

Beginner's guides to the religions and beliefs recommended for learning

Teachers of RE need subject knowledge to teach RE well. There is no substitute for this, and it is part of our professional responsibility. Here is some simple help.

Any RE subject leader might use this section of the RE Syllabus Support materials to help class teachers who are not expert in a religion they are going to teach. The guides to each religion here are very brief – just three pages usually, and carefully focused on what a teacher needs to be reminded about. They are in danger of being trite or superficial, but perhaps are better than nothing.

There is a wide introductory literature to every religion and belief, and all teachers of RE will do their work better if they improve their knowledge by wider reading than is offered here. But perhaps it is worth giving these starting points to busy teachers. Note that no primary teacher needs to know about 6 religions – if you teach one year group, then two or three religions will be part of the syllabus for that year.

In general terms, the following guidance points apply to teaching about all religions and worldviews:

1. **Respect.** Speak with respect about the faith: any religion or worldview with tens of millions of followers is being studied because the people within the community deserve our respect.
2. **Diversity.** Talk about 'some / many / most' believers, but not about 'all believers'. Internal diversity is part of every religion.
3. **Neutrality.** Leave 'insider language' to insiders. A Sikh visitor can say 'We believe...' but teachers will do best to say 'many Sikhs believe...' or 'many Christians believe...'
4. **General words.** Use the general language of religious study to describe things: the Qur'an is not the 'Muslim Bible' – it is the Muslim sacred text. Divali is not the 'Hindu's Christmas' – it is a Hindu festival.
5. **Learning about religion, not 'comparative religion'.** Don't make simplistic comparisons between different religions. Look for similarities, but notice differences too. Religions are not 'all the same really'.
6. **Living religion.** Focus on the 'here and now' of local expressions of religion in your area or in the UK: RE is not merely History. Explore the lives of age-appropriate children in the religion, not just leaders, who may be decades away from your pupils.
7. **Content light, concept deep.** It is better to deal with a small piece of religious understanding in depth than to skate over the surface of vast areas of content, never grasping any of it in depth.
8. **A gift to the child:** the idea of learning from religion is that anyone can take a gift from a faith. You don't have to become Jewish to learn from Judaism. You don't become a Humanist to learn from Humanism. Look for the gift your pupils may gain from their study, and expect RE to include reactions and responses that have personal and critical characteristics.

Buddhism

Who was 'The Buddha'

Buddhism was founded by an Indian prince – Siddhattha Gotama – two and a half thousand years ago. He became known as Lord Buddha, which means 'the enlightened one'. Prince Siddhattha (or Siddhartha) was brought up in a palace, enjoying the luxurious life of a royal prince. When he was born, it was prophesied that he would either become a great king or an even greater spiritual teacher. As his parents wanted him to inherit the kingdom, they did everything they could to prevent him from seeing suffering in any of its forms.

However, he eventually managed to leave the palace secretly. Each time he escaped, he saw that the world was full of the sufferings of old age, sickness and death. Moved by compassion for the sufferings he saw, Siddhartha became determined to do something about it. Inspired by the sight of a wandering holy man, he decided that he would not inherit the kingdom – he would become a wandering monk, free to search for a way to end suffering for himself and everyone else.

At the age of thirty-five, he finally rejected extreme poverty (asceticism), just as he had previously rejected extreme wealth, because neither led to freedom. Sitting down under a Bodhi tree, he resolved that he wouldn't rise again until he had reached his goal. In meditation, he defeated the four 'Maras' (which are four root causes of suffering) and finally became enlightened. He spent his remaining 40 years known as the Buddha, teaching his followers a way of life based on morality, meditation and wisdom, so they too could awaken.

The Three Jewels of Refuge

All Buddhists 'take Refuge' in the Three Jewels:

- The Buddha
- The Dharma (teaching)
- The Sangha (community)

The Buddha

'The Buddha' means the historical Buddha – Siddhattha Gotama (also spelt 'Gautama') or Shakyamuni Buddha: but it is taught that there have been many buddhas in the past and will be many in the future. It also means 'buddhahood' itself, enlightenment.

There are different ways of following the Buddha, depending on what tradition you belong to. Some Buddhists practise for the sake of becoming free of suffering for themselves. They take the historical Buddha as a guide and exemplar. Other Buddhists believe that you can only become free of the cycle of birth and death through developing complete compassion and wisdom like the Buddha himself.

The Dharma

The Dhamma or Dharma is the name given to Buddha's teachings. They are divided into three collections: the Sutras, which are the discourses given by the Buddha, the Vinaya which are the instructions for the lay and monastic lifestyles; and the Abidharma teachings which analyse the nature of mind. There are also many texts taught by great masters to help people understand the Buddha's teachings. The Dharma also means your own true understanding of Buddha's teachings.

The Sangha

This is the community of lay and monastic Buddhist practitioners. Some traditions are mainly monastic, some mainly lay and some both. Monks and nuns have given up family life to concentrate on prayer and meditation. They rely on the lay community to provide them with food and clothing. This gives ordinary people the opportunity to practice virtue (through giving) and also to follow their teachings.

Most Buddhists visit a temple or Buddhist centre when they can and especially on 'Moon Days' (full and new moon) and on the Four Great Festivals which commemorate the most important events in Lord Buddha's life. On these days, it is said that the mind is extremely powerful and it is very important to practice good deeds.

Families also have a small shrine in their own homes, where they make offerings and prayers (good wishes) and where they meditate. There are many different forms of meditation.

The Guru or Lama or teacher is very important in Buddhism. He or she provides the teachings appropriate for each individual, gives advice on how to follow them and helps us to avoid misunderstanding, jealousy and pride. For this reason, the teacher as well as the temple, is treated with great respect and gratitude, as a representative of the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha.

What did the Buddha Teach?

The Five Precepts

These are commitments made by lay Buddhists (i.e. ordinary householders, men and women) as a basis for a positive way of life.

1. Not killing or harming any living being, from conception to death.
2. Not lying or trying to mislead others for your own benefit.
3. Not stealing – trying to be more generous in thoughts, words and deeds.
4. Not practising sexual misconduct - treating your sexual partner appropriately and with kindness, not abusively or deceitfully.
5. Not becoming intoxicated by drink or drugs, because this makes it impossible for you to carry out any of your other good intentions.

'The Four Thoughts that turn the mind to Dharma'

Although there are many different forms of Buddhism, there are some core teachings which they all have in common.

- Precious Human Birth
- Impermanence
- Karma, Cause and Effect
- The Suffering of Conditioned Existence or just 'Suffering')

These are the 'entry-level' teachings in Buddhism: the Four Noble Truths are studied at a much higher level. They are also transferable tools for non-Buddhist pupils as a useful way of thinking about their own empirical experience. They can be taught through one teaching aid, the 'Wheel of Life' (not to be confused with 'The Wheel of Dharma') which is readily available in poster form.

Precious Human Birth

Human life is precious because it is rare and valuable.

- It is rare because the cause of being born a human is the practice of virtue in other lives, and this is always more difficult than practicing selfishness.
- It is valuable because the only way out of the cycle of birth and death is from the human realm. Only human beings can practice religion. It is only as a human that one can attain enlightenment.

Even if one is born a human, there are other things that make up a 'precious human birth'. For example, and living in a culture that has humane values; having the time and the freedom to practice our religion; having compassion for others and not being involved in very negative actions.

Impermanence

The Buddha taught that every thing and every situation is impermanent, for example:

- Our world, right from the changing of the seasons to the birth and death of stars and planets.
- Our own bodies and our health: we are all going to die one day but of course no one knows exactly when.
- Our thoughts and feelings, our families and relationships, our friends and enemies.

Right now, we have precious human birth – the right body and mind and environment in which to develop kindness and wisdom – but this will not last for ever. The point of thinking about impermanence is not to become gloomy but to encourage us to use this wonderful opportunity to escape from the cycle of birth and death now, while we can.

Karma, Cause and Effect

Lord Buddha (or Shakyamuni Buddha, or the historical Buddha) taught that all our actions – of body, speech and mind – have consequences. They are like seeds that ripen in different experiences of happiness and suffering. Some of these effects ripen quite quickly, in this life: some ripen much later when conditions are right, which may be in future lives.

The karmic effects of actions depend essentially on their intention but there are some actions which generally cause happiness and others which generally cause suffering. Actions based on ignorance, selfishness and hatred cause suffering. Actions rooted in generosity, patience, thoughtfulness and courage create future happiness.

The Suffering of Conditioned Existence (or just 'Suffering')

The causes of suffering are ignorance (of the true nature of our minds); and hatred and desire which come from ignorance. These are shown at the hub of the Wheel of Life as a pig (ignorance), a cockerel (desire) and a snake (hatred). Around these are six types of environment produced by negative mental actions. The hell realm is created by anger; the hungry ghost realm is created by greed; the animal realm through ignorance; the demon realm through jealousy; the heaven realm through virtue but also pride.

The human realm has all these elements but also the freedom to stand back and look at our experience, to ask questions about it and to choose to develop virtues such as kindness and patience. We can also develop an understanding of how suffering works – that is shown in the pictures around the rim of the Wheel.

The Wheel of Life is like a mirror held by the Lord of Death. This shows that we will continue to die and be re-born until we understand the causes of happiness and suffering. In every 'realm' there is an image of the Buddha, showing that there is a way to freedom from wherever we are.

In the UK

The Buddhist communities of the UK number over 200 000. Many of these people are ethnic Chinese, Thai, Tibetan or Nepalese. There are also many Buddhists from European ethnic heritage who have joined the Buddhist community as adults. There are hundreds of Buddhist centres, temples and Viharas - large and small - in the UK.

Buddhism: Some 'Dos and Don'ts'

'Dos'

- Do teach the life of the Buddha, the Dhamma (teaching) and Sangha (Community) as the central ideas of Buddhism.
- Do teach about the local 'here and now' communities of Buddhists in the UK as well as those far away or long ago. 'A living tradition' is the right emphasis.
- Do teach about the lay community – most Buddhists are not monks or nuns: avoid suggesting that all Buddhists are celibate monks or nuns with shaved heads. Many active and devoted Buddhists adopt no obvious sign of their faith.
- Do teach about happy Buddhists: be cautious about the use of the word 'suffering' as it is used in accounts of the 'Four Noble Truths'. Suffering (dukkha) refers to the unsatisfactory nature of life. Buddhism doesn't claim that everything is painful.
- Do select stories from the 'Jataka tales' carefully for the classroom. These are accounts of the previous lives of the Buddha. Some are enjoyable for pupils but some are quite difficult to grasp and can appear to outsiders to be grim or ghastly tales of sacrifice.
- Do teach about meditation, but don't ask pupils to 'try meditation'. Stilling activities to encourage the class to be more reflective are in order but simply announcing that everyone in the class is going to have a go at Buddhist meditation comes so close to a faith activity that unless one has the consent of everyone it is unfair on the pupils.
- Do teach about diversity within Buddhism, for example remember that not all Buddhist monks and nuns wear saffron robes, e.g. Zen wear black/brown; Nichiren wear white and yellow; Cha'an wear black; and Tibetan wear wine/gold.
- Do teach the Noble Eightfold Path – noting that it is not eight steps, but one path with eight aspects. The path is actually followed when observing all eight aspects together.

'Don'ts'

- Don't confuse showing respect for the Buddha with worship of the Buddha, as if he were a god. Bowing in front of images or shrines expresses respect and gratitude.
- Don't refer to Siddhatha Gautama as 'Buddha' until after his enlightenment. Strictly speaking the status 'the Buddha' can only be given to Siddhatha after his 'awakening' under the Bodhi tree.
- Don't use the term 'reincarnation'; it suggests a soul or something which can be reincarnated. Many Buddhists prefer the term 'Rebirth'. It is good to distinguish Buddhism on its own terms, not tying it to 'eastern religions' as if they are all the same: they are not!
- Don't use the term 'Begging Bowl'; 'Alms Bowl' is better. Members of the Sangha are not allowed to ask for food, so 'begging' is inappropriate. It suggests members of the Sangha are parasites on the laity when both support each other.
- Don't suggest all Buddhists are atheists, however, most would see debating the existence of God as irrelevant to the pursuit of enlightenment.
- Don't equate Buddhist meditation with Hindu or other forms of meditation. Buddhist meditation leads to calm, concentration and insight; it is associated with achieving 'Mindfulness' or being fully aware. Other forms of meditation are often associated with drawing on transcendent forces outside of the self
- Don't use the term 'merit' without explaining it is not a 'points system' to gain as much personal merit as possible. Merit is only kept when given away totally and freely. A paradox – and not the only one.
- Don't refer to the Five Precepts (for laity) or Ten Precepts (for the Sangha) as commandments but as 'commitments' to train oneself in certain ways. They are taken on voluntarily.

Christianity

Christianity began in approximately 33 AD (Usually called 'CE' / Common Era by RE teachers). It was started by the followers of Jesus. At the centre of Christianity is the belief that Jesus is the Son of God, God come down to earth. The basic beliefs of a Christian can be summed up in the creeds. The two main creeds in Christianity are the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed.

The Apostles' Creed: a widely shared and historic statement of belief for Christians

'I believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.
 I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.
 He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.
 He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
 Was crucified, died and was buried. He descended to the dead.
 On the third day he rose again.
 He ascended to heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
 He will come again to judge the living and the dead.
 I believe in the Holy Spirit,
 The holy catholic church,
 The communion of saints,
 The forgiveness of sins,
 The resurrection of the body,
 And the life everlasting.
 Amen.'

The Trinity: God, three in one

Christianity is a monotheistic religion which teaches that God is one, known in three persons or in three ways of being. These are God the Father and creator, Jesus the incarnate son of God, God made flesh, and the Holy Spirit, God working in the world. Christians believe the Trinity is one God working in three different ways.

Jesus Christ

Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Palestine to a woman called Mary, who the Bible says was a virgin. The Bible also tells of the visitors at his birth: angels, shepherds and wise men. He grew up in Nazareth and at the age of about 30 became a preacher, healer and teacher. He was baptised and the Bible tells of his temptation by Satan in the wilderness. Jesus recruited a group of followers called the disciples – meaning 'followers'. The Bible describes Jesus telling parables and performing healings and other miracles. He taught that the greatest commandment was to 'love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength'. The second greatest commandment was to 'love your neighbour as yourself'. In his early thirties Jesus was crucified by the Roman rulers in Israel: he had many enemies because of his controversial identification with the poor, outcast or unaccepted in his society. Christians believe that three days later he was resurrected. The Bible tells of many resurrection appearances of Jesus, alive again after he died and before he went to be with his Father in Heaven. Christians believe that because of the love of God, shown when Jesus died, their sins can be forgiven and that if they believe in Jesus as the Son of God they will enter Heaven when they die.

The Bible

The Christian holy book, or Bible, contains within it many writings or books.

It is divided into the Old Testament (perhaps better called the 'First Testament' or the 'Jewish Bible', to acknowledge Christianity's Jewish roots) – made up of the Jewish scriptures, writings before the time of Jesus, and the New Testament – writings which are concerned with the life of Jesus and his disciples and apostles.

The Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew and consists of 39 books. The books include laws, prophecy, psalms, poetry, history and stories. There are 27 books in the New Testament, originally written in Greek. These books contain history, prophecy, gospels and letters.

All Christians consider the Bible a source of teaching and authority but there are different views on how and whether it tells literal truth, spiritual truth or is to be read as an exploration of meaning

Worship

Christians see themselves as a body of believers. It is the community rather than the building they meet in which is of principal importance. Christians meet regularly on a Sunday but during the week there are many other informal prayer meetings and groups that get together to study the Bible or discuss how best to live a Christian life or provide services to the community.

Most Christian churches celebrate the death and resurrection of Jesus by sharing bread and wine. This has many different names such as Communion, Eucharist or Mass. Many services also include praying, praising of God through music and singing, listening to the Bible and learning about its meaning and application.

Praying and reading the Bible are not activities confined to Sundays. Many Christians pray and read the Bible every day. The prayers they offer individually and in communal worship include praise of God, confession, thanksgiving and asking for help and guidance from God.

Denominations

The Christian Church is divided into many different groups commonly known as denominations. There are some different beliefs and ways of worshipping between the denominations but they all hold some central beliefs. These are a belief in the Trinity and the resurrection, that Christians should live their lives in a way that shows a love of God, and that when they die they will go to be with God.

The denominations can be organised into three groups:

- The Orthodox Churches ('Eastern');
- The Roman Catholic Church;
- The Protestant Churches (these include Anglicans, Methodists, Baptists, the United Reformed Church, Pentecostals, the Salvation Army, the Society of Friends and many others. Some 'new church' communities don't wish to be seen as a denomination).

Festivals

The most important festivals for Christians are Christmas, Easter and Pentecost.

At Christmas, Christians commemorate the birth of Jesus Christ. The period beginning four Sundays before Christmas, and leading up to Christmas, is called Advent, which means 'coming'. Easter is the time when Christians remember the death and resurrection of Jesus. The 40 days leading up to this are called Lent, when Christians spend time praying and considering the importance of the events at Easter. Holy week includes Maundy Thursday (when the Last Supper is commemorated), Good Friday, the crucifixion of Jesus, and Easter Sunday where the joy of the resurrection is celebrated. Pentecost is the festival that recalls the time when the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples and Jesus finally ascended into Heaven.

In the UK

Christianity has been the major religious tradition and community in the UK for perhaps 1500 years, since its arrival with the Romans. Churches, often ancient, can be found in every community. The history and story of Christianity in the UK is important in children's education, and the moral force and spirituality of Christianity continue important in Britain. 59% of British people identified themselves in the 2011 Census as Christians, though only about one tenth of that number are members of churches, attending once a month or more. Although the churches have become less influential in the last half a century, Christians continue to be the largest religious community in the UK by a long way. There are about 30 000 church buildings in the UK, a large number of these – in the thousands - have begun in the last thirty years.

Christianity: Some 'Dos and Don'ts'

'Dos'

- ❑ Do teach the Christian belief about God as trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, even to younger children. It is mysterious, but is at the heart of Christian understanding of God.
- ❑ Do try to present the Christian belief that Jesus was both fully God and fully human. He was not 'half man and half God', or God disguised as a human.
- ❑ Do be aware that the term 'Holy Spirit' is the current Christian way of describing the third person of the Trinity. The older term 'Holy Ghost' is infrequent and suggests unhelpful or trivial connections with ghosts.
- ❑ Do help pupils understand that Christianity takes a wide variety of different forms e.g. Catholic, Orthodox, Church of England, Pentecostal, Baptist and also radical, liberal, Evangelical etc. Don't give the impression that all Christians have identical beliefs or practices.
- ❑ Do organise visits to a church which involve some members of the congregation being present. Visiting an empty building can reinforce the impression some pupils have that churches are a monument to a faith which is no longer relevant to anyone, a kind of museum.
- ❑ Do be careful when exploring the Eucharist and talking about the bread and wine as the 'body and blood of Christ'. Pupils have been known to react in negative or derisive ways e.g. expressing disgust at the idea that this is somehow cannibalism. A stress on symbolism is good.
- ❑ Do be aware that Christians differ widely in their understanding of the 'bread and wine'. For example, while Catholics refer to the 'real presence' of Christ in the bread and wine, others speak of them as symbols used in memory of Jesus' death.

'Don'ts'

- ❑ Don't make any assumptions about who is or is not a Christian. Obviously, don't say 'we' for Christians, and 'them' for other faiths! Avoid inappropriate phrases like 'our God' or 'we believe' when talking about Christianity and using distancing devices such as 'some Christians believe...'
- ❑ Don't represent Jesus in Christian belief as being merely a good man, a wise teacher or a prophet. For Christians, Jesus is God incarnate represented by titles like 'the Son of God', 'the Christ', 'the Messiah'.
- ❑ Don't edit out stories of Jesus from the study children do: too much RE repeats the Good Samaritan and Prodigal Son but never deals with, for example, stories of controversy, so Jesus appears to be boring and bland. Plan learning from the whole story.
- ❑ Don't liken Christian belief in the Crucifixion to beliefs in human sacrifices made to placate a bloodthirsty God. Although described as a sacrifice, the Crucifixion has to be understood in the light of the Christian belief that Jesus is both fully God and fully human; in some sense God himself dies on the Cross to show divine love.
- ❑ Don't neglect the Resurrection as part of the Easter story. However difficult it may seem, the Resurrection and the Crucifixion are inextricably linked and one should not be taught without the other.
- ❑ Don't suggest that Christians worship Mary or the saints. In some denominations, prayers are made to Mary or the saints as intermediaries.
- ❑ Don't use Bible stories as the basis of a topic when their relevance is tenuous e.g. Noah's Ark isn't really relevant to a theme on water, or even animals. It's a story about God's care for the earth, judgement and human morality.

Hinduism

Hindu traditions have no one founder or formal creedal statement. Hindu tradition dates back to thousands of years BCE. The word 'Hindu' comes from a Persian form of the ancient Sanskrit word 'Sindhu', which was used to describe the river Indus. The term Hinduism is used to describe the ancient religion of India. Those who practise Hinduism often call it the Sanatan Dharma, or the eternal way. Hinduism is complex; some people describe it as being like the roots of the Banyan tree – perhaps it is better seen as a number of similar religious traditions, not a single faith. Hinduism is extremely diverse, depending on things such as culture, family background and geographical location, endlessly varied in forms of expression, and in belief.

Hindu ideas about God / the divine

Brahman is the name given to the ultimate life force. Many Hindus would say there are many gods and goddesses but only one God and that is Brahman. The most important deities are the Trimurti which represents the three aspects of God. These are Brahma – the creator, Vishnu – the preserver and Shiva – the dissolver.

Hindu families will devote themselves to one or two particular gods or goddesses as a way of coming to God. Some people devote themselves to the human forms of the god Vishnu, known as Avatars. Vishnu is believed to have come to Earth in human and animal form for example as Rama and Krishna.

Sacred text

Hindu scriptures are of two types: Shruti and Smriti. Shruti means that which is heard, Smriti means that which is remembered.

Shruti are also called revealed truths. These are scriptures which Hindus believe were revealed by God to holy men, who interpreted them for people to aid their spiritual development. One example of these is the Vedas which were written in Sanskrit. One part of the Vedas is known as the Upanishads which includes discussion between holy men and their students.

As these texts were hard to understand, Hindu teachers wrote Smritis, which are also called remembered truths. Many of these are stories, often in the form of poems. The stories tell of the Trimurti and talk about the right way to behave. They explain the beliefs and values of the Hindu way of living. An example of these is the Ramayana which tells the story of Rama and Sita, and the Mahabharata which tells the story of Arjuna and his charioteer Lord Krishna. The most celebrated part of the Mahabharata is the Bhagavad Gita, which contains the dialogue of Arjuna and Lord Krishna. The Bhagavad Gita is the most loved and well known of the scriptures and for many Hindus the one they are most likely to possess and be familiar with. Hindus regard the Bhagavad Gita as their holy scripture because of the religious philosophy explained by Lord Krishna within it.

Worship

For most Hindus, there is an emphasis on worship in the home: parents teach their children how to pray. Worship in the mandir, or temple, has some individual elements as well as communal aspects. Many Hindu homes will have a room or a corner of a room set aside for a shrine before which puja, or worship, will be performed. In the mandir in this country there will be several shrines to different gods and goddesses whereas in India each mandir is often devoted to one deity. Communal worship at the mandir usually takes place twice a day. At the mandir, Murtis (images of gods and goddesses) are properly consecrated, whereas they may not be in the home.

Dharma

Dharma is fulfilling the duties of a Hindu, both those that are religious and those that relate to the society and the extended family. There are many important duties such as looking after your dependants, the sick or elderly, those needy in society, avoiding arguments, ahimsa (respect for life) and worshipping.

Karma

Karma is the law of cause and effect. This is the idea that every action has a positive or negative effect. Karma is the sum of everything that an individual does: good and bad.

Samsara

Many Hindus have a belief in the cycle of reincarnation or rebirth known as Samsara. If they lead a good life and fulfil their duties in this life then their next life will be better than their present one. If they lead a bad life and do not fulfil their duties they will be reborn into a life less comfortable. Eventually Hindus hope they will be able to step off the wheel of birth and death and achieve Moksha, spiritual freedom, when the soul or Atman is no longer reborn.

Festivals

There are many festivals and special times which draw together family and community. There are some large community celebrations such as those for Divali and Janamashtami (for example, in Watford, annually, about 60 000 Hindus join the Janamashtami celebrations). Some other important festivals are Navaratri, Holi, Shivaratri and Raksha Bandan.

Samskaras

There are four stages of Hindu life: student, householder, retirement and renunciation. The various samskaras, or ritual steps, are sacraments designed to initiate a new stage of life. Not all of these are carried out by all Hindus. Instead it depends on the family that each person belongs to. There are different ritual steps based around birth and naming, the sacred thread ceremony, marriage and death. For example, the sacred thread ceremony happens at the beginning of the student stage when a boy is starting his education, often aged about seven or above. Within the ceremony a boy is given a thread of cotton with three strands on it. He must wear this and make vows of commitment promising to worship God, to respect holy men and their writing, to honour parents, elders and ancestors and to do his duty to the poor and all living things.

In the UK

Over 800 000 Hindu people live in the UK (Census 2011: 817 000), and Mandirs or temples can be found in many of our diverse cities. Hindu people make an impact in the community in many ways, the most visible of which is probably the celebrations of Divali every autumn. There is hardly a primary school in the country that doesn't engage with Divali!

Hinduism: Some 'Dos and Don'ts'

'Dos'

- ❑ Do teach Hindu diversity. Use phrases like 'Many Hindus...' or 'Most Hindus...' There are very few true sentences that begin 'all Hindus.'
- ❑ Do teach about the 800 000 + Hindus in Britain, and give a local flavour to learning whenever you can. Hindu religion is 'here and now' as well as 'far away and long ago'.
- ❑ Do attempt to introduce pupils to the Hindu idea of one God, Brahman, the World Soul, rather than ever suggesting that Hindus are polytheists, who believe in many gods.
- ❑ Do talk about both 'gods and goddesses' because the feminine energy in Ultimate reality is recognised clearly in Hindu forms of the goddess such as Shakti, Lakshmi, Durga and Ambaji.
- ❑ Do teach about the changing role of caste in Indian society: be cautious about the use of the word 'Harijan' (Children of God) used by Gandhi to describe 'outcasts'. It is now often resented as patronising. 'Dalit people' is the best term to use. Dalit people may be mostly Hindu, but this discrimination is a problem in other religious communities in India too.
- ❑ Do present Hindu worship as something that happens at home even more than at the mandir, and set the whole of the Hindu Dharma in the context of family and community life.
- ❑ Do make sure that children come to understand that Hindu dharma ('the eternal way') is not one unified religion, but perhaps best understood as a lot of religious ideas and practices. Diversity matters even more in Hindu tradition than in other religions.
- ❑ Do use the spelling 'Rama' rather than 'Ram' when writing about the incarnation of the god. This may help avoid unnecessary comments about male sheep.

'Don'ts'

- ❑ Don't say 'All Hindus...'. The only true sentence that starts like this is: 'All Hindus are different'.
- ❑ Don't learn about Hindu India only: there are Hindu communities in Africa, the UK and the Caribbean as well. It is a global religion.
- ❑ Don't concentrate too much on Gandhi: there are other great Hindu spiritual leaders to learn from too, such as Vivekananda, Pandurang Shastri Athavale, Shri Aurobindho, and more contemporary figures.
- ❑ Don't trivialise the concept of Samsara (reincarnation) by suggesting that in one's next life one may be reincarnated as a species other than human e.g. a spider, ant, fly. Although theoretically possible to leap from human to another species Hinduism emphasises that the process is a slow one taking place over hundreds of incarnations.
- ❑ Don't describe the images and paintings of Hindu gods and goddesses as 'idols'. This suggests Hindus literally worship the statue or painting. Hindus use images (properly called 'Murtis') to aid and focus worship.
- ❑ Don't refer to the trimurti in Hinduism of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva as being 'the Hindu Trinity'. The role of these three gods in Hinduism bears no resemblance to the place of the Christian Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit).
- ❑ Don't use photographs of Hindu ascetics or holy men (Sadhus) too casually: it is important to prepare pupils properly when using material which may lay others open to ridicule, so images of people caked in mud, naked, or practicing asceticism should be used very carefully.

Islam

Please note: Muhammad is highly respected by Muslims and it is usual to say the blessing 'peace be upon him' after his name. In text this is often shortened to 'pbuh'. This expression of respect is also used after the name of other prophets. This sign of respect should be inferred throughout this syllabus.

The word Islam means submission or peace. Muhammad was born in the city of Makkah in 570 CE. Muhammad is not seen as the founder of Islam but rather as the final Prophet, the first of whom was Adam. There are many other prophets mentioned in the Qur'an including Ibrahim (Abraham), Musa (Moses) and Isa (Jesus). Prophet Muhammad is known as 'the seal of the prophets'. He is the Last Prophet.

Muhammad was a trader happily married to his wife, Khadija. At the age of 40 he began experiencing a series of revelations from God. These revelations were delivered by the Angel Jibril or Gabriel over a number of years and form the sacred text of the Qur'an. The Quranic text was written down, during the life of the Prophet, although it was compiled as one volume only after his death. The words are regarded as a direct transmission from God Himself. Allah is the Arabic name for God

Prophet Muhammad and his followers were persecuted in Makkah and eventually migrated to Madinah in 622 CE. This was known as the Hijrah. By the time of the Prophet's death in 632 CE, Islam was an established religion in the Arabian peninsula.

The Qur'an and Hadith

The Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad over a 23-year period. Muslims show their love and obedience to God by being obedient to the words in the Qur'an and living as closely as possible to the way the Prophet lived. The Qur'an gives guidance on a range of topics about everyday life, ethical, spiritual, social and moral issues. It is treated with reverence, being handled carefully, and ideally read on a daily basis. Children will often learn to read Arabic and recite the Qur'an at an early age. Recitation is important to Muslims: the words of the Quran have a power when spoken that doesn't go with them being read.

The Hadith are a collection of the sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad. The word Sunnah means 'Way (of the Prophet)', and is the life example of the Prophet as reported in the Hadith. Whereas the Qur'an is seen as the word of God, the Hadith are classified according to various levels of authenticity.

Tawhid

Islam is a monotheistic religion. The concept of Tawhid is the oneness of God. God is more important than everything. God cannot be represented pictorially: any picture would be an inadequate distortion, so Islamic art often uses calligraphy and geometric design to express beauty. The different attributes of God are shown in his 99 beautiful names such as Al-Rahim the most merciful and Al-Hafeez the protector of the weak.

The belief in one God is at the centre of the declaration of faith – the Shahadah.

The Five Pillars of Islam

These provide a structure and a focus for Muslim daily life and worship. Muslims express and uphold their faith by practising these pillars. The Pillars focus belonging, community and worship in relation to time: from daily, to annually, to once in a lifetime, there is a ritual to strengthen the community.

The Shahadah (The declaration of faith)

'There is no god but the One God and Muhammad is the Messenger of God.'

Belief in the oneness of God is the foundation of Islam. The words of the Shahadah form part of the words of the Adhan, which are the first words whispered into the ear of a newborn baby and are also the last words a Muslim will hope to hear before s/he dies.

Salah (Prayer)

The ritual prayers (salah – also referred to as namaz), are offered five times a day. All Muslims are required to pray from the age of about 12. Prayer enables one to develop a closer relationship with God. Prayers are said at specific times of day, (once early in the morning, once in the night and the others dispersed through the day), the times will alter slightly depending on the time of year. At the mosque, Muslims pray in rows behind the Imam, the leader of congregational prayers. Prayer can be carried out anywhere that is clean. Often a prayer mat is used to pray on, but as long as a space is clean it is not essential to use one. Muslims will have to have made Wudhu (ablution), before they pray, so access to water is useful. Muslims face Makkah (towards South East in the UK) when they pray.

Sawm (Fasting)

Many Muslims fast at various times of the year, but the month of Ramadan (the 9th month in the Islamic calendar) has special religious significance. In this month every adult Muslim fasts from dawn until sunset. Fasting involves refraining from eating, drinking, smoking (and other bad habits) and sexual relations. Ramadan is an opportunity to increase one's God consciousness 'taqwa', it is regarded as a time of spiritual discipline that contributes to spiritual growth. There is also a sense of identifying with the poor, and encouraging Muslims to give to the weak and needy. There are exemptions to fasting, for example, for pregnant women, the sick and the elderly, but they must try and make up the time at a later date.

Zakah (Almsgiving)

All Muslims must annually give 2.5 per cent of their savings. This is distributed among the poor and needy. This simple starting point is more complex in practice, where different kinds of wealth attract different levels of Zakah. One impact of the practice of Zakah is that a British charity such as Islamic Relief has an income from donations of over £40 million in a year, used for development work across the world.

Hajj (Pilgrimage to Makkah)

Pilgrimage to Makkah is an obligatory act of worship for those who can afford it and are physically able. All Muslims should try to complete the Hajj once in their lifetime. The pilgrimage takes place in the last month of the Islamic calendar Dhul-Hijjah. During the Pilgrimage, Muslims are required to dress simply, focus on worshipping God and be careful not to argue or lose their temper. This is called being in 'Ihram'. As everyone, rich and poor, black and white, are required to dress in the same way and perform the same rituals, Hajj symbolises simplicity, equality, the cosmopolitan nature of the world in one place, and the unity of humanity.

Festivals

Two very important festivals are Id-ul-Fitr and Id-ul-Adha. **Id-ul-Fitr** celebrates the end of the fast of Ramadan. This is a time to ask for forgiveness, thank God for everything He has blessed one with and share in congregational prayers. Special food is prepared and shared with family and friends. Presents are given and new clothes are often bought. This is also a time when Muslims will visit the cemetery and remember dead family and friends. **Id-ul-Adha** celebrates the devotion shown to God by his Prophet Abraham to sacrifice his son Isma'il. God ordered that a lamb was sacrificed instead of Isma'il and so this festival is about devotion to God. In keeping with this practice of Abraham, animals are sacrificed and distributed to family, neighbours, and the poor, or money is given to charities who will ensure a sacrifice is made and given to the poor on your behalf.

In the UK:

The Muslim communities of the UK have grown rapidly in recent decades, and now number well over 2½ million people (Census 2011: 2 700 000). That's about 4.8% of the UK population. Most of these people are British born Muslims. Over 1700 mosques provide for Muslim worship and community association in the UK.

Islam: Some 'Dos and Don'ts'

'Dos'

- Do teach pupils about the origin and spread of Islam as a world religion: the second largest on the planet, a religion that means 'peace'.
- Do use original Islamic materials such as stories of the Prophet wherever possible.
- Do store a Qur'an carefully, ideally wrapped and placed on a high shelf away from dirt and danger and, when showing it to pupils, use a Qur'an stand to hold it. Model respect and you will teach respect.
- Do be cautious about asking Muslim children to do certain forms of artwork. Patterns, buildings and landscapes are usually acceptable but representing animals or humans may not be. Never ask them to 'draw God'. No image of Allah is allowed in Islam – it would be too far from the truth.
- Do stress the important cultural and intellectual contributions Muslims have made in fields such as science, mathematics, language etc.
- Do prepare pupils before exposing them to recordings of the Call to Prayer or reciting from the Qur'an. They may be beautiful, but strange to untrained Western ears.
- Do be careful about references to pigs or pork with Muslim pupils, who may be taught that pigs are unclean animals, to be avoided in all forms.
- Do be careful of photos of Shi'a Muslims commemorating the martyrdom of Imam Hussein. Participants often cut themselves, which appears gruesome and detracts from the reasons behind it.
- Do prepare pupils before visiting a mosque: girls should cover their heads and wear calf length skirts or better still trousers; boys should cover their heads and all will be expected to remove their shoes, sitting with feet pointing towards the Mihrab, in other words towards Makkah, should be avoided.
- Do choose pictures of Muslims praying carefully; show a variety of different positions, not simply 'rear views'.

'Don'ts'

- Don't ever equate Islam with terrorism and violence. Try to help pupils understand the Islamic meaning of 'Jihad'. The greater Jihad refers to striving along a spiritual path. The lesser Jihad refers to using force to defend Islam against attack. The word 'Islam' means 'peace'.
- Don't describe Muhammad as 'the founder of Islam'. Muslims believe he is the last and final Prophet of Islam but that their faith preceded him and goes back through a long chain of Prophets to Adam and the beginnings of human kind.
- Don't refer to Allah as 'the Muslim God'. Muslims believe Abraham, Moses and Jesus worshipped the same God. 'Allah' is the Arabic word for 'God'.
- Don't use the archaic terms 'Muhammadanism' or 'Muhammadan'; these suggest devotion to Muhammad rather than submission to God. Use 'Islam' and 'Muslims' instead.
- Don't touch a Qur'an (or Arabic extract) with dirty hands, place it on a floor or a dirty surface, put things on top of it or leave it open on a stand as an exhibit.
- Don't portray Muhammad or his Companions, in drama or role play or use illustrations which claim to show Muhammad or his Companions either in outline or with faces blanked out as in some forms of Persian art.
- Don't liken Wudu to Christian Baptism. It is a preparation for prayer, not a ritual marking initiation as in Christianity.
- Don't say Muhammad 'fled' from Makkah to Madinah as it suggests cowardice. He left as part of an organised 'emigration'.
- Don't dwell on historical differences which resulted in bloodshed e.g. the crusades. To what extent some of these were religiously motivated is debatable.
- Don't allow pupils to believe killing a sheep or goat at Id-ul-Adha is a sacrifice to a bloodthirsty God. It is a reminder of the story of Abraham and Isma'il. The killing of an animal results in a sacrifice of generosity which feeds many.

Non religious world views

RE is for pupils who do not identify with a faith tradition as much as it is for those with a faith background. From Key Stage 2 onwards, in Walsall, RE therefore needs to consider appropriate alternative belief systems to religion which exist in modern Britain. It is not only religions that regard ethics as central to life, there are many philosophies that encourage their followers to live life mindful of others' needs. These different philosophies can be grouped under the title of non religious ethical life stances including a broad range of ideologies such as Humanism, agnosticism and atheism. Pupils who call themselves atheist or agnostic do not necessarily identify themselves as Humanists. In the wider British population, there are very large numbers of people who describe themselves as 'spiritual but not religious.' Children and young people who see their identity in these terms have the same rights as Christians, Muslims or Humanists to have their learning needs provided for in publicly funded schools.

Humanism

Humanists believe that human nature is remarkable but not created by god or any other divine being. People must rely on humanity not god to support them in life thus human reason, goodwill and science are the key to dealing with life's issues and dilemmas. Humanists value truthfulness, justice, freedom and happiness as positive values and aims in life. Humanists do not refer to religious texts or authorities when making moral decisions but to their own reason.

Humanists believe it is a reasoned sense of goodness that should support decision making of the right path to follow for individuals and other people. When considering ethics and ethical decisions humanists believe we should look at individual cases, considering carefully the individual situation and the effect of possible choices on the well being of people animal, the environment and the wider community. When making ethical decisions humanists try to follow the golden rule - treat other people as you would like them to treat you.

Humanists believe we should enjoy the positive things in life if it is possible to do that without harming the environment or other people. Humanists believe it is important to make responsible choices. Humanists believe in active citizenship and will often be found campaigning against something they have decided is unjust.

Secular ceremonies for weddings, baby welcoming and funerals, are popular for humanists and others who want to celebrate or mark these significant life events without using religious texts, buildings or leaders. There are generally local celebrants and the British Humanist Association provides texts to support these ceremonies.

In the classroom

www.humanismforschools.org.uk

Humanism and non religious world views will be referred to in many lessons as you will be bringing in the experience of the pupils in your class as well as reflecting the beliefs of the community. A more formal study of Humanism might include reference to beliefs and values, finding out about humanist ceremonies and ethical activities and for older pupils learning about contemporary humanist figures.

In the UK

The British Humanist Association has 28 000 'members and supporters'. While this is a small number in comparison to all the religious groups above, there are of course very many more who seek to live a non-religious ethical way, but don't formally identify with humanism. 25% of the population in the 2011 census said they were non-religious. Teachers of RE do well to think through the variety of non-religious identities: atheists, people who call themselves 'spiritual but not religious', and agnostics of various kinds are not one homogenous group. It's so valuable to have different voices from beyond religion in the RE classroom!

Non-religious world views: Dos and Don'ts for the teachers

Do:	Don't:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Teach pupils about non-religious ideas to do with life's big questions alongside religious ideas in RE wherever this is appropriate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Don't make presumptions about the stance pupils or their families may have towards religion or belief: many non-religious people may be 'spiritual but not religious' and others may feel close to 'Humanism with a capital H' – but not belong to it.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Do teach about non-religious ways of living from an early age. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Don't think that RE should leave Humanism or Atheism for the older pupil. It is part of life. Young children benefit for learning about non-religious ways of living.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Do think carefully about when to introduce non-religious belief in RE. Do recognise that excluding the non-religious pupil in the classroom is bad RE. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> The syllabus says pupils can study non-religious ideas and ways of living 'when appropriate' Don't imagine this means the sixth form! This is appropriate in any age group.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Use insiders' ideas, e.g. from the British Humanist Association, to present non-religious ways of life. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Don't support or give the impression that believing in God or a religion is 'normal' and being non-religious is 'not normal.' Humanism is a permanent alternative to religion.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Do present non-religious ways of living in a positive light, as you would when introducing a new religion to pupils, and show that a non-religious ethical life stance is common in Britain today. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Don't ever give the impression that being non-religious is less likely to lead to a life of kindness or goodness than being religious. This is unfair. Many non-religious people live moral lives that should shame some religious people!
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Do enable pupils to learn about critiques of religion, arguments against faith in God or life after death and the view that religion is a negative factor in human life. Developing critical skills in relation to different views is part of RE's core purpose. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Don't shy away from negative arguments about a world view. Give pupils the mental tools to explore truth claims and ideas for themselves, and to set aside woolly thinking or unthinking prejudice about religion and belief.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Do teach about the diversity of atheism and agnosticism. For example, many people are non-religious but describe their lives as 'spiritual' while some atheists think 'spirituality' is a meaningless word. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Don't suggest that all atheists are the same. There is as much variety (at least) in non-religious belief as in different religions, and agnostics, atheists and others all see the world individually.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Do teach pupils about the ways ritual, celebration, and marking key events may be done by non-religious people, e.g. in a civil wedding, on a 'big day' like new year, or for the birth of a baby. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Don't give the impression that religion is better than non-religious ways of life.

Judaism

Judaism is the oldest of the three monotheistic religions and its origins are 4000 years ago in the time of the Patriarchs: Abraham, his son Isaac and his son Jacob. The name Judaism is derived from Judah, one of the 12 sons of Jacob.

There are three particularly important features in Judaism:

- belief in one God;
- the Torah;
- the community and their land.

Belief in one God

Jews believe in a creator God who made humans in the image of himself. They believe that we cannot know what God looks like and so no visual representation of God will be found in synagogues or homes. Many Jewish people believe the name of God is too sacred to pronounce.

The words of the Shema are at the centre of Jewish belief. The opening of the Shema is, 'Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength.'

The Torah

The contents of the Torah is at the centre of Judaism as it embodies the covenant that Jewish people made with God in which God promised to give the land of Canaan to Abraham and look after his descendants. The teaching in the Torah, which means instruction, contains 613 commandments. The most well known of these are the Ten Commandments, which were given to Moses.

Jews have other important teachings which together make up the Tenakh or written Torah. These are:

- Torah – five books of Moses;
- Nevi'im – the books of the Prophets;
- Ketuvim – the holy writings.

The initials of each of these, T, N, K, make up the word Tenakh.

Also important is the Talmud which is known as the oral law.

The Torah is written in Hebrew, and in Orthodox synagogues it is read in Hebrew. The Torah is written on a set of parchment scrolls by a qualified scribe. Scrolls are treated with respect and are dressed in various items before being placed in the Ark of the Covenant in the synagogue. A Torah scroll is covered with a mantle, it has a silver breast plate, a yad or pointer is used when reading the scrolls, and bells or crowns are placed on the wooden rollers. The Ark is situated so that worshippers look towards the holy city of Jerusalem when they are facing it. It takes one year to complete a reading of the Torah and the festival of Simchat Torah celebrates the completion of this annual reading. This festival is full of joy with Torah scrolls processed or danced around the synagogue.

The community and their land

The Jewish identity is very important and at times this has been a challenge as Jews have faced oppression. The land of Israel is a holy site for Jews, wherever they live in the world. Jews believe it was promised to them by God through the promise to Abraham and his descendants. There are many sites of pilgrimage in Jerusalem, the most important of which is the Western Wall, which formed part of the second temple in Jerusalem.

The family and the wider Jewish community are essential to living a Jewish life. The Kashrut or Jewish food laws play an important part in the daily lives of Jews, reminding them of their covenant with God. Foods which are fit to be eaten are called kosher. Food which is unfit to be eaten is called treyfah. In order to be kosher only certain types of meat and fish can be eaten and they must be killed in a special way. Meat and dairy products must not be eaten at the same meal and separate kitchen utensils and

crockery are used for these different types of food. Several hours must elapse between the eating of a meat meal and a dairy meal.

Many Jewish festivals are based around the home as much as the synagogue, showing the importance of the family in Judaism. Each week the Shabbat meal is celebrated at home on a Friday evening. This is followed by a day of rest with the family and a time to worship God.

Festivals

Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are two important festivals. Rosh Hashanah is the Jewish New Year, which is celebrated in September or October. It is a time for thinking about the achievements of the past year and considering plans for the next year. Yom Kippur is the Day of Atonement. It begins at sunset, ten days after Rosh Hashanah. Many Jews fast for 25 hours. It is vital for Jews to forgive one another for anything they have done wrong before the beginning of Yom Kippur. There are many other festivals, including Pesach (Passover) and Hanukkah (festival of lights).

In the UK

A Jewish population of around $\frac{1}{4}$ of a million in the UK is very concentrated in London and Manchester - the establishment of Jewish schools can mean that few Jewish children attend community schools. This makes it important for the teacher of RE to take note of local synagogues: there are over 400 in the UK. The history of the Jewish community in the UK is interesting and an important topic for study. This will include the impact of anti-semitism on the Jewish community both within the UK and for example from wider Europe in the 1930s and 40s. But learning about the holocaust in isolation from understanding the wide and deep tradition of Jewish life leaves pupils with distortions in their understanding. Remember this is RE.

There are large Jewish populations in London (over 150 000) and Greater Manchester (over 25 000) in particular.

Judaism: Some 'Dos and Don'ts'

'Dos'

- ❑ Do picture the Jewish religion as alive and well in the UK today, as well as attending to the history and global geography of Jewish people.
- ❑ Do describe the first 39 books of the Bible as being 'the Jewish Bible' or 'the Tenakh'. In a Jewish context, they should not be referred to as the Old Testament, which is the Christian term for these books.
- ❑ Do attempt to describe the joyous nature of Judaism. Although Judaism is based on fulfilling the 613 mitzvot, these are not to be seen as a burden but undertaken with sincere intention (kavanah) and often with joy.
- ❑ Do follow the convention of many Jewish writers in their use of BCE (Before the Common Era) and CE (Common Era) when giving dates. The use of BC (Before Christ) and AD (Anno Domini) might be seen to assume Christian beliefs in an unhelpful manner when teaching Judaism.
- ❑ Do be cautious about using the term 'Jews'. The word developed a pejorative tone particularly under the Nazis. Many members of the faith prefer the term 'the Jewish people'.
- ❑ Do ensure all pupils cover their heads when visiting a synagogue.
- ❑ Do use the term the 'Western Wall' when referring to the remains of the Temple in Jerusalem. The 'Wailing Wall' might be considered to have negative overtones.
- ❑ Do study the holocaust in RE, with an emphasis on religious and spiritual questions: e.g. how and why did Jewish people practice the faith under the Nazis? What varied impacts on Jewish belief in the Almighty did the holocaust have?

'Don'ts'

- ❑ Don't equate the teaching of Bible stories with teaching Judaism. RE should also take into account the life, beliefs and practices of those in the Jewish community today.
- ❑ Don't make use of 'Yahweh' or 'Jehovah' with reference to God. The Hebrew letters standing for God YHWH were never spoken out loud, instead, phrases like 'the Eternal', 'the Holy One', 'King of the Universe' are used.
- ❑ Don't depict contemporary Judaism as the legalistic, narrow minded Pharisaic form of religion sometimes portrayed in the New Testament (the early Christian depiction of Judaism was not always sympathetic or very accurate: don't rely on it).
- ❑ Don't confuse the Menorah, the seven branched candelabrum and symbol of Judaism with the Hanukiah, the nine branched candelabrum used at the festival of Hanukkah.
- ❑ Don't suggest that Moses on Sinai received only the Ten Commandments. In Jewish belief Moses was given God's Law, the torah, containing the 613 commandments (mitzvot).
- ❑ Don't always or too often see the Jewish religion through the lens of the holocaust. Jewish people presented as victims of Nazi atrocity should not be the main or the only encounter pupils have with the religion.
- ❑ Don't over-emphasise or ignore the place of anti-semitic persecutions. Instead, let Jewish voices speak for themselves about the faith, the tradition and the persecutions.

Sikhism

Central to Sikhism is a belief in one God. God is described by Sikhs as Truth, Eternal and Creator. These beliefs are reflected in the Mool Mantar, an important part of the Sikh holy book which is regularly used in worship.

Sikhs believe in equality, which is essential for ethical decision making. All people are equal, whether male or female, Sikh or follower of a different belief system. Sikhs show their belief in equality in many ways, for example, anyone can eat in the langar, the free kitchen provided after every service in the gurdwara. Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Guru, said that there is no difference between a temple and a mosque, or between the prayers of a Hindu and those of a Muslim.

The concept of service, sewa, is essential to Sikhs. There are many different types of service: manual service, such as preparing and serving food in the langar, or cleaning the shoes of the worshippers; or charitable service, such as giving money or goods to charity; or intellectual service, such as teaching children about Sikhism or showing adults around the gurdwara.

Sikhs should take part in honest work. This is work that is needed for the good of both the family and the wider community. Work should not exploit others. This links with the ideas of equality and the idea of generosity of possessions and time.

The Mool Mantar (an interpretation in English)

‘There is one God
Truth by name
Maker of all things
Fearing nothing and at enmity with nothing
Timeless is his image
Not subject to the circle of birth and death
Self existent
By the grace of the Gurus
Made known to men.’

The Sikh Gurus

Guru Nanak was the first of the Sikh Gurus, born in 1469, and it was his teachings that were the beginnings of the Sikh religion. There have been ten Gurus, who Sikhs believe conveyed God's word to their age.

Guru Nanak (1469 to 1539)

With a few disciples, he devoted himself to meditation on the name of God and writing hymns to help believers reach out to God. He travelled widely, teaching through the words he had written. He shaped the Mool Mantar.

Guru Angad (1504 to 1574)

Created the script in which the scriptures are written.

Guru Amar Das (1534 to 1581)

He taught the practice of the sharing of a common meal in the langar.

Guru Ram Das (1534 to 1581)

Founded the city of Amritsar and built a shrine which has now grown into the Golden Temple.

Guru Arjan (1563 to 1606)

He collected together the hymns of the first four Gurus, which became the Adi Granth, the first part of the Guru Granth Sahib. He was the first Guru martyr when he was killed by Emperor Jehangir.

Guru Har Gobind (1595 to 1644)

He taught Sikhs to stand up against oppression and injustice and instituted the Nishan Sahib.

Guru Hari Rai (1630 to 1661)

Guru Har Krishan (1656 to 1664)

Guru Tegh Bahadar (1621 to 1675)

He was killed for sharing his belief that everyone should be free to worship God in any way that they choose.

Guru Gobind Singh (1666 to 1708)

He created the Khalsa in April 1699 at the festival of Baisakhi. He said that after him there would be no more human Gurus and that from then on the Guru Granth Sahib was the place to look for spiritual guidance.

The Guru Granth Sahib

This written text is the sacred book of Sikhism, but is revered and treated as a living guru, and is a guide for Sikhs after the time of the first Ten Gurus. It is a collection of hymns and words of the Gurus. It is considered to be the last Guru and so is treated carefully with respect and honour. It is held high above the head when it is moved and put on a bed in its own special room at night. When it is being used in worship it is positioned higher than the worshippers. A book of extracts from the holy book is called a Gutka and many Sikhs find this easier to keep at home than a full Guru Granth Sahib.

The Gurdwara

This means house of the Guru and is the place where the Guru Granth Sahib is housed and is also a place of worship. The Nishan Sahib, the Sikh flag, is flown, declaring freedom of worship and the availability of hospitality. It is also the focus of life for the Sikh community where religious teaching takes place and many other community activities.

The Five Ks

In 1699 Guru Gobind Singh instituted the Khalsa, a group of committed Sikhs. To show their commitment they were to wear a number of symbols: the five Ks.

1. **Kesh** – Uncut hair. A man will cover his uncut hair with a turban.
2. **Kangha** – A small comb which keeps the hair in place.
3. **Kara** – A steel bracelet which is worn on the right wrist. It is a symbol of the oneness of God.
4. **Kachera** – Shorts which are worn under clothes to symbolise action. In the Punjab they would have allowed for freedom of movement and modesty.
5. **Kirpan** – A sword which a Sikh should always carry to symbolise the readiness to defend the faith or use against oppression.

Sikhs who join the Khalsa take part in an initiation ceremony called the Amrit ceremony. Joining the Khalsa means someone making promises that require a high level of commitment to the faith and in their own personal life.

Festivals

There are two different types of festivals. Gurpurbs are holy days related to the life of a Guru, such as the birthday of Guru Nanak. Melas are days that coincide with a Hindu festival but are also significant because of something that happened during the life of one of the Gurus, for example Divali when Guru Har Gobind was freed from prison having negotiated the release of all the other prisoners.

In the UK

There are nearly half a million Sikh people in the UK, and over 250 Gurdwaras have been established over the last 50 years. The world population of Sikhs is about 24 000 000.

Sikhism: Some 'Dos and Don'ts'

'Dos'

- ❑ Do present Sikh faith as alive and well in the UK today. There are over half a million Sikhs in this country. Use local examples wherever possible.
- ❑ Do be careful when showing pupils the 5 K's of Sikhism. In particular, showing the 'kachs' can result in poor responses from pupils. Some introduction to the origins of this form of symbolic underwear and its practical significance may help avoid such a response.
- ❑ Do talk to pupils about receiving karah prashad prior to visiting a gurdwara. This is a sacred food offered to each member of the congregation at the end of worship and also to visitors. It isn't to everyone's taste and it would be impolite to be seen to be throwing it away after accepting it. Decisions about the appropriateness of taking karah prasad should be made before the visit takes place, in conversation with your hosts.
- ❑ Do talk to children before they visit about bowing in front of the Guru Granth Sahib. Some people do this as a mark of respects to Sikhs and Sikhism. Others decline because it feels to them like worshipping in the Sikh faith.
- ❑ Do brief pupils about how they should sit when visiting a Gurdwara. Feet should not be pointed towards the Guru Granth Sahib and boys and girls should expect to be seated separately. Boys and girls should cover their heads and girls should wear calf length skirts or, better still, trousers.

'Don'ts'

- ❑ Don't use three-dimensional images of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh. They resemble too closely images of gods and goddesses used by Hindus. Sikhs have expressed the fear that people will equate the place of the Guru in Sikhism with the place of the gods in Hinduism. The Gurus are great and admired human teachers of truth.
- ❑ Don't refer to the Amrit Ceremony as being the 'Sikh Baptism'. The two rituals are not good parallels. Generally, avoid describing one religion in terms of another. Use general language: 'initiation ceremonies'.
- ❑ Don't use the term 'Granth' by itself. It should be accompanied by the honorific titles such as 'Guru Granth Sahib' or 'Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji'.
- ❑ Don't call the kirpan, one of the 5 K's of Sikhism, a 'dagger'. However small, it is a 'sword' and should be introduced in the Sikh context as a noble weapon, in keeping with the Sikh notion of the 'saintly knight' and the importance of defending truth and justice.
- ❑ Don't refer to the chauri as a 'fly whisk'. It is a fan and is used to symbolise the authority of the Guru Granth Sahib.
- ❑ Don't call a kara a 'bracelet' as it suggests that it is merely decorative. 'Bangle' isn't much better. It is a 'steel band'.
- ❑ Don't ask people to act out the role of a guru in a drama or play. This would be seen by some Sikhs as disrespectful.

RE Today Services would like to thank all those members of the different communities who have contributed to this document and invite you to submit improvements to use in any future edition.

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