

A Guide to

# Faith Communities

in  
Scotland



# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Buddhism</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Christianity</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Hinduism</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Islam</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Judaism</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Sikhism</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>The Baha'i Faith</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Brahma Kumaris</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Paganism</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Meeting People of Different Faiths</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Contacts</b>	<b>24</b>

# Introduction



***This booklet has been prepared by the Scottish Inter Faith Council to provide basic information on some of the 'faith communities' who live and worship in Scotland.***

The multi-religious nature of Scottish society is now widely accepted and promoted by various individuals, groups, organisations and institutions. The need to be respectful of, and understand, this diversity is also acknowledged by the Scottish Government and is recognised to be fundamental to the harmony of society whether in a global, national or local context.

It is important that individuals and organisations, particularly those professionally associated with public life in Scotland have some knowledge of the different faith traditions operating in Scotland, and it is hoped that they, and the general public, will find this booklet helpful.

The booklet has been designed to include general information on the basic beliefs, customs and practices, places of worship, main festivals, food and diet and community concerns of *Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Muslims, Jews, Sikhs,*

*Baha'is, Brahma Kumaris and Pagans.* This is not a complete picture of the religious communities in Scotland as there is diversity within the religions mentioned and there are also religions not included in this basic booklet.

## **Inter Faith Initiatives in Scotland**

Since the historic *World Parliament of Religions* held in Chicago at the end of the 19th Century there has been growing awareness that we inhabit a world of many faiths. This awareness has gradually resulted in the growth of inter faith initiatives and bi-lateral religious dialogue groups throughout the United Kingdom. In Scotland such groups have been operating since the 1970s.

Scotland is also home to *The St. Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art*. Opened in Glasgow in 1993, this unique museum aims to promote mutual understanding and respect between people of different faiths and of none.



It is clear that world events abroad influence relationships at home and so the ethos of inter faith, which includes developing understanding, respect and dialogue between religions is critical in the creation of a peaceful and inclusive Scotland.

**The Scottish Inter Faith Council**

The *Scottish Inter Faith Council* was officially launched in 1999 by Patricia Ferguson, the then Deputy Presiding Officer of the new Scottish Parliament. As well as promoting better understanding between faith communities the SIFC can function as a vehicle of communication between the Scottish Government and the various communities living in Scotland. Collectively it represents a major cross section of the faith communities in Scotland and its representative members are committed to the process of developing inter faith structures at both local and national levels. The *Scottish Inter Faith Council* encourages and supports initiatives aimed at increasing mutual understanding and respect between the members of all religious communities.

The *Scottish Inter Faith Council* is dedicated in its work to break down and diffuse barriers of discrimination and prejudice and promote tolerance and acceptance within society.

The **2001 Census** section on religious affiliation gives the following statistics for members of religious faiths in Scotland:

Faith Community	Members
Buddhist	6,380
Christian	3,294,545
Hindu	5,564
Jew	6,448
Muslim	42,557
Sikh	6,572
Other	26,974

# Buddhism

## Introduction

*Buddhism is based on the teachings of the Buddha Shakyamuni who lived in Northern India about 2500 years ago. A Buddha is to be revered, not as a God, but as an example of how we should all aspire to live our lives.*



## Basic Beliefs

The essence of Buddha is within each of us and we can all attain our Buddhahood through sincere practice of the eight-fold path, which includes virtuous conduct such as compassion and generosity, meditation and the cultivation of wisdom. Many Buddhists are believers in spiritual rebirth but this is understood as a causal connection between lives rather than the transmigration or reincarnation of an unchanging individual soul. For most Western Buddhists faith in the efficacy of following the eight-fold path is more central than assent to specific verbal formulations of religious belief.

## Customs and Practices

Although it is particularly strong in northern areas of the Indian sub-continent and in some parts of South East Asia, Buddhism is a world wide religion. Many Eastern Buddhist traditions started becoming established in the West during the 20th Century. This was the case in Scotland where we now have perhaps as many as ten schools from several traditions represented.

These include the ***Theravadan tradition*** (originally mainly from India, Sri Lanka, Burma and Thailand) which has meditation groups in several Scottish cities; the ***Tibetan tradition***, (which has a wide influence through northern India, and China to Mongolia) of which three schools are active, the best known being the *Kagyu school* with its main centre at *Samye Ling* near Langholm and meditation groups in most main Scottish cities; and the ***Zen Buddhist*** tradition, (which originated in China, spread to Korea, Japan and Malaysia) and is most strongly represented in Scotland by the *Soto Zen School* which has a priory in Edinburgh and meditation groups in several cities.



In addition, a specifically Western development of Buddhism is represented in Scotland by the *Western Buddhist Order* which has centres in Glasgow and Edinburgh, a retreat centre near Callander and meditation groups in several other cities.

As indicated by the frequent mention of meditation groups, there is a strong emphasis in the western development of Buddhism on the centrality of meditation practice.

### **Places of Worship**

The term “worship” is not really appropriate to Buddhism, where there is no belief in a separate creator god. Buddhist temples, centres or meeting places are where Buddhists gather to meditate, study, chant or pray together.

There are a number of such centres in Scotland ranging from the large Tibetan tradition temple at *Samye Ling* together with its retreat centre on *Holy Island* and the *Glasgow Buddhist Centre* to smaller institutions and retreat centres in Portobello, Dundee and elsewhere. Some groups make use of hired premises or meet together in private homes.

### **Main Festivals**

Buddhists have many celebrations throughout the year. These generally commemorate particular

events of the Buddha’s life and include his birth (*Wesak*), his enlightenment, the day of his first teaching (*Dharma Day*) and his death (*Parinirvana*). The dates of these events are generally expressed through the lunar calendar and there is some variation between the different traditions. Some Buddhists may also fast on *New Moon* and *Full Moon days*.

### **Food and Diet**

Although their high valuation of life and their rejection of violence means that some Buddhists are vegetarian, this is not always the case.

### **Concerns of the Community**

One of the steps on the *Eight-Fold Noble Path* is the practice of “right livelihood” and this has promoted a tendency in western Buddhists to seek employment within what are referred to as the “caring professions”. They also support such initiatives within the community as *Angulimala*, the Buddhist Prison chaplaincy service, and hospital chaplaincy. A significant proportion of Buddhists are also actively engaged in movements promoting justice and peace.

# Christianity

## Introduction

*Christianity was founded in what is today modern day Israel and Palestine around 2000 years ago. It is based on the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, known as Christ. This means "the anointed one", and Christians believe Jesus to be the Son of God. Christians see themselves as following in the way of Jesus who revealed the forgiving love of God for all people and God's concern for human beings.*

## Basic Beliefs

At the centre of Christian belief is Jesus who is regarded as the revelation of God. For many Christians this revelation is such that he is understood to be the very incarnation of God. In Jesus, Christians come to know something of the nature of God who is seen as loving and forgiving. Jesus is regarded as the one who has transformed human nature so that it need no longer follow its sinful inclinations but rather lead a life of love and service. Their experience of God in Jesus has led them to see God as a community of three persons, *Father, Son and Holy Spirit*, called the *Trinity*. Christians believe that the world was created by God and will be brought to its fulfilment at the end of time. In the mean time they believe in the presence and support of God's spirit, present among all.



The Christian holy book is called the *Bible* and is in two parts. The first, which equates roughly to the Jewish bible, has been called the *Old Testament*. The second is the *New Testament* which contains the *Gospels* (records of Jesus' life and his teachings), the *Acts of the Apostles*, the writings of *St. Paul* and some other works.



## Customs and Practice

Individuals are admitted into the Christian Church through baptism which can take place in childhood or adulthood. The central ritual of much Christian worship is *Holy Communion* or *Eucharist* which is a sharing of bread and wine in memory of Jesus' last supper with his disciples. This action unites Christians in a symbolic or sacramental way with the death and resurrection of Jesus and one another. It can also act as a recommitment to follow in the path set out by Jesus' life and example. Private prayer and meditation is important to Christians in their daily life.

## Places of Worship

The Christian holy day takes place on a Sunday when congregations gather in churches to worship and celebrate Holy Communion. In the Catholic tradition this takes place weekly and even daily while in some protestant churches it takes place on a monthly basis or even annually.

## Main Festivals

Important dates in the Christian Calendar include *Christmas*, the celebration of Jesus' birth (25 December), and the central Christian feast of *Easter* that commemorates the death (on Good Friday) and resurrection (on Easter Sunday) of Jesus. The exact dates for Easter vary from

year to year but are usually around the end of March or the beginning to the middle of April. The forty days before Easter are known as *Lent* and it is common for many Christians to make some form of self-sacrifice during this time, such as fasting or going without something for this period. It is also a time for increased prayer and helping others. *Pentecost*, which celebrates the coming of God's spirit, and is thought of as the birth of the church, is also an important festival.

## Food and Diet

In Christianity, all is seen as a gift of God. This means that no food is seen as unclean but everything is to be enjoyed in moderation and gratitude. Fasting on particular days and at particular times of the year is also common.

## Concerns of the Community

Christians are concerned about working for the values of God's kingdom on Earth: justice, peace and reconciliation. They are concerned for justice for all people and so are involved with justice, peace and development issues. Working together with others for the common good of the nation and the world is important for them.

# Hinduism

## Introduction

*The Hindu tradition has no founder and is best understood as a group of closely connected religious traditions rather than a single religion. It represents a complete way of life. Hindus believe in one God and worship that one God under many manifestations or images. They believe that all prayers addressed to any form or manifestation will ultimately reach the one God. Hinduism does not prescribe any particular dogmas; rather it asks individuals to worship God according to their own belief. It therefore allows a great deal of freedom in matters of faith and worship.*

## Basic Beliefs

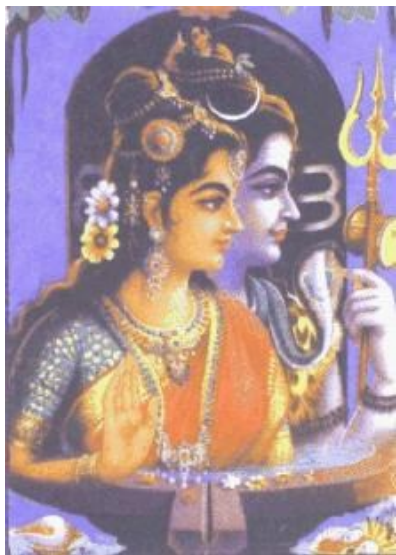
Hindus consider that religion is a sanctified and disciplined path one should follow to reach a higher level of consciousness or goal, i.e. to become a better person. This can only be done by following the path of *Dharma*. Dharma is at the heart of Hinduism which is often called the *Sanatana Dharma*. Dharma means the ancient law which underlies the order of the universe and is reflected in a moral and ethical life. Hindus believe in the *law of karma* - a simple law of cause and effect. "As you sow, so shall you reap". They also believe in the divine nature of the soul, which is indestructible and immortal. It

transmigrates from body to body depending on the merits and sins of one's actions (*karma*) accumulated in a lifetime. In the end, one's *karma* (action) determines one's future rebirth.

Hindus further believe in the descent (*avatar*) of Divinity to protect the righteous and destroy the unrighteous. There have been several examples of this in Hinduism including *Rama*, *Krishna* and *Buddha*. They serve as an example and inspiration for pious Hindus. In one sense Hindus accept the prophets of all religions as manifestations or avatars of God and recognise the presence of God in all living beings.

## Customs and Practices

Prayer and the reading of the Holy Scriptures, which give Hindus an example of how they should live, are important practices. Worship or veneration of the divine image takes place around a shrine morning or evening in devout Hindu homes. There are two kinds of scripture in Hinduism: the holiest texts, called the *Vedas*, and the great epics of the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*. The *Bhagavad Gita*, which is part of the *Mahabharata*, is a very popular text in the West. Hindus follow the lunar calendar and particular days are set aside during the week and month to honour particular manifestations of God.



### Places of Worship

Hindus frequently view systematic organisation with some mistrust, believing it to be often showy and wasteful. Likewise, worship and general religious activity are commonly centred around the home. However Hindu temples or *Mandirs*, which have a priest, educated in the scriptures, do have public worship twice daily and Sunday has become a day for communal worship and activity. Only trained priests are able to perform religious ceremonies on special occasions though anyone may perform *puja*.

### Main Festivals

There are many religious festivals which are celebrated in different ways by different communities. The

most commonly celebrated festivals are *Diwali* (or *Deepavali*), the *Festival of Lights*, and *Navratri*, nine nights during which goddesses such as *Durga*, the Great Mother, are worshipped. This takes place over nine days and nights twice a year.

### Food and Diet

The influence of charity is apparent in the importance attached to hospitality: every pious Hindu is expected to keep some food aside for an unexpected guest and no-one should ever be turned away hungry. The reverence for life surfaces again in the concept of *ahimsa* (non-injury), one of the highest principles which encourages many Hindus to be vegetarian.

### Concerns of the Community

Hindus should show love and respect for all beings as a way of recognising the divinity within all creatures. Charity is extremely important. It is generally practiced in a discreet, individual manner, and is seen as a means of extending the natural love for the family into the wider community. Hindus also have a concern for the future of their young people and offering support to all members of their community, particularly vulnerable groups such as the elderly.

# Islam

## Introduction

*The Muslims' religion and way of life spiritually and materially, is Islam. Islam is an Arabic word which means submission to God. The root of the word Islam comes from a word meaning peace and it is the way of peace as is laid down in the Quran. The word can also mean submission and it is through submission to God's will that a Muslim finds peace. Islam is a world religion that originated in the Middle East in the seventh century CE. Now it is practised by about a fifth of the world's population.*

*Muslims originally came to live in Scotland in the early 1940's mainly from Pakistan or India. Thereafter others came from East Africa and the Middle East.*

## Basic Beliefs

At the heart of Muslim belief is belief in the unity and universality of God. The Arabic word *ALLAH* means the One God. Muslims also believe in the unity of mankind, under one father, *Adam*, and have a strong sense of the Muslim community or *Ummah* and are aware of their solidarity with all Muslims worldwide. Muslims recognise the prophets such as *Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Moses and Jesus*, and see *Mohammed (peace be upon him)* as the last and final prophet. Mohammed (pbuh) was born in *Makkah* in 570 CE. He

received the Holy revelation from God through the *Angel Gabriel* over a period of 23 years. This revelation was recorded in Islam's Holy Book known as the *Quran*, which is regarded as the literal word of God. Muslims are taught to recite the *Quran* in Arabic as any translation of the Holy Book is seen as inadequate.

## Customs and Practices

Islam has two principal bases of faith. The first is that there is no god worthy of worship but the one universal God (*Allah*), creator and sustainer of all beings. The second is that *Mohammed* (pbuh) is his messenger. Islam has *five pillars* that represent the foundation stones of Islamic worship and action:

**Shahadah:** There is no God but the one true God and *Mohammed* is his messenger. Reciting this with intention three times makes someone a Muslim.

**Salat: Prayer** takes place five times a day at given times. It involves a prescribed sequence of kneeling and standing postures and is made facing *Makkah*.

**Zakat:** Two and a half percentage of a Muslim's assets over a given specified amount is given in welfare tax to benefit the poor and needy each year.



**Haji:** This is an annual pilgrimage to *Makkah* which takes place at a fixed time of the calendar. It is a requirement at least once in a lifetime for those who can afford it.

**Sawm:** During the month of *Ramadan* Muslims are required to abstain from food, drink and sexual acts from dawn till sunset. The ill, old and travellers are exempt.

### Places of Worship

Prayer can take place anywhere and often a rug is used to mark out the place of prayer. The word Mosque means a place of prostration and can refer to any place of prayer. Purpose built Mosques will be used for communal prayer, community gatherings, Quranic education and the gathering together for the traditional Friday mid-day sermon. These Mosques are often characterised by their dome and minaret, the tall tower from which the call to prayer has traditionally come. No images representing a living being are allowed in the Mosque which could

be decorated very artistically using calligraphy.

### Main Festivals

*Ramadan* is the ninth month of the Islamic Lunar Calendar and the month of the Islamic fast. The appearance of the new moon at the end of *Ramadan* marks the beginning of the festival of *Eid ul Fitr*. During this festival Muslims visit the Mosque, give charity, exchange presents and cards and celebrate with family and friends. *Eid ul Adha* coincides with the completion of the pilgrimage to *Makkah*. It is celebrated by pilgrims and non-pilgrims alike and unites the whole Islamic community, the *Ummah* with the *Haji*. At this time Muslims offer sacrifices of lambs or other animals to commemorate the sacrifice of *Abraham's* son.

### Food and Diet

Muslims differentiate between food which is allowed (*halal*), and food which is forbidden (*haram*). Pork, any other part of the pig, carnivorous animals or blood are *haram*. Meat must also be slaughtered according to biblical rites by a Muslim butcher. The consumption of intoxicants is also forbidden.

### Concerns of the Community

The Muslim community is concerned about the increase in *Islamophobia* and wants to rectify wrong images of Islam.

# Judaism

## Introduction

*Judaism is a truly ancient religion which has been practised for five and a half thousand years. It is based on the belief in the one true and universal God.*



## Basic Beliefs

Jews believe in the *Torah* (Divine Law) which was revealed to Moses and which is unchanging. They also believe in one God who is omniscient and who will reward the righteous and punish the wicked at the end of time when there will be a resurrection of all the dead. Jews are still awaiting the *Messiah* who they believe has still to come.

## Customs and Practices

There are several basic tenets by which Jews must live their lives—to carry out the *Ten Commandments* and to live according to Jewish values that are based on love of neighbour and tolerance of one's fellow human beings.

## Places of Worship

Jewish people worship in a *synagogue*, which is often a centre for the many aspects of communal life. On the Eastern wall, facing *Jerusalem*, is an 'ark', or closed, usually curtained, cupboard where the '*Sifrei Torah*' or holy scrolls of the five books of *Moses* (the first five books of the *Hebrew Bible*) are kept. These are made of parchment, are hand-written by scribes and are treated with great care and reverence. They are removed during some services and read from by the Rabbi or other members of the synagogue on the '*Bimah*'. This is a raised platform, either on the front of the ark or in the centre of the synagogue, from which prayers are also led.

All males and married females are required to cover their heads inside the synagogue. In an orthodox synagogue, men and women sit separately whereas in liberal or reformed synagogues, they sit together.



There are three daily services in the synagogue, with longer services on Saturday and festival mornings.

## **Main Festivals**

There are a number of festivals throughout the calendar. These include the Jewish New Year, which normally occurs in September or October and is marked by two days of reflection and prayer. Ten days after this comes *Yom Kippur*, the *Day of Atonement*. This is the most solemn day of the Jewish calendar and is spent in prayer and a 25 hour fast. In the spring there is *Pesach*, or *Passover* which commemorates the delivery from slavery in Israel. *Shabbat* (the *Jewish Sabbath*) begins before nightfall and Friday and lasts until the sighting of the first three stars on Saturday night. It should be observed as a day of rest and most *Orthodox Jews* will not write, travel, work or cook during it.

## **Food and Diet**

Judaism also has a number of dietary laws. Food that has been prepared in a ritually acceptable way is known as 'Kosher'. For meat to be considered kosher it must have been prepared correctly, normally under rabbinical

supervision. Some meat such as pork and rabbit will not be considered kosher. Meat and dairy products should not be taken at the same meal and fish without scales or fins are also non-kosher.

Obviously, the extent to which these laws are upheld will depend on the individual. However, after many centuries of dispersal from their original homeland in the Middle East most Jews staying in Scotland will feel intrinsically Scottish, and their lifestyle is likely to reflect this.

## **Concerns of the Community**

Concerns of the community include maintaining the ability to uphold the religious rituals of circumcision and Jewish dietary laws, ensuring facilities to comply with Jewish practices of swift burial, and raising awareness among hospital staff of the specific needs of Jewish patients, particularly when dying and after death. Some Jews have concern regarding non-Jewish religious observance in schools and there are also some issues relating to organ donation. A continuing and on-going concern of all Jews is the manifestation of anti-semitism.

## Introduction

*The Sikh faith is a distinct religion revealed through the teachings of the 10 Gurus, the first of whom was Guru Nanak Dev ji. He was born in 1469 CE in the Punjab, India. In 1708 the tenth and the last human Guru, Guru Gobind Singh ji, vested spiritual authority in the Holy Sikh Scriptures (Guru Granth Sahib ji) and temporal authority in the community of baptised Sikhs (Khalsa Panth).*

## Basic Beliefs

Sikhs strictly believe that there is One God, who is *Nirgun* (transcendent) and *Sargun* (immanent). While being absolute and beyond human comprehension, God can be realised and experienced through contemplation and service. The object of a Sikh's life is to develop God consciousness and ultimately to receive God's grace. Life presents the opportunity to do so through truthful living and selfless service in the context of a family life. A Sikh's way of life is guided by the following principles: *Nam Simran* – remembering and praying to God at all times; *Kirat Karna* - earning a living by honest means; *Wand Shakna* - sharing with the poor and needy; *Sewa* - selfless service to God and humanity; *Equality* - to treat all human beings as equal. A Sikh practices purity of thought, purity of action, and respect and love for God's Creation. He or she

has been given the human form to practice *dharma* (spirituality).

## Customs and Practices

The tenth Guru, *Guru Gobind Singh Ji*, abolished distinctions of caste, colour, race or religion by introducing the concept of equality by making it obligatory for baptised Sikhs to a) share *Amrit* (holy water), ii) adopt the same religious name of *Singh* (lion) for men and *Kaur* (Princess) for women; c) wear five articles of faith, commonly known as the five K's. These are: *Kesh* (uncut hair), *Kangha* (a small wooden comb), *Kara* (an iron/steel bangle), *Kirpan* (a short sword) and *Kachhera* (special shorts).

Although not mentioned in the five articles of faith, the *daastar* (turban) is an essential accompaniment, which is worn to maintain the sanctity of *Kesh* (hair) and is treated with utmost respect. The Guru instructed Sikhs to say prayers in the early morning, at sunset and before retiring, to abstain from alcohol, tobacco and drugs, and to contribute a minimum one-tenth of their wealth, mind and body for religious purposes or to the needy.

## Places of Worship

The Sikh place of congregational worship is called a *Gurudwara*, meaning "Doorway to the Guru" or "House of God". The *Gurudwara* usually consists of two halls: a prayer hall and a larger hall where

the congregation sits together and shares a free community meal. Everyone is welcome at the *Gurudwara* providing they abide by the code of discipline. On entering the *Gurudwara* and before going into the prayer hall, heads must be covered with a large scarf or handkerchief both for men and women, shoes removed and hands washed. It is preferable if women wear long skirts and trousers. The prayer hall represents God's court. Sikhs give utmost respect to the Holy Sikh Scriptures, which is the embodiment of all the Gurus and contains the Word of God.

### Main Festivals

A Sikh festival or holy day is called a *Gurpurb*: Remembrance Day. This usually refers to the birth or the death of the Gurus. *Vaisakhi* (13/14 April) celebrates the day in 1699 when *Guru Gobind Singh Ji* founded the order of the *Khalsa*, the community of baptised Sikhs. *Diwali* (Oct/Nov) commemorates *Guru Hargobind Ji's* return from imprisonment to the *Harmandir Sahib (Golden Temple)*.

### Food and Diet

Sikhs do not take alcohol, tobacco or other intoxicants. Observant Sikhs, especially those who are baptised, are vegetarian. They also exclude eggs and any food containing animal derivatives.



### Concerns of the Community

Government funding is required to maintain Punjabi language classes. Hospitals, schools, social work departments etc need to be given clear guidelines that Sikh articles of faith cannot be removed, for example in cases of pupils doing PE in schools, patients undergoing operations and travellers flying by air. Generally the older generation and parents find it difficult to pass on the rich spiritual heritage to the younger generation due to the demands of society. Welfare state's policies need to be reviewed and modified to promote family ethos and stability.

# The Baha'i Faith

## Introduction

*The Baha'i Faith began in Persia on 23rd May 1844, when a person known to Baha'is as the Bab (Gate) proclaimed that he was a Messenger from God and also the herald of 'the Promised One', a messenger greater than himself. He and his followers were severely persecuted by the Persian authorities and the Bab was finally executed in 1850.*



*In 1863 a person known to Baha'is as Baha'u'llah (the Glory of God) claimed to be the one whose coming the Bab had foretold. He announced that he had come to help bring about a new age of global civilisation which would be characterised by unity and peace. Because of his personal influence and powerful teachings Baha'u'llah was banished from Persia, and later exiled to the prison fortress of*

*Akka in Palestine. He died at a place called Bahji near Akka in 1892. Baha'u'llah's shrine in Bahji is today the holiest shrine of the Baha'i world and is both the spiritual and physical focus of the Baha'i global community.*

## Basic Beliefs

The Baha'i Faith is an independent world religion which proclaims the oneness of God, religion and humankind. Baha'is believe that God reveals His purpose progressively through prophets such as the founders of all the major world religions which exist today.

Key Baha'i beliefs are, belief in one God; the unity of mankind; independent investigation of truth; the common foundation of all religions; the essential harmony of science and religion; equality of opportunity for men and women; elimination of prejudice of all kinds; universal compulsory education; the need for a universal auxiliary language; abolition of extremes of wealth and poverty; the protection of religious and cultural diversity, and the establishment of universal peace by a world government which will have international courts of justice.

## **Customs and Practices**

Baha'i custom and practice is founded on authenticated scripture written by Baha'u'llah. The focus of Baha'i community life is the Nineteen Day Feast when local Baha'is meet to worship, discuss the affairs of their Faith and have fellowship together. Obligations on individual Baha'is include daily prayer and keeping a yearly nineteen day fast when no food is consumed from sunrise to sunset. The affairs of the Faith are administered by 'Spiritual Assemblies' which consist of nine people elected by the Baha'i community. These democratic assemblies operate at local, national and international level. The international administrative body is known as the Universal House of Justice and is based on Mount Carmel in Israel.

## **Places of Worship**

World wide, the Baha'i Faith has a temple on every continent where Baha'is and people of every faith can come and worship God. Depending on the size of their community, Baha'is may worship at their local centre or meet to worship in individual homes.

## **Festivals**

Festivals and holy days are based on the birthdays of important figures of the Baha'i faith or significant events in the history of the faith. The birthday of Baha'u'llah, for example, is an important holy day and is celebrated on the 12th November.

## **Food and Diet**

Baha'is do not have food laws as such but are advised to eat moderately and keep to a balanced, healthy diet. They do not drink alcohol and drug-taking is not allowed unless prescribed by a competent doctor.

## **Concerns of the Community**

Baha'is are concerned about anything that leads to conflict or disunity in the community or in the world. To this end, they are encouraged to support activities which further one or all of the principles of their faith. Baha'is are encouraged to protect the interests of their community and country but are also expected to take on the role and responsibility of world citizens.

*"The earth is but one country  
and mankind its citizens"*

*Baha'u'llah*

# Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University

## Introduction

*The Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University (BKWSU) works in 84 countries around the world. It operates through more than 5,000 centres including three in Scotland (Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Glasgow), and over 30 in the rest of the UK. The world headquarters is in Mt Abu, Rajasthan, India. The BKWSU was founded in 1937 in Karachi by Brahma Baba, a businessman and philanthropist, who dedicated the remaining 33 years of his life to its formation and growth. On nearing retirement age, he had a vision of how people of all cultural backgrounds could come together to rediscover and develop the spiritual dimension of their lives.*

Brahma Baba set up a trust of twelve women to run the organisation and this system has continued with mainly women running its centres around the world. The current chief administrative head of the BKWSU is a founding student now aged in her 90's: Dadi Janki, one of an eminent group "Keepers of Wisdom", convened by the United Nations, to advise political leaders on world wide issues.



## Basic Beliefs

The University's core curriculum is offered in the form of a foundation course in meditation, based on the teachings of *Raja Yoga*. This is the path of understanding and knowing one's identity as a spiritual being. Students study *Raja Yoga meditation*, the linking of the soul with the *Supreme soul* through the power of pure and elevated thinking.

## Places of Worship

Classes are held at the University's learning centres and people from all backgrounds and cultures attend. There are currently around 500,000 regular students worldwide who attend meetings daily in the early morning before work time, for meditation and spiritual study.

## Community Activities

The main activity of the BKWSU is to provide a service to local communities of a variety of educational programmes and courses at no cost to the participants, with an emphasis on meditation and personal spiritual



development. The individual learns to develop a sense of self-worth and respect for others, which helps to bring greater peace of mind and happiness in life. The BKWSU also runs activities both independently and with other organisations to explore the spiritual dimension in different areas including: youth, women, men, inter religious dialogue, business, prison life, education, science, social work and health care.

### **Main Festivals**

In honour of its founder *Brahma Baba*, the BKWSU celebrates the 18th January as a special day of silence and meditation experience, dedicated to world peace.

### **Food and Diet**

All students are encouraged to eat a lacto vegetarian diet free from alcohol and tobacco and to abstain from recreational drugs.



### **Concerns of the Community**

As an international non-governmental organisation, the BKWSU holds general consultative status with the *Economic and Social Council of the United Nations* and consultative status with *UNICEF*. It is a recipient of seven *UN Peace Messenger Awards*. It continues to contribute to raising world awareness of spiritual values through local, national and international projects. These have included *Global Co-operation for a better world*, 1989-1991 and worldwide activities for 2000, the *UN International Year for the Culture of Peace*. The BKWSU is also an active sponsor of *Living Values*, an education programme, a partnership amongst educators around the world, sponsored by *UNESCO*.

The BKWSU provides a caring, co-operative and supportive environment that allows personal growth, recognising that

*“when we change,  
the world changes”.*

# Paganism

## Introduction

*Paganism has its roots in the indigenous, pre-Christian religions of Europe, evolved and adapted to the circumstances of modern life. Its re-emergence in Scotland parallels that observed in other Western countries, where it has been growing rapidly since the 1950's. The social infrastructure of Paganism reflects the value the community places on unity in diversity, consisting of a polycentric network of inter-related traditions and local groups served by a number of larger organisations. In Scotland, the Pagan Federation acts as an educational and representative body liaising with government and other relevant bodies on behalf of the Pagan community.*

## Basic Beliefs

Pagans understand *Deity* to be manifest within nature and recognise Divinity as taking many forms, finding expression in *Goddesses* as well as *Gods*. Goddess-worship is one of the primary characteristics of Paganism. Pagans believe that nature is sacred and that the natural cycles of birth, growth and death observed in the world around us carry profoundly spiritual meanings. Human beings are seen as part of nature, woven into the

great web of life along with other animals, trees, stones, plants and everything else that is of this earth. Most Pagans believe in some form of reincarnation, viewing death as a transition within a continuing process of existence. In Paganism, spiritual truths find expression in *mythopoeic* and symbolic forms rather than through doctrine, and reflect a synergy of *polytheistic*, *pantheistic* and *animistic* understandings of the divine.

## Customs and Practices

Pagan ethics emphasise the responsible exercise of personal freedom in trying to live in harmony with others, and with nature. Pagans frequently use the phrase 'If it harms none, do what you will' to describe this approach to life. Pagan worship seeks to honour the divine powers and to bring the participants in harmony with them, to celebrate the turning of the seasons, and to mark the transitions of human life with appropriate rites of passage. Rituals usually begin with the creation of sacred space by the marking out of a symbolic circle and the blessing of those within. They may involve meditation, chanting, music, prayer, dance, poetry and the enactment of symbolic drama together with the sharing of food and drink.



### Places of Worship

Paganism has no buildings dedicated as places of public worship. Instead, Pagans hold their ceremonies in woods, on hilltops, along the seashore, at standing stones, in parks, gardens and private homes.

### Festivals

Nearly all Scottish Pagans celebrate a cycle of eight seasonal festivals known as the Wheel of the Year. These are *Samhain* (31st Oct), *Midwinter or Yule* (21st Dec), *Imbolc* (2nd Feb), *Spring Equinox* (21st Mar), *Beltane* (30th Apr—1st May), *Midsummer* (21st Jun), *Lughnasadh* (1st Aug) and *Autumn Equinox* (21st Sept).

### Food and Diet

For ethical reasons, most Pagans have a strong preference for foods derived from organic farming and free-range livestock rearing, while many are vegetarian or vegan.

### Concerns of the Community

Pagans regard nature as sacred and are deeply concerned by the damage inflicted by modern, industrialised societies on the natural world. Many regard environmental activism as a religious duty. Pagans honour Deity in female as well as male forms and strongly uphold equality of the sexes. Women play a very prominent role in Pagan religion. Pagans take it for granted that different people will experience the divine in different ways, and are thus very tolerant of other life-affirming religious beliefs. *Proselytising* is regarded as offensive and ill-mannered.

# Meeting People of Different Faiths

## Introduction

*Today in Scotland there are growing opportunities to meet people from different religions and to build friendships across cultures. Below are some general guidelines to consider when meeting people of different faiths.*

## Visiting Places of Worship

Usually people are delighted to show others their place of worship. It is a sharing of what they hold very dear. They will, however, hope that the visitor will be respectful and observe certain basic rules of conduct.

Whether visiting alone, or in a group, it is important to follow the guidelines for clothing and behavior so as not to cause offence. For example, it is important **not to talk loudly**, thus disturbing any who may be at prayer. If anyone has special needs, it is good to let the place/centre that is being visited know about this in advance so that they can prepare to help. For example, although the normal custom of the place of worship in question may be to sit on the floor or to stand for worship, chairs can often be provided for elderly, infirm or disabled visitors. Ask before taking any **photographs** as this is not always allowed.

Most religious communities would expect visitors to **dress modestly** when visiting their centre or place of worship. This may be extended in some communities to having ones

**head covered** and as you may be sitting on the floor short dresses and skirts are unsuitable. Some religious communities require **shoes to be removed** before entering their place of worship and visitors may be asked to **wash their hands** before entering the place of worship.

Most religious communities would find it **offensive if tobacco, alcohol or drugs** were brought to their centers or places of worship.

## Hosting Multi-faith Services and events

Increasingly religious and civic bodies are hosting multi-faith public services for celebration, commemoration or worship. The following suggestions may be helpful for organizers of events involving a number of religious traditions.

It is always a good idea to double **check the date** for an event so that it does not clash with one of the key festivals or special days of a group that is likely to be involved. It is critical that a venue is chosen in which participants feel at ease. If a service is to be held at the premises of a faith community it may be a good idea to hold the service in a social area rather than a sacred area for example as these are usually not so imbued with religious and symbolic significance and might therefore be more appropriate for multi-faith events.

## Eating Together

Many religious traditions have certain **dietary requirements** as a result of their beliefs. Generally speaking the easiest way to cater for a multi-faith event is to make it **absolutely vegetarian**. It is helpful to label food where contents are not immediately apparent. Within Judaism the *Kosher* roles are widely observed but with differing interpretations. A local synagogue can be asked for advice on where to obtain *kosher* food and again this should be clearly marked at an event. It is preferable **not to offer alcohol** at a multi-faith event.

*Values in Harmony* outlines the core ethical and moral values held in common across 11 faith and belief communities.

*Religion and Belief Matter* is an information resource for healthcare staff to help meet the religious and belief needs of patients.

*Reflections of Life* is an NHS resource that offers words of comfort and encouragement with prayers, poems and prose from 13 belief communities.

## Useful Publications

The Scottish Inter Faith Council has a number of publications which are available from our office or to download from our website:

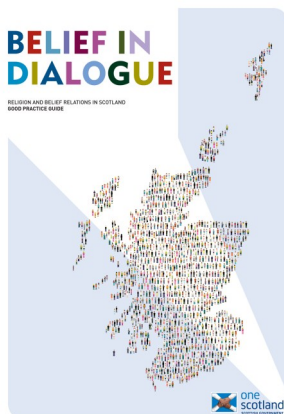
### *Guidelines for Inclusive Civic Events*

*A Training Resource for Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003*

*Our Sacred Earth* offers a comprehensive guide for faith communities in becoming more eco-friendly.

*A Celebration of New Life* provides reflective readings on the theme of birth and new life from seven faith traditions.

*Belief in Dialogue: A Good Practice Guide* has been produced by the Scottish Government and provides guidance on building good relations among and between religious and belief communities and individuals. It also provides practical examples for developing interaction and dialogue.



# Contacts

## **BAHA'IS**

Edinburgh Baha'i Centre, 44 Albion Street, Edinburgh, EH1 3QR

## **THE BRAHMA KUMARIS**

20 Polwarth Crescent, Edinburgh, EH11 1HW  
66a Hamilton Place, Aberdeen, AB15 5BA  
Inner Space, 277 High Street, Glasgow, G4 0QS

## **BUDDHISTS**

Kagyü Samye Ling Monastery and Tibetan Centre, Eskdalemuir, Langholm,  
Dumfriesshire, DG13 0QL  
Portobello Buddhist Priory, 27 Brighton Place, Edinburgh, EH15 1LL  
Theravada Buddhist Group, 5 Bellview Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 4DU  
Glasgow FWBO Buddhist Centre, 329 Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow, G2 3HW  
Edinburgh FWBO Buddhist Centre, 30 Melville Terrace, Edinburgh EH9 1LP  
Scotland's Buddhist Vihara, 1 Caldercuilt Road, Glasgow, G20 0AD

## **CATHOLIC CHURCH**

General Secretariat, 64 Aitken Street, Airdrie, ML6 6LT

## **CHURCH OF SCOTLAND**

121 George Street, Edinburgh EH2 4YN

## **HINDUS**

Glasgow Hindu Mandir, 1 La Belle Place, Glasgow, G3 7LH  
Edinburgh Hindu Mandir/Cultural Centre, St Andrew Place, Leith, Edinburgh  
EH6 7EG  
Tayside Hindu Cultural Centre, 10 Taylors Lane, Dundee, DD2  
The South Indian Cultural Centre of Scotland, 78 Hamilton Road,  
Rutherglen, Glasgow, G73 3DQ

## **JEWS**

The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities, The Director, Jewish  
Community Centre, 222 Fenwick Road, Glasgow G46 6UE



## **MUSLIMS**

Mosque and Islamic Ass. of Aberdeen, 164 Spital, Aberdeen AB24 3JD  
Mosque and Islamic Centre, 50 Potter Row, Edinburgh EH8 9BT  
Glasgow Islamic Centre and Central Mosque, Mosque Avenue, Gorbals,  
Glasgow G5 9TX  
Dundee Central Mosque, 6 Milne Street, Dundee, DD1 5BZ

## **PAGAN FEDERATION**

PF Scotland, P.O. Box 14251, Anstruther, Fife, KY10 3YA

## **RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS (QUAKERS)**

Quaker Meeting House, 7 Victoria Terrace, Edinburgh, EH1 2JL  
Quaker Meeting House, 38 Elmbank Crescent, Glasgow, G2 4PS

## **EPISCOPAL CHURCH**

General Synod of the Scottish Episcopal Church, 21 Grosvenor Crescent,  
Edinburgh, EH12 5EE

## **SIKHS**


Sri Guru Nanak Gurdwara, 1-3 Nelson Street, Dundee DD1 2PN  
Edinburgh Bhatra Sikhs, 1 Mill Lane, Sheriff Brae, Edinburgh, EH6 6TJ  
Central Gurdwara Singh Purba, 138 Berkeley Street, Glasgow, G3 7HY  
Gurdwara Guru Granth Sahib Sikh Sabha, 163 Nithsdale Rd. Glasgow  
Guru Nanak Sikh Temple, 19-27 Otago Street, Glasgow, G12 8JJSikh  
Gurdwara, 32 St. Andrew's Drive, Glasgow, G41 5SG

## **UNITARIANS**

Glasgow Unitarian Church, 72 Berkeley Street, Glasgow, G3 7DS  
Contact the Secretary on the website: [www.sua.org.uk](http://www.sua.org.uk)

Further information can be obtained at the following address:

**Scottish Inter Faith Council**  
**523 Shields Road**  
**Glasgow**  
**G41 2RF**  
**Tel: 0141 420 6982**



Scottish Inter Faith Council  
523 Shields Road  
Glasgow  
G41 2RF

0141 420 6982  
[www.scottishinterfaithcouncil.org](http://www.scottishinterfaithcouncil.org)