

Faiths and Festivals Book 1:

A guide to the religions and celebrations in our multicultural society

by Christine Howard *et al.*

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Published by Practical Pre-School Books, A Division of MA Education Ltd, St Jude's Church, Dulwich Road, Herne Hill, London, SE24 0PB.

Tel: 020 7738 5454

www.practicalpreschoolbooks.com

© MA Education Ltd 2012. Revised 2013.

Design: Alison Cutler **fonthillcreative** 01722 717043

Illustrated by Cathy Hughes.

Front cover images, main picture © iStockphoto.com/Nicole S.

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ISBN 978-1-909280-58-8

Calendar of festivals

Guidance on dates

Different religions have different calendars – for example, the Jewish calendar is based on the traditional date of creation. Each Jewish year contains 12 lunar months of 29 or 30 days.

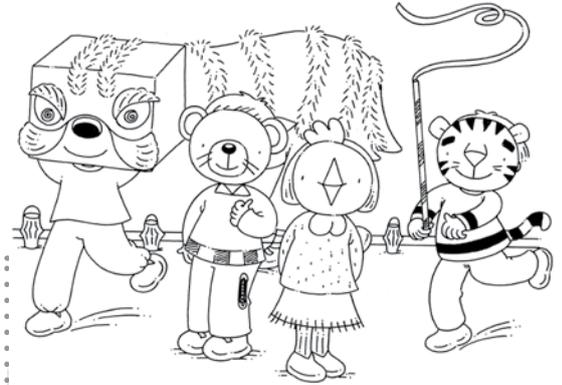
Islam on the other hand dates from the flight to Medina, al Hijrah in 622. It is a lunar calendar so the Muslim year shifts back in relation to the Western calendar. The first of the month is determined by the sighting of the moon in Makkah. Eid ul-Fitr falls at the end of the month of Ramadan.

Buddhist festivals are even more complicated because the dates vary from country to country and between different Buddhist traditions. So while many Buddhists celebrate Wesak on the first full moon day in May (except in a leap year when it is in June), others, for example Tibetan Buddhists, celebrate it in June.

If this seems daunting, check out the date with a couple of sources. Useful websites include:

- www.reonline.org.uk/supporting/festivals-calendar
- www.shapworkingparty.org.uk

Try to use more than one source from the religion you are looking at. If there is still no agreement and you have families from that faith in your group – ask them. This is a quick and easy way to obtain the information, it takes into account any local traditions and is a wonderful way of involving parents in the work you are doing.



January

- 1 New Year's Day
- 6 Epiphany (Christian)
- 6 Orthodox Christmas (Christian)

January/February

Chinese New Year

February/March

- Shrove Tuesday (Pancake Day) (Christian)
- Ash Wednesday – first day of Lent (Christian)
- Purim (Jewish)

The Muslim lunar calendar

The Muslim year is 354 days divided into 12 months of either 29 or 30 days long. Because the lunar year is shorter than the solar year on which the Western calendar is based, Muslim holy days cycle backwards through the Western calendar. The number in brackets indicates the number of the Muslim month, for example Ramadan is the ninth month.

Muslim festivals

- Muslim New Year – 1 *Muharram* (1)
- Safar* (2)
- Muhammad's Birthday – 12 *Rabi' al-awwal* (3)
- Rabiulakhir* (4)
- Jamadilawal* (5)
- Jamadilakhir* (6)
- Night Journey of Muhammad – 27 *Rajab* (7)
- Shaban* (8)
- Eid ul-Fitr – end of month of *Ramadan* (9)
- Shawwal* (10)
- Zulkaedah* (11)
- Eid ul-Adha 10-13 *Zul-Hijjah* (12)

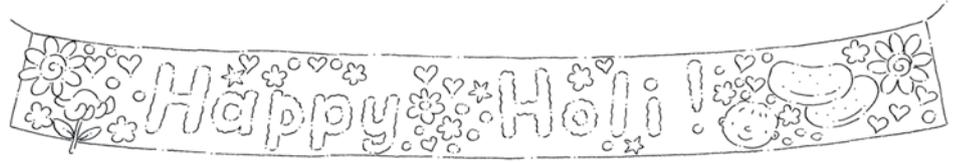


December

- Advent
- 25 Christmas (Christian)
- Bodhi Day (Buddhist)
- Hanukkah (Jewish)

December/January

- Birthday of Guru Gobind Singh (Sikh)



March

- 1 St David's Day (National Day, Wales)
- 17 St Patrick's Day (National Day, Ireland)
- 21 New Year/Naw-Ruz (Baha'i)
- Mothers' Day
- Holi (Hindu)

March/April

- Easter (Christian)
- Passover (Jewish)



April

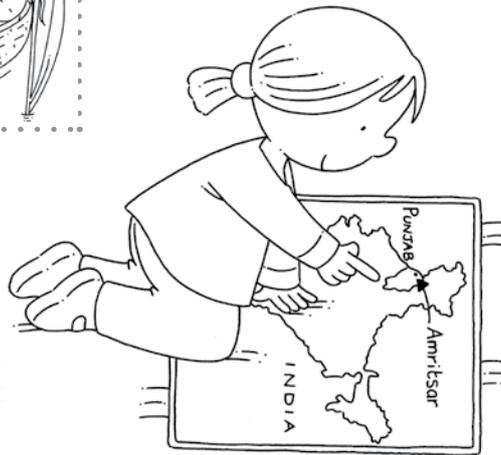
- 13/14 Baisakhi (Sikh)
- 23 St George's Day (National Day, England)

May

- 1 May Day
- 23 Anniversary of the declaration of the Bab (Baha'i)

May/June

- Whitsun/Pentecost (Christian)
- Shavuot (Jewish)
- Wesak (Buddhist)



June

- 16 Martyrdom of Guru Arjan (Sikh)
- Chinese Dragon Boat Festival

July

- 9 Anniversary of the martyrdom of the Bab (Baha'i)

July/August

- Raksha Bandhan (Hindu)



September/October

- Harvest (Christian)
- Rosh Hashanah (Jewish New Year)
- Navrati (Hindu)
- Yom Kippur (Jewish)
- Sukkot (Jewish)

November

- Birthday of Guru Nanak (Sikh)
- 12 Anniversary of the birth of Baha'ullah (Baha'i)
- 24 Martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur (Sikh)
- 30 St Andrew's Day (National Day, Scotland)

October

- Simchat Torah (Jewish)

October/November

- Kathina Day (Buddhist)
- Diwali (Hindu/Sikh)



RE: What you must teach

The Education Reform Act 1988

In 1944 the Education Act made the teaching of religious instruction a legal requirement in Britain. At that time religious instruction was perceived to be Christian only as this reflected the population of the country.

Since the 1960s, however, racial and ethnic shifts in population have meant that in some areas children in schools are from a variety of religions and creeds and from many different parts of the world. RE advisers and teachers recognised this and interpreted religious instruction liberally, including the study of non-Christian religions in their syllabuses.

This recognition was finally enshrined in law with the Education Reform Act 1988 which stated that every local authority should have an agreed syllabus, locally determined, which must 'reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian, whilst taking account of the teaching and practices of other

principal religions represented in Great Britain', in other words Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, Islam and Sikhism.

This was reiterated in the Education Act 1996 which made religious education part of the basic curriculum for all children in schools. The foreword to the non-statutory national framework for RE opens with the words:

'Every pupil in a maintained school has a statutory entitlement to religious education.'

This remains the situation in England and Wales today. Scotland has slightly different requirements with RE being incorporated into RME (religious and moral education). RME has been acknowledged as one of the eight curriculum areas that should inform curriculum planning in Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence which was introduced in 2005. (For more information visit www.educationscotland.gov.uk)

In England and Wales all children have the right to receive religious education which is non-confessional and non-denominational (we are not trying to convert anyone to any particular religious viewpoint) but aims to inform children and young people of a variety of religious standpoints.

Some agreed syllabuses also include non-religious life stances such as Humanism or other faiths not mentioned in the Act, particularly where these are found in the area. This requirement has been endorsed by the non-statutory national framework for RE (published in 2005) which states:

'To ensure that all pupils' voices are heard and the religious education curriculum is broad and balanced, it is recommended that there are opportunities for all pupils to study:

- other religious traditions such as the Baha'i faith, Jainism and Zoroastrianism
- secular philosophies such as Humanism.'

Unlike subjects in the National Curriculum, each local authority produces its own agreed syllabus, so called because it has been agreed by a conference consisting of representatives of the faiths in that community: teachers; local authority officers and the Church of England. Syllabuses are often backed up with schemes of work or guidelines and training will be provided by the local authority to support the syllabus and its implementation. They may also include guidance on RE in the early years.



Humanism

Non-religious people are a growing section of the British population – the 2011 census indicated 25% of the population of England and Wales have no religion. Of these 15,067 identify themselves as humanists.

Humanism has a long and multicultural history stretching back to the ancient Greeks and beyond, but it was only in the last two centuries that humanist thinking became mainstream in Europe and the West, that humanist organisations were formed and the word 'humanist' acquired its modern meaning.

Basic beliefs

There are probably almost as many definitions of humanism as there are humanists, but the one currently used by the British Humanist Association is:

'Humanism is the belief that we can live good lives without religious or superstitious beliefs. Humanists make sense of the world using reason, experience and shared human values. We seek to make the best of the one life we have by creating meaning and purpose for ourselves. We take responsibility for our own actions and work with others for the common good.'

Humanist moral values are likely to be similar to those of most of the world's faiths. Reason and experience lead us to avoid, for example, dishonesty and hurting others; they teach us that life goes better if we respect others and behave kindly and cooperatively.

Where humanism differs from religions is in the absence of any belief in the supernatural – God, the soul, the afterlife, ghosts, miracles – and hence the absence of supernatural influences on our lives or behaviour. The positive aspects of humanism are based on ideas of personal responsibility, and the belief that our moral values stem from ourselves and our needs, not from authority or tradition or revelation. We believe that making things go well is up to us, and the rewards for behaving well are here and now, in personal relationships and the happiness of oneself and others.

What does this mean for you?

Religious education is firmly embedded in the Foundation Stage curriculum and likely to stay there. What can this mean for the many children who arrive at nursery or school with no family connection to a religion and few, if any, family religious beliefs?



Young children from non-religious families must sometimes feel puzzled by all the religion they meet at school, so unlike life and values at home, but humanist and other non-religious parents rarely object to their children learning about other beliefs. They acknowledge that a wide spectrum of beliefs and the stories and traditions of the world's religions are interesting and part of contemporary culture, and they want their children to understand diversity.

They may, however, object to their children being taught that these beliefs or stories are true, or that the beliefs of the six main world faiths are the only possible ideas about the nature of the world and humanity.

To accommodate the occasional parents who want to exercise their right to excuse their child from RE, it is helpful to keep RE separate from other activities such as art, though this may not be easy in the pre-school context.

Understanding there are reasons

Many humanist parents would be happier if their own beliefs were acknowledged and taught about, as well as those of the world religions. Many practitioners will be more than half-way there already. For what most humanist parents want is not abstract discussions about the existence of God or the soul but the use of reason, and reasons, when talking about moral values and behaviour.

Sikhism

With as many as half a million followers in the UK, Sikhs are a growing section of British society.

Sikhism was started by **Guru Nanak** in India in the state of Punjab in 1469 CE. Nine living Gurus followed him, who taught and practised the Sikh teachings in their daily lives. The Gurus wanted to show that although the high ideals they taught are difficult to live by, they are wholly practicable. The tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, declared that after him, Sikhs should follow the Sikh scripture as they would a living Guru.

Today, Sikhs live all over the world. Sikh men are easily recognisable by their turbans and beards and Sikh women by their long hair, left loose or tied neatly in a bun at the back of the head. Sikh men and women wear five symbols, which can be called the uniform of their faith. Each symbol begins with the letter 'K' in the Punjabi language, so they are called the five Ks. They are:

- Kesh** – uncut hair
- Kara** – an iron bracelet
- Kangha** – a wooden comb
- Kachera** – cotton undershorts
- Kirpan** – a sword.

These outward symbols make Sikhs stand out in a crowd and link them to the principles of their faith. These being:

- The oneness of God
- The oneness of humanity
- Equality of women
- Tolerance towards other religions
- Service to humanity.

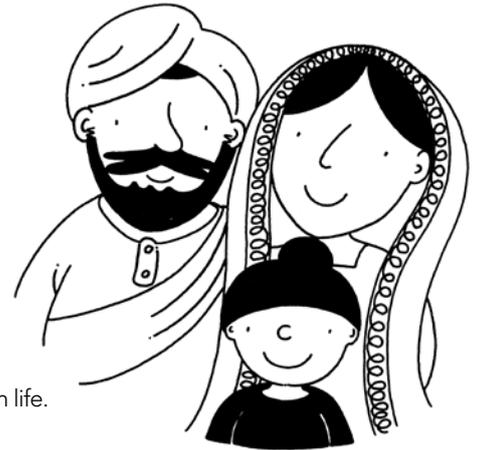
What Sikhs believe

Sikhs believe in one God, who is neither male nor female but is imageless, formless, does not give birth and never dies, is present everywhere, and is the creator of the universe.

Sikhs are taught that: 'There is but one God who is the truth, and is the creator of this universe. God is without fear and without enmity, is not born and does not die to be born again. God is beyond time and immortal. God is self-existent and is by grace revealed'. (Page 1 of Guru Granth Sahib.)

Sikhs believe that God is not exclusive to any one religion. Different religions are different paths leading to the same reality. This does not mean that all religions are the same or equally relevant for all. There are different routes for people to choose

and Sikh Gurus emphasised the right of people to choose their own path through life.



Sikhs are taught to respect other people's views and show tolerance towards those who do not agree with the views of Guru Nanak. The subsequent nine Gurus practised these teachings to show their importance in life. The English meaning of the word tolerance is too weak to fully express this kind of tolerance. In Sikhism it implies a readiness to lay down one's own life for the sake of others, like Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth Guru, who was martyred for defending the rights of others. When Hindus were forced to convert to Islam by the Mughal rulers in India, Guru Tegh Bahadur gave his life defending their right to worship in the manner of their choice.

Given that Sikhs believe there is one God who has created the universe, it follows that all human beings belong to one family of God. Guru Nanak in his first sermon said there is neither a Hindu nor a Muslim, only human beings. God is not interested in labels, only how people behave. Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Guru, writes: 'Recognise there is only one race and that is of all humanity'.

The gurdwara – a place of worship

The Sikh place of worship is called a **gurdwara**. It is open to anyone and everyone who wants to pray to one God. Everyone sits on the floor regardless of social status. There are no assigned places or reserved areas. Men and women are given equal position. Sikh women take equal part in leading services and conducting ceremonies.

Anyone who believes in the Oneness of God and wants to worship can join the Sikh congregation or Sangat. No one can be barred on the basis of caste, religious belief or sex. There are no special holy days or specific times for Sikhs to pray. In England, the congregation usually gets together at the weekend. There is no priesthood so any male or female who can read the Sikh scripture, Guru Granth Sahib, and is knowledgeable about Sikhism can take the service. However, as volunteers do not always have time, the gurdwara management committees appoint staff to conduct services, ceremonies and festivals.

Each gurdwara has a **langar** (common kitchen). After every service the congregation eats together to show that people of diverse backgrounds belong to the one family of God. No distinction is made between rich and poor, giver and receiver. Men and women of all classes and colours prepare and