity, and the Sikh struggle against injustice.

GREETING

As with people from most parts of South Asia, Sikh men and women do not usually touch each other when greeting. Many Sikhs greet each other by putting their hands together and bowing, in respect for the divine in the other person. People of the same gender do touch, shake hands and even hug. Sikh greetings are: Sat Sri Akal (the Timeless One is True) and Vahiguru Ji Ka Khalsa, Vahiguru Ji Ki Fateh (the Khalsa is with God, the victory is with God). When meeting a group of Sikhs it would be normal to begin by greeting the eldest first. There is no objection to shaking hands.

HEAD COVERING

Most Sikh men and some women cover their heads with a turban. It should be treated with great respect. Women may veil their heads, particularly in the Gurdwara. Children may also cover their heads. Sikh head coverings have spiritual significance. Some Sikhs have broken with the tradition of long hair and head coverings for various reasons, including difficulties in the past with employers. They may be very sensitive about this.

IN A SIKH HOME

On entering a Sikh home you should offer to remove your shoes. Some families keep the Guru Granth Sahib in a special prayer room. That room has then become a Gurdwara and should be treated as such by visitors. It is customary to offer refreshments to guests and it might be seen as impolite to refuse them.

MARRIAGE

There is absolutely no restriction on the question of marriage. The adults have every right to get married without the consent of their parents. Arranging of marriages is traditional and not religious. The practice of arranged marriages is dying out quickly among the Sikhs. Most Sikh children and especially girls like to depend on the expert guidance and help of their parents, in finding a suitable partner. There are about two weeks of celebrations before the event. The actual ceremony is centred on the scriptures. As the granthi (reader) reads set stanzas from the Guru Granth Sahib the bride and groom walk round it four times. The bride and groom often make their home with the bridegroom's family.

MEDICAL TREATMENT

Sikhs are permitted to take prescribed medicine. Abortion is not generally considered acceptable.

MODESTY

Sikh families have strong traditions about modesty. Sikh women usually wear a salwar or pajamis, and tend to have their arms covered. Sikh women who wear western style clothes prefer trousers to skirts. Some women veil their faces in the presence of men who are older than their husbands, but this is a cultural variation and not a Sikh requirement. Female patients generally prefer to be attended by female doctors. Sikh women should not be accommodated in mixed wards except in emergencies.

NAMES

The tenth Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, ordained that all Sikh men should be called Singh and all Sikh women should be called Kaur. This is to show that they are all equal. First names are unisex. The mother takes the new baby to the Gurdwara for the normal service and the Granthi (reader) opens the Guru Granth Sahib at random and takes the first letter of the first stanza as a guide to the baby's name, which is then announced to the congregation.

Some Asians have westernised their names.

PRINCIPLES

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

WORSHIP

Sikhs are prohibited from worshipping idols, images, or icons. A devout Sikh will rise very early, bathe and then spend some time in meditation before saying the morning set prayers. There are also evening prayers. These prayers may be said privately, or with the family. Sikhs worship together in the gurdwara, but a gurdwara is a centre for educational, social and welfare activities as well as a place for communal worship.

At the gurdwara visitors will be expected to dress modestly, with legs and head covered. Shoes are removed. Visitors are asked not to bring tobacco products into the gurdwara. Seating is on the floor. Sometimes men and women sit separately. Care should be taken to avoid pointing one's feet towards the dais on which the holy text, the Guru Granth Sahib, sits. At the end of the service, kara prashad, a holy food, is given to the worshippers. The service is followed by a shared meal in the langar (community kitchen/dining hall).

THE GOLDEN TEMPLE OF AMRITSAR

The temple, named Harmandir Sahib and often referred to as the Golden Temple, is one of the holiest places in Sikhism. Built in the city of Amritsar, Punjab in India, construction of the temple began in 1574 and was supervised by the fourth and fifth Sikh Gurus. Though it has been destroyed several times by Sikh enemies, it has been always been rebuilt to be just as glorious as it's always been. An architectural wonder, the temple is visited by both Sikhs and visitors alike.

rites of passage

At birth - When a baby is born a special prayer is read and a drop of Amrit (holy water) is placed on the baby's tongue. At a ceremony at the Gurdwara, the name of the baby is chosen by opening the Guru Granth Sahib at random: the name must begin with the first letter of first word of the Hukamnama on the left hand side of the page. Singh ('Lion'), a reminder to be courageous, is added to boys' names while Kaur ('Princess'), to stress dignity, is added to girls' names.

At puberty - When a person is aged between 14 and 16, an initiation ceremony called the Dastar Bandi (wearing of the first turban) takes place. Young Sikhs are allowed to join the Khalsa. Khalsa Sikhs observe the Five Ks. A special solution of sugar and water, known as Amrit, is prepared in an iron bowl whilst the five Banis (special prayers) are recited by five Sikhs in the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib. During the ceremony the Amrit is blessed and sprinkled on the hair and eyes, a

prayer is said and a meal is eaten together.

HOLY DAYS

Unlike Christians, Muslims and many other religions, Sikhs do not have a special worship day (diwan) in which they must attend the gurdwara. However, Sangraand (the first day of the Indian lunar calendar month) is an important day, when most Sikhs like to visit the Gurdwara for special prayers, usually in the early morning.

During services, men and women are usually separated and everyone sits on carpeted floors. This is to symbolize that they are all one and that everyone is equal.

TAOISM



Taoism/Daoism is generally thought to have begun with the writings of Lao-Tsu, a man from China who is attributed with writing the Tao te Ching, or the Book of the Way and its Power, some time between 604-531 BCE. It was adopted as the state religion of China in 440 CE, but ceased to be so in 1911.

Tao' means 'the Way', and the first cause of the universe: the force that flows through all life. It is the producer and source of order and stability. Taoists seek to live in harmony with that force, by leading a balanced life. Taoism is thus a nature-based philosophy, embodying four principles: Oneness (which starts and ends with the observation of nature), Dynamic Balance, Complementary Cycles and Harmonious Action. For Taoists time is cyclical, not linear as in western thinking.

The principles of Dynamic Balance and Complementary Cycles are embodied in the symbol of the Yin-Yang, which depicts the two opposite energies from whose interaction the universe is believed to have emerged. When these opposites are equally present, everything is calm, which is where the Taoist emphasis on balance comes from. This is also seen in the elements of fire, water, wood, metal and earth, which should be balanced wherever possible to create fortune, as well as in the practice of feng shui, which aims to balance the way the home is set out, in order to generate greater prosperity.

Taoism encourages its followers to accept life, with its good and its bad. It teaches that most suffering and weakness comes from resistance to natural processes. This is evident in the principle of Harmonious Action, which can be illustrated by the example of a bamboo stick bending with the wind. It overcomes the wind by yielding to it. If it were stiff it would break, but because it yields it overcomes. This can also be expressed in the art of wu wei, which is to let nature take its course, but also to be kind to other people because such actions are reciprocated.

Another Taoist principle is that each person has a life force (known as Chi) that should be looked after, and so health is considered very important. An individual's chief task is to develop their virtue – especially the three jewels of compassion, moderation and humility.

Taoism emphasises the individual's responsibility to react to the situation, and is more concerned with guidelines for harmonious living than rules. Matters of dress etc are, therefore, determined by the culture of the person concerned.

Taoists do not pray, rather they seek to answer life's problems through inner meditation and outer observation. Many Taoists practice Tai Chi, which is a slow, controlled technique of movement and breathing.

Many Taoists believe in spirits of nature, or personified deities. Some may not believe in these as actual entities, but as symbols that help them to understand the world around them.

Most Taoists are of Chinese origin. However, increasing numbers of Westerners are becoming influenced by Taoist principles.

DIET

Many Taoists regard their diet as extremely important to their physical, mental and spiritual health in one way or another, especially where the amount of qi in the food is concerned. Taoist diet encourages fasting and vegetarianism.

The Chinese word for food or dishes, cai originally means green vegetables. The invention of vegan food tofu was credit to a Taoist. Taoist religious orders and literatures often encourage practitioners to be vegan to minimize harms, because all life forms are considered sentient. Taoist levels of dietary restriction, however, are varied.

RITUALS

At certain dates, food may be set out as a sacrifice to the spirits of the deceased or the gods, such as during the Qingming Festival. This may include slaughtered animals, such as pigs and ducks, or fruit. Another form of sacrifice involves the burning of Joss paper, or Hell Bank Notes, on the assumption that images thus consumed by the fire will reappear - not as a mere image, but as the actual item - in the spirit world, making them available for revered ancestors and departed loved ones. At other points, a vegan diet or full fast may be observed.

Also on particular holidays, street parades take place. These are lively affairs which invariably involve firecrackers and flower-covered floats broadcasting traditional music. They also variously include lion dances and dragon dances.

Fortune-telling - including astrology, I Ching, and other forms of divination - has long been considered a traditional Taoist pursuit.

WOMEN

Taoism is a gender-neutral religion. This is implied by the concept of Yin Yang which teaches that masculine and feminine are complementary, inseparable and equal.

The Tao Te Ching uses female images such as the mother of the universe and the mother of all things when describing the Tao.

Taoism has always accepted that women have an equal part to play in spiritual life. Women took priestly roles from the earliest days of organised Taoist religion and Taoist legend has many tales of female deities.

PLACE OF WORSHIP

Taoists have many places of worship, including many temples, where Taoists perform ceremonies. There are generally three kinds of these temples; palace-like temples, ordinary temples and hut-like or cave temples. In most Taoist temples the "Three Pure Ones" are worshiped.

These rituals, festivals and places of worship are used so that Taoists may show their faith towards their gods and religion as well as communicate with those who have passed.

FESTIVALS

Taoists have many festivals including; The Lantern Festival, Tomb Sweeping Day, The Chinese New Year and Hungry Ghost Festival. The Lantern Festival is a festival celebrated on the first full moon of the year. It is also the birthday of Tianguan, one of the Taoist gods. They eat dumplings called, Tangyuan, which represents happiness and family unity. Tomb Sweeping Day, a festival believed to have derived from the Tang Dynasty, is a festival for ancestors and is performed at the graves of these ancestors on a particular day of the year. Chinese New Year is probably the most popular celebration and involves burning paper statues of their Gods, believing this allows the spirits to fly up into heaven and report on the family's behavior. The Hungry Ghost Festival is a festival in honor of the dead who were not given a proper funeral and are released from the underworld on this day. Offerings are made to the ghosts, prayers are said and entertainment and music events are held to please the spirits. These festivals are performed to please those who have passed and to pray for a happy and enriching year.

DEITIES

Westerners who study Taoism are sometimes surprised to discover that Taoists venerate gods, as there doesn't seem to be a place for deities in Taoist thinking.

Taoism does not have a God in the way that the Abrahamic religions do. There is no omnipotent being beyond the cosmos, who created and controls the universe. In Taoism the universe springs from the Tao, and the Tao impersonally guides things on their way.

But the Tao itself is not God, nor is it a god, nor is it worshipped by Taoists.

Nonetheless, Taoism has many gods, most of them borrowed from other cultures. These deities are within this universe and are themselves subject to the Tao.

WEDDING CEREMONY

Wedding Ceremony the couple sit in a Pakua facing each other with the family surrounding them. While sitting in the Pakua the man guards an urn with a lit candle, this represents the element of fire. The woman guards a urn filled with water which represents the element of water. The ceremony begins after the couple lights the eight candles surrounding the Pakua. To conclude the ceremony the man places his urn of fire in the center of the Pakua followed by the woman putting hers with water on top. The fire and water create steam and the opposing elements form a union. The master of the ceremony does his part by reading vows and poems. After this the families will dance followed by a wedding feast.

DIVORCE

Taoists do not view marriage or divorce as religious matters. They see marriage and divorce as civil matters determined by law.

While Taoism does not necessarily prohibit the act of divorce, the concept of a divorce can often find itself at odds with Taoist principles of harmony and balance. Part of the divorce process for a Taoist would require an active stance toward changing the family composition, which has its own share of issues.

Because of their skepticism, they are of the belief that when a couple is experiencing marital strife, they should pursue options that promote familial wellness.

FUNERAL CEREMONY

Taoist ceremonies for the dead often include an altar upon which are placed a sacred lamp, two candles, tea, rice, and water. The sacred lamp symbolizes the light of wisdom, yet it could also be referred to as the Golden Pill or Elixir of Immortality. On each side of the lamp are two tall candles that symbolize the light of the sun, moon, and both eyes of the human body. The tea, rice and water are put in cups in front of the altar. The tea symbolizes yin, water is the energy of the yang, and rice represents the union of the yin and the yang.

Five plates of fruit are used to symbolize the five elements: wood, fire, earth, metal, and water. These elements are further equated with specific colors: green, red, yellow, white, and black. These elements all go in a cycle that when balanced ensure that the body is healthy. An incense burner is placed in the middle of the five elements. The burning of the incense represents refinement and purification of the soul, also known as the inner energies.

The ceremony usually takes place in a person's house and is held over an odd number of days, usually three, five or seven days. The candle is lit up for the body all that time before burial. During the vigil and the funeral the relatives wear white.

IMMORTALITY

A very common and major goal of most Taoists is to achieve immortality rather than enter the regular after life. Reaching this goal is not easy; there are various tasks that must be met during your entire lifetime to be qualified to be immortal. The two different categories of requirements for immortality include internal alchemy and external alchemy.

DRESS CODE

Taoism has no specific dress code.

ABORTION

Taoism see abortion as a necessary evil. The Taoists believe abortion should only be used in a situation when the pregnancy

would threaten the mother.

ZOROASTRIANISM



Faravahar

Zoroastrianism is one of the world's oldest monotheistic religions.

Zoroastrians do believe in one God, Ahura Mazda, meaning Wise Lord. They believe He created the world. The truth was revealed through His prophet Zoroaster, who is not worshipped but is followed as his directed path of truth and righteousness.

Fire is a central symbol of the faith –they believe that fire represents God's light and wisdom and also that the elements are pure.

The religion is split into two groups: The Iranians and the Parsis.

Zoroastrians who lived under Muslim rule suffered religious persecution in that conquest they attempted to eradicate the religion by destroying temples and burning libraries. Many Zoroastrians were forced to convert to Islam and subjected to greater taxes, and slowly became the minority religion in Iran.

Zoroastrianism survives in Iran (formerly Persia), where the religion began and is practiced most in India, where the descendants of Zoroastrian Persian immigrants live.

While Zoroastrianism is one of the world's oldest monotheistic religions, it is one of the smallest today. It is reported that there are less than 200,000 practicing worldwide.

Many call Zoroastrianism the first ecological religion because followers believe in the purity and goodness of God's creation. Therefore, they try to not pollute or destroy things in nature including rivers and trees.

Practicing Zoroastrians pray regularly, several times a day. Because fire or light represents the divine light of the Ahura Mazda, they pray in the direction of the light. The sacred book of Zoroastrianism is called The Avesta, and has two main sections. The first, the Holy Scriptures. The second (the younger Avesta) contains rituals, laws and observances.

Zoroastrianism is based on the teachings of Zarathushtra. Although chronology and location are uncertain, it is now generally accepted that he lived c1200 BCE, and that he spread his message in Persia (now Iran). The followers of his tradition, who are mostly now in India after fleeing Islamic persecution in the ninth century CE, are often known as "Parsis", which means "Persians". The main doctrine espoused by Zarathushtra, or Zoroaster as he is sometimes called, was monotheism. This had a major influence on other religions, particularly the Abrahamic faiths.

Despite this monotheism, many of the ancient gods of the Iranian pantheon filtered back into Zoroastrianism after his death as holy spirits, or yazatas. There is also a later strain of the religion that is almost dualist in form, in that it makes the spirit of evil independent of God, and co-eternal with him. Zoroastrianism stresses the free will of all humans to choose good or bad. In this later belief-system, even God, Ahura Mazda, pronounces his deliberate choice of good over evil. Goodness is therefore never to be taken for granted, but is always something that must be strived for over evil. Zoroastrianism is based on a series of firm binary oppositions - good/ evil, truth/ untruth, order/ disorder.

ABLUTIONS

Hands and faces are washed before worship, and shoes are removed before entering the temple.

CHARITY

Hospitality to strangers, and active concern for the underprivileged are central tenets of Zoroastrianism.

DEATH

Zoroastrians see the world as a transitory abode, and believe that individuals will receive reward or punishment in the afterlife. This is envisioned in two symbols. The first is the Cinvat bridge, or Bridge of the Requirer, which the bad cannot pass, but fall into the mud of the abyss. The second is the image of molten metal, in which souls are tested. It destroys the bad, but to the good it is like a bath in warm milk.

One exceptional belief of Zoroastrianism is that resurrection (Frashkart) at the end of the world will be in spirit and body, and that it will be for all – sinners will be freed from hell. Zoroastrianism holds that the soul of the departed hovers near the body for three days. Death is seen as the triumph of evil, and so a corpse is considered to be polluting. It should therefore be disposed of as quickly as possible.

The traditional method of disposal in India would be to expose the corpse in a "Tower of Silence" (daxma) for vultures to eat. This is because Zoroastrians do not want to pollute fire or earth or water with their bodies. This can create problems for British Zoroastrians, who, if not flying the body back to India, must adopt beliefs to suit available options. Cremation, as the socially acceptable norm in India, is likely to be preferred to burial. Ashes will usually be interred at the Zoroastrian cemetery at Brookwood in Surrey.

Zoroastrian funerals are simple – Zoroastrians believe charity in memory of the deceased is more effective than elaborate, costly funeral rites. Ancestor-worship also plays an important part in Zoroastrianism.

DRESS

The wearing of traditional symbols of faith has declined, but Zoroastrians may wear the sudreh and kusti. The sudreh is a sacred shirt, like a white vest, symbolising purity and renewal. The kusti is a long cord tied round the waist. It has seventy-

two strands, symbolising the seventy-two chapters of the holy book, the Yasna, as well as universal fellowship. The sudreh and kusti are both seen as protection against evil, and are thought of as being the armour and sword-belt of Zoroastrians, arming them for the battle against evil.

ETHICS

As in many other religions, "Do in holiness anything you will" is the golden rule. A strict adherence to truth is central to the faith, since lies are thought to belong to the realm of evil. Scrupulous honesty in business dealings is practised.

FAMILY PLANNING

Zoroastrianism is not an ascetic religion – it believes all material things to have been created by Ahura Mazda for enjoyment. Zoroastrians have reverence for physical things, especially those that are in their purest or most natural forms, such as the elements. It is considered a primal duty to assist life's fertility wherever possible, both within the family unit, and in a wider social context. For early Zoroastrians, this meant being good husbandmen to the land, as well as being parents – farming was revered. However, Zoroastrianism also stresses purity and control, so promiscuity and prostitution are unacceptable. British Zoroastrians almost always have small families – rarely more than two children. Perhaps because of the small numbers of Zoroastrians, and because of their history of religious persecution, resistance to intermarriage is high.

FESTIVALS

There are seven main festivals, each relating to major spirits that are worshipped – the six Amesha Spentas, or Holy Immortals, and Ahura Mazda himself. These seven spirits together are known as the divine Heptad, and each is responsible for a certain area of creation. The seven festivals culminate with No Ruz, or New Day, which prefigures the New Day at the end of the world when creation will be transformed, and the dead be resurrected. Since different traditions adopted different calendars, the dates of these festivals vary, but No Ruz is usually at the time of the spring equinox, 20/1 March. There are also minor festivals, but it is the observance of these seven that is obligatory.

RITUAL

Zoroastrianism has many rituals, all of which are important and serve a vital role for the faith, however the rituals below are the most important, the most common and most widely celebrated, affecting most if not all Zoroastrians. Fire plays an important role in Zoroastrian ritual. It is seen as the symbol of Ahura Mazda, and also as the formless living symbol of the source of heat and life. Zoroastrians are often called "fire worshippers", but find this deeply offensive.

WEDDING

There are two stages to a Zoroastrian wedding, whether Parsi or Persian.

The first thing that happens however, is the signing of the marriage contract by the bride, groom, and their parents. Then, already married female relatives hold white scarves over the new couples heads while two crystallized sugar cones are rubbed together in order to "sweeten the couples life together." The scarves are then sewn together to symbolize the new union, and a cord is tied around the bride and grooms hands, binding them to each other.

The second stage is traditionally last from 3 to 7 days.

Traditionally, both bride and the bridegroom dress in white. The colour white is a symbol of purity in Zoroastrianism.

DEATH RITES

When a Zoroastrian dies, there is 3 day mourning period for the family, during this time the body is brought before a four-eyed dog (four eyed dogs are dogs that have spots over their eyes). After this, the body is taken to the Tower of Silence, which is a tall, round tower without a roof. The body is placed naked within the Tower in the right circle, there are 3 circles, one for women, one for men, and the last one for children. The body is left exposed to scavengers and other elements of nature to help with its decomposition. When only the bones remain, they are swept into the central well shared by all. On the 5th morning after death, a Zoroastrian's soul enters into the spirit world where the deities will pass judgement. Zoroastrians can be buried or cremated as well, however this is often frowned upon by the religion.

rites of passage (NAVJOTE)

The Navjote is the coming of age ritual that all Zoroastrians must participate in between the ages of 7-12. This is when the young Zoroastrians are presented with a sudreh (an undergarment to remind them of their modesty, as well as to be trustworthy) as a kusti (a string made of 72 strings, one for each chapter of the Yasna) which they wear for the rest of their lives.

PURIFICATION RITUALS

There are three types of purification rituals. The first is padyab, which is ablution, or washing of one's body/body part. The second type is nahn, which is a bath. The third purification is bareshnum, which is a complicated ritual performed with the participation of a dog, whose left ear is touched by the candidate and whose gaze puts the evil spirits to flight that can last several days.

OTHER RITUALS

Yasna: the sacrifice of haoma, which means "sacred liquor." This is the main ritual and is practiced at all gatherings. It is celebrated before the sacred fire during the recitation of large portions of the Avesta and usually involves offerings of bread and milk as well.

Penance: this ritual involves the confession of sins to a dastur, followed by a recitation of the patet and firm resolve not to sin or to try harder to avoid sin again.

Gahanbars: seasonal festivals that are celebrated every two months, including Noruz (the New Year's Festival), Rapithwin (the summer festival) and Mithra (the autumn festival -- also known as Mehragan)

FOOD

Zoroastrian festivals celebrate the material, so feasting plays an important part. The feasts cross class boundaries, with rich and poor eating together. It is considered a sin to fast, since to do so weakens the body, and also one's resistance to evil. Often ceremonial foods will revolve around the number seven (such as having seven kinds of dried fruits and nuts), with reference to the divine Heptad. Zarathushtra declaimed against drunkenness, and advocated moderation. There are no

specific dietary restrictions, but some Zoroastrians interpret their religion as advocating the avoidance of pork and beef, or as advising vegetarianism.

NATURE

Zoroastrians have particular reverence for cattle. Additionally, they believe that humankind, as the pinnacle of creation, and the only creatures capable of deliberate choice, should care for the world to the best of their capabilities.

WORSHIP

Zoroastrians believe that the elements are pure and that fire represents God's light or wisdom.

Zoroaster placed less emphasis on ritual worship, instead focusing on the central ethics of 'Good Words, Good Thoughts and Good Deeds'. Zoroastrian worship is not prescriptive. Its followers can choose whether they wish to pray and how.

Communal worship is usually centred around seasonal festivals (of which the Zoroastrians have many), but there are other opportunities for worshippers to gather, such as the Navjote, the initiation ceremony where a child is accepted into the Zoroastrian fellowship.

PRAYERS

Zoroastrians traditionally pray several times a day. Some wear a kusti, which is a cord knotted three times, to remind them of the maxim, 'Good Words, Good Thoughts, Good Deeds'. They wrap the kusti around the outside of a sudreh, a long, clean, white cotton shirt. They may engage in a purification ritual, such as the washing of the hands, then untie and then retie it while reciting prayers.

Prayers are primarily invocational, calling upon and celebrating Ahura Mazda and his good essence that runs through all things. Prayers are said facing the sun, fire or other source of light representing Ahura Mazda's divine light and energy.

Purification is strongly emphasised in Zoroastrian rituals. Zoroastrians focus on keeping their minds, bodies and environments pure in the quest to defeat evil (Angra Mainyu). Fire is seen as the supreme symbol of purity, and sacred fires are maintained in Fire Temples (*Agiaries*). These fires represent the light of God (Ahura Mazda) as well as the illuminated mind, and are never extinguished. No Zoroastrian ritual or ceremony is performed without the presence of a sacred fire.

HOLY BOOK

The holy book of Zoroastrianism is called Avesta. It is written in an eastern Iranian dialect/language that is called avestan for the lack of more suitable terms.

REINCARNATION

The concept of reincarnation is foreign to Zoroastrianism.

