

# **ONE COUNTRY MANY FAITHS**



**ONE COUNTRY – MANY FAITHS**  
**Christian engagement with people of other faiths**

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Revd John Davis currently works as the Lead Chaplain of the Selby Communities and District Industrial Mission...a role that encompasses chaplaincy to the local agricultural industry, rural advisor to the Bishop of Selby, chaplaincy to a College of Agriculture and Horticulture and various representative roles within the local community. Prior to that, he has served in a variety of parochial situations throughout the Anglican Diocese of York.

He is also one of the Christian seat holders on the Council of the Yorkshire and Humber Faiths Forum.

The Yorkshire and Humber Faiths Forum has three aims:

- To advance the contribution of faith Communities in the Yorkshire and Humber region;
- To encourage and educate faith communities to work together in matters of policy, strategy and action within the area known as “Yorkshire and Humber”;
- To challenge all forms of discrimination and injustice against persons or groups of people, particularly on the grounds of religious belief.

This resource material is offered primarily to Christian congregations and groups who wish to acquaint themselves with the core beliefs and practices of the other major world faiths and to reflect on their own faith in the light of this.

It is also hoped that this will assist the task of maintaining community cohesion during these times of increasing diversity.

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## **Christian engagement with people of other faiths**

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## FOREWORD

Faith is a vital and live issue. In a small rural congregation it can seem as if faith is on the way out. But faith communities are increasing in numbers and visibility. The population of the Yorkshire and Humber region is on the increase. There will be an even greater ethnic, faith and cultural diversity among us. While many of us welcome this, others feel threatened. Prejudice and discrimination is increasingly about religion and religious identity as well as about race and racial identity. We all have to do all we can to challenge prejudice and racism. Pluralism is essential to our well being. Faith diversity is part of our richness and requires from us all a deep respect for each other.

All faiths practise the golden rule: Only treat others as you would wish them to treat you. Jesus summarised the requirements of faith in five simple words: Love God, love your neighbour. Many of our neighbours are people of other faiths. They have much to share about their experience and understanding of God.

I have heard people say that interfaith matters are not relevant for them because they don't have neighbours of other faiths.

I believe it is more urgent and important, than ever before, to do all we can to:

- Meet with each other as people of different faiths and beliefs
- Build relationships of mutual respect and trust
- Work with each other for the welfare of all
- Engage in deep dialogue, and share our faiths and their challenges with each other
- Engage in a pilgrimage together, of prayer and peace-making, and tackle the whole issue of religious misrepresentation, misunderstanding and illiteracy.

It is essential to have correct knowledge and understanding of different faiths. We must all take responsibility for this if we are not to break the command: You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.

This is required in rural areas as well as in urban areas, in Beverley as well as Bradford, Northallerton as well as Sheffield.

According to the 2001 census Atlas of UK (published 2004) in terms of faith communities that keep themselves to themselves, this is highest in Britain for Christians and not Muslims as is often perceived. This is partly to do with the fact that many Christian communities, particularly in rural contexts, have little or no engagement with people of other faiths. This suggests to me that we need resources to assist us all in terms of education and integration, and to challenge religious and ethnic bigotry.

The material John Davis has put together here is one such resource and an important one. It will help in the process of theological reflection on interfaith matters. I welcome and commend it.

Rev Dr Inderjit Bhogal  
Director, Yorkshire and Humber Faiths Forum

## INTRODUCTION

More years ago than I care to remember, I recall a series of lectures at my theological college on the subject of the theology of mission. At the heart of these lectures was a strong emphasis on the need for the Christian Church to engage in evangelism both in this country and farther afield. During one of them I asked a question of the lecturer: "What is the status of other faiths?" Clearly taken aback and unsure how to reply, the lecturer replied: "That's a very good question, keep thinking about it!" I have kept thinking about it and feel that others must keep thinking about it also.

It's commonly thought that the place of religion in our society is diminishing and yet hardly a day goes by without some mention of an issue that has, either directly or indirectly, some connection with faith. Migration to this country of people from areas where other faiths predominate has led to an increased profile of non-Christian faiths. Some celebrate the diversity that they bring; others sense that the conditions could be set for a weakening of community cohesion. This latter fear can be manipulated by the more unscrupulous for their own ends. Terrorist acts here and elsewhere, allegedly in the name of other faiths, and in particular Islam, have led to a negative light being cast on those who are "different". Those who regard religion as being the cause of so much suffering feel themselves to be justified.

Yet, set against this, there is a vast amount of voluntary service taking place within the wider community which is organised by faith groups. Speaking of the Christian faith alone, in the Yorkshire and the Humber region this has been equated to as much as £75 mill. per annum delivered by 3,600 churches through 6,500 projects. This would be sorely missed if it were to be discontinued. More recently, the government has recognised the potential of faith groups to deliver outcomes that would promote community cohesion. David Blunkett, as Home Secretary, wrote in the 2004 report *Working Together: Co-Operation between Government and Faith Communities*: "There has never been a more pressing need for productive and respectful engagement between public authorities and faith communities".

Census data lends support to the importance that faith still plays in people's lives despite widely reported growth in secularism. In the 2001 Census, an optional question was asked for the first time about religious affiliation. An astonishing 72% of people declared identification with the Christian faith; the figure for religious affiliation rose to some 83% when the other major faiths were included. However encouraging this might seem to religious leaders, others have urged a note of caution in their interpretation. Prof. Linda Woodhead (University of Lancaster) has reported that her own research suggests that many of the 72% who ticked the Christian box did so because they wanted to indicate that they did not belong to another group, say Muslims, and should not be taken as a measure of active religious observance. Also, many white people preferred a Christian label to the "no religion" one. Writing in *The Edge, Economic and Social Research Council, Spring 2007* Prof. Woodhead says: "Belonging may be too strong a word (for peoples' feeling for Christianity), but there's certainly a sense of not belonging to anything else".

An article by Madeleine Bunting in another ESRC publication, *Britain Today 2007*, also offers comment on these census figures in terms of religious identity. She says: "Interestingly, the strongest sense of religious identity in Britain is among non-Christians: 31% of Anglicans feel that they have 'a little' in common with fellow

Anglicans, while 84% of non-Christians feel they have something in common with fellow adherents. This reflects the increasing use of faith identities by ethnic minority communities such as Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs”.

In a similar vein, the organisation ‘Faith Matters’ in *Understanding Faiths: A Practical Guide To Working With Faith Communities* notes the following: “All statistics need to be handled with care and understanding, but, generally speaking, the smaller the faith community, the higher its proportion of active or practising members”. The document also makes mention of anecdotal evidence from a number of Local Authorities that, since the data collected from the 2001 Census, the size of minority faith communities is increasing quite rapidly.

In 2005, the Yorkshire and Humber Faiths Forum was brought into being with support from Government Office and the Churches Regional Commission. This Forum brings together members of the nine major world faiths to work with three core aims:

- 1) Advance the contribution of faith communities in the Yorkshire and Humber region.
- 2) Encourage and educate faith communities to work together in matters of policy, strategy and action.
- 3) Challenge all forms of discrimination and injustice against persons or groups of people, particularly on the grounds of religious belief.

I currently hold one of the Christian seats on the 21-seat Council. For the first time, I have sat alongside members of other faiths and have had the opportunity to hear something of the story of their faith journeys, their core values and hopes for the local communities in which they live. In short, I have been able to see beyond the faith label to the human being beneath...and this has marked a crucial development in my own faith journey. I now find myself empathising with the words of Perry Schmidt-Luekel in the editorial of *Buddhism and Christianity in Dialogue: The Gerald Weisfeld lectures 2004*: “the unity of religions lies not in any doctrinal feature but in their ultimate point of reference...their diversity is thoroughly real; but ultimately compatible and even complementary”.

In my “day job” as an industrial chaplain and as a rural officer within the Anglican Diocese of York, discussions have shown a very low degree of awareness of the beliefs and practices of other faiths.... both inside and outside Christian Church circles. Many of the views expressed to me have been based on stereotypes portrayed by the various media. It is certainly the case that once one moves northwards from Leeds into North Yorkshire, the numbers of non-Christian faith adherents drop off dramatically. The figures for Leeds and Bradford Councils and the North Yorkshire districts of Selby and Hambleton, N.Yorks County Council as a whole and the unitary York Council are given at the end of this introduction.

In itself, the relative sparseness of members of other faiths makes it more difficult to become aware of and engage with them. This can even lead to discrimination, inadvertent and otherwise.

I felt that I could add value to my time with the YHFF Council by producing a workbook, which would give insight into the other faiths and suggest areas for engagement, as well as highlighting areas of difference. In fact, how we handle difference is just as important as how we recognise our commonalities.

As I've indicated above, it was in the meeting with real Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus etc that I discovered the interplay between faith and person which lifted a faith from being a series of facts to being a way for living. Therefore, whilst I shall include basic tenets of the other faiths, I want to allow those personal testimonies to speak to you as they spoke to me.

I do thank those who gave generously of their time and deepest thoughts and have allowed me to reproduce them in this workbook. I hope that by using this material, levels of faith literacy will be increased and that you, too, will be encouraged to think through the question that I posed all those years ago. I further hope that you will conclude, as I have, that those of faiths different to our own are fellow travellers and seekers with whom we share a common vocation.

*Number of faith adherents expressed numerically*

	Bradford (MDC)	Leeds (City Coun)	Hambleton (District)	Selby (District)	N.Yorks (exc York)	York (Unitary)
Total Pop	467,665	715,402	84,111	76,468	569,660	181,094
Christian	281,236	492,656	69,809	62,037	457,432	134,771
Buddhist	537	1,587	100	85	918	388
Hindu	4,457	4,183	42	51	620	347
Jewish	356	8,267	33	48	576	191
Muslim	75,188	21,394	85	37	1,051	1,047
Sikh	4,748	7,586	7	18	107	95
Other	996	1,530	123	118	1,070	538
No Religion	62,226	120,139	8,745	8,588	68,156	30,003
Not Stated	37,921	58,060	5,167	5,486	39,730	13,714

*Number of faith adherents expressed as a percentage of the population*

	Bradford (MDC)	Leeds (City Coun)	Hambleton (District)	Selby (District)	N.Yorks (exc York)	York (Unitary)
Total %	100	100	100	100	100	100
Christian	60.1	68.9	83.0	81.1	80.3	74.4
Buddhist	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.2
Hindu	1.0	0.6	<0.1	0.1	0.1	0.2
Jewish	0.1	1.2	<0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1
Muslim	16.1	3.0	0.1	<0.1	0.2	0.6
Sikh	1.0	1.1	<0.1	<0.1	<0.1	0.1
Other	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.3
No Religion	13.3	16.8	10.4	11.2	12.0	16.6
Not Stated	8.1	8.1	6.1	7.2	7.6	7.0

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**Lead Chaplain, Selby Communities And District Industrial Mission**

## **SOME WORKING DEFINITIONS**

Confusion reigns when it comes to talking about culture, ethnicity, race, faith, religion, and spirituality. There is no one set of agreed definitions; but perhaps the following will help.

**Culture** the collection of a specific people characterized by their own societies and institutions (Franz Boaz).

**Ethnicity** a term which describes social groups with a shared history, sense of identity, geography and cultural roots which may occur despite racial difference.

**Race** a human population considered distinct based on physical characteristics.

**Spirituality** a term which describes a sense of connectedness with the world, those around us and beyond, perhaps with a sense of the “other”.

**Faith** a term describing the outcome of a sense of connectedness which results in some definite form of behaviour.

**Religion** the term given to the situation where the characteristics of faith are shared by a group of believers.

Never, ever, make the assumption that because a particular person belongs to a particular race that they must, therefore, have a particular faith!

## CORE BELIEFS, PRACTICES AND PERSONAL TESTIMONIES

In this section I want to give a very brief outline of the core beliefs and practices of the nine major world faiths. I stress the word “brief” as it is not my primary objective to list enormous strings of factual detail. If greater detail is required, it may be sought through the vast resources of the internet and libraries...the BBC website’s Religion and Ethics pages are thorough enough for most needs. Similarly, outlines are given on the website of the Yorkshire and Humber Faiths Forum. Better still would be to make contact with someone from that particular faith tradition and ask. Most people would be delighted that you have shown an interest and taken the trouble to find out more.

In fact, my main objective is set out in my introduction. I want you to be able to “meet” adherents from the different faith communities. Some of them are “religious leaders”, others are “lay people”...but all of them have a story to tell of how their faith impacts on their daily life with its myriad of choices and decisions to be made. ***I should add a caveat here...each person who has agreed to give some word of testimony has spoken only for himself or herself and it should not be assumed that their views represent the faith tradition to which they belong.***

It is natural to be curious about those who are different to us. I acutely remember meeting a Muslim woman at my local railway station and walking with her through the centre of my home town to my office...the fact that she is olive-skinned and wearing the hijab caused heads to turn and look. Unfortunately, sometimes it is not only curiosity that people feel. It has been my experience in my own part of North Yorkshire that many people are suspicious and afraid of those who are “different” from them. The efforts of the BNP and claims by terrorists to be acting in the name of religion (especially Islam) have created a negative atmosphere that makes people wary of one another. Even in some Christian circles I have met with a hostile response when I have outlined this current piece of work. However, people of other ethnicities and other faiths are here to stay and I maintain that it is a Christian duty to welcome the stranger in our midst. When individuals meet, there should be a looking beyond the label, faith-based or otherwise, to the human beings that we all are.

There is what is sometimes referred to as the “golden rule” running through all religions; examples of this are...

*“Just as a mother would protect her only child with her life, even so let one cultivate a boundless love towards all beings” (Khuddaka Patha, from the Metta Sutta, Buddhism)*

*“Do to others as you would have them do to you” (Luke 6v31, Christianity)*

*“This is the sum of duty: do naught to others which if done to thee would cause thee pain” (Mahabharata 5.1517, Hinduism)*

*“No one of you is a believer until he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself” (An-Nawawi’s Forty Haddith, 13, Islam)*

*“What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow man” (Talmud: Shabbat 31a, Judaism)*

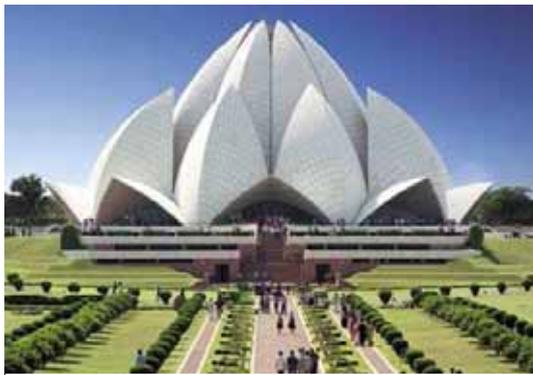
*“No one is my enemy, and no one is a stranger. I get along with everyone” (Sri Guru Granth Sahib p.1299, Sikhism)*

I hope that these brief outlines, the testimonies that go with them and the questions posed in the resource sheets for discussion will encourage us to celebrate not only the diversity of one another’s religious experience but also our oneness as human beings.

# Baha'i

## Core beliefs and Practices

The Baha'i faith is described on the YHFF website as being characterised by the words: "One God, one religion, one humanity, but many messengers, communities and names". The Baha'i faith is sometimes regarded as being syncretistic, ie gathering features from other religions; this is a misunderstanding of what the Baha'i faith intends.



*Bahá'í House of Worship in New Delhi*

Baha'is believe that **God is beyond all that can be known by the human mind**, ie transcendent, and must be encountered through the lives and teachings of his prophets. God has not become incarnate in any one human being. God is **omnipotent, omniscient and perfect**. God is one but has been **called by different names** in different religions and in different parts of the world. All of the other major world religions are regarded as equally valid and true and their major figures are equally

called by God to make Him known. Abdu'l-Baha said: *"Therefore, men have always been taught and led by the Prophets of God. The Prophets of God are the Mediators of God. All the Prophets and Messengers have come from One Holy Spirit and bear the Message of God, fitted to the age in which they appear. The One Light is in them and they are One with each other."*

Baha'i Faith came into being in the **mid 19<sup>th</sup> century** by the declaration of a young man, a descendant of prophet Muhammad, in Iran (city of Shiraz) who proclaimed Himself to be the one prophesied in Islam. He assumed the title "**Bab**" (meaning the Gate) as He declared Himself to be the gateway to a greater revelation from God and consistently referred to "Him Whom God shall make manifest" in His writings. His followers were called **Babis** and subjected to severe persecutions. Bab himself was imprisoned and six years later was publicly executed by a firing squad of 750 soldiers.

One of Bab's followers, Mirza Husayn-Ali Nuri (later adopting the title "**Baha'u'llah**" meaning the "Glory of God" and his followers known as "**Baha'is**") while imprisoned and exiled, declared Himself as the one prophesied by the Bab, foretold by all the previous religions and the bearer of a new revelation from God. He expounded His revelation in extensive writings until His ascension (a symbolic and reverent way of speaking of his death and the giving up of his spirit to God) in 1892 while in exile and officially the prisoner of the Ottoman government. In His Will & Testament He appointed his eldest son Abbas Effendi known as **Abdu'l-Baha** (meaning "Servant of Baha") as His successor and authorised interpreter of His writings. Abdu'l-Baha died in 1921 by which time the Baha'i Faith had already expanded to Far East, Europe and America.

Abdu'l-Baha appointed his eldest grandson **Shoghi Effendi** as his successor who developed the Baha'i World Centre in Haifa, Israel and the Baha'i Faith expanded to all continents during his lifetime. Subsequently the Universal House of Justice, the

elected governing body of the Baha’I world community was established according to the ordinances of Baha’u’llah.

**Bahá’í House of Worship in Wilmette near Chicago, USA** The Baha’i faith is characterised by its commitment to **equality** of all people and the unity of humankind and works towards the **elimination of all kinds of prejudices, inequalities, poverty and persecution.**



*Bahá’í House of Worship in Wilmette near Chicago, USA*

**All the writings of Baha’u’llah are considered as sacred text by Baha’is.** The Most Holy Book is the main book of personal and social Laws and Ordinances. His other writings include Book of Certitude, The Hidden Words, Seven Valleys, The Epistle to the Son of Wolf, Tablets of Baha’u’llah, and Prayers & Meditations of Baha’u’llah.

Baha’is are **focussed more on prayer and social action than communal acts of worship**; there are no initiation rites, no liturgy, no clergy and no sacraments. However, Baha’is do gather for **communal worship**; this is normally conducted by one person on behalf of all and usually consists of reading from the Writings and Prayers revealed by Baha’u’llah and Abdu’l-Baha. **Important times of the year include** a 19-day period of fasting in their month of ‘Al’á and the celebration of Naw-Ruz (New Year), Ridvan and the anniversaries of the key figures of the faith. Of the 11 days designated as holy, 9 are regarded as major holy days. There is no set custom or order of service to commemorate the holy days; different Baha’i communities will organise what is appropriate for them.

In numerical terms, nearly 6,000 live in the UK with over 5 million worldwide.

The symbol of the Baha’i religion is the **nine-pointed star**



A simple nine-pointed star is generally used by Baha’ís as a symbol of their Faith. Nine, as the highest single-digit number, symbolizes completeness and this reflects the sense of fulfilment and completeness at the heart of the faith.

### **Personal Testimonies**

What do you regard as core aspects of your faith?

*“One God...there cannot be more than one Creator. God has different names in different languages. God is an essence that we cannot comprehend as human beings but He has revealed Himself through His manifestations. Baha’u’llah says that all the religions are just one religion of God with different revelations at different times”*

*“The unification of mankind and of the planet are key aspects of the Baha’i faith; hence we find Baha’u’llah saying that the earth is but one country and mankind its citizens”.*

How does your faith impact on your life?

*“Helps me to maintain closeness to God and to remain godly whilst living in this world”.*

*“My faith helps me to cope, on a daily basis, with the tragedies that have befallen me in life, and with racial bias at work and elsewhere...it helps me to remain firm, focussed and hopeful and able to go forward”.*

*“The Baha’i concern for race relations, anti--discrimination, and inter-faith issues brings an international dimension to my life”.*

What is your attitude to other faiths?

*“Baha’is accept the divinity at the core of other faiths”.*

*“The world was dark and God sent His light. This light shines in the darkness and people are attracted to it. As more people came to the light, it became harder for them to have a direct feeling for the light...so people lit their own candles from the light and moved away. In the course of time, they put shades around their light and called it by different names even though it is the same light!”*



*Bahá’í House of Worship, Western Samoa at night*

*“Often I find myself defending Christianity on behalf of Christians. Christianity is like a divine tree, if you can’t see much fruit at the moment, maybe it’s season has passed; but remember that the tree has deep roots”.*

*“Religion is like a divine tailor who makes perfect clothes for a child out of the best material and according to the best fashion. Next year, the child has grown and the suit feels a little uncomfortable...there’s nothing wrong with the clothes, they’re still in perfect condition but maybe the hems need dropping or even a new suit is required. The problem is that we get used to the old suit. However, God never leaves us alone!”*

*“If we look too closely at a tree, we will see dead leaves, parasites etc...you can get so close that you can’t see the overall beauty of the tree and its fruit”.*

# Buddhism

## Core Beliefs and Practices



*Buddhist Temple in Japan*

A follower of a **theistic** religion (ie one with an acceptance of an objective ultimate being) would probably regard Buddhism, as **non-theistic**. However, it would be generally unacceptable for practising Buddhists to hear their faith described in terms of what it is not! Buddhist spirituality focuses on **personal spiritual development** which leads to what Buddhist sages have proclaimed as definitive insight into the nature of mind.

Buddhism is an ancient spiritual tradition which is at least 2,500 years old. Whilst being, originally, essentially a religion of the east, it is now represented all around the world. Of the 376 million followers around the world, over 151,000 live in this country, with some 7,000 living in Yorkshire and the Humber. There are two major groupings within Buddhism worldwide: **Hinayana** and **Mahayana** (including its sub-division **Vajrayana**). There is little discord between the different traditions, as all Buddhists are seeking to be better human beings and allow others to be so too. There is a wide diversity of Buddhist practice; Buddhism is very adaptable to the setting in which it is found. As a broad generalisation, the Mahayana traditions place more emphasis on achieving liberation for the benefit of others; whilst the Hinayana schools focus more on personal liberation.

Whilst the majority of Buddhists in this region belong to the Mahayana grouping (including adherents of the Zen Buddhism of China and Japan, and the Vajrayanist Indo-Tibetan schools), there are also members of the Sri Lankan and Vietnamese Theravada school as well who belong to the Hinayanist tradition. Locally, there are retreat centres in Pocklington and Todmorden, and also Buddhist centres and groups in Harrogate, Leeds, Sheffield and York.

Historically, Buddhism traces its origins back to the birth of a royal prince, **Siddhartha**, in what is now N.E. India over two and a half thousand years ago.

In this historical era, Buddhist practice was initiated by Shakyamuni ('Lion of the Shakyas'), the fourth buddha of this 'fortunate aeon'. Through his enactment of the so-called Twelve Noble Deeds, beginning with his entry into the womb of Queen Mayadevi of the Shakya clan in North East India in around 500 BCE, Shakyamuni demonstrated the path to freedom from delusion and suffering.

He initially lived a life of luxury and, as the Prince Siddhartha, was married and fathered a child. However, on an excursion outside his privileged existence, he first became aware of the 'four rivers' of birth, sickness, old age and death that encircle all living beings. Greatly disturbed by what he saw, he, at first, led a life of extreme asceticism for six years but found no answer to life's paradoxes. Then he relaxed his discipline and sought a middle way between luxury and poverty. In this condition he reflected one day whilst sitting under a tree. Meditating on his experience of life, he sought to find the truth. Eventually, he penetrated to the truth and attained complete Enlightenment, or **Nirvana**.

From this point onwards, he became the **Buddha** (Awakened One). For the next 45 years, the Buddha taught many disciples to achieve liberation from suffering and delusion. The Buddha's teaching is called the **Dharma**, and is expressed as the **Four Noble Truths**:



*British Buddhist woman meditating*

- Suffering is a fact of life
- The cause of suffering is attachment to the view of self
- There is an achievable state of non-suffering (Nirvana)
- The way to this liberation is the **Eightfold Noble Path**

The eightfold noble path is characterised as: right understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.

For any Buddhist, of whatever tradition, these teachings will be expressed through a practice of prayer, meditation and an ethical lifestyle. This ethical lifestyle is sometimes called the “**Five Precepts**”; this means the avoidance of: harm to all sentient beings (Ahimsa), theft or fraud, slander or libel, sexual misconduct, intoxication. It follows that many (but not necessarily all) Buddhists are vegetarian and/or pacifists. Buddhists particularly disapprove of and prohibit intentional killing, ie animals specifically killed for food. However, the Buddha, himself, did not enjoin vegetarianism on his followers and the moderate use of alcohol is not forbidden except to monastics and to laymen and women keeping a temporary monastic discipline.

In common with many other Eastern religions, Buddhism subscribes to the cycle of birth – death – and rebirth (**Samsara**) until liberation (**Nirvana**) is achieved by following and putting into practice the Buddha's teaching. The law of **Karma** dictates that any action that a person takes will have an outcome for good or ill, which will have a bearing on a succeeding life.



*Wesak celebration in Manchester*

The religious calendars of the various Buddhist cultures around the world are rich in both annual and monthly festivals but the phases of the moon are considered particularly propitious times to recall the deeds of the Buddha, reflect on one's own spiritual path and make renewal of vows. Worship can take place in the personal context of one's own home, where a shrine may be kept, or in a communal temple. In both the personal or communal context, prominence will be given to symbolic representations of the body, speech and mind of the Buddha. A statue of the Buddha and the burning of incense and lighted candles will assist the worship. The actual form of worship is said to be as diverse as there are forms of Buddhism. It may include: chanting, playing of instruments and prayers. Mantras are particular prayers that form part of Buddhist worship, sometimes accompanied by use of prayer beads, as a means of focusing ones thoughts. Wesak is the most important of the Buddhist

festivals and is celebrated on the full moon in May. It celebrates the Buddha's birthday, and, for some Buddhists, also marks his birth and death. There are many other festivals which, again, are different around the world; many involve some aspect of the Buddha's life.

Buddhism is practised by both ordained and lay folk. The ordained are monks and nuns; they often wear saffron-coloured or maroon robes. The followers of the Buddha are known, collectively, as the **Sangha**.

In most Buddhist cultures, the lay sangha support the monastic sangha financially and with gifts in kind, thus creating auspicious conditions for present and future lives; whilst the monastic sangha reciprocate with prayers for the benefit of the community as well as individuals.



*Buddhist monks outside Manchester Town Hall*

The most famous Buddhist teachers today are the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh.



The symbol of the Buddhist religion is the **Dharma Wheel**.

The circle symbolizes the completeness of the Dharma (teaching), the spokes represent the eightfold path leading to enlightenment

## **Personal Testimony**

What do you regard as core aspects of your faith?

*“All Buddhist practice can be said to rest on a broad foundation: broad because it is accepted within all three of the main ‘vehicles’ of Buddhism – that of ‘personal liberation’, ‘the way of compassion’ and the ‘diamond way’ and by all schools of whatever socio-geographic provenance.”*

*“These basic teachings are called, within my own (Indo-Tibetan) tradition, the ‘four thoughts that turn the mind to dharma (or the Truth)’. It is the recognition of these truths, whatever they are termed and within any culture, which is the prerequisite, as the Buddha taught, for human happiness. Where they are ignored or shunned, people lose sight of the direction in which happiness is to be found....these ‘foundation stones’ are: the recognition of the preciousness of human birth; the recognition of transitoriness; ‘karma’ (cause and effect); the recognition of the innate ‘sufferings of conditioned existence’, which is any existence in which the mind is fundamentally warped by self-clinging”.*

Another contributor has said of core beliefs....

*“The main focus of the Buddhist spiritual path is to remove our distorted perception of the way things really are. This misperception, or ignorance, is*

*seen as the root cause of our suffering. Removal of ignorance results in liberation or Enlightenment (also called Nirvana). This is achieved by training in moral behaviour, meditation and insight wisdom, with the motivation to free all beings from suffering. Training in this way, and with this motivation, liberates the mind and enables its true qualities of wisdom and universal compassion to be fully realised. With this liberation one realises the state of a Buddha”.*

How does your faith impact on your life?

The contributor who spoke of the ‘four thoughts that turn the mind to dharma’ also gave the following four corresponding impacts....

*“If we look at the history of the idea of the preciousness of human life, we see that it flowers in some times and places and decays in others. Where it is strong, people strive to make their lives count and to protect the lives of others. Here there is a tradition of respecting human life, but it is patchy. Whole sections of even our own society such as the elderly and unborn are undervalued or accorded no intrinsic value at all”.*

*“If we take this (transitoriness) seriously we will use our life to achieve a real understanding of its spiritual significance. If we do not, we will absorb ourselves in chasing one frivolous ambition after another”.*

*“Lord Buddha taught that the world is created through our own actions of body and speech but especially mind. It is our own intentions and our skilful or unskilful actions that have created the world in which we live, like seeds planted and then maturing over time to bear fruit at some future date”.*

*“Some social contexts obscure the truth about the source of our unhappiness more than others and in the modern age, self-absorption is big business! Happiness is presented as the successful evasion of the features of existence common to all humanity – sickness, aging, loss and even death. By contrast, religion reminds us that happiness lies in the attainment of wisdom – understanding the true nature of reality – and the compassionate desire to free all others from ignorance and suffering”.*

What is your attitude to the other faiths?

*“There is no doctrinal basis in the Buddhist teachings for antipathy towards the practitioners of other religious systems. We should practice according to our own faith, preserving the right of others to do the same. Generally, when we see others attempting to preserve in their lives a high standard of moral behaviour, we can rejoice, because this is one of the true causes of happiness.”*

*“In an intellectually sophisticated, historically Christian culture in which the right to practise any religion or none has, over the last two hundred years or so, been established, it has been possible for practitioners of Buddhism, as well as of the other world religions, to find a home and adherents here”.*

However, we should heed the note of caution... *“There is often an unwillingness to accept that religions say different things, from each other as well as from the current social consensus, whatever that may be”*.

## Christianity

As this resource pack is designed to be used by Christians to enable them to better understand, appreciate and engage with adherents of other faiths, at first I was not sure whether it was necessary to include a section dedicated to the Christian faith.



*Perranzabuloe Church, Cornwall*

However, I am persuaded that such a section is appropriate....but what level of detail to include? In answer to this, and to guard against including material that fits more easily with my own spiritual viewpoint, I print in its entirety the article on 'Christianity' (by permission) from the website of the Yorkshire and Humber Faiths Forum. This will give a suitable overview of core belief, main practises and the sheer diversity of the expressions of Christian faith.

The YHFF entry for Christianity reads as follows...

*Jesus - his life, teachings, death and resurrection as described in the four gospels of the New Testament - is the focal point for the majority of Christians. Christianity is a monotheistic religion. (monotheism= belief in one God). God is conceived as a Holy Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Jesus is the Son, seen as 'the word of God made flesh', and it is his death and resurrection that are believed to atone for human sins and restore people to a relationship with God. The 'last supper' of Jesus with the disciples before his crucifixion is symbolised and commemorated in Holy Communion (the Eucharist) when bread and wine are shared among the congregation. Different denominations have differing views on the meaning of this sacrament, its content and frequency. (sacrament= an outward sign of something spiritual). There are a number of sacraments – which include baptism, marriage and the Eucharist. Some denominations only baptise people who are old enough to profess their Faith, but most baptise small children too. Rules about marriage, divorce and remarriage differ by denomination. Many denominations ordain women, but the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches do not. Whilst all Churches recognise ministry, they do not all require ordination. Some Churches give a prominent role to the laity, recognising 'the priesthood of all believers'; some have elders or prophets or apostles or pastors, rather than priests.*

*Christianity has a continuous history in Britain since the sixth century CE, with the 16th century Protestant Reformation and the evangelical revival of the 18th century changing its character and introducing new denominational forms. Today there are a wide variety of different denominations and groups in Yorkshire and the Humber, the largest being the Church of England, but with a strong Catholic presence (owing to the 19th and early 20th century migration of Irish*



*Chapel at the Mother House of the Northumbria Community, Chatton*

*Catholics to the area). Methodists, Baptists, and the United Reformed Church are widely represented, as are smaller groups which have been present in the region for several centuries, such as the Quakers, Unitarians, Moravians and Salvation Army. As its cities and towns are home to many minority ethnic communities, Christianity is also an ethnically diverse religion in the region, with Black African and African-Caribbean, Chinese and Korean, and middle and eastern European Christian churches. Furthermore, new Christian movements, “cell” churches, and ecumenical partnerships (churches of different denominations working together) are active. Formal bodies which enable the region’s Christian Churches to work together include groups such as North York Moors Churches Together, the Churches Regional Commission for Yorkshire and the Humber, and the West Yorkshire Council of African-Caribbean Churches.*

*Census 2001 revealed that there were 3,627,774 Christians in Yorkshire and the Humber, though it is known that only about 15% of them are active. There are some 4,000 Christian places of worship, most of which hold Sunday services (though there*



*Sessay Church, N. Yorkshire*

*are others which are Sabbatarian - their holy day is Saturday – such as Seventh Day Adventists). Worship generally includes reading from the Bible, preaching, prayer, the singing of hymns and choruses, and Holy Communion (though for some churches, not always every week). In some cases it may include healing, witnessing, prophesying, speaking in tongues, silent worship, the lighting of candles, processions, choral music, children’s services and the participation of uniformed organisations such as Scouts and Brownies. Christians*

*may also meet during the week for bible study or discussion, for Christian education, to run community work or to share in social gatherings. Festivals are organised around the Christian year, beginning with Advent, which commemorates the coming of Jesus, followed by Christmas. Easter and Holy Week are the most important events, commemorating his death and resurrection.*

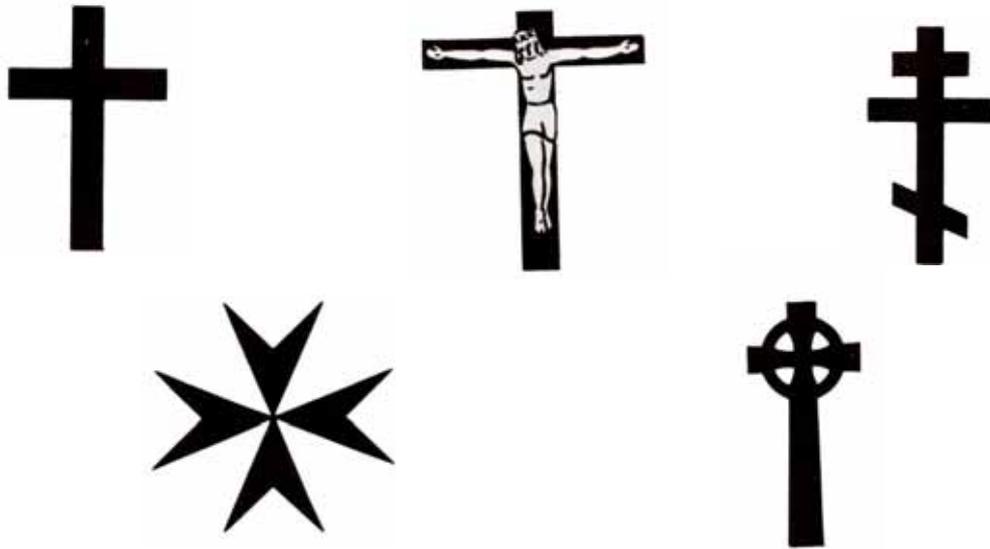
It is impossible in such a brief summary as this to further develop the different nuances that individual groups place on different elements within the Christian tradition as a whole. Suffice it to say that there is lively debate over many of the core beliefs: including the nature of the Biblical material and over the personhood of Jesus.

It should also be noted that, even today with its religious and ethnic diversity, it is the Christian religious festivals that act as important dates within the yearly calendar for the UK – especially Christmas and Easter. In England, particular responsibilities and privileges are accorded to the Church of England as the ‘Established Church’ of the land.



*Nativity scene in Church*

The supreme religious symbol for the Christian faith is the Cross. However, this is depicted in different ways by the various traditions within Christianity...below are a few.



Another popular symbol is the sign of the fish...this being the Greek word 'ichthus' which is an acronym for 'Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour'.

## **Personal Testimony**

What do you regard as core aspects of your faith?

*“That God is love, and reveals that love in creation but supremely in the life and death of Jesus Christ. That God in Christ calls us to love others as he has loved us, and especially to love the stranger. That religion apart from love is not true religion at all”.*

*“I don’t personally place my core aspects around doctrine; I think that Jesus’ mission statement, “love God and your neighbour as yourself”, is sufficient; would Jesus recognise the ‘Jesus’ who has descended to us through history”?*

*“At the core of our faith is a common humanity...that’s what we’re about; religion at its best encourages us to see the humanity in one another”.*

*“Creeds are always going to be provisional if God is beyond all knowledge!”*

How does your faith impact on your life?

*“I try to live out faith in my daily life and it affects my choice of work - though I now have a broader view of what constitutes a Christian way of living and working than I would once have done. I would, for instance, be more positive about enterprise now than at one time”.*

*“Church is coming together as community”.*

*“I believe a lot in forgiveness...a lot of decisions I make depend on that”.*

*“I like to have to a black and white viewpoint presented to me...if only so that I can form my own view”.*

*“Faith offers guidance in situations where decisions have to be made”.*

*“Faith allows me to create a quiet space...peace is an important word for me, I’m a ‘stress-head’; it’s very easy to be so busy with diary filling”.*

What is your attitude to the other faiths?

*“I find much to commend in other faiths. My main knowledge is about Islam, many of whose followers would - of course - place a similar emphasis on God’s compassion and mercy to the emphasis which I would place on God’s love. I suppose that the main difference I would see is that I am less convinced about the necessity for ritual than most of my Muslim colleagues, though - on the other side of the equation - I can see that a regular prayer discipline, for example, helps believers to focus on what they profess to believe in. There is a tendency still for Christians to leave their faith at the church door”.*

*“We are together on a journey”.*

*“All this about converting people...I’m not so sure”.*

# HINDUISM

## Core beliefs and Practices

Hinduism originated in the Indus Valley in what is now modern-day Pakistan. It claims over 900 million followers, including 80% of the population of India. It is said to be at least 9000 years old and this makes it the oldest of the religions in the world. In the UK, most Hindus come from a Gujarati or Punjabi background and arrived in the 1960s and 1970s. Hindus are often organised along linguistic lines or caste division. However, we should note that the caste system, of itself, is not part of the Hindu faith...rather it is a product of Indian social categorisation. Hinduism is different from many other "faiths" in that it does not have a founding figure and has no creed but, rather, is a gathering together of beliefs and traditions.



*Hindu Temple. Huddersfield*

and Lord **Shiva** (known as the Trinity). Each of these has a specific role: Lord Brahma is the creator, Lord Vishnu is the preserver and Lord Shiva the destroyer, or bringer of dissolution. There are many other deities, each bearing different attributes; two of the most popular being Lord **Ganesh** and **Goddess Lakshmi**. Lord Ganesh is commonly known as the elephant God and has the role of being the source of knowledge and remover of all obstacles and is the first God to be invoked at the beginning of Hindu worship. Goddess Lakshmi is the consort of Lord Vishnu and is the Goddess of wealth, knowledge and purity.

Nevertheless, over the years Hindu faith came to centre on the belief in one God given the name **Brahman** who not only created everything but is also everywhere present. Brahman is beyond time and space and is without form. Devotees believe in and worship other deities who between them carry the different attributes of Brahman. The three main deities are: Lord **Brahma**, Lord **Vishnu**



*Hindu Temple. Huddersfield*



*Hindu Temple, Huddersfield*

Whilst Hinduism has a multiplicity of deities, each with different attributes; there are certain themes which characterise the life of a Hindu. Important among these are: a sense of ethics and duties (**Dharma**); acceptance of the on-going cycle of birth-death-rebirth (**Samsara**); the sense of what you sow in one life will lead to what you reap in the next (**Karma**); and that ultimately, when all ignorance and desire is overcome, the samsara cycle will be broken and the soul will be at peace with Brahman (**Moksha**).

The most ancient of the Hindu religious texts are known as the **Vedas**; that date back over 3,000 years; the oldest, the Rig Veda Samhita, may reach back to before 6,500BC . They are known as Shruti texts (heard), ie received from God and passed down the generations. The Vedas are divided into four sections: the **Samhitas** (hymns of praise); **Brahmanas** (guides to the duties of the priests); **Aranyakas** (concerning worship and meditation); and **Upanishads** (mystical and philosophical writings). Other texts are known as Smriti (memorised) include the Bhagavad Gita and the Ramayana are also an important source of inspiration to Hindus.

Hindu worship takes place in both the temple and the home. Many Hindu homes have a personal shrine where devotions are offered to favourite deities. Typically, the temple will contain images of the various deities. Devotees are welcome to make clothes for the deities and to come and wash and dress them. The overwhelming sense is one of colour and variety. The colour saffron is a dominant colour of **Agni**, or fire, which symbolizes the Supreme Being.



*Diwali at the Hindu Temple, Huddersfield*

There are many holy days and these include: **Holi**, **Navarati** and, the most popular, **Diwali**...or Festival of Lights. The latter is also popular with Jains and Sikhs. Holi is a very, literally, hands-on festival. People congregate and throw



*Diwali at the Hindu Temple, Huddersfield*

coloured powder and paint at each other and a good time is had by all! Navratri

is a Hindu festival of worship and dance. The word Navaratri literally means nine nights in Sanskrit. During these nine days and nights, nine forms of Shakti i.e. female divinity are worshipped.



*Act of interfaith worship during Diwali celebrations at Huddersfield Hindu Temple*

Specific rites are associated with birth, marriage and death. When a baby is born to a Hindu family, **Jatakarma** is performed. A small amount of honey is placed in the child's mouth and the name of God is whispered in his/her ear. Hindu's regard marriage as a sacrament and the sacramental acts performed

at a marriage are called **Vivah Sanskar**. It is the tradition in Hinduism for the dead to be cremated on a pyre in the outdoors; the ashes would be gathered and scattered in water...most propitiously, the River Ganges. This allows the mixing of the five elements of; earth, fire, air, water and ether (spirit). However, this is not permitted in this country and this must take place at a crematorium. Some Hindus would seek to return bodies or ashes to India for reverent disposal as indicated above. Discussions

are taking place to see how Hindu funeral practices can be accommodated within this country.

Great value is placed on the sanctity of life. It follows that the killing of animals isn't encouraged and Hindus are mostly vegetarian.

The symbol of the Hindu faith is the OM.



Found first in the **Vedic** scriptures of Hinduism, Aum has been seen as the first manifestation of the unmanifest Brahman (the single Divine Ground of Hinduism) that resulted in the phenomenal universe. Essentially, all the cosmos stems from the vibration of the sound 'Aum' in Hindu cosmology.

Perhaps one should also note that another symbol prominent within Hinduism is the swastika. Unfortunately, it was hijacked by the Nazis but had an earlier religious significance of symbolizing the Hindu concept of samsara--the eternal cycle of birth, suffering, death and rebirth.

### **Personal Testimony.**

What do you regard as core aspects of your faith?

*“Brahman is the energy that is sustaining the universe...it is formless, beyond time, space and comprehension. Brahman sends us the Trinity – Lord Brahma, Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva”.*

*“Hinduism is a universal way of life... the essence of it is that we have one family of humanity, we're all equal, regardless of colour, caste or creed; that the one God we have is our father; that we're all brothers and sisters, regardless of the routes we take”.*

*“In Hinduism, I have the freedom to choose the route that I take”.*

*“Hinduism in a nutshell...being a good human being, doing good deeds”.*

How does your faith impact on your life?

*“In Hinduism, I have the freedom to worship any deity or no deity and use that mechanism to reach the goal of attaining salvation...that is union with the one God”.*

*“Hinduism is expressed through creativity, art, colours, noise or silence”*

*“Devotion involves awakening the God within you as an individual; meditation allows you to be attuned to the vibration of the energy of Brahman”.*

*“The guidelines are given, however it is you, as an individual, who has the freedom to make your own karma”.*

*“I am fortunate to be born as a human being because I have the ability, now, to be able to do good karma in worship, devotion, and charitable works which will give me more chance of attaining salvation”.*

What is your attitude to the other faiths?

*“All faiths are to be respected and are rivers flowing into the same ocean”.*

Why is the cows regarded with such respect?

*“A cow is a symbol of the earth and hence sacred. It is also believed to have been one of the first animals brought into being after the creation. Also, the cow is such a ‘giving’ animal...milk, cheese and even dung for fuel”.*

What about Hinduism and the caste system?

*“Hinduism did not bring in the caste system. The caste system was brought into Indian society by act of law to provide for a better working together of the country. It was never intended to give a “higher” or “lower” class of person but a working partnership. Unfortunately, it has been misinterpreted and misused”.*

# ISLAM

## Core Beliefs and Practices

At the outset, it is worth noting that the name “Islam” is derived from a word in Arabic that has as its core meaning “peace” and “submission”. Islam is the name of the religion...a follower of Islam is called a Muslim, which comes from the same root word.



*Mosque, Batley*

At the very heart of Islam is the declaration of faith (**Shahada**): “There is no god but Allah worthy of worship and Muhammad is the Messenger of God”. Islam has a shared history with both Judaism and Christianity.... great honour is accorded to the Old Testament prophets and to Jesus himself (as a prophet); when these honoured men are mentioned, their names are often followed by the words “Peace be upon him”. Honour is also given to Mary, the mother of Jesus. However, God’s final

messenger is said to be Mohammad, to whom God gave his final revelation of Himself in seventh century Mecca and is recorded as the **Qur’an**, the Muslim scriptures. The **Sunnah**, the practice and examples of the Prophet Muhammad’s life, and the **Hadith**, reports of what the prophet Muhammad said or approved, supplement this foundational material. The Qur’an, written in Arabic, is understood to be unalterable and forms the basis for Islamic law.

The core aspects of Islam are found in the so-called **Five Pillars of Islam**. In addition to the declaration of faith (**Shahada**), are: five daily prayer times (**Salat**), charitable giving (**Zakat**), fasting during the daylight hours of the lunar month of Ramadan (**Sawm**), and a once-in-a-lifetime pilgrimage to Mecca (**Hajj**). This latter pillar occurs in the twelfth lunar month of Dhul and must be undertaken by every sane adult

Muslim who can afford it and is physically able to do so.



*Leeds Grand Mosque*



*Madrassa, Batley*

The Muslim place of worship is the **mosque**. It is expected that male Muslims will attend Friday mid-day prayers; the main holy day. The Imam, the person responsible for leading the prayers in the mosque, would normally deliver a sermon at this time. Women are not required to attend the mosque; if they do so, they would be accommodated in another area of the mosque. The rationale for this, as in Orthodox Judaism, is that no-one should be distracted from the worship of God. The mosque has an area for

ritual washing prior to worship. The mosque's worship area faces towards **Mecca** and usually has an apse along the wall containing a pulpit used by the Imam to deliver his sermon. Whilst doing so, he would hold a staff like the prophets of the Old Testament. Sometimes, a school is associated with the mosque for the teaching of the faith to younger members; this is called a **Madrassa**.



*Al-Hikmah Centre, Indian Muslim Welfare Society, Batley*

There are only two obligatory **holy days**: **Eid ul Fitr** (festival of thanksgiving coming at the end of Ramadan, the month of fasting) and **Eid ul Adha** (festival of sacrifice remembering the prophet Ibrahim's willingness to sacrifice his son when God ordered him to); however, there are also several other special days which Muslims celebrate:

**Al-Hijra** (Muslim new year),  
**Ashura,**

**Lailat al Miraj, Lailat al Qadr, Lailat-ul-Bara'h, Milad un Nabi.** This latter festival is disputed by some Muslims. It is the celebration of the birthday of the Prophet; it is contentious on the grounds that it is an innovation, and innovations in religious matters are forbidden.



*Al-Hikmah Centre, Indian Muslim Welfare Society, Batley*

Islamic Law divides human activity into that which is: obligatory, recommended, permissible, disapproved, or forbidden. A **Mufti**, someone trained in Islamic law, is qualified to make these distinctions. The giving of such religious guidance is a **fatwah**; this is commonly misunderstood by non-Muslims as being a death penalty! An example of such distinction would be that alcohol and pork are forbidden; it is obligatory that other meats should have been ritually slaughtered and declared as **halal**.

The two major groupings within Islam are the **Sunni** and the **Shia**. The former holds a substantial majority worldwide (85%). Whilst the two groupings hold the same basic beliefs, their difference lies in the historical question of who should lead the Muslim faith after the death of the Prophet Mohammad. Sunni Muslims take the view that any new leader should be elected from amongst those capable to take on this role; in comparison, Shia Muslims believe that someone from the Prophet's immediate family should be leader. Therefore, throughout history Shia Muslims have not recognised the authority of elected leaders and acknowledge a line of descent believed to be from the Prophet himself.

There is a tradition of mysticism within Islam known as **Sufism**. Whilst some Muslims would argue that the Prophet made no specific mention of this tradition and question whether it is a legitimate part of Islam; others acknowledge the contribution they make and claim to trace the movement's origin back to the Prophet's words.

Of the c1,000 mosques in the UK, there are over 150 in Yorkshire and the Humber. Whilst they may be administered locally by a committee, in places such as Bradford there are also local councils of mosques.

Rites associated around **birth** do not have to take place within the mosque. Rites include: reciting the Muslim call to prayer in the child's right ear; shaving the child's head at 7 days old as a sign of submission to Allah and the giving of an amount to charity equal to the weight in silver of the child's shaved hair; the circumcision of a male child (either at 7 days or, at least, before puberty); naming; making a sheep meat offering and sharing this among relatives and the poor.

The **marriage** ceremony varies according to the culture of the land. If a mosque is not a registered place of worship, then the marriage must be legally registered according to UK law as well as having a ceremony in the mosque. Marriage is not regarded as being "till death us do part"; it is a contract with obligations placed on both parties. If either party breaks the contract, a divorce may be sought.

The **outdoor dress of Muslim women** is something that has attracted much comment in this country. It is important to note that, officially, a Muslim woman is not required to wear any particular form of attire. Islam simply requires that she be modestly dressed. Some women prefer to wear the **Hijab** (headscarf) which leaves the face and mouth visible; others wear the **Niqab** (face veil) which covers the face leaving only the eyes visible; a small number wear the full-length **Burkha** which completely obscures the person from view. The latter is actually borrowed from Byzantine Christian robes! Women insist that the choice of attire is a personal matter and expresses their freedom from sexual stereotypes and media pressure; it may also be seen as an expression of their Muslim identity. Similarly, a Muslim woman may prefer not to have physical contact with a man; though some are quite prepared to "shake hands" in greeting or farewell.

The symbol of the Islamic faith is the **crescent moon and star**.



It wasn't until the Ottoman Empire that the crescent moon and star became affiliated with the Muslim world. When the Turks conquered Constantinople (Istanbul) in 1453, they adopted the city's existing flag and symbol.

### **Personal Testimony**

What do you regard as core aspects of your faith?

*"Every Muslim would say that the five pillars of Islam are their articles of faith in terms of belief, practice and everyday life".*

*"The focus of my faith is that there is only one God; that is central to my belief and, to be more emotional, that is my core".*

*"The core...the main thing is about serving humanity".*

*“There is no God but Allah worthy of worship”.*

*“The Qur’an is the word of Allah; it can’t, and hasn’t, been changed”*

How does your faith impact on your on our life?

*“Every individual person, in their different fields or professions, would look at the five pillars not only in terms of belief but also in terms of Islam being a guidance as to how to interact with other human beings...the bottom line is that faith is essentially about being human”.*

*“The Qur’an is a way of life 24/7...it includes the rights of women, inheritance, children, other human beings, social cohesion, politics, war, medicine, science, family, partners, history...everything”.*

*“In this day and age, it’s all about rights...nobody talks about responsibilities. Deep down in Islam is the principle that each man or woman will be accountable in the hereafter”.*

*“Whatever comes is from Allah”.*

What is your attitude to the other faiths?

*“The last prophet was Mohammad BUT there was a line of prophets before him who I also respect and believe in”.*

What is your Response to the specific issue of media association of Islam with terrorism?

*“Think to times before 2001!”*

*“Don’t use the term Islamist...it associates Islam with terrorism”.*

*“Don’t take media-driven issues as case histories of Islam”.*

# Jainism

## Core Beliefs and Practices

In many ways, Jainism is different of many other religions in that it doesn't possess a belief in an omnipotent, omnipresent God, or Gods. That said, there is a belief in the devotion offered to the divine beings (**jinas**) who have broken free of the cycle of birth-death-rebirth having achieved perfection.

The name of the religion is drawn from the word "**Jin**", or, "one who has achieved the spiritual victory". This gives a clue as to the nature of the religion; the defeat of harmful practices and urges within oneself, which, in turn mar the experience of living.

Jainism originated in India and advocates a life of renunciation and the seeking to do no harm (**Ahimsa**) against anything that is living. A core feature is that not only human beings, but also animals and plants contain living souls which must be afforded respect. The strictest monks and nuns will brush the ground before they sit so as not to crush any insect. Not surprisingly, Jains are strict vegetarians and also avoid some other foods including: eggs, dairy, garlic, onions. They seek to make the least impact on the world's resources.

As mentioned above, reincarnation is an important part of their faith. Ultimate salvation, or liberation from this ongoing cycle, is called **Moksha**. This will only be achieved as a result of successful spiritual progress whereby all **Karma** has been eliminated from the soul (**Jiva**). Jains imagine karma as a substance that sticks to the soul providing a record of your life...some have referred to it as a "cosmic scorecard". Progress will be encouraged by following the **Three Jewels** of Jainism: Right Belief (**Samyak Darshana**); Right Conduct (**Samyak Charitra**); Right Knowledge (**Samyak Jnana**). Whilst Jainism professes to have gender equality; in practice, for some Jains (**Digambara**) the belief still holds good that a woman can't achieve moksha without first being born as a man...the other main group (**Svetambara**) dissent from this view.

Renunciation lies at the heart of the faith; there are five vows of renunciation (**Mahavratas**). One has already been mention, **Ahimsa**, non-violence. The other four are: non-attachment to personal possessions; not lying; not stealing; and sexual restraint.

Jainism looks back to **Mahavira** as the person who gave Jainism its present form and outlook. He was the last of 24 **Tirthankaras** (Sanskrit word meaning "ford-maker") or jinas. They are believed to have made the crossing over life's stream to perfection by breaking the cycle of birth-death-rebirth. He lived in the sixth century BC in the modern Indian state of Bihar. He was born to a wealthy family but at the age of 30 years renounced his wealthy lifestyle in order to attain purity and an insight into the meaning of life. The rest of his life was spent in meditation and teaching a small group of followers who eventually formed a monastic order based upon the rules he laid down. When he sensed his life to be complete, he entered a final fast and starved to death.

The teachings he gave are called the **Agamas**; the texts had to be memorised because, as part of the vows of renunciation, they were forbidden to write or own books. They are the texts recognised by the Svetambara Jains. Unfortunately, a severe famine around 350BC killed many of the monks and much of the teaching was thought to be lost. Later a conference of monks tried to piece together again the core of the agamas. This was a cause of much dispute with the other group of Jains, the Digambara, who believed that the original texts were irretrievably lost. Today monks are allowed to own books; hence the teachings that have been agreed as authentic should now be preserved.

The difference between the two groups is essentially one of monastic discipline. The Digambara (lit. “**sky-clad**”) are the more ascetic; they wear no clothes (females are allowed to wear saris), have no possessions at all and collect donated food in their bare hands. The Svetambara (lit. “**white-clad**”) monks and nuns collect their food in bowls and wear white robes. Also, as noted above, the Digambara do not allow that women might achieve liberation of the cycle of reincarnation.

In the mid-1990s, there were about 7 million Jains; the majority living in Indian states of Maharashtra (principally Mumbai), Rajasthan and Gujarat. There are c 15,000 Jain in the UK, with only a few families living in Yorkshire. There are major temples



*Leeds Jain Centre*

(**Mandirs**) in London and Leicester; however, a shrine (**Murti**) was installed in Leeds by the Yorkshire Jain Foundation in 2001. There are no priests, the ministers of the Jain faith are monks and nuns.

With regard to worship, the rituals are superficially similar to those of Hinduism. There are shrines at home and in public temples. However, as Jainism has no concept of God, the purpose of worship is different. In worship, Jain devotees remember the example of the Tirthankaras and seek to emulate them...worship is a means to an end rather than being an end in itself. Major festivals include: **Mahavira Jayanti** (Mahavira’s birthday), **Paryushana** (eight days of fasting, repentance and pujas/prayers), **Diwali**, **Kartak Purnima** (comes after Diwali and is a time for pilgrimages to be undertaken) and **Mauna Agyaras** (a time of reflecting on the divine beings).

Jains observe life-cycle ceremonies around the times of: the first taking of solid food by a child; marriage and death.



The symbol of Jainism is the **Jain Hand**.

The open hand symbolises its main tenet, the doctrine of *Ahimsa*, nonviolence. The wheel in the centre of the palm is the wheel of Samsara, the cycle of birth-death-rebirth; the word in the centre of the wheel reads "stop." Together, they represent the halting of the cycle of reincarnation through the practice of Jain asceticism and the avoidance of harm to any living creature.

*Unfortunately, given the sparse numbers of Jains in this area, I have not been able to procure any personal testimony.*

# Judaism

## Core beliefs and Practices

Judaism is a **monotheistic** faith that traces its origins back to Abraham. Both Christianity and Islam would also look back to Abraham as a key historical figure within their particular faith; however, Judaism pre-dates both having originated in the Middle East over 3,500 years ago.

The Jewish sacred texts are known, collectively, as the **Tanach**. This is an acronym of the names of the three main divisions of the texts: **Torah** (Law), **Nevi'im** (Prophets), and **Ketuvim** (Writings). Christian observers would recognise the individual books of the Tanach as being the same as those within their own Old Testament, though in a different order. Christians should note that in dialogue with Jews, it would be regarded as offensive to Jews to hear their own texts being referred to as the old testament as this implies that there is a new testament...for Jews the sacred writings are the “Bible”.



*Sinai Synagogue, Roundhay, Leeds*

There is another body of writings called the **Talmud**. Orthodox Jews regard this as being as equally inspired and authoritative as the Tanach itself; those from the Reform tradition would give less weight to these writings regarding it as a human interpretation formed at a particular time and in a particular place. However viewed, the Talmud was collated between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries CE. It is made up of the **Mishnah** (a rabbinical commentary on the Torah) and the **Gemara** (a commentary on the Mishnah itself. This is a complex area and is one that

represents the whole ideological core difference between the Orthodox and Reform traditions.

A key feature of the Jewish faith is the concept of “**covenant**”. God asks the people of Israel to be committed to Him alone; in return He would guarantee their protection. God made a first covenant with Abraham; this was re-affirmed to Moses at Mt Sinai. The account of the making of these covenants can be read in the books of Genesis (ch 17) and Exodus (ch 19). It is the concept of covenant that leads the Jewish people to regard themselves as being “chosen” by God. One of the implications of being chosen is the requirement to lead holy lives and there are laws to cover the whole range of life experiences. The Talmud identifies 613 commandments, the most important of which are the Ten Commandments. The Christian ethical code also looks back to the Ten Commandments as the authoritative expression of God’s will for human behaviour.

Judaism today comprises a variety of movements, the most important of which is the **Orthodox, Reform, and Conservative**. The Orthodox movement is the most traditional of the Jewish movements: believing that the revelation of God’s teaching for humanity was completed at Mount Sinai with the handing down of both the written and the oral Law and is unalterable and needing no addition. The laws

concerning permitted/forbidden foods are strictly observed within this tradition. The same may be said to apply to gendered behaviour, though there is some variety within the Orthodox tradition. The Reform movement is more liberal and inclusive: food laws may be less strictly adhered to; women have a greater part to play in the life of the faith – they may be rabbis, for example; there is greater acceptance of families with non-Jewish members and Reform teachers are more likely to give due weight to context and culture in religious decision-making. The Conservative movement could be regarded as a middle course between these two.

Judaism has its own mystical traditions: **Hassidism** and **Kabbalah**. Rather like their Christian and Islamic counterparts, inward and spiritual experience sometimes seems at odds with the more rational expressions of faith.



*The Ark, Sinai Synagogue, Roundhay, Leeds*

The Jewish place of worship is known as a **synagogue**. In an Orthodox synagogue women and men would be seated in separate areas. Acts of worship are led by a **Rabbi** or a member of the congregation. Worship in the synagogue takes place at least weekly and always on the Sabbath (**Shabbat**), which extends from sunset on Friday until sunset on the following day. When Jews worship in the synagogue, all males will wear a head covering of some sort, usually a hat called a **yarmulke** (Yiddish) or **kippah** (Hebrew). In the

Orthodox tradition, married women also wear hats. Men (and also some women) will also wear prayer shawls (**tallit**). Services would be in the Hebrew language in an Orthodox synagogue, but may include modern English elsewhere. The focus of attention in the synagogue is the **Ark** containing the Torah scrolls. These are written on parchment and contained within decorative covers. They are ceremoniously brought out of the Ark and placed on a stage (**Bimah**) on which a reading desk is placed; as this takes place the congregation would stand. Above



*Bimah, Brincliffe Crescent, Sheffield Synagogue*

the Ark is hung a light (**Ner Tamid**); this symbolises the ever-present nature of God.



*Bimah, Brincliffe Crescent, Sheffield Synagogue*

Observant Jews will pray three times each day and there are further prayers on the Sabbath and holy days. Whilst praying alone at home is valid, the ideal is to pray as part of a quorum of ten adult males (**minyan**).

On the Sabbath, there are restrictions on the kinds of activity which one may participate in; this reflects the Sabbath as a day of rest and a time for enjoying being together as a family. Special meals and prayers at home form part of the family celebration of the Sabbath.

The Jewish calendar is a luni-solar one; The months are lunar but the year is solar and there are leap year corrections to keep the seasons and months in step.. This means that dates for the beginning/ending of festivals will not be same each year. However, in listing the major festivals below, I have given an approximation with the Gregorian calendar. Note also that the first month in the Jewish calendar is Nisan (Apr-early May), but the Jewish New Year is celebrated as Rosh Hashanah in the month Tishri (Sept-Oct).



*Menorah, Brincliffe Crescent, Sheffield Synagogue*

- **Purim** - commemorates the time when the Jewish people living in Persia were saved from extermination by the courage of a young Jewish woman called Esther (Adar, equiv. to mid-March) as written in the Book of Esther.
- **Passover** - commemorates the liberation of the people of Israel who were led out of Egypt by Moses, unleavened bread is eaten and leaven is removed from the home (Nisan, equiv. to Apr-early May)
- **Shavuot** – the receiving of the Torah on Mt Sinai which marks the completion of the Exodus (Sivan, equiv. to May-June)
- **Rosh Hashanah** – Jewish New Year (1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> Tishri, equiv. to Sept-Oct)
- **Yom Kippur** – The Day of Atonement, the most solemn day of the year for Jewish people (10<sup>th</sup> Tishri, equiv. to Sept-Oct)
- **Sukkot** – commemorates the years spent wandering through the wilderness, also associated with the harvest (15<sup>th</sup> Tishri, equiv. to Sept-Oct)
- **Hanukkah** – Festival of Lights commemorating the victory of the Maccabees and the subsequent rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem (164 BCE) and the miraculous provision of one days worth of oil continuing to burn for eight days (Kislev, equiv. to mid-late Dec) as described in the Books of Maccabees and the Apochrypha.

Another important feature of Jewish life is the observance of **dietary laws**. Key principles include a prohibition of any food that contains pork or shellfish; this is actually a simplification and more detailed information is available from Jewish sources. Also prohibited is the mixing of meat and dairy products. Additionally, those meats regarded as permissible must have been ritually slaughtered. A special term (**Kosher**) refers to any food that is permitted. Those who adhere strictly to kosher principles will require different utensils for the different types of food. As noted above, the manner in which these principles are adhered to will vary between the stricter Orthodox movement and the more liberal Reform movement.

Birth rites differ for boys and girls in Judaism. Jewish boys would normally be circumcised (**Brit Milah**) on the eighth day after birth and their name given. Circumcision is a reminder of God's covenant with Abraham. Girls have their names read out in the synagogue at the first public reading of the Torah after their birth.

Until the age of 13 (for boys) or 12 (for girls) children are not *required* to observe the commandments, though they are to be encouraged to do so. At the age of 13, a boy

becomes **Bar Mitzvah** (or **Bat Mitzvah** in the case of a girl when she turns 12)...lit. a son or daughter of the commandment. It is the point at which religious obligations are assumed. In the Reform tradition, both boys and girls would take part in a ceremony in the synagogue; in an Orthodox setting, if celebrated at all, the girl's Bat Mitzvah would not involve participation in a service and may well be restricted to a party in the home, though some change is beginning to take place.

In respect of marriage, there are many ceremonies that lead up to the marriage rite celebrated in the synagogue.

A special mention should be made of the Holocaust. This terrible event during the Second World War has had a profound impact on the psyche of the Jews; the depth of which is difficult for the non-Jew to understand.

The symbol of the Jewish religion is the **Star of David**



Whilst some regard this as a modern logo, others trace it back to the Magen David (literally "Shield of David") which has six-points that symbolize that God rules over the universe and protects us from all six directions: North, South, East, West, Up and Down.

### **Personal Testimonies**

What do you regard as core aspects of your faith?

*"To try to answer this risks making something which is multi-faceted into a single-dimensional entity".*

*"Judaism provides a way in which humanity can encounter God, a God of mercy and justice."*

*"The Jewish view of the universe is not dualistic, it is not a battleground between good and evil; if something is wrong...it's our fault, we blew it! Our faith helps us to recognise this and do something to repair the damage"*

*"Judaism has no notion of being born in a state of sin".*

*"The Messianic age (which some identify with the arrival of a personal Messiah) will be a time of universal peace."*

*"There is a sense in which the Jewish people are like the canary down the mine...perhaps even our role in history. If things are going well with the Jewish people, then the world is doing OK"*

*"I tell our kids that they are living in at a unique moment in history...nowhere in the world is a Jewish community held captive; the pessimist in me says that this can't last!"*

How does your faith impact on your life?

*“I belong to a chain of tradition that can be traced back 4,000 years; we have learned from the past but are part of a developing, forward-looking relationship with God – for example, in this time of celebrating Wilberforce’s achievements in abolishing slavery, we recall that the biblical tradition had no problem with slavery...however, we have moved on from that position; we are in a dialectical relationship with God.”*

*“Jewishness is more about identity than faith”*

What is your attitude to the other faiths?

*“Judaism has no monopoly on truth; we don’t believe in an innate state of sin and therefore don’t have a product to sell. We are all on the same level playing field”.*

*“Jews welcome the righteous of all the nations”*

*“Judaism is pattern for living for Jews only, not for others”.*

*“Inter-faith activity is something that is easier to destroy than it is to build”*

*“An inter-faith group was created for the Abrahamic faiths to have dialogue in Leeds...this was before the events of 7/7; it co-ordinated a rally in Millennium Square with the support of the City Council after 7/7 and allowed a positive effect to come out of that crisis”.*

# Sikhism

## Core Belief and Practices



*Guru Granth Sahib, Gurdwara, Lay Pitt Lane, Leeds*

Sikhism is a **monotheistic** religion that was founded by **Guru Nanak** in the Punjab that is now divided between Pakistan and India. Guru Nanak founded this religion towards the end of the fifteenth century and it is now followed by 20 million people worldwide; there are about half a million in the UK. Guru Nanak was followed by nine other gurus (teachers), the last being Guru Gobind Singh. This last of the gurus placed spiritual authority in the Sikh scripture – the **Guru Granth Sahib**. Note the name given to the holy book.... it is seen as deserving the same

respect as any of the human gurus; in fact, when placed on a dias (Takht) under its canopy (Chanani) in the gurdwara each morning at daybreak, there is a fan (Chaur) which is wafted over as a sign of authority. When not being read, it is kept covered by an expensive cloth. If any question arises that has no direct reference within the holy book, the last guru decreed that the community as a whole should come to a common mind based on the principles as set out in the book.

As a monotheistic religion, Sikhism has the belief in the oneness of God but stresses that God has **neither form nor gender**. Whilst there are priests to serve in the Sikh temple (gurdwara), all have direct access to God and are to be regarded as of equal status before God. This latter point of Sikh belief is sometimes a cause of tension given the caste structure that is part of the region where the religion grew up. Even in this country, gurdwaras are found to be organised along caste groupings.

Whilst worship of God is a key aspect of Sikh faith, it is also important to recognise the importance of serving one another in the community. Such service is called **seva**. Far from distracting a person from God, seva is a means of approaching God as it turns the attention away from one's own perceived status and guards against pride. Typical seva might be cleaning the gurdwara, caring for the poor, sick or elderly; it might be assisting in the **langar**....the food that is prepared each day in the gurdwara kitchen for the congregation and whoever has need of a free meal.



*Langer Hall, Gurdwara, Lady Pitt Lane*

There are specific rituals that take place **after a child is born**. In the home, the Mool Mantar (a key prayer, composed by Guru Nanak) is whispered into the ears of the child and a drop of honey is placed inside the mouth. It is also customary to visit the temple as soon as it is physically possible after giving birth; this is usually within forty days of the birth of the child. Here the Guru Granth Sahib is opened by the Granthi (priest) and a passage is read out aloud at random. The family will then choose a name by using the first letter of the hymn on the page opened. The baby's

name is announced to the congregation, the Granthi will also add Singh (lion) if the baby is a boy and Kaur (princess) if the child is a girl. This is followed by the distribution amongst the congregation of **Karah Parshad**, made from flour, semolina, butter and sugar.



*Gurdwara, Lady Pitt Lane, Leeds*

Whilst spiritual authority is to be found in the Guru Granth Sahib; temporal authority is invested in the congregation, the men and women who have been initiated into the Sikh faith; this group of committed people is known as the **Khalsa** (literally, the community of the pure ones). There is no specific age at which this initiation ceremony must be performed; the key is that the person should be old enough to understand the nature of their commitment. There are certain rituals that are associated with admittance to the khalsa: those

being initiated are given **amrit**, a sugary drink, and take to themselves a middle name. Men take the middle name, Singh (lit. lion) and women, Kaur (lit. princess). From thence onwards, members of the khalsa would be expected to wear the **5 K's** as a physical symbol of their dedication. The 5 K's are:

**Kesh**: uncut hair hidden beneath the turban (applies also to all bodily hair) is an indication of the acceptance of all that is given by God.

**Kanga**: a wooden comb (kept within the turban) is used to clean the hair and is a sign of cleanliness.

**Kara**: a steel bracelet which symbolises being bound to the guru and is a reminder to do nothing that would bring offence or shame.

**Kirpan**: a curved sword. Kir – “kind”; pan – “blessing”; a sign of willingness to contend on behalf of the righteous.

**Kachha**: a pair of shorts which denote modesty and moral restraint.

Sikhs speak of having **three pillars** which must be adhered to at all times:

Meditating on God's name (**Nam Japna**) – this should not be interpreted as inward-looking; God is present throughout creation and there is spiritual benefit to be gained in all human endeavour.

To earn one's living honestly (**Kirt Karna**) – this reflects the belief that Sikhs should earn their living by honest and truthful means thus avoiding gambling, crime, and the alcohol or tobacco industries.

Share with the needy (**Vand Chhakna**) – this means not only financial wealth but also knowledge and abilities.

Sikhs conceive of life being for the purpose of uniting with the Creator having lived through, possibly, many cycles of birth, death and rebirth.... in this respect Sikhs share a similar world-view with Hindus, Jains and Buddhists. Each life depends on the law of **Karma**....”you reap what you sow”. The only way to break the cycle is to achieve union



*Gurdwara, Chapeltown Road,*

with God. A life full of lust, anger, pride, greed and attachment to worldly things would result in bad karma; the opposite would advance a believer along the road to liberation.

Sikhism has a marriage ceremony known as **Anand Karaj**. This takes place in the Gurdwara before the Guru Granth Sahib, and any Sikh man or woman may act as officiant. The Sikh marriage relationship is modelled on the love between human soul and the Supreme Soul as described in the Guru Granth Sahib). The bridegroom and the bride vow fidelity to each other in the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib and the congregation. They accept their obligations by bowing before Guru Granth Sahib. The ceremony concludes with a sharing of Karah Parshad.

There is no specific **holy day** in Sikhism as all days are perceived as God-given. However, as Sunday is the predominant day of worship in western culture, Sikhism adopts this day as the day of communal worship in the gurdwara. Worship consists of reading of the Guru Granth Sahib, explaining the hymns and philosophy of Sikhism in simple Punjabi (**Viakhia**), and the singing of hymns drawn from the holy book (**Kirtan**) and may be accompanied by instruments such as a small harmonium, tabla and, maybe, the sitar. Special worship is held on the **first day of the lunar month** and festivals include the **gurpurbs** (the anniversaries of the ten gurus), **diwali** (celebrates the release from prison of the sixth guru, Hargobind Singh in 1619), **Vaisakhi** (Sikh new year and celebration of formation of Khalsa in 1699) and **Hola Mahalla** (around mid-March celebrating victory of good over evil). The fact that the lunar calendar is used means that Sikh festivals, like others using the lunar cycle, do not coincide with the corresponding solar calendar dates each year. Anyone can lead worship and recite the scriptures but each gurdwara would normally have one or more **Granthi** who acts as reader and custodian of the Guru Granth Sahib and who would bless those who ask for God protection and guidance before, say, a journey or important life decision.

The symbol of the Sikh religion is the **Khanda**.



This comprises a double-edged sword, two curved swords and a steel ring with a sharpened outer edge for throwing (like a frisbee!)...all of them weapons but symbolising the fight for truth.

### **Personal Testimonies**

What do you regard as core aspects of your faith?

*“The oneness of God and equality of humanity”*

*“Sikhs believe that humans are created in ‘God’s image’”.*

*“The importance of meeting people as people; recognise each person on the basis of their actions not their colour or caste”.*

How does your faith impact on your life?

*“A baptised Sikh must pray a minimum of three times a day, but they must aim to remember God with every breath and realise His presence constantly”*

*“Sikhism is a simple practical religion where respect for other religions and humanity as a whole is important”.*

*“Sikhism’s great gift to the world was to assert the equality of women and men”.*

What is your attitude to the other faiths?

*“The Sikh worldview visualises a wheel rim connected to the hub by spokes. Where each spoke starts at the circumference is each faith group; the spoke is the pathway that members of that faith will travel. As we walk along our own religious path, we find that we are getting closer to God AND each other”.*

*“Sikhism has no concept of conversion; anyone who believes in God is worth respecting and each faith is valuable”.*

*“Other religions are good...live by your own religion’s rules, none are better than any other.”*

## Zoroastrianism

### Core Beliefs and Practises

Zoroastrianism is one of the oldest monotheistic religions in the world, reaching back at least 3,500 years...and quite probably much longer. The key person in this religion is the prophet **Zoroaster** (also known as Zarathustra), who lived in what is now called Iran. He taught that God is one and is called **Ahura Mazda** (Wise Lord) and was the creator of the world. Zoroaster received this teaching as part of a series of visions when he was 30 years old. Ahura Mazda is accompanied by the six **Amesha Spentas** (Holy Immortals). They are not gods but are regarded as attributes of the divine; Zoroastrians believe that a person can draw closer to God through imitation of them. The six are: **Vohu Manah** (good mind and good purpose); **Asha Vahishta** (truth and righteousness); **Spenta Ameraiti** (holy devotion, serenity and loving kindness); **Khashathra Vairya** (power and just rule); **Hauravat** (wholeness and health) and **Ameretat** (long life and immortality).

Ahura Mazda is believed to be in constant battle with the forces of darkness as personified by **Angra Mainya** (Destructive Spirit). The former dwells in the heights of heaven whilst the latter has descended to the lowest hell. This dualism had a profound influence on the Abrahamic faiths that were to follow. Depending on one's actions in this life, a person will, after death, go to either heaven or hell. Therefore, a feature of a Zoroastrian's life is recognising and taking the opportunities afforded in everyday life to advance the cause of good over evil. Zoroastrian belief and practice can be summed up in the mantra: "Good Thoughts, Good Words, Good Deeds".

Zoroastrianism was the official religion of Persia for more than six centuries before and after the birth of Christ. When Islam came to the area, the Muslims sought to convert the Zoroastrians. Some fled to India and became known as **Parsis**; those who remained were the **Irani**. There are c.140,000 Parsis in the world, 90,000 of which live in India (70,000 in Mumbai). There are only c4,000 Zoroastrians in the UK (inc. both Irani and Parsis) and only a small number living in Yorkshire and the Humber.

The Zoroastrian scriptures are known as **The Avesta**. There are two main sections within the Avesta: an older section contains the **Gathas** (seventeen hymns thought to be composed by the prophet himself); and a newer section, the **Younger Avesta**, containing commentary on the older work, myths, stories and details of ritual.



*Fire Temple, Yazd*

There are a variety of centres of worship within the Zoroastrian religion. The most prestigious fire temples (or **Atash Behrams**), of which there are only eight in the world, are all located in India...with the exception of one, located in the Iranian city of Yazd. The next level of Zoroastrian Fire Temples are known as **Agiaries**, and they are far more numerous, being of greatest evidence in Mumbai. The holy fires in the Atash Behrams and Agiaries remain burning perpetually and are never allowed to die. When the Zoroastrians settled in India for the purpose of religious sanctuary, they transported their holy fires from Iran. The fire temple in the Atash Behram at Udvada, in India, has been tended by priests and has been burning incessantly for the past 1,377 years (since the Zoroastrians landed in India).

All fires within fire temples have to be consecrated in line with complex and archaic traditions. Places of worship where the fire is not tended perpetually, but kindled as and when required, are known as **Dadgas**. The holy fire in the Navsari Atash Behram (in India) has existed for 1,377, as above, but may, in fact, have existed for c.3,000 years from its origin in Iran.



*Prayer Room, Harrow  
Zoroastrian Centre © BBC*

There are no Atash Behrams or Agiaries in the UK, just one dadgas, in London. Zoroastrian worship tends to be, of necessity therefore, within the context of the home. Prayers are traditionally offered five times a day and are said facing the sun, a fire or other source of illumination and are usually a celebration of Ahura Mazda and a calling on his name.

Zoroastrianism has many religious festivals; this gives the religion a reputation for being a religion of celebration. There are seven obligatory festivals, six of which are called the **Gahambars**...all of them reflecting an origin in the agricultural background of the original Zoroastrians in Persia/Iran. The six are: **Maidyozarem** ('mid-spring' feast); **Maidyoshahem** ('mid-summer' feast); **Paitishahem** (feast of 'bringing in the harvest'); **Ayathrem** ('bringing home the herds'); **Maidyarem** ('mid-year'/winter feast); **Hamaspahmaidyem** (feast of 'All Souls'). There is also the festival of **Noruz**, the celebration of the new year on the Spring Equinox; this is followed six days later by **Khordad Sal**, the date attributed to Zoroaster's birthday.

There are ceremonies marking the important stages of life around coming into the Zoroastrian faith, marriage and death. A child formally enters the faith at the **Navjote** ceremony; usually between about 5 years old but before puberty. He, or she, is invested with their **sudreh** (a white tunic) and given a **kusti** (a knotted cord worn around the waist) to assist with the saying of the daily prayers. The priest (**dasturji**) would normally officiate at this ceremony. Zoroastrian marriage involves two ceremonies: one to sign the marriage contract; another to celebrate the marriage. The latter includes the symbolic use of sugar to "sweeten" the couple's relationship and the sewing together of two sides of a scarf held over their heads during the ceremony; this symbolises the unity that their marriage has brought about. Perhaps the most well-known aspect of Zoroastrian ritual surrounds the funeral rite. Death is considered to be the work of Angra Mainya. After a person dies, the body is considered as impure. Traditionally, the body would be laid out on a purpose-built tower structure (**dokhma**, tower of silence) exposed to the open air and preyed upon by carrion, such as vultures. This still takes place in Mumbai, where the largest concentration of Parsis still lives;



*Pundole Agiary, Udvada*

however, the practice is now under threat. This tradition is not an option in the UK and most Zoroastrians would opt for cremation.



The symbol of the Zoroastrian faith is the **Faruhar**; this means "to choose". The symbol is made up of four distinct elements. The first is a wing with three layers of feathers representing the

three core features of: good works, good deeds, and good thoughts. The second is a ring representing eternity. The third is two streamers at the base representing the duality of good (left) and evil (right). The final element is the head of a man, the prophet Zoroaster, significantly facing to the left; having made the choice to live a morally upright life.

### **Personal Testimonies**

What do you regard as core aspects of your faith?

*“Zoroaster preached good thoughts, words and deeds”*

*“Zoroastrian’s teachings are non-prescriptive...it leaves it open for each one to decide the path they are to follow”.*

*“There is a constant struggle between good and evil, with a final victory for the good. The world will be made fresh again and there is hope, eventually, even for those souls who find themselves in hell”.*

How does your faith impact on your life?

*“It requires me to respect others and always be conscious of the actions that you take; also to be aware of ecological issues and the needs of the animal kingdom”.*

*“We can’t live without the light of the sun or without heat; so fire plays an important part in our worship”.*

*“An example of the benevolence practised by Zoroastrians is that of JRD Tata (Indian industrialist, and new owner of British Steel); when such people had made their money, they built flats for the poor”*

What is the Zoroastrian attitude to the other faiths?

*“The Zoroastrian religion does not hold or propagate opinions about other faiths. It is, in essence, tolerant towards all alternative religious philosophies”.*

## SUGGESTED TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

The topics for discussion which follow have suggested themselves as this piece of work has progressed. I hope that you will consider them in the light of the information given here of the other main faiths, the personal testimonies given by members of those faiths, and your own experiences and perceptions.

Whilst it is certainly true that we may well have not spoken in depth, or even at all, with a member of a faith different from our own, it will certainly be true that we will have been exposed to their presence through the sometimes distorted views of newspaper reporters or TV interviewers. A Native American leader is said to have once advised that we shouldn't presume to say that we know someone or criticise them until we have walked in their moccasins!

Andrew Wingate has written an important book which explores the issues raised by the increasing numbers of non-Christian believers residing in this country – “Celebrating Difference, Staying Faithful” (DLT, 2005). In it, he writes that Archbishop Trevor Huddleston believed that fighting the evils of colonialism was the major issue for the latter part of the twentieth century, and that developing understanding of and between faiths should have the same urgency at the start of this twenty-first century.

Let me be clear...I am not advocating a lowest common denominator approach to religious expression; nor do I support those within the Christian tradition (or any other tradition for that matter!) who believe that they alone have the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. The title of Wingate's book probably best expresses my position. It ought to be possible to celebrate the different things that each of us holds dear, whilst remaining faithful to the spiritual tradition in which we ourselves were nurtured. So much of the antipathy towards other faiths that I have been on the receiving end during the course of this work stems from a sense of insecurity. However, when once we have dared to 'meet' and look beyond the labels that each of us wears...we discover fellow human beings with much in common. This is exactly the point that one of the personal contributors made during the course of this work “at its best religion makes us more human”.

I have (with some difficulty!) resisted giving answers to the questions that are posed here. I suggest that you approach them as you would a travel guide, noting them as possible stopping off points to take in the view. Please use them, ask your own questions, seek out help in answering them and marvel that wherever you look in the world, someone has a name for that of infinite value which they sense to be beyond themselves.

## Topic One - The Bible, Jesus and other faiths

Commenting on the person of Jesus, Mark Goodacre (Senior Lecturer, University of Birmingham) writes: *“That such a person could have become so significant in world history is remarkable. But how much can we know with certainty about the Jesus of history? How reliable are the New Testament accounts about him? Opinions vary widely among scholars and students of the Bible”*.

How do you react to this quotation?

I strongly suspect that, in large measure, our attitude to people of other faiths is determined by who we think that Jesus is and what his ultimate purpose was. John Bell (a leader in the Iona Community) writes: *“It’s difficult to know how much of what’s written in the Gospels is an insight into how Jesus saw himself and how much is comment of other people as to how they saw Jesus”*.

I was brought up and trained in a theological tradition for which the words of John 3v16 *“God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life”* were paramount. It was assumed that Jesus was the unique and sole meaningful expression of God. Other passages also suggested a uniqueness that was beyond question...John 14v6 *“I am the Way, and the Truth and the Life. No-one comes to the Father except through me”*; also Acts 4v12 *“There is salvation in no-one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved”*. And yet I must acknowledge the presence of so many believers who look to another source of inspiration under God.

How can it be true that so many are deceiving themselves?

What do we mean by salvation?

Is salvation something that has already been ‘won’ for us, or is it something that requires a lifelong effort on our part?

Mark Goodacre again, *“The big question about Jesus is did Jesus think of himself as Messiah, did he believe he was the distinctive person that had a really pivotal role to play in God’s plan”*.

How would you respond to Jesus’ own question – who do people say that I am?

Three positions have been suggested that the Christian faith might adopt in its viewpoint on other faiths:

- **Exclusivist** – as its title suggests, those who belong to this camp take the view that Jesus, and Jesus alone, is able to bring us to the realisation of salvation. The texts I mentioned above would be conclusive.
- **Inclusivist** – here would be those who say that Jesus speaks for all people and includes all, irrespective of class, race or creed. They would take their inspiration from St John’s notion of Jesus as the *Logos*, the Word of God. This *Logos* is identified with the Spirit that moved at the time of creation and which is beyond the close confines of the Christian Church alone.

- Pluralist – the view here is that Jesus is a pathway to God for Christians but that those of other faiths have their own equally valid pathways. A musical analogy would be that of singers singing together in harmony rather than unison; what sounds very different when heard in isolation, together makes for an uplifting whole.

What merit, or otherwise, would you give to each of these positions, and why?

You should also note that other faiths are not unaware of Jesus....

- Islam has 93 references to *Isa* in the Qur'an. His birth of the Virgin Mary is attested...in fact there are more verses referring to *Maryam* in the Qur'an than there is in the Bible! Jesus is acknowledged as a prophet, is accorded greater miraculous powers than given in the New Testament, and his return is expected as a sign of the end times. Muslims would say that it is not possible to be a Muslim without believing in Jesus...however, Jesus is not believed to be more than a prophet, *Allah* has no son and is indivisible.
- Hinduism easily accepts Jesus as one of their Gods. It is a commonplace to hear Hindus speak of their respect for Jesus. Many temples have pictures of Jesus alongside other divine representations. What is difficult for a Hindu is the notion of exclusivity that the Christian faith suggests. Some Hindus find it possible to respond to the Christian faith whilst still remaining as Hindus. I have also read of a Christian minister who also serves as a Hindu priest whilst visiting India.
- Sikhs can relate to the suffering and death of Jesus, as many of their gurus have also experienced much at the hands of others. They can also relate to Jesus as a teacher and to the Bible, as Sikhism values the place of teaching.
- A Buddhist nun who converted to Buddhism in her thirties, Ajahn Candasiri, reflects once more on the faith of her upbringing through (now) Buddhist eyes: *“Well, I have to say that he (Jesus) comes across as being much more human than I remember. Although there is much said about him being the son of God, somehow that doesn't seem nearly as significant to me as the fact that he is a person - a man of great presence, enormous energy and compassion, and significant psychic abilities. He also has a great gift for conveying spiritual truth in the form of images, using the most everyday things to illustrate points he wishes to make: bread, fields, corn, salt, children, trees. People don't always understand at once, but are left with an image to ponder. Also he has a mission - to re-open the Way to eternal life; and he's quite uncompromising in his commitment to, as he puts it, 'carrying out his Father's will.'”*
- Jews will, largely, acknowledge Jesus as a great moral teacher in the tradition of their rabbis. Provided Christians do not insist that the old covenant is annulled by Jesus, there is much that can be shared in the knowledge that Jesus, indeed, lived his life as a Jew.

Wingate quotes Archbishop Rowan Williams from a 2003 lecture: *“Our doctrine is still in formation; and the question of how holy lives can exist outside our own tradition has throughout Christian history led to some of the most searching and far-reaching extensions of our language about the significance of Jesus...we do not see others either as bad or unsuccessful copies of ourselves or as people who have a few*

*casual variants on a shared truth. We have to see how very other our universes are; and only then do we find dialogue a surprise and a joy as we discover where and how we can still talk about what matters most – holiness, being at peace, and what truly is”.*

How do we respond to this vision of Archbishop Williams?

## Topic Two – Living alongside people of different faiths

In the report commissioned by Faith Matters, “Understanding Faiths”, we find the words: *“What we believe informs our sense of who we are, gives rise to our attitudes and values, and affects the way we behave towards each other and towards the environment we all share. So faith is a social and public matter, as well as a private matter, and it’s something we must try to understand in order to build better, stronger communities”*.

Do you accept the premise of this quotation?

If so, how do you demonstrate it in your own neighbourhood, or home?

The above report lists a variety of areas where faith may impact on our everyday lives:

- Daily, weekly, monthly and annual schedules
- Diet
- Death and dying
- Dress codes and symbols
- Economic choices
- Education and nurture
- Employment issues
- Environment
- Ethical decision-making
- Health issues
- Housing
- Identity
- Leisure choices and requirements
- Political choices and participation
- Travel
- Voluntary activities

Reflect on each of these areas, are you aware of how the different faith tradition might impact on them? What might that impact be?

In what ways do the different faith communities contribute to community life and cohesion?

In North Yorkshire, as elsewhere, there are large numbers of migrant workers; though many of these are Christians from Eastern Europe, this is not exclusively so. There is much evidence of exploitation of such workers...in the areas of withholding wages, accommodation, denying access to services, unsafe and/or illegal work practises. Similarly, under current legislation, asylum seekers often find themselves unable to support themselves or make a clear representation of their case.

Is this an area for people of faith to intervene?

And if so, how?

At a more personal level, in a previous parochial appointment one member of my congregation (Anglican) was married to a Roman Catholic wife. Each Sunday, both

would go to their own respective churches. Rarely during their marriage, if ever to the best of my knowledge, did they attend worship together at either of their churches.

Whilst acknowledging that this practice worked for them; what is your reaction to this?

What factors do you think that they might have had to grapple with over the years?

A feature of modern life is the mobility of the population. Whilst it is certainly true that strong geographic loyalties remain in some of our English villages, there is a greater desire to look beyond the horizons set by our previous generations ..... particularly amongst the young members. This might be expressed through going to a university or college elsewhere in the country or by visiting a different country. The very act of travelling is likely to bring together people of different backgrounds and faiths.

What would be your considered response to a person who wishes to further a relationship with someone from a different faith tradition?

What issues do you think they might face in the short, and longer, terms?

As a child, I vividly remember our next-door neighbour banging on our door in the middle of the night in a state of extreme distress. She had woken up during the night and was unable to arouse her husband. My father went to investigate and discovered that he had died in his sleep.

If your neighbour is a member of another faith, are you aware of the protocol to be followed in such a situation? What must, or more importantly, what mustn't you do?

Similarly, in the case of an accident or illness most of us would wish to show support and natural human concern for the person and/or their family. A typical response would be to give a traumatised person a hug and perhaps offer a cup of tea or something a little stronger; or maybe to loosen the clothing of a person.

How aware are you of what is regarded as appropriate in such a circumstance?

If you are not sure of appropriate responses in times of crisis, you could refer to a local interfaith group as listed in the further resources, or contact me.

### Topic Three – Working alongside people of different faiths

The Chief Rabbi, Jonathan Sachs, has said: *“If religion isn’t part of the solution, it will be part of the problem”*.

Do you accept that this is a true statement?

What examples can you give from your own personal experience where religion has been (a) part of the solution, or (b) part of the problem?

In recent years, the government has seen the value of engaging with both the voluntary and community sector and the faith-based sector in order to deliver its agenda of regeneration and development of sustainable and effective communities.

What does your faith tradition possess and demonstrate that ties in with the government’s agenda?

How would you go about finding out what key skills other faith traditions possess and the areas that they are already working in?

Would you feel comfortable working alongside someone of another faith?

Are there some issues that you could not work together on? What are they?

It is often said that in time of adversity, communities pull together. In West Yorkshire, faith leaders sought to demonstrate a positive working together for good in the light of the ‘London bombings’ and the disclosure that those involved were Muslims from Beeston, Leeds. Dr Louis Sako, Chaldean Archbishop of Kirkuk, Iraq, has said of his own context: *“The problem is not between Christians and Muslims. The problem is fundamentalism which excludes others, annihilates them for religious or ethnic reasons. The solution is to encourage a culture of pluralism, help people acknowledge one another as humans and recognise in each other an absolute value”*. One Muslim woman and mother has spoken to me of her concern for herself and her family’s safety against a backdrop of indiscriminate acts of violence...we should note that the bombings referred to above made no distinction between Christian, Muslim, etc.

Would you agree with the Archbishop’s words?

What specific things do you think drive a fundamentalist ideal?

What can non-fundamentalists do to demonstrate the validity of the ‘golden rule’... *“Do not do to others what you would not have done to you”*.

What can we do together as faith communities to reassure that woman and mother?

In my own area of North Yorkshire, those with Far-Right opinions sought to spread inaccurate and inflammatory material prior to the local government elections.

How could, or should, Christians respond?

Do you know those who represent the other faiths in your locality, however small numerically they might be? (*local interfaith groups would be pleased to give details*).

How would you go about trying to give a co-ordinated answer to some of those who seek to foment unrest within our communities?

Professor Richard Berthoud (Institute for Social and Economic Research) has written: *“Forty years ago, innovative social research established that ethnic minorities were the victim of systematic discrimination when they applied for jobs. The findings were crucial in encouraging the government to outlaw racial discrimination in employment. Today there are laws banning discrimination against women and disabled people, and on the grounds of age, religion or sexual orientation. Now the government is proposing unified legislation across all these groups, and a new overseer, the Commission for Equality and Human Rights”*.

Are you aware of the distinction between ‘direct’ and ‘indirect’ discrimination?

Make a list and place each entry in either one or the other category.

How could you ensure that any joint activity you undertake is not perceived to be, or actually is, discriminatory....however inadvertent?

## Topic Four – Inter-Faith Worship

It is now a common experience for Christians of the different denominations to share worship with one another...if only during the well-established 'Week of Prayer for Christian Unity'. Recently I heard of an elderly devout Roman Catholic lady who made the courageous step of attending an act of worship in the Church of England parish church for the very first time in her life. Her reaction was one of amazement; she told her daughter: "*They are just like us!*".

Let us ask a very basic question at the start of this topic...how comfortable do you feel when you attend worship which is not of your own Christian tradition?

A.Wingate says this of inter-faith prayer and worship: "*Prayer, meditation and worship are at the heart of all religions. Here, and in social action together, we can most easily be seen as a hopeful influence in a world that is drunk on consumerism, power rivalry, the unhelpful aspects of globalisation and often violent religious rivalries. Meeting at heart level, and taking risks to do so, is at the centre of a journey to rediscover the Soul of Europe. This is something we can only do together across faiths*".

What do you think is meant by the phrase "*meeting at heart level*"?

The key figures of the different faiths (eg Jesus, Mohammad, Guru Nanak) and their sacred writings do not have the same role within their own traditions...in other words, a Christian will view Jesus differently from a Muslim viewing the Prophet, etc. However, I often hear people saying words to the effect that we're all working towards the same thing and that God is the same no matter what we call him or how we approach him.

Is this a piece of folk belief to be encouraged; or would you seek to be more rigorous in your approach

The singer Boy George in an interview with The Independent newspaper said: "*God to me is total, unconditional love. I have Sufi, Christian, Buddhist friends, and I respect what they believe in, and in their temples I bow down. I believe there is a force out there that matches us step by step. I am not explaining it brilliantly, but it is a feeling for me*".

How far do you think that Boy George's words are an adequate basis for worshipping together?

A Simon and Garfunkel song ("The Sound of Silence") has the lyric: "*the words of the prophets are written on the subway walls and tenement halls*". Perhaps it is here that we can most accurately capture the "spirit of the age". If the death of Princess Diana taught us one thing it is surely this, that people have a sense of the spiritual dimension to life and that all traditional faith communities need to re-evaluate how they offer the opportunity to engage in worship.

To what extent do you feel that our expression of worship is conditioned not so much by our awareness of God, but by our cultural and ethnic backgrounds?

If you could gather all the faith leaders together in one room, what would you ask them to do?

It is clear from the short reviews of the major faiths given in this resource book that the major faith traditions do have differing views as to how we conceive of God, if, indeed, we do so at all. Given that this is the case, it will be difficult to find words that please everyone, all of the time.

How effective might be the use of silence in worship?

Does this mean that we should abandon words in inter-faith acts of worship?

How could the different things that enoble our lives be used as centre-pieces of worship for people of different faiths?

At times of community tension, and particularly when the media spotlight has been focussed on the followers of Islam, faith leaders have sometimes made a show of solidarity by organising a march or rally.

What factors would you consider in deciding whether to join such an event if one were to be held in your area?

The German theologian, Jurgen Moltmann, writes in “The open Church”: *“in the light of Christ, who opened his arms wide on the cross, we should be expected to justify not every inclusion but every exclusion”*.

Are there people who you would feel uncomfortable sharing an experience of worship with?

If so, can you rationalise the source of this sense of discomfort?

## Topic Five - Inter-faith gatherings for study or social activity

In the topic two above, I included a list compiled by Faith Matters which indicates some of the issues and areas of concern that need to be in the minds of those who engage with people from different faith traditions.

With that list to hand, how many do you need to take into account when organising an inter-faith study or social event?

The same document also contains the words: *“The most important principle to bear in mind when organising an event for people from a diverse range of faith traditions and backgrounds is consultation. Many faith-related needs can be met and pitfalls avoided if you bring the people for whom you are organising your event into the planning process at as early a stage as possible. In this way you will both show your commitment to diversity and be able to tailor your event to the particular needs of those attending”*.

How would you go about consulting with the faith traditions in your area?

A Jewish contributor made the comment that: *“Inter-faith activity is something that is easier to destroy than it is to build”*.

Don't assume that everyone knows what you mean when you do or say something. Don't even assume that everyone has a working grasp of the English language...it may be a second, or even third language for them at best. Don't assume that everyone uses email these days. Don't assume that everyone is aware of the dress codes that apply across the different faith traditions. Don't assume that because a date is not a significant one in your calendar it isn't in someone-else's; eg during Ramadan, Muslims will have been fasting since sunrise...an early evening meeting may be too tiring for them. Don't assume that vegetarians will be OK with fish! Don't assume that a hand-shake is an appropriate form of greeting. As a good rule of thumb, don't assume anything!

What assumptions do YOU make of others?

If your meeting is set up as an opportunity to study together or to discuss matters of common concern, be clear about 'ground rules' at the outset and probably before you get to the point of actually meeting; though as mutual trust and confidence grows the group may review them. Some faiths hold a deep suspicion of being a target for proselytising.

What is the distinction between 'dialogue' and 'evangelism'?

How would you explain the basis of your faith in a sensitive manner to people of another faith?

Much controversy and animosity was aroused by the publication of Salman Rushdie's book, 'The Satanic Verses'; this was rekindled by the publication, in Denmark, of cartoons which caricatured the Prophet Mohammad. Some Christians protested against the film "The Life of Brian" and, more recently, the play, "Jerry Springer – The Opera".

Do you think that religious belief and practice should be protected from criticism or comment?  
Is there a line that shouldn't be crossed in the treatment of religious subjects?  
If you believe that there is, where do you place it?

The Reformed Jewish prayer book of 1977 contains this prayer: *“We are children of many traditions, inheritors of shared wisdom and tragic misunderstandings. In that which we share, let us see the common prayer of humanity; in that which we differ, let us wonder at the freedom of man; in our unity and our differences, let us know the uniqueness that is God”*.

How can we know and celebrate that sense of uniqueness within a context of diversity?

It will be the case that some people will never be prepared to enter any kind of dialogue that asks for a sense of open-mindedness. Dialogue true to the name will always involve transformation.

Would you wish to enter into dialogue with people of other faiths?  
How would you respond to those who see no need to enter dialogue with a person of another faith?

## **FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES**

The following ideas might be worth considering as follow-up activities in our own areas. Only you will know best what is possible where you live and work.

- Undertake a faith-mapping exercise of your area...use the census data which is available down to at least District Council level; be aware of notices in libraries and shop windows advertising events which might indicate a faith presence that you are not aware of.
- Visit another faith community, perhaps a visit to their place of worship.
- Invite people from another faith community to visit you and, perhaps, share in a suitable common event.
- Could a dialogue group be formed, are there sufficient numbers to make this a viable option?
- Is there an already established inter-faith group nearby who could give advice?
- Can you support a local Faith Forum which will have a higher profile and which will act as a mouthpiece for faith communities in your area? For example, the Yorkshire and the Humber Faiths Forum, or the City of York faith Forum.
- If you have questions arising from this resource pack, or you would like me to come and speak to a group...please contact me at: SCADIM, Community House, Portholme Road, Selby, N.Yorks YO8 4QQ; or tel. 01757 241050; or email me at: [office@scadim.orguk](mailto:office@scadim.orguk)

## LINKS TO FURTHER RESOURCES

### Bibliography

Centre for Excellence in Leadership	Faith Communities Toolkit
Devon County Council	A guide to the world's major religions
Faith Matters	Understanding Faiths: a practical guide to working with faith communities
Home Office	Working Together :co-operation between government and faith communities
Regional Action (W.Midlands)	Believing in the region:effective partnership working with faith communities www.rawm.net
Stoke on Trent Council	Celebrating ethnicity & faith diversity in Stoke on Trent & N.Staffordshire
Wingate A	Celebrating Difference, Staying Faithful, How to live in a multi-faith world (DLT 2005)

### Groups and Organisations – web and email links

Active Faith Communities Programme	www.activefaiths.org.uk info@activefaiths.org.uk
BBC Religion & Ethics	www.bbc.co.uk/religion
Census data 2001	www.statistics.gov.uk
Churches Regional Commission For Yorkshire and the Humber	www.crc-online.org.uk info@crc-online.org.uk
Cleveland Interfaith Group	Richard@gtayton.demon.co.uk (*)
Dept. for Communities and Local Govt	www.communities.gov.uk
Faith Matters	www.faithmatters.co.uk
Hull and East Riding Interfaith	j.r.lukes@hull.ac.uk (*)
Interfaith Network for the UK	www.interfaith.org.uk
Leeds Faith Forum	davidrandolph-horn@leedschurcheinstitute.org (*)
Middlesbrough Council of Faiths	www.middlesbroughfaiths.org.uk chair@middlesbroughfaiths.org.uk
Multifaiths...general information	www.multifaiths.com
Tees Valley Faith Communities Regeneration Group	davidandlesleywhiting@compuserve.com (*)
Religion Facts website	www.religionfacts.com
Scarborough Interfaith Group	Rebecca.clare@ntlworld.com (*)
Yorkshire and Humber Faiths Forum	www.yorkshireandhumberfaiths.org.uk info@yorkshireandhumberfaiths.org.uk
York Interfaith Group	janet.jauncey@tiscali.co.uk (*)

(\*) denotes email contact at the time of printing

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