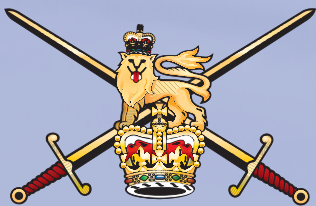




MINISTRY OF DEFENCE



# GUIDE ON RELIGION AND BELIEF IN THE MOD AND ARMED FORCES





## Foreword

The Ministry of Defence is committed to creating a culture that:

- encourages and welcomes people throughout society to join us, and remain with us, to make their distinctive contributions and achieve their full potential;
- is free from harassment, intimidation and unlawful discrimination; and
- ensures each individual is treated fairly, with dignity and respect.

Our aim is to create an environment free from discrimination, prejudice, fear or misunderstanding, which can damage operational effectiveness.

This Guide shows how we put this into practice in relation to religion and belief. It also seeks to explain how the Employment Equality (Religion and Belief) Regulations 2003 apply to service in the Armed Forces and employment in the MOD Civil Service and to increase awareness of some of the most commonly practised religions and beliefs in the UK today.

The Guide is intended for use by personnel at all levels, whether Service or Civil Service, so that they are aware of, understand and comply with the new Regulations and with our diversity and equality policy.

While the information contained in it is as accurate as possible, it should not be seen as a definitive statement of law or as an authoritative or comprehensive guide on religions or beliefs. It should be read in conjunction with other Service and MOD Civil Service guidance and personnel/administrative instructions on diversity and equality and on dealing with complaints of discrimination, harassment or bullying. Further sources of information and advice can be found on page 12.



## CONTENTS

	Page
<b>Guidance on Religion and Belief in the Armed Forces</b>	
Our Diversity Policy	5
The New Regulations	5
How Religion and Belief are Defined in the Regulations	5
Unlawful Behaviour	6
Positive Action	7
Exception for National Security	7
Making a Complaint	8
Potential Conflict between Religion and Sexual Orientation Regulations	8
Religious Observances at Work	9
Handling Requests	9
Time off and Facilities for Prayer	9
Requests for Leave for Religious Festivals/Holidays	9
Time off for Bereavement	10
Dress	10
Dietary Needs	10
Fasting	10
Meeting the Spiritual Needs of Personnel	11
Conscientious Objection	11
Death in Service	11
Emergency Burial	11
Collection of Information on Religion and Belief	12
Further Information	12
<b>Annex A - Religious Dress in the Armed Forces</b>	13
<b>Annex B - Frequently Asked Questions</b>	15
<b>Annex C - Brief Introduction to Major Religions Practised in the UK:</b>	17
Baha'i	17
Buddhism	19
Christianity	21
Hinduism	24
Islam	26
Jainism	28
Judaism	29
Other Ancient Religions	31
Rastafarianism	32
Sikhism	33
Zoroastrianism (Parsi)	35
Non-Religious Beliefs and Non-Belief	36

Notes:



## Our Diversity Policy

1. The MOD's diversity policy is to create a working environment free from harassment, intimidation and unlawful discrimination in which every individual is not only valued and respected but is also encouraged to realise their full potential and to make the best use of their unique talents in contributing to defence capability. This is not just about compliance with equality legislation but about encouraging people from different backgrounds and cultures, and with different perspectives and abilities, to work together to their own and the organisation's benefit. In line with our diversity policy, everyone should be treated fairly, with dignity and respect, regardless of their religion or belief or if they have no religion or other belief. It is everyone's responsibility to ensure that this is put into practice.
2. Our policy is that religion is a private life matter. In order to recognise and harness individual difference and to remove any barriers which might prevent people from joining the Armed Forces or MOD Civil Service, we endeavour to give those who wish to do so the opportunity to practise their religious observances wherever possible subject to vital considerations of operational effectiveness, health and safety and business needs. It is important that in applying this policy the needs of individuals are balanced with those of their colleagues and the organisation as a whole.

## The New Regulations

3. The Employment Equality (Religion and Belief) Regulations 2003 and corresponding legislation in Northern Ireland, implement in UK legislation the religion and belief elements of the European Employment Framework Directive. These Regulations came into force on 2 December 2003 and make it unlawful to discriminate against personnel on the grounds of religion or belief.
4. The Regulations apply to employment, including recruitment, terms and conditions of service, promotions, transfers, dismissals and vocational training and also to the treatment of contract workers such as agency temps. They also make it unlawful to discriminate, harass or victimise an individual in relation to the provision of references.
5. The Regulations provide that an employer can be made responsible for the behaviour of its personnel towards an individual working for someone else but on their premises. An employer can also be responsible for discrimination or harassment of employees by third parties.
6. The Armed Forces and MOD Civil Service have been practising policies that respect individuals' religion or belief for some time. However, it is important to understand that, where in the past MOD as a matter of policy aimed not to discriminate, the new Regulations make discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief unlawful and give individuals a right to bring Employment Tribunal claims for breaches of the Regulations.

## How Religion and Belief are Defined in the Regulations

7. Religion or belief are defined in the Regulations as any religion, religious belief, or similar philosophical belief. This is likely to include less well-known religions such as Paganism and non-religious philosophical beliefs like Humanism. It will not include any philosophical or political beliefs unless they have similar attributes to religious beliefs. Characteristics such as collective worship, a clear belief system or a profound philosophical belief affecting an individual's way of life or view of the world are likely to be relevant in determining what constitutes a religion or belief. Ultimately, it will be for the Courts and Tribunals to consider which religions or beliefs are covered by the Regulations.

## Unlawful Behaviour

**8.** The MOD will not tolerate any form of harassment, victimisation or unlawful discrimination. The law has protected people from such treatment on the grounds of sex or race for many years. Under the new Regulations individuals now have similar protection on the grounds of religion and belief.

**9. Discrimination** can be direct or indirect, intentional or unintentional. It can apply to job applicants as well as Service and civilian personnel.

**10. Direct Discrimination** is unlawful except in very limited circumstances (see paragraph 11 below) and occurs when someone is treated less favourably than others because of their actual or perceived religion or belief or lack of it, whether the intention was to discriminate or not.

Example: a candidate for promotion with the required skills and qualifications is perceived to be a Muslim and is not recommended for promotion because of this assumption about his/her religion. This would be direct discrimination.

**11.** The Regulations recognise that there may be some very specific and limited circumstances in which direct discrimination would be justified. This is where there is a **genuine and determining occupational requirement** for a certain jobholder to be of a particular religion or belief and it is proportionate to apply such a requirement. This is likely to be of very limited application in the Armed Forces. Service Chaplains are an example of posts where being of a specific religion is a determining factor and constitutes a genuine occupational requirement.

**12. Indirect Discrimination**, which is unlawful unless justifiable, occurs when an apparently neutral provision, criterion or practice is applied which, although applied to all personnel, has the effect, or potential effect of disadvantaging people of a particular religion or belief compared with other persons. An example could be selection criteria which seem fair because they apply to all but which inadvertently disadvantage those of a particular religion or belief.

**13.** Indirect discrimination is lawful only where it can be objectively justified as a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim. To justify it, an employer must be able to show that there is a legitimate aim for the practice, policy etc (e.g. maintaining operational effectiveness or health and safety) **and** the practice is a proportionate means of achieving that aim (i.e. that it is necessary and there is no alternative means available).

Example - A "no headwear" policy for all personnel may inadvertently impact on Sikh personnel who wish to wear a turban. In the Armed Forces, Sikh personnel are allowed to wear turbans in all circumstances, except where there is a requirement, for health and safety reasons, for personnel to wear protective headgear, such as a live firing exercise. The protection of health and safety is a legitimate aim and the requirement that personnel wear protective headgear, although it indirectly discriminates against Sikhs, is a proportionate means of achieving that legitimate aim.

**14.** Care should be taken to ensure that policies and practices do not have an unintentional adverse impact on those of a particular religion or belief. If they do, commanding officers/line managers should consider whether reasonable changes might be made. The summary of the main features of some of the most commonly practised religions or beliefs in Annex C will aid understanding and help to avoid unintentional discrimination.

**15. Harassment** is unlawful. It occurs when a person engages in unwanted behaviour on the grounds of religion or belief, whether actual or perceived, which has the purpose or effect of violating dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.

**16.** Such behaviour as use of nicknames, teasing or name-calling relating to an individual's religion or belief may constitute harassment irrespective of the intention. Other examples of harassment include:

- physical or verbal threats or abuse, including derogatory or stereotypical remarks, use of offensive or inappropriate language when describing an individual's religion or belief.
- unwelcome, intrusive or persistent questioning about an individual's religion or belief (real or assumed).

**17.** Harassment in any form will not be tolerated and should be challenged. For many people religion is a private matter and seemingly innocuous comments or questions about an individual's religion or belief may be viewed as intrusive or offensive. It should not be assumed that, because an individual does not object to language or behaviour, they consent to it.

**18. Victimisation** is unlawful. It occurs when an individual is subjected to a detriment because they may have made a complaint or intend to make a complaint about discrimination or harassment or have given evidence or intend to give evidence relating to such a complaint. Labelling someone a troublemaker, denying them promotion or training opportunities or ostracising them would constitute victimisation.

## Positive Action

**19.** Positive discrimination is not permitted by the Regulations but they do allow employers to take steps in limited circumstances to redress the effects of previous inequality of opportunity. This is sometimes referred to as positive action and could include giving particular encouragement or providing specific training for individuals from religions or beliefs who are in a minority in the workplace. However, decisions on recruitment, career progression and selection for training and promotion must always be on merit, regardless of religion or belief. Positive action should not be confused with positive discrimination which is unlawful.

**20.** Examples of positive action in the Armed Forces and MOD Civil Service include outreach programmes and advertising aimed at encouraging applications from people from minority ethnic and faith communities while making it clear that selection will be on merit. The MOD Civil Service has also introduced the "New Horizons" development programme for ethnic minority staff.

## Exception for National Security

**21.** The Regulations contain an exception for anything done to protect national security provided this can be justified. This is likely to be very narrowly construed and legal advice should always be sought if it is thought that a discriminatory measure should be taken to preserve national security.

## Making a Complaint

**22. Internal grievance/redress of complaint** All personnel have a right to complain about any matter that affects them personally, without fear of victimisation and with confidence that their complaint will be taken seriously, investigated thoroughly and resolved as quickly as possible. They should ensure that they are aware of what steps they may take if they feel they have been discriminated against, harassed or victimised. The procedures are set out in the Personnel Manual for Civil Servants and single Service Acts and administrative instructions for Service personnel, and in various Service guidance booklets.

**23.** If individuals feel that they have been harassed or treated unfairly on the grounds of their religion or belief, they should if possible make it clear to the person concerned that his or her behaviour is unwelcome and should stop. Before making a formal complaint, individuals may wish to consider taking advice from their immediate superior/line manager or speaking to someone else such as the unit Equal Opportunities Adviser/Equality and Diversity Officer, Chaplain or Medical Officer or the local Welfare Officer/Families Service. Service personnel can also contact the appropriate Service Confidential Helpline for advice. Details of other contact/advice points will be available in the guidance or Regulations mentioned above and in unit admin orders. The right to redress is a statutory right for Service personnel.

**24. Access to Employment Tribunal** Under the Regulations, Armed Forces and MOD Civil Service personnel have the right to submit complaints of discrimination, harassment or victimisation on the grounds of religion or belief to an Employment Tribunal. Before a Serviceman or Servicewoman can make an application to an Employment Tribunal, a complaint covering the same issue must first have been submitted (and not withdrawn) using the internal Redress of Complaint procedures. Because of this requirement, a Service complainant has six months from the day on which the matter of complaint occurred to make a claim to an Employment Tribunal, as opposed to three months in the case of civilians. Further advice can be obtained from MOD Personnel Manual and Single Service administrative instructions and from Service guidance booklets.

**25.** An individual pursuing an Employment Tribunal claim can name their employer or the perpetrator or both as respondents to their claim. As such, culpable individuals as well as MOD can be held liable for discrimination and be required to pay compensation.

## Potential Conflict between Religion and Sexual Orientation Regulations

**26.** The Government also introduced Regulations covering discrimination and harassment on the grounds of sexual orientation at the same time as those on religion or belief. Potential conflicts may arise where the Regulations on religion appear to infringe the rights given to an individual under the Regulations on sexual orientation. The right for everyone to be treated with dignity and respect in the workplace applies irrespective of sexual orientation as well as of religion or belief. In cases where an individual claims that his or her behaviour towards a gay, lesbian or bisexual colleague is founded on religious conviction, the protection from discrimination and harassment afforded by the Regulations on sexual orientation would take precedence over the right to religious expression. This means that personnel of any religion cannot refuse to work with someone on the grounds of their sexual orientation (and vice versa) whatever their religion or belief.

## Religious Observances at Work

**27.** Religious belief is treated as a private matter but, recognising the unique and demanding circumstances of Service life, the Armed Forces aim to facilitate and support individuals' spiritual needs. Both the MOD Civil Service and Armed Forces make every effort to respect and accommodate religious or belief requirements subject to vital considerations of operational effectiveness and health and safety. However, we may need individuals to be flexible, particularly when this is in the interests of their own safety or that of their colleagues.

**28.** Commanding Officers and line managers should consider whether policies, rules or procedures indirectly discriminate against staff of particular religions or beliefs and, if so, whether changes might be made. Most needs will require little or no change.

**29.** Service personnel should not be compelled to attend religious services of a belief different to their own. Neither should those who indicate that they have no religious belief be compelled to attend.

## Handling Requests

**30.** The Regulations do not say that employers must provide time off or facilities to enable personnel to meet religious observances in the workplace. However, reasonable requests must be considered objectively and met wherever practical. Indeed, blanket policies or refusals may constitute indirect discrimination unless justifiable as a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim (e.g. where the granting of leave for a religious holiday would substantially impact on a unit's or department's needs).

## Time off and Facilities for Prayer During the Working Day

**31.** Some religions require their followers to pray at specific times during the day (see summary in Annex C). Although the Regulations do not specifically require the provision of time and facilities (such as a quiet room) for religious or belief observance in the workplace, it is MOD policy to make such provision where circumstances allow. Individuals should discuss their needs with their Commanding Officers or line managers and every effort should be made to accommodate such needs. Time off for religious observances such as a prayer session during exercises or operations may have to be delayed or deferred due to unit activities. Wherever practicable, areas for worship or contemplation should be made available in all MOD Buildings and Service establishments, including ships and submarines. Personnel will normally be expected to use break times for their religious observances.

## Requests for Leave for Religious Festivals/Holidays

**32.** Many religions or beliefs have special festivals or spiritual observance days and an individual may request annual leave to celebrate festivals or attend ceremonies. Commanding Officers and line managers should make every effort to allow individuals time-off to celebrate religious festivals or holidays (e.g. Yom Kippur, Vai Sakh, Eid Al-Fitr, Diwali, etc).

**33.** Requests for annual leave for religious festivals or holidays need to be considered objectively and Commanding Officers and line managers should bear in mind the need to avoid indirect discrimination. Care should be taken to ensure that, where there are numerous requests for leave

at the same time, decisions on who should or should not be allowed leave are made according to fair and objective criteria with a mind to the need not to indirectly discriminate. It is important not to make assumptions on the basis of an individual's religion or perceived religion (for example that non-Christians will be prepared to work during the Christmas holiday period).

**34.** The practice of operating a holiday system whereby the unit closes for specific periods when all personnel must take leave may be indirectly discriminatory in preventing individuals taking leave at times of specific religious significance. However, such indirect discrimination will not be unlawful if it can be justified as legitimate and proportionate for operational or business reasons.

**35.** Individuals should give as much notice as possible when requesting leave and bear in mind that a number of their colleagues may request leave at the same time.

### **Time off for Bereavement**

**36.** Normal compassionate leave arrangements will apply for attending funerals of close family.

### **Dress**

**37.** The Armed Forces and MOD Civil Service recognise that individuals with specific religions or beliefs generally welcome the opportunity to wear clothing with significance to their religion or belief. This is reflected in the Services' dress regulations that take account of cultural and religious differences such as permitting individuals to wear items of religious significance and Muslim women to cover their arms, legs and head in all aspects of their work. More detailed information on religious dress in the Armed Forces can be found at Annex A. For operational and health and safety reasons, members of the Armed Forces may have to be flexible in some circumstances. However, MOD's policy is to ensure that any such restrictions regarding clothing to be worn in an operational environment are genuine requirements on grounds of operational effectiveness or health and safety. General dress codes which conflict with religious or belief requirements may constitute indirect discrimination under the Regulations unless they can be justified.

### **Dietary Needs**

**38.** The Armed Forces make every effort to cater for all special religious dietary requirements, and vegetarian options or Halal or Kosher meals can be provided in Service Mess facilities. However, preparation of Kosher food, by Mess staff, in strict observance of the Jewish faith cannot be guaranteed. Vegetarian, Halal and Kosher Operational Ration Packs are normally readily available for operations and exercises. However, in some circumstances or operations it may not be possible to guarantee this.

### **Fasting**

**39.** Some religions require their followers to undergo extended periods of fasting (e.g. Muslims fast during Ramadan). In the Armed Forces fasting should normally be allowed although there may be some operational circumstances when the physical demands on an individual are high and fasting would be hazardous and inappropriate. Care should be taken to ensure that permitting an individual to undertake a fast does not place unreasonable burdens on other personnel.

Example: Two Muslim recruits at an Army Training Regiment asked if they would be permitted to fast while undertaking recruit training during Ramadan. Both recruits were counselled about the physical demands of recruit training and advised that fasting could be dangerous. After discussions with the recruits' families and a local Imam, one recruit decided to defer training until the end of Ramadan, while the other chose to start training immediately, waiving the requirement to fast but continuing with all other aspects of religious observance (the Qur'an allows Muslims to be exempted from fasting as long as missed days are made up afterwards).

## Meeting the Spiritual Needs of Personnel

**40.** Commissioned Armed Forces Chaplains are at present drawn from the main Christian denominations to which the majority of Service personnel belong. They have a dual responsibility to provide spiritual care for Service personnel, and their families, within their denomination as well as to provide practical pastoral care for personnel of all faiths or those who have no religious beliefs. Should non-religious personnel in the Armed Forces wish to discuss their beliefs or problems with someone other than chaplains, there are a wide range of non-religious organisations which provide support and advice, including social workers, doctors and other professionals. The Armed Forces have appointed religious leaders from the Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and Sikh faiths to act as advisers on matters specific to those faith groups. Action is being taken to appoint civilian Chaplains from the faiths other than Christian most represented within the Armed Forces. For further information contact the Royal Army Chaplains Department (see page 12) The Multi-Faith Directory of Local Religious Advisers listing local centres of prayer and religious advice for those faith groups has also been published and is available at all Service establishments. This will be periodically updated.

## Conscientious Objection

**41.** Armed Forces personnel have a liability to deploy with their units worldwide. There are well-established appeal procedures for Service personnel who, during their service, develop a genuine conscientious objection to further military service. A member of the Armed Forces who develops an objection to future military service should make that objection known to his or her commander.

## Death in Service

**42.** Visiting/Assisting Officers who provide assistance and advice to families in cases of death in service should take account of any specific requirements relating to the religion or belief of the bereaved and of any funeral, burial or cremation arrangements which may arise as a result. Advice should be sought from casualty staff, Service Chaplains or Service Religious Advisers where appropriate. In circumstances where death occurs in combat or operations, bodies of the deceased will normally be repatriated to the UK.

## Emergency Burial

**43.** Chaplains on front line duty carry an emergency order of prayers for the five main minority faith groups (Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism) as well as Christianity. This is to permit the battlefield burial of deceased Service personnel in the extremes of a combat situation where repatriation may not be feasible. Advice on these procedures is contained in Service casualty manuals (BR8886 (Naval Service); AC12874 (Army); AP1933 (RAF)).

## Collection of Information on Religion and Belief

**44.** The Regulations do not require the collection of data on the religion or belief of personnel. However, they recognise that this may help organisations to understand individuals' needs and help them make provision for those needs. The Armed Forces record the religion of all personnel for this reason and for casualty reporting purposes.

### FURTHER INFORMATION

**45.** The main provisions of the Regulations were summarised in DCI Gen 37/04 which can be found at:

[http://www.defence.mod.uk/dci2004/gen2004/gen33-42\\_04.pdf](http://www.defence.mod.uk/dci2004/gen2004/gen33-42_04.pdf)

Guidance on the Regulations issued by the Advisory Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) is at:

<http://www.acas.org.uk/publications/pdf/religion.pdf>

and the full text of the Regulations can be found at:

<http://www.hms0.gov.uk/si/si2003/20031660.htm>

The MOD diversity and equality website is at:

[http://www.mod.uk/issues/equal\\_opportunities/intro.htm](http://www.mod.uk/issues/equal_opportunities/intro.htm)

The Armed Forces Chaplaincy Service have published a Directory of Local Religious Advisers which is available at all units.

Guidelines on flexible working arrangements for members of the Armed Forces can be found in DCI JS 33/04 at:

[http://www.defence.mod.uk/dci2004/js2004/js32-62\\_04.pdf](http://www.defence.mod.uk/dci2004/js2004/js32-62_04.pdf)

**If you would like any further advice on the Regulations on religion and belief then please contact:**

Royal Navy:	Diversity Policy Officer	9380 27624
Army:	DM(A) SO1 Emp	94344 5338
RAF:	PTC-COS-SO2ED	95471 5049
MOD Civil Service:	DGCP HR Ops – DWLB7	020 721(87633MB)

Specific religious advice can be provided by your unit Chaplain or through the Chaplains Department as follows:

Royal Navy:	Naval Chaplaincy Service	9380 27901
Army:	Royal Army Chaplains Department	94344 5808
RAF:	RAF Chaplaincy Service	95471 5032

## RELIGIOUS DRESS IN THE ARMED FORCES

1. All Service personnel are required to wear standard pattern uniforms and adhere to Service clothing policy and instructions. However, the Armed Forces recognise the need to observe specific codes of dress in accordance with particular religious beliefs. For operational and health and safety reasons, members of the Armed Forces may have to be flexible in some circumstances. More detailed information on religious dress can be found in single-Service Dress Regulations.

### Sikhs

2. In the Armed Forces Sikhs are permitted to wear the 5Ks: Kara (steel bangle), Kesh (uncut hair), Kanga (small comb), Kaccha (special design knee length underwear) and Kirpan (small sword); male Sikhs can also wear a turban. However, some constraints regarding the wearing of a turban and keeping facial hair uncut do exist:

Some trades require specialist headgear to be worn, especially in operational circumstances. Examples of this are Commander's helmets in armoured fighting vehicles, combat helmets, breathing apparatus (full hood) for fire fighters, and flying helmets for aircrew in some types of aircraft. Turbans are incompatible with such specialist headgear, which must be worn on health and safety grounds. Male Sikh personnel can normally wear a patka under specialist headgear, however, this is not possible under a flying helmet which must be closely fitted to the contours of the head. Aircrew with long hair, male and female, may be required to have their hair cut short in order to achieve a satisfactory fit of a flying helmet.

### Muslim and Sikh Men

3. Muslim and Sikh men are permitted to wear short neatly trimmed beards. However, for occupational or operational reasons, where a hazard clearly exists, personnel authorised to wear beards on religious grounds will have to be prepared to modify or remove their beards to such an extent as to enable the correct wearing of a respirator or breathing apparatus.

**a. Aircrew** It is unlikely that a male Muslim or Sikh would be able to obtain an effective seal on his oxygen mask without trimming his beard.

**b. Respirator** An effective seal on a respirator can only be achieved when the skin is clean shaven. In an operational environment (including training in preparation for operational deployment) where there is an NBC threat, Muslims, Sikhs and indeed all personnel with beards, would need to shave. However, when practising NBC drills, male Muslim and Sikh personnel will not be required to shave their beards.

### Muslim Women

4. Muslim women are allowed to wear uniform trousers, rather than a skirt and may wear a hijab except when operational or health and safety considerations dictate otherwise. Long sleeve shirts are also available with most forms of Service dress. Tracksuit bottoms may be worn for sport. All Service personnel are required to achieve a basic swimming standard as part of their training. Although every effort will be made to ensure that these tests take place in an all female environment, it should be stressed to female Muslim applicants that this will not always be possible.

## **Jewish Men**

- 5.** A male member of the Jewish faith may wear a dark plain or patterned yarmulke whenever he removes other headress.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### **Q1 Is it acceptable to discuss religion and belief in the workplace?**

**A1** Yes – provided personnel understand the distinction between reasonable discussion and offensive behaviour. Staff should be aware that if offence is reasonably taken, this may be considered to be harassment and therefore unlawful.

### **Q2 Does the law provide that a prayer room must be made available for those who ask for it?**

**A2** No – but the law does impose an obligation on an employer to give reasonable consideration to requests for facilities for religious observance. MOD's policy is to provide facilities for prayer wherever possible.

### **Q3 Do the Armed Forces rules on dress and personal appearance breach the Regulations?**

**A3** No. The Armed Forces regulations on dress are as flexible as possible and are designed to accommodate the religious dress requirements of all personnel. Personnel are normally allowed to dress in accordance with their religion but there are some circumstances when, for operational, occupational or health and safety reasons, some compromises may have to be made on the part of the individual.

### **Q4 Can personnel from other faiths be required to take time off for Christian festivals such as Christmas and Easter?**

**A4** Block annual leave is given primarily to coincide with school holidays and follows UK national practice, with the result that Christmas and Easter normally fall within block leave. Leave is also given for bank holidays on the basis of the days being national holidays and not religious festivals. The practice of operating a holiday system whereby the unit closes for specific periods when all personnel must take leave may be justifiable where the policy is a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim such as operational or business efficiency.

### **Q5 Why should personnel from other faiths be required to use annual leave for their religious festivals?**

**A5** With the exception of those festivals which fall within national public holidays, members of all faith groups, including Christian, are expected to use annual leave for religious festivals.

### **Q6 Would personnel be allowed time for prayer during the working day?**

**A6** Personnel would normally be expected to use break time for prayer, but this is a matter for discussion between the individual and their Commanding Officer/line manager.

**Q7 How does the MOD propose to reconcile its policy to accommodate different religious beliefs when the tenets of some religions appear to conflict with the MOD's diversity policy with regard to sexual orientation?**

**A7** The right for everyone to be treated with dignity and respect in the workplace applies irrespective of sexual orientation or religion or belief. In cases where an individual claims that his or her behaviour towards a gay, lesbian or bisexual colleague is founded on religious conviction, the protection from discrimination and harassment afforded by the Regulations on sexual orientation take precedence over the right to religious expression. This means that personnel of any religion or belief cannot refuse to work with someone on the grounds of their sexual orientation, and vice versa.

**Q8 How do we meet the needs of personnel from other faiths?**

**A8** Local religious contacts are available for members of non-Christian faith groups through the Multi-Faith Directory of Local Religious Advisors held by Commanding Officers and Chaplains. Action is being taken to appoint civilian Chaplains from the faiths other than Christian most represented within the Armed Forces. For further information contact the Royal Army Chaplains Department (see page 12)

**Q9 In meeting the needs of those with specific religious requirements, does this not disadvantage others who have no such requirements?**

**A9** No – In operating its diversity policy, the MOD, like any employer, will at times be required to balance the needs of different individuals. The MOD will always seek to provide the best outcome for individuals and the organisation in any situation whilst operating within the law.

## BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO MAJOR RELIGIONS AND BELIEFS PRACTISED IN THE UK

Listed below are some of the most commonly practised religions and beliefs in the UK. This list is not exhaustive and is intended for guidance only. Not all members of each religion follow all the practises and observances or will want time off for each and every festival or holiday. The information in this brief introduction has been drawn from a variety of sources including the guidance on the Regulations issued by the Advisory Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) (<http://www.acas.org.uk/publications/pdf/religion.pdf>).

### RELIGIONS

#### BAHA'I

The number of Baha'is in the UK is very small. Most are converts from other religions or are former agnostics or atheists.

#### Beliefs and Practices

At the heart of the Baha'i faith is the conviction that humanity is a single people with a common destiny. Baha'u'llah taught that there is one God who progressively reveals His will to humanity. Each of the great religions brought by messengers of God – Moses, Krishna, Buddha, Zoroaster, Jesus, Mohammed – represents a successive stage in the spiritual development in civilisation.

Baha'is believe that Baha'u'llah, as the most recent divine Messenger, has brought teachings that address the moral and spiritual challenges of the modern world. The goal is to develop the innate noble characteristics of every human being, and to prepare the way for an advancing global civilisation.

Baha'is should say one of three obligatory prayers during the day. Prayers need to be recited in a quiet place where the Baha'i will wish to face the Qiblah (the shrine of Baha'u'llah, near Akka, Israel). Baha'is are required to wash their hands and face before prayers.

#### Festivals

Baha'i festivals take place from sunset to sunset.

During the Baha'i Fast (2 March – 20 March), Baha'is refrain from eating or drinking from sunrise to sunset. There are exemptions from fasting for sickness, pregnancy, travel and strenuous physical work.

- The most important Baha'i festival is **Ridvan** (21 Apr – 2 May) which includes three holy days:
- 1st Day of Ridvan 21 April
- 9th Day of Ridvan 29 April
- 12th Day of Ridvan 2 May

Other festivals:

- **Naw-Ruz** (Baha'i New Year) 21 March
- **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

## Diet

As a matter of principle most Baha'is do not take alcohol. Otherwise there are no dietary restrictions.

## Dress

There are no specific dress regulations.

## Rites of Passage

Burial should take place as soon as possible after legal formalities and funeral arrangements can be put in hand. The body should be transported no more than one hour's journey from the place where the person died, so funerals take place relatively close to the place of death. Baha'is have no specific period of mourning.

## BUDDHISM

There are about 150,000 Buddhists in the UK according to the 2001 Census.

### Beliefs and Practices

Siddharta Gautama, who became known as "the Buddha" or "Enlightened One", founded Buddhism in India in the sixth century BC. Buddhist philosophy is based on a system of ethics. Buddhists see life as a process of birth, ageing, illness and death, in which nevertheless people can achieve enlightenment through understanding the roots/origins of suffering and in overcoming worldly attachments and grief. Buddhists believe in rebirth and that the life you lead has a direct effect on the next life. Buddhism stresses love for all living beings and respect for all forms of life. It emphasises generosity, hospitality and self-discipline. For most adherents, Buddhism represents a way of life informed by precepts, the practice of friendship and the establishment of good social relationships. Wisdom and compassion are the essence of the teachings.

The main traditions in Buddhism are Theravada (earliest form practised in Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Laos and Cambodia), Mahayana (later form practised in China, Vietnam, Japan, Korea and Mongolia) and Vajrayana (practised in Tibet). All Buddhist traditions are represented in the UK. Buddhist temples are places of teaching, religious observance and meditation.

Meditation and chanting are practised in Buddhism with incense being burned during meditation. In some traditions, fasting is undertaken at each new and full moon.

### Festivals

There are many festivals, some of which are more important than others. They are celebratory in character rather than obligatory religious observances. Different traditions in Buddhism celebrate different festivals. Some do not celebrate any festivals. Festivals follow the lunar calendar and therefore do not take place on the same day each year.

The most important Buddhist festival is:

- **Vesak or Wesak** (Theravada tradition) between April/May (which celebrates Buddha's birth, enlightenment and death)

Other festivals include:

- **Parinirvana** (February) -The anniversary of Buddha's death.
- **Magha Puja Day** (February/March)
- **Honen Memorial Day** (March)
- **Hana Matsuri** (Mahayana tradition) - 8th April - celebrates Buddha's birthday.
- **Buddhist New Year** – varies according to tradition
- **Dharma Day** - Celebrates three events in the Buddhist's life, and is generally celebrated in a monastery in the presence of monks (July).
- **Abhiddhamma Day** (October)
- **Kathina Day** (October)
- **Loy Krathong** (December)
- **Bodhi Day** (December)

## **Diet**

Some Buddhists are vegetarian or occasionally so at the time of certain festivals. Vegetarianism is held in high regard and considered to be consistent with the spirit of the teachings.

## **Dress**

There are no specific rules relating to dress but some Buddhists may prefer to wear clothing which conforms to their belief in non harm (e.g. not wearing leather clothing or shoes).

## **Rites of Passage**

Weddings are civil rather than religious ceremonies but services of blessing usually follow in the temple or elsewhere. Funerals usually focus on a reflection on the transitions of life. Bodies can be either buried or cremated.

## CHRISTIANITY

There are over 40 million people in the UK belonging to a Christian denomination according to the 2001 Census.

### Beliefs and Practices

Christianity is the largest and most widespread religion in the world. It is comprised of three main groupings: Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant. As with other religions, these differences can amount to deep divisions, resulting in the growth of separate denominations. At the centre of Christianity is the belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and Saviour of the World, with followers modelling their lives on his teaching and example. Christianity is a faith with a great sense of mission.

Christianity's Holy Book is the Bible, made up of a collection of books, written over a thousand-year period. The first part is the Old Testament which covers the history of Judaism and Hebrew thought. The New Testament has twenty-seven books including four Gospels, describing the life and teachings of Jesus. Admission to full membership is marked by Baptism or Christening (a ceremonial washing with water) and Confirmation (a profession of faith).

The predominant Christian church in England and Wales is the Church of England, which is part of the Anglican Communion of Churches. It has two main traditions: one emphasising a Catholic 'High Church' style of worship and teaching, the other 'Low Church' evangelical teaching, having more in common with other Protestant denominations. The Church of England is the established Church in England only. In Scotland the national Church is the Church of Scotland which is Presbyterian in government and worship.

The Roman Catholic Church is characterised by a special devotion to the Mass which affirms the belief that the bread and wine become the body and blood of Jesus symbolizing his sacrificial death. The head of the Roman Catholic Church is the Pope and the leadership of the church is centred in Rome.

The Orthodox Churches have expanded from their largely national based origins to include a broad-based British membership. Their worship and liturgies are characterized by their ornate nature. They share similar major festivals with other Christian Churches but the dates may differ.

The different Protestant churches reflect the diverse ways in which the Scriptures have been interpreted over time. These churches include:

**Baptists** Baptism, by profession of faith, is a personal decision made on attaining adulthood. There is less ministerial hierarchy, and a methodical approach to Bible study and prayer meetings and the personal value and experience drawn from conversion.

**Methodists** Emphasis is placed on a methodical approach to life, based on scripture and on the preaching of John Wesley.

**Pentecostals** Emphasis is placed on Baptism and profession of faith, as a personal decision made on attaining adulthood. There is a methodical approach to Bible study and prayer meetings and the personal value and experience drawn from conversion. The gifts of the Holy Spirit, including the ability to speak in an unlearned spiritual language, and interpretation of tongues, healing, prophecy and other spiritual gifts are an important aspect of the faith.

**Plymouth Brethren** Committed to an urgent evangelism driven by the expectation of the Second Coming.

**Presbyterians** Great emphasis is placed on orderly, dignified worship and strong preaching led by the elders, who are ordained ministers or lay people. The Church of Scotland is Presbyterian in worship and organisation.

**Quakers** There is no clergy or set form of service. Worshippers stand up to speak, through the guidance of God's Spirit. There is a very strong sense of community amongst the believers.

**Salvation Army** An evangelical movement, respected for its social work. Organised on military lines, with joyful worship meetings often featuring lively and musical forms of worship.

**United Reformed Church** The union of the English Presbyterian and Congregational Churches. Presbyterian in worship and order.

#### **Other traditions derived from Christianity include:**

- **Unitarians** Affirmation of God as one person, rather than the Trinity doctrine of 'Three in One'. Tolerance, freedom and reason unite members.
- **Christian Scientists** Christian Scientists believe in redemption through positive thinking, faith healing and self-help. Jesus is viewed as one whose perfect obedience to God enabled him to transcend the illusion of sin and suffering. Through following Christ's example the individual can be released from death and suffering.
- **Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons)** Mormons believe that the Bible and the Book of Mormon are the word of God and that God reveals himself through prophets in the present day.
- **Jehovah's Witnesses** Dedicated to Jehovah (God) and his laws, and spreading the message through home visits. High moral standards based on Bible principles.

Christianity is probably the most diverse of faiths and it is practised throughout the world. For these reasons, no general customs can be identified outside the key Christian festivals.

## **Festivals**

There is great variation in the rituals and practice of the Christian Church, with all using prayer in private or public. There are a large number of Festivals and Holy Days in the Christian Year, of which the most important are:

- **Advent** This four week period leading to Christmas Day is a time of preparation for Christmas. It is regarded as the start of the Christian year.
- **Christmas Eve/Christmas Day** (24 & 25 December) Celebrates the birth of Jesus Christ. The giving of presents recalls the gift from God of his son, Jesus. The singing of carols in Church signifies peace and goodwill to all. Feasting is important and homes are decorated.

- **Ash Wednesday** Start of Lent – a day of fasting and abstinence for many Christians (February/March - date set by lunar calendar).
- **Lent** This period of forty days, from Ash Wednesday to Holy Saturday, is a period for fasting and restraint in preparation for the celebration of Easter. It recalls the period Jesus was tempted in the wilderness and the forty years the Jews spent as slaves before returning to their homeland.
- **Maundy Thursday** A day when Christians commemorate the Last Supper which Jesus shared with his disciples before his arrest and crucifixion (March/April – date set by lunar calendar).
- **Good Friday** This day, leading to Easter, recalls the anniversary of Jesus' crucifixion as the means of redemption and salvation for all believers. Jesus' sacrifice meant that all believers would be forgiven and reconciled to God (March/April – date set by lunar calendar).
- **Easter Sunday** This major festival commemorates the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It reflects the joy of the risen Christ, following the sadness of Good Friday (March/April - date set by lunar calendar).
- **Pentecost** Celebrates the Coming of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus' disciples. It is regarded as the birth of the Christian Church and represents the power of God in the life of believers. Special services may be held.

In addition, there are a number of "holy days of obligation" (e.g Ascension Day) when Christians may wish to attend a church service.

## Diet

There are no specific dietary rules. Fasting may be required during Lent as a form of spiritual discipline.

## Dress

There are no specific dress regulations.

## Rites of Passage

Funerals normally take place within a week or two of death. Christians may be either buried or cremated.

## HINDUISM

There are some 560,000 Hindus in the UK according to the 2001 Census. The majority of Hindus in the UK originate from India, East Africa, Fiji, Trinidad and other Caribbean islands.

### Beliefs and Practices

Hinduism is the dominant religion of India and one of the world's oldest. It is a mixture of beliefs, values and customs with many Gods. Brahma is the supreme being. Hindus can be monotheists, polytheists, atheists or pluralists. God is symbolised by the word Om or Aum. The Hindu temple is the Mandir where worship is individual and congregational.

Hindus pray either in a shrine or in their home. The scriptures fundamental to Hinduism are: the Veda (contains the life beliefs and customs); the Upanishads (contains the basic philosophical framework); and Bhagavad-Gita (The Lord's Song – probably Hinduism's most important single text).

Hindus believe that all living things have an eternal soul, which is born and re-born. A constant cycle of birth, death and rebirth (Samsara) is of central importance until such time as Samsara is broken and individual soul (atman) has achieved liberation (moksha).

There are three generally recognised paths to liberation (Moksha):

- Karma** - fulfilment of worldly duties and responsibilities
- Jnana** - path of knowledge and discipline including the yogo.
- Bhakti** - the path of inner direction

The four main aims in life are considered to be:

- Dharma** (each person's religious and moral duties)
- Artha** (to earn money for the betterment of the family)
- Kama** (control of your actions and enjoyment of the physical pleasures of life)
- Moksha/Atman** (continuous rebirth and liberation of the soul).

Hindus also believe the world is periodically recreated through the God Vishnu. There have been nine incarnations of this God and the seventh - Rama - and the eighth - Krishna - are the forms most worshipped by Hindus. Other popular Gods include Siva, his son Ganesha, Kali and Hanuman. Some devout Hindus pray at least twice daily.

Hinduism includes class (varna) distinction which puts people in different social groups. Historically, Hindus cannot change or leave their class or marry outside it, although some of the class rules have been relaxed. Hindu society is broken down into four main groups:

- Brahmin** - The priestly caste who teach and perform religious ceremonies, and encourage others to learn religious duties.
- Kshatriya** - The military caste, who protect society and govern, rule and administer a country towards a disciplined life.
- Valshiya** - Who engage in business, commerce and agriculture.
- Shudra** - The manual labourers.

## Festivals

Hinduism is a diverse religion and not all Hindus will celebrate the same festivals.

Main festivals are:

- **Holi** (Spring Festival) (March)
- **Diwali** (Diwali) (late October/early November) (five day celebration marking the start of the Hindu New Year)
- **Dusheshra** (aka **Vijayadashmi**) (September/October)

Others include:

- **Makar Sakranti** (14 January)
- **Maha Shiva Ratri** (February)
- **Ramnavami** (April)
- **Rakshabandham** (August)
- **Janmashtami** (August)
- **Ganesh Chaturthi** (August/September)
- **Navaratri** (September/October)
- **Karava Chauth** (October)

## Diet

The eating of meat is forbidden, particularly beef, since the cow is a sacred animal. Many Hindus are strictly vegetarian and will not eat fish or eggs. The drinking of alcohol is regarded as taboo.

## Dress

Traditional clothing for women includes the Sari, Shalwar (loose fitting trousers) and Kameez (a loose fitting trouser suit). Hindu men cover themselves from waist to knee and wear Kameez/Kurta/Dhuti (long tunic) on special occasions. Hindu women will often wear a bindi which is a red spot worn on the forehead. Many married Hindu women wear a necklace (mangal sutra) which is placed round their necks during the marriage ceremony and is in addition to a wedding ring.

A few orthodox Hindu men wear a small tuft of hair (shikha) similar to a ponytail but this is often hidden beneath the remaining hair. Some also wear a clay marking on their foreheads known as a talik.

## Rites of Passage

There are celebrations marking pregnancy, birth and the first haircut. The wedding ceremony is very colourful. The majority of adult Hindus are cremated. This takes place within 24 hours of death. Eldest sons may also shave their heads as a sign of grief. Several ceremonies take place before cremations and traditionally elder sons light funeral pyres. Prayers are conducted by Hindu priests in homes and at crematoriums. Sometime after cremations ashes are collected and scattered in sacred rivers. The family stays indoors for 10-13 days of mourning.

## ISLAM (MUSLIMS)

There are about 1.6 million Muslims in the UK according to the 2001 Census. The majority of Muslims in the UK have their origins in India, Pakistan or Bangladesh. Islam is a multi-racial faith and the main languages are Urdu, Punjabi, Bengali, Arabic, Swahili and Turkish.

### Beliefs and Practices

The word Islam means 'to submit to God' and followers of the religion are called Muslims – 'one who is faithful to God' or Allah. Islam is a way of life, governing not only religious practice and morality, but social relationships, marriage, divorce and kinship, besides economic and political relationships among Muslims.

Islamic beliefs and practises are based upon The Qur'an or Koran (the Holy book of Islam). Muslims believe that the Qur'an is the word of Allah revealed through the Prophet Mohammed. Muslims are guided by the Qur'an and the separately recorded sayings (haddith) and traditions (sunaah) of the Prophet Mohammed. Muslims believe that the Prophet Mohammed was as near to being perfect as any human being can be and in their daily lives and practices attempt to follow his example. The two main sects are Shi'a and Sunni.

The Mosque is the Muslim place of worship and community activity centre. All mandatory congregational prayers (such as Friday midday prayers and Eid prayers) are held in a Mosque. There is no hierarchy of ordained clergy in Islam. A person who leads prayers is called an Imam. In the Sunni sect of Islam, an Imam is one who is respected for his knowledge of Islam and any person in whom the congregation has trust can lead prayer and perform the role of Imam. Amongst Shi'as, the role of the Imam is more significant and carries greater authority than just leadership of prayer. Friday is the Muslim holy day.

Muslims adhere to five essential Islamic practices:

**The Profession of the faith (Shahada)** The words "There is no God but One God, and Mohammed is the Messenger of God" are known as a declaration of faith and recited with sincere 'intention' by the true believer.

**Prayer (Salat)** Devout Muslims are required to pray five times each day. Exact times vary but generally take place at dawn, midday, late afternoon, after sunset and late evening. Each prayer time takes about 15 minutes to recite and can take place anywhere clean and quiet. Muslims will cover their heads and require only a prayer mat and the Qur'an to pray; ritual washing of hands, face and feet in running water forms part of the preparation. Friday midday prayers are particularly important to Muslims and may take a little longer. Friday prayers must be said in congregation.

**Almsgiving (Zakat)** Islam stresses the moral obligation to share wealth with the less fortunate. This occurs during the Ramadan festival which gives Muslims the chance to share the pain of hunger and poverty.

**Fasting (Sawn)** During Ramadan, Muslims fast for thirty days between sunrise and sunset, and the Qur'an is read daily. During daylight hours Muslims are not allowed to eat or drink. All adult Muslims, except the infirm, very elderly and pregnant women, are required to fast. Fasting is seen as an expression of discipline and thanksgiving to Allah.

**The Pilgrimage (Haj)** Adult Muslims have to make a pilgrimage, known as the Haj, to Mecca at least once during their lifetime. When a Muslim undertakes a Haj, an absence of at least three weeks should be expected.

## Festivals

The dates of Muslim festivals are based on the lunar calendar and vary from year to year.

- **Ramadan**, which takes place in the ninth month of the lunar calendar, is a particularly significant time for Muslims. Fasting is required between dawn and sunset.

Muslims celebrate two main festivals of the lunar calendar:

**Eid-al-Fitir** - one day to mark the end of Ramadan

**Eid-al-Adha** - a three day festival which takes place two months and 10 days after Eid Al-Fitr.

## Diet

No alcohol, tobacco or drugs (other than those taken for medicinal purposes) are allowed. The Qur'an also forbids eating anything from a pig, which is considered an unclean animal. Any food derived from a carnivorous animal is also forbidden. Meat that is consumed must be slaughtered by the Halal method, cooked with separate utensils and not stored or cooked with non-Halal food.

## Dress

Modesty and correct behaviour between men and women are considered very important. Hence, men must be covered from the navel to the knee and only the faces and hands of women should be visible. Some Muslim women wear a form of headscarf known as a hijab.

## Rites of Passage

Muslims circumcise male children in infancy or when a little older. Marriage is a contract, not a sacrament. Burial must take place as soon as possible after death. Cremation is strictly forbidden. Prayers and ritual washing and shrouding of bodies are carried out at Mosques. Mourning periods of up to 3 days follows this.

## JAINISM

It has been estimated that there are between 25,000 to 30,000 Jains in the UK. The majority of the small Jain community in the UK can trace their historical and ethnic origin to the Gujarat and Rajasthan areas of India.

### Beliefs and Practices

Jainism is a religion without a belief in a creator god. Rather, there is akasha (infinite space) within which there is a finite area called loka (the universe). This is made up of an infinite number of jiva or atmas (sentient beings) and pudgalas (non-sentient material atoms). The key principle of Jainism is ahimsa, or non-violence, which covers the avoidance of all physical or mental harm to any living being.

Jains are required to worship three times daily, before dawn, at sunset and at night.

### Festivals

The main Jain spiritual festivals are:

- **Oli** - Eight days of semi-fasting twice a year when some take one bland meal during day time (April and October).
- **Mahavira Jayanti** - Birth anniversary of Lord Mahavira (April).
- **Paryusan** - For eight days Jains fast, observe spiritual rituals, meditate and live a pious life taking only boiled water during day time (August/September).
- **Samvatsari** - The last day of Paryusan when Jains ask for forgiveness and forgive one another (September).
- **Diwali (Diwali)** - Death anniversary of Lord Mahavira, includes a two-day fast and listening to the last message of Mahavira (October/November).

### Diet

Jains practice avoidance of harm to all life. They are, therefore, strict vegetarians although some may take milk products. Many also avoid root vegetables. Jains do not eat between sunset and sunrise, and do not drink alcohol.

### Rites of Passage

Cremation will take place as soon as practical after death (usually three to five days). There is no specified mourning period.

## JUDAISM

There are about 270,000 Jews living in the UK according to the 2001 Census, with the majority belonging to the Orthodox branch led by the Chief Rabbi.

### Beliefs and Practices

Judaism is over 4,000 years old and is the forebear of Christianity and Islam.

Jews believe there is only one God. Their most important sacred text is the Torah which is part of the Hebrew Bible, written and studied in Hebrew. The Torah is substantiated by "Oral Law" contained in the Talmud. Congregational prayers are said in the Synagogue. Saturday is the Sabbath day (from sunset on Friday until nightfall on Saturday). As the Sabbath represents God's rest from creation of the world, devout Jews may not perform "creative" work on that day, including activities such as travel (except by foot), commercial transactions, use of the telephone and writing. The progressive Jewish community is divided into Reform, Conservative and Liberal Judaism.

Devout Jews pray three times a day. Orthodox Jews wear a skullcap and a prayer shawl, along with Phylacteries which are small leather boxes holding quotations from the Torah.

### Festivals

Jewish festivals follow the lunar calendar. The most important are:

- **Passover** (Pesach) (March/April, 8 days, the first and last 2 of which are celebrated as festivals) - From 10am on the day before Passover until the end of the festival, no food or drink containing yeast or anything fermented may be eaten.
- **Pentecost** (Shavouth)(May/June, 2 days)
- **Rosh Hashanah** (September/October) – New Year festival.
- **Yom Kippur** (the Day of Atonement)(September/October) - The most important holy day of the year, observed by a day of fasting and prayer seeking atonement for past sins.
- **Tabernacles** (Sukkot)(September/October, 2 sets of 2 days)

### Diet

Orthodox Jews follow strict dietary laws. Food which has been treated and prepared in a particular manner and acceptable to the Jewish religion is known as Kosher. Food that is prohibited includes: fish without fins and scales, shellfish, pork, birds of prey and rabbit. Meat and milk are not eaten together, and separate utensils are used for meat and dairy produce.

### Dress

Except for a few orthodox minority groups, Jews in Britain dress in the same way as the wider community. Men may cover their heads at all times or only when praying. Any covering is acceptable but many wear a small skullcap and also Tzitzith, which is a tasseled garment. Orthodox Jewish men may also wear a beard and have sidelocks. During certain periods of the religious calendar, some Jews might not shave. Orthodox Jewish women will wish to dress modestly and may not want to wear trousers, short skirts or short sleeves; some may wish to keep their heads covered with a scarf or beret.

## Rites of Passage

Jewish boys are circumcised on the eighth day after birth if health permits. They become Bar-Mitzvah at the age of 13, with a ceremony held in a synagogue. A Bat-Mitzvah ceremony is also often held when a girl reaches the age of 12. Jewish marriage is both a civil ceremony and a holy covenant. A dying Jew should not be alone; wherever possible, a Rabbi or any practising Jewish leader should be asked to attend, so that the dying person may recite the appropriate prayers. Jews are buried as soon as possible after death in a simple ceremony. Reform Judaism does not object to cremation. Following a death, there is often a week of private mourning (Shiva). Following the death of a parent, an observant Jewish man may wish to go to the Synagogue to pray morning, afternoon and evening for 11 months of the Jewish calendar.

## OTHER ANCIENT RELIGIONS

These include religions covered by the Council of British Druid Orders and examples are Druidry, Paganism and Wicca. There are also other ancient religions such as Asatru, Odinism and Shamanism.

### Festivals

Examples of festivals include:

- **Candlemas** 2 February
- **Spring Equinox** \* 21/22 March
- **Beltaine** 30 April
- **Summer Solstice** \* 21/22 June
- **Lughnasadh** 2 August
- **Autumn Equinox** \* 21/22 September
- **Samhain** 31 October
- **Winter Solstice** \* 21/22 December

\*Dates moveable due to astronomical times set in accordance with GMT.

### Diet

Generally vegetarian or vegan, although not always.

### Dress

Some items of jewellery are associated with Pagan faiths such as ankh, pentagram, hammer and crystal.

### Rites of Passage

There is no set format laid down for bereavement. Some may prefer cremation or burial at a public institution, though a public or private ceremony may follow in the tradition of the deceased at a private home, grave or stone circle.

## RASTAFARIANISM

Rastafarianism originated in Jamaica in 1930 and it has been estimated that there are about 5,000 Rastafarians in the UK.

### Beliefs and Practices

Rastafarianism links with Judaism and early Christianity. Obedience to the Ten Commandments is very important and both the Bible and Ethiopian history are closely studied. The Nazarite Vow of Separation is followed closely and prohibits the cutting of hair. It also emphasizes the celebration of life, rather than death.

Many British Rastafarians belong to the Twelve Tribes of Israel movement, which seeks to educate youngsters in the advancement of black people. The crowned Lion of Judah, bearing the Ethiopian flag of red, gold and green, is a highly recognised symbol, as too are the Star of David and the Cross.

### Festivals

- **Birthday of Haile Selassie I** (23 July)
- **Ethiopian New Year** (11 September)
- **Anniversary of the Crowning of Hiale Selassie I** (2 November)
- **Christmas** (25 December)

### Diet

Rastafarians prefer natural food such as fruits and vegetables (called I-tal). Salt is avoided but spices and pepper are very popular. Most do not eat pork as it is seen as unclean and some refuse alcohol.

### Dress

Hair is worn uncut in dreadlocks often covered by a hat which is usually red, green and gold.

### Other Points of Note

Whilst the faith supports the smoking of ganga (marijuana) this practice remains unlawful in the UK, and is unaffected by the Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations.

## SIKHISM

There are 336,000 Sikhs in the UK according to the 2001 Census, many of whom have their origins in the Indian subcontinent.

### Beliefs and Practices

Sikhism was founded 500 years ago by Guru Nanak in the Punjab region of north-west India. Sikhs believe in one God and equality for all. The word 'Sikh' means a pupil or discipline. There are two stages of development of Sikhs: Sahajdhari and Amritdhari. The former are termed 'apprentices' who are working towards the second stage but may already be wearing one or more of the five symbols or 5 Ks (see below). Amritdharis are those who have been formally baptised and must, thus, keep rigidly to the disciplines and code of conduct enjoined upon them at the time of baptism. These Sikhs are called the Khalsa (the pure ones) and keep the 5 Ks.

The Sikh temple is known as the Gurdwara. Worshippers bow to the Scriptures which are on a platform or dias, and hymns from the Scriptures are sung. There are no priests, and men or women may lead worship. "Prasad" is shared as a sign of equality and worship is followed by a meal taken together. Prayers may also be said at home.

### Festivals

Main Sikh festivals are:

- **Vaisakhi** (or Baisakhi) (14 April)
- **Birthday of Guru Gobind Singh** (5 January)
- **Martyrdom of Guru Arjan Rev** (16 June)
- **Sri Guru Granth Sahib Day** (1 September)
- **Diwali (Diwali)** (October/November date set by lunar calendar)
- **Martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur** (24 November)
- **Birthday of Guru Nanak** (November)

### Diet

Sikhs do not eat Halal meat. Some do not eat beef and many are vegetarian.

## Dress

Older children and adults initiated into the Khalsa are expected to wear five symbols (known as the 5 Ks), which can be called the uniform of their faith.

**Kesh** - uncut hair. Observant Sikhs will not cut or trim any body hair. The hair is tied in a knot under a turban for men or a Chunni or Dupatta (long scarf) for women.

**Kangha** - a wood comb usually worn in the hair.

**Kara** - a steel bracelet worn on the wrist.

**Kachhahera** - knee-length underpants.

**Kirpan** - a short sword worn under the clothing so that it is not visible.

## Rites of passage

Sikhs are cremated and have a preference for this to take place as soon as possible after death. Death to a devout Sikh is no cause of grief, as one must submit to God's will, and there is no specified mourning period.

## ZOROASTRIANISM (PARSI)

It has been estimated that there are between 5,000 to 10,000 Zoroastrians in the UK, the majority originating in Iran while some came from East Africa.

### Beliefs and Practices

Zoroastrianism was founded in ancient times by the prophet Zarathushtra. Zoroastrians believe that Zarathushtra identified, for the first time in human history, the importance of the Vohu Manah (Good Mind). His ethical monotheism taught human beings to think and reflect with a clear, rational mind in order to dispel ignorance and blind faith. Zoroastrians worship Ahura Mazda (the Wise Lord).

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

**Hwab** (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 Zoroastrian 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.

### Festivals

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

- **Khordad Sal** – The Prophet's Birthday

### Diet

There are no dietary requirements for Zoroastrians although, through personal choice, some may abstain from beef and pork and some may be vegetarian.

### Dress

Devout Zoroastrians wear the sudreh, a sacred white shirt worn next to the skin, and the kushti, a sacred cord worn over the sudreh, passed three times around the waist and knotted at the front and back. The sudreh and kushti are meant to be worn at all times by Zoroastrians.

### Rites of Passage

Zoroastrians regard the body of the deceased as polluting and believe that human remains should be disposed of in a quick and ecologically sound manner. In the UK, the remains of deceased Zoroastrians are usually cremated or buried.

## FURTHER READING ON WORLD RELIGIONS

### Religions of the World (Collins Fact Books)

E. Breuilly

M. Palmer

ISBN: 0001983598

### Word Religions

J. Bowker

ISBN: 0789496763

## NON-RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND NON-BELIEF

In the 2001 Census, 9.1 million people said they had no religion. This category included agnostics, atheists, heathens and those who wrote "Jedi Knight".

### Beliefs and Definitions

"Non-believers" have many beliefs, though not religious ones. They typically hold that morality is social in origin, rather than being the exclusive preserve of religion. They may describe themselves in various ways, the most common today being "agnostic", "atheist", "freethinker", "humanist", "rationalist", "sceptic", "secularist" - or simply "non-religious" or "nothing". These different terms, many of which overlap, generally reflect differences in emphasis. In practice, however the needs and requirements of non-believers do not vary greatly.

**Agnostic** in normal usage means "don't know" or open-minded about religious belief, but it can mean that nothing is known, or can possibly be known, about God or supernatural phenomena, and that it is wrong to claim otherwise.

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

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

**Humanist** is used today to mean those who seek to live good lives without religious or superstitious beliefs. They reject the idea of any supernatural agency or afterlife. Humanists believe that moral values are founded on human nature and experience, and base their moral principles on reason, shared human values and respect for others. They believe that people can and will continue to solve problems, and should work together to improve the quality of life and make it more equitable.

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

**Rationalist** means someone who rejects religion on the grounds that it is unreasonable and lacks good evidence.

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

**Secularists** believe that public life, the state and the education system should be neutral towards religion. They also call for freedom of belief, including the right to change belief and not to believe. Secularists seek to ensure that persons and organisations are neither privileged nor disadvantaged by virtue of their religion or lack of it. They believe secular laws - those that apply to all citizens equally – should be the product of a democratic process, and should not be determined, or unduly influenced, by religious leaders or religious texts. Most secularists are non-believers, but some believers also take a secularist position.

**Non-belief** only began to become publicly accepted or mainstream during the late 19th and 20th centuries. During this period non-religious beliefs became more structured, and organisations sprang up to serve and represent the interests of non-believers, in particular the British Humanist Association and its antecedents ([www.humanism.org.uk](http://www.humanism.org.uk)) and the National Secular Society ([www.secularism.org.uk](http://www.secularism.org.uk)).

## Festivals

The non-religious have no obligatory festivals, but are usually happy to celebrate traditional holidays in their own way. Many are aware of the pagan or seasonal origins of these holidays, which pre-date their adoption by more recent religions.

## Practices and Requirements

There are no obligatory practices, for example in dress or diet, or obligatory ceremonies for non-believers.

## Rites of Passage

Most non-believers recognise a need for and the value of ritual and ceremonies marking “rites of passage”. Secular humanist and non-religious ceremonies are becoming common, particularly to mark births, marriages and deaths.

Many will be content with civil registration of a marriage or partnership, though some will also have a non-religious or specifically humanist ceremony. Funerals are probably the ceremony that the majority consider most important, and there is an increasing demand for ceremonies with no prayers and no reference to an afterlife or other religious beliefs. Such ceremonies tend to have a short period for silent reflection, leaving those present to remember the deceased in the way they are most comfortable with. Humanist and other non-religious ceremonies are a celebration of the life that was lived, and are designed to meet the needs of those left behind rather than the deceased.





**Designed and produced by  
TES-TI Media.Bath**





