



# A Guide to major faiths and obligations.

## Introduction

This Guide provides a brief overview of the *main* religions and faiths practiced in the UK. We are aware that this is not an inclusive list.

- Baha'i faith
- Buddhism
- Christianity
- Hinduism
- Islam
- Jainism
- Judaism
- Rastafarianism
- Sikhism
- Zoroastrians (Parsi)

Please note this is not an exhaustive list. For more information on other religions and faiths please visit the BBC website at:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/index.shtml>

If you feel that the information contained within this document is incorrect or would like to comment further please contact: Diversity Team on [diversity@stlegerhomes.co.uk](mailto:diversity@stlegerhomes.co.uk)

The types of religious obligations which affect people at work and which are the focus of this guidance include matters such as:

- Observing religious festivals and holy days
- Prayer and worship
- Pilgrimage
- Dress
- Diet
- Fasting
- Bereavement
- Religion based etiquette

When reading or applying the guidance and information provided in this section it is important to note and remember the following:

- **The descriptions provided under each faith heading are not intended to be an exhaustive account** of the practices and beliefs of the faith as they may affect a person's employment. They are simply intended to provide a flavour of those aspects of religion and faith (bullet pointed above), which commonly affect persons in employment.
- **Many faiths are diverse, comprising different sects, denominations or schools of thought within, with differing beliefs**

**and practices.** Within Judaism for example, there are the orthodox and progressive Jewish schools of thought, each with some common beliefs and practices and some that are different. This guide does not necessarily reflect all the practices and beliefs of all the various sects of the faiths covered.

- **People practice and follow their faiths in differing ways.** Some people are born into a family that follows a particular faith but never practice it themselves. Some fully practice their faith. Others observe only some aspects such as diet, religious holidays, or dress codes. Not all Christians go to church on Sundays, not all Jews avoid all non-kosher food and not all Muslims pray five times a day. So, it is important not to assume a person's faith-associated needs simply from their religious affiliation. Example: There is a conference being held on a Friday and you wish to select one member of your staff to attend on behalf of your team. One new member of the team is Jewish. You are aware that the conference will not finish until late Friday evening. You are also aware that the Sabbath will have commenced by the time the conference finishes. Do not assume that the Jewish person will not wish to attend because they will want to observe the Sabbath.
- **Assumptions should not be made about a person's faith affiliation simply from things such as names, colour, race or country of origin.** Some people do not adopt any faith at all. Some choose to adopt a religion into which they were not born, or to with which they have no family links e.g. British white Muslims, British white Buddhists etc.
- **There is no substitute for asking your staff about their individual needs.** This guide merely provides a general guide to some aspects of some faiths as they may affect a person whilst in employment. However, it is advisable and indeed good practice to ask staff about their individual needs. This can be done by conducting a full staff audit of religious needs, as part of an overall strategy for implementing the new regulations. Once information about religious needs has been obtained from staff, the issue could be revisited once a year as part of a supervision meeting. The needs of new staff could be identified as part of an induction process.

**Finally**, it is important to stress that different faiths prescribe and guide the lives and conduct of their members to varying degrees. Some faiths such as Judaism and Islam guide almost every aspect of their members lives, whilst other faiths are much less prescriptive, provide more loose guidance, or cover less spheres of life. This is inevitably reflected in the length and detail of information provided under each faith section covered in this guidance. The length of a section should therefore not be seen as a reflection of the importance or weight given to the faith by the authors of this guidance, but rather a consequence and reflection of the degree to which the faith impacts on the followers' lives whilst at work.

## **THE BAHA'I FAITH**

### **Introduction to the faith**

The Baha'i faith is a religion which originated in Persia in the 1840s. However, today it is world religion with approximately six million members comprising over 200 nationalities and a variety of religious backgrounds, ethnic groups and social classes.

The three central figures of the faith are:

- **Bab.** Born into a Muslim family in Persia he declared himself a messenger of God and prophesied of the coming of One Greater who would bring a new age of civilisation characterised by world peace.
- **Baha'ullah.**(birth name Hussain Ali). Born in Tehran, Persia, Baha'ullah in 1863 declared himself to be 'the Great One' whose coming had been foretold by the Bab. He declared that he was the bringer of divine revelation which was to fulfil the promises made by the previous messengers of other religions.
- **Abdu'I - Baha** - He was the son of Baha'ullah and through Baha'ullah's will was appointed as the authorised interpreter of the Bahai's teachings.

Key Baha'i beliefs include:

### **There is one God**

Baha'is believe there is and there has only ever been one God, though he has been called by different names by different people throughout the history of time. He is beyond gender, infinite, and unknowable in Divine essence.

### **The concept of progressive revelation**

Baha'is believe that God has made revelations to humankind since the beginning of time, through a series of messengers sent to different places at different times to pass on divine law about how humankind should live and behave. They recognise the Prophets or messengers of many other religions such as Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and others, as messengers of God, including Moses, Jesus, Krishna, Buddha, and many others. All messengers of God are believed to have promised a time when a great messenger would come to bring peace to the world. Baha'is believe Baha'u'llah to be that final messenger.

### **The unity of mankind**

Unity, the oneness of humankind and a belief that the future of the world lies in a single world order existing for the benefit of the whole of humankind, regardless of issues such as race, gender, religion and class are all central themes of the Bahai' faith. Baha'is believe that this unity will be achieved in time and from it world peace will follow. They believe that the unity of humankind will be achieved through the abolition of prejudices and extremes of wealth and poverty, the equality of men and women, universal compulsory education and a world government, world parliament and world courts.

There is a belief in a soul which can be developed in this world and subsists after death.

The Bahai faith has no set worship services, nor does it have an ordained priesthood. Most Baha'i gatherings take place at people's homes. These gatherings are known as Firesides.

Baha'i scriptures include the writings of Bab, Baha'ullah and Abdu'l-Baha, the three central figures of the faith. Key scriptures include Kitab-I-Iqan (the book of Certitude), which contains the key doctrinal beliefs and Kitab-I-Aqdas (Most Holy Book), considered to be the basis for Baha'i moral principles and institutions.

### **Religious festivals and holy days**

Baha'i festivals take place from sunset to sunset. Therefore, followers of the faith may wish to leave work early in order to be home for sunset on the day prior to the festival date. Observant Baha'is will wish to refrain from working on key festival dates which include the following:

|                              |                              |
|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Naw-Ruz (New Year)           | 21 March                     |
| Ridvan                       | 21 April, 29 April and 2 May |
| Declaration of the Bab       | 23 May                       |
| Ascension of the Baha'u'llah | 29 May                       |
| Martyrdom of the Bab         | 9 July                       |
| Birth of the Bab             | 20 October                   |
| Birth of Baha'u'llah         | 12 November                  |

### **Prayer/worship**

Baha'is are required to recite one of three obligatory prayers during the day. These prayers need to be recited in a quiet place facing the qiblah (a holy shrine in Israel), which from the UK is located in a south - easterly direction. One prayer is recited once in a day between the hours of noon and sunset. The second is recited three times a day, morning, noon and evening, and the third is a prayer which to be recited once in twenty four hours. Depending on which prayer or how many prayers a Baha'i chooses to pray, and their working hours, followers of the Baha'i faith may request time to be permitted to perform their prayer (s) at work.

Baha'i staff may require a room for observing their prayers. It is good employee relations practice for organisations to set aside a quiet room for prayer or spiritual contemplation, wherever possible.

Baha'is must wash their hands and face before prayers. Normal washroom facilities will suffice for this purpose.

### **Pilgrimage**

Pilgrimage to the Baha'i holy places in Haifa, Israel, is obligatory for Baha'is if they can afford it and are able to do so. Staff who follow the Baha'i faith may seek extended leave in order to perform a pilgrimage.

## **Diet**

Observant Baha'is do not consume alcohol. Vegetarianism is commended as a healthy and natural lifestyle but is not compulsory.

Where catering is provided at work in canteens, in meetings and at social gatherings, effort should be made to ensure it meets the dietary needs of Baha'i staff with faith based dietary restrictions. Furthermore, where employers provide facilities at work for employees to store their food, employees should be consulted to ensure that the arrangements meet the needs of all staff, for example by having separate shelves for the storage of meat and vegetarian foods.

## **Fasting**

Observant Baha'is fast during the period March 2<sup>nd</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> March, abstaining from consumption of food and drink between the hours of sunrise and sunset each day.

It is good employee relations practice for employers to consider how they can support staff who are fasting for example by:

- Allowing staff to take a break when the fast ends to enable them to take a meal
- Allowing changes in work patterns to enable staff to finish work when the fast ends, where this does not create any operational difficulties
- Avoiding meetings, wherever possible, for the time when the fast is due to break.

## **Dress**

Baha'is do not have any form of dress requirements other than to practice moderation and modesty. Standards of moderation and modesty may well vary between individuals.

## **Bereavement.**

Under the Baha'i faith, burials should take place as soon after death as practicable, (usually within three to five days). The body should not be transported any more than one hours journey from the place where the person died, so funerals take place close to the place of death. Followers may therefore wish to seek extended leave to attend a funeral where it is to take place in another country. There is no specific mourning period within the Baha'i faith.

## **BUDDHISM**

### **Introduction to the faith**

Buddhism originated about 2,500 years ago in India or from the enlightenment and teachings of a Nepalese prince, who came to be known as Buddha. It is a major world religion, the fourth largest of all organised religions, mainly found amongst people who originate from the South East Asia or the Far East. However, it is increasingly also practiced by indigenous people of western societies and has had followers in the UK since the late nineteenth century.

Buddhism is the majority religion of the populations of Thailand, Myanmar, Bhutan, Laos, Japan, Cambodia, Tibet, Sri Lanka, Vietnam and Dagestan. It is also strong in China, Mongolia, North Korea and Taiwan.

Buddhists do not believe in a divine deity. They have many religious texts but do not claim to have any divinely revealed book. The fundamental beliefs of Buddhists include the four noble truths and the belief in the eightfold path to enlightenment.

The four noble truths:

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

The eightfold path:

1. Right understanding
2. Right thought
3. Right Speech
4. Right action
5. Right livelihood
6. Right effort
7. Right mindfulness
8. Right concentration

As the original Buddhist teachings spread they took on many different characteristics and practices according to the country in which they took root. Today there are many different Buddhist traditions including for example, the Theravada, Vajrayana and Mahayana traditions. However, all have in common the four noble truths and the eightfold path and also meditation (see below).

Meditation plays a central role in the practice of Buddhist teachings. Meditation is seen as a route to the cultivation of faith, concentration, mindfulness, energy and wisdom, all of which are foundations to developing spiritual life. Meditation practices vary between different traditions. The two

main types are known as Samatha (tranquility meditation) and Vipassana (insight meditation). Meditation is seen as some thing which requires a lot of practice and training.

### **Religious festivals and holy days**

There are many Buddhist festivals. However, not all festivals are celebrated by all Buddhists. Different traditions in Buddhism arising from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds celebrate different festivals. However, one key festival which is universally celebrated by all Buddhist traditions and upon which Buddhists would usually wish to abstain from working is Vesak (or Buddha Day). In the western world, this is usually celebrated in May on the day of the full moon, by all Buddhist schools of thought. It must be noted that Buddhist staff may wish to take time off to celebrate other festivals which are of particular relevance to their particular tradition.

Buddhist festivals follow a lunar calendar and will therefore not take place on the same day each year.

### **Prayer/worship**

Meditation is central to the practice of Buddhist teachings. Meditation practices vary between different Buddhist traditions. However, often a quiet space is required to practice some forms of meditation. Buddhist staff may wish to meditate at work and may depending on their meditation practices request a quiet space in order to meditate. It is good employee relations practice for organisations to set aside a quiet room for prayer or spiritual contemplation, wherever possible.

### **Diet**

There are many traditions within Buddhism. Whilst many Buddhists are vegetarians e.g. Chinese Zen Buddhists, some other Buddhists e.g. Tibetan Buddhists and Theravada Buddhists do eat meat. In Chinese forms of Buddhism garlic and onions are also avoided. Buddhists upholding the precept to avoid intoxication will avoid consuming alcohol.

Where catering is provided at work in canteens, in meetings and at social gatherings, effort should be made to ensure it meets the dietary needs of Buddhist staff with faith based dietary restrictions. Furthermore, where employers provide facilities at work for employees to store their food, employees should be consulted to ensure that the arrangements meet the needs of all staff, for example by having separate shelves for the storage of meat and vegetarian foods.

### **Dress**

Many Buddhists do not wear leather clothing and leather shoes to reflect their adherence to non-harm to animal life.

### **Bereavement**

There are over 500 varieties of Buddhism and few formal traditions relating to funerals, as Buddhists see the body as just a shell. There is an emphasis on

the person's state of mind leading up to death and many Buddhists think the spirit of the deceased will undergo rebirth after a period of 49 days. Buddhists are cremated at a simple service, where there will be readings.

## **CHRISTIANITY**

### **Introduction to the faith**

Christianity dates back about 2000 years and has around one billion members worldwide. Geographically, its members can be found across the world in most countries and across all continents. It is the majority religion in west.

The Christian faith is a diverse one with many different denominations and diverse practices and beliefs. The Bible is the main religious text. However, interpretation and beliefs vary widely between different denominations. There are no universally agreed positions on Euthanasia, homosexuality, abortion, nuclear warfare, pacifism and many other ethical issues amongst the denomination and other issues such as diet. Practices vary not only according to denominations but also through the influence of the different cultures of the different countries where Christianity has developed as a faith.

However, there are some core beliefs, principles and practices which are common to all denominations. Some of these are set out below.

One God. Christians believe there is one God who caused all creation to happen and who remains involved with the life of this world.

The Doctrine of Trinity - This is the teaching that God is experienced and manifested in three ways, as the Creator and Father, as the son (Jesus Christ) and as the Holy Spirit.

The Golden rules. These are the Love of God and Love for others. These are guiding principles which Christians should follow in living their lives. However the applications and interpretations of these rules vary between denominations. Christians applying these rules to similar problems/issue may come up with different answers.

A belief in a judgement day. Christians believe that humans have only one life and that they will be judged on how they have lived this life.

A belief in life after death. Christians believe in eternal life after death in this world.

### **Religious festivals and holy days**

Sunday is the day of worship and the day of rest within the Christian faith. Christians may therefore wish to avoid working on Sundays.

There are diverse traditions within the Christian faith, some of which mean that different religious holidays/festivals are celebrated by different Christian traditions. Furthermore, in some instances it can also mean celebrating the same religious festival on different dates as is the case with Christmas in the Orthodox and non-Orthodox Christian traditions. There are many religious festivals in the Christian calendar. However, those that staff are most likely to want to be absent from work include:

|                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| Christmas Day   | 25 December or in the Orthodox tradition 6 January |
| Ash Wednesday   | Feb/March (determined by lunar calendar)           |
| Maundy Thursday | March/April (determined by lunar calendar)         |
| Good Friday     | March/April (determined by lunar calendar)         |
| Easter Sunday   | March/April (determined by lunar calendar)         |

In addition there are a number of holy days of obligation, when Christians may wish to attend a church service and may therefore request a late start or an early finish.

### **Prayer/Worship**

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

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

### **Pilgrimage**

There is no obligation within the Christian faith to perform pilgrimage. Nevertheless Christian members of staff may wish to visit holy sites e.g. in Israel and seek extended leave for this purpose. Although not a compulsory aspect of faith it would be good employee relations practice to allow this where it would not create operational difficulties.

### **Diet**

Christians do not have any universally agreed dietary laws. (The majority of Christians in this country do not adhere to any religion based dietary restrictions). However, some Christians do avoid the meat of pigs and also alcohol on the basis of religious teachings. Some Christians also avoid eating meat on Fridays.

Where catering is provided at work in canteens, in meetings and at social gatherings, effort should be made to ensure it meets the dietary needs of Christian staff with faith based dietary restrictions. Furthermore, where employers provide facilities at work for employees to store their food, employees should be consulted to ensure that the arrangements meet the needs of all staff, for example by having separate shelves for the storage of meat and vegetarian foods.

### **Fasting**

Some Christians fast at individually chosen times in order to focus on prayer or as an act of solidarity with the poor. They may choose to fast at times when they are at work.

It is good employee relations practice for employers to consider how they can support staff who are fasting for example by:

- Allowing staff to take a break when the fast ends to enable them to take a meal
- Allowing changes in work patterns to enable staff to finish work when the fast ends, where this does not create any operational difficulties
- Avoiding meetings, wherever possible, for the time when the fast is due to break.

### **Dress/ Appearance**

Some Christian churches forbid the use of cosmetics. Some churches require female members to dress particularly modestly. A small number of churches require women to avoid wearing trousers.

### **Bereavement**

There are over 220 different Christian denominations in the UK and funeral rituals may vary from church to church. The basic premise is that people are resurrected and the human soul continues, if the person has lived a Christian life. It is traditional to wear black or dark clothing to funeral and men wear black ties with a suit but occasionally people will request mourners wear bright clothing as a celebration of life.

There is usually a set service for funerals and prayers are said around at the graveside or when the coffin disappears from view at a cremation. Some funerals may be followed by a memorial service where friends and colleagues can celebrate the life of the deceased.

### **Etiquette**

The use of "X" as an abbreviation for "Christmas" to "Xmas" on cards or in other official communications or correspondence should be avoided in order to avoid offending practising Christians.

## HINDUISM

### Introduction to the faith

Hinduism is an ancient religion dating back over 3,000 years and some texts cite it to be the world's third largest religion with over 500 million followers. Despite this very large following, the religion is the majority of the population's faith in only a few nations, namely India, Nepal and Mauritius.

Hinduism is a diverse faith. Due to its ancient origins and its visions of truth, the Hindu traditions embrace and encompass a very wide range of beliefs, customs and practices with regional, linguistic and doctrinal variations. A whole range of philosophical positions, religious practices and devotional foci are accepted as valid and legitimate. There is some commonality of belief and practices, some of which is described below.

Hindus believe in Brahman, who in western society might be referred to as God. Brahman is depicted as having three aspects, Brahma - the creator, Vishnu - the Preserver/Sustainer and Shiva – the completer/renewer. God is conceived in many forms depending on the specific traditions of individuals from different geographical areas.

Central beliefs of Hinduism include a belief in the existence of a cosmic or natural order, a balanced way of living and the crucial role that astrology plays in this. Hindus also believe in re-incarnation.

Religious life is centred on the principles of belief in the Brahman, prayer, re-incarnation, law of good and bad actions and compassion for all things. Hindus believe that humans should strive for four achievements:

1. Dharma- cosmic order which is maintained by righteousness and observing social and religious law
2. Artha – Acceptance of wealth, possession and power, for the creation of a sustainable society
3. Kama –Achieving quality and enjoyment of life in a balanced way
4. Moksha – The ultimate goal of liberation from the cycle of births and deaths.

The main sacred texts of Hinduism include what are known as the four Vedas and the Bhagavad Gita.

Hindu places of worship are known as Mandirs.

### Religious festivals and holy days

Hinduism is a diverse religion, with diverse traditions. There are many different festivals celebrated by Hindus and to some extent the festivals that will be celebrated by a Hindu will depend on the particular Hindu tradition to which they belong. However, the two main festivals which tend to be universally celebrated and usually involve taking time off work include:

**Holi** February/March and  
**Diwali** Late October/ Early November

### **Prayer/Worship**

Hindu worship, or puja, involves images (murtis), prayers (mantras) and diagrams of the universe (yantras).

Central to Hindu worship is the image, or icon which can be worshipped either at home or in the temple.

### **Individual Rather than Communal**

Hindu worship is primarily an individual act rather than a communal one, as it involves making personal offerings to the deity.

Worshippers repeat the names of their favourite gods and goddesses, and repeat mantras. Water, fruit, flowers and incense are offered to god.

### **Worship at Home**

The majority of Hindu homes have a shrine where offerings are made and prayers are said.

- A shrine can be anything from a room, a small altar or simply pictures or statues of the deity.

Family members often worship together. Rituals should strictly speaking be performed three times a day. Some Hindus, but not all, worship wearing the sacred thread (over the left shoulder and hanging to the right hip). This is cotton for the Brahmin (priest), hemp for the Kshatriya (ruler) and wool for the vaishya (merchants).

### **Temple Worship**

At a Hindu temple, different parts of the building have a different spiritual or symbolic meaning.

- The central shrine is the heart of the worshipper
- The tower represents the flight of the spirit to heaven.

A priest may read, or more usually recite, the Vedas to the assembled worshippers, but any "twice-born" Hindu can perform the reading of prayers and mantras.

### **Pilgrimage**

Pilgrimages form an important part of Hindu religious observance. These involve visits to holy places in India e.g. the river Ganges. Hindu staff may wish to request extended leave for the purpose of performing a pilgrimage. It is good employee relations practice to accommodate such requests where they do not create insurmountable operational difficulties.

### **Diet**

Some Hindus are entirely vegetarian, avoiding all meat, fish and eggs. Other practicing Hindus eat meat but avoid beef, which is absolutely prohibited within the Hindu faith. Sometimes onions and garlic are avoided. Many Hindu people also avoid alcohol and in some cases tea and coffee too.

Where catering is provided at work in canteens, in meetings and at social gatherings, effort should be made to ensure it meets the dietary needs of Hindu staff. Furthermore, where employers provide facilities at work for employees to store their food; employees should be consulted to ensure that the arrangements meet the needs of all staff, for example by having separate shelves for the storage of meat and vegetarian foods.

### **Fasting**

Although not a compulsory aspect of the faith, there are a number of occasions through the year when some Hindus (especially women) fast, avoiding certain foods at certain times, such as on particular days of the week of the lunar month and of the year. The selection of the timings of these fasts is usually a matter of individual choice.

There are particular Hindu festivals upon which it is common to fast. These include:

|                       |  |
|-----------------------|--|
| Shivratri<br>calendar | 1 day in February/ March, determined by the lunar calendar |
| Ram Navami            | 1 day in March/April, determined by the lunar calendar     |

### **Dress/Appearance**

Some Hindi women will often wear a Bindhi, a red spot on the forehead denoting membership of the Hindu faith. Some married women wear a necklace known as a mangal sutra which is placed around their necks during marriage. Many women may wish to wear this at all times including when they are at work.

Some Orthodox Hindu men wear a clay marking on their foreheads known as a Tilak.

### **Bereavement**

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

The closest male's relatives of the deceased may wish to take the ashes of the deceased to the river Ganges in India. However, this does not need to be done straight away and could for example be done a year later, or even later than that.

## ISLAM

### Introduction to the faith

Islam is a monotheistic faith. Muslims, the followers of Islam, believe that there is one God (in Arabic referred to as Allah), who is the supreme creator and sustainer of the universe. Allah is omniscient and omnipresent, powerful, merciful and unique.

Islam is a major world religion, with a very diverse following. Muslims come from across all continents and can be found in virtually all the countries in the world. Collectively they speak many different languages and have many different cultural backgrounds. Islam is the majority religion in over 45 countries and the second largest faith in many others. (In Britain it is the largest minority religion). There are around one billion Muslims in the world, who can be divided into two distinctive group, Sunni Muslims who comprise approx 90% of the total Muslim population, with Shia Muslims forming the remainder.

Islam is a monotheistic faith in common with Judaism and Christianity. Muslims believe that since the creation of man, God has sent a long line of messengers or prophets to the world to guide mankind. These include Abraham, Moses, and Jesus all of whom are regarded as some of the greatest prophets and explicitly afforded high esteem within the religious scripture of Islam, the holy Quran. The Quran is believed to be the literal word of God, revealed to the prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), by the angel Jibreel (Gabriel). Muslims emphasise that the Prophet Muhammad did not bring a new faith, but rather 'as the seal of prophets' renewed and completed the teachings of Abraham, Moses and Jesus. They therefore affirm the Torah and Injil (Gospel) brought by Moses and Jesus respectively, but believe these have been corrupted from their original purity.

In addition to the holy Quran, Hadith are also a source of religious teachings. These are the traditions which contain accounts of the words and actions of Muhammad (peace be upon him) and his companions. The sunna is the example of the prophet Muhammad's way of life and a model for Muslims to emulate. Islamic teachings address all areas of human life, private and public. They cover human relationships, worship, ethics, social justice, law, political principles, finance, trade and economics, birth, death, marriage and many other issues. Islam is regarded as a whole complete way of life. The holy Quran should be treated with respect at all times and this extends to how it is handled where it is kept.

Islamic beliefs reflect and incorporate concepts of piety, righteousness, morality, sin, freedom, equality, brotherhood and peace, judgement day, heaven and hell and eternal existence of the soul after death.

Central to Islamic belief and practice are the five pillars of Islam. These are:

- **Shahada** - This is the confession of faith, the affirmation that 'There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is his messenger'

- **Salah** - This is the duty to offer five ritual obligatory prayers in devotion to God.
- **Sawm** – This is the duty to fast during the month of Ramadan, abstaining from food and drink, sex and smoking from just before sunrise to sunset. There are certain exemptions which are described later elsewhere).
- **Zakat** – This the duty to pay alms or welfare due annually, of 2.5 % of net savings accumulated above a certain limit.
- **Hajj** - This is the duty upon every Muslim who is fit and can afford it, to undertake a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in their lifetime

### **Religious festivals and holy days**

**Friday (Jumma)** - This is a holy day of the week for Muslims, and although Muslims are permitted to work on this day, men are required to go to the mosque to pray the midday prayer and listen to a sermon (Kuthba). This usually takes about an hour.

The Islamic Calendar is a lunar calendar. Therefore, the dates of religious festivals are not fixed and change annually. The festivals upon which Muslims are usually likely to refrain from working are:

**Eid Ul Adha** – This is a three day festival which commemorates the trial that Ibrahim (Abraham) underwent when he was asked by God to sacrifice his son. This festival also marks the end of Hajj, the annual pilgrimage to Mecca. Muslims will usually abstain from working on the first of the three days although some abstain from working on all three days.

**Eid Ul Fitr** – This is a one day festival which marks the end of Ramadan. Most Muslims will choose not to work on the day of this festival. However, employees may wish to book leave either side of the festival in addition to the day itself. The date of Eid changes each year, moving back approximately ten days each year. This is due to the fact that the lunar calendar is shorter than the Gregorian calendar.

**Ramadan (month of fasting)**. Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. During this month all Muslims (except those who are exempt for health reasons, pregnancy, menstruation, mental capacity or young age) are required to fast from just before dawn until sunset abstaining from all food and drink between the hours of the fast. The beginning and end of Ramadan moves back by approximately 10 days each year in accordance with the lunar calendar.

Ramadan is a very holy period of time. Many aspects of life slow down. A greater amount of time is spent on worship and in the company of family. Many Muslim staff choose to take their annual leave during this month, so that they are able to make the most of Ramadan. However, many also continue to work as working is permitted during Ramadan.

It is good employee relations practice for employers to consider how they can support staff who are fasting for example by:

- Allowing staff to take a break when the fast ends to enable them to take a meal
- Allowing changes in work patterns to enable staff to finish work when the fast ends, where this does not create any operational difficulties. (When Ramadan takes place in the winter months, Muslim staff may prefer to start work earlier and leave earlier than usual, so that they can break their fast at home with their family. Flexible approaches for dealing with this include allowing annual leave days to be broken up to cover this early leaving).
- Avoiding meetings, wherever possible, for the time when the fast is due to break.

### **Prayer (Salah)**

It is an obligatory aspect of the faith that Muslims perform five prayers (salah) a day. Daily prayer must be conducted at dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, just after sunset and at night. As prayer times are determined by the movement of the sun, prayer times are not at the same times each day and vary throughout the year. For those that work a traditional nine to five day shift, in the summer only one prayer time is likely to fall within the working day. In the winter up to three may fall within the working day.

There is usually a window period of time within which each prayer must be performed. This window of opportunity for each prayer is wider in the summer than the winter as the days are longer. Most prayers can be performed in five to ten minutes, with the night time prayer requiring fifteen to twenty minutes.

It is preferable, but not compulsory for men to perform their prayers in a mosque (place of worship). However, the Friday noon prayer must be performed in a mosque. Females can pray at home, a mosque or elsewhere. Men and women do not pray together. Muslims always face Makkah in Saudi Arabia (south east from Britain) when they pray.

Muslim staff may require a room for observing their prayers whilst at work. It is good employee relations practice for organisations to set aside a quiet room for prayer or spiritual contemplation, wherever possible.

Before a Muslim can perform his prayers, s/he must carry out an ablution (ritual washing) which involves washing the hands, face, hair, mouth, nose, arms up to the elbows and the feet up to the ankles. Normal washing facilities may suffice for this purpose. However, potentially washing in view of others can be uncomfortable and/or embarrassing for both the Muslim who is washing and other staff who may be also using the facilities, especially if the other staff are unfamiliar with the washing requirements of the faith. There may be objections for example to the washing of feet in the sink. (Please note that it is not necessary for the washing facilities to be located next to the prayer room).

It is good practice to consult staff and consider whether there is anything reasonable and practical which can be done to help meet the ritual requirements of their religion. With regards to the washing rituals of Muslims before prayer, options which enable privacy while carrying out ablution include allowing staff to use accessible toilets which usually have a sink in the room. Where toilets have multiple cubicles, having one cubicle which is wider than usual and including a sink would help. Although employers would not be expected to make such changes to toilets, if and when refurbishment was planned, making the relevant changes could be considered at that point in time.

### **Pilgrimage (Haji)**

This is the annual pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia. Every Muslim must undertake the pilgrimage at least once in a lifetime if they have the wealth and health to enable them to do so. Muslims may therefore request extended leave normally between 2-4 weeks in order to perform the Hajj pilgrimage. It is good and considerate employment practice to accommodate such requests where they do not create insurmountable operational difficulties.

### **Diet**

Muslims are strongly guided by their faith about what food is permissible (halal) and that which is not (haram).

All vegetarian food and dairy produce is permitted. Seafood that is dead out of water but not slaughtered is permitted. Game, poultry and the meat of non-carnivorous animals are also permitted when it is slaughtered in accordance with religious laws.

Pork and the meat of carnivorous animals (land or water based) are forbidden. Alcohol is also forbidden in any quantities.

Any food that is permissible per se, e.g. potatoes, vegetable oil, becomes haram (forbidden) if it is mixed with or comes into contact with something haram. Food that contains or is cooked in animal extracts for example chips cooked in lard, a tomato and lettuce sandwich made with spread containing animal oils, chips fried in vegetable oil after the same oil has been used to fry non-halal chicken, and a vegetarian pudding made with alcohol would all not be permissible for a Muslim. Where food is vegetarian it is good practice to label food with a V sign to indicate that this is suitable for vegetarians.

Where catering is provided at work in canteens, in meetings and at social gatherings, effort should be made to ensure it meets the dietary needs of Muslim staff. Furthermore, where employers provide facilities at work for employees to store their food, employees should be consulted to ensure that the arrangements meet the needs of all staff, for example by having separate shelves for the storage of meat and vegetarian foods.

**Fasting** See section on Ramadan above.

### **Dress/Appearance**

Dress. The dress of Muslims varies from culture to culture. However, modesty must be observed and there are strict religious rules as to how much of the body must remain covered.

Men must cover themselves from their naval to knees at all times as a minimum. Women must cover their hair\* (they often wear a headscarf for this purpose) and some may wish to cover their body from the neck to the ankles. Tight dresses or clothing which accentuates the bodily shape/figure must be avoided.

Appearance. Devout Muslim men keep beards in accordance with religious teachings.

\* There are different schools of thought on this and whilst most agree that women must cover their hair whilst praying not all agree that it is an obligation for women to cover their hair all of the time.

### **Etiquette**

Some devout Muslim do not shake hands with members of the opposite sex regardless of what religion they are and may therefore politely decline the opportunity to shake hands. Employers should not view this behaviour in a negative manner, since it is based on religious principle and is not intended to offend.

### **Bereavement**

Muslims are required to bury their deceased as soon as possible and it is preferred that the burial takes place within 24 hours of death. Muslim staff who have been bereaved may therefore seek leave to attend a funeral at very short notice and then take leave subsequently. This may apply to extended family as it does to an immediate family member.

## **JAINISM**

### **Introduction to the faith**

Jainism is minority religion which originated in India. Jains are followers of Jinas, a line of teachers. These teachers (Thirthankaras) are believed to have existed since the beginning of time, wise people who through their own efforts have attained infinite knowledge and perfect of purity. Jains believe that there have been 24 Thirthankaras in the present cosmic cycle, of which the twenty fourth is known as Mahavira.

### **Beliefs:**

Ahimsa (non-violence, physical or mental). This is a central and fundamental belief of Jainism. It encompasses not only the avoidance of physical harm but also mental harm to any living being, no matter how small. Jains recognise that to live a harmless life is impossible, but strive to the best of their ability to avoid harm.

### **Absence of a creator God.**

Jains do not believe in a creator God. The universe and all sentient and non-sentient existents within it are seen as being uncreated, without a beginning and eternal.

### **Karma**

Jains believe in re-incarnation and that a soul can be embodied in many different life forms. The doctrine of karma maintains that the kind of body or life form a soul may inhabit in its next life is determined by the activities it undertakes in the present life. In other words the soul is seen as responsible for its own spiritual progress.

### **Moksha (Nirvana).**

Jains believe that the cycle of birth and death can be broken. However, it can be broken only by achieving Nirvana, a state of purity which puts one beyond the cycle of birth and death. Right faith, right knowledge and right conduct are known collectively as The Three Jewels of Jainism. Collectively they constitute the path to Moksha or Nirvana.

### **Anuvratas.**

A lay Jain who undertakes to refrain from all forms of intentional violence does this by assuming the anuvrata, five life-long vows. These include ahimsa (non harm) which underpins a further for including satya (truthfulness), asteya (not stealing), brahmacharya (refraining from sexual activity outside of marriage) and aparigraha (placing limits on ones possessions).

Jain scriptures are known as Shruta, Agamas or Siddhanta (doctrine). They comprise some sixty texts, which are the canonical literature containing the teachings of Mahavira and other Thirthankaras. The texts can be divided into three main groups known as the Purvas (older texts), the Angas (Limbs) and the Angabahyas (Subsidiary Canon).

### **Religious festivals and holy days**

The Jain calendar is a lunar calendar. Therefore the dates of festivals change each year.

The main festivals that staff may require leave for include:

|                                |                               |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <b>Mahavira Jayanti</b>        | 1 day in March/April          |
| <b>Paryushana Parva</b>        | 8-10 days in August/September |
| <b>Samvatsari-pratikramana</b> | 1 day in August/September     |
| <b>Vira Nirvana (Diwali)</b>   | 1 day in November             |

Paryushana Parva is an eight day to ten days festival. The number of days Jain staff would wish to take off during this period are likely to vary from individual to individual.

### **Prayer/worship**

Jains are required to worship three times a day, before dawn, at sunset and at night. Jains working evenings or nights may therefore wish to take time out to worship.

Staff following the Jain faith may require a room for observing their prayers whilst at work. It is good employee relations practice for organisations to set aside a quiet room for prayer or spiritual contemplation, wherever possible.

### **Diet**

Jains are strict vegetarians and also avoid eggs and alcohol. Some also avoid milk and root vegetables.

Some lay Jains (like non-lay Jays or mendicants) do not eat between sunset and sunrise. Therefore, they may wish to take time out to take their meal before sunset, if working at this time of the day.

Where catering is provided at work in canteens, in meetings and at social gatherings, effort should be made to ensure it meets the dietary needs of Jain staff. Furthermore, where the employer provides facilities at work for employees to store their food, employees should be consulted to ensure that the arrangements meet the needs of all staff, for example by having separate shelves for the storage of meat and vegetarian foods.

### **Fasting**

Jains fast as part of certain religious festivals. There are eight days of semi-fasting twice a year as part of Oli festivals in April and October. There are eight days of fasting during the sacred period of Paryusan and a two day fast during the Diwali festival.

It is good employee relations practice for employers to consider how they can support staff who are fasting, for example by:

- Allowing staff to take a break when the fast ends to enable them to take a meal

- Allowing changes in work patterns to enable staff to finish work when the fast ends, where this does not create any operational difficulties
- Avoiding meetings for the time when the fast is due to break, if this does not create operational difficulties

### **Dress**

Some Jains may avoid wearing leather in adherence to their principle of non-harm. Clarify that is the case.

### **Bereavement**

Jains cremate their deceased as soon as practical after death. There is no specified mourning period. Therefore, normal compassionate leave arrangements will usually suffice. However, extended leave may be required if the employee is attending a funeral abroad.

## JUDAISM

### Introduction to the faith

The Jewish faith originated in the Middle East and is over 3,500 years old. Its beginnings are often associated with the 'Fathers', Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Jews make up the majority of the population in Israel and although this is the only country in the world in which they form the majority, there are more Jews in the USA alone than in the whole of Israel. Most Jews in Israel are secular, with the religious Jews being a minority.

There are a number of ways of classifying Jews, some based on geography and some by different religious practice or schools of thought. In terms of differing religious practices or schools of thought, Jews can be divided into Orthodox Jews and Progressive Jews. Progressive Jews can be further divided into Conservative, Reform and Liberal communities.

The Jewish holy book is known as the Torah (the books of Moses). Orthodox Jews believe this to be the literal word of God, revealed by God. Progressive Jews believe that the Torah was inspired by God but regard it as open to challenge, interpretation and revision. The Torah contains 613 commandments which deal with all aspects of life, covering issues such as ethics, spirituality, diet, Sabbaths, festivals and many others.

Jews believe that the Messiah has yet to arrive.

### Religious festivals and holy days

**Shabbat (Sabbath)** – The Shabbat is central to Jewish life. It begins about an hour before dusk on Friday evening and ends at nightfall on Saturday. As a general rule Jews are forbidden to work on Shabbat. (However, there are exceptions where life is at risk). Employers can therefore expect that observant Jewish employees who work the conventional nine to five hours may wish to leave early on a Friday evening in the winter time to ensure that they do not breach the obligation to abstain from working during the Shabbat.

Observant Jews are also required to refrain from work on key religious festivals. The main festivals upon which Jewish staff are likely to ask for leave and upon which they are required to refrain from working are:

|                               |                                   |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Pesach (Passover)             | 2 sets of two days in March/April |
| Shavout (Pentecost)           | 2 days in May/June                |
| Rosh Hasana (New Year)        | 2 days in Sept/Oct                |
| Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) | 1 day, usually in October         |
| Sukkot                        | 2 sets of 2 days in Sept/Oct      |

There are other festivals upon which working is permitted, but upon which Jewish staff may still wish to abstain from working. Examples of these include:

|         |                   |
|---------|-------------------|
| Hannuka | 1 day in December |
|---------|-------------------|

**Prayer/Worship****Public Prayer**

Much of Jewish prayer consists of reciting the written services aloud in synagogue.

Praying in public affirms that a person is a member of a community, and when they do so, an individual puts themselves into the context of other Jews, and to some extent puts their own particular situation aside to put the community first. It's also an act of togetherness with Jewish people who are doing the same all around the world.

Attending regular services and following the order of the prayer book is a valuable spiritual discipline, and a mechanism that enables a person to spend time with God on a regular basis.

**Segregation**

In Orthodox synagogues men and women sit separately, and everyone (except young girls) has their head covered. In a Reform synagogue men and women can sit together

**Prayer - Three Times a Day**

Jews are supposed to pray three times a day; morning, afternoon, and evening. Praying regularly enables a person to get better at building their relationship with God.

The Jewish prayer book (it's called a siddur) has special services set down for this.

**Pilgrimage**

There is no obligation within the Jewish faith to perform pilgrimage. Nevertheless Jewish members of staff may wish to visit holy sites e.g. in Israel, and seek extended leave for this purpose. Although not a compulsory aspect of faith it would be good employee relations practice to allow this where it would not create operational difficulties.

**Diet**

Jews are heavily guided by their faith as to what food is permissible (kosher) and food which is not (treif). Jews are permitted to eat all vegetables, farmyard fowl and also meat that comes from animals that chew the cud and have split hooves. Meat from the pig is not permitted. Fish which have both fins and scales are also permitted. Shellfish are not.

Meat is only permissible when it is slaughtered by a specially qualified person (sochet) in accordance with a prescribed religious procedure. Meat and meat-containing food may not be mixed with milk and milk-containing food.

Foods which contain, or have been cooked in, products from non acceptable animals are also unacceptable e.g. chips cooked in non-kosher animal fats and desserts containing non-kosher gelatine etc

Where catering is provided at work in canteens, in meetings and at social gatherings, effort should be made to ensure it meets the dietary needs of Jewish staff. Furthermore, where employers provide facilities at work for employees to store their food, employees should be consulted to ensure that the arrangements meet the needs of all staff, for example by having separate shelves for the storage of meat and vegetarian foods.

### **Fasting**

Practicing Jews observe a 24 hour fast during

- Yom Kippur (day of atonement) festival
- Tishah Be-Av (a one day festival in July/ August).
- And at other times to varying degrees, for example the day before the Purim festival.

It is good employee relations practice for employers to consider how they can support staff who are fasting for example by:

- Allowing staff to take a break when the fast ends to enable them to take a meal
- Allowing changes in work patterns to enable staff to finish work when the fast ends, where this does not create any operational difficulties
- Avoiding meetings, wherever possible, for the time when the fast is due to break.

### **Dress/Appearance**

**Dress.** Devout men keep their heads covered at all times with either a skull cap or a hat. Orthodox married females are required to cover their natural hair. To comply with this aspect of faith they wear a headscarf or a wig or beret. Devout Jewish women do not wear sleeveless garments or trousers in accordance with religious principles concerning modesty.

**Appearance.** Orthodox Jewish males often keep beards.

### **Bereavement**

Jewish tradition requires that the deceased are buried as soon as possible after death and preferably within 24 hours of death. Jewish staff who have been bereaved may therefore seek leave to attend a funeral at very short notice.

Following death, the immediate family members must stay at home and mourn for seven days (Shiva).

Following the death of a mother or father, an observant Jewish man will be required to go to a Synagogue to pray morning, afternoon and evening for 11 months of the Jewish calendar.

## **RASTAFARIANISM**

### **Introduction to the faith**

Rastafarianism originated in the 1930s when Ras Tafari, a prince (believed to be direct descendent of King Solomon) was crowned Emperor Haile Selassie I of Ethiopia. It is from Ras Tafari that the revivalist movement obtained its name. Rastafarians believe in the divinity of Emperor Haile Selassie and regard him as the re-incarnation of Christ and the Lion of the Tribe of Judah as foretold in the Bible's Book of Revelation.

It is thought that there are approximately a quarter of a million adherents to Rastafarian worldwide.

The Bible is the main religious text of Rastafarianism. In particular, the Old Testament book of Leviticus defines living codes, covering issues such as diet, conduct and lifestyle. The African race is seen as one of God's chosen races, one of the Twelve Tribes of Israel.

Rastafarians believe that they and all Africans who have migrated are exiles in the biblical Babylon. Jamaica and all the places to which Africans have been exiled are collectively seen as the biblical 'Babylon'. Rastafarians believe Babylon is the place which will never see spiritual reform or liberation and that they are destined to be delivered out of captivity to Zion or Africa, the land of their ancestors.

The practice of 'reasoning' is an important part of Rastafarian practice. It emphasises the importance of collective reading, study, interpretation and debate of the Bible, history and religious teachings.

### **Religious festivals and holy days**

Many Rastafarians observe the Sabbath (Saturday) in accordance with Biblical teachings. Rastafarian staff may therefore wish to avoid working on Saturdays.

The main religious festival for which Rastafarian are likely to want to refrain from working include:

|  |    |           |
|--|----|-----------|
| Birthday of the Emperor Haile Selassie | 23 | July      |
| Ethiopian Christmas -                  | 7  | January.  |
| Coronation of Emperor Haile Selassie   | 2  | November  |
| Ethiopian New Year's Day               | 11 | September |

### **Pilgrimage**

Adherents of Rastafarianism may wish to make pilgrimage visits to Shashamane in Ethiopia. Shashamane is the sacred land granted to the people of African Diaspora by Emperor Haile Selassie to acknowledge support for the motherland. It would be good employee relations practice to allow Rastafarian staff wishing to make a pilgrimage extended leave for this purpose, where it would not create operational difficulties.

### **Diet**

The model diet for a Rastafarians is described by the term 'Ital', meaning salt less, vegetarian diet. Many Rastafarians are therefore either vegetarian or vegan. Rastafarians shun the eating of scavengers such as Pigs and shellfish. However, some do eat other meat such as fowl and fish. Alcohol is discouraged, therefore many Rastafarian abstain from this. Many adherents of Rastafarianism also avoid other stimulants such as tea coffee.

Where catering is provided at work in canteens, in meetings and at social gatherings, effort should be made to ensure it meets the dietary needs of Rastafarian staff. Furthermore, where employers provide facilities at work for employees to store their food, employees should be consulted to ensure that the arrangements meet the needs of all staff, for example by having separate shelves for the storage of meat and vegetarian foods.

### **Fasting**

Fasting is often observed, sometimes as often as twice a week or simply on the first Saturday of every month. When fasting takes place consumption of food is usually avoided between noon and evening.

It is good employee relations practice for employers to consider how they can support staff who are fasting for example by:

- Allowing staff to take a break when the fast ends to enable them to take a meal
- Allowing changes in work patterns to enable staff to finish work when the fast ends, where this does not create any operational difficulties
- Avoiding meetings, wherever possible, for the time when the fast is due to break.

### **Dress/Appearance**

African attire is encouraged, though not compulsory. Often the colours of black, green, red and gold are found in combination in the clothing of Rastafarians, although again not compulsory.

Uncombed, uncut locks are symbols of devout Rastafarians and are seen as a sacrament. They are seen as a sign of strength, and also the mane of a lion, the lion being the symbol of African strength and emancipation. Many adherents keep their locks covered with a woollen hat (Tam) or a turban.

### **Bereavement**

Normal compassionate leave arrangements will usually suffice. However, extended leave may be required if the employee is attending a funeral abroad.

## **SIKHISM**

### **Introduction to the faith**

Sikhism originated in the Punjab, India in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In comparison to many other religions it is therefore a very young faith. It is based on the teachings of Guru Nanak, the first Sikh Guru (teacher/enlightener) and the teachings of nine further Gurus. Sikhs believe the Sikh dharma (way of life) to be an original revealed religion.

There are approximately 20 million Sikhs worldwide. Sikhism does not make up the majority religion of the population of any nation. However, it is the majority faith of the population of one Indian province, namely the Punjab.

Sikhs believe in one God, who is believed to be nirankar (formless) and akal (eternal) and present in all creation.

There are a number of ethical principles which are central to Sikh belief and practice. Four of these include:

#### **Nam Japna**

This is meditating on God and his attributes through recitation or contemplation of passages from religious scriptures

#### **Kirat Karna**

This is earning a living by honest and approved means

#### **Vand Chakna**

This is sharing with the needy, time, talents and earnings

#### **Sewa**

This is service to the community at large, or in helping to meet a particular need for the benefit of others.

Devout Sikhs are those who have taken special vows (Amrit Sanskar) are denoted by the five Ks. See below the section on dress/appearance for more details.

The religious scripture of Sikhs is known as the Guru Granth Sahib.

### **Religious festivals and holy days**

Within Sikhism there is no day of rest as such. However, in the UK Sunday is the day on which most services are held in the Gurdwaras (place of worship), as this is the customary day of rest within Britain. Sikhs may therefore wish to refrain from working on Sundays, or take some time off to enable them to attend a service at a Gurdwara.

Most Sikh festivals are based on the lunar year. Therefore the date on which they are celebrated changes each year. The following are the main Sikh festivals upon which Sikhs would usually wish to refrain from working:

Vaisakhi  
Diwali

14 April  
October/November  
(determined by lunar  
calendar)

### **Dress/appearance**

Many practicing Sikhs males wear a turban. Some devout females also wear a turban.

Sikhs who have taken special vows (Amrit Sanskar) and become part of the Khalsa (the pure Sikh community) observe the following five Ks:

- Kesh**            Uncut hair. Observant Sikhs do not remove or cut hair from their body.
- Kangha**        Wooden comb usually worn in the hair
- Kara**            Metal bracelet to be worn on the wrist
- Kachahera**    Knee length underpants
- Kirpan**        Short sword/knife worn under clothing so that its not visible (blade is short enough so as not be classed as an offensive weapon for the purposes of being carried in public places)

### **Diet**

Dietary restrictions are a matter of conscience and religious belief for each individual Sikh. However, no Sikh is permitted to eat Halal meat, (which is meat slaughtered in the accordance with Islamic slaughtering tradition), or beef.

Most practicing Sikhs are vegetarian and abstain from alcohol, smoking and other intoxicants. Devout Sikhs (those that have taken special vows) always adopt a vegetarian diet and avoid alcohol and other intoxicants.

Where catering is provided at work in canteens, in meetings and at social gatherings, effort should be made to ensure it meets the dietary needs of Sikh staff. Furthermore, where employers provide facilities at work for employees to the store their food; employees should be consulted to ensure that the arrangements meet the needs of all staff e.g. by having separate shelves for the storage of meat and vegetarian foods.

### **Fasting**

Some Sikhs, particularly women, do occasionally fast, but it is not a compulsory aspect of the faith. Some Sikh women fast with the aim of securing good health and futures for their husbands.

### **Pilgrimage**

Sikhs are not required to go on pilgrimage. However many Sikhs regard certain holy sites as places for pilgrimage and like to visit these. Such sites include for example the Golden Temple in India. Sikh employees may therefore wish to request extended leave from their employer to visit holy places. Although not a compulsory aspect of faith it would be good employee

relations practice to allow this where it would not create operational difficulties.

**Bereavement**

Sikhs are cremated and there is a preference for this to take place as soon after death as possible. There is no specified mourning period, although some Sikhs follow a practice which involves reading of the entire Guru Granth Sahib (religious scripture) over a period of several days with breaks, or continuously for 48 hours. Normal compassionate leave arrangements will usually suffice for this purpose. Sikhs wishing to attend a funeral in another country may seek extended leave.

## Zoroastrians (Parsi)

### Introduction to the Faith

Zoroastrianism is one of the world's oldest monotheistic religions (religions with a single god).

It was founded by the prophet Zoroaster (or Zarathustra) in ancient Iran approximately 3500 years ago.

For 1000 years Zoroastrianism was one of the most powerful religions in the world. It was the official religion of Persia (Iran) from 600 BCE to 650 CE.

It is now one of the world's smallest religions with around a quarter of a million followers worldwide. There are 4000 Zoroastrians living in Britain.

Zoroastrianism is a religion of free choice and personal responsibility, with emphasis on truthfulness, responsibility for the well-being of fellow-man and care for the natural environment.

Zoroastrian beliefs and code of conduct are encapsulated in the maxim:

*Good Thoughts, Good Words, Good Deeds*

### **The Bare Essentials of Zoroastrianism**

- Approximately 3500 years old.
- Began in Iran.
- Zoroastrianism is one of the world's first monotheistic religions.
- God is called Ahura Mazda (Wise Lord) and he created the world.
- Ahura Mazda revealed the truth through the prophet, Zoroaster.
- The Zoroastrian book of Holy Scriptures is called the Avesta.
- The Zoroastrian building for communal worship is known as a Fire Temple or Agiary.
- Zoroastrians traditionally pray several times a day.
- Zoroastrians are roughly split into two groups:
  - The Iranians
  - The Parsis
- Zoroastrianism had a significant influence on the development of Judaism, Christianity and Islam as well as other religions and philosophies.

### **Religious festivals and holy days**

Dates follow the lunar calendar and will therefore vary from year to year.

Khordad Sal – the Prophet's Birthday

Fravardigan – Rememberance of departed souls

Tiragan – Water Festival

Mehergan – Harvest Festival

Ave roj nu Parab – Water Festival

Adar roj nu Parab – Fire Festival

Jashn-e-Sadeh – Mid Winter Festival

Zardosht no Disco – Death of the Prophet

Makted – Festival of All Souls

NoRuz – New Year

In addition there are six seasonal festivals

Maidyoizaremaya            Mid Spring

Maidyoishema                Mid Summer

Paitishahya                  Early Autumn

Maidhyairya                  Mid Winter

Hamaspathmaedaya        Pre-Spring

### **Prayer/worship**

Zoroastrians are required to pray five times during the day, saying a special prayer for each part of the day.

Hawab                        (sunrise to midday)

Rapithwin                    (midday to mid-afternoon)

Uzerin                        (mid-afternoon to sunset)

Aiwisruthrem                (sunset to midnight)

Ushahin                      (midnight to dawn)

Prayers should be said in front of a fire – or a symbolic replica of fire.

In addition, a ritual is performed each time a Zorostrain washes his/her hands although the ritual is not always strictly performed in all its detail. When it is performed, the individual will stand on the same spot and must speak to no one during the ritual. No special facilities are required. A prayer will also be said before eating.

## **Diet**

There are no particular dietary requirements for Zoroastrians although some of those living in the context of a majority Muslim and Hindu society in Iran and India respectively abstain from pork or beef.

## **Bereavement**

Following the death of a close family member there is a mourning period of 10 days followed by a ceremony to mark the first month, the sixth month and the twelfth month of bereavement.

## **The Chinese Calendar**

The Gregorian calendar was adopted in China in 1912 but Chinese people still use the lunar calendar for recognising birthdays and religious festivals. The Chinese calendar is actually lunisolar: the years are reckoned according to the sun and the months according to the moon.

The year has 12 months, alternatively 29 and 30 days long totalling 354 days. In order to make the months correspond with the solar year (Gregorian), a 13<sup>th</sup> month is inserted every two or three years. The new year begins on the new moon and may occur at any time from January 1 to February 19, inclusive.

The years are named in a 12 year cycle.

Animals are associated with each year within the cycle and the names are used for astrological purposes. Chinese people believe a person's year of birth has a profound influence on personality and fortunes can be told.

Legend has it that the Lord Buddha summoned all the animals to come before him before he departed from the earth. Only twelve animals came to bid him farewell and as a reward he named each year after the animals in the order they arrived.

According to a different legend, the animals were quarrelling about who should head the cycle of years. When asked to decide, the gods suggested a contest. Whoever reached the bank of a certain river first would head the cycle and the rest of the animals would be listed accordingly. All the animals lined up and the Ox jumped in.

Unknown to him, the rat was on his back and stepped ashore first.

## **Yuan Tan (Chinese New Year)**

New Year's Day is the most important event in the traditional Chinese calendar. It occurs between mid-January and mid-February, marking the beginning of the first lunar month and is celebrated with fireworks and dragon dances.

The celebration lasts 15 days. Houses are cleaned, old clothes are thrown out, gifts, flowers and sweets are exchanged and all debts are paid before the new year begins.

Homes are decorated with red banners, flowers and good luck scrolls. People who keep a kitchen god smear his lips with honey or offer sticky rice cakes so that sweet remarks will be said when he returns to heaven. Drums, firecrackers and shouting frighten away evil spirits. On New Year's Day older people are wishing long life, business people success and young people fine marriages.