

Overview of Religions

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This article provides a brief overview of 9 religions: Christianity, Judaism, Jehovah's Witnesses, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, Christian Science, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, and Buddhism. Basic information on the origins, language, naming practices, diet, personal hygiene, and dress requirements is provided. For additional information, Web sites for each of these religions are also provided. (*Clinical Cornerstone*®. 2004;6[1]:7-16) Copyright © 2004 Excerpta Medica, Inc.

CHRISTIANITY

Christianity has been the predominant religion in the Western world for more than 1000 years. Even in ages of customary religious observance, devout belief was probably limited to a minority. Nevertheless, Christianity has shaped Western culture and particularly Western beliefs.¹ Its principal festivals are Christmas and Easter, which are public holidays in most Western countries. Christianity has its origins in Judaism and spread rapidly around the Mediterranean region, incorporating elements from Greek thought.

Christians believe in one loving God comprising 3 interrelating forms: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, referred to as the *Holy Trinity*. God the Father sent Jesus his Son (the Messiah or Christ) in human form to show people the way back to God (the doctrine of the *Incarnation*, celebrated at Christmas). Jesus was crucified for blasphemy and high treason (an act remembered as Good Friday). Christians believe that he came back to life on the third day after the crucifixion (the *Resurrection*, which is celebrated on Easter Sunday) and remained on earth preaching for 40 days before being received back into heaven (the *Ascension*), where he sits at the right hand of God. Most Christians also believe in the Second Coming of Jesus (the doctrine of the *Parousia*), who will return to judge the living and the dead at an unknown date in the future (cf. *Mark* 13:32), which will terminate the present world order.

The death and resurrection of Jesus are seen as God's means of forgiving people their failings or sins (the doctrine of *redemption*: *Ephesians* 1:7), assuring them of life after death. The *Bible* (the *Old* and *New Testaments* that became recognized in the fourth century as sacred doctrine) is Christianity's holy book and Christians believe that the Holy Spirit, the coming of which is celebrated at the Feast of Pentecost (*Acts* 2:1), works to help them follow the commands and example of Jesus Christ.

KEY POINT

Christianity has been the predominant religion in the Western world for more than 1000 years and has shaped Western culture and beliefs.

Christian Churches

Christianity has 3 main groups: the Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant Christian churches (the latter encompass the Anglican and Presbyterian churches among others).¹ The separation between the Catholic and Orthodox churches reflects the division of the Roman Empire into a Latin-speaking Western empire centered in Rome and a Greek Eastern empire with its capital in Constantinople (the Great Schism of 1054).

The Catholic Church, or Roman Catholic Church as it is often known, is the largest Christian denomination worldwide with ~1.1 billion followers. The Roman Catholic Church celebrates Mass, which presupposes attendance each Sunday, regards Easter and Christmas as the key religious observances, and acknowledges the jurisdiction of the Pope. The Pope is the supreme authority on spiritual issues and establishes what the church requires of its members. Guided by the Congregation of the Faith, the Pope also interprets what does and does not constitute Catholic belief. Catholics believe in the doctrine of the *Immaculate Conception*, which states that the Virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus, was without sin and that Christ was conceived by the Holy Spirit and not man (*Catechism of the Catholic Church [1994]*, para 494).

Catholics observe 7 sacraments: baptism, communion, confession or penance, confirmation, marriage, the priesthood, and anointing the sick (or the last rites or extreme unction: *Catechism of the Catholic Church [1994]*, para 1113).

The orthodox branch of Christianity has several national churches, eg, Greek, Russian, and Serbian. Although there are theological differences, chiefly concerning ecclesiastical authority (orthodox Christianity regards the Ecumenical Council of the church as the highest ecclesiastical authority), Catholic and orthodox Christians agree on most fundamentals but differ in some observances (personal correspondence, November 2003). Orthodox Christians accept the 7 sacraments (“mysteries”), but no rigid distinction is drawn between these and other sacramental actions, such as the monastic profession, burial of the dead, or anointing of a monarch. The veneration of icons assumes a much more significant part in worship in orthodoxy than in Catholicism; the orthodox church believes in the bodily Assumption of the Virgin Mary, and baptism is performed by immersion. “Chrismation” (confirmation) is administered immediately after baptism and children are taken to communion from infancy. The orthodox church calculates its date for Easter on the basis of the Julian calendar and the 19 paschal full moon dates table, which results in the orthodox community usually celebrating Easter later than the Catholic and Protestant churches. However, the dates will coincide in 2004 and again in 2007.

The Protestant movement began in the 16th century in Western Europe, following Martin Luther’s break with Rome (1517–1520). Protestants rejected authoritarian church structures and emphasized the individual’s faith and conscience, subject to direct access to the Scriptures (Luther’s doctrine of the “priesthood of all believers”). Therefore, a large number of Protestant groups differ on various points of faith, practice, and church organization, with nevertheless much in common. The Anglican Church (those in communion with or recognizing the leadership of the See of Canterbury), the religious tradition that contributed most to the culture of Britain and its former colonies (except in North America, where it never gained a monopoly), considers itself distinguishable from other traditions, whether Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant. In the United States, Christianity was assimilated with the culture as religious descendants left Britain and Europe in the hope of gaining freedom of religious expression. An individualistic culture was created that was largely Protestant and in which belonging to a church, forming a strong sense of community, and being supported pastorally were key principles (personal correspondence, November 2003). In the United States the Episcopal (equivalent to the Church of England), Methodist, Lutheran, and Baptist churches have large followings with high levels of church attendance. A new phenomenon has recently emerged—the “Mega” church movement exemplified by the Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, California, where the congregation can number up to 10,000. This movement has very clear objectives regarding what it means to be a Christian and to belong to the Christian faith. For more information on this movement see the **Appendix**.

Christianity also includes “free” churches that have a less-defined hierarchical structure. Free churches include the Assemblies of God, Baptist, Brethren, Congregational, Evangelical, Methodist, and Pentecostal. The Unitarians are in a special position because they deny the doctrines of the *Holy Trinity* and the *Divinity of Christ* and are not regarded as truly Christian by some Christian denominations.

Language and Naming Systems

The language of Christians depends on their origin, although the *Bible* is translated into most world

languages. In the Catholic tradition, an additional “baptismal name,” consistent with Christian sentiment (*Catechism of the Catholic Church [1994]*, para 2156), is given at baptism, the beginning of an individual’s relationship with God through the church that takes place only once in a person’s life; however, this naming ceremony is rejected in the Protestant tradition, which calls this rite a “baptism” or “christening.” Although most Protestant churches do practice baptism, some groups insist on adult baptism while many do use infant baptism; this is one of the fundamental sacraments following the teaching of Jesus, although the precise observation may vary. It is generally held that any believer can baptize another, using water and the words ‘I baptize you in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost (or Spirit)’—this may be important in cases where a newborn child is at risk of death [see www.lmpc.org/baptism.pdf]. Some traditions, notably the Baptists, believe in adult or believers’ baptism. In such cases, the naming of the individual has already occurred. Christians sometimes refer to their forenames as Christian names.

Traditionally, women have taken their husband’s surname on marriage, and the father’s surname is usually given to the children of the marriage. Catholics (and some other traditions) also have a confirmation ceremony at which the adult (or older child) confirms acceptance of the vows and promises made at baptism. It is believed by some members of churches that a ‘Christian’ or confirmation name may be taken at this event as well. This name does not have to appear on official documents.

Dietary Requirements

There are few dietary requirements apart from some Christians preferring not to eat meat on Fridays (fish is a suitable alternative), while others may fast or adopt a simpler diet during Lent (the period of 40 days leading up to Easter).

No specific requirements apply to personal hygiene or dress except with regard to modesty of appearance. Most Christians consider dress as less important than commitment to the gospel of love: “therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience” (*Colossians 3:12*). For more information on Christianity please see the **Appendix**.

JUDAISM

The current orthodox Jewish calendar dates from a start in ~3760 BC when God through the prophet Moses made revelations to the Jewish people. Jews trace their origin and faith to Abraham and his covenant with the one God—the same God worshipped by Christians and Muslims. Today there are ~12 million Jews worldwide with large Jewish populations in the United States, Israel, Canada, France, Belgium, Holland, South Africa, Argentina, Brazil, and Australia.

Beliefs and Obligations

Jews believe that everything in the universe is under the direct control of one God. All aspects of Judaism, whether relating to belief, philosophy, or religious and civil law, is based on the *Torah*, also known as the “written law,” and the *Old Testament* in the *Bible*.^{2,3} The “oral law” is the *Talmud*, a large, encyclopedic legal commentary on the *Torah* (third to sixth century), which remains the cornerstone of Jewish law to this day. The *Talmud* is regularly studied in great depth by orthodox Jewish men and forms the basis of religious authority in Orthodox Judaism. Together the written and oral laws, which are seen as being inseparable, represent the *Torah*. The cupboard or ark in a synagogue contains the *Torah* and this is set in a wall nearest to Jerusalem. On either side of the ark, and sometimes above, are written the Ten Commandments received by Moses at Mount Sinai.

In addition to Jews being required to do good, to give a portion of their income to charity, and to study, the actual practice of Judaism requires observance of the *Mitzvos*, the 613 commandments of the *Talmud*.

Language and Naming Systems

Although Hebrew is the language of prayer and worship, most orthodox (strictly observant) Jews speak English. However, an increasing number of Hassidic Jews, a movement started in 18th-century Poland and centered on a traditional way of life (“clinging to god”) and seclusion from the Gentile world, are returning to Yiddish, a blend of German dialects, as a first language.³ Two other groups are the Sephardic Jews, who originate from Spain and Mediterranean and Middle Eastern countries, and the Ashkenazi Jews, who originate from Eastern European countries.

All orthodox Jews are given a Hebrew name. In addition, many Jews will be given a secular name on their birth certificate, which is often a direct equivalent of the Hebrew name, for example Yakov/Jacob, Dovid/David. Traditionally, males are named at the Bris circumcision (bris) ceremony on the eighth day after being born. Females are named a few days after birth when the father attends a brief synagogue ceremony.^{2,3}

Dietary Observances

The aims of Jewish dietary laws are to sanctify the act of eating, to follow the teachings of the *Torah*, and to preserve health. Food that is permitted by Jewish law is known as kosher, which means “fit to eat” and adhering to the laws of kashruth. Pork, rabbit, shellfish, and other fish without scale or fins (and by-products of these species) are not allowed. All meat has to be slaughtered and prepared in a certain way (cleansed, soaked to remove the blood, and salted) in a kosher kitchen. Meat and milk should not be prepared, cooked, or eaten or kept together, for example, in the refrigerator. Foods such as fish, fruit, or vegetables that contain nothing of meat or dairy origin are considered parev (neutral). These foods can be consumed with either a meat or dairy meal. Jewish people may fast on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), which occurs in September or October. For many observant Jews, religious dietary laws are fundamental to their lives, but the precise level of observance will vary.^{2,3}

Other Observances

In Jewish orthodoxy, hygiene is central to the way of life, and many religious activities may only be performed in a clean state; therefore, hands are washed prior to praying. With regard to dress, women dress modestly and expose very little skin. Once married, orthodox Jewish women cover their hair at all times with a head scarf or wig “sheitel.” Orthodox and conservative Jewish males wear a skullcap known as a yarmulke with their heads covered at all times (a reminder they are in the presence of God). Jews may refrain from showering on the Sabbath (from Friday evening at sundown until Saturday after nightfall), the day ordained by God for rest and spiritual joys. Jews often go to the synagogue on a Friday evening for communal prayer before welcoming the Sabbath in

their homes. The main act of Jewish worship takes place on a Saturday morning in the synagogue. For more information on Judaism see the **Appendix**.

JEHOVAH’S WITNESSES

The modern history of Jehovah’s Witnesses began in the early 1870s with a small *Bible* study group in Pennsylvania in the United States. Charles Taze Russell was the central figure of the group.⁴ Currently there are ~ 6 million Jehovah’s Witnesses in some 235 countries. Jehovah’s Witnesses usually belong to congregations of ~100 people, who are often regarded as an extension of family.

Doctrine

Jehovah’s Witnesses should live their lives according to God’s commands and their priority is faithfulness to God, which transcends all earthly considerations. Members are baptized when they reach the “age of understanding” so that they are able to fully understand their baptismal commitment. They believe that when a person dies there is a period of rest until the resurrection when the Kingdom of God will rule the earth. Sharing in the Kingdom of God is not guaranteed for Jehovah’s Witnesses because it is dependent on God remembering and resurrecting the individual after death. A small number of Jehovah’s Witnesses will be destined to rule in heaven—those who have a special calling. Jehovah’s Witnesses are committed to sharing and passing on their faith; hence, they believe in making the effort to reach other people.³ They offer Scriptures and literature to households to spread their message, which is based on the *Old* and *New Testaments*. Jehovah’s Witnesses have no specific language naming conventions.

Dietary and Other Observances

Jehovah’s Witnesses do not eat any food containing blood nor the meat of animals from which the blood has not been properly drained. Excess of alcohol is discouraged as the *Bible* warns against “overindulgence and drunkenness,” and smoking and the use of tobacco are forbidden.^{3,4} No specific personal hygiene or dress requirements apply. However, there are medical observances. For example, blood transfusions are refused because it is believed to be morally wrong to take another person’s blood into the body. This includes the use of whole blood or pri-

mary blood components (red cells, white cells, and platelets). The use of any derivatives of these, however, is an individual decision and many Jehovah's Witnesses consent to the use of immunoglobulins, interferons, and similar medications. If a Jehovah's Witness is undergoing surgery, autologous blood may be used.³ For further information please see the **Appendix**.

THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

Members of this religion were given the name "Mormons" because of their belief in the *Book of Mormon*, a scripture translated by John Smith in 1820 from golden plates whose hiding place on a hill was shown to him by an angel called Moroni, one of the book's authors.³ With the administrative center based in Salt Lake City, Utah, in the United States, there are now ~11 million Mormons worldwide. Mormons believe in celestial marriage, which binds together husband, wife, parents, and children for all eternity.

Beliefs

The Trinity is seen as 3 separate entities, God the father and Jesus Christ both having a physical body and the Holy Ghost, a spirit. It is believed that all human beings have the potential to become as God by having faith in and living by the teachings of Jesus Christ. Entry to the church is through baptism by immersion.

Young people between the ages of 19 and 22 years are invited to serve as missionaries, traveling throughout the world in pairs for a period of 2 years to teach the doctrines. Young women and mature couples may also serve for 18 months.

Other Observances

Children are baptized at the age of 8, which is considered the age of accountability. There are no specific instructions with regard to language, names, or personal hygiene. Mormons however follow a strict dietary code, and do not smoke tobacco or drink alcohol, tea, or coffee or proprietary drinks such as colas which contain caffeine. Worthy male adult Mormons who have attended a temple wear a sacred undergarment, which may consist of 1 or 2 pieces and is worn at all times, and may be removed for only hygiene, sports, or medical purposes.^{3,4} For

more information on the Mormon religion please see the **Appendix**.

CHRISTIAN SCIENCE (THE CHURCH OF CHRIST SCIENTIST)

In 1866 Mary Baker Eddy experienced personal healing following her reading of the *New Testament*, which marked her founding of Christian Science—a Bible-based system of spiritual healing.^{3,5} *Science and Health With Key to the Scriptures* was published in 1875, and the first church was established in Boston in 1879. Mary Baker Eddy devoted more than 4 decades communicating a message of hope, healing, comfort, and strength through the *Christian Bible*. As her ability to prove the effectiveness of her discovery grew, Mrs. Eddy, as she is referred to by church members, established herself as a healer and began to teach others how to heal. She also founded *The Christian Science Monitor* in 1908, a newspaper respected around the world for its editorial integrity and news insight. There are 2000 branch churches worldwide in 80 countries.

The teachings of Jesus are central to Christian Science. Although Christian Scientists respect the medical professions, they choose prayer over medicine based on their belief that healing comes about through and by God and prayers. While there are no specific instructions with regard to language, naming, personal hygiene, and dress, use of alcohol and tobacco is forbidden. For more information on Christian Science please see the **Appendix**.

KEY POINT

Although Christian Scientists respect the medical professions, they choose prayer over medicine based on their belief that healing comes about through God and prayers.

ISLAM

Islam was founded in the Middle East at the beginning of the seventh century by the Prophet Mohammed (Peace Be Upon Him [PBUH]) through revelations from Allah (God) who directs the whole universe. Islam involves submission to the will of

God. Muslims believe in one God—the same God as Christians and Jews.

As a major world religion, there is a great deal of similarity in the practices and beliefs of all Muslims; however, 2 main groups—the Sunni Muslims (~90% of all Muslims) and the Shia Muslims (~10% of all Muslims)—have emerged from differing interpretations of the *Quran* and historical movements.^{6,7} Most Sunni Muslims are from Pakistan and Bangladesh and believe there is no line of hereditary or divinely appointed leaders to succeed Mohammed and that every Muslim has equal status before God. The Shia Muslims are mostly from India, especially from Gujarat, and believe in a continuous line of divinely designated charismatic leaders. Muslims from Middle Eastern countries can have both Shia and Sunni populations, eg, Iran and Iraq.

Beliefs and Prayers

The foundations of this religion are based on 5 main duties, written in the *Quran* (sacred text):

- Faith – in God and the prophet Mohammed (although only God is to be worshipped)
- Prayer (Namaz) – should be 5 times a day, before sunrise (Fajr prayer), in the early morning (Thur prayer), and late afternoon (Asr prayer); just after sunset (Maghrib prayer) and during the night (Isha prayer). The call to prayer (Adhan) comes from every mosque at the appropriate time of the day. To pray, the believer must face toward Mecca. A marker is shown in mosques and on places of Muslim airlines, showing the direction of Mecca.
- Charity (Zakat) – Giving money particularly to the poor and needy is an expectation.
- Fasting – All adults are expected to fast between sunrise and sunset during Ramadan, which lasts for ~1 month and varies in occurrence each year as all Muslim festivals (Eid) are based on a lunar calendar (12 months of 28 days each). The first Eid of the year is known as Eid Al Fitr (the end of the fast of Ramzan) and the second Eid is to celebrate the 10th day of the Pilgrimage (Eid Al Adha).
- Pilgrimage (Haji) – Pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca is essential for every Muslim at least once in their lifetime and should be made in the 12th month of the Islamic year.

Language and Naming Systems

The language of Muslims who live in the United Kingdom and the United States depends on their origin and may include Urdu, Punjabi, Gujurati, Bengali, and Arabic among others. According to the Muslim naming system, each Muslim has 3 names: religious, personal, and family names, eg, Mohammed Tanq Rashid. Muslim family names are different for men and women, with women not necessarily taking the husband's name upon marriage. Many Muslims take the religious name Mohammed but do not use it as a personal name or form of address.

Dietary Observances

With regard to diet, food that is permitted by Islam is designated “Halal” (pure) and food that is not permitted “Haram” (forbidden). Pork, alcohol, drugs, and shellfish are avoided. Meat should come from animals that have been ritually slaughtered with the saying of prayer, not drugged or found dead. Halal food should not be cooked with or stored with non-Halal products (something hospitals should be aware of).^{1,6,7} Halal and Haram also apply to other aspects of life, eg, impure thoughts and medicines, and many Muslim jurists have now outlawed cigarette consumption on the grounds that the practice violates one of the central doctrines of Islamic law, that of “killing or harming oneself.”

Hygiene Observances

Physical and spiritual cleanliness is closely linked with washing to a set pattern. The hands, face, ears, forearms, and feet are washed 3 times a day with running water and the nose and mouth are rinsed out. The perianal area must also be washed with running water after using the toilet. Showering is preferred to bathing.

Dress

Muslims are modest with regard to dress, with some women covering their faces with a veil. A loose scarf to cover the head and a loose dress so as not to show the shape of the body are also common. Men may wear a small cap; however, this is an individual choice, and caps are often worn during prayers as a sign of humility before Allah. For further information on Islam see the **Appendix**.

KEY POINT

The foundation of the Muslim religion is based on 5 main duties, which are written in the Quran: faith, prayer, charity, fasting, pilgrimage.

HINDUISM

Hinduism is the world's third largest religion and originated in northern India ~4000 years ago. Hindus believe in the concept of a supreme spirit—Brahman—worshipped in 3 main forms: Trimurti Lord Brahman, the creator who represents energy; Lord Vishnu, the preserver who represents change in life, or fate; and Lord Shiva, the great destroyer and re-creator of life.^{1,6}

Two major sects are the Senathan Hindus who believe in Gods and venerate statues, and Araya Samaj Hindus, who only believe in scriptures. The Hindu temple usually has a canopy beneath which deities are represented by statues. Each temple is attended by a priest who cares for the sacred objects and makes offerings on behalf of those who visit the temple. The Hindu scriptures include the Vedas, a Sanskrit word meaning “knowledge.” The Vedas also include the epics, poems told as stories, such as the Mahabharata, which has some 200,000 verses. Among other epics are the Ramayana and the well-known Bhagavad-Gita. Examples of Gods and Goddesses that are worshipped include Goddess Lakshmi, goddess of wealth and beauty; Sita, wife of Lord Rama, characterized by chastity and kindness; Lord Ganesha, the elephant God and son of Lord Shiva, the great destroyer; and Parvati, Lord Shiva's wife who is the remover of obstacles.

Beliefs

Hinduism is a social and cultural system and a way of life that is based on 5 main principles: Parmeshwar (God); Prarthana (prayer); Punarjanma (rebirth); Purusthartha (action); and Prani (compassion for living things). Hinduism is based on the persistent quest of absolute truth and higher consciousness with the final aim of uniting the individual soul (Atman) with

God (Brahman). Within Hinduism there are many different sects that unite people depending on family origins, place of origin, and religious traditions. For example, the Gujarati sect known as Swami Narayan promise to adhere to 5 spiritual vows: not to steal, not to eat meat, not to take alcohol or any other intoxicating substance, not to commit adultery, and to lead a pure life. Common to all groups is the belief in nonviolence and the continuous cycle of creation, destruction, and reincarnation. The Hindu concept of the cycle of birth and rebirth is based on the premise that all people are responsible for their own karma (natural moral law of reward and punishment for all thoughts and deeds). Hindus believe they will be reborn again and again until they raise themselves above the cycle of rebirth and are united with God. This belief involves acceptance and responsibility but not fatalism.

Also linked to the belief in reincarnation is the caste system (personal communication, November 2003).⁶ In Hindu society there are 5 major castes—Brahmins (priests), Kshatriyas (warriors), Vaisyas (farmers, merchants), Sudras (laborers and servants), and outcastes (untouchables). Although Indian law has outlawed caste discrimination, this system is deep-rooted and migration in some instances has reinforced the system; thus, caste groups may be composed of people from particular social, occupational, and geographical origins. People from the same caste tend to marry within that caste.^{1,6,7}

Language and Naming Systems

Most Hindus have a working knowledge of Hindi; however, the language spoken at home will depend on the family area of origin, eg, those from a region of Gujarat would speak Gujarati and from the Punjab, Punjabi. One of the other main languages spoken is Urdu. Hindus may have 2 names and a surname that consists of a personal name, a middle name (usually father's or husband's name), and a surname (which usually reveals the caste status of the family).

Diet

Diet is very important and reflects the Hindu's respect for animal life and the principle of “ahimsa,” nonharming. Many Hindus are vegetarian, which is regarded as an indication of spirituality. Beef is not eaten (the cow

is a sacred animal) or pork (which is considered unclean). Tobacco and alcohol are not consumed.

Personal Hygiene

Personal hygiene is an important part of Hindu religion with a preference to wash in running water. It is also customary to regard the left hand as unclean and use it for personal ablution; thus, it would not be wise to shake hands or offer food and other items with the left hand.

Dress

Although most Hindus in Western countries wear Western dress for work and daily life, many prefer to wear a traditional form of clothing. For women this includes the sari or the shalwar kameez. Women may also wear a tika, bindi, or chandlo, which is usually a red dot (but it may be other colors, or a drawn symbol) placed on the forehead (as a sign of union or marriage). Some married women may also wear a streak of red paint (sindur) in the parting of the hair, especially in the early days of marriage or on special occasions. The men, in addition to Western clothes, may also wear a tunic (kurta) or kameez and they may also wear a cap. For further information on Hinduism see the Appendix.

KEY POINT

Hinduism is the world's third largest religion. Hindus believe in the concept of a supreme spirit—Brahman—worshipped in 3 main forms: Trimurti Lord Brahman, Lord Vishnu, and Lord Shiva.

SIKHISM

Sikhism was founded by Shree Guru Nanak sometime during the late 15th or early 16th century.^{1,6} Sikhs believe in one God who is considered the creator of the universe. Sikhs believe that all human beings are equal and believe in reincarnation, which may be to a lower life form if union with the creator is not achieved. Sikhism was developed by 10 human Gurus, until the 18th century when the last human Guru, Guru Govind Singh, decreed that there would be no more human gurus and that the Sikh doctrine

would continue through their holy book, the 11th Guru, also known as the *Guru Granth Sahib*. Guru Govind Singh also instituted the Khalsa or the pure form of Sikhism. Sikhs worship congregationally in a Gurudwara and may observe Sunday as a day for prayer. Khalsa Sikhs adhere to the 5 k's: the kesh, which is uncut hair; kanga or comb; kara, a metal bracelet; kirpan, a sword; and kaccha, shorts.¹ Sikhs who undertake a special devotion known as "Amrit Dari" promise to wear the 5 signs that symbolize Sikhism, to say special prayers, to refrain from eating meat, and to attend the Gurudwara every day.

Inside the Gurudwara

Anyone is welcome in a Gurudwara and before entering prayer rooms, shoes must be removed and the head covered. The *Guru Granth Sahib*, or holy book, is placed at a clear focal point visible from all points of the room. It is important that worshipers do not turn their back to the holy book. The *Guru Granth Sahib* lies under a Palki or tall platform on a stool, also known as a Manji Sahib, covered by a romala or cloth that signifies its sacred status. At ceremonies, 3 musicians sing and play religious melodies.

Naming and Caste Systems

Because Sikhism originated in Punjab, Punjabi is likely to be the common language. Sikh names like Hindu names have parts: first name, middle name, and family (subcaste) name.^{1,6} The Sikh religion has discouraged this naming to promote equality and encourage the use of Singh (lion) for men and Kaur (princess) for women.

Dietary Observances

It is difficult to generalize Sikh dietary laws as customs vary in different Sikh communities; however, many Sikhs are vegetarian and many will not eat fish. They also do not usually eat beef (sacred cow) or pork (considered unclean). Some very devout Sikhs fast as Hindus do and may fast on certain days, often on the first day of the Punjabi month or at the time of the full moon. Sikhs are not permitted to smoke but are allowed to consume alcohol.

Hygiene and Clothing

Sikhs prefer to wash under running water and have distinctive roles about dress. Males usually have their

hair in a turban (pug); young boys in a small handkerchief. Women will wear a shalwar kameez and dupatta covering their head and bosom. A metal bangle is also worn and should not be removed from an ill person. It is essential that a Sikh man's underwear/shorts (kaccha) are not removed unless absolutely necessary, and it is offensive to remove a man's turban. Traditionally, male Sikhs also carry a small symbolic knife (kirpan). For further information see the **Appendix**.

BUDDHISM

With origins in the Far East, Buddhism principles are commonly followed and underlie the belief systems of many people from China, Japan, and the Far East. Buddhism is a way of life for the people who follow the teachings of Buddha who is worshipped not as a God but as the founder of a way of life, ie, there is no belief in a creator god or a permanent soul.¹ Buddha promulgated the middle way between luxury and self-torture, which is known as enlightenment or "nirvana." Buddhists believe in the concept of the "three jewels": taking refuge in Buddha; his teachings (dharma); and the community (sangha). They believe in 4 basic truths: suffering, concept of re-birth with suffering, correcting faults through meditation, and following the true spiritual path.

Although there are many Buddhist temples, observance of faith can be done as a personal decision and activity. Buddha's purpose in founding an order of monks and nuns was to provide an environment that would support spiritual development. The lay community provides to monks and nuns their basic needs (food, shelter, clothing, and medicine) so that they can devote their time to study and the practice of dharma. The ordered and simple lifestyle of the monastery is conducive to inner peace and meditation, and in return monks and nuns are expected to share what they know with the community and serve as an example of how a good Buddhist should live.¹ There are no particular symbols associated with the faith, other than the image of Buddha; however, flowers and incense are commonly used and may bring comfort. Buddhists follow an 8-fold path:

- Right Understanding
- Right Aspiration
- Right Speech

- Right Action
- Right Livelihood
- Right Effort
- Right Mindfulness
- Right Concentration

The language which Buddhists speak would depend on their country of origin, eg, Japanese or Chinese. Increasingly, there are Buddhists from India, where Buddhism is seen as another religion that does not observe caste differences.

Naming and Dietary Observances

With regard to names, Buddhists can have both a lay and a Buddhist name, eg, Ayya, that may be recorded with any temple. Many Buddhists are vegetarian because of their respect for life, and it is common to fast for the first part of the day (until 12 noon). Buddhists like to wash before prayer and meditation and there are very few dress stipulations apart from Buddhist monks wearing a yellow robe with sandals or bare feet. The yellow shroud was worn by ancient Indians who could always tell which leaves were about to drop from the trees because they were either yellow, orange, or brown; consequently, in India yellow became the color of renunciation. Monks' and nuns' robes are yellow so they can act as a constant reminder of the importance of not clinging, of letting go, of giving up.¹ For further information see the **Appendix**.

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APPENDIX

Buddhism. For further information see the following Web sites:

www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/buddhism/isms/varieties
www.buddhanet.net
www.ship.edu/~cgboeree/buddhahist.html

Christianity. For further information see the following Web sites:

www.arn.org
www.catholicism.com
www.catholic.org
www.christianity.about.com
www.christiantoday.com
www.cofe.anglican.org/
www.saddleback.com
www.smart.net/~mmontes/Eastdiff.html

Christian Science. For further information see the following Web sites:

www.ccs.org.uk
www.cis.org.uk
www.csmonitor.com
www.spirituality.com
www.tfccs.com

Hinduism. For further information see the following Web sites:

www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/hinduism/index.shtml
www.hinduism.co.za
www.hindunet.org
www.hindu.org

Islam. For further information see the following Web sites:

www.al-islam.org
www.islam.com
www.islam-guide.com
www.islam-qa.com
www.islamworld.net

Jehovah's Witnesses. For further information see the following Web site:

www.watchtower.org

Judaism. For further information see the following Web sites:

www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/judaism/index.shtml
www.jewish.co.uk
www.rj.org
www.selectsmart
www.spiritualsearch.net

Mormons. For further information see the following Web sites:

www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/mormon/index.shtml
www.ldsw.org

Sikhism. For further information see the following Web sites:

www.sikhionz.com
www.sikhnet.com
www.sikhseek.com
www.sikhs.org

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