

## **Cultural Awareness**

What is Culture?

Culture has been called 'the way of life for an entire society'. This can include manners, dress, language, religion ritual or systems of belief. This can be based on religious beliefs or not, it can be simply a way of life people choose to follow.

UNESCO (United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation 2002) have said;

'Culture should be regarded as the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of a society or social group'

We live in a multi-racial and multi-cultural society where there are people from a variety of different faiths or beliefs. Many people define themselves by their religion or beliefs or by their ethnic origin. Similarly it is important to recognise and respect the thoughts of those who have no religious belief or do not particularly define themselves based on their ethnic origin.

People are non-believers for many reasons and it is important to respect non-belief too. Atheism is the absence of belief in God and takes different forms including Humanism, Secularism and Rationalism. Buddhism does not believe in a God and is a form of atheism.

Agnosticism has come to mean a doubt about the existence of God. Popularly agnostics don't believe that God exists but they don't believe that God doesn't exist either. The original meaning of agnostic is someone who believes it is only possible to know about the material world and so we can never be certain whether God exists or not.

There are six major world faiths currently represented within our communities Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism. This is not to say there are not many more faiths equally as important this section is not intended to support or reject any specific religion or belief. However to enable us to start to understand the similarities and differences between faiths and how they might affect cultural difference these are the religions and their basic belief systems that have been outlined.

The aim here is to give a basic understanding of these different faiths and to encourage people to respond in a positive way when encountering difference.

It is important to remember that all faiths are practised by people from differing backgrounds and traditions and with varying degrees of adherence. For example, not all the Muslims you meet say their prayers five times a day, just as not all Christians go to church every Sunday. However, even people who do not strictly adhere to all of the practices of their religion might be affected by the beliefs, rituals and history of the faith they were born into or later adopt.

# Buddhism

Buddhism is more than 2,500 years old and has more than 2,000 sects. It developed in North East India (Nepal) in the 6<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE, when Prince Siddhartha Gautama attained 'Enlightenment' (the ultimate truth by which people are freed from the cycle of re-birth) and was known thereafter as Buddha, which means "the awakened one".

Buddhists do not worship gods or deities. Buddhists believe that the pathway to enlightenment is found by personal spiritual development. Buddhism developed from Hinduism, and while there are some fundamental differences between the two there are also some core beliefs which they both share.

There are estimated to be 300 million Buddhists worldwide, the majority in South East Asia and the Far East. The 2001 Census indicates there are approximately 152,000 Buddhists living in Britain today a number that appears to be on the increase. Nearly every Buddhist tradition is represented in the UK, with approximately 17 monastic centres and 18 meditation centres between them.

## Beliefs

The essence of Buddhist belief is the doctrine of the Four Noble Truths, which were revealed to the Buddha during his meditations:

- **Dukha** - Suffering and imperfection are part of life;
- **Samodaya** - They are caused by selfishness and desire;
- **Nirodha** - Release from suffering is possible;
- **Magga** - It can be achieved only by following the 'Eightfold Path' which makes it possible to reach the state of bliss and freedom known as Nirvana.

The "Eightfold Path" consists of right;

- **Understandings** – To see life as it is and understand the Four Noble Truths;
- **Thought** – a pure mind free from ill-will, lust and cruelty;
- **Action** – love, charity, generosity, honesty, compassion etc;
- **Vocation** – an occupation which harms no-one;
- **Speech** – free from lies, harshness, gossip and slander;
- **Effort** – to seek and maintain good;
- **Mindfulness** – concentration to become aware of the truth about the body, mind, feelings and thoughts;
- **Concentration** – meditation as a means to right understanding.

Buddhism is a very practical religion or way of life that aims to help people to live a happy and harmonious existence whilst identifying the path to Nirvana.

Buddhists undertake to live according to five precepts to refrain from:

- Injuring living things;
- Taking things which are not given;
- Using one's body to hurt or harm one self or others;
- Falsehood, prejudice and anything less than the truth;
- The abuse of elements which cloud the mind

**Karma** - There is a general belief in rebirth with the status of the next life dependent on right action in the present one.

### **Buddhist Scriptures**

The basic collection of scriptures is made up of the teachings of the Buddha and is known as the Pali Canon. The whole of this has been translated into English. There is also a vast collection of Buddhist writings in Sanskrit, Tibetan and Chinese.

### **Places of Worship**

Buddhists offer incense and flowers to the Buddha in their temples as an act of recollection and gratitude. Every Buddhist home also has a corner which is regarded as a shrine. The Buddha is not worshipped as a god, but venerated as a great teacher who taught his people the way out of suffering.

### **Main festivals**

- **Nirvana Day** – Celebrated on the 15<sup>th</sup> February, it is the date that Buddhists observe his passing.
- **Buddha Day** – The full moon day in May celebrates the birth, enlightenment and death of the Buddha.
- **Bodhi Day**, traditionally December 8th, is the Buddhist holiday that commemorates the day that the historical Buddha, Siddhartha Gotama experienced enlightenment

### **Dietary Requirements**

Many Buddhists are vegetarian, believing that it is wrong to kill or harm living things. However this is not obligatory.

### **Dress Code**

There are no religious laws governing specific dress code.

# Christianity

Christianity was founded over 2000 years ago in the Middle East. Christians believe in one God and that God revealed Himself to mankind as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is also believed that he has revealed Himself through the Bible and through his Son, Jesus Christ.

There are over 1 billion Christians in the world today, making it the world's largest religion. Christianity is divided into four principal denominations: Orthodox, Pentecostal, Protestant and Roman Catholic.

## Beliefs

- Christians believe that God is a trinity of three persons in one: Father, Son (Jesus Christ) and Holy Spirit. All have equal divine status.
- All Christians believe that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God who lived on earth as a human being, was crucified as part of God's plan for redeeming the sins of mankind, and then rose from the dead. For Christians, Jesus is the saviour of the human race.
- The doctrine of the Virgin Birth has led, especially among Catholics, to the veneration of Mary, the mother of Jesus.
- Holy Communion – also referred to as the Mass, the Eucharist and the Lord's Supper – is a pivotal aspect of Christian worship. Worshippers consume bread and wine as a token of the body and blood of Christ sacrificed for human sins.

## Holy writings

The holy book of Christians is the Bible, which is in two parts:

- **The Old Testament**, roughly equivalent to the Hebrew Bible;
- **The New Testament**, which includes the Gospels (Jesus' life and teachings) and the letters of St Paul and other saints, as well as writings from other authors.

## Places of Worship

Christians normally worship in churches, which range in style and grandeur from St Paul's Cathedral to small mission halls in urban areas and homes. However, there are many different forms of meeting place.

The standard working week and public holidays have been influenced greatly by the traditions and religious observances of Christianity.

## Holy days and festivals

The Christian holy day is Sunday, when congregations gather for worship. The chief festivals of the Christian year are:

- **Christmas** - This celebrates the birth of Jesus. This is held on 25 December in Western Christendom and on 6 January in Eastern Christendom.
- **Lent** - A forty day preparation for Easter, during which time some Christians impose restrictions on themselves, such as eating less or "giving something up".
- **Easter** - This commemorates the death (on Good Friday) and resurrection (on Easter Sunday) of Jesus. The exact dates, in late March or early April, vary from year to year.
- **Ascension Day** - This celebrates Jesus' ascension into Heaven, 40 days after Easter.
- **Whitsun or Pentecost** - This falls on the 7th Sunday after Easter and marks the coming of the Holy Spirit on the first followers of Jesus.

## Dietary Requirements

Christian dietary habits tend to be culturally rather than religiously determined. However, some African and South Asian Christians may avoid pork. Alcohol is forbidden according to some Christian groups, although, drinking wine (in moderation) plays a symbolic role in Holy Communion.

## Dress Code

There are no religious laws governing dress code. Christians will wear clothes according to their cultural or national origin. As a result, it would not be out of the ordinary to see a South Asian Christian woman wearing a shalwar kameez or sari. Some conservative European Christians ascertain that women must wear hats in church.

# Hinduism

The term 'Hinduism' is used to describe the ancient religious culture of India. This culture is over 5,000 years old and is practiced by countless millions.

Hinduism has neither a single founder, nor a single scripture that is uniquely authoritative. Hinduism is an amalgamation of several faith traditions. It may be helpful to view Hinduism not so much as a single religion, but as a family of religions. With such a wide variety of practices and beliefs that the following information cannot do more than scratch the surface and indicate some of its more common features.

Hindus themselves use various terms such as sanatana-dharma (loosely translated as 'eternal religion') to describe their faith; the word 'Hindu' is originally a geographic designation (those who live east of the Indus River) and is not found in any Hindu scriptures.

Worldwide there are estimated to be around 500 million Hindus, the majority in India. Hindus in Britain number about 400,000 making it the fourth largest religion in the UK

## Beliefs

Hinduism is a religion personified by many gods, who are themselves regarded as manifestations of different attributes of one supreme God. The three main gods are:

- **Brahma** - creator of the world;
- **Vishnu**, preserver of the world;
- **Shiva**, the destroyer;
- **Vishnu** is often worshipped in the form of his incarnations, Krishna and Rama.

At the heart of Hindu philosophy lie the concepts of:

- **Reincarnation**, karma, or past action, and the belief that right living and good deeds in one life lead to reincarnation in a higher form or salvation;
- **Dharma** or duty, appropriate to an individual's status and caste in the present life

There is also a caste system which was introduced by the supreme deity, Brahman. This system is intended to create a just but hierarchical society in which different groups have different hereditary rights.

## Holy writings

- The most revered of the Hindu sacred writings are the Vedas. The Bhagavad-Gita is another very popular Hindu sacred book and forms part of the Mahabharata epic, which recounts the deeds of the Hindu gods, thousands of years ago.

## Places of worship

- In India, Hindu temples are usually places where the priests serve the gods on behalf of the people. Only at festival times do they become the focal point of congregational worship. Daily worship is offered in the home.
- Although Hindus in the UK still worship mainly at home, more emphasis is placed on regular congregational worship in the temple. Before entering the temple the hands are washed and shoes removed. The central ceremony includes lighting the sacred fire using ghee (clarified butter) as well as prayers and the singing of hymns.



- The river Ganges in India has a particular significance for Hindus; it is a holy river and Hindus who bathe in it believe they are purified.

## **Festivals**

Hindu holy days and festivals follow a lunar calendar, thus dates vary from year to year. A few of the most popular are:

- **Diwali** – Known as the festival of lights, this commemorates the return of Lord Rama from His exile in the forest. It is, for many traditions, a new-year celebration. It takes place between late October and the middle of November.
- **Dussehra /Dasara** – A celebration in honor of Rama, of good conquering evil, this festival last ten days and takes place between late September and the middle of October.
- **Holi** – A spring festival to celebrate creation and renewal, linked with Lord Krishna.
- **Navaratri** – A nine day festival which celebrates the triumph of good over evil, as a prelude to Dasara.
- **Janmastami** – A celebration marking the appearance on earth of Lord Krishna.
- **Maha Shivratri** - A festival for Lord Shiva usually in February or March.

## **Dietary Requirements**

- Hindus uphold the sacredness of all life, including animal life. Devout Hindus will neither eat meat nor fish. Some will not eat eggs.
- Even those Hindus who have decided to eat meat will nonetheless refuse to eat beef since the cow is seen as a sacred animal. Hinduism forbids the consumption of alcohol.
- Garlic and onions are thought to be foods discarded by the Gods.
- Strictly orthodox Hindus will not eat food prepared by someone not belonging to the same level of caste as them.
- Food is only touched with the right hand.
- The kitchen is an area of ritual purity and usually houses the family shrine, therefore, it is the holiest part of the house.

## **Dress Code**

Hindus don't observe any specific cultural dress with stringency. They will gladly wear clothes from other countries, including Western attire. However, Hindu men typically wear a pyjama (narrow trousers) and kurta, which is a loose fitting shirt. Women often wear a sari, a long piece of material wrapped around the body. Married Hindu women wear a bindi – a red powder spot marked on the forehead.

#### Other Notes

- Property has always passed along the male line as women were seen as being someone else's property. Eventually women will marry into someone else's family. All domestic decisions tend to be made by the senior women in the family. Women tend to live with their eldest son in old age
- Generally, modern Hindu women now enjoy equal status although some traditions do still exist

# Islam

Islam was founded about 1400 years ago by the Prophet Muhammad; people who follow this faith are known as Muslims.

Muslims form two distinctive groups; the Sunni Muslims and the Shi'a or Shi'it. The former is the mainstream, orthodox branch of Islam and accounts for 88% of the Muslims in the world.

There are roughly 2.5 – 3 million Muslims living in Britain today, which makes it the 2<sup>nd</sup> most popular religion in the UK.

## Beliefs

Muslims believe in one God whose name in Arabic is “Allah”. They also honour a succession of prophets from Abraham and Moses, through Jesus to Muhammad in the 7th century, but do not regard Jesus as divine.

Muslims are required to follow the “Five Pillars of Islam”:

- **Shahada** - Affirmation that there is no other God but Allah;
- **Salah** - five daily ritual prayers, at dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset and night;
- **Sawm** - fasting during the month of Ramazan (often written as Ramadan). To keep strictly to the fast, Muslims will abstain from food and drink from dawn until sunset;
- **Zakah** giving money to the poor;
- **Hajj** - making a pilgrimage to Islam's most holy shrine, the place of the Prophet Muhammad's birth at Mecca, at least once in a lifetime.

The Qur'an promotes monogamy wherever possible; however the Qur'an does allow a man to have up to four wives. Traditionally women were offered security within a polygamous marriage in societies where they outnumbered men. A man who has more than one wife must treat each wife equally

The role of women in Islam can be particularly difficult for westerners to understand. However, Islam does not discriminate between men and women, only their roles in society are different. The Qur'an demands that women are treated equally in this life and will receive equal reward in the next.

**Holy writings**

The holy book of Muslims is known as the Qur'an, which contains the revelations given by God to Muhammad.

**Places of Worship**

Muslims worship in mosques, which are social centres and centres of learning, as well as places of worship. The best way to approach the local Muslim community is usually through the mosque. The Imam (religious leader) or the mosque secretaries are the best people to contact initially.

**Dietary Requirements**

Muslims do not eat pork or ham and many eat only halal meat (from animals slaughtered in a ritually acceptable way). Alcohol is forbidden to all Muslims.

**Dress Code**

Both men and women are required to dress and behave modestly. Most Muslim women dress modestly and some keep their head covered at all times. If a non-Muslim woman enters a mosque it is appreciated if she too covers her head as a mark of respect. In the prayer hall itself, shoes are removed by both men and women.

**Holy days and festivals**

The Islamic holy day of the week is Friday and communal prayers are said at mid-day.

**Festivals**

- **Ramadhan.** This Holy Festival takes place in the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. It is a time of fasting and daily repentance.
- **Lailat ul-Qadr** – The final 10 days of Ramadan. Muslims celebrate Muhammad's first revelation.

- **Id al-Fitr** – The feast period just after the month long fast of Ramadan. It lasts for three days.
- **Id ul-Adha** - Two to three months after Ramadhan, animals are slaughtered to benefit the poor. The purpose of the Id ul-Adha is to celebrate the faithfulness and obedience of Abraham.
- **Al-Isra Wal Miraj**. Celebrated on the 27<sup>th</sup> Day of the 12<sup>th</sup> month in the Islamic Calendar. It marks Muhummad's journey from Mecca.
- **Maulid al-Nabi**. Celebrates the birth of Muhummad.

#### **Other points to note**

- Physical / close contact between the sexes is discouraged and some Muslims may politely refuse to shake hands or be alone with the opposite sex. This should not be viewed negatively.
- Any form of gambling is forbidden under Islam.
- Recent world events have caused Islam to be misrepresented in the minds of many people. In fact, its teaching strongly emphasises the brotherhood of mankind and sets the tone for most Muslims' relationship with others.

# Jainism

Jainism is one of the world's oldest religions and originated in India, where the majority of its followers still live today. Jainism does not believe in a creator God, but it does believe in many Gods who are the self-realised individuals who have attained enlightenment. Jainism believes that all living things (animals and plants) have souls and are of equal value.

There are thought to be between 25-30,000 Jains in Britain. Estimates vary although the community is probably growing.

Jainism is a religion without a belief in a creator god. According to its scriptures, there is **akasha** (infinite space) within which there is a finite area called **loka** (the universe). Within this universe there are an infinite number of **jiva** or **atmas** (sentient beings).

## Beliefs

**Ahimsa** - The cardinal principle of Jainism is ahimsa, generally translated as non-violence, although it goes far beyond that to encompass the avoidance of all physical or even mental harm to any living being. A lay person who undertakes to refrain from all forms of intentional violence expresses this by assuming the **anuvratas** (five life-long minor vows).

- **Satya** - truthfulness;
- **Asteya** - not stealing;
- **Brahmacharya** - refraining from sexual activity outside of marriage
- **Aparigraha** - placing limits on one's possessions.

Employment is also restricted to occupations where there is only a minimal likelihood of harm to human or animal life.

Jains consider that the true path of emancipation does not begin until one renounces the household altogether in order to lead the celibate life of a **sadhu** (male mendicant) or **sadhvi** (female mendicant) by taking the **mahavratas** (the great vows). The vows taken by a mendicant are the same as those taken by a lay person, but are much more restrictive.

## Holy writings

Jain scriptures are known as the Shruta, Agamas or Siddhanta (doctrine) which comprise the canonical literature containing the teachings of Mahavira and other Tirthankaras

## Places of Worship

- **Personal Puja** - Jains may offer puja (worship) at their home shrines three times a day, before dawn, at sunset and, at night, by chanting mantras (litanies).
- **Pratikramana** is a confession of transgressions against one's religious vows committed knowingly or unknowingly.

## Dietary Requirements

Jain scriptures permit the consumption of dairy products such as milk, curds and ghee (clarified butter), but prohibit the eating of meat, eggs and honey. They also prohibit the consumption of certain vegetables that grow underground such as potatoes or fruits with many seeds such as figs, as well as fermented products such as alcohol. Some lay people, as well as all mendicants, observe the restriction of not eating after sunset or before sunrise.

## Festivals

Fasting is very important part of the Jains tradition. Most Jains fast during Holy Days and Festivals; some Jains choose fasting at other times in order to purify or to assist in their spiritual development. This ritual can vary from giving up food and drink entirely to only giving up favourite foods. Many Jains choose to fast when their death is approaching so that they may purify their thoughts in the preceding moments to their death.

- **Mahavira Jayanti** – Occurs around March/April. A celebration of the birth of Mahavira (the founder of Jainism). Celebrations include community worship, processions, and other devotional and spiritual activities.
- **Paryushana** – Occurs in August/September. Considered by some to be the most important festival in Jainism. All Jains are required to fast and the spiritual preceptors read out and explain in detail the Kalpasutra (sacred scripture). The first seven days of the festival are days of attainment, and the eighth and final day is one of fulfilment and achievement.
- **Diwali** – Occurs in October/November. The whole night of Diwali should be spent in the recitation of holy hymns and meditation. Svetambara Jains believe that on the night of the day of Diwali in 537 BCE, Mahavira achieved Nirvan, or deliverance and attained to a state of absolute bliss. The day after Diwali marks the beginning of the New Year in their calendar.
- **Kartak Purnima** – Occurs in October/November. Thousands of Jains go on pilgrimages on this day to sacred Jain sites.
- **Mauna Agyaras** – Occurs around November/December. This is the day on which Jains fast and observe total silence. It is a day for meditation.

# Judaism

Judaism was founded about 4000 years ago by Abraham, who taught his people to worship one God – Jehovah or Yahweh. The character of the Jewish faith has been shaped by its history of exile and persecution.

The most traumatic event in modern Jewish history was the Holocaust, when Hitler attempted the genocide of the Jewish people. Jews currently number about 15 million worldwide, with approximately 300,000 in the UK.

## **Beliefs**

Jews believe in one God and assert this daily in their prayers. The rules and traditions an observant Jew follows are known collectively as the halakha (the path).

According to Orthodox Judaism, 613 commandments (or mitzvot) lie at the heart of the halakha. God in the Torah gave some of these, while others were added by the rabbis and derived from ancient Jewish customs

## **Holy writings**

The Old Testament of the Bible contains the sacred Jewish writings. The first five books comprise the Torah and reveal the will of God. They are central to the Jewish faith.

## **Places of worship**

The Jewish centre of worship is the synagogue; the Hebrew word means “to gather together”. It is the focal point of Jewish activity, being the place for prayer, meeting others and a centre of administration. The Rabbi is a teacher to the community. The Rabbi's time is spent partly in pastoral duties, studying, teaching and sometimes conducting services.

## **Dietary Requirements**

The Jewish faith has many dietary laws; the extent to which they are upheld will depend on the individual and the degree of their orthodoxy. Many Jews do not eat pork, or shellfish, or dairy and meat products at the same meal. Food which has been prepared in a ritually acceptable way is known as ‘Kosher’. In the case of meat, for example, this means that the animal has been slaughtered by a qualified person in a way which allows its blood to drain away. In the case of other food, there must have been no contact with banned items. An example of this would be an egg which, if fried in bacon fat, would not be permissible.



## Dress Code

It is imperative that practising Jewish men keep their head covered at all times generally by wearing a Kippah (skull cap). Orthodox Jewish women are required to dress modestly.

## Holy days and festivals

The Jewish holy day is Saturday, the Sabbath (Shabbat), which runs from sunset on Friday to nightfall on Saturday. It is a day of rest and prayer, and is strongly family centred. Jews who observe the Sabbath strictly need to be able to leave the work place on Friday in time to be home before sunset.

Jews celebrate many religious and cultural festivals associated with significant historical events in Jewish history. The Passover commemorates the Israelites' deliverance from slavery in Egypt. Rosh Hashana is the Jewish New Year. It coincides with beginning of the Ten Days of Repentance. The last of these days is the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), the holiest day in the Jewish calendar.

- **Rosh Hashanah** – The Jewish New Year. Occurs around the middle of September/October. It celebrates the religious New Year and the creation of earth.
- **Yom Kippur** – Occurs shortly after Rosh Hashanah. It is the Day of Atonement. It runs from sunset to sunset and believers do not eat or drink during this time. It is a time to repent for actions of the past year.
- **Sukkot** – The feast of Booths. It last for eight days and occurs around the end of October. It is known as the Harvest celebration.
- **Channukah (Hannukkah)** – Occurs early to mid December. Known as the Festival of Lights it celebrates the victory of the Maccabees over the Syrians in the second century B.C.E.
- **Purim** – Occurs late February to early March. It remembers the deliverance of the Persian Jews from destruction. The day before Purim is spent fasting; the actual day of Purim is joyous.
- **Pesach (Passover)** – Occurs from late March to early April. It honours the delivery of the Jewish people from slavery. It last between 7 and 8 days (depending on the branch of Judaism).
- **Shavout** – Occurs in May/June and lasts for 2 days. It is the spring harvest festival and the celebration of God's gift of the Torah.

# Rastafarianism

Rastafarianism dates back to the early 1930s when the Prince Regent, Ras ('Prince') Tafari, was crowned as Emperor Haile Selassie 1 of Ethiopia (1930-74). It is from Ras Tafari that this Revivalist Movement gained its name.

Rastafarians believe in one God (Jah) and that they and all Africans who have migrated are but exiles in 'Babylon'. They are destined to be delivered out of captivity by a return to Zion or Africa – the land of their ancestors. There are believed to be about 250,000 adherents to this religion world-wide, of whom approximately 5,000 live in the United Kingdom.

## Beliefs

- The modern characteristics of the Rastafarian movement include a loosely defined belief system, due to its lack of a single authoritative voice.
- Some consider the Rastafarian movement to be influenced by Marcus Garvey's own set of beliefs. He established the Universal Negro Improvement Association in 1914 in both the United States and Jamaica. This organisation was the vehicle for Garvey's aim to return Black to Africa. His teaching remains the key influence upon this Black religion. Garvey was thought to have predicted the coronation of Emperor Haile Selassie with his alleged phrase "Look to Africa when a Black king shall be crowned, for the day of deliverance is near".
- Despite the lack of a central authority, Rastafarianism is guided by key tenets of faith.
- The Bible is the main religious text of Rastafarianism.
- The African race is one of God's chosen races, one of the twelve Tribes of Israel. Jamaica is the biblical 'Babylon', although all the places to which Africans have been exiled are also included.
- 'Babylon' is the place which will never see spiritual reform and liberation.
- Jah' is believed to reside in each person and there is 'Oneness' between the individual and God.
- Revivalism, the belief that they are destined to be delivered out of captivity by a return to Zion or Africa, is the key tenet of faith held by the adherents to Rastafarianism.

## Holy writings

### Places of worship

Worship takes place at various times depending upon each Rastafarian commune. Nevertheless, a service is conducted at least once a week. Central to the service is music and, sometimes I-TAL (vegetarian, organic and natural food prepared in the colours red, green and gold).

## **Dietary Requirements**

Fasting is observed, sometimes as often as twice each week or simply on the first Saturday of every month. On these days, nothing whatever is consumed from noon until evening. Adherents to Rastafarianism consider Saturday to be the Sabbath day. Cutting of hair is prohibited. Dreadlocks symbolise the 'mane of the Lion of Judah' (reference to the divine title of Emperor Haile Selassie).

Most adherents of Rastafarianism are vegetarian and avoid stimulants such as alcohol, tea and coffee. However, marijuana (ganja) is consumed and plays a significant role within Rastafarianism.

## **Main Festivals**

- Birthday of Emperor Haile Selassie 23 July
- Ethiopian Christmas 7 January

## **Other notes**

- Since the Second World War, the influence of Rastafarianism on Jamaican society has been very significant. Music, language and cultural styles of dress have become symbolic of both Jamaica and Rastafarianism. As a consequence, it is difficult to ascertain where Rastafarianism ends and Jamaican culture begins. It would be a mistake to assume that everybody wearing their hair in dreadlocks or even the 'Tam' (a woollen hat used by 'Dreads' to cover their locks) is an adherent of Rastafarianism.
- Nevertheless, some adherents choose to express themselves in music rather than religious observance.
- Furthermore, the vocabulary of Rastafarianism is largely that of Jamaican Patois. Rastafarianism has, in the past, played a significant role in the politics of Jamaica. Indeed, Rastafarians remain very critical of many aspects of Jamaican politics and way of life.
- Within Rastafarian communities, men and women play distinct roles and have different status. It is accepted that women, within the Rastafarian religion, may become educated. Abortion or birth control are opposed.

# Sikhism

Sikhism is a monotheistic faith, which was founded in the fifteenth century by Guru Nanak in the region of Punjab, North West India. It is recognised as the youngest of world religions. It was originally conceived as a synthesis between Hinduism and Islam, but rapidly took its own distinctive identity. Sikhism emerged as a result of the teachings of Guru Nansak's aim was to encourage all people to faithfully worship one God. The fundamentals of the religion were then further developed by a continuous line of nine gurus (teachers) who succeeded him.

The last guru declared that after him, there would be no other gurus. The Guru Granth Sahib, The Sikh holy book, would be viewed as the eternal guru. For Sikhs the Granth Sahib is the focal point of a Sikh temple (Gurdwara) and the ultimate source of religious authority

There are estimated to be about 20 million Sikhs throughout the world, with around 500,000 in Britain.

## **Beliefs**

Sikhs believe in one God, whose word was revealed to mankind through ten ajor prophets called "Gurus". Salvation comes from achieving union with God through devotional worship. Until that union is achieved, Sikhs believe they must live through many reincarnations.

## **Holy writings**

The holy texts are known as the Guru Granth Sahib and consist of a collection of hymns and prayers of the Gurus. They include texts from followers of other faiths such as Islam and Hinduism.

## **Dietary Requirements**

Sikhism forbids smoking and the consumption of alcohol. A devout Sikh will neither eat eggs, nor any animal by-product. Many Sikhs do not eat meat either.

## Dress Code

Sikh men are religiously required to wear turbans to cover their uncut hair. Should she choose, a Sikh woman may also wear a turban. Young Sikh boys will wear their long hair tied in a topknot. The five Ks will be worn on the person: some will be visible, such the Kesh (uncut hair covered by a turban) and Kara (steel bracelet), while others, such as the Kirpan (sword) and Katcha (shorts) will be worn under the clothes. Some married women, like their Hindu counterparts, may also wear a Bindi – a red powder spot marked on the forehead.

## Festivals

Sikhs celebrate several religious festivals that combine a cultural and religious significance.

- **Vaisakhi** - the central festival which is a dual celebration incorporating both a harvest festival and a commemoration of Guru Gobind Singh's creation of the Khalsa, the pure brotherhood of Sikhs.
- **Gurpurbs** - The marking of important anniversaries relating to the birth or death (martyrdom) of a Guru. This includes the full recitation of the Guru Granth Sahib as well as the singing of hymns and Sikh lectures.
- **Baisakhi** – The day is celebrated around the 13<sup>th</sup> April. It is celebration of the founding of the Khalsa Order and Sikh nation. Many Sikhs choose to be initiated on this day. Often, a religious street procession marks the key event.
- **Bandi Chhor** – Sikhs commemorate the release of Guru Hargobind (Sixth Guru) from false imprisonment. It coincides with the Indian Festival of Lights (Divali) between the end of October and mid-November. A Muslim saint laid the foundation stone of the Golden Temple, also on this day.
- **Maghi** – This celebration occurs around the middle of January and marks the martyrdom of forty Sikhs at the hands of the Mughal army.
- **Hola Mohalla** – On this day Sikhs practice military exercises, stage mock battles, perform martial arts and organise sports competitions. This is to keep the martial skills and spirit alive. Hymn singing and lectures also take place. It occurs the day after the Indian festival Holi around mid-March.

## Other practices and symbols

Guru Gobind Singh, the last of the ten Gurus, founded an inner circle of Sikhs called the “Khalsa” (meaning “the pure ones”). Khalsa Sikhs are distinguished by five sacred symbols of the faith, often called “the five Ks”:

- **Kes** – or uncut hair, which men keep tidy under a turban;
- **Kangha** – a comb, which men wear inside the turban;
- **Kara** – a steel bracelet;
- **Kaccha** – knee-length underwear;
- **Kirpan** – a small replica sword which is generally worn at the waist. Sikhs regard the kirpan as a ceremonial item and not a weapon of aggression.